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# LYRIC POETRY

*The Channels of English Literature*

Edited by OLIPHANT SMEATON, M.A.

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# LYRIC POETRY

BY

ERNEST RHYS




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LONDON AND TORONTO
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*Printed in Great Britain*
*by The Temple Press Letchworth*
*for*
*J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.*
*Aldine House Bedford St. London*
*Toronto . Vancouver*
*Melbourne . Wellington*
*First Published 1913*
*Reprinted 1933*

# FOREWORD

MODERN usage and the effect of the printed page have to-day made of the song in literature almost a silent piece of music, and it is hard for us when we take up a new book of poems to realise what the lyric idea originally was and what the conditions were that gave the art its congenial form. How are we to relate an intellectual lyric, written for the book and for the abstruser part of a man, like Browning's—

> "Let the mere star-fish in his vault
> Crawl in a wash of weed, indeed,
> Rose-jacynth to the finger-tips:
> He, whole in body and soul, outstrips
> Man, found with either in default":

to the rain-song of the savage?—

> "While Benga doth praise thee,
> And Padi sings to thee,—
> *Stop, Rain, Stop!*"

Yet as we go on we find the art virtually unchanged, and still ask of the lyric poet the old quickening of the pulses and the same power of kindling thought by musical suggestion and increase in the sensation of life. One of the aims of this book is to show broadly how the lyric principle, through all the changes that taught it the literary habit, yet maintained its powers, from the time when *The Seafarer* was written to that of Swinburne's *Songs before Sunrise*. To explain the full process, however, it is not enough to record only the growth of the pure lyric, which openly called itself so. The observer is driven over and above that to watch every sign of its life, however sporadic, whether displayed in the usual forms or not. He has to account for the presence in

romantic and dramatic pages of "interspersed lyric" and submerged melody, and make allowance for the fact that of all the categories, the lyrical is the most lawless and has least hesitation about breaking bounds. These are among the difficulties that beset the record, driving the chronicler at length to ask what the test is to be if it is to be widened to meet all these illegal divagations? The test is, however, left where originally it was. "Lyrical," it may be said, implies a form of musical utterance in words governed by overmastering emotion and set free by a powerfully concordant rhythm. So soon as narrator or playwright, carried out of the given medium by personal feeling, begins to dilate individually on the theme, that moment he or she as surely tends to grow lyrical.

This need not interfere with our conviction that the art has its separate provenance and works towards a specific ideal of perfection in form. After watching its course in the mazes of a given language and a literature like the English, we are only strengthened in our belief in its heaven-sent grace. With Shelley, we accept the transcendent idea of its powers, as moving toward the creative embodiment of a beauty, higher than nature herself, that adds to the ideal wealth of mankind. The lyric in this sense looks for a separate expression that is of a part with the symmetry of a crystal or an exquisitely formed flower. The art by which it survives is based on structural laws that govern the rhythms of nature echoed in our own voices, and on the æsthetic correspondence between the waves of sound and the crescent and decrescent movements of our musical thought.

This again brings us back to Aristotle's idea that Poetry is an imitation or a copy of things and forms existing in nature. In another view than his (and it is worth note that Aristotle takes no separate cognisance of lyric in his categories), we shall observe how often the song or lyric appears to seek of itself to become the conductor of that greater emotion which passes the sensual life. Thereby it justifies its claim to be termed creative, and breaks into the circle of supreme

beauty and perfect happiness, recalling the vision that Dante beheld when he stepped out of space and time into the eternal, and from Florence to Heaven—

> ". . . che al divino dall' umano,
> all' eterno dal tempo era venuto
> e di Fiorenza in popol giusto e sano."

It is impossible here to do more than hint at the full theoretic account of lyric. But two or three points may further be noted, and one is, that its history in English goes to prove that unless there is a concurrence between the contemporary idioms and rhythms of a period, with the individual idiom of the lyrist, half the expressional force of his ideas will be lost. Newton, when he spoke of the subtle spirit that lies hid in material things, and the accord that should exist between the vibrations of that spirit and the spirits that are in human creatures; and Tyndall, when he showed how, to attain the same note, the vocal chords of the singer must vibrate in the same time as the string,—were only expressing other aspects of the same reciprocal law.

The danger is that under the modern bookish order the natural concert between the mind of the poet and the larger mind and rhythm of his time is broken. Gaston Paris once showed us how the old idea of gaiety associated itself with that of youth and love and the return of spring, and how the old *chansons de danse* served to ally the natural happiness of the whole people, in the spirit of folk-songs, to that other more conscious art which was springing up in Provence. There indeed, before the old folk impulse has lost its force, poetry was able to attain forms which set a lyric pattern for all time. Literatures, he said, " must be the free expression of the abundant national life of a people; where there is no such literature, there is only an imperfect life. Great writers are not enough; it needs that the soul of a people be poured out and expressed through them." So much one is tempted to repeat in trying to measure what the vital continuity of the art may hope to be under the conditions that now obtain? But this is a question that it requires a

prophet and not a critic to answer. It is enough now to leave the destinies in the hands of the new poets and the poets to come.

As to the evidence which is brought into the present volume, it goes to suggest that the two chief factors in the history of English lyric have been the stubbornