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A POPULAR HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

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EDITED BY T. EARLE WELBY

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A POPULAR HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

BY

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

A Popular History of English Poetry by the late T. Earle Welby, when it first appeared, was hailed as a masterpiece of compression and sound judgement. It has now been republished in a style uniform with *Shakespeare to Hardy* and *An Anthology of Modern Verse*, to which, as it deals with many of the poets represented in these collections, it may be regarded as a companion volume.

PREFACE

THIS book has been written for a public which knows English poetry chiefly through anthologies. Its aim is to provide that public, not with facts and dates, except in so far as they are necessary to an understanding of the subject, but with an outline of the development of English poetry and with impressions of the genius of individual poets. As little as possible has been said of characteristics common to, or supposed to be common to, groups and schools; for what matters ultimately is no formula, war-cry or tendency, but the genius of each writer.

In writing the book I have relied chiefly upon opinions formed in the course of some twenty years of desultory reading of English poetry, but those opinions were doubtless shaped by criticism read at the time or later, and I am bound to acknowledge obligations even though I cannot now be sure of tracing them. Let me, then, make this general statement of debt to the long line of poets who have been critics, from Coleridge to Mr. Symons; to Lamb, Hazlitt, Pater and other artists in criticism; to Mr. Saintsbury, Mr. Gosse, the late Sir Walter Raleigh, the late W. P. Ker, Mr. Oliver Elton, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Mr. Middleton Murry and other academic or journalistic critics; to the two historians of the subject, Warton and Courthope; to the authors or editors of various authoritative works of reference, and notably to those responsible for the Cambridge History of English Literature and the Dictionary of National Biography. I have expressed no opinion which is not mine, but I have suppressed some opinions which, in so small a book, I could not defend or which it would be unreasonable to put before the public here addressed.

T. E. W.

1923.

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A POPULAR HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

I

THE BEGINNINGS

Anglo-Saxon or Provençal ?—The true ancestry of English poetry—The great Tradition—Its modification—Accent and rhyme—The Goliardic songs—The new mythology—Origins of romance—The new poetry—England's contribution.

(1) The Pedigree of English Poetry

'*ENGLISH POETRY*': Of what do you think first on hearing these two words? Of the *race* by members of which that poetry was produced? Or of the *language* in which it was produced? Or of the *art* of that poetry?

If it is of race that you think first, and if you follow that clue back into the far past, you are led without a break to the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons. But on arrival there you are likely to be disconcerted. The Anglo-Saxons, certainly, are among our forefathers; but is their poetry the ancestor of that which has been made in these islands from Chaucer downwards? It will seem to you lacking in the familiar features. You will note that it differs

immensely from comparatively modern English poetry in form, having indeed an altogether different prosody, the basis of which is alliteration. You will note also that it differs from all modern English poetry in the mythology that it uses, except where that is Christian. And finally you will note that it differs in spirit, being tribal rather than national, and shut off from the general spirit of European civilization. Struck by all these differences between supposed ancestor and descendant, you will also be concerned by the information that some of this oldest 'English' poetry was quite probably never composed on English soil, but was brought over by the invading Angles and Saxons from their Germanic homes.

At this point you will do one of two things: either you will crush down the doubts arising in you about the pedigree, and persuade yourself that here and there Anglo-Saxon poetry shows our adventurousness or our love of the sea or some other of our national qualities, and must therefore be the ancestor of modern English poetry; or you will bluntly repudiate the pedigree. For the moment it need only be said that, according to the writer of this book, you will be justified in dismissing this reputed ancestor and looking elsewhere for the founders of English poetry.

But you may not have seized on the clue of race. When you heard the title of this book, 'English Poetry', you may have thought first of the language in which that poetry has been composed. Well, if you follow back the clue of language you will again be led to the Anglo-Saxons, but with slightly less danger of your being satisfied to have their

poetry as the ancestor of modern English poetry. For although we have the habit, and a thoroughly bad habit it is, of talking of ourselves as an Anglo-Saxon people, as if Norman and other elements had not most powerfully affected our character, few of us are quite so ignorant and wrong-headed as to suppose our language to be merely Anglo-Saxon a little modified by a Latin element. Innumerable passages of our greatest prose, from the Bible, from Sir Thomas Browne, from John Donne, from Landor, from De Quincey, from Walter Pater, rebuke the notion that the Anglo-Saxon element in our language is of higher value than the Latin; our poetry yields from amongst its greatest lines Shakespeare's 'The multitudinous seas incarnadine', and Wordsworth's 'An incommunicable sleep', lines charged with sonorous Latin; and the Anglo-Saxon element, except in manuals of essay-writing, is seen to be but co-operative with others. No; the clue of language will not lead you to the true ancestor of English poetry; unless, which is most improbable, you chance to have seized that clue at one particular point, where there are in English a few words, all of them connected with the old Anglo-French trade in wine, such words as 'funnel', 'spigot', 'rack'. Those words came into England with French wine; they came from Provence. And it is in Provence that you may find the ancestry of English poetry. It was on Provence, directly and indirectly, for the influence of Provençal poetry went through France generally and through Italy, that Chaucer and the minor originators of English poetry drew. Had you, when you heard 'English Poetry', thought

not of race or of language, but of the art of our oldest indisputably English poetry, it is to Provence that you would have been led back.

(2) The Poetry of Provence

Poetry had flowered in Provence, that is to say, in certain areas of southern France, northern Spain and Italy, with astonishing suddenness at the very beginning of the twelfth century, with the first of the troubadours, as its poets were called, Guilhelm IX, Count of Poitiers and Duke of Acquitaine, 1071–1127. It disappeared with the last of the troubadours, Guiraut Riquier, in 1294. It was the work of some four hundred writers, some of them women, some of them men of humble origin, but most of them men of good birth, having positions at Court, and attached in platonic love, or under pretence of it, to great ladies. It made for itself various highly conventional forms, such as the morning song (the *alba*), the serenade (the *serena*), the funeral song (the *planh*), and, perhaps most characteristic, the lyrical discussion (the *tenson*) of some subtle question of love or of philosophy. What is much more our concern, it produced no less than nine hundred forms of stanza construction and had an extraordinarily elaborate science of rhyming.

A few of the troubadours came vaguely into English history, as Bertram de Born, who created strife between Henry II and his sons, and was on that account set in hell by Dante, and Bernard de Ventadour, who was attached to Eleanor of Acquitaine and is said to have followed her to England, and Marcabrun, another reputed visitor to England. For the most part, however, their

influence on England was indirect, through their influence on members of the Frenchified English court, through their influence on France in general, and through their influence in Italy. Of the effect of Provençal poetry on the technique of English verse we may note two interesting instances, one very early, the other, in the form in which we shall view it, modern.

There is no simple English lyric of its sort lovelier, and there are very few earlier, than the piece usually known as the Alison poem, written about 1300.

> Bytuene Mershe ant Averil
> When spray biginneth to spring,
> The lutel foul hath hire wyl
> On hyre lud [1] to sing . . .

The rhyme-scheme of the long stanzas of that poem is borrowed from the Provençal poet, Gaucelm Faidit. Skip nearly five centuries and you find Robert Burns using as his favourite stanza one long acclimatized in Scotland but in its origin Provençal.

(3) The Great Tradition

But it is not on account of the impulse given by the troubadours directly or indirectly to English poetry late in the thirteenth or early in the fourteenth century that it is important to trace our poetic ancestry back to Provence. It is because contact with France generally, and with Italy, where all the early poets were Provençal in everything but language, meant contact with the great, ancient, central tradition of European culture.

[1] *In her language.*

It is because it meant contact with Rome, and through Rome with Greece.

Had our poetry truly originated in Anglo-Saxon, it could have drawn only on sources narrow, tribal, barbarous. When its makers sought to renew their strength by harking back to their ancestral home, they could only have lost themselves in the dark forests of the Teuton lands, getting further and further away from the landmarks of civilization. But as our poetry originated in that of peoples with a Roman heritage, in Provence, in France generally, in Italy, its distant sources were the widest, the most international, the most civilized—those sources on which all cultured Europe had drawn, still draws, and will continue to draw to the end of time. For in going back, as our poets in every generation have done, to their true ancestral home, they do not return to literature which has long since ceased to matter seriously to any but specialists in history and philology and mythology and primitive social organization. They return to works of supreme art, which have never ceased to speak to the minds and hearts of all thinking and feeling men in Europe. They return, through Provence, to Rome, and through Rome to Greece to the greatest of the world's epics, to the loftiest poetic drama, to æsthetic criticism which still has immense value for us, to literatures in which the modern mind can find both stimulus and repose and not merely the satisfaction of antiquarian curiosity.

Let us now glance at the form in which the old Græco-Roman culture had come down to Provence and to the rest of once Roman Europe.

If Provence was co-heir with all civilized Europe

to Rome, that which it had inherited was not the pure Græco-Roman culture of the classical period, but had been affected by the character and circumstances of those who had guarded it down the ways of six centuries. With the collapse of the Roman Empire under barbarian attacks, the control of public education had passed to the Church. Now the Church was not ill-qualified to bear this responsibility. Some of its greatest figures had been eminent in public office before attaining high ecclesiastical rank, and some, like St. Jerome and St. Augustine, had themselves been teachers of rhetoric. But the Church naturally had ideals other than those of scholarship and literature. In the third century, the followers of Origen, who recommended the study of the Greek poets and philosophers, had been defeated by those of Tertullian, who condemned pagan literature, and a century later St. Jerome had abandoned his favourite Cicero after a heavenly voice, heard in a dream, had warned him, ' Ciceronian thou art, not Christian, for where thy treasure is there is thy heart '.

Yet one at least among the greatest of Roman poets was fairly secure against the assaults of bigotry. As the author of the fourth of his Eclogues, with its expression of a new hope for the world from a manchild yet to be born, Virgil was held to have prophesied Christ's birth forty years before the divine event. This accident apart, something spiritual in him aroused the sympathy of some of the finer natures among the Christians, and a much earlier Christian poet might have written the lines, dating from the thirteenth century, in which St. Paul is described as mourning by Virgil's tomb.

Again, an earlier Christian generation, could it have perused, would have approved the passage in the twenty-second Canto of the 'Purgatory', in which Dante depicts Statius saluting Virgil as his guide to Christianity no less than to poetry.

Other and less spiritual poets of pagan Rome came to be more or less tolerated by the Church, increasingly drawn to secular duties and unable to do without men of worldly culture among her servants. Only, for religious and other reasons, the classical poets were now objects of an admiration extended equally or in even larger measure to later and inferior writers.

In a book like this there may be taken of the Latin poetry of the decadence a view more cheerful than the customary. Thus if Ausonius, in the fourth century, should seem a minor and sometimes a tiresome poet, we, who are concerned with him and other late Latin writers only so far as they have ministered to our own poetry, should not thereby be prevented from recalling with gratitude a line in his really charming 'Rosæ',—

Collige, virgo, rosas dum flos novus et nova pubes.

Gather roses, girl, while yet the flower and your youth are new.

For that line has reverberated delicately through our own poetry from before Herrick's,

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,

to after Henley's,

Oh gather me the rose, the rose,
While yet in flower we find it!

So, too, whatever judgment may be delivered by the historian of Latin poetry on Claudian and on Rutilius Namatianus, we should acknowledge that these poets of Rome's latest and darkest hours, better perhaps than any of her noon, struck the note for our own poetry of Empire, especially when Rutilius, even after the sack of Rome by Alaric, asserted in words of immortal ardour the immortality of Rome.

(4) The Establishment of Accent and Rhyme

Our business, however, is less with the occasional charm or the last magnificent flaring up of inspiration in the Latin poetry of the decline than with the technical changes at work in it. For out of these changes emerged both our scansion and our art of rhyme.

Prosody is an affair of stress, or of the time taken by a correct speaker to utter a syllable: an affair of accent, or of quantity. Now accent had always been much more powerful in Latin than in Greek, and the Latin ear had never been very acutely conscious of the quantitative difference between syllables. But Latin poetry had found all its greater models in the literature of Greece, and a succession of Latin poets had imposed on their language, somewhat insecurely, the foreign quantitative prosody of Greek. When those illustrious poets had passed away, the temporarily subdued nature of the Latin language began to reassert itself. In other words, the system of scanning verse by quantity began to weaken as the force of accent began to revive. The process can be clearly seen in the verse of Prudentius (A.D. 348–410), who was born

twenty-three years after the establishment of Christianity as the State religion of the Roman Empire. While adhering generally to the classical quantitative prosody, Prudentius is found allowing accent to determine the quantity of a syllable, and varying the quantity of the same word as he changes his metre.

Licence of this sort could not cause the appearance of any new and vital prosody. It meant, however, that any new mode of writing verse which was put forward with energy would find little resistance from an established mode. The motive of the new mode was not artistic; it was religious.

In Prudentius himself may be noticed not only the licence which he takes in the ordinary way but a deliberate, purposeful tampering with the quantity of certain words which he must have for their meaning—words of religious meaning, such as his *Paraclitum* and his *catholicus*. A lay writer finding some such word awkward to get into his metre might use a substitute word with more or less the same meaning; the Church writers of the early Latin hymns could not do so when the word in question was a technical Church word or a sacred name. To take an instance, they had great trouble with the word most closely connected with the Church, the word *ecclesia*. The two great non-lyrical measures of Latin poetry were the hexameter and the pentameter. Well, with its true classical quantity the word *ecclesia* could be used as regards the antepenultimate in the hexameter in only one of its cases and in the pentameter not at all. The Church writers therefore boldly shortened the word.

But no amount of shortening and lengthening

would meet the situation. To write in the classical mode, with however much licence, would mean every now and then employing, simply for the sake of scansion, words unfamiliar to at least a part of the congregation. St. Augustine tells us definitely that he selected a certain rhythm 'lest metrical necessity should compel me to words which are little used by the common people'. The writers of Church hymns, in short, needed freedom to write the kind of verse in which words they wished to use could be employed despite quantity and words they did not wish to use could be excluded. They desired to write that which would have a pattern clear to common people who knew little and cared less about quantitative scansion. The decline of the strict quantitative system enabled them to fix as the basis of their system that which was natural to the Latin language: accent.

This substitution of accent for quantity as the basis of verse was a process of reaction. It was a return to the old Latin usage of days before a foreign system had been imposed on the language. But the introduction of rhyme was not a process of reaction; it was an innovation. It is true that rhymes can be found in classical Latin verse. It is even true that they are not always accidental. For example, Ovid must have intended to rhyme when he wrote,

Quot cœlum *stellas*, tot habet tua Roma *puellas*.

But in this declaration that Rome has as many girls as heaven has stars the rhyme has only a prose value; it is merely a trick which comes naturally when we are thinking in pairs of things for com-

parison or contrast; it is simply a way of rounding off a phrase or giving emphasis. There is nowhere in classical Latin verse an *art* of rhyming. Rhyme was wholly unnecessary in the severely regulated quantitative verse of classical Latin. In the new, looser mode of the Church hymns, however, it was clearly desirable to have some means of indicating the end of each line. Further, it was desirable to make the hymns easy to remember, and rhyme was a most effective aid to memory.

Rhyme is found in the Latin poetry of the Church in the third century, and in the sixth century we find what is known as 'leonine' verse, that is, hexameters with internal rhyme. But it was not until the twelfth century that it entered fully into its own. Here it is impossible to do more than glance in passing at one masterpiece of twelfth-century Latin hymn poetry, the poem of three thousand lines written about 1145 by Bernard of Morlaix and entitled 'De Contemptu Mundi'.

It is extraordinarily intricate and opulent in rhyme, each line consisting of three parts, of which two rhyme with each other, while the lines themselves are in couplets, bound together by double rhymes. As it has yielded both 'Jerusalem the Golden'—

> Urbs Syon aurea, patria lactea, cive decora,
> Omne cor obruis, omnibus obstruis et cor et ora—

and 'The World is very evil'—

> Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt, vigilemus
> Ecce minaciter imminet arbiter ille supremus—

it is in part extremely familiar to us in substance.

The version generally used, however, that by Neale, though excellent, cannot do full justice to the effect of the internally rhymed dactyllic hexameters, and I will quote a few lines from a beautiful incomplete translation by Swinburne.

Every heart boweth down to the grace which doth crown thee, O Sion, O Peace,
Time there is none in thee, stars neither sun in thee rise not nor cease;
Of the saints thou art trod, and made glorious of God; thou art full of thy Lord;
And the sound of thee rings from the great ten strings of the decachord.
Thou hast lilies made sweet for their maiden feet who were clothed in lowliness;
And roses blood-red, as a saint's blood shed, in the beauty of holiness.
With His wings He shall cover thee, He that rules over thee, even the Son,
The Mystic Lion, the Lamb out of Sion, the God which is One,
Purged of all revelling, clear of all travailing, pure of all strife,
Land of glad hours, made fair with new flowers, and sweet with new life.

When a form as intricate as that could be used with Bernard's success, and Adam of St. Victor could attain equal success in rhymed stanzaic forms, models were before the poets of France, Italy and Spain who desired to write in a living language.

These models, however, were purely religious. What of models for profane verse? These latter were produced between perhaps 1150 and 1225 in a mass of Latin student songs, the Goliardic songs,

so called on account of their relation to a more or less mythical monkish reprobate honoured by convivial students and named Golias. Of the merits of some of these pieces this is hardly the place to speak, yet it is necessary to explain that if many of these songs were not much more than cheerful or derisory tavern noise, roughly equivalent to 'We won't go home till morning', others deserved and must have had some serious admiration from the students of many nations who sang them and among whom must have been some of the poets of the next generation. Of classic feeling there is in these songs hardly anywhere a trace, though a single composition, which you may read on page 166 of the Stuttgart edition of the 'Carmina Burana', in a vow to Cupid recovers something of the elegance of Horace. Another piece, 'Sævit Auræ', page 148, 'Carmina Burana', an outpouring of gratitude that man's loving is not like the animals', limited by the seasons, has a sort of gravity in desire which tells us it was made by a true poet. But nearly all the other pieces are just student songs, gay, rowdy, satirical, now and then a little wistful, full of warnings against the serious error of diluting wine with water, or brushing aside the solemn occupations of middle age to declare that youth's only business is love. There is nothing really mediæval about these songs; they belong rather to a narrow, premature, disreputable renaissance. They remind us that, whatever the monkish world might be about, there were alive then in young men the desire of light love and the desire of drink and the defiance of order out of which will later come so much lyrical poetry.

We can take stock now of the inheritance of those

poets who in Provence or elsewhere in Romanized Europe were about to break into poetry in living languages. They had no direct touch with Greek literature, for the knowledge of Greek, possessed by every cultured Roman of the classical period, had died out and was not to be recovered for generations yet. But since almost all that mattered in classical Latin literature was work on Greek models, they had as much of the Greek spirit as could get through the somewhat tough Roman temperament. Their possession of Latin poetry was almost complete, though there was a good deal of confusion as to the relative values of the Latin poets. In the chief masterpieces of the Church poetry, such as the 'Dies Iræ' and the poem by Bernard of Morlaix we lately quoted, they had verse of great merit in the new models—scanned by accent instead of by quantity, and rhymed. Some frivolous models, though not many, were provided by the Latin student songs. On the other hand, the living languages were somewhat uncouth. As regards this, we may recall that from the second century to the sixth the speech of all that part of Europe on which we have our eyes had been Low Latin; that from the sixth century it had been Romance, that is, one or other of the dialects ancestral to modern French, to Provençal, to Italian, or to Spanish. In France itself there had grown up two main dialects, distinguished by the pronunciation given by speakers to the word for 'yes', *oui* becoming in the mouths of one section *oil* and in the mouths of the other section *oc*. Provençal was the *langue d'oc*, and it was this which, as we saw on an earlier page, suddenly and amazingly achieved

the extreme of artificial refinement in the structure and rhyming of its verse.

(5) The New Mythology

We have now seen how the mode of writing verse inherited from classical Rome was altered into modes essentially those of modern European, including English, poetry. We have traced rapidly the development in technique, and must now examine the change in spirit. It has already become clear that the survival, in altered prosodic forms, of Latin as a language of poetical expression did not ensure the full survival of the spirit of Græco-Roman poetic art. For whatever of the ancient culture had been preserved was preserved not by secular authorities of the pagan Empire but by the Christian Church; and, whatever importance might be allowed by the Church to any of the pagan books it had preserved, it thrust them all immeasurably beneath a book of which classical Rome had known nothing. A book? Its very title proclaimed it to be The Book.

The supreme new fact in Europe was the Bible, made available in Latin. We make an error if we here write the Bible as meaning just Christianity. The point is not simply that Christianity ruled where paganism had prevailed. The point is that, whereas the pagan mythology had had no authoritative and supposedly inspired book, the sacred stories of Christianity were set forth definitely, decisively, rigidly in a book declared to be inspired by God in every syllable and containing a complete guide to life here and hereafter.

Such a book created a new habit of mind. To

ascertain the exact bearing on belief and conduct of every story, symbol, event in the Bible became obviously the duty of pious learning. Now not much enquiry was possible without discovery of the fact that, though the Bible condemned polytheism, insisting that there was but the One God, it here and there acknowledged dualism, allowing a certain power to an evil energy in revolt against God. The early missionaries of Christianity among the barbarians, whether through their own superstitiousness or in despair of convincing barbarians that the tribal gods were utterly without existence, seem to have assisted the progress of dualism by giving to heathen divinities an inverted eminence among the enemies of God. Thus, for capital instance, they did not totally dissolve the Teutonic goddess Hellia into air, but thrust her, still powerful, into the place of torment named after her, Hell. To put matters in a sentence, while the missionaries welcomed the barbarians themselves to Christ, they despatched the gods of the barbarians to swell Satan's army. They recruited for both forces.

With the idea of debased and banished but still existent barbarian divinities vaguely in their minds, and brooding over brief and mysterious Biblical references, in Jude and elsewhere, to the 'angels which left their former state' and were reserved under chains till the day of judgement, and to the fallen Lucifer, star of the morning, men's imaginations began to work out the grandiose myth of warfare in heaven. Literary form was eventually given to it in the fifth-century Latin poem, 'De Originali Peccato,' of Avitus. To this was added, in the same century, the order of precedence among the heavenly

hosts as set out in works associated with Dionysius the Areopagite, works which, when translated into Latin in the ninth century, familiarized men's minds all over Europe with the social life and topography of Heaven. The apocryphal 'Gospel of Nicodemus', with its really moving narrative of Christ's descent into Hell, may be regarded as having completed the body of sacred myth supplementing the Bible.

Secular legend developed through these centuries to make the nearer past not much less strange than the Bible and the myths afterwards attached to it had made the beginnings of the human drama. There were absurdities of the forger's art, as in narratives of the Trojan War furnished in the fourth century by Dictys the Cretan and Dares the Phrygian; there was the fabulous history of Alexander, originating in Egypt and translated into Latin at some date in the fourth century; there was the forged history of Charlemagne, and the authoritative biography of Eginhard, with its brief record of the death in action of Roland at Roncevaux to justify the admirable early French epic, the 'Song of Roland'.

Incomparably more important to us was the substance of Arthurian legends, shaped, expanded and given to the world by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the first half of the twelfth century. Out of this came in time a masterpiece of our early prose, Malory's version of the legends. And out of Malory or his sources came all the Arthurian material of Tennyson, of William Morris, of Swinburne. But the debt of our poetry to Geoffrey of Monmouth does not end there, for from him Shakespeare had the story of

Lear and Milton part of the matter for his ' Comus '. The story of the Holy Grail, the tragedy of Guinevere and Lancelot, the tragedy of Tristram and Iseult, with so much else of spiritual or knightly adventure, whether originally related to the legend of King Arthur and the Round Table or later absorbed into it, made mysterious and romantic the early history of Britain, and gave poetry both a new background and new figures embodying the qualities in human nature with which poetry is most concerned.

Other means of embodying moral qualities were sought out in a literature of allegory; and fantastic moralized bestiaries, guides to a kind of spiritual zoology, with the mythical unicorn and the actual panther made equally unreal, contributed colour to the medium through which the Middle Ages saw the world.

(6) The Element of Romance

The importance of these bodies of new myth and legend in the history of poetry can hardly be exaggerated. For it is from these myths and legends that modern poets, our English poets included, have derived the greater part of their symbols of mystery, spiritual exaltation, horror, pity, and revolt, symbols the like of which the beautiful, almost rational, mainly clear and happy mythology of pagan Greece and Rome could not offer.

A point to which special attention must be directed is this: the lack of harmony in this new mythology and mass of legend when compared with the results of the Greek imagination which Rome took over. It is explained by the very different way in which the new myths and legends came into existence. Greek

mythology was the production of a single corner of the world, expressed the mind of a single civilization. But the new European mythology of the Middle Ages was compounded of the most diverse material, poured in from every quarter and expressive of the most various hopes and fears and curiosities. The Bible itself had brought strangeness into Europe, not only in the sublime Semitic religious poetry, which had a feeling for the infinite altogether unknown to the classical mind, but also in the simplest of its imagery, for similes and parables that would be homely in Palestine were far from homely in central or northern Europe. The European mind was in this extraordinary situation, that the book to which it turned for the law of conduct here and for guidance as regards the life hereafter, the book nearest and dearest and most sacred to it, was a book entirely *foreign*.

Further, as we have seen, out of portions of the Bible had been developed such myths as that of Satan's revolt against God and his fall from Heaven. Secular legends and the most extraordinary perversions of classical history (the legend of Troy, the history of Alexander) had flourished and taken colour from every country they passed through.

This astonishing medley of fable, history, forgery, could not possibly be made all of a piece. Old and new, the homely and the foreign, the classical and the Oriental, were wildly mixed in it. Out of its incongruities arose things for which the orderly and consistent classical mind had had no room—that distortion which we call the grotesque and that blending of beauty and strangeness which we call the romantic.

(7) The New Poetry

To sum up what is itself far too summary, the poets who began to write in the living languages instead of in Latin towards the end of the Middle Ages had inherited:

(1) Græco-Roman culture in forms modified by the Church.

(2) A prosody developed out of decadent Latin, with accent for its basis instead of quantity, and with rhyme as an innovation.

(3) A new body of myth and legend, quite different in character to the classical.

Their task was to develop the living languages into means of artistic expression. In this task Provence succeeded first and most brilliantly, arriving with almost incredible speed at a poetry of most elaborate technique devoted to an extremely conventional celebration of courtly love and philosophy. The devastation of Provence by the Albegois crusade scattered the troubadours over neighbouring countries, especially Italy, where under their influence the new Italian poetry began, and where Dante himself was an admirer of the troubadour, Arnaut Daniel. Meanwhile the rest of France had been producing its own new poetry. Elsewhere too there was poetic activity. But the end of the Middle Ages was at hand with the end of the thirteenth century. For six centuries all civilized Europe, held together under the Church as formerly under the Roman Empire, had had all things intellectual in common. Henceforth each unit was to have its own national life, and to produce its own national poetry.

(8) The English Genius

At this point or a little later begins the history of English poetry. The first great figure in it is Chaucer, whom Pope, in the history of English poetry he planned but never wrote, assigned to 'the school of Provence', and whom Swinburne defined as a French or Italian poet in the main, thoroughly lined and warmed with the substance of an English humorist.

It is natural that we should here ask ourselves what the genius of the English people could contribute to the new poetry. This and that and the other it had from Provence, or from France generally, or presently from Italy: what, beside the English language, could it add?

The answer, I think, must be: romantic atmosphere. It comes largely, of course, of the conditions under which the visible world for the most part presents itself to the eyes of the poet in a country with such a climate as England's. The lack of definition in things seen under our usual skies, the mutable face of nature with us as cloud and mist and changing lights work on it, encourage a view of the world in which the bare and enduring fact, independent of its surrounding atmosphere, of the aspect it bears at a choice moment, is negligible. And then there is something in the English character, a kind of modesty towards most things beautiful and passionate, tending in the average no doubt towards prudery and inadequacy of response, but valuable to the artist. Nature with us has more reserved beauties than in any country of strong sunlight and less capricious weather, and, though no poets

have observed her beauties more closely than our own, ours have used a certain reticence in singing of them, as in singing of human passion. Of all races in Europe we are the most tongue-tied, the most given to understatement of emotion, the most on guard against making a scene, and, to whatever absurdity this may lead with the average person, it helps the poet. Rhetoric is not much expected from him; rhetoric, the curse of poetry, in fact troubles English poetry very little. A quieter, a more personal and intimate utterance is usual in our poetry.

Atmosphere and intimacy of feeling constantly distinguish our lyrical verse, making it difficult for any English lyrist to be rightly appreciated in countries in which things are seen more nakedly, felt with a more spectacular surrender to feeling, making it difficult also for the music most characteristic of our verse to be heard rightly by ears accustomed to more rhetorical cadences.

It has, on the whole, been our tendency to soften, to veil, to spiritualize the material of our poetry, and to sing our emotions to a music of less emphatic rhythm than that of most other poetry. It has also, and this is not a cause for self-congratulation, been on the whole our tendency to be less careful in choice of an adequate subject, less heedful of outline in treating our subjects, than the poets of countries holding more closely to classic ideals.

But when we talk of our national genius and of the tendencies of that genius we are assuming that the former has developed and that the latter are evident. It would be a gross mistake to suppose that stage to have been reached when Chaucer appeared.

The nation was then still in the making, and so was the language. French did not cease to be the legal language of England till 1362. English was first used for a speech in Parliament in 1363. At these dates Chaucer, at most, was in his early twenties; some put his birth later. It was not till about twenty years later, and in consequence partly of Chaucer's own work and of Wycliffe's translation of the Bible, that the various dialects of English began to be consolidated into one English language. And, as for the English character, it had many experiences to undergo before the qualities latent in it were to be called into full play.

II

THE AGE OF CHAUCER

Chaucer's career—French and Italian influences—Chaucer as a pioneer—His sense of character—The spirit of his work—The errors of the English Chaucerians—The merits of the Scottish Chaucerians—The genius of Dunbar—Poetic dearth in England.

IN the month of May, in the year 1374, a certain citizen of London took, nominally for life, the lease of the dwelling-house above the gate of Aldgate, binding himself to keep the premises in repair and not to sublet them, while the Corporation, his landlord, agreed not to make a gaol of those premises, so long as he was there, and not to disturb him 'except it be necessary for the defence of the City'. The tenant was an official about to take up, next month, the duties of Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidies of wools, skins and tanned hides in the Port of London. By origin he was of the middle class, the son of a well-to-do dealer in wine, but he was more than ordinarily well-educated, and he was something of a favourite at Court, having from the age of seventeen been attached to the household of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, and later to the household of the King himself. He had seen service in France, had been taken prisoner, and had been

ransomed, the King personally contributing £16, equal to nearly £200 of modern money, for the purpose. Seven years before he came to dwell in Aldgate he had been granted by the King a special pension 'for good service'.

He was a married man, and his wife, with whom it was suspected he was not on the best of terms, had connections at Court. He was financially in a sound position, having, apart from his new salary and his pension, the custody of the lands of Edmund Staplegate, and one way and another more than £1,500 a year in terms of modern money. He could count, too, on rewards for detection of smuggling, and in fact once received the equivalen of over £700, modern money, the value of forfeited wool which John Kent, of London, had tried to get through to Dordrecht without paying the duty. Also, he was entitled, by royal favour, to a daily pitcher of wine from the King's butler.

He was a travelled man. That he had been in France was in those days of political and social and business nearness to French affairs nothing remarkable. But he had been in Italy also, just before he settled at Aldgate, and, though his official business had been on that journey with Genoa, he had visited Florence and probably attended the lecture given there on the 3rd of August, 1373, by Boccaccio to inaugurate that great story-teller's Professorship of Dante. For this English official was a profound admirer of 'the grete poet of Italie that hight Daunt'. He was half a century too late to see Dante in the flesh, but he could meet, and probably did meet, Petrarch, his 'Fraunces Petrarck, the laureat poete'. He mentions among his masters

Lollius, but Lollius is a Mrs. Harris—there ain't no sich person among authors. It may have been Chaucer's name for someone else, or it may have been 'only his fun', as Charles Lamb said of Coleridge's sermons; but it does not matter. The point is that this English official, who till 1372 or thereabouts had been strongly influenced by the French poets, came under the influence of the Italians, who had themselves learned very much from the scattered poets of Provence.

He was himself, for all his official work, given over to the writing of poetry, for he was no other than GEOFFREY CHAUCER (? 1340–1400). With a courage we can now hardly understand, he wrote it in English, of which neither he nor his possible readers had been taught anything at school. It was, certainly, the cradle-language of every English child, but it was not taught at all in Chaucer's schooldays or for some while later. English grammar was not in the curriculum; English composition was unpractised by schoolboys; English prosody was not thought upon. English was not even used by boys in construing their Latin. It was Chaucer's ambition to make English a literary language, to give it artistic form; and in this, working first under wholly French and then under mainly Italian influences, but always with a marvellous feeling for the secret genius of the English language, he succeeded only too rapidly. He, in truth, so far outstripped the general progress of his countrymen in the national language that when he died no one—or only his royal Scottish disciple, King James—could carry on his work. The very pattern of his verse speedily became obscure to Englishmen, even to

English poets. So that Chaucer the fine artist seemed to the later of them, and even, two centuries on, to the scholarly and admiring Dryden, a rude genius. It was not till late in the eighteenth century, nearly four hundred years after Chaucer's death, that the pattern, the fine art and finish of his verse, were recovered for us by a superb and ever to be gratefully remembered achievement of English scholarship, that of Tyrwhitt.

And, if Chaucer's prosody and the artistic qualities of his verse were so far ahead of his time, still more splendidly premature was his choice of subject for his masterpiece, the 'Canterbury Tales'. The age into which he was born was one of allegorical literature, and particularly of that huge allegory which he translated from the French, the 'Romance of the Rose'. Fables, romances, abstractions, conventional moral ideas occupied the attention of writers. But Chaucer was a realist and a humorist, and it was here that all the English side of him was most evident, for in pure poetry he was mainly French or Italian. Before anyone else in all Europe, and so long before the poets of England that they could not even see what a door he had opened to them, Chaucer seized on man for his subject. Not on heroic, half-mythical men, not on figures nominally human yet no more than personified virtues and vices, but on ordinary men and women. He took hold firmly, shrewdly, humorously on *character*.

His interest in life, in all its details, was inexhaustible. It was less like that of the poet than that of the novelist, and it is probable that in the sixteenth century Chaucer would have been a dramatist and in the nineteenth a writer of realistic and

humorous fiction. What constitutes his peculiar greatness is the perfect blending, in his best work, of this prose material with his poetic quality.

It is true that his poetry, when you can detach it from his realism and humour, is not often of the loftiest or subtlest kind. He was in some ways a rather worldly poet, but fortunately also a rather earthly poet, so that he says the most charming and touching words about the beauty of young and growing things and about the familiar face of nature. Still, his poetry does not aspire to any heavenly rapture. From the very spirit of their art, most poets are the poets of wisdom or else of noble folly, but Chaucer is mainly the poet of prudence. He is shrewd rather than wise. He is easy and tolerant, and amused by the variety of human character and the movement and colour of crowds. He has tenderness, he has a true pathos, but for the most part he is too intrigued by the comedy of ordinary human conduct to indulge those sentiments. His humour can be very broad, and it can be delightfully sly; it is never savage or quietly cruel. And he will forgive anything to people who really enjoy *something*. No doubt they might find higher and finer things to enjoy. He as a poet can enjoy beauty in art and in the earth renewing itself in spring, as well as relish the fun of the fair. But the main thing is to be alive, to have zest for something, even if it be gross. So, for all that the Wife of Bath is a coarse old reprobate as Chaucer shows her to us among the sharply delineated people of his 'Canterbury Tales', his heart warms to her, even as her own warms over recollections of her jolly and unprofitable youth. His own enthusiasm for life

as well as hers cries out in her shameless exultation over old days:

> But, Lord Christ! when that it remembreth me
> Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,
> It tikleth me aboute myn herte rote
> That I have had my world as in my tyme.

Before coming to the 'Canterbury Tales', Chaucer had written a great deal of verse. He was already the author of the 'Book of the Duchess', in honour of the memory of Blanche of Gaunt, of 'Troilus and Cressida', mainly a paraphrase of Boccaccio but showing a great advance in originality, of the 'House of Fame', and of the 'Legend of Good Women'. Nevertheless, he was within sight of his fiftieth year without having produced any complete and indisputable masterpiece when he resolved to picture typical English characters and to represent the humour of contemporary life through the device of a pilgrimage to Canterbury during which the pilgrims should tell each other stories to beguile the tedium of their journey.

The scheme was never completed, but all the same we have in the 'Canterbury Tales', as Dryden admirably said, 'God's plenty'. No words of praise could have been better chosen than Dryden's, for it is a feeling of abundance that Chaucer's chief work gives. His world is no choice corner into which a shy, thoughtful poet retires; it is the great, common, wonderful world, and, like that which Stevenson sang of in a nursery rhyme, it is 'full of a number of things'. Chaucer enjoys it all. His keen, twinkling eyes miss nothing that reveals character, and his humour plays round almost

everything he sees. The oddities, the inconsistencies, the weakness of his people interest him endlessly; their humanity, the flesh-and-blood warmth of them, rejoices him. In the true spirit of the greater novelists, he cares very little whither they are going, since for him the point is that they move; and he lets them move as if of their own accord because in obedience to their individual character. They are English men and women of his own day, exactly as he could see them in the streets or the country-side, but they are also types you may see in other garb about you to-day. We shall find no other such vivid human creatures in our literature until we get to Shakespeare.

And, as for Chaucer, he will create no more, for misfortunes come upon him, he loses his official position, apparently through neglect of duty but perhaps through hostile political influence, and, though later on he is Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster, this position is also taken away from him. Matters improve with him quite at the last, and he once more became a householder, this time in Westminster, where, however, he soon after dies. His art dies with him, for the poets who mourn him cannot reproduce even the imitable part of his technique.

Of the English Chaucerians it is difficult to write fairly. It is so, not only because they lack the April freshness of Chaucer's poetical feeling and the salt of his humour, but because their faults are those of which a modern mind is much less tolerant than the mediæval. Lowell went too far when he declared GOWER, the 'moral Gower' of Chaucer's commendation, had 'positively raised tediousness to the

precision of science', but Gower was certainly an adept in monotony. Given the mood, it is still possible to get some mild pleasure out of a few of the tales in his 'Confessio Amantis'; but there are 30,000 lines in that work. JOHN LYDGATE and THOMAS OCCLEVE, who flourished between the uncertain dates 1370–1450, are the one slightly more and the other slightly less monotonous than Gower. Occleve got nothing out of his youthful sowing of probably not very wild oats, but had in him somewhere some of the materials of poetry and managed in his lament for Chaucer to utilize them after a fashion. A later, and in the main perhaps worse, poet, STEPHEN HAWES, who died or desisted soon after 1520, produced a few lines more generally and justly remembered than any work of theirs, the epitaph:

O mortal folk, you may behold and see
How I lie here, sometime a mighty knight:
The end of joy and all prosperity
Is death at last, thorow his course and might:
After the day there cometh the dark night,
For though the day be never so long,
At last the bells ringeth to evensong.

There is poetry almost unique in possessing the value of a proverb, but there is nothing else of real merit in the dreary stretch of 'The Pastime of Pleasure'.

The trouble with all these writers is that they are unable to do more than gaze back at Chaucer, in whom they see not the new and most valuable thing, the poetic and humorous grasp of character, but only qualities which Chaucer to some extent shared with Gower. They are made out of a rib

of Chaucer, but not out of one against which his very human heart beat.

More of Chaucer and very much more of poetry is to be found in the Scottish Chaucerians: the royal poet, James I of Scotland, Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, to whom it is usual but generous to add Gawain Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld and translator of Virgil.

As regards JAMES I (1894–1437), it is dangerous to go to his poem, the 'King's Quhair', with a mind too full of his story. He was taken prisoner by the English when eleven years of age, and spent nineteen years in England in captivity. It was through his prison bars that he loved Jane Beaufort, whom he married on his being ransomed, and with whom he had thirteen years before he was murdered in Scotland in circumstances of tragic picturesqueness, the Queen's maiden, thenceforth known as 'Kate Barlass', thrusting her arm into the bolt-sockets of his room's door in vain effort to keep out the assassins. The conditions under which it was composed and some shadow of the end come between us and the poem; but poetry had not then learned to be closely personal, and the 'King's Quhair' uses some of the generalized mediæval apparatus, disappointing our unreasonable expectations. Taken, however, for what it is, it will yield some fresh and sweet emotion, and be recognized for the work of a studious and discriminating disciple of Chaucer.

Worschippe ye that loveris bene this May,
For of your blisse the Kalenis are begounne.
And sing with us, Away, Winter, away!
Cum, Somer, the suete seasoun and sonne!

Of ROBERT HENRYSON (? 1425–1506), in some respects the most original of the Scottish Chaucerians, we know little for certain; but we can see him clearly enough, and in the very act of reading Chaucer, thanks to one of his graphic descriptive passages.

> I mend the fire, and bekit me about,
> Then tuik a drink my spreits to comfort,
> And armit me weill fra the cauld traiout;
> To cut the winter nicht and mak it schort;
> I tuik ane Quair, and left all uther sport,
> Written be worthie Chaucer glorious
> Of fair Cresseid and lusty Troilus.

In his continuation of this Quair, or book, of Chaucer's, Henryson rises to a tragic power hardly attained by the master himself. Cressida, smitten by leprosy, sees again the lover she has lost, and he, moved by mere humanity, unable to identify in the ruin of her beauty the face once most dear to him, gives alms to her as to a stranger, and there is the piteous end of her. Henryson's most important work, however, is his 'Morall Fabillis of Esop', made, of course, out of borrowed material, but showing much skill in giving contemporary meaning to old fables and something of Chaucer's clear and broad outlook on humanity. He is to be honoured, too, for his 'Robene and Makyne', the first pastoral in English or Scottish poetry, and one happily free from the affectations common in verse about love-making shepherds.

Less Chaucerian than Henryson but a greater poet, WILLIAM DUNBAR (? 1460–1520) disputes with Burns the first place among Scotland's writers of verse. As a song-writer he is not in competition

at all, and he is less thoroughly representative of the Scottish genius, but in the highest qualities of imagination he is the superior of Burns, and in confident technical ability not inferior. Considering his period and the state of the language and of poetic art, Dunbar's complete assurance, his readiness to tackle any problem of versification, is indeed remarkable. His resource in vocabulary, especially the vocabulary of insult, is extraordinary, and when in one of his moods he can pour out abuse with a speed that amazes us. But his moods are many, and the variety in the moderate amount of his work that we have is noteworthy. He ranges from florid courtly compliment to wild grotesques, from the 'Golden Targe', an allegory, and the 'Thistle and the Rose', a ceremonial poem on the Anglo-Scottish royal marriage he helped to arrange, to the boisterous humour, like that of some of the Goliardic songs noticed in our introduction, of the 'Testament of Mr. Andro Kennedy', and the horror of the 'Dance of the Sevin Deidle Synnis'. Like most poetic humorists, he was keenly aware of the nearness of death, and his best-known short poem, the 'Lament for the Makers', that is for the poets, tells us in its refrain of how the fear of death troubled him.

He has done petuously devour
The noble Chaucer, of makaris flour,
The Monk of Bury, and Gower, all three:
Timor mortis conturbat me . . .

Sin he has all my brothers tane,
He will nocht let me live alane;
Of force I mon his next prey be:
Timor mortis conturbat me.

The English poets mentioned in this lament were valued by Dunbar chiefly for their 'aureate' style, so far as they had it; his praise was for their success in having, as he said, 'over-gilt' and 'enamelled' and 'illuminated' the English language. At that stage in the development in poetry it was often less the imaginative achievement of a writer than his work in shaping and polishing the language that was admired by brother poets.

Dunbar, who as a begging friar had travelled all over England, had not taken long to discover that he had no true religious 'call', and had entered the secular service of the Scottish Court. As secretary to the Scottish Embassy he had been in France, where, as may be suspected from some of his work, he may have seen Villon's poems, then just published after the 'golden-voiced gallows-bird's' death. Later he had been with the Scottish Embassy in London. He was a diplomatist and a courtier, and the other Scottish Chaucerians were well-born men writing for an aristocratic circle. Their work, therefore, though it breaks back sometimes into coarse fooling or abuse, is on the whole courtly, artificially decorated, gilded to satisfy the ideal of 'aureate' style. Therein it is both the less Chaucerian and the less Scottish. A more national, though much less valuable, poetry was being produced at the same time, and continued till Burns in the last quarter of the eighteenth century absorbed it and re-issued it with his own powerful personality stamped on it. Thus the Scottish Chaucerians mattered less as influences on national poetry than writers of such merit might be expected to matter. Dunbar, in fact, was almost lost to view

for two hundred years, till brought again into prominence by Allan Ramsay.

In England, for reasons already glanced at, no progress was made in applying the discoveries and the methods of Chaucer, and changes in the language hid from a new generation the principles of his verse. In the absence of any English poet of standing, Henry VII actually had a French writer, himself of no consequence, Bernard André, as poet laureate of England, and the King's feats were celebrated not in Chaucer's tongue but in the French of the 'Douze Triomphes de Henry VII'.

But, whatever dearth or sapless growth there was in the garden of English poetry, in meadow and wood the wild flowers were out. The English lyric, which in two or three instances had attained a wonderful charm well before Chaucer, was being produced, uncertainly and at wide intervals, but with an increasing command of the qualities of the language. Our first song, 'Sumer is icumen in', had been written about ninety years before Chaucer's birth, the Alison poem about 1300; some lovely carols, and the beautiful and affecting mystical poem, 'Quia Amore Langueo', and that delightful and romantic defence of women, 'The Nut-brown Maid', were written somewhere within the century after Chaucer's death. To this anonymous poetry a chapter must now be devoted.

III

LYRICAL POETRY, 1250–1500

The first notes—Carols—*Quia Amore Langueo*—'The Nut-brown Maid'—Prosodic difficulties—Changes in the language—Skelton.

WE now address ourselves to the mass of lyrical poetry, nearly all of it anonymous, produced in the latter half of the thirteenth century and in the fourteenth century. The later specimens of this poetry have importance as showing that, when the more pretentious writers of what we may loosely call the Court had lost all hold on the principles of verse, simpler and nameless poets kept their hold through sheer singing instinct. The earlier specimens are noteworthy as striking the true English note of delight in the advent of spring, in the life of bird and beast in the field and greenwood. And first for 'Sumer is icumen in', of which we have not only the words but the original music.

Very well known as they are, the lines of this delightful song must be quoted:

Sumer is icumen in,
‡*Loud* Lhude‡ sing cuccu!
Groweth sed, and bloweth meed,
And spring'th the wude nu—
Sing cuccu!

‡*Ewe* Awe‡ bleteth after lomb,
Lhouth after calve cu:
‡*Jumps* Bulluc sterteth,‡ bucke verteth§
Murie sing cuccu! §*Runs to the forest*

Cuccu, cuccu, well singes thu, cuccu:
‡*Stop* Ne swike‡ thu naver nu;
Sing cuccu, nu, sing cuccu,
Sing cuccu, sing cuccu, nu!

Some fifty years later is the Alison poem, with a rhyme scheme taken, as was noted in our Introduction, from the Provençal. This lovely song of the lover of Alison—

‡*Gracious* An hendy‡ hap ichabbe y-hent§, §*Enjoyed*
‡*I wot* Ichot‡ from hevene it is me sent,
From all wymmen my love is lent
Ant lyght on Alisoun—

has a charm of movement to which the writer of the cuckoo song had not attained. Another poem of about the same date continues the welcome to spring in these compositions:

Lenten us come with love to toune,‡ ‡*In turn*
With blosmen and with briddes roune,
That all this blisse bryngeth;
Dayes-eyes in this dales,
Notes suete of nyghtegales,
Vch foul song singeth.

The refrain is happily used in 'Blow, Northern Wind':

Blow, northerne wynd!
Send thou me my suetyng!‡ ‡*Sweetheart*
Blow, northerne wynd, blow, blow, blow!

But the passing of spring, the approach of winter, the vanity of this world's joy are not out of the thoughts of these early singers.

‡*Sigh* Oft I sike‡ ant mourne sare
When hit cometh in my thoht
Of this world's joie, hou hit goth all to noht.

says the author of some lines made about 1300, and there are many other variations on the theme, none so remarkable as the powerful piece in which the inevitability of the rhyme enforces the inevitability of the end:

Erth owt of Erth is worldly wrowght;
Erth hat gotten uppon erth a dygnite of nowght;
Erth upon erth hath set all his thowght,
How that erth upon erth myt be hye browght.

Turning to carols, we find at least one of delicate excellence before Chaucer's day, that address to the Virgin ending:

‡*Lady* Levedy‡, flour of all thinge,
Rosa sine spina,
Thu bere Jhesu, hevene king,
Gratia divina:
Of alle thu ber'st the pris,
Levedy, quene of paradys
Electa:
Mayde mild, moder es
Effecta.

There the blending of Latin hymn and English lyric is effected with art. There can be no suggestion either of pedantry, for Latin was familiar, or of eking out the resources of so poor a language as English, for it is used for the main part of the poem.

The makers of such pieces were artists, realizing that the inlay of Latin could make a pattern, and introducing it at nicely calculated intervals. An enchanting example of their skill in this as of the tender poetical feeling in some of them is 'Quid Petis, fili?' Why this piece is not in all the anthologies I do not know.

Yet there remains a thing still more precious, a poem of Christ's birth, made somewhere in the century after Chaucer's death in pure and simple and exquisitely cadenced English:

He came al so still
    There His mother was,
As dew in April
    That falleth on the grass.

He came al so still
    To His mother's bour,
As dew in April
    That falleth on the flour.

He came al so still
    There His mother lay,
As dew in April
    That falleth on the spray.

Religious feeling finds subtler and more sustained symbolism for its expression in 'Quia Amore Langueo', the finest mystical poem written in English before the great age of English mystical poetry, the seventeenth century. Seeking 'in a valley of the restless mind', says the poet of 'Quia Amore Langueo', for 'a true love'—seeking as the human soul seeks for the divine

lover—he heard a sorrowing voice, and, when he drew near to it, behold, there was one sitting under a tree on a hill, 'a seemly man to be a king'. To the question put by compassion, the mourner answered:

> I am true love that false was never;
> My sister, man's soul, I loved her thus.
> Because we would in no wise dissever
> I left my kingdom glorious.
> I purveyed her a palace full precious;
> She fled, I followed, I loved her so
> That I suffered this pain piteous
> *Quia amore langueo.*

And so verse by verse, with a profoundly moving simplicity, Christ relates His sufferings as the lover of man's fickle and wayward soul. The simplicity is that of poetic passion and art, not the childishness of a poetry still very young, and it hurts as it was intended to hurt. Take this of the marks of crucifixion:

> Look unto mine hands, man!
> These gloves were given me when I her sought;
> They be not white, but red and wan;
> Embroidered with blood my spouse them brought....
>
> Marvel not, man, though I sit still.
> See, love hath shod me wonder strait. . . .

The whole poem aches and pleads.

> Long thou for love never so high,
> My love is more than thine may be.
> Thou weepest, thou gladdest, I sit thee by;
> Yet wouldst thou once, love, look unto me!

But earth and the loyalties of human affection have their place in this fifteenth-century poetry we are considering. Witness, above all, the ever delightful 'Nut-brown Maid'. It is a poem in dialogue, with a man and a woman as friendly disputants over the alleged unreliability of woman's love. To his non-committal report of the evil men say of women she replies that, though woman's faith may have decayed from what it was, there is the great instance of the Nut-brown Maid to prove how much a loyal woman's love will bear. Thereupon the disputants agree to act the Nut-brown Maid and her lover, and the trial of faith is set forth in a dramatic way. The lover announces himself a banished man, and would bid the maid good-bye for ever; she retorts that she will follow him. He urges the harm to her reputation, the dangers of an outlaw's life in the greenwood, the notorious inability of women to help instead of hinder a man who is attacked; but to each objection she has her reply. Not even when he says that he has another love in the greenwood will she agree to give him up. And so he is convinced of her devotion, tells her that he was but testing her, and adds that she has 'won an Earle's son and not a banished man'. Written in stanzas of twelve lines with frequent but not quite regular internal rhymes, the 'Nut-brown Maid' has an assured and happy swing to it, and whoever made it knew thoroughly what he was about. In its plain, small way, it shows even that feeling for character which a few pages back we lamented as lacking in Chaucer's immediate successors. The maid has all the virtues, but most mercifully is not herself a Virtue; and she has

imaginative eyes, and can see as in a picture, with definite detail, what going to the greenwood would mean: herself with bobbed hair and shortened skirt, bow in hand. Note how feminine is her vision, how truly 'in character'!

The makers of all these pieces and of many others not much less admirable escaped falling into prose stiffness on the one hand and into doggerel on the other chiefly because they wrote with the object of being sung to music or at least recited in a kind of chant. The more ambitious and learned or courtly writers, as we have already noted, from Lydgate onwards, stumbled and staggered in verse in the most extraordinary way. Partly, of course, they erred through inability to follow Chaucer where the ground was common to him and them, but it is only fair to acknowledge that they were increasingly on new ground.

The language was changing rapidly. Numbers of words of native English were becoming obsolete, their place being taken by words of French origin. Trade with the Netherlands and the settlement of Flemish weavers in England were adding to the language some Teutonic words. A few Italian words, such as 'pilgrim' and 'brigand', were coming into use. And, with much more effect on poetry, the structure of the language was altering.

The final pronounced 'e' had not been sounded in Chaucer's day quite to the extent that he, for metrical reasons, chose to sound it; within a few years after his death it had almost entirely ceased to be heard. Thus words which had been of two syllables became words of one syllable, and when

Chaucer's verse was wrongly read it failed to yield up its principle for the guidance of imitators. Changes in vowel pronunciation, especially as regards 'o' and 'e', affected poetry, and the muting of 'gh' in the middle of words rendered possible a rhyming of words like 'might' and 'write' which Chaucer would not have allowed.

In the utter confusion thus set up doggerel developed rapidly. Writers who were not safeguarded by composing their poems for music or for rhythmical chanting, or preserved from error by some instinct, lost almost all touch with metrical law by neglecting to account for their short or unaccented syllables, and little but rhyme kept some of their work from being indistinguishable from prose, and from bad prose, for prose of the finer sort had not yet been produced.

But one writer found in this chaos his queer opportunity. JOHN SKELTON (? 1460–1529) has often had less than justice done him. In his own age he had academic and royal favour, being appointed poet laureate to the King at both Oxford and Cambridge, and made tutor to the future Henry VIII. The great Erasmus called him 'the light and ornament' of the time; in the eighteenth century Pope looked back at him as 'beastly Skelton'. But this dealer in ribaldry and helter-skelter rhymes was a satirist of no small power, able decisively to attack so commanding a personality as Wolsey, and, what is more to our purpose, he had at moments the delight in beauty of a true poet. It is a joy to encounter in his vivacious, scrambling rhymes such a passage as this from his lines to Mistress Isabel Pennell:

It were a heavenly health,
It were an endless wealth,
It were a life for God Himself
To hear this nightingale
Among the birds smale
Warbling in the vale—
Dug, dug,
Jug, jug,
Good year and good luck,
With chuk, chuk, chuk, chuk!

The building up of English verse after the collapse of the more ambitious verse of the fifteenth century occupied about three-quarters of the sixteenth century, and until Spenser we can see verse going carefully lest it should relapse. But the feat was accomplished under foreign, mainly Italian, influences which demand explanation. To enter on that explanation here would be premature, and it seems well to give up the next chapter to the ballad.

To do so, no doubt, is to risk censure. For *in the form in which we have them* nearly all the ballads are of considerably later date than any we have yet reached. But in allusion, in substance or in spirit nearly all reach back; and, whatever the period in which they assumed the corrupt or falsely refined form in which we know them, they are more congruous in a fourteenth-fifteenth century setting than in a sixteenth-seventeenth century context.

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IV

THE BALLAD

Disputed origins—The communal origin nonsense—The people mere vulgarizers of the work of individual poets—Some typical ballads—The value of ballad poetry.

WITH the sole exception of Shakespeare as a by-product of Bacon, the ballad has inspired more learned and ingenious nonsense than anything in English poetry. Writers whose scholarship cannot be questioned, though their understanding of the conditions and processes of poetic creation must be, have contended that the ballad is not in any sense worth considering the work of individual authors but proceeds from either the independent efforts of the people in mass or from the collaboration of the audience with the quite unimportant improvising poet. We have been invited to believe that the ballads were made either by informal public meetings or by their co-operation with an improviser glad of their help.

The likelihood of the ballads having originated in the undirected and thoroughly democratic efforts of people in general can easily be tested. We have only to invite a jury or a committee to compose a ballad, a sonnet or a limerick to see the utter

absurdity of the idea. Somewhat more plausible is the theory of the co-operation of the audience with the poet. Those who urge this theory, however, presuppose that the ballad found its beginnings always in improvisation. They assume that the poet had the hardihood to appear before his audience relying on them to do his work for him. There is not a shred of evidence to justify this assumption. Improvisation has never been a common accomplishment in Great Britain; it has never produced work of anything like the vigour and poetic merit of the finer ballads; and there is nothing in such ballads to suggest that they sprang from the pooled happy thoughts of the poet, the tinker, the tailor, the ploughman and the chance passer-by. Further it is assumed or, rather, it has to be admitted, that the audience could contribute to the ballad-in-the-making only from a huge stock of poetical commonplaces, suitable for insertion into pretty well any ballad. But when did such a stock come into existence, and how? It could be drawn only from older ballads; it could exist only when scores of ballads had become familiar. How then can it possibly explain the making of those older ballads? Again, if all the audience did was to insert stock phrases, lines or refrains into the ballad being made before it, of what importance was its contribution? On this theory, all the essential, all the new part of the poem was provided by the poet. With what reason, then, can it be said, as it has been by a distinguished exponent of the theory, that the poet 'did not count'?

But indeed it is waste of time to argue these matters. There never has been a poem to which

any audience contributed anything worth mention. Poetic creation is an act of the mind which the poet shares with no one but God.

All that the people had to do with the ballad was to vulgarize it, to bring each example of the ballad nearer to an average, depriving the poem of some of the marks of its individual authorship. What was most easy to understand in a particular ballad they would understand; what was most easy to remember they would remember; the rest they would of intention reject or carelessly forget. Any gaps thus made in the poem as it originally came to them would be roughly filled up with those stock commonplaces mentioned above, and even those, having been drawn from earlier ballads, would be not genuine contributions by the people but the fragments of work by individual poets of the past.

No doubt the average ballad is very impersonal. Ballad does not differ from ballad as a poem by Shelley differs from one by Keats or one by Tennyson from one by Swinburne. No ballad that we have carries clearly impressed on it the marks of its maker's individuality. But this is readily explicable in part by the nature of the ballad and in part by the process almost every ballad has gone through before reaching us. The ballad presents in miniature some of the qualities of the epic and of the drama of action. It is a swiftly moving narrative, not the expression of its maker's private emotions, nor his commentary on life. Its interest is in situation and event, not in the maker's point of view. It would thus from the first be more or less impersonal. Then, passing from mouth to mouth, it could

lose in a generation or two such signs of individuality as it had. The unusual allusion, not being generally comprehended, would be dropped out; the novel phrase, not being generally liked, would be replaced by one more customary; and eventually the ballad would resemble other ballads more nearly than it did when first recited by its maker.

Impersonality is no evidence that the ballad was made wholly or in great part by the people. Nor is anonymity any evidence. There is no lack of anonymous lyrical poetry which has never yet been ascribed to people in general.

Behind every ballad is an individual poet, though between us and him there are the early editors who 'improved' the ballads with false refinements, the careless producers of the broadsides in which the ballads first were printed, the several generations of reciters by whom the ballads were vulgarized and passed on from the poet. Sometimes we can see the individual poet in the masterly direction of the ballad to its climax through stanzas which in phrasing are probably much corrupted. Sometimes we can see him only in the power of a line or two here and there. Never can we be sure of his lineaments. But he is there, and if he had never been born or never had chosen on a certain day a certain subject, the ballad would never have come into existence. In fact of the mystical democratic theory of ballad origins, it cannot too strongly be insisted that no ballad exists because scores of Toms, Dicks and Harrys felt disposed to produce it, and that every ballad exists solely because some one man, set apart from his fellows by the gift of poetry, elected to make it for pleasure or profit, to beguile

the tedium of his tramp, or to pay for his night's lodging, or because his stock of ballads was getting too familiar to his audiences, or because a legend or an event had stirred him, or because a phrase sang in his mind's ear and demanded development.

The very earliest ballads were connected with dance-songs. Their name comes from *ballare*, to dance. Originally the *ballata* was in Italy much what the *carole*, an ancient circular dance in which the dancers joined hands, was in France. But as the *ballata* in Italy, the *ballada* in Provence and the *ballete* in France, it was in time restricted to a particular form of dance-song created by the addition of an extra rhyming line of some significance in the refrain, which had previously been merely an imitation of some musical instrument or of the sound of some kind of action. But as in English we have no ballads of great antiquity it is needless to enquire closely into the primitive form of the ballad. Our ballads retain only faint traces of the origin of the form.

They are mostly dramatic narratives in which the object is to tell a tale of strange or tragic happenings in such a manner as to appeal to the audience's wonder, fear, pity or pride, without inculcating any lesson or conveying more than the necessary minimum of information about the characters of the story. The sense of humour is almost wholly ignored in the true ballad, so is the religious sense.

Certain characteristics are common to almost all ballads. One is abruptness, the narrative beginning without introductory explanation, and being carried

by a single phrase or line over long intervals of time in the action. Another is the use of fixed phrases to indicate distance—

> They had na' sailed a league, a league,
> A league, but barely three—

or time—

> And up and crew the red cock
> And up and crew the gray—

and for some other purposes. A third characteristic is a quaint definiteness regarding numbers, with a preference for three and seven and nine, where no definiteness is required by the story. A fourth is the description of all sorts of objects in common use as being made of gold or of silver. Other peculiarities of the ballad might be mentioned, but it is time to describe and appreciate a few of the most famous of these poems.

'Thomas the Rhymer' is an instance of a ballad not inspired by hitherto untreated legend or historical event but literary in origin. It derives from the fifteenth-century romance of Thomas of Erceldoune, embodying a story similar to that of Tannhauser, except that the Queen of Elfland takes the part of Venus. Thomas, in the ballad, is lying on Huntlie bank when he sees 'a ladye bright' riding past. He greets her with reverence as Mary Queen of Heaven, but she tells him she is Queen of Elfland, and bids him come 'harp and carp', play and recite, with her, adding that if he dares to kiss her lips she will be sure of him. He kisses her, thereby becoming her thrall, and, being set on her milk-white steed, is taken away. They come to three roads, of which one, she tells him, is the Path of Righteousness, the

second the Path of Wickedness, and the third leads neither to Heaven like the first nor to Hell like the second, but to Elfland. It is this third they take.

O they rade on, and farther on,
And they waded rivers abune the knee;
And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the roaring of the sea.

It was mirk, mirk night, there was nae starlight,
They waded thro' red blude to the knee;
For a' the blude that's shed on the earth
Rins through the springs of that countrie.

And so Thomas fared on with her and was seen on earth no more.

'Sir Patrick Spens' deals with the fatal voyage of that knight, sent to 'Noroway o'er the faem' to bring over the princess of that country. Disaster overtakes the ship, and it is emphasized, in the manner usual in the ballad, by dwelling on the hopeless vigil of those who await the return of the dead hero and his companions.

'The Lass of Lochroyan', which is evidently a good deal corrupted in the form in which we have it, tells how the heroine sailed forth to find her lover with her newly-born child. Arrived at her destination, she cries out for admittance at the door of his castle. His mother, assuming his voice, affects to doubt her identity, and eventually turns her away. The lover wakes in the morning and tells his mother:

'O I hae dreamed a dream, Mither,
The thought o't gars me greet!
That fair Annie of Lochroyan
Lay dead at my bed-feet.'

The mother confesses she has turned Annie away. The lover attempts to overtake Annie, but her ship has sailed away into a storm and foundered. Over her body, washed ashore, he calls down vengeance on his mother, and stabs himself.

Far deeper pathos is attained in 'Clerk Saunders', in some respects the most powerful of all ballads. Saunders is killed by one of her brothers while sleeping with Margaret.

Clerk Saunders he started, and Margaret she turned
Into his arms as asleep she lay;
And sad and silent was the night
That was atween thir twae.

At dawn, urging him to leave her, she discovers he is dead. Her father bears the body away for burial. That night the ghost of Saunders comes to her, begging for release from his troth. She will not release him till she is told what awaits in the next world women 'who die in strong traivelling'. Then she follows the ghost till she loses sight of him by his grave, and cries out:

'Is there ony room at your head, Saunders?
Is there ony room at your feet?
Or ony room at your side, Saunders?
Where fain, fain, I wad sleep?'

'There's nae room at my head, Margaret,
There's nae room at my feet,
My bed it is fu' lowly now,
Among the hungry worms I sleep.'

The grim ballad of 'Edward', the text of which was sent in the eighteenth century to Percy by Sir Edward Dalrymple, is entirely in the form of ques-

tion and answer. It shows very remarkable skill in working up to its climax, and is entirely free from weak or coarse phrasing. But whether this be due to its having escaped alteration by reciters or to highly capable restoration may be disputed.

'The Queen's Marie', which Sir Walter Scott thought was a distorted version of events at the court of Mary Queen of Scots, and which Kirkpatrick Sharpe thought he had traced to a scandal at the Russian Court, is an excellent example of the traps in which apparently historical ballads abound. The late Andrew Lang seems to the present writer to have conclusively refuted the Russian theory. But anyone who chooses to take Scott's view will be upset by the pathetic and musical lament of the heroine-victim just before her execution.

> 'Yestreen the Queen had four Maries,
> The night she'll hae but three;
> There was Marie Seaton and Marie Beaton,
> And Marie Carmichael and me.'

It can scarcely be necessary to remind the reader that in history there was no Marie Hamilton, the 'me' of these verses, and no Marie Carmichael about the Queen, whose four Maries were surnamed Seaton, Beaton, Livingstone and Fleming.

Other ballads of special merit are 'Edom o' Gordon', the ballad of sisterly enmity called from its refrain 'Binnorie', 'The Wife of Usher's Well', 'The Dowie Houms of Yarrow', and that ballad of the Percy-Douglas feud fought out at Otterburn which has stirred every chivalrous reader through the generations.

The usual form of the ballad was fixed early, and in England proper, as we may see from one of the Robin Hood ballads which is known to date from at least 1450 :

> In somer when the shawes be sheyne‡ ‡*bright*
> Ann leves be large and long,
> Hit is full merry in feyre foreste
> To here the fowlys'‡ song. ‡*birds*

But when we speak of ballads we think of those made on the English-Scottish border and for the most part, at least as regards the form in which we now have them, in the seventeenth century, by authors whose hearts, however, were in the sixteenth or fifteenth or fourteenth and who may have drawn on old compositions.

Though the intrinsic value of the ballads can be exaggerated, for after all they are too simple to sound the depths or scale the heights of human experience, their influence on modern romantic poetry hardly can be. But that we shall try to measure when we come to the romantic revival at the end of the eighteenth century and the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Recovered from neglect by Bishop Percy in his 'Reliques', they have never since ceased to inspire poetry, and no small amount of fine work in the same or similar form and on like subjects has been produced by nineteenth-century writers. As to this, Rossetti seems to the present writer most successful in recapturing and intensifying the element of wonder in the finest of the old ballads but to have given his work in this kind too evidently literary a manner, whereas Swinburne, especially in some of the ballads

published only after his death, has absolutely thought himself back into the minds of the old ballad makers and produced work in some instances quite indistinguishable from theirs. Other modern ballads of high quality, with less aim at reproduction of the old manner, have been written by John Davidson. I mention these modern examples because it is extremely desirable that the ballad should be studied, not as a really or reputedly very ancient curiosity, but as a vital and permanently interesting form of poetry.

V

THE AGE OF SPENSER

The Renaissance and the Reformation—England shielded from the first shock of the new thought—The Renaissance more than a revival of classical learning—The new value set on personality—The ideal of the gentleman—Three great English amateurs—Betterment of English versification—The sonnet—Daniel and Drayton—Sidney—Characteristics of Spenser's poetry.

WE speak of the spirit of an age, and the phrase is convenient, but no age has ever had a spirit other than that which its greatest men breathed into it. And now that we have come to the Renaissance and Reformation it will be wise to refrain from talking as if they made the men who, each in his own way and different degree, in fact made them.

Not that we here have much to do with the making of either of those great movements. Our concern is with their continuation, with the extension of those movements, which began respectively in Italy and in Germany, to England. That they did not begin here or speedily affect our people is a fact of great importance. Especially should we remember that the Renaissance, as a revival of the ancient Græco-Roman world, did not reach this

country until the ideas and emotions of the old paganism had been brought into relation with the conditions of the world of the early sixteenth century. We British never experienced the first wonderful shock of seeing Greece as it were rising suddenly, in the freshness of her youth, from her grave. We were never puzzled to know whether and where the ancient ideals could be accommodated in the arts of a Christian world saddened by many centuries of meditation over its sins. All that part of the problem had been worked out before we entered into the Renaissance. Simultaneously with the ancient types we were presented with later work done in Italy and in France under their influence. Naturally enough, though we had in England great Greek scholars like Thomas Linacre, founder of the Royal College of Physicians, and William Grocyn, who was teaching Greek at Oxford before 1488, many of our writers drew in the strongly revived classical influence through Italian or French poets and thinkers rather than from those masterpieces which Europe could once more read in the original Greek.

But the Renaissance was really much wider than the revival of classical learning with which it is sometimes identified. It began well before the fall of Constantinople in 1453 sent Greek teachers westwards and stimulated the study of Greek. The Renaissance, widely considered, was a re-assertion of that belief in man's capacity and that joy in life which monkish Christianity had tended to crush down. It was just because it was a re-assertion of the eternal pagan in man that it enabled even the Latin classics, which had never ceased to be studied,

to be read like new books, without any mediæval prejudices, and the newly recovered Greek classics to be received with eager sympathy. The revival of classical learning did not cause the Renaissance; as early as the thirteenth century we may find an almost perfect Renaissance type in the Emperor Frederick, with his linguistic gifts, his profuse patronage of the arts, his dream of a State embodying the ideals of Provençal poetry, his unbridled sensuality. But the revival of classical learning gave direction, confidence and dignity to much in the Renaissance that would otherwise have tended to confusion and mere licence. In the literary masterpieces of antiquity men saw the sanction of their impulses. They found there an assurance that there was another way of life, and that the world could be accepted instead of being rejected as sinful and vain, and that States could achieve the highest civilization without being under any religious authority of the Christian type.

Some of the impulses which made the Renaissance helped to make the Reformation. As the men of the Renaissance in Italy cultivated artistic personality, so some of the men of the Reformation cultivated religious personality. In England the Reformation was marked by nothing more significant than the extraordinarily original effort of John Colet, the founder of St. Paul's School, to search out the personality of St. Paul. It was an age of great teachers, and it is well to note that what has since been most characteristic of our public school and university education, the direction of almost all effort towards the production of the *gentleman*, was inspired by Italy. We can hardly

exaggerate the influence in England for some fifty years of the work in which the Renaissance ideal of a gentleman was set forth, 'The Courtier' of Baldassare Castiglione. And we cannot hope to find anywhere in our history three better examples of the English gentleman than Wyatt, Surrey and Sidney, English amateur poets of the Renaissance tinged with some of the moral earnestness of the Reformation.

It is the chief claim of Wyatt and Surrey on our literary gratitude that they disciplined and polished English versification at a time when it had forgotten almost everything taught by Chaucer.

The masculine and impetuous nature of Sir THOMAS WYATT (1503–1542) never found entirely satisfactory utterance in the verse which he produced under Italian influence. Certain of his lyrics have a feeling for music and a personal and manly note in the expression of foiled or scorned love, but nothing does much more than hint at his restless energy, at all that side of himself to which he alluded in writing:

> Such hammers work within my head
> That sound nought else into my ears.

HENRY HOWARD, EARL OF SURREY (1516–1547) worked out a fuller expression of a nature perhaps less significant than we guess Wyatt's to have been though quaintly blending chivalry and crudish moral zeal. It is odd to find this knightly and courtly figure engaged in breaking London's windows at night with his cross-bow and pleading, like any Puritan of a later age, that he was arousing the sleepy consciences of sinful Londoners at the Lord's

command. To us he matters chiefly because, with more technical discretion than Wyatt, he regularized iambic verse, cultivated a way of balancing line against line or clause against clause in expressing antithesis, and was careful about the placing of the check in the 'heroic', five-foot iambic line. You have only to compare a line typical of his predecessors, 'Poor people wayleth and cale for helpe in vayne', with any line in which he puts the cæsura firmly after the well-stressed last syllable of the second or third foot to realize how he served English versification. As a poet in the high sense he is hardly of great importance, but his lines written during imprisonment in Windsor Castle have real pathos, and his sonnet ending, 'Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs', has both freshness of feeling and security of movement.

To Wyatt is due the credit of introducing into England the sonnet, a form invented in Italy two centuries earlier. Wyatt, however, entirely misunderstood the principle of the Italian sonnet, and by following it partly and neglecting it for the rest produced an effect of muddle. Surrey was wiser in abandoning it altogether and producing sonnets of three quatrains and a final couplet. But this, the usual English form in the sixteenth century, is certainly inferior in musical value to the true Italian or close approximations to it, such as most English poets of the nineteenth century have used.

The famous outburst of sonnet writing in England did not follow immediately on Wyatt's and Surrey's experiments and translations from the Italian. It was delayed for a generation, and came at French rather than Italian instigation. Its greatest result,

the incomparable sonnets of Shakespeare, are treated in our brief notice of Shakespeare's poetry, and the general mass of Elizabethan sonnet poetry cannot in this book be examined. Let two examples show the quality of minor sonneteers.

BARTHOLOMEW GRIFFIN, of Coventry, of whom little is known for certain except that he published his series of sonnets, 'Fidessa', in 1596 and died in 1602, was the author of this delicious but very seldom quoted poem:

Fair is my love that feeds among the lilies,
The lilies growing in the pleasant garden
Where Cupid's Mount, that well-beloved hill, is,
And where that little God himself is Warden.
See where my love sits in the beds of spices,
Beset all round with camphor, myrrh, and roses,
And interlaced with curious devices,
Which her from all the world apart encloses.
There doth she tune her lute for her delight,
And with sweet music makes the ground to move;
Whilst I, poor I, do sit in heavy plight,
Wailing alone my unrespected love.
Not daring rush into so rare a place
That gives to her, and she to it, a grace.

Another minor writer capable of great excellence in the sonnet was BARNABE BARNES (1569–1609). Witness this example, with its finely used double rhymes:

I wish no rich-refined Arabian gold,
Nor Orient Indian pearl, rare nature's wonder,
No diamonds the Ægyptian surges under,
No rubies of America, dear sold,
Nor sapphires which rich Afric's sands enfold,
Treasures far distant from this Isle asunder;
Barbarian ivories in contempt I hold.

But only this, this only, Venus, grant—
That I my sweet Parthenope may get.
Her hairs no grace or golden tires want,
Pure pearls with perfect rubines are inset,
True diamonds in eyes, sapphires in veins,
Nor can I that soft ivory skin forget;
England, in one small subject, such contains.

We cannot regard SAMUEL DANIEL (1562–1619) as exclusively a writer of sonnets, and perhaps his chief success is the lyrical dialogue, 'Ulysses and the Siren', a singularly smooth piece of work. MICHAEL DRAYTON (1563–1631), on the other hand, lives chiefly by one sonnet of supreme merit, the famous 'Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part'. It is no doubt the humblest of its many excellences, but nevertheless that which gives all the others their full effect, that it is so *manly* a thing. With its mingling of pride and deference, of passion and self-control, it comes to us with a peculiarly human appeal out of that age of over-sweetened and prettily conventional sonneteering, and it is the most original of Drayton's achievements. But Drayton has a good deal else to his credit. He had a genius for succeeding, not very brilliantly, where most other poets would fail, as in his huge topographical poem, the 'Polyolbion', and in that poem of the Battle of Agincourt which remained unrivalled till Campbell wrote. But for the most part he did pretty well what others could not do rather than extremely well what others could do. It is impossible that as a whole he should be anyone's favourite reading.

We must be content with only a few words on Sidney, already named as representing with Wyatt

and Surrey the fine flower of aristocratic English intellectual, moral, social and physical culture. The sonnets of Sir PHILIP SIDNEY (1554–1586) have been very variously estimated. As love poems in the ordinary sense they cannot satisfy us; they are not the intense expression of such passion as tortured Catullus or inflamed Burns, nor are they spiritual raptures like Shelley's. They are literary exercises in the manner of the time, sweet to over-sweetness, and ingenious even when professing to be only the plain speech of one who has looked in his heart to write. They are, that is, excellent in a kind of poetry which is the noblest of accomplishments rather than the noblest of arts. But as Sidney's farewell to life, when as a dying man he insisted on water being given before him to a common soldier, was of the loftiest, so his farewell to his kind of poetry rose to a great spiritual height:

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

Sidney had a considerable personal influence on EDMUND SPENSER (1552–1599); this influence, that

of the pedantic Gabriel Harvey, and the pressure of some extreme Protestants among his friends brought out in Spenser features not wholly characteristic. His mind was not really that of the vigorous and original creative artist; it was sensitive, receptive, and accommodating, so that some of the harsher ideas of Protestantism were lodged in it with some ideas of Catholicism, and a mediæval love for allegory worked in it with the enthusiasm of the Renaissance. The truth is that Spenser was a great decorative artist to whom ideas were seldom more than the pegs on which to hang the sumptuous fabrics of his verse. It is very revealing that even in the poems apparently most expressive of his philosophy, the hymns to beauty, or rather to the Platonic idea of a Beauty of which all earthly beauty is but the shadow, Spenser has not given any personal turn to the thought, but has taken it bodily from Italian sources and used it as it was.

His chief work, 'The Faerie Queen', for all its wealth of delicate and rich poetry, is a failure. He came to it with too many aims, all of them vague, none of them persisted in. Listen to his confession: 'In that Faerie Queen I mean glory in my general intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our sovereign the Queen (Elizabeth), and her kingdom in faerie-land. And yet, in some places else, I do otherwise shadow her.' Thus, too, Duessa is sometimes False Theology, and sometimes Mary Queen of Scots, and sometimes only a picturesque figure in a leisurely and elaborate pageant. Spenser is continually unsuccessful in giving character, event and scene both their outer and their inner meaning; and the reader

is wise who ceases to trouble about the inner or indeed any meaning other than that which music and colour have for us.

What Spenser gave to English poetry was no definite masterpiece on the grand scale but the Spenserian stanza, used afterwards by Thomson, Shelley and Keats, and the example of joy in beauty for its own sake. To the general reader, except perhaps through his two elaborate bridal songs, the 'Prothalamion' and the 'Epithalamion', Spenser has never meant much. To poets he has never ceased to be an inspiration, and it is with a poet's tribute, Wordsworth's, that we should take leave of

> Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven
> With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace.

Wyatt and Surrey and Sidney, and in a way Spenser, were poets in whom we can see most of the more delicate and chivalrous impulses of an England stimulated by the Renaissance and sobered by the new religious spirit. But the Renaissance had other and much more violent impulses. It meant not only the perfect gentleman of Baldassare Castiglione, but the cynical statesman of Machiavelli. It meant not only a subtle Platonic philosophy but a fierce delight in material power imaginatively appreciated. It meant adventure, lust and cruelty. It was incarnated, not only in scholars, artists and great Christian gentlemen, but also in figures of a terrible fascination, with personalities that shock as well as inspire us. And in England, among the play actors and tavern haunters, it helped to produce the violent and splendid Elizabethan drama.

VI

ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN DRAMATISTS

The parentage of Elizabethan drama not as commonly reported—Peele—Greene—Marlowe—Shakespeare, his sonnets neither pure fancy nor pure autobiography and his experience the stimulus to composition rather than the subject—Ben Jonson vindicated—Webster—Ford—Tourneur—Marston—Dekker—Day—Middleton and Rowley—Beaumont and Fletcher—Chapman—Massinger—Shirley—General estimate of the dramatists.

IT is a wise child that knows its father, and the Elizabethan dramatists would not have been wise enough to recognize the parent provided for them by a certain kind of literary historian. Products of the Renaissance, they were almost unconscious of, certainly in all but two or three instances wholly uninfluenced by, the old, simple, religious drama of England. Their thoughts can have gone back but seldom and incuriously to the dim beginnings of that drama, on the Continent, in the need which a Church using Latin for its services felt for *tableaux vivants* to convey its message to the unlettered in its congregations. They can have cared little to know, if indeed any of them knew it, that the first play on English soil had been a

'Ludus de S. Catherina', done at Dunstable shortly before 1110. They are not likely to have troubled much about the distinctions between the three forms in which the religious drama developed in England through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—the 'mysteries', dealing with the Gospel story, the 'miracle plays', dealing with events in the lives of the saints, and the 'moralities', dealing with personified virtues and vices. The quaintness, humour, pathos, infantile poetry that we may find in some of the religious plays done regularly at York, Chester and Coventry in the fifteenth century cannot have existed for them.[1]

For the Elizabethan dramatists, for the most part, regarded themselves as disciples of no English or mediaeval tragedian, but of Seneca, Nero's tutor, and in his preference for bizarre or repulsive subjects and the most artificial of styles a somewhat Neronian playwright. Every one of Seneca's plays had been done into English between 1559 and 1581, and the very first attempt at blank verse drama, the 'Gorboduc' of Sackville and Norton, played before Queen Elizabeth in 1562, had won no loftier praise than Sidney's declaration that it climbed to the height of Seneca. Now 'Gorboduc' is nearly or quite unreadable, and the unquestionable genius of Sackville, who too soon deserted poetry for politics, shines forth, for the very few who heed it, only through the gloomy contributions he made to the 'Mirror for Magistrates'. What 'Gorboduc' may have meant to contemporaries for some twenty years is rather difficult to guess; but, in the end,

[1] It is noteworthy that the old religious drama was mainly provincial, the new secular drama almost wholly metropolitan.

that over-rationalized drama, written in painful ten-syllabled lines of unrhymed verse, was utterly lost in the blare and blaze of young Christopher Marlowe's achievement.

With CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE (1564–1593) it has been usual to mention two slightly senior writers, GEORGE PEELE (? 1558–1597) and ROBERT GREENE (1560–1592), which is as if a pair of glow-worms were to be counted as making memorable the year of the most startling comet that ever flamed across the heavens. But Peele, though a poor dramatist, was a genuine and charming lyrist. His 'Farewell to Arms' is justly in all the anthologies, and he has other lines, such as these from his 'David and Bethsabe', in which he delightfully satisfies one of the tests of lyrical poetry by showing that he can dispense with the prose luxury of 'meaning':

Hot sun, cool fire, tempered with sweet air,
Black shade, fair nurse, shadow my white hair;
Shine sun, burn fire; breathe air, and ease me;
Black shade, fair nurse, shroud me and please me.
Shadow, my sweet nurse, keep me from burning;
Make not my glad cause cause of my mourning.

Greene also appeals to us most as a lyrist, as the writer of those lines to Fawnia:

Oh, were she pitiful as she is fair,
Or but as mild as she is seeming so,
Then were my hopes greater than my despair,
Then all the world were heaven, nothing woe.

But the world has agreed to remember him chiefly by his tracts and tales in prose, one of which, 'Pandosto', afterwards called by the very name we have just used, 'Dorastus and Fawnia', gave

Shakespeare the plot of his 'Winter's Tale', and another of which, 'A Groats-worth of Wit', is famous for its jealous allusion to Shakespeare. This last he wrote penitently from the death-bed to which vice had brought him, and there, too, he scrawled to his deserted wife on his bill for lodging these words, which it is impossible to read unmoved: 'Doll, I charge thee by the love of our youth, and by my soule's rest, that thou wilte see this man paide, for if hee and his wife had not succoured me, I had died in the streets.' A pitiful figure of soiled grace, a sinner not strong enough to profit by his sins or to repent of them effectively, Greene has his historical position at the head of the long line of English poets who have gone down into the pit.

No thought of the squalid tragedy in which Marlowe's life closed when, on the worst day that ever dawned for English poetry, he was stabbed in a Deptford tavern by some scullion rival for a harlot's favour, can cause one to include Marlowe in that fatal procession. For in life we may be sure, and in poetry we know, Marlowe never sinned otherwise than strongly. The faults of his magnificent and preposterous tragedy of 'Tamburlaine the Great', produced in 1587, were on the same scale and proceeded from the same qualities as its unprecedented virtues. He wrote it eight years before the publication, ten years before the translation into English, of the Abbé du Bec's 'Histoire du Grand Tamerlan', in which the character and exploits of the conqueror were reduced to the level of the credible, but in no event would Marlowe have condescended to respect limitations. To Marlowe, in the twenty-third year of his splendid and vehe-

ment youth, Tamburlaine was merely a pretext for the explosive expression of his own lust for beauty and power; and the instrument he had less found than invented for that expression, the English blank verse line, was too rich in sonorous effects to be used solely for purposes of the drama. Tamburlaine had to share the young poet's own enthusiasms, and the drama, sometimes urged on furiously, had at other times to wait while Marlowe explored the possibilities of blank verse.

So when Meander said to Tamburlaine,

> Your Majesty shall shortly have your wish
> And ride in triumph through Persepolis,

it was the poet who answered through Tamburlaine, rejoicing in the sound of names and the pageantry of success:

> 'And ride in triumph through Persepolis!'
> Is it not brave to be a king, Techelles?
> Usumcasane and Theridamas,
> Is it not passing brave to be a king,
> 'And ride in triumph through Persepolis'?

It was Marlowe again, not Tamburlaine, not even his Tamburlaine, who uttered the greatest of all the speeches in this wild and straining play—Marlowe, contemplating the huge unconquered spaces of the poetic world, and admitting that a limit was set even to such powers as his. The reference, it can hardly be necessary to say, is to that superb discourse on the insatiable aspiration of poetry which begins with eulogy of Xenocrates' face.

Where Beauty, mother to the Muses, sits,
And comments volumes with her ivory pen,
Taking instructions from thy flowing eyes;
Eyes, when that Ebena steps to heaven,
In silence of thy solemn evening's walk,
Making the mantle of the richest night
The moon, the planets, and the meteors, light;
There angels in their crystal armours fight
A doubtful battle with my tempted thoughts . . .
What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then?
If all the pens that ever poets held
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,
And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,
Their minds, and muses on admired themes;
If all the heavenly quintessence they still
From their immortal flowers of poesy,
Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
The highest reaches of a human wit;
If these had made one poem's period,
And all combined in beauty's worthiness,
Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest.

And there, after the most magnificent words any English poet has written of poetry, Marlowe remembered that the speech was after all one in the mouth of Tamburlaine.

But how unseemly is it for my sex,
My discipline of arms and chivalry,
My nature, and the terror of my name,
To harbour thoughts effeminate and faint!
Save only——

But here, even in the act of adroit excuse, the poet once more resumed:

—Save only that in beauty's just applause,
With whose instinct the soul of man is touched;
And every warrior that is rapt with love
Of fame, of valour, and of victory,
Must needs have beauty beat on his conceits:
I thus conceiving, and subduing both,
That which hath stooped the chiefest of the gods,
Even from the fiery-spangled veil of heaven,
To feel the lovely warmth of shepherd's flames,
And mask in cottages of strowed reeds,
Shall give the world to note, for all my birth,
That virtue solely is the sum of glory.

Extravagant as this early tragedy of Marlowe's is, and it abounds in glorious absurdities of stage 'business' and passages of sonorous rant, the reader is to be pitied whose first comment on it is one of satisfaction that Marlowe outgrew these extravagances. It is true that he did outgrow them; true also that it was well for him and the English drama that he did so; but there is no penalty for critical falsehood that may not rightly be extended to those who emit truths inopportunely to chill our essentially justified rejoicing. For all the correctness of such judges, their ability to appreciate poetry is to be suspected, and for my part I should infer insensibility rather than delicacy of perception in any one who had not at some moment over-valued Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine the Great'.

Still, the young demi-god did curb his magnanimity in the play that followed. 'The Jew of Malta' was emerging a portrait worthy to be set beside Shakespeare's Shylock when Marlowe lost patience and hurried into caricature. 'Dr. Faustus', grandly conceived, was worked out

in a final scene of the utmost truly dramatic power; and in 'Edward II' Marlowe stood forth as an absolute master of historical tragedy. 'The death scene of Marlowe's King', said Charles Lamb, 'moves pity and terror beyond any scene, ancient or modern, with which I am acquainted'; but the dialogue there is far other than that which Marlowe wrote in 'Tamburlaine', being subdued to the strict dramatic purpose.

What Marlowe, lord of himself at by no means long last, might have done in drama in another few years it is idle to conjecture. To the broad humanity of Shakespeare he never could have attained, and humour he lacked almost entirely. And, as to his verse, his 'mighty line', so described by Ben Jonson, was epic rather than dramatic, and might never have been thoroughly adapted by him to the lighter or the subtler purposes of drama. But it is quite certain that, if Shakespeare had died at Marlowe's time of life, Marlowe would now be considered the greater dramatist. It is even more certain, if certainty admits of degrees, that Marlowe's romantic fragment of narrative poetry, 'Hero and Leander', is firmer verse, and finer poetry, than the only work of Shakespeare, or of that age, comparable with it, the 'Venus and Adonis'.

The age knew well enough the extent of its loss in Marlowe's death. Peele mourned him as 'the Muses' darling'; Drayton, thirty-four years after his death, defined him in immortal words—

> **Next Marlowe, bathed in the Thespian springs,**
> **Had in him those brave translunary things**
> **That the first poets had; his raptures were**
> **All air and fire——**

and Chapman, continuing Marlowe's 'Hero and Leander', witnessed to his immersion in poetry as of one who 'stood up to the chin in the Pierian flood'.

Marlowe's part of that poem is a lovely and luxurious thing in the spirit of the Renaissance. We must look forward to Keats to find anything like the feeling for pictorial or sculptural beauty in such a passage as this:

> So fair a church as this had Venus none:
> The walls were of discoloured jasper-stone,
> Wherein was Proteus carved, and overhead
> A lively vine of green sea-agate spread,
> Where by one hand light-headed Bacchus hung,
> And with the other wine from grapes out-wrung.
> Of crystal shining fair the pavement was;
> The town of Sestos called is Venus' glass:
> There might you see the gods in sundry shapes,
> Committing heady riots, incests, rapes. . . .

One line of the poem is proverbial, 'Whoever loved that loved not at first sight?' But for the rest 'Hero and Leander' seems to remain only a title to the general reader.

Of WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616) as dramatist it is obviously impossible to give any account here. A genius comprehensive enough to create Hamlet and Falstaff, Cleopatra and Imogen, Lear and Caliban, Lady Macbeth and Juliet, cannot be impudently subjected to summary in a page or two. Nor is it necessary to inculcate reverence for that genius, for, to speak plainly, it has come to be worshipped idolatrously through a thick cloud of incense. Perhaps, then, the best use that could be made of the little space here available would be to

fill it with protest against every interpretation of Shakespeare which ignores certain humble facts—such as that he was a working Elizabethan dramatist whose concern with his characters began when they made their first entrance and ended when they made their last exit; that he wrote always with fluency and often in haste; that he never expected every line of his plays to be scrutinized as the work of an all-wise thinker; that he had to develop his plots and end his plays, and was not too particular about the means. . . .

But there is not space enough for that, and I will content myself with an attempt to clear away some of the misinterpretations of his chief works outside the drama.

The 'Sonnets' of Shakespeare, composed most probably between 1599 and 1602, have had the strangest and most lamentable fate of any English poems. Whereas 'Venus and Adonis' passed through several editions in a decade, the 'Sonnets', published piratically, with the famous enigmatic dedication to their 'only begetter', the mysterious 'W. H.', in 1609, did not reach a second edition till 1640. Thereafter they were little studied till Malone, towards the end of the eighteenth century, drew attention to their importance to the biographer of Shakespeare. Since then, instead of being read for their divine poetry, they have alternately been treated as pure autobiography and dismissed as mere literary exercises.

A single disinterested reading should show that the 'Sonnets' were not written as literary exercises in emulation of Sidney, whose 'Astrophel and Stella' had appeared in 1591, or of Daniel, whose

'Delia' had been issued in 1594, or of the less distantly comparable Drayton, whose 'Idea's Mirror' bore the same date as Daniel's volume. It should show also that Shakespeare's tragic experience of friendship for a man, who may or may not be identifiable with 'W. H.', and of love for a woman provided the stimulus to composition rather than the subject. To me, at least, it seems that many interpreters of the 'Sonnets' have confused the occasion with the substance of these poems.

The writer of these great poems, as several whole sonnets and passages in many others attest, had absorbed much of the more imaginative philosophy of his age, and in particular that Platonic idea of beauty, of the perfect and immortal type of which all earthly manifestations of beauty were thought to be but 'shadows', a technical term of this philosophy recurring significantly in the 'Sonnets':

> What is your substance, whereof are you made,
> That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
> Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
> And you, but one, can every shadow lend.

The Platonic theory of beauty as reflected from the eternal type had become, however, in the extravagant working of Shakespeare's youthful mind, so inverted that the beauty of his friend was not merely the shadow of the type but that type itself, regarded by him sometimes as 'Beauty's pattern to succeeding men' (Sonnet XIX) and sometimes as the fulfilment of ancient predictions of beauty (Sonnet CVI), but in the culmination of the subtle and lofty argument as independent of past and

future and of all circumstance and condition (Sonnets CXXIII–CXXV).

Such thoughts of beauty—of its earthly fading, of its human renewal in children, of its survival in poetical panegyric, of its identification with the eternal type, of its ability to arouse a love as absolute as itself, and of the consequent defeat of time—are the subject matter of the 'Sonnets' no less or even more than his experience of friendship and of love. Again and again, as it seems to me, the actual friend is half or wholly forgotten by Shakespeare as the general theme dilates and grows subtle. I do not think the actual woman is so often forgotten in the poems that deal with her; that experience, by every law of probability and on the evidence of many lines in the 'Sonnets', cut deeper into Shakespeare's heart. Nevertheless, the 'Sonnets' transcend her, and I believe that if all the missing proofs of her identity were made available we should find in these poems of Shakespeare not much more of her lineaments than of Emilia Viviani's in Shelley's 'Epipsychidion'.

While, therefore, I reject the contention that the 'Sonnets' are without relation to Shakespeare's life, I see little use in asking who was the man and who the woman. He may have been William Herbert, a man 'of excellent parts', as Clarendon recorded, 'having a good proportion of learning, and a ready wit to apply it, and enlarge upon it, of a pleasant and facetious humour and a disposition affable, generous and magnificent', but a rake, and in 1601 involved in scandal as the confessed father of a child born to Mary Fitton, the Queen's maid of honour. If Herbert was the man, Mary

Fitton was Shakespeare's unworthy mistress. But the man may equally have been Southampton, soldier, sailor, scholar, and as high in Shakespeare's youthful regard as Herbert. If so, we may speculate at large as to the identity of the woman.

I cannot think that the 'Sonnets', however rearranged in search for clues, can be made to yield up the secret. For, if sometimes in the 'Sonnets' Shakespeare seems to be writing directly from experience, more often he seems to be expressing Platonic ideas apprehended in his own way, and the relation of experience and philosophy is effected now from one side and now from the other, by mere ingenuity or by an act of the noblest imaginative energy. The 'Sonnets' give us, in short, neither the autobiographer indulging in occasional philosophic reflections nor the Platonic thinker using autobiographical material consistently for purposes of illustration, but the poet idealizing experience and realizing ideas, too great an artist for us to be quite sure where the one activity of his mind blends with or is replaced by the other.

It is for us, then, to control our curiosity about facts, and to refrain from disentangling ideas incomparably more valuable in his expression of them than in any abstract statement. It is for us to yield ourselves to the poetry of the 'Sonnets'. Our reward will be, not a more obstinate conviction that Herbert or that Southampton was the friend, not greater fluency in discoursing of Shakespeare as Platonist, but the heightened vitality, the finer 'nerves of delight', proper to those who have lodged in the memory and taken, as it were, into their very blood such lines as:

That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang. . . .

When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights. . . .

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

Of Shakespeare's two essays in romantic narrative, the 'Venus and Adonis' and 'Lucrece', it is possible here to say nothing but a word directing attention to the peculiar and often excessive vividness of their imagery, a quality that troubles the mind's eye as one reads. Of the songs scattered through the plays—few of them really finer as poetry than Fletcher's, but almost all of them unrivalled in being strictly vocal and in dramatic appropriateness—treatment here must be as shamefully inadequate. For room must be saved for a few remarks on his vocabulary, style and versification.

That Shakespeare, with much the largest vocabulary of any English poet, has an exceptional art in bringing naturally together words born to live strangers to each other has been universally acknowledged. It is less a commonplace that he has an extraordinary power of emptying words of their poorer metaphorical suggestions—so that,

for a single example, no fit reader of poetry can find merely legal imagery in:

> When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
> I summon up remembrance of things past.

There can be no grosser misunderstanding than to suppose him dependent on professional terms and anxious to work their mundane associations when he so rescues words enslaved to technical processes. As to his style, especially in the plays, the final thing was said by Coleridge, and must not be repeated in any but his words: 'Shakespeare's intellectual action is wholly unlike that of Ben Jonson or Beaumont and Fletcher. The latter see the totality of a sentence or passage, and then project it entire. Shakespeare goes on creating, and evolving B out of A, and C out of B, and so on, just as a serpent moves which makes a fulcrum of its own body and seems for ever twisting and untwisting its own strength.'

Of metre Shakespeare is in several respects the greatest master our poetry has had, and he alone has paid no price for the use of blank verse, which has forced every other writer of it to employ artificial stiffening for dignity. Shakespeare's blank verse, in his eventual management of it, has an ease, a probability, even rarer than its sweetness and majesty. It is subtle and flexible beyond that of any other dramatist.

Ben Jonson (1573–1637) is a poet who really had a choice of direction in his art. Very few have it; for most their direction is settled by a marked bias of nature, by the inadequacy of their technique for any but a particular purpose, by the spirit of

their age. But Ben Jonson had it in him to be either in some sort a Romantic or a classical Realist; his choice was not made illusory by technical aptitude for none but classic-realistic work; and, strong enough to rebel against Romantic excesses, he was not of a temperament that would force him everywhere and always into opposition for the sheer pleasure of it. Read the best of his songs and his epitaphs! Much of his lyrical work may be somewhat stiff of movement, and his theory that 'verses stood by sense without either colour or accent' and his practice of composing poems in prose and then turning his matter into metrical form conduced to stiffness. But listen to this:

Have you seen but a bright lily grow
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall of the snow
Before the soil hath smutched it?
Have you felt the wool of the beaver,
Or swan's-down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier,
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
Oh so white, Oh so soft, Oh so sweet is she!

Or to this from the fresh and beautiful pastoral of his old age, 'The Sad Shepherd':

Here was she wont to go! and here! and here!
Just where those daisies, pinks and violets grow;
The world may find the spring by following her;
For other print her airy steps ne'er left.
Her treading would not bend a blade of grass,
Or shake the downy blow-ball from his stalk!
But like the soft west wind she shot along,
And, where she went, the flowers took thickest root.

It would be absurd to suggest that the author of such things, and of 'Drink to me only with thine eyes' and of the tender epitaph on 'Elizabeth L. H.', lacked poetry. Hardly less absurd to suggest that the author of the finest eulogy ever offered Shakespeare was incurably because radically anti-romantic.

By choice, not of necessity, by a deliberate choice, persevered in with extraordinary resolution, Ben Jonson turned away from half his kingdom to cultivate the good but stubborn soil of the other half. And, with almost complete agreement, critics have praised his skill and industry there in terms that markedly indispose men to examine the results. Thanks to them, the most of us see Ben Jonson as a man of strong and well-stored mind working far too much according to that pestilential thing, a theory; an impressive but somewhat repellent figure, whose considerable stature we may take on the critic's word, and whose harsh or tedious works we may excusably leave alone.

With great deference to higher authority, and with no little prejudice in favour of Romanticism, I find myself unable to take this view of Ben Jonson. His choice seems to me legitimate, and his resolute exclusion of the romantic element in him from his classical and realistic plays eminently wise. I do not affect to doubt that moving a great mass of material by the muscles of the intellect, as Ben Jonson does, is an achievement less wonderful than moving it by a wave of the enchanter's wand used by Shakespeare. Only, I submit, virile strength, judiciously directed and openly displayed, may give us as much pleasure, of a different kind, as seemingly angelic energy, operative one can hardly guess how.

There *is* a pleasure in discerning the plan, in observing the process. But the results?

Well, of the Jonsonian results I would surrender to the enemy every play except 'Volpone' and 'The Alchemist', among the comedies, and 'Sejanus', that in its way great tragedy. He who denies the excellence of these must be like far too many of us in these days of the sentimental novel and play, the possessor of a relaxed mind. The comedies are harsh, certainly, and they are too intellectual to be very easy reading. 'Volpone' is a study of extreme cupidity and extreme credulity; it is beyond nature, but logically, by development from what does exist very actively in human nature. It is about vile people, but it is not a vile play. On the contrary, it is inspired by a power of mind worthy of Swift, and the theme is held, through all its working out, with a tenacity past praise. It is not a delightful comedy; our sentiment-sodden minds are not presented with people whom we are to gush over as we laugh at them. It is a comedy that has in it something sinister; it is great enough to make us afraid. As for the tragedy of 'Sejanus', which every manual of literature declares to our youth to be frigid, it is a complete success in its own kind, a very novel success in that it elaborates the portrait of a classical historical figure, Tiberius, more fully and judiciously than any other English dramatist has done. A masterpiece does not cease to be one because it happens to be of a kind very few people like. For my part, I venture to think it would be exceedingly wholesome for us if, without decline in our worship of Shakespeare or enthusiasm for the

romantics of Shakespeare's age, we were to acquire the wits and the taste to appreciate Ben Jonson.

It is at least possible for us to understand the position he carefully took up and firmly maintained. 'The true artificer', he wrote, 'will not run away from Nature as he were afraid of her; or depart from life and the likeness of truth; but speak to the capacity of his hearers. And, though his language differ from the vulgar somewhat, it shall not fly from all humanity, with the Tamerlanes and Tamer-Chams of the late age, which had nothing in them but the scenical strutting and furious vociferation to warrant them to the ignorant gapers.' Such self-denial, however, need not mean, and with Ben Jonson did not mean, the exclusion of all poetry. It was this abstainer from the nobler and the grosser excesses who wrote that glittering and superb line:

When she came in like starlight, hid with jewels.

The poetry that he did shut out from his plays was of a kind the infusion of which, far from bettering, would have ruined those works of reasoned art. And it is stupid ingratitude to condemn him for the absence of charm, of sympathetic characters, of mind-tickling, when we should be applauding his judgment and consistency in withholding what it had not been difficult, but must have been disastrous, for him to give.

To write of JOHN WEBSTER (. . .–1680 ?) is but to append prosaic foot-notes to the magnificent panegyrics of Lamb and Swinburne, who have perhaps exaggerated his strictly dramatic power. Listen to Lamb! 'To move a horror skilfully, to touch a soul to the quick, to lay upon fear as much

as it can bear, to wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop, and then step in with mortal instruments to take its last forfeit: this only a Webster can do.' Certainly no one else has accumulated spiritual horrors with such power as overwhelms us in Webster's two masterpieces, 'The White Devil', otherwise 'Vittoria Corombona', and 'The Duchess of Malfi'. Nor has any worker in this dreadful kind kept so much of his native nobility of soul. The muse of Webster may walk the floors of charnel-houses, but the shroud she wears for robe gathers on its trailing hem nothing of mere foulness. Not depravity but some inscrutable necessity of her nature compels her to funeral offices, to the rehearsal of the last rites before the eyes of their destined subject, to the representation of a madness which but anticipates the collapse of sanity in the mocked victim, to an inexorable alternation of effort between making life seem worse than any death and making death seem worse than even the life of multiplied tortures decreed to the heroic sufferers of Websterian tragedy.

But the unique genius of Webster is fully itself only at certain moments, and in certain speeches in 'the dialect of despair'. The general machinery of even 'The Duchess of Malfi' seems to me somewhat loose, somewhat arbitrarily set in motion, and even in the greatest scene of all some of the devices employed to increase the horror of the situation are lacking in that dramatic 'decorum' which Lamb too generously ascribed to all.

The Duchess of Malfi is a young widow. Her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, have menacingly warned her against re-marriage, though with

what motive Webster unwisely leaves us to guess. The Duchess in secret marries Antonio, her steward, to whom she bears three children. After improbable delays, her relations with Antonio are discovered by Bosola, the spy her brothers have left in her household. The Duchess and Antonio are forced to fly, but she is taken captive, elaborately tortured, and put to death. With this fourth act, unequal but full of marvellous poetry, the climax has been reached. Unfortunately Webster's plan requires of him a fifth act, in which Ferdinand, by now gone mad, the Cardinal and Bosola shall be punished.

Even so brief a summary will have suggested that 'The Duchess of Malfi' cannot be accepted as a well-nigh flawless masterpiece of drama. If we look critically into the great fourth act, we shall see even there that there are dramatic blemishes. Thus the parade of madmen before the imprisoned and doomed Duchess, though terrible in conception, is rather frigid in execution, with a lapse, in the song sung by these creatures, into what Webster may have meant to be horribly grotesque, but what in fact is ugly doggerel. And poetical and impressive as is the dirge of the Duchess sung into her living ears by Bosola—

> Much you had of land and rent;
> Your length in clay's now competent:
> A long war disturbed your mind;
> Here your perfect peace is signed.
> Of what is't fools make such vain keeping?
> Sin their conception, their birth weeping.
> Their life a general mist of error,
> Their death a hideous storm of terror—

it cannot be regarded as dramatically appropriate.

But if we turn from the dramatic to the poetic qualities of the play, there are passages hopelessly beyond any praise but Lamb's or Swinburne's. Nor are there lacking some passages in which the poetry is so exactly appropriate to the character and the situation as to be inevitable—to be strictly and intensely dramatic. Thus it is sorrow's intimate who cries out in that heart-shattering speech of the Duchess:

> Oh, that it were possible we might
> But hold some two days' conference with the dead!
> From them I should learn somewhat, I am sure,
> I never shall know here. I'll tell thee a miracle:
> I am not mad yet, to my cause of sorrow;
> The heaven over my head seems made of molten
> brass,
> The earth of flaming sulphur, yet I am not mad.
> I am acquainted with sad misery
> As the tanned galley-slave is with his oar;
> Necessity makes me suffer constantly,
> And custom makes it easy.

The writer of such a speech was not only a very noble, powerful and subtle poet, but in kind a dramatic poet; yet the writer of the play as a whole was clearly unalive to the need for full and convincing exposure of motives and incapable of organizing action throughout a drama, which is to say that he was something less than a complete dramatist. I cannot admit, even though moved to the depths by reperusal of his chief work, that he was of the order of Shakespeare. But this thing he did have in common with Shakespeare, a quality of pity for which outside Shakespeare and Webster

we may look in vain. Witness the almost intolerable pathos of that scene in 'The White Devil' in which Webster allows the child Giovanni de Medici to prattle to his uncle of his mother's death:

G. de M. What do the dead do, Uncle? Do they eat,
Hear music, go ahunting, and be merry,
As we that live?
F. de M. No, coz; they sleep.
G. de M. Lord, Lord, that I were dead!
I have not slept these six nights. When do they wake?
F. de M. When God shall please.
G. de M. Good God, let her sleep ever!
For I have known her wake an hundred nights,
When all the pillow where she laid her head
Was brine-wet with her tears. I am to complain to you, Sir;
I'll tell you how they have used her now she's dead:
They wrapped her in a cruel fold of lead,
And would not let me kiss her.
F. de M. Thou didst love her.
G. de M. I have often heard her say she gave me suck,
And it should seem by that she dearly loved me,
Since princes seldom do it.
F. de M. Oh, all of my poor sister that remains!
—Take him away, for God's sake!

And Webster has this also in common with Shakespeare, the power of striking out some phrase or line which sums up the whole of a character or illuminates the whole procession of events. Perhaps the most memorable instance is, not in 'The

Duchess of Malfi', but in 'The White Devil', where the lost Brachiano says to Vittoria:

> Thou hast led me, like a heathen sacrifice,
> With music and with fatal yokes of flowers,
> To my eternal ruin. Woman to man
> Is either a god or a wolf.

More exclusively his own is the quality of that utterly unexpected line, no sooner uttered than felt to be inevitable, when Ferdinand, gazing upon the dead Duchess of Malfi, says: 'Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young.' But that almost continuous fusion of poetry and drama which distinguishes Shakespeare in his great plays is scarcely attempted by Webster.

JOHN FORD (1586–1639) has a certain obvious affinity with Webster, but was in some ways a subtler dramatic poet, being curious about the abnormal rather than the terrible. His real masterpieces, ''Tis Pity She's a Whore', a tragedy of incest, and the finely conceived historical tragedy of 'Perkin Warbeck', have sometimes been thrust back to give precedence to 'The Broken Heart'. The claim of this play is based mainly on the culminating scene, which is theatrically striking but bewilderingly unmotived, and which Lamb decidedly overpraised. The argument of the piece is that Orgilus and Penthea have been parted by the latter's brother, Ithocles, who makes her marry Bascanes. She, still loving Orgilus, in honour will not yield to him. Orgilus vows vengeance on Ithocles, and after Penthea's death murders him. At this point in the play the betrothed of Ithocles, Calantha, is dancing at a wedding which her father,

King Amyclas, is too ill to attend. News comes to Calantha successively of the deaths of her father, of Penthea, and of Ithocles, but at each announcement she only commands the next figure of the dance, though presently she is to die of grief. Not in the devising of any such scene, it seems to me, but in the power of delicate spiritual analysis often displayed by him, in his maintenance through 'Tis Pity She's a Whore' of the only possible temper in which its subject could be treated, and in the severe and subdued fervour of his style are we to find proofs of Ford's genius.

But about the foundation of whatever claims may be made for CYRIL TOURNEUR there can never be any reasonable dispute. As a dramatist the author of 'The Atheist's Tragedy' belongs to the madhouse, and even his maturer play, 'The Revenger's Tragedy', is a complicated nightmare of lust and blood in which dramatic logic is suspended. One great quality he has, one alone, but that in an intensity unknown elsewhere. Cyril Tourneur possesses as no other has possessed the power of releasing by sudden jets the long-repressed moral indignation of his characters. The spurts of flame-like speech burn into the flesh of the mind because they are the climax of a myriad silent and angry questionings of God and man, the ultimate flash of lightning from long-gathering clouds that can contain it no more. Once, too, in 'The Revenger's Tragedy' there is an imaginative stroke which the greatest of poets might envy, when Castiza cries out to her mother, who has been swayed by her brother's cynical pretence to the idea of traffic in her honour:

I have endured you with an ear of fire;
Your tongues have struck hot irons in my face:
Mother, come from that poisonous woman there!

That appeal to the mother to stand forth from her false self is beyond praise.

JOHN MARSTON (1575–1634) had less poetry than almost any of the other dramatists of the period, and THOMAS DEKKER (1575–1641) in a famous phrase 'had poetry enough for anything'. Almost the only indisputable asset of Marston is the Prologue to the second part of 'Antonio and Mellida', which Lamb eulogized for its 'passionate earnestness and for the tragic note of preparation which it sounds'; the play itself seems to me a coarse and confused melodrama made largely out of borrowed materials. To turn from such a writer to Dekker is indeed refreshing. Nothing in its way could be more delightful than his comedy, 'The Shoemaker's Holiday'; nor has any English dramatist except Shakespeare created a finer character, of anything like the sort, than the father of Bellafront in Dekker's masterpiece. Minute knowledge of the vicious side of contemporary London life never deprived Dekker of his freshness and simplicity; and poetry, not indeed of any great energy but genuine, was for ever bubbling up in him. His most famous song is thoroughly characteristic in its revelation of the moral beauty of homely labour and in its clear and sure music.

Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers?
O sweet content!
Art thou rich, yet is thy mind perplexed?
O punishment!

Dost thou laugh to see how fools are vexed ?
To add to golden numbers golden numbers ?
O sweet content ! O sweet, O sweet content !
Work apace, apace, apace, apace ;
Honest labour bears a lovely face ;
Then hey, nonny nonny—hey, nonny nonny !

A still smaller and yet sweeter genius was that of JOHN DAY (? 1598–? 1640). In his delicious piece, 'The Parliament of Bees', charm is everywhere, but possibly the most delicate reward of the reader is that passage in which Ulania, a female bee, admits her passion for Meletus, who, unhappily, loves Arethusa. The happiest of fancies, the lightest of simple but skilled hands, went to the making of this bright and gentle piece, which one admirer at any rate has used unfailingly for the exorcising of heavy or bitter moods.

Day collaborated with Chettle; Dekker with Chapman, with Webster, and notably with Massinger, whose drama of persecuted Christianity, 'The Virgin-Martyr', owes its most charming and touching scene, that between Dorothea and her angel-page, to Dekker. Collaboration was the rule rather than the exception in the dramatic literature of the age. The most celebrated example is that of Beaumont and Fletcher, but I find more interesting the influence on each other of Middleton and Rowley.

THOMAS MIDDLETON (? 1570–1627) and WILLIAM ROWLEY (?1585–? 1687) did nearly all their finest work together. In both their joint masterpieces, 'A Fair Quarrel' and 'The Changeling', the writing of the greatest scenes seems to be almost wholly Middleton's and the spirit of these scenes almost wholly Rowley's. In the former play,

Captain Ager is a character more naturally and nobly masculine than any of Middleton's conception; but listen to his speech to his mother, in defence of whose honour he is about to fight a duel, and who, to shield him from its risk, has falsely accused herself of a lapse from virtue:

> What a day's hope is here lost, and with it
> The joys of a just cause! Had you but thought
> On such a noble quarrel, you'd ha' died
> Ere you'd ha' yielded; for the sin's hate first,
> Next for the hate of this hour's cowardice.
> Cursed be the heat that lost me such a cause,
> A work that I was made for. Quench, my spirit,
> And out with honour's flaming lights within thee!
> Be dark and dead to all respect of manhood!
> I never shall have use of valour more.

Swinburne's 'rough Rowley handling song with Esau's hand' was as incapable of the style of that as Middleton of creating the character from which it so naturally comes, passionately and yet on the level of daily speech. It was again, I think, Rowley who imagined the characters and the 'horribly striking' scene, as Sir Walter Scott called it, in 'The Changeling', in which De Flores, having become a murderer in the interests of Beatrice, to her surprise and terror will not be content with any reward but that after which he has lusted from the first. It is a scene justly described by Leigh Hunt as the most 'tragical, probable and poetical' in the drama of domestic life. Unhappily, it is worked up to by means far from probable or adroitly employed. Our business with it, however, is to notice how, with character and situation provided by Rowley, Middleton works loyally on a moral level,

which here means a poetical level, higher than his own. Left to himself, he did nothing finer than the blistering political satire of 'A Game of Chess' directed against Spain. For the rest he borrowed from 'Macbeth' for 'The Witch', and for 'The Mayor of Quinborough' took that character almost complete from Dekker's 'Shoemaker's Holiday', but had his own momentary success in the hasty presentation of libertines, procurers, usurers and other low types of the town. His study of complete feminine depravity, in the character of Livia, in 'Women Beware Women', is the impressive tragic counterpart of these somewhat Hogarthian sketches.

JOHN FLETCHER (1579–1625) and FRANCIS BEAUMONT (1586–1626) used to be regarded as having carried collaboration to the point at which individuality disappears. As lately as eighty years ago Hallam could record that their styles had never been distinguished. But Fletcher's versification can instantly be recognized by his use of additional syllables in the blank verse line, a use obviously deliberate since the extra syllable is often in a superfluous 'sir' or 'lady' or an insignificant adverb. He has other peculiarities also, such as that of making line-end and sentence-end coincide frequently. The operation of his mind is generally piecemeal. He does not educe what is in his initial substance, but builds sentence by sentence; and when he uses more than one metaphor for a single idea the latter of them is not implicit in the former but is fetched from another quarter of the imaginative world.

It is not only the closeness of their collaboration that has been exaggerated. Writers perfectly well

acquainted with the facts have dealt with Beaumont and Fletcher in such a way as to leave the impression that they worked together till death parted them. Actually, neither their lodging together and sharing their clothes nor their literary co-operation began before 1608 or continued after the year of Beaumont's marriage, 1613. It yielded at the outside fifteen plays, more probably eleven, possibly no more than nine. Fletcher afterwards had as collaborator Massinger, a friend no less devoted, it would appear from his duly fulfilled wish to be buried in Fletcher's grave; and Fletcher alone wrote sixteen plays.

The three great successes of Beaumont and Fletcher, working together, are: 'The Maid's Tragedy', excessively improbable in its premises, since Evadne, in wedding a nominal husband merely to screen her intrigue with the King, would never have chosen a man in love with her, but nevertheless, when Evadne kills the King, attaining to a loftier level of tragedy than its authors elsewhere reached; 'A King and No King', an excellent tragic comedy; and 'Philaster', the finest and most poetical, though by no means the least improbable of their productions.

Philaster, the true heir to the throne of Sicily, loves and is loved by Arethusa, daughter of the reigning usurper. He attaches to Arethusa his loyal page, Bellario, who is in fact a girl, by name Euphrasia, daughter of a courtier. Suspicion is cast by a revengeful and disgraced woman on the conduct of Arethusa and Bellario; and suspicion, for the purposes of the plot, is hastily transformed into certainty in the minds of both the King and of

Philaster; and it is only at the verge of disaster, after motiveless delay, that Bellario confesses to being Euphrasia.

On this characteristic and unsound foundation Beaumont and Fletcher made a play of rare incidental beauty. Arethusa and Bellario are admirably imagined, and there is no more natural or poetic speech in the work of these dramatists than Bellario's reply to Philaster under threat of immediate death, a threat the supposed boy has astonished him by taking calmly.

Philaster: Oh, but thou dost not know
What 'tis to die.
Bellario: Yes, I do know, my lord:
'Tis less than to be born; a lasting sleep;
A quiet resting from all jealousy;
A thing we all pursue; I know, besides,
It is but giving over of a game
That must be lost.

Beaumont would seem to have had more delicacy of moral feeling and more appreciation of cumulative effect than Fletcher, who appears to have been eager for immediate effect at any cost. By himself Fletcher did nothing more striking than that scene in 'Thierry and Theodoret' in which the childless King of France, bound if he would secure an heir to slay the first woman he meets coming from the temple of Diana, encounters a veiled woman, and discovers in her his own wife.

For variety of entertainment and abundance of—it is true somewhat relaxed—poetry the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher and of the latter alone are hardly rivalled in the drama of the period

No small part of their attraction is in the songs by Fletcher, which number some three score, and of which a dozen may be compared with Shakespeare's own.

Fletcher's instinct for song proclaims itself beyond possibility of doubt in the very first lines of his songs.

> Beauty clear and fair,
> Where the air
> Rather like a perfume dwells. . . .
>
> Hear, ye ladies that despise
> What the mighty love has done;
> Fear examples and be wise. . . .
>
> Weep no more, nor sigh, nor groan,
> Sorrow call no time that's gone:
> Violets plucked, the sweetest rain
> Makes not fresh nor grow again. . . .

There is no mistaking the impulse of the born singer in such things, but Fletcher had proved once for all his lyric gift at the beginning of his career, when, alone, he wrote his beautiful pastoral, 'The Faithful Shepherdess', a piece perhaps a little too artificial and alien but containing such delicious poetry as this from a Satyr's speech:

> Thou divinest, fairest, brightest,
> Thou most powerful Maid, and whitest,
> Thou most virtuous and most blessèd,
> Eyes of stars, and golden-tressèd,
> Like Apollo, tell me, Sweetest,
> What new service now is meetest
> For the Satyr? Shall I stray
> In the middle air, and stay

The sailing rack, or nimbly take
Hold by the moon, and gently make
Suit to the pale queen of night
For a beam to give them light?
Shall I dive into the sea,
And bring thee coral, making way
Through the rising waves that fall
In snowy fleeces? Dearest, shall
I catch the wanton fawns, or flies
Whose woven wings the summer dyes
Of many colours? Get thee fruit?
Or steal from heaven old Orpheus' lute?

Limitation of space will oblige us to deal very briefly with some other eminent dramatists, meriting at least as much attention.

GEORGE CHAPMAN (1560–1634) must have had audiences at once amazingly quick to discern poetry under pedantic rhetoric and extremely tolerant of exaggeration and obvious improbability. Before the century was over Dryden could say of one of his chief successes: 'When I had taken up what I supposed a fallen star, I found I had been cozened with a jelly; nothing but a cold dullness, which glittered no longer than it was shooting; a dwarfish thought, dressed up in gigantic words.' This of 'Bussy d'Ambois', and much too harshly, though not without a good deal of truth. But Chapman's most loftily imagined drama is that relating to the 'Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron, Marshal of France'—work well-nigh unactable, but still deserving some of the elaborate eloquence with which Swinburne has praised it. 'It has an epic and Titanic enormity of imagination, the huge and naked solitude of a mountain

rising from the sea, whose head is bare before the thunders, and whose sides are furrowed with stormy streams; and from all its rocks and torrents, crags and scaurs and gulleys, there seems to look forth the likeness afar of a single face, superhuman and inordinate in the proportion of its prodigious features.' So much can Chapman, with but little instinct for drama, mean to a reader alive to his poetry.

To us, however, as to Keats, Chapman is less the overfull and labouring dramatic poet than the translator of Homer, a translator who, in Swinburne's now exact appreciation, 'can give us but the pace of a giant for echo of the footfall of God', yet does that in the seven-foot couplets of his version of the 'Iliad' if not often in the heroics of his rendering of the 'Odyssey'.

In PHILIP MASSINGER (1583–1640), of whom Coleridge justly said that 'his plays have the interest of novels', we reach the most competent dramatic craftsman of all, an artist judicious in choice of plots and careful in their working out, but hardly a poet of great eminence. His early training under that incorrigible stage opportunist Fletcher seems to have done little to warp or weaken his natural dramatic logic, but neither did it infect him with poetry of the abundant Elizabethan kind. His versification is meritorious, not brilliant; his style adequate, with few if any 'brave translunary things'. Praise has usually been concentrated on 'A New Way to pay Old Debts', the chief character in which, Sir Giles Overreach, was almost into our own times a recognized challenge to great actors, but I think Massinger was right in regarding 'The

Roman Actor', with its fine exposure of the character of Domitian, as 'the most perfect birth of his Minerva'. His judgment in selection of theme and skill in directing the course of events were never, however, more plainly shown than in 'The Bondman', the play in which his heroine, Cleora, a charming creation, is shown turning from her suspicious lover, Leosthenes, to the chivalrous slave, Marullo. Many of Massinger's plays are lost to us, having been used, with other works of the period, for fire-lighting by the accursed cook of Warburton in 1815. I have not the slightest doubt that she has been made co-sufferer with Blake's executor and other such criminals in an appropriate corner of the Inferno.

There Bagford's evil trade
Is duly punishèd;
There fierce the flames have played
Round Caliph Omar's head;
The biblioclastic dead
Have diverse pains to brook,
'Mid rats and rainpools led
With Betty Barnes the Cook.

Of close on forty plays written by JAMES SHIRLEY (1596–1666) the best probably is his romantic tragedy, 'The Traitor', on the subject chosen in the nineteenth century by Alfred de Musset for 'Lorenzaccio'. In Shirley the Elizabethan energy, long waning or diverted to abnormal tasks, dies out, but he had some dramatic merit, and the world is not likely to forget that he had some poetry, for one of his incidental poems is the excellent and familiar dirge for worldly greatness:

> The glories of our blood and state
> Are shadows, not substantial things . . .
> Only the actions of the just
> Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.

Before Shirley's death Parliament shut down the theatres; they did not re-open till the restoration of Charles II, and then only for a more sophisticated drama.

The Elizabethan and Jacobean drama has been very variously valued, and nothing is less common than a cool and measured yet sympathetic estimate of its worth. As drama, it is for the most part open to severe criticism, and has frequently enabled the wrong people to be in the right. But, for all the looseness and roughness of construction, the carelessness about place and time, the dependence on improbable successes in disguise, the recourse to soliloquy and asides, which weaken most of the plays, for all the coarse comic relief and promiscuous bloodshed from which modern taste recoils, the works of these old masters can be underrated even as drama. It is perversity, where it is not ignorance, that sets beside or above them the modern plays of observation and ingenuity. For the highest duty and privilege of the dramatist is to show us man, not in the only too probable conditions of his social, but in his spiritual life. The Elizabethans and Jacobeans were not incapable of realism in comedy; in tragedy, also, they have left us such a masterpiece of realistic horror as 'Arden of Feversham', almost certainly a youthful essay by Shakespeare, and such a masterpiece of homely realism as 'A Woman killed with Kindness' by THOMAS HEYWOOD (? 1572–1650); but they aspired to the loftiest func-

tions of the dramatist and were content to fail in much else if they could discharge those. With some of them, the drama was sometimes hardly more than a series of concessions to the audience for the sake of one or two scenes, in which the purest or the most dreadful spiritual energies might be shown in action. If we are to read them as dramatists, it must usually be for the single scene, with tolerance for the rough or reckless means by which they reach it. But, on the whole, it is wiser to read them as poets. Only some of their poetry is at one with their drama; much of it is a kind of splendid irrelevance, much of it is mingled with rhetoric. These are not scrupulous and patient artists. But, whether in strictly dramatic or other poetry, they have certain unique things to give us; there is no substitute for Marlowe or Webster or Ford; and to turn away from them is wholly to miss certain vivid experiences of wonder, delight and terror, to remain ignorant of certain extreme possibilities of the human spirit.

VII

DONNE AND THE MYSTICS

Sir John Beaumont—Drummond—Wither—Browne—The nature and origin of poetical wit—Donne—Quarles—Herbert a misrepresented poet—Crashaw—Cowley.

BEFORE dealing with Donne and later poets it is convenient to say a few words of some early Jacobean poets not of the first importance but for one reason or another entitled to consideration in even so brief a book as this. Sir JOHN BEAUMONT (1583–1627) is known to the readers of anthologies by his touching lines on his son, Gervase, but seems to me to have reached his greatest height in a couplet of that passage in his 'Bosworth Field' which describes the King killing a soldier found asleep while on sentry duty:

> I leave him, as I found him, fit to keep
> The silent doors of everlasting sleep.

Historically he is due more recognition than he has usually received, as having to some extent anticipated Waller in a certain smoothness. WILLIAM DRUMMOND (1585–1649), for a few days the Boswell of a very different Johnson, may claim the honour of having suggested to Milton the speech made by Eve to Adam in the fourth book of

'Paradise Lost' by his sonnet beginning, 'The sun is fair when he with crimson crown', and of having contributed something to the metrical methods of Coventry Patmore. He wrote several good sonnets, one of which, that on John the Baptist, foreshadows the poetic tactics of innumerable later sonneteers, and showed fancy and grace in some madrigals, as in those lines on Death's irresponsiveness to his summons:

> But he, grim-grinning King,
> Who caitiffs scorns, and doth the blest surprise,
> Late having decked with beauty's rose his tomb,
> Disdains to crop a weed, and will not come.

GEORGE WITHER (1588–1667) is universally known as the author of the 'Lover's Resolution':

> If she be not so to me,
> What care I how kind she be?

There is perhaps more poetry in 'The Choice', with its pleasant *embarras de richesses*, and more human feeling in 'A Widow's Hymn', with one unexpected and admirable phrase:

> Those eyes which unto me did seem
> More comfortable than the day.

WILLIAM BROWNE, of Tavistock (1588–1643), was in great part a disciple of Michael Drayton, who called him 'my Browne', but his thoroughly English and often charming pastorals were his own. There is a beautiful way of entering into the subject in 'The Sirens' Song'—

> Steer, hither steer your wingèd pines,
> All beaten mariners!

and in his lines on memory—

So shuts the marigold her leaves
At the departure of the sun;
So from the honeysuckle sheaves
The bee goes when the day is done.

He has been given the famous epitaph on the Countess of Pembroke, sometimes assigned to Ben Jonson, and without question he produced this other little pearl of great price:

May! Be thou never graced with birds that sing,
Nor Flora's pride!
In thee all flowers and roses spring,
Mine only died.

But it is necessary now to go back some decades to the obscure beginnings of the tendency to subordinate more strictly poetic qualities to poetical *wit*. So far as I am aware, no full and satisfactory account of the origin of this tendency and of its development through all the literatures of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has yet been written. Certain manifestations of this wit have been associated, as 'Marinism' and 'Gongorism', with the names of two over-ingenious and exquisitely affected writers in Continental literature, but English poetical wit would seem, if only on chronological grounds, to have sprung into activity more or less independently of their example. Probably the germ of poetical wit is to be sought in that which was common to all the literatures, the memory of subtleties and paradoxes in the logic of mediaeval schoolmen and of the casuistry and courtly extravagance of Provençal poetry. It is possible also that there may be some relation between the working of this wit in the English religious poetry of the

seventeenth century and the mediaeval disposition to cast into logical form mysteries of the Christian faith clearly beyond the scope of logic.

It is, at any rate, certain that the great master of this poetical wit in our literature, JOHN DONNE (1573–1631), was in closest intellectual touch with the sources indicated as probable or possible. But Donne was something else beside being, in this special sense of the word, an incomparably brilliant wit. He was a realist, and as regards his peculiar province in lyrical poetry, the poetry of love, the very first and almost the last in our literature. This astounding poet, in power and daring of intellect surpassed by no writer of our language, united in himself much of the mediaeval mind and much of the very modern mind. On one side he was all for logical quibbling and wild hyperbole ; on the other he was intent on such subjects as have been dealt with only, with reserve, by Browning, with much less analytical curiosity by Swinburne, with less sensuousness by Meredith, in a very different spirit once or twice by Coventry Patmore, and rather frequently but hardly less differently by Mr. Arthur Symons. These writers owe nothing worth mention to Donne, and I write their names here only because, in one way or another very modern in the poems I have in mind, they have crossed some corner of his territory, which remains indisputably in his sole occupation.

Donne, in his love poems, which with one or two poems of hate, perhaps one religious poem, and three or four unclassified compositions, make up his best work, is the only complete amorist. His capacity for experience is unique, and his conscience

as a writer towards every kind of it allows of no compromise in the duty of doing justice to each. The poetry of lust has never been written with more minute truth, but then neither has the poetry of a love transcending sex. For obvious reasons, anthologists shrink from one half of his work, but were I privileged to make a selection of English verse I should certainly put into it both the eager 'elegy' on his mistress going to bed as well as the famous lines on spiritual love:

> As 'twixt two equal armies Fate
> Suspends uncertain victory,
> Our souls—which to advance their state
> Were gone out—hung 'twixt her and me.
>
> And, whilst our souls negotiate there,
> We like sepulchral statues lay;
> All day the same our postures were,
> And we said nothing all the day.

And I should think it necessary to give at least considerable passages from his series of extravagant but frequently magnificent mourning compliments to a doubtful paragon of womanhood whom he had never seen. The personal sincerity of such things is neither here nor there; they have at their best the poetic sincerity which carries off in Donne conceits and quibbles and exaggerations that would ruin most poets. Only then would I give those songs in which, though all have their subtlety of thought, Donne remembers that he is partly an Elizabethan and sings as an Elizabethan should.

With so much intellect, such rare twists of the mind, so much imagination and ardour, and so much sensual and spiritual experience for material,

what is it that this very great poet lacks? Is it not contentment with his art? The most genuine poets, including both those greater and lesser than Donne, will yield themselves often to the enchantment they have called up. Donne is incapable of that. He cannot suspend the operation of his prose energy, which is as wonderful as his poetic. The two work simultaneously, in momentary accord or in opposition. His wit, in the perception of secret likenesses between things mostly dissimilar, is alternately a help and a calamity in his verse; his realism contributes to his successes less frequently than it thwarts him; and the subject, when he has done with it, is sometimes less expressed than wrenched to pieces which separate lines convey triumphantly in different directions.

But, when Donne does succeed, he is what Ben Jonson, in censuring his metrical liberties, called him, the first poet in the world for some things. He is too restless to expose any steady view of the world, but now and then he opens up a vista which, while we gaze, seems to lengthen indefinitely. And these strange glimpses are the more exciting because they are not given us at the end of an introductory exploration of less and less familiar ground, but afforded suddenly through chinks in the world of a realist.

Sensualist and saint, mystic and realist, Donne eludes us. The face, spiritual and sardonic, that starts forth out of the terrifying portrait of him, done by his own desire, in his shroud, when he was dying, is inscrutable. The great sermons of his later life as Dean of St. Paul's leave his religious life as enigmatic as the poems leave his sensual and

intellectual youth in the world. But I cannot doubt that in his own mysterious way he had made his peace with God before he wrote his sentence of God's mercies, perhaps in substance and in music the most beautiful in our whole prose.

More or less of poetic wit, sometimes accompanied by other qualities of Donne, distinguishes or disfigures the work of the four remarkable religious poets of the seventeenth century, Quarles, Herbert, Crashaw and Vaughan. The quality of quaintness, a kind of serious grotesque, is evident enough in some of the work of each, though in Crashaw, much the greatest of the four, it is often lost in imaginative splendour, but its importance even in Quarles or Herbert can easily be exaggerated. What concerns us is their essential poetry.

FRANCIS QUARLES (1592–1644), who had least poetry, has been robbed of his best poem in the interest of the scapegrace Rochester, and has suffered other hardships. That he was a very pious person, and the father of eighteen children, are incontestable facts; but he did not always disdain worldly extravagances, as witness his epigram on a certain Mary:

Four Maries are eternized for their worth:
Our Saviour found out three, our Charles the fourth.

It is a relief to recollect that the royal discoverer of those lines was the first King Charles, not the second, whose appreciation of female virtue tended to be moderate.

But if the exclusive piety of Quarles has been exaggerated the temperament of GEORGE HERBERT (1593–1632) has been inexcusably misrepresented.

The impression left on the youthful mind by inferior academic authorities is that of a venerable priest who wastes his genius in the solemn sport of shaping verses that, when printed with suitable indentation, shall resemble angels' wings or other objects of piety. But George Herbert, who died young, spent his best years in the world, and, though he regarded himself as a brand plucked from the burning, he cherished to the end a vivid sense of the beauty of the flames. Listen to these wonderful lines of his:

I know the ways of Pleasure, the sweet strains,
  The lullings and the relishes of it;
The propositions of hot blood and brains;
  What mirth and music mean; what love and wit
Have done these twenty hundred years and more;
I know the projects of unbridled store:
My stuff is flesh; my senses live.

Yes, his senses live, and that is partly why he is, in his insecure way, for a moment now and then, so very much more than a writer of pious verse. It is purified sensuousness that makes the lovely first verse of his 'Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright', a poem the whole world happily knows, and it is sensuous no less than spiritual revival that is celebrated in the most universal thing he ever produced, the sixth stanza of 'The Flower':

And now in age I bud again,
  After so many deaths I live and write;
I once more smell the dew and rain,
  And relish versing: O, my only Light,
It cannot be
That I am he
  On whom Thy tempests fell all night.

Herbert's piety matters profoundly to us for the same reason as St. Augustine's, for a reason that counts with the artist and not merely with people concerned about salvation. It is an open-eyed piety, as he justly claims :

> With open eyes
> I fly to Thee, and fully understand
> Both the main sale and the commodities ;
> And at what rate and price I have Thy love.

RICHARD CRASHAW (? 1613–1649) is a poet who dazzled himself with his own gold and made himself dizzy with his own incense. His work is to be read in his own mood or not at all, but those who assail it are less likely to be persons of the severe taste they boast than persons without generosity of imagination. For, with all his excesses, Crashaw is supremely a poet, and even many of his worst things shine with the glory shed on them by his best. Simply as a piece of writing, his 'Music's Duel', made on the then popular subject of a contest between a lutanist and a nightingale, is undeniably brilliant, and it is in many passages a poem of great beauty also, though unlike his nightingale he forgets to 'qualify' his 'zeal'. The verses on St. Teresa have still more of his characteristic ardour and effulgence, Crashaw himself being a mystical amorist. But perhaps, with the general reader, it is a better service to Crashaw to direct attention to things that must charm all tastes, like the unfairly neglected 'Love's Horoscope', or touch all hearts, like these simply beautiful lines on Christ crucified :

Thy hands to give Thou can'st not lift,
Yet will Thy hand still giving be;
It gives, but, Oh, itself's the gift!
It gives tho' bound, tho' bound 'tis free!

Of such things also, not only of misplaced ingenuities, was the 'poetical wit' of the seventeenth century capable. At least with Crashaw, for with ABRAHAM COWLEY it mostly served to make more evident the tedium of false Pindaric odes as darkness is made more visible by a street-lamp. That Cowley had poetry in him is certain, but he aborted it, and the biography of the still-born is a waste of time.

VIII

MILTON

'Paradise Lost' not the true climax of Milton's work—Difficulties of the theme—The youthful promise of Milton—Coarsening and hardening influences—The tragic end—Marvell.

TO say anything lowering to the majesty of JOHN MILTON (1608–1674) is as if a man should lift his hand against a mountain. Yet it is necessary to say that the world has too meekly taken Milton's masterpiece at the valuation suggested by his own haughty predictions and by the circumstances of its composition.

He was a very great man; perhaps no greater, certainly no prouder has used our language. In 'Paradise Lost' he found and made a very great subject. He approached it with a lofty and inflexible moral purpose, 'to justify the ways of God to man', and in the resolution to produce also that justification of himself which he had long and earnestly meditated. Conscious always of 'gifts of God's imparting', and fearing, in his own words, lest at the day of judgment they should be 'reckoned many rather than few', Milton had earlier made this highly characteristic demand of his reader: 'that for some few years I may go on trust with him towards the payment of what I am now indebted'—a perfect masterpiece, of course!—'as

being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapour of wine . . . but by devout prayer to the eternal Spirit who can enrich '—to him that hath shall be given!—' with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases'. Retrospectively we have allowed Milton to ' go on trust ' through the years of prayer, during which he not only prayed but accumulated for his enterprise the results of ' industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs '. Looking back with awe on the blindness and political disaster that came upon him when at last he was ready, we have been thrilled to see him—

> Though fallen on evil days,
> On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,
> In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,
> And solitude—

settling indomitably to his task, a smitten and invincible man, sitting in his poor room, in an attitude usual to him, with one leg cast over the arm of his chair, and, since he is blind, dictating to his undutiful daughters the story of the first and greatest tragedy of the human race. And the work of such a man, on such a subject, so long brooded over, so heroically begun at last, has been piously taken by us for precisely that which Milton was born to produce, the highest and purest and most beautiful of which his genius was capable. But is it?

Impious as the question must seem, is ' Paradise Lost ' either a virtually flawless masterpiece or the natural climax of his poetic effort?

As to the first part of the question it can hardly be denied that the subject chosen by Milton from among ninety-nine which he had entered in his note-book had great disadvantages as well as great possibilities. For one thing, with the first man and woman as central characters, the epic could not appeal to readers by the presentation of experiences in some degree common to all human beings. For another thing, the passions of those two characters could not be illustrated, without gross anachronism, by reference to those institutions, beliefs, usages or arts which even according to the old chronology came into existence only many centuries later. The uniqueness of the situation of Adam and Eve separated them from human sympathy and the ultra-primitive setting excluded a very great deal of the circumstances and imagery available to Homer or to Virgil or to the authors of the Indian or other ancient epics. But the difficulties of the subject did not end there. Milton was dealing with Heaven, with a Paradise on earth, with Hell, and a crude materialism could be avoided only by conceiving of them as regions of the mind. Marlowe, in his greatly imagined 'Dr. Faustus', had set the high example with his lost angel declaring, 'Why, this is Hell, nor am I out of it'. Milton followed, when his Satan said,

Which way I fly is Hell, myself am Hell,

and when the Archangel comforted Adam on expulsion from Eden with the vision of

A Paradise within thee; happier far.

But the whole design of 'Paradise Lost' rendered it impossible for Milton to develop, or even to stress

this idea, and forced him towards a hard and sometimes grotesque literalism.

With all these and many other difficulties, inherent in the subject or due to Milton's general treatment of it, he struggled learnedly, artfully, with a superb confidence, but it is idolatry to deny that his success was often only partial and that from time to time he failed outright.

'Paradise Lost', then, is no blameless masterpiece. It has indeed some passages unsurpassed and scarcely approached for sublimity of style and solemnity of music, but certain of these are not directly related to the central theme, and others are in a context which, by too obviously exposing the mechanism, lessens their effect. As a whole, despite the passages to which allusion has just been made and scores of phrases or separate lines of great beauty, 'Paradise Lost' remains for our admiration of learning, art and endeavour rather than for our delight in genius accomplishing all which it purposes.

How far it may be regarded as the natural culmination of Milton's career must depend on our view of his youthful character as man and poet, and at this we must now glance.

That Milton was naturally pure, earnest, religious, and disposed to employment of his gifts to the glory of God and of John Milton is true, but it was not as a Puritan or with any harshness of spirit that he began. He came of a family of Roman Catholics, and his father had been disinherited on embracing Protestantism. This father, an Oxford scholar, by profession eventually a scrivener, was a musician of considerable note, composer of a six-part madrigal in Morley's 'Triumphs of Oriana', 1601, and con-

tributed to Ravenscroft's 'Whole Book of Psalms' the common metre tune, 'York', still commonly used in the churches. Music had an immense place in the boyhood and early manhood of the son also. At Cambridge, the young Milton was nicknamed for his delicate beauty of person and manner 'The Lady', and while there, according to Wood, 'was esteemed to be a virtuous and sober person, yet not to be ignorant of his parts', one who would have disapproved the piety with which Wordsworth two hundred years later got drunk on visiting the college rooms once occupied by him. But, if virtuous and fastidious, Milton was not set against the more gracious pleasures of the senses, either then or considerably later. We may recall his two poetic invitations to a refined conviviality, the sonnet to Laurence:

> What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,
> Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise
> To hear the lute well touched, or artful voice
> Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?
> He who of those delights can judge, and spare
> To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

and the sonnet to Cyriac Skinner:

> To measure life, learn thou betimes, and know
> Towards solid good what leads the nearest way;
> For other things mild Heaven in time ordains,
> And disapproves that care, though wise in show,
> That with superfluous burden loads the day,
> And, when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.

We may recall also from 'Comus', that ravishing masque which Milton wrote in 1634 for performance, to the music of Lawes, by the family of the Earl of Bridgwater, the denunciation of those who in 'a pet of temperance' would scorn the

pleasure of fine raiment, choice food, wine—to 'live like Nature's bastards, not her sons'.

Serious, and perhaps too serious, too well aware of his gifts, and more anxious not to disappoint God than a Christian or a person with a sense of humour ought to be, the young Milton was still, in his comeliness and his discreet enthusiasm for music and wine and the graces of life, a winning figure. And clearly he was not only a very wonderful poet but one that we may love. Enjoying a scholar's leisure at his father's country residence at Horton, he had come to that feeling for natural beauty and rural life which is peculiar to the scholar, a feeling more conscious than that of people habitually in the open air, a sense of the refreshment of landscape to studious eyes, and of the antique poetry of occupations so little altered since Theocritus or Virgil.

To the earlier and only happy period of Milton's life belong: the 'Ode on the Nativity', written at Christmas, 1629, in which his poetic character first clearly emerges; the companion poems, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', supposed to express the mirthful and the melancholy view of the world but in fact expressive only of two degrees of melancholy; the masque of 'Comus'; and the first and in some respects the greatest of our capital English elegies, 'Lycidas', written in 1637, the year before Milton left for his Italian tour. What delightful as well as noble poetry there is in these! The Christmas Ode, with other and grander things, has the charming picture of the shepherds:

> The shepherds on the lawn,
> Or ere the point of dawn,
> Sate simply chatting in a rustic row;

and that other picture like some great early Italian master's :

> And all about the courtly stable
> Bright-harnessed Angels sit in order serviceable.

' L'Allegro ' gives us detail after detail of country pleasure :

> When the merry bells ring round,
> And the jocund rebecks sound
> To many a youth, and many a maid,
> Dancing in the chequered shade ;

and of courtly or studious pleasure, too, whether with

> Ladies, whose bright eyes
> Rain influence, and judge the prize ;

or at the London playhouse :

> If Jonson's learned sock be on,
> Or sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child,
> Warble his native wood-notes wild.

And there is ' Il Penseroso ', ' most musical, most melancholy ', with its forest walks and its grave charm of the cloister. Then ' Comus ' with its enchantment :

> The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,
> Now to the moon in wavering morrice move,
> And on the tawny sands and shelves
> Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves ;

and its lovely songs, with their curious valuing of every word :

> Sabrina fair,
> Listen where thou art sitting
> Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
> In twisted braids of lilies knitting
> The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair ! . . .

And for example of almost every excellence of Milton's earlier poetry there is 'Lycidas', interrupted by the appearance of a grim theological figure, but for all that a true pastoral lament:

Together both ere the high lawns appeared
Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
We drove afield and both together heard
What time the grey-fly winds her sultry horn,
Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night. . . .
But O the heavy change now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!

Then came the ruinous years; marriage, apparently by taking the bride in payment of a debt, and a honeymoon spent in writing part of a pamphlet on divorce, and the unhappy bride's flight to her parents; schoolmastering in private, with abundant flogging of nephews; the political secretaryship under Cromwell, and coarse controversy with those who supported the Stuart or other hostile causes; loss of sight; and at last the retirement of a roughened and embittered and almost insanely arrogant man, to produce, in darkness and in bitterness of spirit, that which should be the realization of the dreams and hopes of the young, grave but half-pagan and quite unsoured Milton of Cambridge and Horton.

Scholarship had hardened into pedantry, art into artifice, pride into an inhuman self-assertion, and at the very last, in the bleak and immensely powerful 'Samson Agonistes', with his own obvious tragedy crowded into one tremendous line, 'eyeless, at Gaza, at the mill, with slaves', he came to value over everything the soul-destroying passion of revenge. *That* he had been, *this* he had become.

Who shall seek thee and bring and restore thee thy day?

Milton's friend, ANDREW MARVELL (1621–1678), who was eventually his colleague in the Latin Secretaryship, kept himself free from that which harmed Milton. It has been thought curious that this poet employed by the Commonwealth should have written, and in an Ode of welcome to Cromwell, so nobly of Charles, but Marvell thought Charles 'a prince truly pious and religious', considered that the Civil War should never have been waged, and when Fairfax withdrew from military command on grounds of conscience followed him to be tutor to his daughter. To this fortunate temporary retirement at Nunappleton we owe the loveliest of Marvell's pure and luxurious country poetry, written in the twenty-ninth and thirtieth year of Marvell's life.

Apart from the beautiful lines on Appleton House, Marvell has to his credit 'The Mower', the charmingly fancied 'Nymph complaining for the Death of her Fawn', the 'Thoughts in a Garden', with its famous lines:

> Annihilating all that's made
> To a green thought in a green shade,

'The Bermudas', and that address 'To His Coy Mistress', which rises from quaint gallantry to the superbly imagined warning of the brevity of life:

> But at my back I always hear
> Time's wingéd chariot hurrying near;
> And yonder all before us lie
> Deserts of vast eternity.

There was no Puritanism in Marvell, only the purity which comes of reverence for the senses.

IX

SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURY LYRICS

Elizabethan songs—Campion—Herrick—Carew—Waller—The Court poets—Cartwright.

THE Elizabethan was the great age of English song, strictly so-called. Partial explanation of the quantity and quality of Elizabethan songs may be found in the fact that then, as never before or since, music was an all but universal accomplishment and recreation, but it seems to me probable that something must also be ascribed to the blending of a kind of homely and more or less popular poetry with the lyric of courtly culture. As usual, however, no complete explanation is possible, the genius of individual authors being a mystery, which no pseudo-scientific reference to social causes or historical events can elucidate. They are nameless, these writers of words for the musical collections of John Dowland, whose 'Third and Last Book of Songs or Airs', issued in 1603, contains the beautifully cadenced 'Weep you no more, sad fountains' and 'I saw my Lady weep', of Thomas Bateson, of Thomas Ford, of Captain Tobias Hume. It is in Hume's 'The First Part

of Airs', 1605, that we come on the lovely and typical:

O Love, they wrong thee much
That say thy fruit is bitter,
When thy rich fruit is such
As nothing can be sweeter.
Fair house of joy and bliss,
Where truest pleasure is,
I do adore thee:
I know thee what thou art,
I serve thee with my heart,
And fall before thee.

Ford's 'Music of Sundry Kinds', 1607, yields:

There is a Lady sweet and kind,
Was never face so pleased my mind;
I did but see her passing by,
And yet I love her till I die.

Such things tell us nothing of their author except that an impulse to sing came to him. But this indifference of the writer to his own minor idiosyncrasies means little more than that he respected the limitations of his art, for the song proper ought to be verbal music expressive of a single simple idea or emotion and cannot particularize and become minutely personal without losing its flow.

To the Elizabethan song there soon succeeded poems, done more or less under the influence of Ben Jonson or of Donne, which had little but the appearance of being songs. Exceedingly beautiful as was some of the work of both those masters, Ben Jonson's art had too little spontaneity and too little of the popular element, and Donne was capable of filling what should have been liquid lines with harsh

consonants. Meanwhile another kind of sophistication was in progress among those who wrote words definitely for music. We have had no more learned or curious metrical artist in song-writing than THOMAS CAMPION (? 1567–1619), a writer about six years Ben Jonson's senior. He shares with William Collins the distinction of having written a perfect unrhymed lyric, and the latter's Ode to Evening is not more exquisitely musical than Campion's 'Laura':

> Rose-cheeked Laura, come,
> Sing thou smoothly with thy beauty's
> Silent music, either other
> Sweetly gracing.

But for song we turn rather to his enchanting:

> Kind are her answers,
> But her performance keeps no day,
> Breaks time as dancers
> Who from their music stray,

where the double rhymes compel one to half-sing even in reading. Some of Campion's effects are doubtless due to musical rather than metrical prompting, and thus lie outside our subject. But he could write when he chose with a faultless feeling for purely metrical values.

If music is the explanation of much in Campion, it hardly enters seriously into the discussion of the song writers of the seventeenth century. They have lost and gained; are much less, or not at all, dependent on music to complete their effects; and, if some airiness of rapture has gone, there is a new conscious art in their work.

The chief master of the short lyric in the seventeenth century, ROBERT HERRICK (1591–1674), was the proud and grateful disciple of Ben Jonson, but his work is more instinctively a lyrist's. The average of his very considerable production is astonishingly high, and indeed, if a few coarse epigrams be set aside, it might be said that Herrick wrote no poor verse at all. The misfortune, as he deemed it—the good fortune as we must regard it—of long banishment from his loved London to Devonshire helped to make him a country poet, but what wins us in Herrick is the perfect balance of the Latinate and the homely English qualities. He has all the finer Latin merits—economy, point, finish, a delicate feeling for the pathos of the bud that will begin to fade almost as soon as fully blown; and he has the freshness of a man writing with his eye on the poetical facts of English gardens and meadows. The long and gracious procession of his mistresses is full of figures realized to exactly the right degree for his purpose; they are neither mere Horatian and Propertian symbols nor actual English girls. His emotion towards them is never too intense, yet never mere feigning, and he is in truth what he claims to be, the poet of 'cleanly wantonness'. An easy poetic decorum reigns throughout his world.

Everyone has by heart such things of his as 'To the Virgins, to make much of Time', 'To Daffodils', 'To Blossoms', 'A Meditation for his Mistress', 'To Dianeme'. Perhaps not quite everyone realizes how great a thing is the poem inviting Corinna to come a-Maying, with its brilliant line:

Rise and put on your foliage,

and with its marvellous pagan moral, worthy to be set beside the supreme passage in Catullus :

Come, let us go, while we are in our prime,
And take the harmless folly of the time !
We shall grow old apace, and die
Before we know our liberty.
Our life is short, and our days run
As fast away as does the sun.
And as a vapour or a drop of rain,
Once lost, can ne'er be found again,
So when or you or I are made
A fable, song, or fleeting shade,
All love, all liking, all delight
Lies drowned with us in endless night.
Then, while time serves, and we are but decaying,
Come, my Corinna, come, let's go a-Maying.

Of the religious poetry of this pagan clergyman not much will bear comparison with his secular verse, though it should be added that it is undervalued because its sentiment is so un-English and so like that of some Spanish religious poetry ; but it would be difficult to overpraise these three lines on Easter :

We see Him come, and know Him ours,
Who, with His sunshine and His showers,
Turns all the patient earth to flowers.

The word 'patient', just there, is perhaps Herrick's clearest proof that he was among the greatest artists our verse has known.

To pass from Herrick to THOMAS CAREW (? 1595–? 1639) is to pass from a seemingly to a really rather trivial poet. Most of his work is in substance too petty, in style too laboured ; but he wrote not

only the beautiful 'Ask me no more where Jove bestows' and the perfectly balanced and pointed and really classical 'Ingrateful Beauty Threatened', pieces familiar to every reader of verse, but these much less-known lines, which have faults but have always haunted me since I first became acquainted with them:

> I do not love thee, O my fairest,
> For that richest, for that rarest
> Silver pillar which stands under
> Thy sound head, that globe of wonder;
> Though thy neck be whiter far
> Than towers of polished ivory are.

Is it only the double rhymes that work this little miracle not in the best taste?

EDMUND WALLER (1606–1687) undoubtedly has historical importance, but it seems to me less as the inventor of smooth and pointed verse, in which, it is too often forgotten, he was anticipated by Sir John Beaumont, than as the poet who guided writers finally away from Donne and metaphysical wit and towards the art of uttering commonplaces with nicety. As a poet he matters less than as an influence, but 'Go, lovely rose' justly keeps its place in every anthology, and there are the unusually grave lines on old age:

> The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that Time hath made,
> Stronger by weakness, wiser men become
> As they draw near to their eternal home.

Also, though this I fear is very seldom reckoned, there is the metrically very interesting and other-

wise attractive poem in which for once English is made to sing in dactyllic verse:

Hylas, O Hylas, why sit we mute?

All this courtly poetry finishes with Sir JOHN SUCKLING (1609–1642), the 'easy natural Suckling' of Congreve's praise, author of the delicious ballad on a wedding and of some gay, cynical love poems; RICHARD LOVELACE (1618–1658), author of the immortal:

I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more;

and JOHN WILMOT, EARL OF ROCHESTER (1647–1680), with whom, perhaps, should be mentioned Sir CHARLES SEDLEY (1639–1701). The last-named has one of the finest beginnings of a song in our literature:

Love still has something of the sea
From which his mother rose;

but the thing goes to pieces after the most hopeful opening, and his best piece is doubtless the neat poem 'To Celia':

When change itself can give no more,
'Tis easy to be true!

Rochester cannot be regarded as merely a brilliant wit and rake who happened to write some good verse. He was a small but thoroughly authentic poet. In saying that I have not in mind the famous poem, 'To his Mistress', for that is not by Rochester at all, but is really the seventh 'Emblem' of Quarles, and a poem of sacred not of profane

love.[1] Nor am I thinking of those powerful lines in his 'Satire against Mankind' which were so justly valued by Tennyson:

Then old Age and Experience, hand in hand,
Lead him to Death, and make him understand,
After a search so painful, and so long,
That all his life he has been in the wrong.

I would base high claims for Rochester rather on the concealed imagination and passion of his trifling:

The time that is to come is not;
How can it then be mine?
The present moment's all my lot;
And that, as fast as it is got,
Phyllis, is only thine.

Then talk not of inconstancy,
False hearts and broken vows;
If I by miracle can be
This live-long minute true to thee,
'Tis all that Heaven allows.

That is one note of Rochester's, a note never to be struck by a man to whom the moment is only the moment. The other is in that magnificent exercise in the pathetic-grotesque, 'The Maimed Debauchee', in which he figures himself, an impotent toper, still spiritually sharing in the revel, as some old admiral may watch from a promontory the progress of the sea-fight in which he can take no active part.

Out of the strong came forth sweetness, and Mrs.

[1] The erroneous attribution to Rochester seems to be perpetuated by every standard collection of English verse, but the authorship of Quarles cannot be disputed.

APHRA BEHN (1640–1689), whose career was so unlike the home-life of our own Mrs. Hemans, proved her lyrical genius once for all in the splendid :

Love in fantastic triumph sate
Whilst bleeding hearts around him flowed,
For whom fresh pains he did create
And strange tyrannic power he showed :
From thy bright eyes he took his fires,
Which round about in sport he hurled ;
But 'twas from mine he took desires
Enough t' undo the amorous world.

Luckily her best poem is morally inoffensive. The best poem of the eminently virtuous WILLIAM CARTWRIGHT (1611–1643) is so unlikely to improve conduct that all anthologists have passed it over, and this beautiful ' Song of Dalliance ', the rhythm of which so admirably expresses the resolute sensuality of its mood, remains generally unknown :

Let not dark nor shadows fright thee ;
Thy limbs of lustre they will light thee.
Fear not anyone surprise us,
Love himself doth now disguise us.
From thy waist thy girdle throw :
Night and darkness both dwell here :
Words or actions who can know
Where there's neither eye nor ear ?

Show thy bosom, and then hide it ;
License touching, and then chide it ;
Give a grant, and then forbear it ;
Offer something, and forswear it ;
Ask where all our shame is gone ;
Call us wicked, wanton men ;
Do as turtles, kiss and groan ;
Say, ' We ne'er shall meet again.'

I can hear thee curse, yet chase thee ;
Drink thy tears, yet still embrace thee ;
Easy riches are no treasure ;
She that's willing spoils the pleasure.
Love bids learn the wrestlers' fight ;
Pull and struggle whilst we twine ;
Let me use my force to-night,
The next conquest shall be thine.

But an end must be made of this chapter. Let it be with MATTHEW PRIOR (1664–1721), that happy artist in light verse, adept in compliments to ' children of quality ', in not too serious professions of love, and in apology for his own life—' a life parti-coloured, half pleasure, half care ', as he called it in his smiling epitaph for his own monument.

X

DRYDEN

An occasional writer—The charge of sycophancy refuted —His great satires—His lyrical verse—His influence.

JOHN DRYDEN (1631–1700) was so much the occasional writer, so dependent on the political and other accidents of his time for impulse and for subject, that it is difficult to imagine what his poetical production would have been without them. He did little of any sort and nothing of value before the age of twenty-eight, when in ' A Poem upon the Death of his late Highness, Oliver, Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland ', he revealed his adroitness in panegyrical verse and his talent for making each stanza work towards a definite, brilliant point.

His habit of adulation has been sharply rebuked by many critics, but these moral reproaches seem to me merely stupid, and I would rather invite the reader to note how Dryden even in flattery usually avoids falsehood, fastening on the real qualities of his subject, and exaggerating them, where the sycophant or poetaster would have assigned to the hero virtues not possessed by him at all. Eulogy of Cromwell was natural enough for Dryden, whose family had

long been more or less Puritanical and anti-monarchical in feeling. But within a year he was writing another occasional poem, the 'Astræa Redux', to welcome Charles II. A good deal later he followed up his meritorious statement of a layman's religious position, the 'Religio Laici', with an extraordinarily close and vigorous argument in verse from a very different position, 'The Hind and the Panther'. And as the political change has been attributed to the basest motives so also the shifting of his religious allegiance has been contemptuously described as a bid for the favour of James II. These accusations are unfair. Dryden was inconsistent in other matters where change brought no reward, and even where his motives were largely those of the courtier or hireling he sometimes reserved a certain independence. Certainly 'The Hind and the Panther', in effect an appeal to Anglicans and Roman Catholics to join forces against Nonconformity, cannot have been intended slavishly as part of James II's policy of securing Nonconformist support against Anglicanism.

But to return to the earlier part of his career, we have occasional poetry once more in his striking topical composition, the 'Annus Mirabilis', 1666, the year of the Great Plague and of the Great Fire, and yet again in the first of the satires by which Dryden chiefly lives, 'Absalom and Achitophel', with King Charles as David, Monmouth as the erring son and Shaftesbury as evil genius.

Before he came to satire Dryden had worked, with some distaste but with fits of great energy, at drama. I venture to think more highly of many passages and scenes in his plays than much better

judges have done, and I do not see how 'Aurangzebe' or the hardy attempt to deal in 'All for Love' with the story of Antony and Cleopatra after Shakespeare can be denied greatness in their own kind; but in so brief a notice of Dryden his plays can be touched upon only as having afforded him practice in that characterization which was to be the special glory of his satire. He reached the subject of 'Absalom and Achitophel' a master in the presentation of character and an expert in such versification as the subject demanded, and he produced, in the first part of that satire, a work justly credited by Johnson with 'acrimony of censure, elegance of praise, artful delineation of character, variety of sentiment, happy turns of language, and pleasing harmony of numbers'. The portrait of Achitophel is unequalled.

> 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 near the sands to boast his wit.

All through this piece and the literary satire of 'Mac Flecknoe' Dryden exhibits his rare skill in adapting the structure of the sentence to the movement of the verse and of getting his most deadly words into exactly that position in which the maximum of grammatical and metrical emphasis will fall

on them. The momentum is astonishing. But the initial impulse? That seems as a rule to come from no profound indignation or enthusiasm in the man, but from the pressure of circumstances, and to be the politician's or the journalist's rather than the poet's. Poetry, when it comes at all into this verse, is engendered in the development of the theme. The sparks are from the powerful and well-directed blows of the hammer on a stubborn material, not from any constantly burning fire.

The more ambitious lyrical verse of Dryden has not lasted well, and of his songs perhaps only the rather Carew-like 'Ask not the cause why sullen Spring' will give much pleasure to the reader of to-day. But two of the major lyrics are in part of great excellence. The poem for St. Cecilia's Day, with its fine opening and conclusion, is weakened by a misguided attempt to match sense and sound in an obvious way in the middle of the piece. The Ode to the memory of Mrs. Killigrew is also unequal, and its hyperboles have little of the ardour that carries off those of Donne, but the first stanza is nothing less than magnificent in substance, phrasing and orchestration:

> Thou youngest virgin-daughter of the skies,
> Made in the last promotion of the blest;
> Whose palms, new plucked from Paradise,
> In spreading branches more sublimely rise,
> Rich with immortal green above the rest:
> Whether, adopted to some neighbouring star,
> Thou roll'st above us, in thy wandering race,
> Or, in procession fixed and regular,
> Moved with the heaven's majestic pace . . .

Dryden was the greatest and most varied poet of

his time, an excellent prose writer and the first of our great critics. The criticism of Dryden, when he is dealing with Chaucer or Shakespeare or expounding general principles, is that of a poet, as Johnson said : ' not a dull collection of theorems, nor a rude detection of faults, which perhaps the censor was not able to have committed, but a gay and vigorous dissertation, where delight is mingled with instruction, and where the author proves his right of judgment by his power of performance '. The combination of poetical and critical merit made Dryden to the generation growing up under him much what Ben Jonson had been to an earlier and Pope was to be to a later period. On Pope his influence was very marked, and through Pope he affected most eighteenth-century poets ; but his example in the use of the heroic couplet was not without inspiration in the nineteenth century on poets so different from himself as the Keats of ' Lamia ' and the Swinburne of ' Anactoria ', and I have satisfied myself, though I cannot here attempt to convince others, that FitzGerald's style in the paraphrase of Omar Khayyam owes something to Dryden's in the translations. Dryden's technical service to English verse has been acknowledged by Pope :

> Waller was smooth ; but Dryden taught to join
> The varying verse, the full-resounding line,
> The long majestic march, and energy divine.

XI

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

'Acceptance' and 'Wonder'—Causes of eighteenth-century 'acceptance'—Importance of the personal character of Thomson, Gray, and Collins, poets temperamentally unfitted to lead revolutions—Eighteenth-century inconsistency—Addison—Smart—Parnell—The Countess of Winchilsea—Young's independence as critic—Pope—His unrealized romantic promise—His satire—His dictatorship—Dyer and natural poetry—Thomson—Johnson—Goldsmith—Shenstone—Akenside—Gray—Collins—Cowper—Increased interest in primitive poetry—Ossian—The 'Reliques'—Chatterton—Burns—His place in Scottish poetry—The lesser and the greater Burns.

WATTS-DUNTON has said that 'there are two great impulses governing man: the impulse of acceptance, the impulse to take unchallenged and for granted all the phenomena of the outer world as they are—and the impulse to confront these phenomena with eyes of enquiry and wonder'. These impulses are not so hostile to each other as to be incapable of being alternately experienced by the same person: on the contrary, both have been experienced in every age by every person who was not either caught up into a lifelong rapture or stunned into being a dull and callous clod. But we can distinguish between ages like, on the one

hand, the sixteenth, seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, on the whole ages of 'wonder', and ages like the Augustan in Rome and the eighteenth century in England, on the whole ages of 'acceptance'.

If we enquire what made the eighteenth century in the main an age of acceptance, we shall find partial explanations in social and political conditions and in certain ideas then generally entertained.

It is, for example, part of the explanation that in the last years of the seventeenth century and the early years of the eighteenth century English literature was very largely the work of a limited urban, indeed metropolitan, group of writers, a coterie of coffee-house wits. Poetry brought forth by such men under such conditions could hardly be expected to express much wonder over Nature, or to avoid convention, modishness, knowingness, and excessive valuation of wit: could hardly be expected to be other than most of the poetry of this part of the eighteenth century in fact was—under the domination of Pope. But when a quarter of the century was gone by, and still more when nearly half of it was history, literature was given centres of production other than London, and became the work of men of more varied social class and less closely in contact with each other. Roughly simultaneous with this change, though of course only in a small degree due to it, was that awakening to natural beauty, and that broadening of the means of expression beyond the pointed and balanced heroic couplet, which we associate with the names of Thomson, Gray, Collins and some minor writers.

Again, it is part of the explanation of eighteenth-century 'acceptance' that the class producing

literature in the earlier years of that century was politically complacent. The strictly aristocratic spirit, which may well inspire great poetry, was either passed away or unexpressed in verse; the democratic spirit, which in its extreme workings, generally, by the way, in aristocratic rebels, has inspired a lofty poetry of pity and indignation, was not yet manifested. What ruled was the spirit of gentility, of upper-middle class approval of the order of things.

Further, getting their notions of the classical merits from the Latin rather than the Greek classics, and from those as unimaginatively interpreted by the French critics, our eighteenth-century poets recognized order chiefly in artificial order, proportion chiefly in conventional proportion, lucidity chiefly in clearness of appeal to the prose reason.

We have attained, however, only to part, and the less important part, of the explanation of why the eighteenth century was on the whole a period of 'acceptance'. The rest of the explanation is in the economy of God. That is to say, the frequency with which and extent to which the poetry of the eighteenth century rose above the century depended mainly on the characters of the individual poets God decreed to be born in that period. It is worthy of special note that of the three finest poets of the generation after Pope's not one had the character of an efficient revolutionary. Thomson was indolent and mild; Gray was indolent apart from his scholarly studies, and of a pensive disposition; Collins was shy, withdrawn, and passed early into the shadow of madness. They were men of low vitality, without the hot blood, hopefulness, con-

tentiousness, persistence, required for rebellion and public defence of it and defiant continuance of it if defence failed. They had none of the resolution with which Chatterton, near the end of Gray's life, forged poetry and killed himself. They had none of the self-sufficiency with which Blake went his own way through an age that could not understand him. They lacked altogether the animal spirits which are as necessary for the making of a Burns as what is called his genius. They innovated somewhat diffidently; Gray delayed publication; Collins bought up his published poems and destroyed all copies he could obtain. They fell silent or chose other tunes when a renewal of song might have accustomed the public ear to their newer notes. In their characters is to be found the reason why eighteenth-century 'acceptance' was not more deeply and widely disturbed by them and why the transition from largely pseudo-classical to romantic poetry was delayed.

Delayed, I have just written, but it must be strongly emphasized that the beginnings of change or omens of it came much earlier in the century than is popularly supposed. The century was no more than twenty-six years advanced when Thomson published his 'Winter' and Dyer his 'Grongar Hill', poems with a new feeling for nature and a music quite other than that of the fashionable couplet. Every decade after that saw insinuated into English poetry some new or some old and long-neglected element. If Thomson turned poetry towards nature, Gray and Collins restored elaboration of stanzaic form, Chatterton fabricated ancient poetry in which his genius brought romantic wonder back again, Percy made our old Border Ballads

known, the half-reactionary Crabbe introduced realism, Burns reminded poets that song must sing, and in spite of delays and some survivals of the ideals of Pope the romantic triumph was inaugurated by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1789.

In this preliminary view of the eighteenth-century poetry we have seen what were its qualities when it was consistent and what qualities it acquired in moments of wise inconsistency. It is desirable to note also in it an inconsistency by no means wise, and due to causes quite other than truer feeling for nature or the longing for a more varied music than Pope's heroic couplet could be made to produce.

It may appear extremely paradoxical that the period of fairly general ' acceptance ', of moderation, elegance, reasonableness, was also the period of what writers addicted to it called ' rage ' ; but not much thought is needed to convince ourselves that just such a period would be liable to the error of calculated transports and violences. A genuinely and deeply poetical body of writers would have regarded poetry as what it in truth is, the most natural thing in the world, and would have felt that the highest poetical ecstasy, however rare in experience, was only the sublimation of emotions natural to man. Writers in the main of a more prosaic temper conceived of that ecstasy as a planned but furious abandonment of self-control, the ' rage ' of their poetic jargon. And with fatal inconsistency they endeavoured at intervals to achieve this ' rage ' as well as the moderation, the elegance, the reasonableness to which their efforts were more frequently directed. Hence the deliberate extravagances and conventional wild-

nesses to be found even in Pope, and hence the frequency with which words like 'madded' and frigidly frantic impersonations like Horror, Danger, Ruin, the Furies, present themselves to the reader of a poetry in its more usual intention reasonable and polite. Hence that attempt to be lawless by rule, the Pindaric Ode, written in what was fondly supposed to be imitation of Pindar's Greek, and an element that is to be traced even in some of the more imaginative and more discreet work of Gray and Collins. Having read too much law of the narrowest kind into the classics, many of the eighteenth-century poets accounted for the noble and natural freedom of poetry of the most passionate kind by assuming that such poetry was anarchical, and was that by method: the result of putting selected straws in the hair and reproducing the conventional symptoms of madness till wild inspiration came.

Thus the poetry of the eighteenth century erred not only in choosing ground too narrow, and in cultivating it with intentions of too formal a garden, but also in occasionally introducing into that formal garden features of a calculated wildness—a fact too seldom perceived by its admirers and its assailants. But depreciation of the eighteenth century had gone too far. It is not to be forgiven simply for its partial exceptions, Thomson and Gray and Collins, nor are they quite so exceptional in it as used to be thought. It is not tolerable only when it foreshadows the nineteenth. It is intolerable when it is inconsistent, when besides denying us the romantic pleasure it never promised it cheats us of the satisfaction its narrower and tamer principles did offer.

The verse of JOSEPH ADDISON (1672–1719) has claims, perhaps more than adequately recognized, on the anthologist of religious poetry, but deserves only the briefest notice here. Of lyric he was almost wholly incapable, as may be judged from the jigging and futile songs in his opera, 'Rosamund', which he himself had the sense later on to parody in the *Guardian*, No. 124, August, 1713. To what he could attain in the sober yet of its sort genuine religious inspiration of 'The spacious firmament on high', no reader needs to be reminded, but it may not be superfluous to indicate the difference between this reasonable testimony of creation to its Creator and the adoration crying out vehemently through a myriad mouths in CHRISTOPHER SMART (1722–1770).

> The spacious firmament on high,
> With all the blue ethereal sky,
> And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
> Their great Original proclaim.
> The unwearied Sun from day to day
> Does his Creator's power display;
> And publishes to every land
> The work of an Almighty hand.

'In Reason's ear they all rejoice': it is in another ear that Smart's crowding symbols sing in his wild and magnificent 'Song to David', written in a mad-house:

> The world, the clustering spheres, He made;
> The glorious light, the soothing shade,
> Dale, champaign, grove, and hill;
> The multitudinous abyss,
> Where Secrecy remains in bliss,
> And Wisdom hides her skill.

THOMAS PARNELL (1679–1718) is remembered for two compositions, 'A Night Piece on Death', anticipating the sepulchral literature of the later eighteenth century, and the colloquially fluent, neat and rather pretty song:

When thy beauty appears
In its graces and airs . . .

There is some feeling for nature here and there in his work, and he was in that age, though to little purpose, the last confidant of the fairies.

Much nearer to nature, despite some conventional melancholy and some still more conventional aspiration towards indifference, is the verse written out of womanly musings under the night sky or about birds and trees and quiet landscapes by ANNE, COUNTESS OF WINCHILSEA (1661–1720). She has moments when, but for some turn of eighteenth-century phrase, she might pass as one of the milder Victorian women poets. Her poem 'To the Nightingale' is of a lyrical quality so exceptional in her age and is so little known that it must be reproduced here:

Exert thy voice, sweet harbinger of Spring!
This moment is thy time to sing,
This moment I attend to praise,
And set my number to thy lays;
Free as thine shall be my song,
As thy music, short or long;
Poets, wild as thou, were born,
Pleasing best when unconfined,
When to please is least designed,
Soothing but their cares to rest;
Cares do still their thoughts molest,

And still the unhappy poet's breast
Like thine, when best he sings, is placed against
a thorn.
She begins! Let all be still!
Muse, thy promise now fulfil!
Sweet! oh sweet! still sweeter yet!
Can thy words such accents fit?
Canst thou syllables refine,
Melt a sense that shall retain
Still some spirit of the brain,
Till with sounds like those it join?
'Twill not be! then change thy note,
Let division shake thy throat!
Hark! division now she tries,
Yet as far the Muse outflies!
Cease then, prithee, cease thy tune,
Trifler, wilt thou sing in June?
Till thy business all lies waste
And the time of building's past?
Thus we poets that have speech—
Unlike what thy forests teach—
If a fluent vein be shown
That's transcendent to our own,
Criticize, reform or preach,
Censuring what we cannot reach.

EDWARD YOUNG (1683–1765), satirist, moralist and assiduous seeker after ecclesiastical preferment, comes into the history of English poetry only after having collected, at the age of sixty, his 'Poetical Works'. The lyrics of his prime are probably the worst ever written by a man of talent and culture; one of them, 'The British Sailor's Exultation', contains perhaps the most revolting metaphor ever produced in our language. The satires are quite another affair, with

dozens of couplets as sensible and well turned as :

> Though wrong the mode, comply ; more sense is shown
> In wearing others' follies than your own ;

and with sketches of feminine types as neat and lively as that of the lady of whom we are told that :

> For her own breakfast she'll project a scheme,
> Nor take her tea without a stratagem.

But his enduring reputation dates only from ' The Complaint, or Night Thoughts ', written in sometimes pompous but often impressive blank verse, and published between 1742 and 1745. It belongs to that mortuary literature of which ' The Grave ' of Robert Blair (1699–1746) and the prose ' Meditations among the Tombs ' of Hervey are the other notable examples, and which had its influence, not always perceived by literary historians, on Gray and Collins and other eminent poets. Grossly overvalued for more than half a century, the ' Night Thoughts ', as Young's chief work is usually called, has now fallen into a disrepute not wholly deserved. It has some wit as well as sepulchral eloquence, some romantic feeling, some lines as musically good in a way then unusual as :

> And quite unparadise the realms of right.

There is something else to Young's credit, or would be if writers about him took the pains to examine his work : the ' Conjectures on Original Composition '. This essay, published in 1759 in the form of an anonymous letter to the ' Author of

" Sir Charles Grandison ",' is a performance extraordinarily spirited, almost boyish in gusto, for all its author's seventy-five years, extremely independent, and in many phrases and passages positively brilliant. The neglect it has suffered is disgraceful. For here is a critic in the middle of the eighteenth century boldly at war with the classicist rules, eloquent in demanding freedom for modern writers, and declaring with just wit that ' the less we copy the renowned Antients we shall resemble them the more '. Where in that period was sounder literary common-sense expressed in neater phrasing than in such sentences as these ? ' Let us build our Compositions with the spirits, and the taste, of the antients ; but not with their materials : Thus will they resemble the structures of Pericles at Athens, which Plutarch commends for having an air of antiquity as soon as they were built.' ' It is by a sort of noble contagion, from a general familiarity with the writings, and not by any particular sordid theft, that we can be the better for those who went before us.' ' Rules, like crutches, are a needful aid to the lame, tho' an impediment to the strong.' Of Pope's translation, ' What a fall is it from Homer's numbers, free as air, lofty and harmonious as the spheres, into childish shackles, and tinkling sounds ! ' ' Though we stand much obliged for his giving us Homer, yet had he doubled our obligation by giving us—a Pope.' ' As lacemen are foes to mourning, these two authors (Dryden and Pope, using rhyme respectively in tragedy and in a translation of epical poetry) . . . were no great friends to those solemn ornaments which the noble nature of their works required.'

If all the masterpieces of ALEXANDER POPE (1688–1744) had perished, and he were known to us by these lines only—

> Most souls, 'tis true, but peep out once an age,
> Dull sullen prisoners in the body's cage:
> Dim lights of life, that burn a length of years,
> Useless, unseen, as lamps in sepulchres;
> Like Eastern Kings a lazy state they keep,
> And, close confined to their own palace, sleep—

we should conjecture him to have been a poet with some of the qualities we admire in Donne. And such a poet he was, perhaps, becoming in those years, 1712–1717, to which belong his exquisite exercise in the mock-heroic, 'The Rape of the Lock', the 'Elegy to the memory of an unfortunate Lady', from which the finest lines have just been quoted, and the more artificial attempt at passion, 'Eloisa to Abelard'. But before the later of those dates he was absorbed in the translation of Homer, and he emerged from that long labour, not indeed without benefit from it, but a man grown elderly in mind, into a world no longer containing the friends of his youth and containing far too many people with whom it was tempting to quarrel. Satire claimed his remaining energy, and the doubtful promise of an empassioned, a partly romantic poet was neither shown to have been utterly false nor fulfilled.

How doubtful, except in the six lines already quoted, that promise was may be made evident by a very little examination of the piece from which they are taken. The author of them put into their context such phrases as 'ruby lips', 'love-darting

eyes ', such a line as ' above the vulgar flight of low desire ', and the passage, impressive in intention, but rather ridiculous in effect, which foretells the activity of undertakers in disposing of the ' unfortunate lady's ' unkind relations. He put there the falsely precise ' ball ', for the sake of rhyme :

> Thus, if eternal Justice rules the ball,
> Thus shall your wives, and thus your children fall,

though the earth's shape is wholly irrelevant ; and he put there the rhetorical lines beginning with ' By '. He put there also, it is to be acknowledged, phrases and lines much more worthy ; and the conclusion has tense phrasing. But, the great six lines always excluded, the piece will not support the comparisons with unquestionable poetry which it invites. The opening couplet has often been set against a very similar one by Ben Jonson. But I have another comparison in reserve, fairer in that it puts whole poem against whole poem. There could scarcely be two pieces more nearly comparable in subject, the lonely death of a beautiful woman, than this and a famous piece by Mr. Yeats. In Mr. Yeats there is the concision, the rapture of poetry. Pope develops the subject rhetorically, with a certain triviality in exploiting every antithesis. Only, in those six lines we began by quoting, there is a quality of imagination unmatched by the later or indeed by any but the very greatest poets.

The Pope familiarly known to us, however, is he of the ' Dunciad ' of 1728, when the brilliant Shakespearean textual critic Theobald was most unfairly made its hero, and of the new ' Dunciad ' of 1742,

with Cibber eventually set in that position. Coarseness is the fault of one part of this great attack on stupidity, an ill-contrived plan and the unlucky change of hero weaken the general effect, and it is really to be valued for brief passages of satire and invective which must not be called unsurpassable only because Pope himself surpassed them in the 'Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot', of 1735. That wonderful blend of autobiography, apologia and satire contains many of Pope's most famous things—couplets of astonishing finish and point, more elaborate work like the portrait in blandest oils and most blistering vitriol of Addison, and the attack on Hervey with its final stroke of

> Beauty that shocks you, parts that none can trust,
> Wit that can creep, and pride that licks the dust.

And amidst all this cleverness and venom it has personal dignity, a just pride, generosity to friends, a filial tenderness genuine and moving in its expression.

Pope's satire here and almost everywhere else gains immeasurably by the noble prodigality of his compliments. On a prose level, with the clinching effect of metre as almost his only gain from writing in verse, Pope is the king of compliment as on a poetic level Swinburne is the king of eulogy. Pope has the whole art of such turns of phrase as compliment and every mundane kind of apostrophic verse may best use. A dozen celebrated passages testify to it; but take an example merely from his occasional verse, the lines he left for the Duke of Argyle after sleeping in his house in the bed once used by Rochester:

With no poetic ardour fired
I pressed the bed where Wilmot lay;
That here he loved, or here expired,
Begets no numbers, grave or gay.

But in thy roof, Argyle, are bred
Such thoughts as prompt the brave to lie
Stretched out in Honour's nobler bed,
Bēneath a nobler roof—the sky.

Evidently lines that anyone could have written, and as evidently written by no one else. His own ideal of 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed' was constantly realized by the mature Pope, if by 'well' we mean no more than with the utmost lucidity and point.

His lucidity, all the same, is deceptive. Pope, as may be seen in the ambitious 'Essay on Man', 1733–34, was not a systematic thinker or always aware of the logical consequence of the thoughts he enunciated. He had his philosophic ideas largely from his friend Bolingbroke—the St. John of this gospel, as Lowell with a happy pun called him. Each was set out with remarkable clearness, but the system they were to have constituted remains a muddle of pantheism, deism, unsectarian Christianity and what not, with some quite absurd notions made momentarily plausible by the neatness of the phrasing.

Pope, in fact, excelled in detail rather than in giving to a whole metrical composition that coherence which he demanded of every sentence. His 'correctness' has been much exaggerated. His ear for rhyme was certainly indifferent, and his very grammar exhibits some licences without excuse.

On the other hand, monotony of metrical effect has been too unreservedly urged against him. Given the narrow limitations he in part inherited from his favourite Dryden and Waller and in part imposed on himself, he may fairly be credited with having extracted as much variety out of the balanced heroic couplet as it could yield. Certainly he spared no pains in avoiding monotony of pause or vagueness of phrase. 'I corrected,' he said, 'because it was as pleasant to me to correct as it was to write.'

His dictatorship of thirty years is without true parallel in the history of English poetry, for it covered the whole realm of contemporary poetry. Ben Jonson in his circle, Dryden in his, perhaps Rossetti in his, may have been as authoritative: Tennyson certainly had as long continued an influence over the world of writers and readers. But each of the poets just mentioned refrained from, or was undistinguished in, some poetical form, used with conspicuous success by contemporaries as celebrated. Pope wrote without serious rival in every one of the few forms honoured in his age. His mediocrity in lyric and abstention from dramatic verse mattered nothing when neither were attempted frequently or with distinction.

That his dictatorship was wholly disastrous was an excusable belief of those great poets who at the end of the eighteenth century and early in the nineteenth revolted against pseudo-classic conventions. They were warring against the ideas that knowingness can be a substitute in poetry for wisdom, that elegance is beauty, that song need not sing; and in that war they could give no quarter.

The historian of poetry, writing long after the romantic triumph, has not their excuse. It is for him to acknowledge that, narrowing as Pope's influence was, it was in most respects salutary.

Gray said of JOHN DYER (*c.* 1698–1758): 'Mr. Dyer has more of poetry in his imagination than almost any of our number', and among later poets Wordsworth was an admirer of his 'modest lay'. He is to be honoured chiefly for his delicate feeling for landscape, but no memory of his study of painting should be allowed to persuade us that he was merely a painter using words as his occasional medium. He was a poet, and he had an ear as well as an eye, and skill in bringing movement into his landscapes. 'Grongar Hill', published in 1726, has lines of a charm then very rare:

> Silent Nymph, with curious eye!
> Who, in the purple evening, lie
> On the mountain's lonely van,
> Beyond the noise of busy man,
> Painting fair the forms of things,
> While the yellow linnet sings;
> Or the tuneful nightingale
> Charms the forest with her tale . . .
>
> And see the rivers how they run,
> Thro' woods and meads, in shade and sun,
> Sometimes swift, sometimes slow,
> Wave succeeding wave, they go,
> A various journey to the deep,
> Like human life to endless sleep!

He was less happy in the somewhat Thomsonian blank verse of 'The Ruins of Rome'. His true

work was to sing gently to his mostly unheeding age :

> Be full, ye courts, be great who will ;
> Search for Peace with all your skill :
> Open wide the lofty door,
> Seek her on the marble floor.
> In vain ye search, she is not there ;
> In vain ye search the domes of care !
> Grass and flowers Quiet treads,
> On the meads and mountain-heads,
> Along with Pleasure, close allied,
> Ever by each other's side :
> And often, by the murmuring rill,
> Hears the thrush, while all is still,
> Within the groves of Grongar Hill.

The poetry of JAMES THOMSON (1700–1784) may not ever have meant almost everything to anyone but it will always mean something to everyone who cares for poetry at all. His choice of subjects, neither unworthy of poetry nor so poetical as to alienate the average reader, his combination of obvious truth to familiar aspects of nature with something of the finer truth, the *vraie verité*, about aspects revealed only to a loving and patient observer, his mingling of a genuine but traditional music and of cadences exquisite and his own : these merits guarantee him an honoured though unexalted place in the esteem of the most various readers.

The subject matter of ' The Seasons ', published in sections of which the ' Winter ' in 1726 was the first to appear and the ' Autumn ' in 1730 the last, was doubtless suggested to him by the Virgilian fashion set by Philips in ' Cyder ', and it is through Philips's reproduction of Milton rather than as the

result of direct study that Thomson arrived at the Latinisms and inversions that sometimes dignify and sometimes disfigure his style. This indirectly acquired Miltonic manner to some extent remained with him when he deliberately took Spenser as a model and, partly indulging his luxuriousness and partly jesting about it, wrote, with an appropriate leisureliness of progress, his masterpiece, 'The Castle of Indolence'. But neither indirectly from Milton nor directly from Spenser could he learn anything of the observation and art that gave us the picture of the autumnal sun which 'sheds, weak and blunt, his wide-refracted ray', that other picture of the

> Auriculas, enriched
> With shining meal o'er all their velvet leaves,

and the still more precise 'yellow wall-flower stained with iron-brown'. These things, and a score like them in 'The Seasons', are wholly his own; as is the music of such a line as 'Placed far amid the melancholy main' and of the whole beautiful stanza of 'The Castle of Indolence' to which that line belongs. He had an eye, he had an ear, and another sense was gently active with him, making him the first poet, and except for William Morris perhaps the only poet, to notice the scent of bean-fields.

His felicities, to be sure, are somewhat widely separated, except in 'The Castle of Indolence', and the conventions of the period dominate considerable portions of his work. His metrical mastery, again, is limited to blank verse and the Spenserian stanza, his few attempts at the

heroic couplet being almost clumsy. But in his way Thomson expanded the scope of poetry, without ceasing to offer much quiet pleasure to minds unwilling to travel outside the frontiers as settled in his age.

Something of his command of blank verse, remarkable resource in a kind of Lucretian overlaying of obstinate matter with poetical ornament, and occasionally preposterous diction impress and irritate the reader of his friend JOHN ARMSTRONG (1709–1799), author of a poem on the impossible subject 'The Art of preserving Health'.

'The business of a poet', we read in the 'Rasselas' of SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709–1784), 'is to examine not the individual but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances. He does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades of the verdure of the forest'. There, in a beautiful phrase, as unintentional in its obeisance to beauty as Pope's 'die of a rose in aromatic pain', Johnson has defined what some of the finest poetry delights to do; but to number the streaks of the tulip was no ambition of his contemporaries or of Johnson himself. In his most considered verse a massive intelligence is found only too diligently examining the species, remarking and moralizing over general properties and large appearances, and examining and remarking on these in the style of one who writes about their names in the great dictionary rather than about the qualities and aspects themselves in even the most generalized forms in which they can be apprehended. It is otherwise in the only pieces by which Johnson, as a writer of verse, really lives. He comes nearest to

poetry, through irony and an ironical lightness in the expression of weighty disapproval, in the 'Song of Congratulation' written for the majority of Sir John Lade. When that young fool sought Johnson's advice about marriage, he received the reply, 'I would advise no man to marry, Sir, who is not likely to propagate understanding.' But in these rhymes the indignation of the moralist catches up a kind of gaiety as it ironically urges the spendthrift to evil courses, and, the rhythm aiding, the thing becomes, yet without loss of moral weight, almost as 'wild as wind and light as feather'. Only irony could so lift and quicken Johnson. But even in verse stiffened with conventional diction and oppressed by ponderous imagery may sometimes be felt the beating of his great, his infinitely generous heart. 'Of the pathetic in poetry', Mrs. Piozzi has told us, 'he never liked to speak', for 'he was more strongly and more violently affected by the force of words representing ideas capable of affecting him at all than any other man in the world, I believed'. The approaches to Johnson's sensibility were not very numerous, or those by which the subtlest poetic emotion comes to men, and some were obstructed by barriers of pseudo-classical theory, morality, John Bullishness, but what did reach to it excited a response almost intolerable. And in the verses on the death of Dr. Robert Levet the artificialities of the medium, on a first reading so incongruous as to ruin the composition, come to seem a justifiable, a necessary veil over grief not to be looked upon directly. These verses were written about a man whose appearance, by Johnson's admission, disgusted the rich and terrified the poor

among his patients, and whom he could defend against the charge of brutality only by warmly asserting that the brutality was in Levett's manners, not in his mind. The death mourned in them was the removal of a burden long borne by Johnson's charity. That charity he belittled, but he had no illusions about Levet, and immeasurable affection and measured truth to character combine to give this lament for the friend and physician ' obscurely wise and coarsely kind ' its singular pathos.

The close personal association of OLIVER GOLDSMITH (1728–1774) with Johnson and their agreement on many critical questions ought not to deceive the most casual reader into supposing that their attitude towards poetry was identical. In 1751 Johnson had written in the *Rambler*, of one of the most promising developments of the age, ' to imitate the fictions and sentiments of Spenser can incur no reproach, for allegory is perhaps one of the most pleasing vehicles of instruction ', and added, ' but I am very far from extending the same respect to his diction or his stanza '. For Spenser's style, the argument proceeds, ' was in his own time allowed to be vicious ', and ' his stanza is at once difficult and unpleasing '. Goldsmith in the *Critical Review*, eight years later, is found writing that, ' with all his faults, no poet enlarges the imagination more than Spenser,' whose verses, he thinks, ' may, perhaps, one day be considered the standard of English poetry '. If we compare their attitudes towards ballad poetry, Johnson is caught indulging in notorious jocosities about it, while Goldsmith, imperfect as his sympathy with it may be, imitates the ballad, and joins in Percy's discussions of the material for the ' Reliques of Eng-

lish Poetry'. Or, to consider them in relation to contemporary poetry, though Goldsmith is with Johnson in some respects, and is quite as unsympathetic in his bearing to Gray, he differs in appreciating to the full the perfect Ode of Collins. It cannot indeed be said that Goldsmith was consciously and consistently working towards the triumph of a more natural poetry, but his impulses, his care, within certain limits, for truth in description of humble fact, his simplicities, helped to create a new atmosphere. 'The Traveller' and 'The Deserted Village' keep their gentle attraction, which is not quite that of poetry. Shorter pieces by Goldsmith vary from the amusingly disastrous tragic chorus over Babylon the fallen to fair exercises in the manner of Swift. 'Retaliation' has not in its sort been surpassed, but does not fall within the category, poetry. Is it quite certain that the one small success by which Goldsmith is represented in all the anthologies does so?

When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy?
What art can wash her guilt away?

The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom, is—to die.

But an innominate poet had written before:

O, waly, waly, gin love be bonnie
A little time while it is new!
But when 'tis auld it waxeth cauld,
And fades awa' like morning dew . . .

But had I wist, before I kist,
That love had been sae ill to win,
I had locked my heart in a case o' gowd,
And pinned it wi' a siller pin.
And O if my young babe were born,
And set upon the nurse's knee;
And I mysel were dead and gane,
And the green grass growing over me!

Goldsmith had some freshness of poetical feeling and much general literary accomplishment; he was not fitted to be the poet of primary emotions.

'I wanted', said WILLIAM SHENSTONE (1714–1763) 'to write *one* good song and could never please myself', and Horace Walpole said much the same thing of him: 'poor Shenstone was labouring through his whole life to write a perfect song, and, in my opinion at least, never once succeeded'. 'Mr. Shenstone', asked Gray, 'who trusts to nature and simple sentiment, why does he do no better? He goes hopping along his own gravel-walks, and never deviates from the beaten paths for fear of being lost.' It is to the credit of this timid and frustrate poet that, though with reservations, he did on the whole trust to nature and simple sentiment, and not less to his credit that, though apologetically, he came to think 'a certain flimsiness of poetry' 'expedient in a song'. Some faint naturalness, some simplicity of sentiment, some flimsiness not quite developed to the aerial quality he had divined in song, redeems this and another among his songs and ballads. But he alternated between too much ambition and too little, was fastidious without any clear sense of the standard to be satisfied, and left the one good song unachieved.

MARK AKENSIDE (1721–1790), the ' frozen Keats ' of Edmund Gosse's admirable epigram, came nearer to realizing his ambition, which in his own words was that he might

> English fancy's eager flame
> To Grecian purity chastise.

He was, among poets, the finest Greek scholar England had produced since Milton; he honoured Milton intelligently, and from childhood loved and in some sort imitated Spenser, and cultivated the lyric at a time when it was little in fashion. It was, one is tempted to think, the character of the man more than anything else that foiled the poet. There was frost in him, with his rigid manner, his look ' as if he never could be undressed ', his appearance when he walked in the street as of ' one of his own Alexandrines set upright '. Something chill and formal represses the real poetry intermittently to be felt beneath the surface of his verse. Not quite always, however:

> But ah! in vain my restless feet
> Traced every silent shady seat
> Which knew their forms of old:
> Nor Naiad, by her fountain laid,
> Nor Wood-nymph, tripping through her glade,
> Did now their rites unfold;
>
> Whether to nurse some infant oak
> They turn the slowly tinkling brook,
> And catch the pearly showers;
> Or brush the mildew from the woods,
> Or paint with noontide beams the birds,
> Or breathe on opening flowers.

A faint echo of Caroline lyric pleases the reader of the lines to Amoret:

> This, sure, is Beauty's happiest part;
> This gives the most unbounded sway;
> This shall enchant the subject heart
> When rose and lily fade away;
> And she be still, in spite of Time,
> Sweet Amoret in all her prime.

And, for chief title to our regard, there is 'The Nightingale', spoiled by a conventional phrase or two and by the intrusion of the moralist, but happy in its beginning:

> To-night retired, the queen of heaven
> With young Endymion stays,

and creating over again a mood, a scene, really experienced, truly observed.

Of Thomas Gray (1716–1771), it was declared by Matthew Arnold, in a phrase that has become famous, 'he never spoke out'. The criticism has a measure of truth, but Arnold carried his argument too far, and the repressive influence on this poet of the 'age of prose' in which he lived has generally been exaggerated. Gray was a man of subdued vitality, fastidious, indolent, undesirous of being regarded as a professional author. There is no reason to suppose that he had very much to say, and his temper and the circumstances of his life inclined him to take ample time to say it.

His less instinctive poems, due in part to his admiration of Dryden and wish to emulate that poet's odes, have qualities that would have deserved applause in any period and in his own excited bewil-

derment, passing into enthusiasm for what was thought their 'wild' greatness. Of 'The Bard', issued with 'The Progress of Poesy' in 1757, the *Critical Review* of that day said that it 'alarms, amazes and transports the reader'. So revolutionary and empassioned did Gray appear to most of his contemporaries, by some of whom, and those not the least intelligent, he was only with difficulty understood. 'I hear', he wrote with reference to the two poems just mentioned, 'we are not at all popular. The great objection is obscurity, nobody knows what we would be at.' The modern reader will not find in such compositions, allusive as they are, any obscurity; nor will he be conscious of anything revolutionary; and as for passion and wildness, he may incline to echo, with some reserve, Hazlitt's complaint about 'a kind of methodical borrowed frenzy'. What he will, however, acknowledge, and with gratitude, is the frequent beauty of phrase in these poems, the welcome revival of elaborately concerted music, the quite masterly evolution of the theme in an age in which poetry tended to immediate point. He will note, too, in 'The Progress of Poetry', that Gray, though not by any means the first to write judiciously panegyrical verse about other poets, was a pioneer of the fervent critical lyric, of which more than a century later Swinburne was to be sometimes a great master. Hear Gray on Milton and Dryden, after eulogy of Shakespeare:

> Nor second he that rode sublime
> Upon the seraph-wings of Ecstacy,
> The secrets of the abyss to spy.
> He passed the flaming bounds of place and time.

The living Throne, the sapphire blaze,
Where Angels tremble while they gaze,
He saw—but, blasted with excess of light,
Closed his eyes in endless night.
Behold, where Dryden's less presumptuous car
Wide o'er the fields of glory bear
Two courses of ethereal race,
With necks in thunder clothed, and long-resounding pace.

But Gray to the world means the author of the 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard', a poem of universal reputation, reprinted separately oftener than any other short piece in our language and translated long ago into almost every language capable of admitting it. For all that it far surpasses any English poem of the period at all comparable with it, the 'Elegy' should be regarded not as a lonely phenomenon but as part of that literature of moralizing among tombs or over the shortness of life to which Young's 'Night Thoughts' and Blair's 'Grave' also belong. The subject matter was not made acceptable to Gray's public, which received this work of his with instant approval, by his art; the subject was already and for years afterwards peculiarly in favour. Gray himself remarked to a friend, 'with a good deal of acrimony', that the poem 'owed its popularity entirely to the subject, and that the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose'. In those last words he did his public some injustice. Much as it may have been attracted by a subject than rather morbidly in fashion, and also by sentiments of which Dr. Johnson well said that he who reads them 'persuades himself he has always felt them', it cannot

have been insensible to the poetry. To speak plainly, it is the more likely to have felt that poetry because the poetry is not of the highest.

It was said by one of Gray's editors, Mitford, and in his honour, that 'poetry is most excellent where the character of the poet appears with strong and visible features through the design of the poem'. Well, part of the trouble with the 'Elegy' is that the personality of the poet in the churchyard remains shadowy. Let us, however, be fair to the poem. Let us admit that if, regarded as music, it seems to drone when contrasted with the mourning music of Milton's 'Lycidas', of the 'Adonais' of Shelley, of the 'Thyrsis' of Matthew Arnold, of the 'Ave atque Vale' of Swinburne, it is kept with careful skill in accord throughout. Let us add that if, regarded as a picture, it has no rarity of atmosphere or exquisiteness of colour, it is admirably composed. It holds together as it could never have done in Gray's hypothetical prose; it is exceptionally portable, and through many generations has been carried with them by men and women of all kinds, a sentimental possession, not of the most intimate sort, but dear in some degree to all.

Whether Gray was a great poet allows of some dispute; but he was indisputably a great man of letters, a scholar of the first rank, a critic of wide and delicate sympathies, responsive to many appeals very rarely felt by his contemporaries, as, in nature, to the beauty of mountain scenery, and, in poetry, to the power of Norse literature.

A sensitive taste will always prefer WILLIAM COLLINS (1721–1759) to Gray, but it is necessary to remember that Collins is really the poet of one poem

only, the exquisite 'Ode to Evening', so beautifully modulated, so delicately pictorial in its glimpses of crepuscular landscape. The 'Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands' has one wonderfully imaginative passage:

Unbounded is thy range; with varied style
Thy muse may, like those feathery tribes which spring
From their rude rocks, extend her skirting wing
Round the moist marge of each cold Hebrid isle,
To that hoar pile which still its ruins shows:
In whose small vaults a pigmy-folk is found,
Whose bones the delver with his spade upthrows,
And culls them, wondering, from the hallowed ground!
Or thither where beneath the showery west
The mighty kings of three fair realms are laid;
Once foes, perhaps together now they rest.
No slaves revere them and no wars invade:
Yet frequent now, at midnight's solemn hour,
The rifted mounds their yawning cells unfold,
And forth the monarchs stalk with sovereign power
In pageant robes, and wreathed with sheeny gold,
And on their twilight tombs aerial council hold.

But it is impossible not to feel an incongruous eighteenth-century element in that poem. The 'Ode to Pity' has these beautiful lines:

Long, Pity, let the nations view
Thy sky-worn robes of tenderest blue
And eyes of dewy light!

But that, too, is not pure Collins. All the eighteenth-century part of him appears, in delicate

formal perfection, in the too seldom noticed lines he wrote at eighteen:

> When Phœbe formed a wanton smile,
> My soul! it reached not here!
> Strange that thy peace, thou trembler, flies
> Before a rising tear!
> From midst the drops, my love is born
> That o'er those eyelids rove:
> Thus issued from a teeming wave
> The fabled queen of love.

There, if you will, is paste preferable to many diamonds for the art of its setting. But for the qualities that raise Collins above Gray we must return to the 'Ode to Evening':

> If aught of oaten stop, or pastoral song,
> May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
> Like thy own solemn springs,
> Thy springs and dying gales . . .

Hazlitt was right in praising him for 'an Attic simplicity, a pathos and fervour of imagination', Swinburne in eulogy of his lyric instinct and his 'infallible eye for landscape'. But it has not been sufficiently seen that Collins, as his own verse frequently confesses, was less engaged in expressing emotion than in cultivating emotion with a view to having matter for expression. Such a poet, even if spared madness, even if born in a century more congenial to him than the eighteenth, could not have produced much of the first quality.

There were qualities in WILLIAM COWPER (1731–1800) and circumstances in his life which ought to have worked together to produce something rarer,

of an acuter implicit pathos, than his actual poems. The situation of the man, through the greater part of his life, was one to excite expectation of something much more curious and poignant than came out of it. On one side of him a modish, a slightly Horatian creature, condemned to a rustication that would both stimulate his feeling for Nature and give his urbanity a foil, he was also, among those provincial pieties and domesticities, a lost soul, finding intermittent comfort by turns in religion and in the pretence that trifles made up life. We know what lay outside the little lamp-lit space in the Olney interior in which this clinger to petty elegances, to God's dubious mercy, and to the art of 'giggling and make giggle' strove to cut a figure, to assure himself of salvation, to deceive himself into taking life as a parlour-game. We know that the surrounding darkness was scarcely ever out of his thoughts, and that it was full of terrors. We know that the approach of January, the month of his earlier attacks of insanity, caused him agonies of apprehension: 'twice has that month returned upon me', he wrote in a letter of 1790, 'accompanied by such horrors as I have no reason to suppose ever made part of the experience of any other man'. We know, too, that on his death-bed, asked what he felt, he could only answer, 'unutterable despair'. But, though we know all this, we cannot feel it in his work. His little gaieties do not, in the actual verse, imply the terrors he would forget in them. Insanity does not give to his philosophy that 'hare-brained vein of home-felt truth' which Hazlitt so justly found in the nonsense playing wildly round the wisdom of Charles Lamb. He gets out of his

often deliberate and desperate triviality no paradoxical advantages. There is no twist in Cowper's mind; each quality in Cowper's verse exists for itself, not to suggest its ignored opposite. The finest possibilities of the situation remain unrealized.

He wrote of Nature with his eye on it, and historically he has a place of considerable importance among those who led English poetry back to natural truth and a diction not far removed from that of human beings. 'Oh! I could spend whole days and moonlight nights in feeding upon a lovely prospect,' he said in one of his admirable letters. 'My eyes drink the rivers as they flow.' There was none of this luxury in his feeling for the sea, which troubled as much as it fascinated him. He took an agitated pleasure in hearing 'thunder rolling over the great waters', found melancholy in calmer seascapes, menace in the sea's movements.

> To me the waves that ceaseless broke
> Upon the dangerous coast
> Hoarsely and ominously spoke
> Of all my treasure lost.

And the sea became his secret symbol of the power that engulfed his reason. Writing of his sensations when sanity was first failing him he had said that he was 'like a man borne away, by a rapid torrent, into a stormy sea, whence he sees no possibility of returning, and where he knows he cannot subsist'. His sense of the infinite and inscrutably motived power of the sea and of himself as a spiritual 'castaway', combining on the pretext of some passage read in Anson's 'Voyages', yielded in 1799 the last and finest of his poems.

No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.

The remarkable increase, especially after 1760, of interest in more or less primitive poetry is a phenomenon that has escaped no writer on eighteenth-century literature, but has been misunderstood by many. Too often it has been assumed that interest in mediaeval poetry was something quite new or that such interest necessarily produced work nearer to the spirit of the old poetry. For such assumptions there is no historical excuse. Chaucer, to take the capital instance, was not more nobly honoured by anyone in the later years of the eighteenth century than he had been by Dryden, and Pope was not much behind Dryden in recognizing his essential greatness. But to Dryden and Pope, and still more, of course, to lesser men of their day, Chaucer was a great poet contending doubtfully with a barbarous medium. It was not till an Oxford scholar, Tyrwhitt, in his masterly 'Essay on the Language and Versification of Chaucer' and 'Introductory Discourse to the Canterbury Tales', had revealed the principles of his prosody that it was possible to see in Chaucer also the consummate artist. So, also, for other reasons, it was not until the eighteenth century was rather far advanced that mere interest in older poetry as valuable in substance but obsolete in method changed into the artist's interest in possible models. The point is, not that interest increased,

but that it changed. There was not so much discovery of the older poetry, which had always been kept in view and on the whole honoured for its substance, as discovery of the truth that it had a bearing on the problems of poetic production in even the eighteenth century.

At the outset, there was a chance that the primitive models accepted might be those of Scandinavian literature. The citation by Sir William Temple, in an essay, of 'The Death-Song of Rognar Lodbrook', the appearance of Hickes's 'Thesaurus' of Teutonic antiquities, and above all Gray's fine translations, the 'Descent of Odin' and the 'Fatal Sisters', might have given the newer poetry a bias that way. The chance vanished in the amazing success of the pseudo-Ossian.

These professedly Ossianic poems, vague, rhetorical, grandiose, written in a somewhat Biblical prose by their 'translator', were the fabrications of JAMES MACPHERSON (1736–1796), who sufficiently expiated his crime when, under demands for the Gaelic originals, he sat down to the hopeless task of producing the compositions he had pretended to be rendering into English. Meanwhile Ossian had enjoyed an immense vogue, and the influence did not soon diminish, lasting long enough, indeed, to be felt powerfully by both Goethe and Napoleon. But this influence was not really literary, and except for passages in the prophetic books of William Blake there is nothing in English literature written in the Macpherson-Ossian manner. The influence was spiritual. Macpherson's Ossian was welcomed uncritically because it suggested to a generation wearying of formal poetry a way of escape into a more romantic world.

The definitely literary, the strictly poetic, impulse came from Bishop Percy's 'Reliques' of old English ballad and other poetry, published in 1765. These he took from a folio MS. rescued by him when it was being used for lighting fires. If he meddled overmuch with the text in the spirit of the day, it should be reckoned to his credit that he distinguished between the genuine romantic ballads and 'the other sort', which, as he said, 'are written in exacter measure, have a low or subordinate correctness, yet often well adapted to the pathetic'.

The effect of the 'Reliques', and of Sir Walter Scott's edition of the 'Border Minstrelsy' nearly forty years later, on English poetry can scarcely be exaggerated. As to the 'Reliques', we have Wordsworth's testimony to the beneficence of the book: 'Poetry has been absolutely redeemed by it. I do not think there is an able writer of verse of the present day (1815) who would not be proud to acknowledge his obligations to the 'Reliques'; I know that it is so with my friends; and for myself I am happy on this occasion to make a public avowal of my own.'

This happily recovered ballad poetry, however, had surprisingly little influence over a fabricator infinitely greater than Macpherson, an interpreter of mediæval life incomparably more intuitive than Percy. Metrically and otherwise the pseudo-antique poems of THOMAS CHATTERTON (1752–1770) owe nothing to the 'Reliques'. His debt to Chaucer is quite superficial, and if examined proves to be only to Speght's glossary to Chaucer, whence and from certain identified dictionaries he drew the archaic words used by him without much

regard for their date. His master, so far as he had one, was Spenser, always the poet of youthful poets. But Chatterton needed none. English poetry has not known a genius more individual and masculine than that of this boy in his imitations. The language itself, that of no real period, ought to have been to him a disastrous handicap; he made it a genuine medium of expression, achieving in it, at his best, the best of a poet who died aged seventeen years and nine months, extraordinary ease and energy as well as colour and music.

Compound of clay and ordure and vehemently laughing flame as ROBERT BURNS the man (1759–1796) really was, he cannot be degraded into a representative of Scottish virtues to gratify the sentimentality of his fellow-countrymen. Nor can English ignorance of Scottish literary history be allowed to perpetuate the false notion of Burns the poet as an utterly novel and isolated phenomenon. Here, at any rate, we shall view him as no startling apparition in the Scotland of his day but as in almost every respect the poet towards whom Scottish poetry had aspired through the centuries. That such he was is proved by the immediate acceptance of him as the national poet, but we need not rely on that, and may find justification for our view in the history of Scottish poetry before him.

The way had begun to be made ready for Burns, more than three hundred years anterior to his birth, by the poetry preserved in the famous collections of Sir Richard Maitland and George Bannatyne. Later and more utilizable material for the great borrower and betterer of other men's songs had been brought together, fifty years before the

birth of Burns, by James Watson in his 'Comic and Serious Scots Poems both Ancient and Modern', a collection containing amongst other matter for him the Anglicized original of his 'Auld Lang Syne'. For Burns had ALLAN RAMSAY (1686–1758) worked up old Scottish verse and written his own. For Burns had Alexander Pennecuik or another produced 'The Merry Wives of Musselburgh's Welcome to Meg Dickson', an exercise in the humorous-spectral, half anticipating the 'Tam o' Shanter' of the master. For Burns had written many singers, nameless, or known like the Rev. James Skinner by a single masterpiece, 'Tullochgorum', which Burns described as 'the best Scotch song Scotland ever saw'. But indeed all Scotland had worked unwittingly for Burns, and lest he should have a serious rival, or so one might fancy, ROBERT FERGUSSON, a kindred and in some ways perhaps not much less gifted poet, had died in very early manhood in 1774.

Burns was the more fortunate in having all this mass of imperfectly wrought material and variety of lyrical suggestion available to him because he was most curiously dependent on models. To be more precise, original as he was in final effect, he almost invariably needed to be set off by a borrowed subject or lilt or phrase on a course sufficiently independent and impetuous once he was started. But to say this is only to credit him with a genius as rare as that of the purely original poet, the genius to divine the possibilities of subjects mishandled by those who first conceived them, of tunes marred in the playing, of phrases found in an unworthy context.

It is in his songs, of which only a few like 'Mary

Morison ' and ' Of a' the airts ' are without obligation to predecessors, that Burns most boldly borrowed and bettered in the borrowing. They are the best-known part of his work and eminently deserve their fame. Indeed they lure one at times into comparing him with some of the world's greatest singers. For disfigured as ' Ae fond Kiss ' is by two atrocious lines, it contains these :

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

and for passionate simplicity at least those lines have been likened to the work of Catullus. So too a line here and there, in other pieces, slung to its mark as fatally as David's stone, has tempted men to think Burns in directness and vigour of smiting phrase the equal of Villon. But hearty and tuneful as are a score of the secondary songs of Burns, irresistible in élan and warmth of human feeling and a kind of homely magic as are a dozen of his best, they cannot entitle the man who made them, sometimes out of shreds and patches of older songs, to a place beside the chief lyrist of ancient Rome and the chief lyrist of old France.

No ; it is not until we turn to the humorous Burns, and to that part of his work in which humour is quickened by imagination and made servant of his wrath against the hypocrisies of life, that we find a poet utterly incomparable. ' The Jolly Beggars ', matchless in verve, defiance, tensity ; ' Tam o' Shanter ', prodigious in the energy of its grotesque humour ; ' Holy Willie's Prayer ', so

trenchant in irony and secure in aim: there is the greatest, the unique work of Burns.

But the distinction between the lesser and the greater Burns has been drawn once for all in Swinburne's centenary poem:

> And sweeter far in grief or mirth
> Have songs as glad and sad of birth
> Found voice to speak of wealth or dearth
> In joy of life:
> But never song took fire from earth
> More strong for strife.

And as for Burns the man, so variously capable that Dugald Stewart thought 'his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition', as for that brilliant-eyed creature, with 'sorcery' in his tongue as one woman said and as a host of seduced women could have testified, it is again Swinburne who has the last word on the proud, reckless, smutty, hard-drinking, wildly laughing challenger of all our judgments:

> Above the storms of praise and blame
> That blur with mist his lustrous name,
> His thunderous laughter went and came,
> And lives and flies:
> The roar that follows on the flame
> When lightning dies.

To the end of time Burns will have the laugh on his pious defenders even more than on his assailants. As well give Pan a good reference and Lucifer a prize for conduct as Burns the testimonials conventionally offered him.

XII

THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

Blake—Wordsworth—His strength and weakness—His theories—His chief works—The tragedy of Coleridge—Hogg—Landor—Scott—Southey—Campbell—Byron—Shelley, his more and his less characteristic work—Unity of his work and life—Keats, his probable development if he had lived on—Clare—Hood—Some translators—Darley—Beddoes—Smith and Dobell—Poe.

IT was seen in the preliminary view we took of the eighteenth century, and subsequently in accounts of some of its principal poets, that the return to Nature, the reawakening of imagination, the revival or invention of forms more suitable to natural poetry began early in that period, though somewhat timidly. It must now be added that for all the development towards romantic poetry something of the old manner and something of the old spirit continued in certain writers to the very end of the eighteenth century and, with some modification, well into the nineteenth.

Looking to the facts of poetical production of the highest kind, it was then declared that the eighteenth century, for our purpose, ended in the seventeen-eighties, the years during which Burns, Blake and, conjointly, Wordsworth and Coleridge published

their early verse. The conscious beginnings of romantic poetry were indeed a little earlier still, in Chatterton. But turning from the facts of production to those, so very much less important, of public recognition, it must be set down that general appreciation of what had happened was long delayed. Blake, in truth, though he did not wholly escape the notice of such a critic as Charles Lamb, did not come fully into his own till more than half the nineteenth century was over and D. G. Rossetti and Swinburne had strongly asserted and finely expounded his genius. Wordsworth's plea for a more natural diction in verse for years was little heeded or was ridiculed, as was much of his own poetry. Coleridge, at his rare best the supreme magician of the new poetry, that is, of a poetry in essentials the same as all before the eighteenth century's but more conscious of its principle of imaginative life, made way with the public on the whole but slowly. The very titles of some volumes of verse admired and widely read in the first two decades of the nineteenth century remind us that the romantics did not conquer the whole public at once. Rogers, who had published 'The Pleasures of Memory' in 1792, issued his versified guide-book, 'Italy', in 1822–28; and though Campbell's first volume, 'The Pleasures of Hope', with its eighteenth-century title, dated back to 1799, his biographer could say after his death in 1844 that it belonged to 'that species of poetical composition which can alone be expected to attain in the eyes of true taste a classical and healthy longevity'. What is more significant, Byron, himself in many ways a violent rebel, could declare, 'We are all wrong except Rogers, Crabbe and Campbell'.

But, if the direct attack of the romantics on public prejudice had no large amount of immediate success, they to some extent were unrecognized sharers in the swiftly won and resounding victory of Sir Walter Scott. Great as he is in prose fiction, Scott is hardly, except for successive generations of schoolboys, of permanent value as a poet, but his contemporary popularity as a poet was immense, and it meant popularity for something of the spirit and a good deal of the apparatus of romanticism. Moreover, Scott, who had heard Coleridge's 'Christabel' recited, based his metrical method on as much as he could grasp of Coleridge's 'new principle' of metrical freedom, really an old principle revived and applied with novelty. Scott, too, was already the editor of our old Border Ballads, poems the popularization of which, so far as it was achieved, was eminently helpful to the romantic movement. . . .

But delays in public recognition and the means by which it was generally secured must not detain us. Our business is with the poetry itself.

In the production of much of the poetry written in the last years of the eighteenth century and the first twenty of the nineteenth the French Revolution is commonly made a principal factor. The idea is preposterous. All that contemporary events can ever do for the true poet is to offer him subjects, which he accepts or rejects at his own will, and which, if he accepts them, he shapes according to his individual genius. The French Revolution, the thought which inspired it, the drama of the Napoleonic wars, affected most of the poets of the time, but gave them nothing essential. The best of Wordsworth's poetry was made chiefly out of the

contact of his mind with the mountains and lakes among which he lived; the best of Coleridge's was magic unrelated to his age. Byron, no doubt, was strongly stimulated by contemporary events, but his much less poetic imagination needed, more than theirs, a ready-made setting to operate in; and, after all, is it possible to conceive of Byron, egotist, rake, mocker, hater of shams and of oppression, as anything but a rebel in any age or as being thoroughly dependent on the particular stimulus his own age gave him? Shelley's is another affair. Except in many of his supremely beautiful songs and in a few other pieces, Shelley is that unique being who is at once all doctrine and all poetry. In reading the greater part of Shelley's work it is necessary to remember his theological, political and social opinions; and it is not merely an interesting fact about the man but a requisite for the understanding of the poet that he regarded himself as 'atheist, philanthropist, democrat'. In another age he might have chosen other labels, but his conception of himself could not seriously have been other, and in any age what would have mattered most in Shelley would have been his unmatched power of making doctrine sheer poetry, an accomplishment in which in his own age he was aided neither by the French Revolution nor by anything else external to his peculiar genius.

Such transformation of what in a characteristic eighteenth-century poet would have remained mere opinion into rapture was among the imaginative processes proper to the romantic movement. For, if the romantic movement was in part an escape from the burden of mere opinion, escape was not simply

by avoidance of opinion but by transformation of it. If it was in part an escape from the town to the country, that was not only to deal with the more evidently poetic aspects of Nature and to avoid what might seem her prose or the town's prose, but to transform her and its humblest and most usual facts into fit material for poetry, as Wordsworth, among many failures, did triumphantly in scores of instances. For remember that it was Wordsworth, the poet of nature, who wrote in his sonnet composed on Westminster Bridge the loftiest and most moving poem ever inspired by London—not avoiding town fact as prosaic, but escaping from the dead weight of that prosaic fact by intense imaginative perception of the living truth obscured by custom and ' acceptance ' but always present in it. Remember, too, that it was Coleridge, the magician of ' Kubla Khan ', who surpassed every English poet past or to come in the century in the union of imaginative daring and exquisite discretion in the treatment of prosaic detail, worked into a purely lyrical and pathetic poem, ' Youth and Age '. Remember also that it was with Wordsworth that the language of verse escaped from stock eighteenth-century phrases and much pomposity to get nearer to what he called ' a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation ', taking the risk of prose in the confidence that by the wisdom of that ' selection ' and by adjustment to the pattern of the line the prose word could be raised to poetry.

It is by reason of this transforming power—a power essential to genuine poetry and present in the genuine poetry of every age, but never before so consciously and generally cultivated—that the

romantics stand on the whole fairly clear of the events and conditions of their time. In a century like the eighteenth, though indeed there has been in England no other like it, in which opinion is often received into verse while it is merely opinion, in which most writers of verse think not of man the essentially unchanging but of social man in a particular state of society, doctrines and social conditions and other externals are of some importance to the historian of poetry, and in our preliminary view of the eighteenth century a certain limited importance was allowed them. But, where the transforming power is strongly at work, the bare doctrine, the social or other temporary fact, though not utterly to be neglected, has very much less importance. Encountering a set of prose opinions, say, in Pope's work, where as a rule they will exist with only their prose life, though in a brilliant and mechanical metrical statement, we may if we choose trace them to their original source and not be wasting time. But even in Shelley, who is so often all doctrine as well as all poetry, to what purpose do we trace his opinions, to Godwin, for example? Those dead bones cannot go even half-way towards explaining the life that has entered into what are now so very much more than opinions. It is the paradox of this matter that, the more authentic the poets of a period, the more, with individual exceptions, will they respond to their environment, but the less will they be explicable even on their weaker sides by it. For their response will be less calculable than the often mainly logical response of the eighteenth-century poet, and temporary facts will be seen by them 'under the aspect of eternity'. They will

get out of their own age pretty much what they would have got out of any: the eternal out of (does it matter much which?) temporary embodiment of it.

If it should be asked how, where it is not the mystery of creation, this transforming power worked, the answer would be: through a sense of the strangeness of life and the world and through atmosphere. As Walter Pater pointed out, it is the union of strangeness and beauty that produces romantic art; and, though strangeness may be sought in imaginative return to the Middle or other remote ages or in an exercise of the imagination 'out of space, out of time', it may also be discovered in the minds of ordinary human beings and the recurrent facts of daily life by the poetic intelligence that seizes on the finer shades of truth and will take nothing for granted. And atmosphere, whether it be that of Coleridge's 'wizard twilight', or Wordsworth's 'that never was on sea or land', or a sensitive and purified reproduction of the actual atmosphere of a landscape seen with emotion, besides often heightening the strangeness of a situation or natural object, will give unity to the subject. But the poets of the romantic movement, in seeking, in their several ways and degrees, strangeness and atmosphere were not innovators except as compared with most of the poets of the eighteenth century. No qualities hitherto utterly alien to poetry could have been imported into poetry by them to their and its benefit. They were doing just what Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and the Elizabethans and all other genuine predecessors had done, only doing it with a livelier sense of what they were about, more persistently, and it may be further said with a surer

sense of where, in what context and with what material, it could be done.

For it is the distinction of the nineteenth century, not only in this particularly romantic part of it, say, 1790–1825, but throughout its course, that its genuine poets scarcely ever attempted things contrary to the real nature of poetry while they attempted almost everything accordant with it. It produced bad poetry enough, this nineteenth century. In its middle a temporarily very popular writer, Tupper, did work more repugnant to the nature not only of poetry but of literature in general than any work equally popular in the eighteenth century. Another writer, a man of unquestionable genius, Whitman, wasted the poetic material existing imperfectly related in him much more disastrously than any frustrate or misled poet of any other century. But Tupper, not being a poet at all except in pretension, does not come into the argument, and Whitman is the most startling of exceptions. On the whole it is true that, whether by instinct or self-criticism, the nineteenth-century poets arrived at an unprecedentedly clear idea of what was possible in poetry, and, working to the very limit of those possibilities, rarely tried to go beyond them.

The fame of WILLIAM BLAKE (1757–1827) is entirely modern. To his contemporaries, when they were at all aware of his existence, he was no more than a madman with some artistic and poetic gifts, and though Charles Lamb, with his genius for discovering beautiful things, could write of him as 'one of the most extraordinary persons of the age', he had to write of him as an apparition 'flown, whither I know not—to Hades or a mad-house'. For part

of his life he had a not always comprehending Boswell in the diarist, Crabb Robinson, whose references to him have been carefully brought together for us to make part of a very valuable critical study of Blake by Mr. Arthur Symons. There were few people privileged to hear his talk who thought it worth recording. Outside England he had one contemporary admirer, but for one only of his poems, 'The Tiger', which was translated into German in 1806. But Blake, though his death was noticed in one remarkable obituary tribute, meant nothing to his countrymen until in 1863 there appeared the 'Life' by Gilchrist, including the poems from D. G. Rossetti's manuscript. The first collected edition of the poems was issued by W. M. Rossetti in 1874; for the authoritative text, that of Mr. John Sampson, we had to wait till 1904. Understanding of the ideas of Blake dates from the noble book on him issued by Swinburne in the 'sixties, has been increased by Mr. Yeats and Mr. Symons, and others, but is still incomplete and will always remain so.

For William Blake, though never without his personal message, drew contrary meanings, even in successive drafts of the same poem, from the same natural symbols, and in what he called 'the fury of my course among the stars of God and in the abysses of the accuser' he was often too hurried to translate the facts of Heaven or Hell into the language of earth, and he left no key to his system of symbolism. If that virtuous rascal, Tatham, had not burned a great deal of Blake's work, we might be rather less uncertain of the meaning of some passages or the relation of some ideas, but it is probable that the lost work would have had its own riddles.

If, however, we cannot fully grasp the imaginative philosophy of Blake we can at least refrain from the stupidity of calling him mad. Few men have been so sane or made so much of a success of life on their own terms. He chose to live chiefly in the other world, but he always knew what he was about in this; his just contempt for mere reason did not prevent him from following it in worldly matters, and as he lived a busy, purposeful, happy life so he died the happiest of deaths, making the rafters of his poor room ring with the songs of joy he improvised and sung on his death-bed. *Ut migraturus!* He lived here but as one travelling to the heavenly city that was his home, yet in all his dealings with worldly people there was excellent sense, courtesy, the punctilio of the traveller who is a gentleman towards the custom of the country, so that when he declined royal drawing-pupils he dismissed all others lest the refusal should seem churlish.

What manner of man he was we may see in the well-known portrait, but better in Swinburne's description of the face that looks forth from it—'a brilliant eager old face, keen and gentle, with a preponderance of brow and head; clear bird-like eyes, eloquent excitable mouth, with a look of nervous and fluent power; the whole lighted through as it were from behind with a strange and pure kind of smile, touched too with something of an impatient prospective rapture.'

There is rapture in all the work Blake did as poet and prophet and artist, but of a kind peculiar to himself. He was almost himself in that song, 'How sweet I roamed from field to field', which Malkin tells us Blake wrote before the age of fourteen, and

except for a few things in the Elizabethan style followed no one in his maturity as a lyrical poet. In certain pieces of the early 'Poetical Sketches' and in all the 'Songs of Innocence' and 'Songs of Experience' we have a sort of abstract ecstasy altogether his own. His symbolism is already elaborate, but it is a visual symbolism, of things seen with the most extraordinary intensity, and it is almost all pure poetic gain, because all through this stage of his development he has a passionate or tender delight in the thing for its own sake as well as for the sake of its meaning. 'The Tiger', for instance, is a rapture of awed and delighted wonder:

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 watered heaven with their tears,
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He who made the lamb make thee?

In masterpieces like that there is nothing to give pause to my reader. But ideas crowded upon Blake, and his delight in the natural beauty of the symbol weakened as his intellectual passion for that which it symbolized grew. He wrote poems, some of them among his finest, which cannot be understood without some acquaintance with his philosophy and the meaning of his names. 'To Tirzah' requires the knowledge that Tirzah was Blake's name for Natural Religion. The very striking but somewhat obscure poem 'My Spectre' demands the preliminary explanation that by 'spectre' Blake meant the reasoning power in man and by 'emanation' his emotional and imaginative faculties. The magnificent declaration of some of his profoundest ideas, 'The Everlasting Gospel', is a riddling blasphemy to anyone who has not seized its central thought—that, as the supreme sin cannot commit merely human faults, so neither can the supreme holiness follow the principles of merely human saintliness. Blake habitually lived, in his poetical life, above good and evil. As he said in prose, in condemning what passes for education: 'It is eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was the fault of Plato. He knew nothing but the virtues and vices, and good and evil. There is nothing in all that. Everything is good in God's eyes.' Everything was good in Blake's eyes, and with a more urgent message than perhaps any other poet he is the least in danger of falling into didacticism, for it is not conduct but the energy which may issue in it that concerns him. And he rejoices in energy chiefly when it is abstract, excarnated or not yet incarnated.

It is the defect of Blake as an artist that, with

marvellous vision and a magnificent sense of design, he gave a massive, strained, far too anatomical form, learned from too slight an acquaintance with the work of Michelangelo, to conceptions which required a less determinate, a more wavering and spiritual outline. He made no such mistake in the best of his lyrical verse. Remembering the sublimity of many of his designs one hesitates to say a syllable that might sound disparaging to his genius as an artist, but it cannot be doubted that his technique in poetry was more personal and more secure.

Yet the art of the lyrics was forsaken by Blake when he came to write the prophetic books, in which a fitfully rhythmical prose mostly remembers Ossian but sometimes anticipates Whitman. These difficult works, of great importance to the student of Blake and to the historian of ideas which in our own time have had a voice in Nietzsche, cannot, however, be held to come within the scope of any treatise on English poetry.

The shortest and simplest way of dealing with WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770–1850) is to assume that one half of his brain was that of a great poet and the other half that of a village idiot, and to divide his writings in verse into the works of the great poet, the works of the village idiot, and the works of the two writing in alternation. It is not a method which will here be adopted. On the contrary, it is one against which the strongest protest of which this pen is capable will be entered at the very outset. For our one chance of understanding Wordsworth and his noble and inestimably salutary influence over the modern mind is to hold constantly to the truth that his most disastrous, his most ludicrous

failures proceed from the conception of himself and of poetry which gave us his loftiest successes.

Wordsworth conceived himself to be an explorer —as regards certain tracts of nature and of the human mind the very first to traverse them, as regards others the first to traverse them with seeing eyes. With this conception of himself, he thought his every experience and observation worthy of poetic record. From time to time, little as he heeded the work of other poets, and solid as was his simple vanity, and sluggish as was his sense of humour, it must have struck him that he was here and there, in his prosy recitals, telling an oft-told tale or dwelling on facts apparently trivial. But when such thoughts slightly disturbed his usual complacency he could reflect, with perfect justice, that not all his finest successes of the past had been won as the traveller returned from hitherto utterly untrodden mountain-peaks or valleys. He could lay those doubts, as he presumably did, by recalling that many of his successes had been with material rescued from under the feet of multitudes of the unobservant. But such doubts came seldom, and the desire to write was always with Wordsworth. He made his poetry and his metrical prose equally out of the sight of his eyes and his memories. Such and such things he had seen, and so he remembered in all its circumstances his experience. With complete sincerity and perfect confidence, he thought he had only to record his vision and his 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' to make the reader share them. Even the bare fact was not to be disdained. On a certain day the contemplation of it had moved him; he had but faithfully to reproduce it, as it was, and it

would move the reader. And so, through his virtues, through his most precious virtues of discovering everything for himself, of being utterly sincere, of believing to the utmost in the inherent power of things, he became sometimes this intolerable peddler of truisms newly discerned by himself, this conveyer of bleak facts which are to affect us without our being put into the mood in which they had affected him.

Further, and here we come to the absurd infelicities of a great master of style, since he was a poet he knew that one of the functions of poetry is to break the unworthy accidental associations of ideas, but he simply ignored them. It did not occur to him, with his faith in poetry and in himself, that infinite circumspection is required in that enterprise. Far from guarding against the dangers which those accidental associations present, he would not even look at them. As if writing were not a process of excluding undesired associations as well as of creating desired associations of ideas! It was with pained surprise that he became aware of ribald laughter over the very title of his 'Idiot Boy'. In his own noble and reverent mind he had been wont, as he explained, to apply to idiots 'that sublime expression of Scripture that "*their life is hidden with God*"'. He was dimly aware that the mere *word*, idiot, had cheap and comic associations, and after the event he told a correspondent that 'if there had been any such word in our language *to which we had attached passion*' he would have 'certainly employed it in preference'; but there was no such word. The dignity of his own idea and the poverty of the English vocabulary seemed to him completely to justify his error.

But while we laugh let us realize that this kind of absurdity in Wordsworth proceeds from the very same independence of accidental associations which gives us his unique successes. Whatever he may be at his worst, at his best he is, through the same qualities that ruin his worst work, the most faithful to truth of all English poets. With much conscious and still more unconscious courage, with deep humility before the eternal beauty of the world and the workings of man's mind, with invincible faith in the ultimate value of every form of experience, he produces the thing seen, the joy or sorrow it gave him, with an unrivalled fidelity. He will not suppress whatever in it seems to other minds trivial or heighten whatever in it seems to them most significant, and he is not to be deterred by even his own inability fully to understand an experience. So it was, so he presents it on his page, in which, when he is not painfully literal, he is imaginative in the sense in which an actual landscape may be called imaginative and the universe an imaginative activity of God. In such pages, few as they are, and in hundreds of single lines or phrases, not Wordsworth but Nature herself seems to be writing the poem.

For such poetry there was needed a style, simple and inevitable, in which felicities should seem not the poet's achievement but the result of laws like Nature's. To such a style Wordsworth attained; but he used it intermittently, was hardly aware of its coming to him and its departure from him, and in the latter years of his long life was able to summon it only once or twice. How far his attainment of it was assisted by his theory of diction is disputable.

In his famous prefaces he set out that theory with

the utmost lucidity, though he gave to it there somewhat more prominence than it had had in his work, the novelty of which was often due to something quite other than simplicity of language. 'Poetic diction' he very rightly rejected as not being 'the real language of men in *any situation*'. The language he deemed fit for poetry he defined in his preface of 1798 as 'the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society', but, with far more truth to both his own better practice and to poetry in general, in the amended preface of 1800 as 'a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation.' Though he thus improved the definition it is plain that he did not altogether get free from a prejudice in favour of 'the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes' or at least amongst his Cumberland petty farmers. It is plain, too, that he did not quite realize the procedure in his own 'selection' of words from 'the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation', failing to note that selection implied some criterion, and that his was not possible to anyone unacquainted with such masters of diction as Shakespeare and Spenser and Milton. It did not dawn on him that the result of referring the real language of contemporary men, his humble Cumberland neighbours or others, to the greatest poets of the past can differ from the results of referring the language of these poets to shepherds, farmers and beggars, only in poverty, not in any essential. What is common to the two results may well be most excellent diction for poetry, but it will be very limited; it does not follow that what is found in Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton but not heard from the lips of

unsophisticated persons or in 'the middle class of society' will be vicious. But as Wordsworth's practice was much more liberal than his theory the point need not be laboured. A more serious and less frequently criticized error was laying so much stress on the identity of the vocabularies of prose and verse without perceiving the greater importance of establishing identity in *order*. Given a natural order of words, the occasional rare and difficult word will be carried off; given an order contrary to that of prose and evidently dictated by metrical requirements or need for a rhyme, and the most usual and simplest words will not produce the desired illusion. Here Wordsworth sinned very frequently, and sometimes very clumsily, falling back on inversions quite as bad as those of the eighteenth-century writers he condemned for using a false poetic diction.

Commonly it is said that Wordsworth succeeded, other things being reasonably equal, in proportion as he broke away from his theory of diction. That, however, is a gross exaggeration. The truth is that he acted on his theory very irregularly, sometimes almost wholly forgetting it to his momentary advantage, but in the long run respecting it quite as much as any artist should respect a mere theory. Getting away from the theory gave him some beautiful phrases and lines and stanzas, but also many of his worst and least characteristic. Obedience to it also gave him some of his worst, but most of his best. And there were whole poems, of every degree of merit, in which defiance and compliance were exhibited by turns for good and evil.

Take one of his very greatest, that 'Affliction

of Margaret ', which seems to me in the intensity of its pathos unmatched in the whole of our lyrical poetry. Here is a stanza of great beauty not easily to be reconciled with this theory of diction :

> Perhaps some dungeon hears thee groan,
> Maimed, mangled by inhuman men ;
> Or thou upon a desert thrown
> Inheritest the lion's den ;
> Or hast been summoned to the deep,
> Thou, thou and all thy mates to keep
> An incommunicable sleep.

And here is another stanza, not less beautiful, with purer individuality, and exactly accordant with his theory :

> My apprehensions come in crowds ;
> I dread the rustling of the grass ;
> The very shadows of the clouds
> Have power to shake me as they pass.
> I question things and do not find
> One that will answer to my mind ;
> And all the world appears unkind.

Wordsworth wrote like Shakespeare for a moment, and that with a power not inferior to Shakespeare's, when in ' Ruth ' he imagined

> The engines of her pain, the tools
> That shaped her sorrow.

He wrote like no man this earth has held upon it, not even himself, for never again did he reach quite that awful and heart-shattering simplicity, when he composed the eight lines on Lucy's death :

> A slumber did my spirit seal ;
> I had no human fears :
> She seemed a thing that could not feel
> The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

But, if such a miracle was not to be repeated, the great, bare, pure Wordsworthian phrase or line came to him often in the twenty years between his majority and the almost final departure of his inspiration, as when he said of Milton

Thy soul was like a star and dwelt apart,

and of Chatterton that he was

The sleepless soul that perished in its pride,

and of the Highland girl reaping and singing that her song was, perhaps, of

Old, unhappy, far-off things
And battles long ago,

and as when, in the stanzas on Peele Castle, he fixed in a single magnificent epithet the likeness of the 'trampling' waves. We may find such most frequently in a little space, and with context more than usually worthy of them, in his Sonnets, where he was forced by the form to concentrate. The best of these, such as that composed on Westminster Bridge, that on Milton, that to Toussaint L'Ouverture, those on England as she was in 1802, that beginning 'The world is too much with us', the valedictory sonnet to the river Duddon, and the sonnet beginning 'Surprised by joy—impatient as the wind', are among the greatest we have, the most imaginative and the most full of moral ardour. There are many of the most famous Wordsworthian phrases and lines in the ode on 'Intimations of

Immortality from Recollections of Childhood ', the poem into which he put his most intimate belief, and for which he is most generally admired ; there are many in the more completely successful ' Ode to Duty ', into which he put his finest moral ideas, and which has the sublime lines :

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong ;
And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong.

But if any single poem is to illustrate Wordsworth's qualities it should, I think, be the ' Leech Gatherer ', which has somewhere or another in it all his merits, and in which they are harmonized as perhaps nowhere else in his work.

Wordsworth was the poet of the sense of sight, which he called ' the most despotic of our senses ', and of the memory, calling up out of it things which moved him more than they had done at the time of his original experience :

Nor is it I who play the part,
But a shy spirit in my heart,
That comes and goes—will sometimes leap
From hiding-places ten years deep.

And Wordsworth was the poet, as everyone agrees, but in ways that not quite everyone understands, of nature and of the moral instinct. As he waited quietly on his memory, so he waited in ' a wise passiveness ' on nature.

Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking ?

To his mind there was only one answer to that question. We needed but to be still, to be receptive, to be disinterested, and nature would give us the wisdom and peace we miss by busy and selfish seeking:

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.

Merely a poet's fancy, you may retort. But poetry is truth, Wordsworth's especially. A recent poet, the late James Elroy Flecker, excellently said that the business of poetry was not to save souls but to make souls worth saving. Well, Wordsworth's business was not to inculcate morality, though he did that drearily enough sometimes in later years, but to make it worth inculcating, by enriching it; and he thought it was enriched by patient waiting on nature and trustful abandonment of the self to her every mood. She had given him in youth an intense sensuous pleasure, and later had healed him and calmed and uplifted him, and he believed she was the chief means of giving depth and spontaneity and beauty to what without her promptings would be mechanical and shallow morality, contrived merely, and contrived for mere social convenience instead of for the satisfaction of man's profoundest instinct.

It was said of Wordsworth, with as much truth as wit needs, that when he had written his 'Ode to Duty' he was done with that matter. It seems to me that the tragedy of the poetic no less than the moral life of SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

(1772–1834) was that nothing of the sort could ever be said of him. As a man and as a poet, he was the victim of extreme sensitiveness of conscience and extreme indisposition to act on its urgings. He knew himself, and I find almost all the explanation of a life in which hardly anything was completed in one sentence of a letter he wrote to the diarist Crabb Robinson: 'The moral obligation is to me so very strong a stimulant that in nine cases out of ten it acts as a narcotic.' Never was Coleridge able either to live for duty or to turn his back decisively on it and live for impulse. He lived in an uneasy oscillation between two positions, in either of which he could have done a complete life's work, just as he moved through his garden in the walk described by Carlyle, unable to keep to either side of the path.

Opium, which he began to take innocently when he was twenty-three and to which he was a slave by the time he was twenty-nine, merely increased a vagueness and an indolence that would in any event have been his. Marriage with a woman who could not understand him merely resulted in a neglect of family duties which further inflamed his conscience. Deprivation of the society of Wordsworth and of that poet's sister was far more serious in consequence than either opium or domestic unhappiness, for Dorothy Wordsworth, with her alert and delicate perception of natural beauty, was the only stimulant, at once spiritual and earthly, that Coleridge's too active mind required, and William Wordsworth was the only person in his circle capable of pinning Coleridge down to poetry.

There was, unfortunately, no blind-spot in the

mind's eye of Coleridge, no callous tract in his brain. Without Dorothy Wordsworth to direct him to definite, concrete things, without William Wordsworth's wisely narrowing influence in favour of poetry, Coleridge hardly needed opium or that other drug, metaphysics, to set him drifting in a neglect of all duties and all tasks which had none of the value of willed refusal to do them. Coleridge was a truant without exhilaration, and without ability to decide what he should do with his unlawful leisure. Divided between poetry, criticism, metaphysics, he came in time to feel poetry too personal a thing, too apt to set him thinking of the duties of which he was acutely conscious but which he could never make any strong or sustained effort to discharge. 'Poetry', he is found confessing rather late in life, 'is out of the question. The attempt would only hurry me into that sphere of acute feelings from which abstruse research, the mother of self-oblivion, presents an asylum.' But even metaphysical enquiry for that huge work which he dreamily planned and of which he left large unrelated fragments involved more exertion towards fixed ends than suited him. He took refuge in conversation, or rather in monologue, and the years slipped past while he talked away, in possibly the subtlest and most various discourse ever heard, the materials of who can say how many masterpieces of criticism and speculation. 'The stimulus of conversation', he wrote to the friend who eventually took charge of him, 'suspends the terror of my mind.' He had gone to opium for one kind of relief, he went to conversation for another.

Coleridge was perhaps the most imaginative

poet we have had; and he was the profoundest, though not as regards details the surest, critic of poetry. He had infinite sensitiveness and an infinite wealth of ideas; he had a grasp of poetic principles which makes most other great poets look like rule-of-thumb experimenters. But almost all that matters of his poetry can be enumerated in a short sentence: 'The Ancient Mariner', 'Christabel', both begun in his great year, 1779, 'Kubla Khan'; and, with less rarity of magic, the 'Ode on Dejection', 'Work without Hope', 'Youth and Age'; to which might be added three or four pieces for their incidental beauty of music or colour. Personally, I should certainly include Glycine's song from 'Zapolya', for a brilliance of sparkling colour very characteristic of Coleridge, who, however, as a rule cared more for 'amber' and 'amethyst' than for 'fire' and 'gold'. On the other hand, I should certainly not include 'Love', which is in all the anthologies, but which is a female and gushing poem made a success by consummate art. The same art, applied to a very much more solid but not very much more poetic substance, makes the success of 'Youth and Age'. 'Work without Hope' is a beautiful and pathetic trifle. The 'Ode on Dejection' is of the finest quality only in that stanza which laments the loss of his poetic genius:

But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Nor care I though they rob me of my mirth;
But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient all I can,

And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man—
This was my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.

In a final valuation of one of the very greatest of poets we are reduced to three poems, of which one, 'Christabel', was left unfinished, and of which another, 'Kubla Khan', was composed in sleep, and also remains a fragment, though an entirely self-sufficing one.

The 'Ancient Mariner', produced when Coleridge was in constant touch with Wordsworth and the outcome of collaboration, is the most securely directed of all its author's work. It is, perhaps, the most evenly and exactly imagined poem in our language, everything in it having been translated with equal success from our world into the world which is presented in it. So it is at once as a whole the most supernatural and in the relation of its parts the most natural of poems, requiring of us not a series of imaginative acceptances, involving various degrees of effort, but only the initial assent, which we give easily, and after which every development of beauty and horror seems to us inevitable. If it has at all a fault, it is in a tinge of didacticism. Of that Coleridge was conscious. 'It ought to have had no more moral', he said, 'than the Arabian Nights tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant, because one of the date-shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son.'

The witchcraft that made 'The Ancient Mariner'

is in essence a mystery, but we can at least see it at work. In 'Christabel', and not in the least because this poem is unfinished, we cannot so much as guess the quarter from which it operates. There is not here a translation of earthly things and feelings into an unearthly region, as in 'The Ancient Mariner', but the earth has grown hollow beneath our feet, the skies have deepened their mystery over our heads, and powers beyond our conjecture have stealthily invaded familiar things. But it is 'Kubla Khan' that is the final miracle.

> 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 . . .

To quote it is to repeat an incantation. It has almost every excellence of which lyrical poetry is capable, and in the highest degree, with only so much of meaning as may suffice to hold it together.

What a robust critic of the eighteenth-century type would make of such work has been pleasantly suggested in a book for which I have warm admiration, and which for a dozen different reasons, its rare skill in mimicry, its lightly carried scholarship, its shrewd wit among them, I commend to you—'The New Lucian', of the late H. D. Traill, a book which will some day be a minor classic.

James Hogg (1770–1835), the Ettrick shepherd, was twenty before he could write all of the alphabet and twenty-six before he began to compose verse. He became a poet who could do his best work only when not himself, some translation into a remote and

by preference an unearthly personality being necessary to him. His best work, quite naturally when this has once been grasped, was done in faery poems, one of which, 'Kilmeny', is his masterpiece, and in those amazing and shamefully neglected parodies which Hogg wrote by assuming the personality of Wordsworth or of Coleridge or of Scott. The Coleridge parody is as lovely as most of Coleridge's own poetry, the Wordsworth has some of Wordsworth's own imaginative power.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR (1775–1864) defined with exactitude his ideal, better or at least oftener realized in his prose than in his verse: 'rejection of what is light and minute, disdain of what is trivial, and selection of those blocks from the quarry which will bear strong strokes of the hammer and retain all the marks of the chisel.' His prose in the 'Imaginary Conversations' is among the purest, the most felicitous in imagery and the most delicately modulated ever written in English, but the final effect of it on an assiduous reader is faintly depressing, and his poetry, taken as a whole, leaves one at last a little chilled. Prose or verse, the outline is almost always noble, but that which it encloses, never hot in colour or tricked out with cheap ornament, is apt to be inadequately vitalized. It is classical in avoidance oftener than in achievement, and I find it significant that in defining his ideal while discussing Pindar's he should write of 'rejection', 'disdain', 'selection'.

As a man, Landor was full of impulse and anger. He quarrelled with his father; he married recklessly, and quarrelled with his wife; his extreme old age was almost Lear's, his daughter shutting the

door of his home to him and declaring to Browning that she would not help her father if he lay dying before her eyes in a ditch. The caprices of his temper were preposterous, and it was with a ludicrous and painful untruth to the mere facts of his life that he said 'I strove with none'. But these weaknesses of the man, and anger in him was always a weakness, never a source of strength, are excluded from all the best work of the artist, who is very far from simply a projection of the man through his medium of prose or verse. The artist in him was certainly as aloof and as proudly at peace as in the perfect epigram of his last years:

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife.
Nature I loved and, next to Nature, Art:
I warmed both hands before the fire of life;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

It was with the same just pride that he said in prose that he had 'never contended with a contemporary, but walked alone on the far eastern uplands, meditating and remembering', and that he predicted his fame—'I shall dine late; but the dining-room will be well lighted, the guests few and select.' No one in our literature had written of himself more haughtily or with a pathos more immune from suspicion of exhibiting wounds for our alms: his hauteur exalts not only himself but every reader, and his reticence in self-pity is that of a great gentleman who will not force his griefs on suffering humanity. He is unexcelled, too, in the lofty and paternal tenderness of his compliments to youthful beauty and of his restrained laments over beauty gone before him to the grave.

All these qualities are in a series of epigrams the like of which no other English poet has produced. The two finest are the lines on Dirce—

> Stand close around, ye Stygian set,
> With Dirce in one boat conveyed!
> Or Charon, seeing, may forget
> That he is old and she a shade—

and the exquisite lament for Rose Aylmer:

> Ah, what avails the sceptred race!
> Ah, what the form divine!
> What every virtue, every grace!
> Rose Aylmer, all were thine.
>
> Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes
> May weep, but never see,
> A night of memories and of sighs
> I consecrate to thee.

But a dozen others approach these in excellence. For that happiness in simile of which Landor was a master, the epigram on Catullus, for grace in turn of compliment the lines on 'Ianthe's Question', for reserved pathos, 'The Leaves are falling', 'There is a mountain and a wood between us', 'Mild is the parting year', could scarcely be overpraised.

To go no further than this section of Landor's work, however, is to do him grave injustice. The early poem of 'Gebir', conceived originally in Latin, and published in Landor's twenty-third year, is in its severe way the nearest English poetry has got to epic since Milton, and contains, with other beautiful things, the most musical passage of blank

verse he ever wrote, those lines on the sea-shell ending

> Shake one and it awakens, then apply
> Its polisht lips to your attentive ear,
> And it remembers its august abodes,
> And murmurs as the ocean murmurs there.

And, undramatic as his professedly dramatic work usually is, some of the later portions of it, 'The Siege of Ancona', which dates from 1842, and 'Beatrice Cenci', which is included in 'Last Fruits off an Old Tree', 1855, are memorable for more than chastely beautiful passages. The 'Hellenics', 1847, revised and enlarged in 1859, is his most characteristic volume, not least in this that certain of the poems are translated from his own Latin verse. For Landor was in the main a Latin poet, born centuries too late into a literature to which he contributed qualities perhaps not the very greatest but certainly the least common in its poetry. Amidst the splendid romantic luxuriance of English poetry he set up a piece of pure, cool marble, with antique figures wrought out on it in low relief. It can never be a very intimate possession of ours, but the composure and firmness of its fastidious art are to be the more honoured by us for their rarity.

SAMUEL ROGERS (1763–1855) was born seven years before Wordsworth, and outlived the devotedly admiring Byron by thirty-one years, surviving long enough to show kindness to a young Etonian who thought the world of poets and poetry, Swinburne. By his wit, taste, hospitality, generosity to poets, Rogers has a literary fame quite unrelated to his own work in verse, which included the exceedingly

popular eighteenth-century composition, 'The Pleasures of Memory', and 'Jacqueline', published with Byron's 'Lara', and 'Italy', Ruskin's spiritual guide to that country. The best of Rogers is in the 'Italy', of which, with its splendid illustrations, it was said that 'it would have been dished but for the plates'.

The longevity of Rogers, with his wealth and social influence and reputation as an expert in matters of art, has its historical importance. Until well into Victorian days, English poets had before them an incarnate reminder that there were ideals other than romantic. But he lives elsewhere than in his own neat verse; is immortal in compliments, and most finely in the fact that the only security against his caustic wit was to owe him money.

The poetry of SIR WALTER SCOTT (1771–1832) was nearly all produced in fifteen years, between 1802, when, at the age of thirty-one, he began 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel', at the urging of a lady and on a metrical basis that would never have occurred to him if he had not heard Coleridge's 'Christabel' recited, and 1817, when he followed up the failure of 'Waterloo' with the catastrophe of 'Harold the Dauntless'. For the remaining fifteen years of his life he wrote no poems of length and ambition. These facts should long ago have excited suspicion. They remind us that Scott was without any deep inner impulse to poetry, other than the story-teller's impulse which presently worked itself out so very much more satisfactorily in his prose romances. With his usual modesty and clear-headedness Scott said he wrote with 'a hurried frankness of composition which pleases soldiers, sailors and young

people of bold and active dispositions ', and claimed no more. Much more has been claimed for him by admirers who forget that the ability to tell a story in verse, with manly sentiment and a certain vigour, is nothing if there be in the narrative poem no poetic vision, no magic, no music other than the obvious sound of the gallop of events. Where he might have done more was in those snatches of song which appear in the prose romances, late work produced after poetic ambition had been laid aside. In these he has something of the Scottish feeling for the lilt of a song, and now and then a gleam of real poetry. The extremely famous but essentially if heroically commonplace ' One crowded hour of glorious life ' has lately been taken away from him and given to its true and unimportant author, but no one can take away from him his indisputable claim to the title of poet, the unique song in four brief stanzas, ' Proud Maisie ', published in a prose context in 1818. It has nothing in common with anything else he ever wrote. It is poetry in its elements, but it is poetry.

ROBERT SOUTHEY (1774–1843) was in his day what Byron, his satirist, called him : ' the only existing entire man of letters.' He had immense reading, an exceptional memory, method, a pure though insufficiently idiosyncratic prose style, and he wrote two biographies of rare merit, the Nelson, which everyone has read, and the Wesley, which is less read but perhaps finer. As a writer of verse he totally misunderstood his own talent, wasting his energies on ' Thalaba the Destroyer ' and ' The Curse of Kehama ' and such cold and grandiose work when his real business was to cultivate his

gift for a kind of verse in which irony of the simplest sort, or else the combination of the domestic and the macabre, would tell. In such work the form of verse, never exquisite with Southey, would have been either part of the mockery or a way of giving legendary prestige to a new invention. All he did was to write 'The Battle of Blenheim', which he could not, however, have surpassed in years given to such ironical simplicity, and 'The Old Woman of Berkeley'. As a lyrist he was nothing; his wife, CAROLINE ANNE BOWLES SOUTHEY (1786–1854), wrote out of genuine feeling and observation, and with a sense of style Southey never had in verse, some pieces worthy of revival; her lines 'To Death' are a woman's and a poet's as surely as Anna Lætitia Barbauld's lines to Life.

In the more elaborate poems of THOMAS CAMPBELL (1775–1844), there is a vague elevation, getting them out of touch with one sort of reality without getting them into touch with the other, and in many of his shorter and simpler pieces there is a display of emotion which embarrasses the reader, who cannot laugh at it, for its origin is in sincerity, or share it, for its expression is insincere, and who finds it excessive. All that really matters of Campbell, with the doubtful exception of the strongly conceived but too rhetorical piece called 'The Last Man', is battle poetry: 'Hohenlinden', which is not much above prose in substance but has a remarkably appropriate form and gets its effect; 'Ye Mariners of England', which has more poetry in its substance and a still more appropriate form; and 'The Battle of the Baltic', a masterpiece, with a form, due to a wise second thought, quite original and extraordin-

arily apt. Campbell was peculiarly aware of the poetry of the mere life of ships, and of that heightening of it brought by the idea of things so beautiful as war-ships being intended for mutual destruction. 'Those who ever witnessed the spectacle of the launching of a ship of the line', he wrote, 'will perhaps forgive me for adding this to the sublime objects of artificial life.' He at any rate felt something quite other than 'vulgar joy' on such occasions of 'affecting national solemnity', and it was this sense of the war-ship as a thing dedicate, this and the proudly restraining form, that for once kept his patriotic fervour from dissipating itself.

When Byron called THOMAS MOORE (1779–1852) 'the poet of all circles and the idol of his own' he used little or no exaggeration. Whether in the 'Irish Melodies', issued in instalments from 1807 to 1834, or in the pretty second-hand Orientalism of 'Lalla Rookh', or in many clever squibs, Moore gave pleasure to a very wide public, and in his own set he was liked for himself and by the sentimental almost adored for his singing of his own words. What survives out of the ten volumes of his 'Poetical Works' is perhaps no more than a dozen songs, of which 'Oft in the stilly Night' and 'At the midhour of Night, when stars are weeping, I fly', are the best. The former has something that keeps it, not seriously honoured, in the memory; the latter has a rhythm new in English verse. But neither in these two pieces nor anywhere else was Moore an artist or deeply sincere. His levity in amorous verse was not that of the poetical and humorously wondering:

> Out upon it, I have loved
> Three whole days together!

and still less that of:

> If I by miracle can be
> This livelong minute true to thee,
> 'Tis all that Heaven allows.

Moore's was the levity of a nature without weight, not that of one with buoyancy.

JAMES HENRY LEIGH HUNT (1784–1859) will always have a position of considerable historic importance as a writer of verse who sought to unite 'fancy and familiarity', but his extremely uncertain taste almost always spoiled his attempts in that enterprise, and made him an unfortunate influence on Keats. To the general reader he is known perhaps only by 'Abou Ben Adhem', which makes its point excellently, and 'Jenny kissed Me', a delightful little epigram of consolation. His sonnet on the Nile has one magnificent line in allusion to Cleopatra, 'the laughing queen that caught the world's great hands'.

But for the finest of both his comic and his serious verse we must turn to those strange sonnets, 'The Fish, the Man and the Spirit', which rise from the most fantastic mockery to noble imagination in the final lines.

THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK (1785–1866), whose witty novels are caviare to the general, and as delightful as caviare to the few, wrote a tender reminiscent lyric, 'Love and Age', which everyone has appreciated, the most delicately fanciful drinking-song we have, the exquisitely absurd 'War-Song of Dinas Vawr', some brilliant jingles, and the inexplicably beautiful 'Grave of Love'.

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON (1788–1824),

needed fame as no other of our poets has needed it. For, whereas to other poets fame has been but the reward of work done, to Byron it was the condition of doing the work at all. As a serious writer he had only one subject, himself, and that self not in its essential being but in its accidental relation to a gazing, applauding, shocked world. Try to imagine his 'Childe Harold' (1812–1818) as written by any but a celebrated man: it is inconceivable, for the poem presupposes, for its very existence, that the eyes of the world are upon its author-hero, that his sins and sorrows are creating universal scandal and arousing universal pity, that without fatuity he can assume mankind to be curious about his every action, that he can moralize amongst famous ruins and set himself against great mountains without fear of the audience's attention straying from the actor to the stage-scenery.

It has been said that Byron was an egotist: he was not egotistical enough to realize that the bare personality may be an adequate subject for poetry. Fitness for poetry came, in his view, from circumstances in which his personality was placed, from the accidents that he was a peer, young, handsome, lame, that he was first lionized in society and then hounded out of it, that he was a wanderer in the East and in Italy, and at odds with the world. It has also been said that his most serious feeling was his sense of sin: it was, rather, a sense of scandal, of the consequences of sin known rather than of sin committed.

It is this dependence on exterior, accidental things more than his grave enough technical failure that prevents Byron from being in the full sense

a poet. Pure poetry, though it exist only in a single anonymous line, is significant simply as such: most of Byron's would mean little to us if it were not signed with his name and written in circumstances we know, as most royal or criminal speeches would mean little to us if they were not made from a throne or a scaffold.

Byron was the great showman of himself, taking through Europe 'the pageant of his bleeding heart'; and when fame had become infamy, and even infamy had lost its savour, and he had turned thirty, and had wearied of passion, and had settled down, a defeated man, to the only possible revenge on the world, a refusal to take it seriously, even then, in the utterly different poetry of 'Don Juan' (1819–1824), the old romantic or pseudo-romantic circumstances counted in the final effect. If this 'wandering with pedestrian muses', as he called it, was his true business, this ironical, disillusioned, worldly, middle-aged poetry that which his genius was meant to produce, the poetry of his earlier years was by no means now seen as waste of effort. It was his past, the evidence that he had seen things before he saw through them. Because of it, because he had once said with so much emphasis:

> Admire—exult—despise—laugh—weep—for here
> There is such matter for all feeling: Man!

he could say with all the more tragedy, in the tone of jest, 'man is an unlucky rascal'. The thing said still depended for much of its effect on the circumstances of its saying, as it came now conversationally from the mouth that had uttered so much thunder.

But by now Byron said things incomparably

better. He who could never learn any instrument of serious poetry had found and completely mastered the perfect instrument for serio-comic poetry, the *ottava rima*, the eight-line stanza of the Italians, adapted for English use by Frere, that stanza with the final jaunty flourish or contemptuous flick. And Byron had beyond any writer the quality the form most demands: more than anyone he could suggest lazy, latent strength, as of one who, if he thought anything worth the exertion, could smash with a single stroke of the paw the ball he patted and rolled about in a tigerish playfulness. The ball was nothing less than the world. In the days of his stormy revolt he had assailed it from above, insecurely, for he was not in mind above it; now he renewed the contest with a treacherous good-humour on the world's level, with the world's own weapons, without risk in his new style of the retort which the world can always with a base justice fling at the poet, the prophet, the saint. He no longer took the hazard of defeat, seeming now to refrain from crushing the world only in a scornful indulgence or with a feline wish to prolong the play, and not because he was incapable.

'Don Juan' is immeasurably better than anything else Byron wrote except two pieces in somewhat the same temper, 'Beppo' and the wonderfully easy and pungent satire on Southey and the King to whom Southey was laureate, the 'Vision of Judgment'. It is as the author of these things, and not of 'Childe Harold' or 'Manfred', though the former has many justly famous phrases and the latter the finest thought and imagination of which Byron was capable, that he made his contribution to

the development of English poetry. It is as the writer of this new conversational verse that he became unwittingly the fellow-worker of Wordsworth in the reform of English poetic diction, getting it as near the speech of the worldling as Wordsworth got it near the speech of the natural man. It is curious that he who thought the verse of Pope 'the Christianity of poetry', and declared of himself and his contemporaries 'we are all wrong except Rogers, Crabbe and Campbell', should have done English verse the service of ridding it of abstractions, pompositions, inversions, and making it talk. No serious technical purpose drove him to be a reformer; merely disillusion with the subjects of poetry, which in earlier years he had sometimes absurdly romanticized, extended to the methods of what he still supposed to be the finest poetry.

To the spirit of English poetry, agitating as he was, he contributed nothing of permanent value. Ours is in the main lyrical poetry, and Byron could not sing. His best lyric, 'The Isles of Greece', is really only effective oratory; we may remember his description of his boyish self, 'my qualities were very much more oratorical than poetical'. Overemphasis or some obtuseness about the qualities of words renders it necessary for Byron's earlier and more ambitious verse to be translated, or read by those who know English imperfectly, for his qualities to tell without rant or flashiness or rhythmical weakness disconcerting the reader, and it is on the Continent that Byron has most influenced the spirit of poetry, helping to make the French Romantics of 1830 and finding in Alfred de Musset the perfect disciple.

While he lived, the innocence of PERCY BYSSHE

SHELLEY (1792–1822), arising from his lack of sex and his incorrigible belief in human perfectibility, was often mistaken for extreme impiety. That mistake is no longer possible, but we are liable to a literary error not less gross, for Shelley, in addition to his genius, had a general literary competence which denies us warning when he is engaged on something other than the work most proper to his genius, and we may fail to discriminate between his more and his less characteristic work simply because both are successful.

To draw the distinction at once, the work in which we shall find most of the essential Shelley is that which allows him amplest opportunity to soar or float away from earth into some region of the upper air, where he can be companioned, not too closely, by bright yet veiled phantoms and can listen to a thin ecstatic music. No words come more readily to him than 'winged' and 'dizzy'. His desire, when he is most himself, is, in his own words, 'the desire of the moth for the star'. His happiness is in an aspiration that would not complete possession of that to which it yearns. He is himself such a one as the poet described in the song of the Fourth Spirit in the first act of his 'Prometheus Unbound':

> Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
> But feeds on the aerial kisses
> Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.
> He will watch from dawn to gloom
> The lake-reflected sun illume
> The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom,
> Nor heed nor see what things they be;
> But from these create he can
> Forms more real than living man,
> Nurslings of immortality!

He is one who wishes ardently—

> To nurse the image of unfelt caresses
> Till dim imagination just possesses
> The half-created shadow.

Such a poet could give us his truest self, without admixture, only in the brief lyrics which Shelley wrote so abundantly and instinctively, finding occasion for them, in the three last wonderful years, in the events of his life almost from day to day, and in such a longer lyric in celebration of imaginative love as 'Epipsychidion'. Or so it would seem, and one is tempted to say that an inexperienced reader would most quickly reach the core of Shelley by passing over everything in a volume of the poems that looks 'important' or at all solid. But there are exceptions, for which we may find a reason, in 'Prometheus Unbound' and 'Adonais'.

'Prometheus Unbound', though I cannot admit that it is so characteristic throughout of Shelley as 'Epipsychidion' and certain of the short lyrics, is its author's chief work, eminently characteristic in a great many passages, containing some of the loftiest and most beautiful poetry he ever wrote, and conveying the most significant part of his message. But then 'Prometheus Unbound', though it is founded on the ancient myth of the Titan who stole fire from heaven for the benefit of mankind and endured the vengeance of Jupiter, and thus has at its base a solidity on which this architect of mist was not wont to build, is a lyrical drama set in illimitable space, with no human characters, and with continual opportunity for those swift processions of vague and luminous phantoms congenial to Shelley.

Prometheus is man aspiring to self-liberation, which is to be attained by unwavering defiance and patient suffering, and by forgiving the supreme tyrant while overthrowing his power. The unbinding of Prometheus is also to be the unbinding of the whole earth, and Nature, presented in this lyrical drama as Asia, is to be re-united with man, Prometheus, in the enjoyment of the new liberty. The action occupies three acts, of which one, the beautifully invented second act, is chiefly dramatic prophecy; the fourth act, a fortunate after-thought, is no more than the celebration of triumph. Now the action is decidedly confused, partly because it is not clear how Demogorgon is both the son of Jupiter and the immortal principle of things whereby Jupiter is at last subverted, but the meaning of the drama is never in doubt. And when the indescribably noble conclusion is reached we feel that the remote and sublime drama, with its unearthly pageantry and its choruses, as of music from wandering spirits, has indeed justified the final moral:

> To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
> To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
> To love, and bear; to hope till hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
> Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
> This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
> Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
> This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory.

The great elegy on Keats, 'Adonais', is another exception to the general truth that the essential Shelley must be sought in the slighter-seeming, the

almost improvised poems. But here too an explanation may easily be found. For 'Adonais', professing to be a lament for a particular dead poet, and cast into a form fixed in classical times and used by Milton for 'Lycidas', really gives us hardly anything of the actual Keats, but escapes in sorrow and transcendental hope into that company—

> Dreams and adorations,
> Winged persuasions and veiled Destinies,
> Splendours, and Glooms, and glimmering
> Incarnations
> Of hopes and fears, and twilight Phantasies—

in which Shelley was always happiest.

The songs and short lyrics of other kinds, with only a very few lapses into sentimentality or shrillness, were made entirely in that region of which Shelley was native. They are not really like anything done before him, though they might be described as least unlike some of Fletcher's, and they remain in their delicate élan and keen faint music unmatched by anything done since. The best of them—which I take to be 'The golden gates of sleep unbar', 'Swiftly walk over the western wave', 'The Indian Serenade', 'When the lamp is shattered', and, perhaps finest of all, 'O World! O Life! O Time!'—in their utter lack of prose residue are the most purely lyrical poetry that we have even in English, if Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' be excepted.

'Epipsychidion'—the word is of Shelley's own invention, and to be translated as 'soul on my soul', 'soul that completes my soul'—is in great part the Shelleyan song lengthened and at the same time hurried. The lengthening does not give us longer

intervals between images : on the contrary, these are accumulated incessantly, breathlessly, and by the rapidity with which they are superseded Shelley wonderfully conveys to us the absolute beauty for which every image must be inadequate. Into this central poem of Shelley's there has been caught up, unconsciously, I suppose, something of the gracious gnomic manner of Marlowe's ' Hero and Leander ', as in the couplet,

> True love in this differs from gold and clay
> That to divide is not to take away,

something of the subtle and passionate argument of Donne, something of the gather and upward rush and explosion into golden stars of Crashaw ; but the final effect of the whole poem is unique. Merely as a piece of versification the thing is a miracle, never approached except by passages in Swinburne's ' Anactoria ' and ' Tristram '. But the spirit of the poem—that passion which trembles between sexless and sexual love, thins to a ghost's desire of a ghost, broadens and softens to some divine and unexclusive friendship—where can we find anything in the least like that ?

Shelley was without lust or humour or any constancy but constant obedience to the principle of intellectual beauty. ' I think ', he said with reference to this very poem, ' one is always in love with something or other ; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal.' He could marry Harriet, in pure chivalry, and leave her, without soiling himself, for Mary, and then invite her, without

humour or shame, to join Mary and himself. He could be devoted to Mary, and yet write this mystical love poem to Emilia Viviani, and now it was Emilia who was invited to join Mary and himself in an island paradise where the division would not be the diminution of love. He could also, in a very little while, think of this supreme poem as the celebration of an Ixion's embrace of a cloud, and start back from it: 'the error consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal.'

Yet Shelley, when he chose to do work not strictly that for which he was destined, could do it with scrupulous regard to the laws of its lower and more closely organized world. 'Epipsychidion' itself is not wholly a bodiless rapture among the stars, indeed owes some of the effect of its loftiest and most inhuman passages to the beautiful ease of ascent and descent in transition between an earthly paradise and that trysting-place for phantoms. It was, in fact, first conceived as a poem admitting passages of almost conversational verse, and in the original draft had some topical and even trivial allusions to things as mundane as the *Quarterly Review*. For at that stage of his career Shelley, apart from his true work, was showing more worldly poets how the problem of the familiar style in verse could be solved, and in 'Julian and Maddalo' there is genuine conversation as in the 'Letter to Maria Gisborne' there is genuine letter-writing, while both remain poems.

There, outside his own sphere, Shelley surpassed Leigh Hunt in familiarity, without falling into any of that writer's vulgarities, and anticipated the most talking verse of Browning, without indulging in trick or grotesqueness. And when he, the pure

lyrist, turned to drama, in 'The Cenci', he excelled all the poets of the nineteenth century on ground which was not his. There was no mere instinct in this success. Read Shelley on his own drama and you will see that, with an alien task before him, he understood faultlessly the principles on which it must be executed. 'This story', he wrote of his tragedy of cruelty, incest and parricide, 'is indeed eminently fearful and monstrous: anything like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal, and diminish the actual horror of the events. . . . There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose. . . . It is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered consists. . . . I have avoided with great care in writing this play the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry. . . . In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being reserved simply for the full development and illustration of the latter. Imagination is as the immortal God, which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion.'

The severe and powerful play introduced with these sentences—the last two of which are among the profoundest truths ever uttered about poetical drama—is the greatest thing done for our stage since Webster's 'Duchess of Malfi', and the most

original. The trial scene may owe something to Webster's in 'The White Devil'; the only other obligation is, in the perfect concluding speech of Beatrice, to the prose of Shelley's note on the Niobe at Florence. Yet his essential genius is not in 'The Cenci'. Nor is it in the elaborate Odes on the classical model, though one so-called Ode of his, written in sections of unvarying form, that 'To the West Wind', is of the pure Shelleyan quality and for spiritual energy unsurpassed in his work:

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!

The prayer has been granted; Shelley's words have gone over the world; and hardly anywhere has there since been a generous movement of man's mind without some direct or indirect inspiration from him. He has become a symbolical figure, by virtue of his lyric genius, certainly, but also of something else, a power of drawing his fate to him or of imposing his own quality and rhythm on the accidents of his life, so that not only his verses but all his days and deeds should seem to unite into a poem and to possess throughout a significance otherwise perhaps belonging only to the works and words and lives of some who have founded religions. That

power was with him to the end; and, as we think upon his death by drowning and of the antique rite of cremation beside the sea and under the open sky, we are almost forced to attribute to some posthumous exercise of such a power his lustration by the elements, the body laved with great waters, the lamp given to a flame less vivid than that which was wont to burn in it, the presence of Trelawny, as of a sea-eagle, at the obsequies of one who had been to wave and dawn and night their sea-mew and skylark and nightingale, the gesture that drew from the funeral pyre the unconsumed heart, the collection of the ashes for no less a reliquary than Rome, the choice, in '*Cor Cordium*', of the one epitaph as eloquent as the silence of a world deprived of the song of songs that had been Shelley's.

Shelley was perfectly aware how exceptional a thing in his poetry 'The Cenci' was, and, wishing to mark its difference from the rest of his poetry, set it aside with the curious and revealing description, 'a work of art'. But everything that JOHN KEATS (1795–1821) wrote was a work of art, and Keats, not so great a poet as Shelley, is the perfect type of the artist in poetry. Like nearly all poets, he thought that the way it was best for him to travel was the best in itself, and to be recommended to all others. So we find him advising Shelley to be 'more of an artist', to 'load every rift with ore'. That personality can matter in poetry as much as Shelley's matters was hidden from Keats, whose most beautiful work can be fully appreciated without reference to its author. That something may be gained as well as lost by the Shelleyan rapture, sweeping the poet away from the very experience which excited

it, was not a possibility contemplated by Keats, who lingered luxuriously over his experiences of beauty, extracting from each all it could yield. There is a kind of earnestness and a kind of æsthetic prudence in the voluptuousness of Keats; he is intent, and he is determined to lose nothing through any personal or philosophic distraction. He is imaginatively practical. Listen to perhaps the profoundest of very many remarkable sayings about poetry in his letters.

He has been reading Shakespeare, and he says: 'Several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge.'

Keats was himself full of what he calls 'negative capability', and nowhere does he deny himself anything of artistic value, or admit anything not in his opinion of artistic value, through discontent with mystery or out of any irrelevant enthusiasm. His business, as he sees it, is to 'load every rift with ore', to fill every line with rich beauty. He works like a jeweller, a sculptor, or, most frequently, a painter desirous of close pattern and glowing, delicately applied colour. He has none of the urgency of a poet with a mission and none of the abandonment of a poet carried away by his own ecstasy.

If you look closely into almost any of the finer poems of Keats you will see that they are not, as many of Shelley's are, simply evidence that an idea or emotion transported the poet we know not to what heaven of the imagination. The poetic excitement of Keats goes straight into his work, and so does the actual beauty that caused it. Visible beauty is, as it were, bodily reproduced by Keats, and with its accessories and circumstances, for he has that power which he noticed in Milton of 'stationing' a beautiful thing, of setting it in relation to its surroundings. There is something else you will notice if you scrutinize the typical poems of Keats: that the effect is much less that of passion expressed or idea developed than of a succession of records of beauty experienced.

The Odes are probably the best instance of this last-mentioned peculiarity, and they are the poems on which the fame of Keats chiefly rests. Few have known how to choose between them, and there is no need to do so. The 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is perhaps the most evenly beautiful, the 'Ode to Psyche' is the most subtly elaborated; but each of the great five is an inestimable treasure, and the fragment of an 'Ode to Maia' gave promise of a sixth fully as precious. It is the 'Ode to a Nightingale', of course, which has the supremely imaginative lines, on the song that ofttimes hath

> Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

But there are slight blemishes in this Ode; there is some obscurity as to who 'envies' who and why in the second part of the first stanza, and in the very

stanza from which quotation has just been made the line 'in ancient days by emperor and clown' seems to me due to such a rhyme famine as caused disaster in the last stanza of the extraordinarily beautiful 'Eve of St. Agnes', where deformity and the coffin-worm appear to provide a rhyme for 'storm'. There is an awkward sentence in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', and almost everywhere in Keats there are minute defects. They do hardly anything to mar the general effect of beauty, and often one is not even aware of them. The rifts of his own metaphor are so heavily loaded with ore that we do not notice or hardly resent such things. Keats is master of a kind of phrase which seems to have been long steeped in beauty, to be not only beautiful in itself but evidently drawn from a treasure-house of beautiful things. His phrase about 'the tiger-moth's deep-damasked wings' might be applied to himself; it is the gorgeousness of that moth's wings or of the plumage of some tropical bird that we are set thinking upon by the rich colouring of his own words. And he has at times a loftier beauty of phrase than this, as in those wonderful lines about

> The moving waters at their priest-like task
> Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.

The poem from which those two lines are taken, the last sonnet written by Keats, is the final poetic expression of his torturing love for Fanny Brawne. Keats, with all his usual self-knowledge and candour, said he had 'no right feeling towards women'; he had intense physical jealousy, and the imagination to provide it with excuse for its activity. All

this side of him is in two poems which are seldom recognized for the very significant things they are, though one is more bitterly personal than anything else he ever wrote, and though on purely artistic grounds the other deserves by its great concluding lines inclusion in every anthology. I will quote most of the latter:

What can I do to drive away
Remembrance from my eyes? for they have seen,
Aye, an hour ago, my brilliant Queen!
Touch has a memory. Oh, say, love, say,
What can I do to kill it and be free
In my old liberty?
When every fair one that I saw was fair
Enough to catch me in but half a snare,
Nor keep me there:
When, howe'er poor or parti-coloured things,
My muse had wings,
And ever ready was to take her course
Whither I bent her force,
Unintellectual, yet divine to me:
Divine, I say!—What sea-bird o'er the sea
Is a philosopher the while he goes
Winging along where the great water throes?
How shall I do
To get anew
Those moulted feathers, and so mount once more
Above, above
The reach of fluttering love,
And make him cower lowly while I soar?
Where shall I learn to get my peace again?
To banish thoughts of that most hateful land,
Dungeoner of my friends, that wicked strand
Where they were wrecked and live a wretched life;
That monstrous region, where dull rivers pour,
Each from their sordid urns unto the shore,

Unowned off any weedy-haired gods;
Whose winds, all zephyrless, hold scourging rods,
Iced in the great lakes, to afflict mankind;
Where rank-grown forests, frosted black and blind,
Would fright a Dryad; whose harsh-herbaged meads
Make lean and lank the starved ox while he feeds;
There bad flowers have no scent, birds no sweet song,
And great unerring Nature once seems wrong.

This piece, following on the lines 'To Fanny', with their feverish jealousy, and almost abject appeal—

Oh, if you prize my subdued soul above
The poor, the fading, brief pride of an hour;
Let none profane my Holy See of love—

warn us what 'hateful land' Keats would have entered if he had lived longer and developed more interest in human character. There was something morbid in him, and I cannot think that with longer life he would have attained in drama or in any direct dealing with the conflict of personalities to the highest success. In short, except out of sympathy with Keats the man, I see no such overwhelming tragedy in his early death as most critics have invited or ordered us to lament. He had not indeed done his work when, a dying man, he left England for Italy, but in that wonderful year of his life, 1819, the year of the great Odes and of 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' amongst other masterpieces, or perhaps even a little earlier, he had found his true work and the method most congenial to him. For the genius of Keats was not for drama or narrative or philosophy or suddenly soaring lyric

rapture but for the presentation of romantic detail and circumstance bathed in the emotional atmosphere of the situation. In 'Lamia', done under the temporary influence of Dryden, and showing some gain in metrical vigour but also some uncharacteristic hardness of feeling, there is not very much of the true Keats. But 'Isabella', on a story taken from Boccaccio, and 'The Eve of St. Agnes', on a hint from Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy', are perfect illustrations of the pictorial way of dealing with human actions. 'The Eve of St. Agnes' indeed is scarcely more than a series of marvellous pictures of things it would be a delight to see or handle or taste. In 'The Eve of St. Mark's' there is much of the quality of 'The Eve of St. Agnes', with a new suggestion of the grotesque, and here Keats has anticipated Rossetti and Morris and become the link between them and Chatterton. As for 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', where the style of Keats is for once stripped of every luxury, it is the quintessential expression of the romantic imagination.

Should 'Hyperion', his incomplete and on the whole unluckily revised poem on the fall of Hyperion before Apollo, of the Titans before the Olympians, be counted among the masterpieces of Keats? Shelley, so much more generous to Keats than Keats was to him, declared that 'the whole poem was supported throughout with a colossal grandeur equal to the subject', and Leigh Hunt thought it 'like a ruin in the desert, or the bones of the mastodon'. It has grandeur in its outline, and many passages in which the opulence natural to Keats is ordered under Milton's influence much more

severely than was usual with him. But Keats was wise in abandoning it as too Miltonic, right in decision that Miltonic art and his own were incompatible, so that 'life' to Milton would be 'death' to him. We must think of 'Hyperion' as no more than a magnificent literary exercise in a manner alien to its author's true genius, with here and there lines which are purely Keatsian, only given some greater depth or stateliness by a subject sublime instead of merely beautiful.

Read the opening lines, or these:

> As when, upon a tranced summer-night,
> Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
> Tall oaks, branch-charmèd by the earnest stars,
> Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
> Save from one gradual solitary gust
> Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,
> As if the ebbing air had but one wave,
> So came those words and went.

'As if the ebbing air had but one wave': Keats, peculiarly sensitive to the movements created by wind, was accustomed in daily talk to grow rapturous over what he called 'a wave billowing through a tree', and his friend Severn has told us how, if he heard the wind coming across woodlands, he would behave: '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 till he would look 'like a wild fawn waiting for some cry from the

forest depth, or like "a young eagle staring with proud joy" before taking flight'. It is a fitting last glimpse of the poet who intensely meant his line, 'The poetry of earth is never dead', and gathered that poetry so richly into his own.

Whatever else he was, JOHN CLARE (1793–1864) was not in any sense that matters the peasant turned poet. His nature poetry is unique in English, through a kind of familiarity and inability to choose from among natural objects which we shall not find elsewhere. Clare came to the most beautiful of his natural details as little children come to twelve times twelve, by saying all that comes before; and I suppose that Lamb, who never uttered meaningless criticism, had something of this in mind when he congratulated Clare on the *quantity* of his natural observation. He ended in a mad-house, where the poet in him seems to have been most free from distraction, and to this final period of his life belong the loveliest of his love poems and the finest of his poems on children. There is in certain of these things a joy far more thrilling than the happiness in some of the earlier pieces. Clare is known to everyone by his epitaph for himself, but that is far from being the only poem of that quality in his work, and, now that he has been restored to the world by Mr. Arthur Symons and Mr. Edmund Blunden, there can be no excuse for ignorance of 'The Dying Child' or of 'Song's Immortality'.

When THOMAS HOOD (1799–1845) died shortly after the appearance of his greatest poem, 'The Bridge of Sighs', Thackeray said that poem had been 'his Corunna, his Heights of Abraham: sickly, weak, wounded, he fell in the full blaze and fame

of that great victory '. Thackeray knew Hood and his own business as a writer, and the metaphor was no fancifulness but an acknowledgment of the quality of the poem, which, like its predecessor, ' The Song of the Shirt ', was an action as well as something written. Those two pieces are alone in our literature. Every poet with a humane cause has wished to write their like, but only Hood has succeeded in writing poems which seem to exist entirely for their message and at the same time entirely for their poetry. ' The Bridge of Sighs ' is the finer of the two, as the voluntary death of a dishonoured woman is a deeper tragedy than any abomination of sweated labour, and it has the rarer beauty of form, owing indeed much of its effect to the narrowness of the outlet given to the flood of his indignation and to a certain delicacy in its swift movement.

Hood was a consummate artist in verse, and when he assailed the gross cruelty of the world he kept to the weapon of the artist, putting on it the finest point conceivable, and in the most democratic of causes using it like an aristocrat of the spirit. He kept it delicate while making it deadly, and kept himself Ariel or an avenging angel instead of becoming a reformer. He had come to this perfection of art less by way of his serious verse, though that was often beautiful in a traditional manner, as in that sonnet on Death, or in the manner of Keats, as in the Ode to Autumn, than by way of his comic verse. It was there that he had mastered double and triple rhyme, used with such secure audacity in ' The Bridge of Sighs ', for nothing could have taught him how to guard against its almost inevitable comic effect so well as a training in its use for that effect.

It was there, too, that he had learned how to use antithesis and to get sharpness of point, such famous things as the antithesis in his powerful 'Eugene Aram',

> A dozen times I groaned; the dead
> Had never groaned but twice,

and that other in the poem on a death-bed,

> We thought her dying when she slept
> And sleeping when she died,

and the most smiting of all in 'The Song of the Shirt'—

> O God, that bread should be so dear,
> And flesh and blood so cheap—

being derived from the sudden contrasts of the comic verses, where, among such twists of fancy as that of the door shut with such a slam 'it sounded like a wooden damn' and a multitude of the most astonishing puns, there is sometimes as sharp a point to the knives tossed up and caught by this juggler.

All his art and all his chivalrous indignation went into 'The Song of the Shirt' and 'The Bridge of Sighs', and a quality of inwardness by virtue of which, unlike all other denunciatory poems, they seem to accuse not that abstraction, society, but each reader and with the voice of his own conscience.

Fine gifts, sometimes hardly or not at all to be distinguished from those of the poet, were applied to translation during the nineteenth century, and the work of several of these translations had its influence on original poetry. The earliest and one

of the most scholarly, fastidious and graceful was JOHN HOOKHAM FRERE (1769–1846), who did admirable versions from Aristophanes, but was most influential when, in 1817, he issued his original 'Prospectus and Specimen of an intended National work, by William and Robert Whistlecraft, of Stow-Market, harness and collar-makers', and gave Byron the model for 'Beppo' and eventually 'Don Juan'. HENRY FRANCIS CARY (1772–1844) is famous for his complete 'Vision, or Hell, Purgatory and Paradise of Dante', published in 1814, but also did excellent versions from the old French, thirty years before Rossetti and Swinburne were attracted to Villon. JOHN GIBSON LOCKHART (1794–1854), the son-in-law and biographer of Scott, himself the author of a notable novel, 'Adam Blair', and a ferocious critic, produced in 1823, with other renderings of 'Ancient Spanish Ballads', one piece, 'The Wandering Knight's Song', which, whatever its relation to the Spanish, can only be regarded as an original poem :

My ornaments are arms,
My pastime is in war,
My bed is cold upon the wold,
My lamp yon star.

My journeyings are long,
My slumber short and broken ;
From hill to hill I wander still,
Kissing thy token.

I ride from land to land,
I sail from sea to sea ;
Some day more kind I fate may find,
Some night kiss thee.

The rhythm of that, the passionate patience of the thing, are evidence that Lockhart was once a poet. But the great translator or paraphraser was EDWARD FITZGERALD (1809–1883), whose mosaic of stanzas from the Persian of Omar Khayyam, neglected on its appearance, rose into celebrity, less through the influence of his friends, though these included Tennyson, than through the enthusiasm of Rossetti and Swinburne, colouring some of the verse of those poets and powerfully affecting much subsequently produced verse. To praise it is superfluous. It survives even the praise of such as in the last thirty years have come to make of it a Bible.

FitzGerald's temperament and leisurely way of life fitted him to be the interpreter of Omar. The man is revealed in his preferences in art and music and literature and in the reasons he gave for them in his delightful letters, as when he eulogizes the Poussins (' nature looks more steadfast in them than in other painters : all is wrought up into a quietude and harmony that seem eternal ') and praises Handel and Mozart and the composers of the English madrigals and the English prose writers of the seventeenth century. He wishes to put the splendid, rollicking sixteenth-century song, perhaps written by John Still, Bishop of Bath and Wells, ' Back and Side ', into his Paradise of Poetry, and writes, ' I admit nothing into my Paradise, but such as breathe content and virtue : I count " Back and Side " to breathe both of these, with a little good drink over.' Loving Alfred Tennyson personally, he mourns, amidst the general applause, over the decline of Tennyson, and declares that ' In Memoriam ' has the air of ' being evolved by a poetical machine of

the highest order'. In dealing with Omar, FitzGerald, as he admitted, 'mashed together' many quatrains, and did not hesitate to introduce ideas from other poets or out of his own unconventional thinking. Thus from another Persian, Attar, he took the idea of the sea having lost God, whence in the paraphrase of Omar the great lines:

> Earth could not answer, nor the seas that mourn
> In flowing purple of their Lord forlorn.

And, if one theological audacity in the paraphrase was due to misunderstanding of the original, another may be traced to FitzGerald's own remark: 'It is a lucky thing that God made man, and that Man has not to make God; we should fare badly, judging by the specimens already produced.' But it was not only Oriental ideas and colour that FitzGerald brought into English poetry; he introduced a new stanza, using it with wonderful art for the purpose to which it was best adapted, the expression of weary meditation.

Between the years in which England lost Keats and Shelley and those of Tennyson's mature production there was a period in which poetry seemed leaderless and almost without future. The finest verse of this period is associated with the names of GEORGE DARLEY (1795–1846) and THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES (1803–1849). Darley, a good scholar, a fierce critic of himself as well as of other men, explained his own partial failure more clearly than anyone else can hope to do when he described his genius as 'occasional, intermittent, collapsive'. It is nothing but direction that Darley lacks to make his 'Nepenthe', which is brimmed with imagination,

a great as well as an extraordinary poem. Lacking direction it comes to nothing in particular, and only a few lyrics, notably that one in the seventeenth-century manner, 'It is not Beauty I demand', which deceived Palgrave, attain to real success. Beddoes is even more self-frustrated. His imagination was great enough for almost anything, but it was wasted on a morbid, essentially undramatic drama on the strangest Elizabethan model. To poets and the most poetical readers his morbid verse must always mean a great deal, but to the general reader Beddoes is unlikely to be more than the lyrist of 'Wolfram's Dirge' and of 'Dream Pedlary':

> If there were dreams to sell,
> What would you buy?
> Some cost a passing bell;
> Some a light sigh
> That shakes from life's fresh crown
> Only a rose-leaf down.

Personally, I think the greatest passage in Beddoes is that speech by a murderer in which he figures himself growing in the conscience of his crime into a mountain haunted by wild-beast thoughts. Others have thought more highly than I can of his essays in the terrible-grotesque, but all must admire the twist of fancy that describes love as the 'bee of hearts', and phrases of imaginative beauty are never far to seek in his work.

Two other poets, ALEXANDER SMITH (1829–1867) and SYDNEY DOBELL (1824–1874), engaged attention during Tennyson's earlier career, and were not wholly without effect on him, for it was the un-

noticed habit of Tennyson to go some way with the current, to show that he, too, could be ' spasmodic ' with Smith and Dobell, and amorous enough, with Swinburne, to write of a lady with decorative but indecorous ' budded bosom peaks '. It is unnecessary now to spend words on rebuke of the excesses of the ' Spasmodics '. At their best both Smith and Dobell were genuine poets. The latter's ' Keith of Ravelston ', which should, however, be read in its context and not in an anthology excerpt, is the only poem at all comparable with the ' Belle Dame sans Merci ' of Keats. Another of his successes, ' Tommy's Dead ', is the only poem which really does render with effect the garrulity of stricken old age, though innumerable recitation pieces have attempted that. Smith's reputation now rests mainly on ' Barbara ', full of echoing music, and on ' Glasgow ', which accumulates detail with something of the inspiration of Christopher Smart.

Edgar Allen Poe (1809–1849), who was born in the same year as Tennyson, belongs less to America than to England, and less to England than to France, to which Baudelaire and Mallarmé introduced him with the subtlest sympathy and skill. The finest poetry of Poe is fantasy operative on a basis rigidly geometrical. Logic was as much developed in him as imagination. But readers do him an injustice who fasten on ' The Raven ' or ' The Bells ', poems of ingenuity and effect immeasurably inferior to ' Annabel Lee ', as that is itself inferior to the verses for ' Annie ', the pure and perfect lines ' To Helen ', and ' The Sleeper '. It is ' The Sleeper ' that gives us most of the essential genius of this wizard, whose magic circle is drawn with exactitude,

and who is proud of leaving no liberty to the spirits he summons up, but in whose very finest work there is something after all beyond his calculations. His genius was flawed; there was something tricky in Poe; but he has left perhaps in all two hundred lines which shame most other poetry by being the unmixed essence of that which others dilute:

> And all my days are trances,
> And all my nightly dreams
> Are where thy bright eye glances
> And where thy light foot gleams,
> In what ethereal dances
> By what eternal streams.

XIII

THE LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY

Tennyson—Contrast of personality and poetry—His finer qualities—The Brownings—Emily Brontë—Whitman—Ebenezer Jones—James Thomson—Arnold—The Rossettis—Morris — Swinburne — O'Shaughnessy — Dobson — Wilde — Poets of the 'Nineties—Patmore—Thompson—Mrs. Meynell—Meredith and Hardy—Prospect—Retrospect.

HE who would understand the poetry of ALFRED TENNYSON (1809–1892), now by natural reaction from foolish Victorian idolatry much undervalued, had better begin with the man, in many ways so unlike many things in his verse. To look at almost any portrait of Tennyson is to look upon physical grandeur troubled, weakened, made more interesting by a peculiar morbidity. Carlyle's two wonderful verbal portraits of him give us the largeness of the man better than almost anything in his own poetry: 'A man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom, carrying a bit of Chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into Cosmos. . . . One of the finest-looking men in the world. A great shock of rough, dusky, dark hair; bright, laughing, hazel eyes; massive aquiline face, most massive yet delicate; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian-looking,

clothes cynically loose, free and easy, smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail and all that may lie between.' And again : ' A fine, large-featured, dim-eyed, bronze-coloured, shaggy-headed man is Alfred ; dusty, smoky, free and easy ; who swims outwardly and inwardly, with great composure, in an articulate element as of tranquil chaos and tobacco smoke ; great now and then when he does emerge ; a most restful, brotherly, solid-hearted man.'

It was this swart gipsy of a man, a potential athlete fallen into slouching, over-smoking of a short pipe and a glum addiction to the fullest and sweetest port, who was persuaded in middle life to become the official and popular bard of Victorian England. He came of a Lincolnshire family that had in it what he himself called ' black blood ', a certain glowering hostility towards life ; his father, the clergyman, was a disinherited man, with a continual grievance ; he himself, except for the domestic happiness which he delayed in securing but after a thirteen-year engagement had at last in amplest measure, and for wide popularity and something like affluence in later days, would have remained a man both menacing and frightened. Even as it was, with a Civil List pension, the Laureateship, hosts of awed admirers, two country houses and no greater problem than that of hiding from the fond attentions of tourists, Tennyson kept some mistrust and surliness. His indignation in verse had often a hollow threatening, worthy of note, for it gives a hint of his not infrequent inner fear, which itself at times finds expression in almost the only poignancies of which his poetry was capable.

The acrid, morbid, timorous elements in Tennyson: these, not very often or very clearly evident, saved him from the suavity and complacence which were also in him, and which private happiness, literary success and the constant expectation of his enormous public encouraged. The languor in that tall frame, a weakness of nerves in an otherwise powerful organization, the tendency to brood, the instinctive sympathy with those wide and wet and flat prospects of the evening landscape in his Lincolnshire, the shyness, and mooning, and fear hiding in anger or anger inspired by fear, made and kept him a poet. And he had read Keats, and in his short-sightedness had peered closely at natural detail.

The real and exquisite and perhaps great Tennyson was a subtle artist in the rendering of languid, complex, often more or less unwholesome moods, and in the painting of landscape to harmonize with them, with at rare moments a pungent personal quality coming up amidst all his elegances, as in his wonderful half-success, ' Maud '. You may find this Tennyson in ' The Lotos Eaters ', and in the Mariana verses, unsurpassed in their summing up of desolate mood and atmosphere, and with more of the fortunate sharpening of his note by fear in ' The Two Voices ', and in passages in ' Maud ', and in some sections of ' In Memoriam '. The other and immensely more popular Tennyson was on the one hand a poet of the simple emotions, which he was far too subtle to touch without disaster, and on the other hand a thinker, though he had no faith in the power of thought. All that now matters, to intelligent people, of ' In Memoriam ' is the frequently perfect adjustment of mood and landscape and the curious

success in dealing with relaxed states of mind. We read it admiringly for:

> To-night the winds begin to rise
> And roar from yonder dropping day:
> The last red leaf is whirled away,
> The rooks are blown about the skies;
> The forest cracked, the waters curled,
> The cattle huddled on the lea;
> And wildly dashed on tower and tree
> The sunbeam strikes along the world;

and for the wonderful expression of conditions of lowered vitality:

> Be near me when my light is low,
> When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
> And tingle, and the heart is sick,
> And all the wheels of Being slow.

As a lament it is touching, but too often justifies the amusing error of the critic who, on the anonymous appearance of 'In Memoriam', supposed it to be an effusion from the full heart of the widow of a military man. As a serious attempt to solve, or even to state, the eternal problems of religion and philosophy it is almost everywhere weakened by the poet's reluctance to think out any of his thoughts to their end.

Tennyson's character was very complex, with streak upon streak of harshness, feminine delicacy, mistrust, over-refinement, and rank earthiness of humour. His nervous system was weak and sensitive, an ideal system for a writer of the lyric of moods. It was the intellect that was second-rate. His art, very carefully cultivated after he had winced under early criticism, became consummate

of its sort, but in detail and ornament rather than in the handling of a great matter. To the end, though the 'Idylls of the King' are very considerable in aggregate, he remained incapable of giving to any one work the variety of life; each was the expression of a single idea or mood, and any effect of largeness was sought only by adding small units together, instead of by casting the whole of a various subject into a single grand mould. In place of an epic of King Arthur he wrote separate short 'Idylls of the King', and in place of one great and changeful but continuous lament the several sections which made up 'In Memoriam'. The feminine part of him, as real as that part which one associates with the strong tobacco, the port and the coarse rural humour of tales told with growl and guffaw, issued sometimes in mere school-miss prettiness and sometimes in an unmanly spitefulness like that of 'Locksley Hall', but once with a wonderful hysterical passion in 'Rizpah'. Some of his very finest lyrics were inserted in the now rather tiresome filigree-work of 'The Princess'. We can well detach from their setting such lovely things as 'Tears, idle tears', and 'Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white'.

The art of Tennyson went chiefly into a kind of finish, which is admirable but often seems to me the result of a final glossing or burnishing of an intrinsically not very precious substance, whereas the finest finish is no more than the completion of work to the point at which the quality and grain of the material is perfectly revealed. His metrical art was carefully elaborated, after the methods of Gray, not after those of supreme lyrists like Coleridge and Shelley and Swinburne, and, beautiful as the results often

were, I cannot but think that two such authorities as Coleridge and Swinburne were right in doubting Tennyson's ear. As for his verbal felicities, too many are little more than ingenuities, and it is perhaps only in so exceptionally severe a piece of work as his 'Ulysses' that he has the grand manner.

'Ulysses' is Tennyson for once braced to a great matter, and it is a noble thing, with lines like—

> The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
> Moans round with many voices.

But it was the genius of Tennyson to be not braced but relaxed—more completely so than he often allowed himself to be. Twilight within and without, the ebb of natural and spiritual tides, these were the subjects almost certain to draw out his personal qualities.

Readers in general have chosen the most obviously romantic aspect of ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING (1806–1861) and ROBERT BROWNING (1812–1889) as that which is most characteristic, and they are right. For these two were not only poets who loved, they were eminently the poets of love. Mrs. Browning certainly was her best self only in those 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' which she composed during the period in which Browning was wooing her, and which, some months after the marriage of the poets, she shyly and without a word put into his hand. Or, if there is anything else in which Mrs. Browning is in utterance equal to her inspiration, it is a single lyric, 'A Musical Instrument', which tells, with some of the 'piercing sweet' music it describes, of the making of a poet. For the rest, her true and

abundant emotion was allowed to overflow too easily, and into forms unworthy of it in her use of them. That she suffered from rhyme-deafness, so that she could perpetrate such unnatural coupling of words as ' mountains ' and ' dauntings ', is always remembered against her; not so often the still more lamentable fact that even in true rhymes she was frequently absurd, as in her preposterous

Will you oftly
Murmur softly ?

But all her laxities and peculiarities have been criticized once for all in that miraculous parody by Swinburne, ' The Poet and the Wood-louse ', which is a masterpiece of absurdity and yet in every stanza the work of a poet. The author of that parody, it should be recalled, was wont to refer to the writer he so exactly mimicked and pitilessly mocked as ' our divine and dearest Mrs. Browning ', and, intolerable as most of her verse is, it is always in a sense divine, the outcome of a real and urgent poetic impulse. Immeasurably surpassed in art by Christina Rossetti and in passion by Emily Brontë, she retains by virtue of a certain breadth and immediacy of feeling a position between them, and is much more nearly the kind of poet the average woman would wish to be.

Robert Browning's sins against art were quite other than his wife's. They were purposed, and at times they had excuse if not perfect justification in the dramatic character of his work, though it is impossible to acquit Browning of needless or even self-defeating outbursts of grotesque phrasing and rhyming. It was part of Browning's purpose to

make verse talk instead of singing or to make it sing with a more recognizably human voice than that of most lyrists. The attempt was legitimate, for, though it would seem that some of the intensest emotions of man can be expressed only in a voice like that abstract crying in our hearts, emotion with its circumstances, the emotion of a particular man in a particular situation, would appear to need an expression as full of idiosyncrasy and as often checked and hurried by the pauses and rushes of thought as Browning's. Something of the sort had been attempted, in rather a coxcomb's way, by Leigh Hunt, and the conversational and epistolary styles had been consummately used by Shelley, as we have seen, in ' Julian and Maddalo ' and the verse letter to Maria Gisborne. But Browning's intention was much more dramatic. He wished to express emotion not at its final white heat but as it kindled in his imaginary people, and thought not in its results but in its processes, and as nearly as possible in the terms the supposed speaker would have used.

Again and again he succeeded magnificently. But sometimes he was willing to pay an unnecessarily high price for success, and sometimes he thought paying the price ensured it. Of his obscurity, which had much better be called his difficulty, for it comes not of darkness but of too much and too rapidly changing light, we now hear little, and much of the best of his work is not difficult at all, while some of the most difficult pieces have little to reward the reader who grapples successfully with them.

The value of Browning's thought, simply as thought, has often been grossly exaggerated, but the question with a poet always must be of what value

his thought is to *him*, not to us. Philosophically it may be almost worthless: if it can call into vivid activity his peculiar powers, it will possess the only kind of value we can rightly attach to thought in poetry. Thus it is nothing to Browning's credit that he was an optimist, but immensely important that his natural disposition led him to work so suited to his poetic genius as the defence which failures and sinners may make for themselves. As a dramatist he failed, chiefly, perhaps, because he could not convey that sense of life in general going on about his characters, of a world not merely existent in their apprehension of it, which is necessary for true dramatic effect. But his sense of character was acute, his skill in tracing the windings of thought in the secret chambers of the brain unrivalled, and he gave us a long line of men and women more vividly realized than any other modern English poet's.

Yet, for us here, it is the lyrical part of Browning's genius that most matters.

> Thus the Mayne glideth
> Where my Love abideth;
> Sleep's no softer; it proceeds
> On through lawns, on through meads,
> On and on, whate'er befall,
> Meandering and musical.

At rare moments Browning would yield himself to what, for all, is the central impulse of poetry, give himself to the dream and the music, and then all harshness would fall from him.

> And strew faint sweetness from some old
> Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud
> Which breaks to dust when once unrolled;
> Or shredded perfume, like a cloud

From closet long to quiet vowed,
With mothed and dropping arras hung,
Mouldering her lute and books among,
As when a queen, long dead, was young.

This was Browning the lyric poet, and admiration for the Balzacian power and reach of the Browning who wrote ' The Ring and the Book ' should never be allowed to obscure him.

The bleak, pure, passionate poetry of EMILY BRONTË (1818–1848) never found its proper instrument, and most of it must be read with allowance for the conventionality of the form in which it struggles. But there are exceptions, notably that fable of her own life, ' The Prisoner ' :

Still let my tyrants know I am not doomed to wear
Year after year in gloom and desolate despair ;
A messenger of Hope comes every night to me,
And offers for short life eternal liberty.

He comes with Western winds, with evening's wandering airs,
With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars :
Winds take a pensive tone, and stars a tender fire,
And visions rise, and change, that kill me with desire.

Desire for nothing known in my maturer years,
When joy grew mad with awe, at counting future tears :
When, if my spirit's sky was full of flashes warm,
I knew not whence they came, from sun or thunderstorm. . . .

Then dawns the Invisible; the unseen its truth reveals;
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels;
Its wings are almost free—its home, its harbour found,
Measuring the gulf it stoops, and dares the final bound.

Oh, dreadful is the check—intense the agony—
When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins to see;
When the pulse begins to throb—the brain to think again—
The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain.

England has produced no more fiery or noble-natured woman, nor has our poetry ever been made more directly expressive of a passion like that of the wind on her own wild moors.

WALT WHITMAN (1819–1892) will never have exact justice done him because he is a stage through which we pass, not a region of the mind in which we can dwell or which we can revisit. While he means anything much to us, he means too much, for reasons other than poetic. He is then the deliverer from false idealism, priggishness, morbid soul-searching, many kinds of growing pains, and one rises up and calls him blessed, and one reads him and finds an outlet for an instinct as genuine and at that period more salutary than the instinct of modesty, the instinct to be naked and unashamed. When he has done his work he drops out of one's thoughts as no great and few genuine poets do. Presently one remembers of his writings little more than some incidental felicities—'Stretched and still lies the

night ', ' The tongue of the carpenter's plane ' whistling ' its wild ascending lisp ', the ' sluff ' of boot-soles on the pavement, and phrases at once precise and absurd. He was in his fashion a great man, full-blooded, brotherly, and with a native dignity never really impaired. Also he had in him most of the materials of great poetry, and a power at moments of seeing them in a just imaginative relation. But he chose, perhaps with less option than he thought, to write not verse but a sort of semi-metrical prose, in which the Bible, Ossian, the American language and scraps of preposterous French and Spanish were mixed together. He made no form, for his lines seem always to be either aspiring to the condition of verse or falling away from it and never to be happy in some life of their own. He was thought to point to new possibilities for verse, but really indicated, without himself achieving, except in an occasional line, new possibilities for prose. Still, ' O Captain! My Captain! ' is moving in a merely human way as poetry seldom is, and there is a kind of aboriginal wisdom in almost everything he said about birth, bodily love, death.

EBENEZER JONES (1820–1860) seems to me the most unjustly neglected of all the Victorian and indeed of all nineteenth-century poets. His ' Studies of Sensation and Event,' with innumerable crudities, has wonderful things on almost every page. Even the suggestion of the comic in the piece called ' The Naked Thinker ' cannot distract any competent reader from the evidence that it is by a man of genius. ' A Crisis ' has an exact and yet almost delirious description of a girl's body, in one of those moments in which every detail of expression

and gesture seems immeasurably significant, and the whole poem anticipates and overwhelms boasted ultra-modern attempts to report the agitations of sex. There is no mistaking the born lyrist's cadences in 'A Lady's Hand', or the tiger cub's energy in certain fiercer things, though they have a good deal more cubbishness than one can approve. And there is the beautiful and very nearly flawless vision of the final conflagration, 'When the World is Burning':

> Laughing maids, unstaying,
> Deeming it trick-playing,
> High their robes upswaying
> O'er the lights shall dart;
> And the woodland haunter
> Shall not cease to saunter
> When, far down some glade,
> Of the great world's burning,
> One soft flame upturning
> Seems, to his discerning,
> Crocus in the shade.

The sombre and solitary genius of JAMES THOMSON (1834–1882), the second of that name, has had acknowledgment rather than sympathetic and exact appreciation. George Meredith wrote to him of his work: 'Nowhere is the verse feeble, nowhere is the expression insufficient; the majesty of the line has always its full colouring, and marches under a banner. And you accomplish this effect with the utmost sobriety, with absolute self-mastery.' George Eliot wrote to him in praise of his 'distinct vision and grand utterance'. But both made great reservations, and few among later and lesser eulogists have been able to refrain from protest against the dark monotony of Thomson's masterpiece, 'The

City of Dreadful Night'. But where, I would ask, is the offence? To me it seems that Thomson said the final word of justification when he remarked, 'There is truth of winter and black night, there is truth of summer and dazzling noonday.' 'The City of Dreadful Night' is not the whole truth about human life; it is 'truth of winter and black night'. What then? Are we to dismiss it with reluctant praise as a thing poisonous or at least lowering to the vitality of the reader? I cannot understand how any fit reader can feel lowered by the majestic triumph of art, by the assertion of indomitable imaginative power, in such verses as these:

Thus has the artist copied her, and thus
  Surrounded to expound her form sublime,
Her fate heroic and calamitous;
  Fronting the dreadful mysteries of Time,
Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,
Undaunted in the hopeless conflagration
Of the day setting on her baffled prime. . . .

But as if blacker night could dawn on night
  With tenfold gloom on moonless night unstarred
A sense more tragic than defeat or flight,
  More desperate than strife with hope debarred,
More fatal than the adamantine Never
Encompassing her passionate Endeavour,
  Dawns glooming in her tenebrous regard:

The sense that every struggle brings defeat
  Because Fate holds no prize to crown success;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
  Because they have no secret to express;
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light behind the curtain;
  That all is vanity and nothingness.

The whole of the passage depicting the 'Melancholia' of Dürer is nothing less than magnificent. Thomson knew that work of art only through an engraving in which the animal prone at the strange figure's feet seemed to be a dead sheep, awaiting dissection, and wrote of it at first:

With the poor creature for dissection brought.

Consultation with the late W. M. Rossetti having resulted in enlightenment, this line was altered to:

With the keen wolf-hound sleeping undistraught.

But the inner meaning of the 'Melancholia' he knew better than Dürer himself.

Yet Thomson was no limited and perversely melancholy man, and his range in poetry was not narrow. The narrative poem of 'Weddah and Om-el-Bonain', which he based on an Arabic story in Stendhal's 'De l'Amour', has an almost Keatsian quality; some of his lyrics on traditional subjects and in more or less traditional manners are pleasant as well as distinguished; and there is real Cockney gaiety as well as poetry, sometimes quite exquisite, in 'Sunday up the River'.

As a man he had his double aspect, drink bringing out in him a personality so different that his landlord's children, going to open the door to him once when he was almost literally not himself, ran back to report that 'Mr. Thomson's bad brother' was at the door. A life as an army schoolmaster, as a contributor to a vulgar atheistical paper and as the associate of the wrong people, with one great sorrow and a good deal of poverty, ended most horribly in collapse in the rooms of a blind friend, P. B. Marston.

But his work is sober, ordered, unimpulsive, for the most part, and owes very little for good or evil to his life. 'The City of Dreadful Night' is not a thing wrung out of him by experience; it is a thing built up, deliberately, and some of its impressiveness comes from the fact that it is the expression of a conviction, not of a mood, and would have been what it is if life had been easier for its author. The technique of the verse, with its heavy stresses and sonorous double rhymes, is most remarkable, and the resource with which symbols of calamity are accumulated is extraordinary.

The poetry of MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822–1888) has in it some reminders that it was only part of his life. It acknowledges that it is the escape, in a high and solemn sense the recreation, of a man of various intellectual interests, who is something of a worldling and something of a moral preacher to the world. Some of it is the expression of purposes in life to the enunciation of which poetry does not very graciously lend itself, and some of it is the record of the wiser second thoughts of one whose first thoughts were formed outside poetry. Such poetry cannot be of the very greatest sort. But Arnold in youth and early middle-age was a poet of rare genius, and, when that genius had scope beyond the slightly prim restrictions he was apt to impose, it produced work of immortal excellence. No amount of familiarity can ever rob 'The Forsaken Merman' of its wonder, of its bewildered, alien look as of the actual merman marvelling at the world of human beings. The pathos and beauty and spiritual appeal of 'Thyrsis' and of 'The Scholar-Gipsy' are secure against all changes of literary fashion. Not less secure are some of

the lyrics, though some, dealing with the Victorian agony of doubt, are clearly only of their time. The melancholy of the famous lines to Marguerite speaks to everyone, and the lovely 'Requiescat'—

> Strew on her roses, roses,
> And never a spray of yew—

is of all time. But we must still see Arnold a little too often in that condition of half-hopeful scepticism or half-despairing faith out of which can come no fine poetry, but only the spiritual documents of a crisis almost meaningless to a later generation. 'Not here, O Apollo!'

To the very end of his career as poet and painter DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI (1828–1882) was commonly supposed to be a creature languid and precious, absorbed in somewhat unwholesome æstheticism. But the Italian element in Rossetti was combined with, and in the ordinary relations of life obscured by, a distinctly British bluffness, and the dreamer of strange dreams was a very practical, resolute man of his own kind of affairs until insomnia and drugs taken to alleviate it broke him down. His humour, carefully kept out of his poetry, his slang, his skill in improvising what are now called limericks, his delight in the ways of queer animals, of which he kept a small menagerie, have to be fitted into any portrait of Rossetti. And in studying his poetry we have to take account not only of its ritual in the worship of a peculiar type of beauty but of the powerful intellect that directs it, not allowing ourselves to be persuaded that rich colour and heavy perfume and full music are sought by this poet out of mere unideaed sensuality.

Rossetti himself, in his few trenchant sayings about poetry, insisted on the necessity of what he called ' fundamental brainwork ' and ' mental cartooning ', and in almost all his work there is a very definite intellectual foundation, though it is rarely allowed to be so perceptible as in his great poem, ' Nineveh '.

It is to this poem, as in many ways one of his finest, but especially for its corrective effect on a still common misunderstanding of Rossetti, that the reader new to Rossetti should be first sent. Next, perhaps, such a reader ought to be directed to that flawless masterpiece of masculine pathos, ' Jenny '. The rare beauty of such a passage in ' Jenny ' as that in which the relations between soiled and innocent womanhood are set forth under the image of the rose—

> Shut in a book
> In which pure women may not look—

yet still such that

> The sweetness of the sanguine stain,
> Seen of a woman's eyes, must make
> Her pitiful heart, so prone to ache,
> Love roses better for its sake—

cannot fail to be appreciated by any reader. Nor can there be any fear of his failing to recognize the immense imaginative power of the image of lust shut into the world like a toad in a stone. But over and above all these incidental successes, whether in the most elaborate working out of an idea or in the inexpressibly moving simplicity of that line, coming where it does,

> Jenny, you know the city now,

it is for the reader to realize the singular *rightness* of the poem as a whole, the naturalness, dignity, humanity, inevitability of this meditation over a fallen woman. No subject could be more likely to yield cheap morality, easy and greasy sentiment, pious twaddle, or, in anxiety to avoid all these, an ugly cynicism. But Rossetti, because of that 'fundamental brainwork' he put into poetry and of his absolute sincerity, reviews 'Jenny's case' with unerring truth to its spiritual facts, with an indignation the more telling because it does not affect to be a saint's, and without any pretence of offering a solution of her heart-breaking problem.

It is only when the reader has fully apprehended the intellectual power and the human feeling in Rossetti that he may safely venture among those more numerous poems, sonnets for the most part, in which sensuous mysticism prevails. He may well take the ballads before the lyrics and sonnets. Walter Pater, who wrote a profound but incomplete criticism of Rossetti, thought the best introduction to Rossetti to be 'The King's Tragedy', a late work on the subject of the murder of the Scottish royal poet. But is there anywhere in that composition, beautiful as some stanzas are, and successful as the whole may be considered in mere narrative, anything of Rossetti's proper quality of imagination? It has always seemed to me exterior. Nor can I join in any but much qualified eulogy of 'The White Ship'. But the earlier ballads are quite another matter.

One of them, 'Sister Helen', is in certain respects the finest thing Rossetti ever did. It gets much of its effect, of course, from the contrast between the speakers in the dialogue—the revengeful woman,

melting the waxen image of her false lover, and her innocent young brother, who questions her naïvely at each stage in the progress of her black magic. It gets much, too, from the recurrence of the refrain, a poetic instrument which Rossetti used often but very seldom with quite this power. Yet, as usual, it is the energy of the ' mental cartooning ' that gives the poem most of its hold on us. Something else helps: for superstition, magic, the supernatural stimulated Rossetti's imagination always. A subject like that of his ' Lilith ', taken out of the ancient legend of Adam's first love, and still more a subject like that of his ' Rose Mary ', in which tragedy comes of a girl's inability to see aright in the magic beryl since she had lost her chastity, always called out the finest qualities of a poet more securely in touch with the supernatural than any since Coleridge.

But it was not only in this ballad-like way that Rossetti could deal with mystery. In many lyrics and in still more numerous sonnets he summons up, in a small picture charged with the atmosphere of enchantment, some ' covert place '

> Where you might think to find a din
> Of doubtful talk, and a live flame
> Wandering, and many a shape whose name
> Not itself knoweth, and old dew,
> And your own footsteps meeting you,
> And all things going as they came.

These lines, in their kind amongst the most wonderful in our poetry, are from ' The Portrait ', a poem of great beauty and pathos, the reverie of the painter over the likeness he made of a loved woman since

dead. It is not throughout a strictly characteristic poem, for it has a measure, here and there, of a quality more Tennysonian than Rossettian, especially in the admirable phrasing of

> With underglances that surveyed
> The empty pastures blind with rain.

Rossetti, as a rule, worked in harder material, though with ample or even excessive luxuriously superimposed ornament of a deceiving softness. It was said by Coventry Patmore of one of his finest effects—

> But the sea stands spread
> As one wall with the flat skies,
> Where the lean black craft, like flies,
> Seem well-nigh stagnated,
> Soon to drop off dead—

that it was ' scratched with an adamantine pen upon a slab of agate ', and something of the sort might be said of many other passages of description done in obedience to a tyrannous intensity of vision. It was only exceptionally that the intellectual and pictorial elements of the poem were allowed by him to yield to music, as in that lovely stanza of ' Love's Nocturn ' :

> Poets' fancies all are there :
> There the elf-girls flood with wings
> Valleys full of plaintive air ;
> There breathe perfumes ; there in rings
> Whirl the foam-bewildered springs ;
> Siren there
> Winds her dizzy hair and sings.

Rossetti was a dreamer to whom dreams came with

more than the solidity and definition of waking life. All poetry rejoices in the concrete, but his almost too much; and it was eminently like him to put into a mystical poem such as 'The Blessed Damozel' a wealth of earthly colour, exact detail, tangible beauty, imaginative realism. Written in youth, carefully revised afterwards, perhaps not quite everywhere to its advantage though with wonderful gain at some points, it remains his typical achievement, and the most widely esteemed of all his works.

Yet, after all, it is as a writer of sonnets that Rossetti takes his highest position. 'The House of Life', as his collected and re-arranged sonnets were eventually entitled, only a few remaining outside the scheme, has many mansions, firm of structure, rich and intricate in decoration, with windows on many beautiful and mysterious prospects of garden and woodland. But those windows are unopened, the atmosphere seems at times close, and the silences and echoes, the perfumes too insistently awakening memories, the mirrors seeking the ghosts of beauty they once reflected, remind us that it is a haunted house.

Physically, Rossetti could not sleep. As a poet he has often something of the aspect of a sleep-walker, and we watch every movement of his with an attention we should never give any but a somnambulist, whose strangeness is in the bare fact of movement. I suppose there is no poet safer from the reproach of having written an insignificant line. There is even too much significance in some of his work. Rossetti cannot get free for a moment from the pressure of his subject, and simply as a writer of verse, with many and many a line 'of its own

arduous fullness reverent', whole sonnets brimmed with emotion and meaning, it is rhythmical impulsiveness that he lacks. But what an artist he was! And how original and authoritative a man! We have had greater poets, but none better fitted to rule in the kingdom of poetry, from the throne of which Shakespeare would have stepped down, and in which Milton would have been the harshest of dictators, but Rossetti a casual, unquestioned practitioner of the right divine.

His poems came, as the world has been told too often, from the grave of his wife, into whose coffin he had thrust the manuscript. Mrs. Rossetti, ELIZABETH ELEANOR SIDDAL, seems to me herself deserving of mention in any history of English poetry. None of her verse has been published, and I understand that the quantity of it surviving is not large. All that is beside the point, which is that her lines, 'A Year and a Day', are poetry. I quote the last two of five stanzas that express a substance far from obvious with a voice that to me seems her own:

The river ever running down
  Between its grassy bed,
The voices of a thousand birds
  That clang above my head,
Shall bring to me a sadder dream
  When this sad dream is dead.

A silence falls upon my heart,
  And hushes all its pain,
I stretch my hands in the long grass,
  And fall to sleep again,
There to lie empty of all love,
  Like beaten corn of grain.

There, surely, as well as in her husband's pictures and poems, is an enduring memorial of the 'matchless grace, loveliness, courage, endurance, art, humour, heroism and sweetness', Swinburne's words, of one who hid her heart from the world beneath bitter-sweet persiflage and kept some secret to her early end.

If Rossetti's wife was a potential and at one moment an achieving poet, his sister was the greatest woman poet we have in our whole history, and CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830–1894) has the historical importance of a pioneer or a forerunner. For it was she who first won readers to what is loosely called Pre-Raphaelite poetry, the verse accompanying the movement in painting to which for a time Rossetti and Holman Hunt and Millais belonged, in which Holman Hunt continued, and from which Rossetti turned partly aside with such younger followers as Burne-Jones. It is a fact too seldom noticed that the impact of this new poetry on the general public was long delayed, and that when it came the collision was lateral. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Blessed Damozel', in its first version, appeared in the famous periodical of the group, the *Germ*, and some of the strongest and most characteristic of the poetry of William Morris in his first volume. But these publications attracted no general attention. The first public success of the group, of which by then Swinburne had become a very junior member, was with Christina Rossetti's initial volume.

What makes Christina Rossetti so great a poet is the union in her of sensuousness and spirituality. Consider that 'masterpiece of ascetic passion', as her poet brother called it, 'The Convent Thres-

hold '. Its hold on the other world is not firmer than its hold on this. Or take that wonderful outburst of lyric joy, ' A Birthday '.

> Raise me a dais of silk and down ;
> Hang it with vair and purple dyes ;
> Carve it with doves and pomegranates,
> And peacocks with a hundred eyes ;
> Work it with gold and silver grapes,
> In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys ;
> Because the birthday of my life
> Is come, my love is come to me.

The language of the Song of Solomon came naturally to the lips of this saintly poet, and she too could find again and again a melancholy pleasure in testifying to the vanity of all things in words steeped in luxurious colour. Her metrical art was extraordinary, and far more spontaneity is to be found in her songs than in any of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's. Of tiny, perfect poems she wrote more than any poet since Herrick : one is almost tempted to the paradox that these lovely snatches are her chief claim to immortality. But, of course, in the last resort she must be judged by the profoundly felt, wonderfully rhymed ' Passing Away ', in some ways the greatest of all sacred English lyrics. Her range was not wide, and the thought of death was with her too often, but it is not while reading her that one thinks of her limitations.

William Morris (1834–1896) is usually thought of as the poet of ' The Earthly Paradise ', but it is impossible to doubt that a still greater poet was announced in his first volume, ' The Defence of Guinevere '. The Arthurian verse in that volume

had less of the gracious charm now associated with Morris than the verse of 'The Earthly Paradise', many of the poems were ill-composed, some were distorted. But they, and particularly the Arthurian poems and 'Sir Peter Harpdon's End' and 'The Haystack in the Floods', exhibited in a very rare degree the very quality least to be found in the later poetry of Morris—the quality of intensity. There was a convulsive energy of grasp on the subject, a fierce, stammering eloquence in many passages, for which the reader will look in vain in the maturer work. In certain of the shorter poems there was something else also missing in the latter volumes—a power, quite individual, but in degree not inferior to Poe's, of putting witchcraft into poetry. The reader unfamiliar with Morris cannot be too strongly urged to begin with the Guinevere volume, written before Morris had begun to write verse as one weaves tapestry, with heed lest any particular stitch should stand out from the pattern. Not that 'The Earthly Paradise' is not a treasury of beautiful things, not that the more equable procession of the verse is not a delight, but that the more passionate and strangely imaginative poet died out in Morris. Some have thought he was resuscitated in the final work done under Northern influences, when the mind of Morris was full of sagas and when, despite Rossetti's mischievous declaration that it was impossible to take seriously a hero whose grandfather was a dragon, he shaped his primitive material into a form of great originality. But that late work, grand as it is, and it is epical where 'The Earthly Paradise' was romantic, is not what would have been expected from the author of 'The Defence

of Guinevere '. The narrative work of Morris has unduly overshadowed his lyrics, though ' Poems by the Way ' would have made any poet's fortune. The loveliest thing between its covers, however, was earlier in date than most of its contents. I speak, of course, of the nymph's song to Hylas :

> I know a little garden-close
> Set thick with lily and red rose,
> Where I would wander if I might
> From dewy dawn to dewy night,
> And have one with me wandering.

That lyric and ' Summer Dawn ' and certain sections of ' Love is Enough ' would give Morris very high rank if he had never written a line of narrative. Yet it is to his first volume that one returns, for a pungency everywhere else lacking, for the thrill of being brought too close to characters whom in his later works he would deliberately have made remote to the reader.

The literary fate of ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE (1837–1909) was unhappy. His noble drama on the Greek model, ' Atalanta in Calydon ', and his sensational first volume of ' Poems and Ballads ' acquired a prominence in his work which, some decline and diversion of gift and some personal circumstances helping, resulted in injustice to a good deal else that he did, and causes that need not here be discussed have delayed popular reconsideration of his work as a whole. ' Atalanta in Calydon ' is a very great achievement, but I have come to differ from the opinion I expressed in a book about Swinburne nine years ago, and to see that Swinburne was right, in a way, in preferring ' Erechtheus '.

It is true that the later and more nearly Greek drama has not that dewy freshness of language which the earlier possessed. Its theme is much less sympathetic, and in fact is almost intolerable, for the modern mind recoils from the sacrifice of a maiden that Athens may be saved. The later drama can never appeal to the average reader as its predecessor did. But it is altogether a more powerfully conceived, more minutely organized, more severely wrought out masterpiece, and the greater of two things does not become the lesser because it is less lovable. It is not necessary to salvation that this opinion be accepted, but attention to the later drama will very usefully correct the foolish idea that there was little in Swinburne but a rush of flame over the twigs, after which there was no fire for the massive male-log.

That idea may be further corrected by comparing the best of the second series of 'Poems and Ballads' and of the 'Songs before Sunrise' with the first of his lyrical poems. Wonderful as many of the early lyrics are, all but two or three are open to some suspicion of being the product of superficial excitement rather than of deep passion. Will anyone assert that 'Hertha' or 'Ave atque Vale', 'The Pilgrims' or 'At a Month's End', are froth from the waves of a shallow and too swiftly troubled sea? If so, he must be one who would declare the stupendous drama, 'Bothwell', a proof of the essential levity of Swinburne's genius.

Far from being a mere virtuoso, Swinburne in the 'Songs before Sunrise' wrote some of the most purely philosophical poetry that exists in English. Matter-full he never was, nor is it the business of the

lyrist to be so, though people in general recognize intellect only when it gets in the way of the poetical impulse and the weight of the thought carried only when it breaks the poet's wings. Empty he could be sometimes, especially during a period of his later life when his main energy was given to other than lyrical work. But for one poem in which he is really empty there are a dozen in which he merely seems so to uncomprehending readers. How this failure of understanding comes about cannot be fully explained here, but something must be said, and I would but remind the reader that Swinburne very largely uses anapæstic metres, the very nature of which prohibits, for people with an ear, any packing of the line. Hence there is at the outset a certain appearance of either emptiness or thought beaten out very thin over a wide space. Next, it is the very peculiar and for his purpose very necessary habit of Swinburne to use epithets which belong less to the word to which they are attached than to the line as a whole or the stanza or the entire poem. The choice of language is really made with the most remarkable skill out of an enormously rich vocabulary, and the success is in writing a poem in which every word shall be in accord with the music and atmosphere of the whole. But the effect on the reader who takes the poem phrase by phrase is one of epithets chosen out of mere habit or for merely metrical reasons. The deliberate dimming of the individual word seems to him due to the absence of intellectual intention. It is due only to absence of any desire to make an immediate point. Scores of lines may seem superfluous, may seem to have contributed nothing to the development of the idea, but they have prolonged

the general musical scheme without admitting any distraction, and they could not have been dispensed with.

But even the reader who cannot learn to take Swinburne as he should be taken, incuriously as regards the single phrase or line, may find the greater Swinburne beyond possibility of doubt in ' Hertha ', the expression of his central thought, in the magnificent elegy on Baudelaire, ' Ave atque Vale ', in ' At a Month's End ', which is matchless as a description of turbulence in the soul and in the world—

> Our hearts were full of windy weather,
> Clouds, and blown stars, and broken light—

and many another poem. He will not so learn, however, to see quite how great a thing is the chief lyric of Swinburne's old age, ' A Nympholept ', with its evocation of the secret life of nature, of the oppression of noon in the forest, of ' the strong sun's fearful might ', of the terror to which the ancients gave the profoundly significant name panic, and its final assurance of the peace of the earth.

Swinburne was too lyrical to make a complete success of the great narrative poem of ' Tristram of Lyonesse ', the opening of which is his highest achievement in the use of the heroic couplet, and which contains innumerable seascapes done with an unrivalled feeling for atmosphere though with scarcely any for outline. It is outline rather than intellect that is lacking in much of his verse. But the later and less ambitious narrative, ' The Tale of Balen ', has it, and it is perhaps the most considerable work of his age. His dramas, in which there is no prose residue at all, abound in magnificent poetry,

but what holds us in them is the ebb and flow of passion in the swift and splendid verse, not the consequences of passion in action.

A very great poet, he needed, if anything, only some alloy of prose or some difficulty in writing verse to be yet greater. But only as he was could he have rendered to English verse the immense and complicated service he did, suppling and enriching it at every point, giving it a speed and spin unknown before him, and inventing or improving out of recognition stanzaic forms almost beyond computation.

The work of Rossetti, William Morris and Swinburne was in a way continued, with much slighter substance and a vaguer sense of direction, by PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON, the blind poet, and by ARTHUR WILLIAM EDGAR O'SHAUGHNESSY (1844–1881). The former was often too directly imitative, but had genuine pathos, and at least his verses on the old churchyard at Bonchurch deserve a permanent place in our literature. O'Shaughnessy had not very much to say, and had exhausted it before his short life ended, but he cultivated his tenuity to fine purpose and was thoroughly entitled to call one of his volumes of verse 'Music and Moonlight'. Melody never failed him, and a pale radiance plays over many of his melancholy little landscapes. Homesickness for some land known before birth or in dreams was his truest inspiration, but he had others. 'Bisclaveret' is without rival in English verse as a treatment of the werwolf superstition; 'The Fountain of Tears', though tending towards easy sentiment, has its appeal to the ear and the imagination; the Ode beginning 'We are the music makers' says something personal and worthy

about his art; and the song, 'I made another garden', has some exquisite cadences. There was a little of Moore and a good deal of Poe in O'Shaughnessy.

A certain relation is perceptible between these poets and the three versatile writers—AUSTIN DOBSON, ANDREW LANG, and EDMUND GOSSE—who in the late 'seventies and early 'eighties toyed with the fixed French forms, such as the Ballade and the Triolet. Lang had it in him to win a considerable place in poetry, and actually did several things, besides the well-known sonnet on the Odyssey, which will long be remembered. 'My soul is melancholy but my mind is gay', he said of himself; his mind was curious and given to journalistic dissipation as well as gaiety, and the wistfulness he could sincerely and musically express in verse never had time enough to produce its perfect embodiment. Gosse's best poem may be 'Revelation', a parable of the intellectual life that misses warmer human experience; but my own preference is for his sonnet in dialogue, by no means a mere *tour de force* though extremely adroit. He, however, chose to be less a poet than the close, admiring yet malicious observer of poetic personalities, and used with increasing skill through a long life his talent for seizing the significant detail in whatever context it was presented to him.

Austin Dobson, though active in prose, especially on the subjects offered by his favourite eighteenth century, was far more careful to keep himself before the public as primarily a writer of verse. He attained to great popularity, but his genius missed the applause given to his talents. He was much

more than a graceful writer of social verse, and a sensitive reader can hardly fail to feel the ironical pathos implicit in his frivolity. So much intentness on the moment is possible only to a poet acutely aware of its brevity. If his light verse has been taken too lightly, the very best of his grave, 'The Sick Man and the Birds', remains neglected by anthologists. Dobson, in fact, despite his popularity, is undervalued.

In the years during which Dobson, Lang and Gosse were writing some of their best verse there seemed to be growing up, out of the more luxurious part of Rossetti's vocabulary, a new 'poetic' diction. Æstheticism, not unuseful in other matters, came to a slightly absurd climax in some of the earlier verse of OSCAR WILDE (1854–1900), ultra-Keatsian, ultra-Rossettian, full of clever imitations of other poets, redeemed by fine lines here and there. In the prose narrative of 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' and the prose dialogue of 'The Importance of Being Earnest', Wilde, I agree with a lady of my acquaintance in thinking, cannot always have meant what he said; and it is possible that suspicion should extend to his very remarkable essay in decorative decadent verse, 'The Sphinx'. 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol', wrung out of his highly artificial nature by a first introduction to realities, is quite another matter. Its power has never been denied, but one of the sources of that power has seldom if ever been noticed. If you consider it, the poem tells as it does largely because its style, framed in happy years for a luxurious dealing with remote subjects in an expensive atmosphere, is often *in*-appropriate to the realistic and frightful substance

and reminds us almost everywhere that it is a dandified voluptuary who is being tortured.

Wilde's one-time friend, LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS, may be regarded as the last descendant of the Pre-Raphaelites. He was twenty years behind the times when he began with 'The City of the Soul', published in 1899, and has lived far beyond the era when it was usual to write about chrysoberyls and such romantic accessories. Many of his sonnets are of rare excellence; 'Rejected', the utterance of one who has forsaken Apollo for Christ and sought vainly to revert, is one of the best mystical lyrics of the last thirty years; and 'Perkin Warbeck' is a dramatic lyric in ballad-like form showing a firm grasp of tragic situation. His later verse, two or three sonnets apart, has been a disappointment.

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT (1840–1922) wasted his energies in futile political agitations, doubtless generous in their prime motive but carried on eventually with a peevishness that could not possibly inspire poetry. With many good and two or three really striking sonnets on the Shakespearean model, he wrote some noteworthy pieces in which echo of the vowel took the place of rhyme, but despite ample production remained something of an amateur to the end. However, to have married Byron's granddaughter, bred Arab horses, and been admired by Henley and by George Wyndham is to have made a good deal of life.

Three writers having little or nothing in common but experience of schoolmastering may here be taken together. THOMAS ASHE (1836–1889) wrote some delicate and wistful things about children and young girls—'To Two Bereaved', 'Meet we no

Angels, Pansie ? ' perhaps the best among them—and something of the charm of a fine nature is in certain other of his shorter lyrics. THOMAS EDWARD BROWN (1830–1897) wrote powerfully in Manx dialect, gathering up the best of this part of his work into his ' Fo'c'sle Yarns ', published in 1881, but to the general reader may be better known by various shorter lyrical pieces in literary English. One of the finest and most familiar of his poems, that on a child suddenly realizing by her brother's grave what death means, illustrates a too common weakness of his work. For at the climax Brown, with a gasp of hysteria or anguished aversion of his face, will resign the poet's functions exactly when it is most binding on him to exercise them most finely :

> If this is as it ought to be,
> My God, I leave it unto Thee.

But the remarkable blending of mysticism and realism in much of his work will always secure him a place of his own in English poetry, as his personal quality will make him the friend of most men who read him at all. His best things are unusually memorable, for beauty, or colloquial force, or an imaginative quaintness like that of :

> This sea was Lazarus, all day
> At Dives' gate he lay,
> And lapped the crumbs.
> Night comes ;
> The beggar dies—
> Forthwith the Channel, coast to coast,
> Is Abraham's bosom ; and the beggar lies
> A lovely ghost.

WILLIAM JOHNSON CORY (1823–1892), an eccentric and inspiring master at Eton, an original historian, and a poet with a small but highly individual personality, made some beautiful things out of the emotion with which a teacher sends his pupils into the world and out of his loving familiarity with the classics. 'Mimnermus in Church' is the final statement of the naturally pagan soul:

> Show me what angels feel. Till then
> I cling, a mere weak man, to men.

'Heraclitus' is a perfect success on the classic model:

> And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,
> A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,
> Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake:
> For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

There is nothing to compare with the poems on boyhood except 'Pater Filio', by Robert Bridges. Cory thought himself a failure; it was his sense of failure that made him a poet.

In WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY (1849–1903) there were qualities curiously mingled. On one side of him, through his love of poetical bric-à-brac, he may be connected with Dobson and Lang; on another side of him, in a rather too self-conscious virility, touching in one physically crippled, he was related to Mr. Kipling, and in a finer adventurousness to the two Stevensons, R.L.S. and the brilliant R.A.M.S.; finally, in his impressionism, he had affinities with some of the writers who have been called Decadents

and whom we shall treat on a later page. When, especially in earlier years, Henley wrote lyrics in the traditional manner on the usual subjects he was apt to fall into sentimentality—not through gushing emotion, from which his masculine nature was free, but through vagueness or over-largeness of phrase. The aggressive verse was often vigorous in a rhetorical way, but there was some truth as well as wit in the reply of a reader to the vaunting 'I am the Sword': 'No; only Ancient Pistol'. With one or two exceptions, what ultimately matters of Henley's poetry is the work, often in unrhymed lyrical form, in which life and the world are seen from unusual angles, as from his invalid's bed in the Edinburgh Infirmary, or under some sinister aspect, and summarized with an art like an etcher's. Both 'In Hospital' and the 'London Voluntaries' are full of things seen with unnatural clearness, noted as if with two or three sharp strokes. Usually, in his successes, either the matter or the imagery presents a combination of the bizarre and the familiar, the macabre and the lusty. A striking instance is the grimly jocular fable of Life and Death as respectively the courtesan in the room and the bully on the stair. That imagery reappears in a highly characteristic seascape, in one of his best unrhymed lyrics, in which 'the sinister seduction of the moon' and the 'menace of the sea' are worked into a thing of fantastic and yet realistic horror. In the pure lyrical style he never did anything else so good as 'Out of the sound of ebb and flow', a bird-call of old and simple romantic note.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling has put more journalism into his verse than Henley, a much greater journalist,

ever did; but in an often journalistic attitude of mind as well as in assertive masculinity he has some likeness to Henley, as in his patriotism he bears some resemblance to the discreeter Sir Henry Newbolt. But he is far too original to be set in any group. A good deal of his poetry is an attempt to seize beauty by cunning and violence; there remain those poems, his best, in which he has been humbler and more passive, and in which beauty is a voluntary captive. One emotion has never failed to inspire him, the inverted nostalgia of the man returned home and yearning for far and once familiar scenes of exile. It arouses all the poet in him, puts wistfulness into his generally brazen music, clears his style of semi-Biblical claptrap, and sets his extraordinary descriptive talent to work more legitimately than usual. But Mr. Kipling, to his advantage and disadvantage, is something more than a poet, and can be read for dozens of pages with interest and admiration by those who care nothing for poetry.

Sir Henry Newbolt, to whom reference was made a moment ago, seems to have had much less admiration for his later work than he deserves. He began, one might almost say, with no philosophy beyond that of the perfect public schoolboy, and in those earlier days did several things, most notably, perhaps, 'Drake's Drum' and 'Gillespie's Ride', which no one else has matched and which he himself has not surpassed. But time has revealed or developed a far more intimate part of his genius, and in 'Songs of Memory and Hope' there are lyrics of deeper feeling, more delicate and severe style, than any in his previous volumes.

Other poets who began or became prominent in the

'nineties have claims to notice which cannot here be allowed, but something must be said, if only a word or two, of the lucid, balanced, often in its way impressive poetry of SIR WILLIAM WATSON, in which the grand manner is used for ideas and emotions rather too slight to justify it, and then we must revert to some earlier poets who came late into their due.

Of RICHARD WATSON DIXON it might be said that he is still not fully established in the regard of the general reader. The associate of the Pre-Raphaelites, and in earlier years apt to echo Rossetti or Morris, he came to write a lyrical poetry of highly individual merit, with a remarkable art in packing natural details into a line or stanza, and with an unobtrusive felicity of epithet that may easily escape a hasty reader.

A friend of his and of Robert Bridges may be dealt with between them. GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, a Jesuit priest, who died in 1889, aimed at using only the most suggestive words of the sentence as it forms in the mind and at establishing a coincidence of grammatical, emotional and metrical stress to which poetry cannot continuously attain. He remains a fascinating failure. His most irritating trick is the leaving out of the relative pronoun; his ear's worst failure is in rhymes like 'eternal' and 'burn all'. But what in the end counts of his difficult strained work is of a curious beauty:

> Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
> Oh, look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!
> The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!
> Down in dim woods the diamond delves! the elves'-eyes!

The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies !
Wind-beat whitebeam ! airy abeles set on a flare !
Flake-doves sent floating forth at a farm-yard scare !

' The Wreck of the Deutschland ', if very formidable, is a very wonderful endeavour to do the impossible. ' Spring and Fall ' is a beautiful and touching thing. And there is the poem on a nun taking the veil, which anyone can understand and everyone must admire.

I have desired to go
Where springs not fail,
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be
Where no storms come,
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb
And out of the swing of the sea.

Robert Bridges (1844–1930) is a poet whose ampler works, the graceful ' Eros and Psyche ', the gravely felt ' Growth of Love ', the poetical dramas, count for less than his ' Shorter Poems '. It is as a writer of songs that he will eventually be honoured most. Part of the charm of these songs is that, with all their originality, they recall now some Elizabethan and now the youthful Milton, and indeed with this scholarly poet the recognition of the past history of his subject, his images or his words is a constant part of the pleasure he has to give. His originality is far from obvious, and his proud shyness, his way of insinuating into a line a most surprising epithet so that it shall pass without surprising us, hides it still

further. But the fit reader will not be so persuaded that an epithet like 'unchristened' in 'the soft unchristened smile of Eros' is the first that suggested itself or one that could have come at all to any but a fine imagination. The apparent simplicity, the frugality of this verse will not conceal from such a reader the subtlety and richness. And even another kind of reader will not miss the airy and delicately various music of these songs, which realize so completely their author's declared ideal:

I have loved flowers that fade,
Within whose magic tents
Rich hues have marriage made
With sweet unmemoried scents;
A honeymoon delight,
A joy of love at sight,
That ages in an hour:
My song, be like a flower.

I have loved airs, that die,
Before their charm is writ
Along a liquid sky
Trembling to welcome it,
Notes that with pulse of fire
Proclaim the spirit's desire,
Then die, and are nowhere:
My song, be like an air!

The poetry of Bridges presents a character. So, with much more pungency, does the poetry of Mr. A. E. Housman, whose two tiny volumes of verse are the most original, the most powerfully stamped with their author's personality, of any published by this generation. The ache of desire in these singular poems, the peculiar acrid flavour,

the clear sharpness of the note, the braced and manly pessimism set them altogether apart. The style is stripped of every ornament, the language is of the choicest simplicity, and the concision reminds us that this 'Shropshire Lad' is among the greatest Latinists we have ever had.

The burst of poetic activity in the 'nineties of last century has been much too definitely related to what was called Decadence in France. In strictness, Decadence is a literary condition, proper to epochs in the decline of literatures through weariness and over-cultivation, in which the more natural modes of expression are abandoned for a style grammatically dislocated and directed towards the capture of evasive ideas and fleeting, more or less perverse, sensations. Of the men of the 'nineties perhaps only MR. ARTHUR SYMONS showed much trace of French influence or Decadent tendency, and he was saved from even the most excusable errors of Decadence by a quality which, though far from being the most obvious in his work, has always controlled it, a quality of mind operative in his verse even when the verse seems to be written only by his sensitive nervous system. The conventional comparison is between Mr. Symons and Paul Verlaine, from whom he has made some wonderful translations, but I have come to think that he should be compared rather with a yet greater French poet, Baudelaire. For he, like Baudelaire, has worked outwards from a firm intellectual core of conviction, and though most of his poems are miniatures and some seem too slight, they and his always precise as well as imaginative criticisms of many arts combine, as Baudelaire's do, to make a whole. His highest

achievement is the poetic tragedy, 'The Harvesters', but it is as a subtle dissector of love that he is most likely to be honoured in the history of our poetry.

His intimate friend, ERNEST DOWSON, also had some affinities with Verlaine, and could write that kind of lyrical verse in which the words almost disappear into a murmur of music, but in his finest work was engaged in giving a modern and shyly personal meaning to the delicate commonplaces of amorous or elegiac Latin poetry. It was eminently characteristic of him, when he put into verse his wistful aspiration and feverish effort to forget its disappointment, to choose for title the classic line, 'Non sum qualis eram bonæ sub regno Cynaræ.'

LIONEL JOHNSON (1867–1902), an admirable scholar, an abstraction of a man, was pleased to fancy himself Irish, but he was in several respects the spiritual brother of Ernest Dowson, the likeness coming out in such little matters as a liking for the letter 'v' and for epithets like 'vesperal'. Lionel Johnson's most celebrated poem is that on the statue of King Charles I at Charing Cross, but it is probably in more subjective poems, expressive of Roman Catholic devotion or of a scholar's delight in austere beauty, that we should seek the essential qualities of this poet. His careful ritualism in the use of words at times gives to his verse the quality of ecclesiastical vestments stiff with sacred ornament, but he has lyric ease at times and always choiceness. Nothing done in his day is more musical than his lovely lines on William Collins.

If Lionel Johnson was innocently self-deceived in thinking himself Irish, MR. WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS was perhaps not less mistaken in supposing himself

the lineal descendant of Irish poets. Nothing is more depressing than an anthology of English verse by Irish poets of the pre-Yeats generations, for it offers us everywhere the half-achieved, the incompletely or prematurely expressed. Even JAMES CLARENCE MANGAN (1803–1849), beyond all question a man of genius, and a master of many kinds of effect, is a poet in the full sense, instead of mostly in intention and potentiality, only in two poems, the passionate 'Dark Rosaleen', with its beautiful repetitive effects, and the somewhat too rhetorical poem on himself, 'The Nameless One'. But Mr. Yeats has always been master of himself and a conscious artist. A Symbolist, influenced by Blake and by certain of the earlier French Symbolists, he has not always escaped the danger of using a fixed code of symbols instead of creating symbols afresh as poetic necessity demanded; but from the typical Irish faults he was free from the first. His purely lyrical verse culminated in 1899 in 'The Wind among the Reeds', though some of the earlier poems have more of a faery enchantment and some of the very latest a severer beauty. His dramatic poetry has come closer to life, at some cost but with benefits which are not to be denied. His mysticism is less capable of existence independently of his poetry than that of MR. GEORGE RUSSELL, 'A. E.', whose often fallible verse comes with less beauty and security out of a wisdom that may indeed be supposed to have been guarded by initiates down the centuries. But when a poet has written verse of such dim and exquisite beauty as much of that written by Mr. Yeats, it matters little whether the secret significance of it is quite so precious or so personal as he

takes it to be. It is the wavering cadences, the magical evocations of remote loveliness, not the doctrines, that hold us entranced.

One other very remarkable poet of the 'nineties remains to be named, FRANCIS THOMPSON (1859–1907). But to understand him it is necessary to cast back to the powerful and narrow genius of COVENTRY PATMORE (1823–1896), for after certain of the religious poets of the seventeenth century no one influenced Thompson so much as Patmore. If greatness implies breadth and variety and suppleness, Patmore cannot be called a great poet; yet what else is one to call him? Few even of our very greatest have been so fiercely individual or more completely masters of their resources. We may, if we foolishly so choose, disparage him as the poet of a single idea and a single metre, and his monotony is undeniable, but the one idea was highly original and the one measure was made to yield an astonishing number of effects. Patmore recognized in the universe only two entities, God and man, and he believed that their relation was that of mystical marriage. Beginning with the famous, in parts very beautiful and in parts quite fatuous, poem of domesticity, 'The Angel in the House', Patmore came at last to write of that symbolical marriage between God and the soul of man in the most transcendental verse produced in his age, 'The Unknown Eros'. Readers who had roared over the conclusion of 'The Angel in the House'—

> But here their converse had an end;
> For, crossing the Cathedral lawn,
> There came an ancient college friend,
> Who, introduced to Mrs. Vaughan,

Lifted his hat and bowed and smiled,
And filled her kind large eyes with joy
By patting on the cheek her child,
With, 'Is he yours, this handsome boy?'—

were taken aback when the realistic and frequently flat laureate of married bliss appeared as the lofty, austerely passionate celebrant of that other mystery; and even now, probably, there is no large public for the later and greater Patmore. They miss much who remain content to know him by such excerpts from earlier or later work as are most generally esteemed, for affecting as is 'The Toys' in its treatment of God's paternal attitude to the things with which we comfort ourselves, and beautiful as well as moving as is 'A Farewell', and wonderful as are the splendours which intrude into the domestic atmosphere of 'The Angel in the House', there is more of Patmore, in all the courage of his matured genius, in the terrible truth of 'Tired Memory', which justifies the faithful lover's remarriage, and in the indignant political poem inspired by the extension of the franchise, the greatest utterance of Conservatism in our whole poetry.

It was from this strange, narrow, penetrating, imperious man of genius almost as much as from Crashaw that Francis Thompson drew his inspiration. The audacities that glorified and disfigured Thompson's work, however, were not comparable to Patmore's. They were the consequence not of an idea pressed to its extreme but of a passion for what Crashaw called 'fair and flagrant things', what Keats called 'cloudy trophies'. The immensity of most of Thompson's themes gave him only too many occasions for a cheap sublimity, for the kind of phrase

in which he swung the earth a trinket at his wrist. But he had true sublimity also, real splendour as well as glitter of language, the grand manner as well as the gorgeous; and it is astonishing how the numerous incidental errors of his work are lost in the glory of the whole poem. His urgency carries off much that, separately considered, would seem fatal to any poet.

ALICE MEYNELL (1850–1922), the third of this group of Roman Catholic poets, was as frugal as Thompson was lavish. Her delicate, carefully concentrated work, with its regard for law and its heed for the value of every word, by its very nature had no broad sweep, but all of it was choice, the best of it exquisitely beautiful. The only other woman poet fit to be mentioned with her, MARY COLERIDGE, worked much and effectively in the fantastic, but did her finest things, as I think, in painting her own portrait, that of an austerely empassioned, very English woman, adventurous in the spirit but heedful of her spiritual safety, courageous and circumspect.

The poetry of GEORGE MEREDITH (1828–1909) is for the most part a making of bricks with only too much straw. Overfull of substance, too exclusively intellectual in motive, too purposeful, many of his poems are probably destined to be studied only for their bearing on the rest of his work in verse and prose. There remain certain things of extraordinary excellence in which, with, in a sense, less ambition, he has succeeded. There are certain dramatic monologues or studies of character, and notably 'Juggling Jerry', the admirable speech of a wandering juggler, now near his death, to his wife, with its conjecture of the future:

Maybe—for none see in that black hollow—
It's just a place where we're held in pawn,
And, when the Great Juggler makes as to swallow,
It's just the sword-trick—I ain't quite gone!

There are certain poems, especially 'The Song of Theodolinda' and 'The Nuptials of Attila', quite alone in English poetry for the savagery of their conception and the intentional and powerful harshness of their consonantal lines and barbaric clanging rhymes. 'The Nuptials of Attila' is a furious recital of the mysterious end of that conqueror, whether through natural causes or by the murderous action of his bride neither history nor the poem claims to tell us. No fragmentary quotation can give an idea of the ferocious splendour of the verse, but take a few lines from the passage describing how his soldiers break into the bridal chamber:

Square along the couch, and stark,
Like the sea-rejected thing
Sea-sucked white, behold their King.
Attila, my Attila!
Beams that panted black and bright,
Scornful lightnings danced their sight:
Him they see an oak in bud,
Him an oakling stripped of bark:
Him, their lord of day and night,
White, and lifting up his blood,
Dumb for vengeance. Name us that,
Huddled in the corner dark,
Humped and grinning like a cat,
Teeth for lips!—'tis she! she stares
Grinning through her bristled hairs.
Rend her! Pierce her to the hilt!
She is Murder: have her out!

What! this little fist as big
As the southern summer fig!
She is Madness, none may doubt.
Death, who dares deny her guilt!
Death, who say his blood she spilt!
Make the bed for Attila.

A third, and in some ways the most important, section of Meredith's poetry contains the nature poems, some of them too philosophical or doctrinal, but some as beautiful as 'The Lark Ascending':

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake,
All intervolved and spreading wide,
Like water-dimples down a tide
Where ripple ripple overcurls
And eddy into eddy whirls.

Finally there are the two great poems of happy and of tragic love—the enchanting 'Love in the Valley', unsurpassed for freshness of rapture, and the subtle, powerful, difficult piece in sonnet-like sections, 'Modern Love', in which almost all the finest qualities of Meredith combine to make a masterpiece.

As Meredith was a discontented novelist, so he is on the whole a discontented poet; in the one medium or the other he is almost always straining after some effect not naturally to be secured. The poet in THOMAS HARDY (1840–1928) never troubled the novelist, and when, late in life, he resumed, or first seriously undertook, the writing of poetry it was not to stretch and wrench verse. But he came to his new art inexpert, and no literary process of the last thirty

years has been of such interest as that by which he slowly conquered the new medium. There remains, in his vocabulary and in the construction of his sentences, something obstinate to the influence of verse. His verse is often in the same relation to most other English verse as a man's writing with his left hand would be in to that done with his right. The hand is inexpert, not the man. And Hardy, with his all but unique faculty of learning in old age, schooled that hand to some purpose. Supple he never made it, but skill it acquired amazingly, and power it had from the first. It is too soon to choose from among Hardy's poems, and after a passing salute to his gigantic drama, 'The Dynasts', I will only offer the opinion that some of the briefer and more lyrical poems will eventually rank above most of his rather over-contrived studies of ironic circumstance.

Strange as it may seem, it is right to make an end of this history with Hardy. He is the only Victorian who means very much to the younger poets of to-day; he is himself a writer of to-day as well as of yesterday; and they have not yet become subjects for historical consideration. Some of the most finely gifted of them—Mr. Walter de la Mare, with his rather frequent difficulty in saying things and his marvellous power of creating atmosphere; Mr. John Masefield, with his excellent adventurousness and his inability to keep throughout a long poem at his chosen distance from actual life; Mr. Ralph Hodgson, a man of genius for all that his 'Song of Honour' owes something to Christopher Smart and his 'Eve' to Christina Rossetti—have kept to the traditional instruments of English poetry.

Others have experimented more or less boldly with new instruments, imported from the Continent or from America, or home-made.

So far as these experimental poets are seeking each the form that will best express his individuality their enterprise is not only lawful but necessary. The popular view of the matter, however, is that a new age requires new instruments, and that is a vulgarity against which I must protest. An antique is not necessarily an outworn form, and the age or modernity of a form in itself is really irrelevant, for the moment a genuine poet uses it with mastery it ceases to be either old or new, becomes contemporaneous, becomes his, and in the most important sense has no existence outside his work. Particular forms become obsolete for particular poets ; no form that has been proved capable of great use ever becomes obsolete for all poets. The question whether anything further can be done with a traditional form is always an open question. So also is it an open question whether anything can be done, except in swift impressionism, with that rather trying novelty, *vers libre*. To me it seems unhopeful, and I dislike its English pedigree, showing a descent from the worthless work of that Dr. Sayers whose metrical experiments Southey preferred to Milton's. Pegasus, as I fancy, had a sister, and the *vers libre* writers have but found her nest. But to-morrow I might be proved wrong by the actual production of some poet to whom free verse was the natural medium. He would deserve honour not for using free verse but for using the medium in which he could work best.

But our business here is very much less with the future or the present than with the past. There is

time for one glance back and for the briefest answer to the enquiry what and where the highest achievement of English poetry may be.

Our poetry began much too late to yield any genuine epic. It has, however, one of the greatest of literary epics in Milton's 'Paradise Lost', and I would venture to add, with due allowance for the difference of star from star, the 'Gebir' of Landor. It might not be improper to include a third great, much less poetical, but very much more vital and various work, the 'Don Juan' of Byron, as a kind of worldly and modern epic. In narrative poetry we have our incomparable Chaucer, and then in our own time William Morris, whom the Georgians may despise, but who remains a master. In ballad poetry we are wealthy, both as regards the ballads of unknown authorship and those added by Rossetti, Swinburne and other poets. In the poetic drama written for the stage we possess, even outside Shakespeare, a great mass of treasure, and with this may be reckoned certain untheatrical dramas the substance of which could not have been treated otherwise and the form of which is therefore justified. In lyrical drama we may glory in 'Samson Agonistes', 'Prometheus Unbound' and 'Atalanta in Calydon'. In elaborate elegiac poetry of the highest ambition we have the very great laments, 'Lycidas', 'Adonais', 'Thyrsis', 'Ave atque Vale'. In the true Ode, written in varied and metrically corresponding sections on some occasion of actual or imagined national joy or mourning, we have great examples by Coleridge, Shelley and Swinburne. At the other extreme of lyrical poetry we have the beautiful Elizabethan songs and those done later by Shelley

and by Bridges, though of the robuster type of song perhaps only Burns can provide many good examples. And so the proud inventory might continue. But the final glory of our poetry is the English lyric that has neither the tenuity of the song nor the formality of the true Ode. There may be greater things outside it than in it, but it is this that we have most constantly produced with high success through the centuries.

And here an end must be made, with many things unsaid, and many ill said, but with the hope that between the lines there may be discerned the single quality that makes the worshipper, if none of the many needed to make the preacher on so sacred a text as that of English poetry.

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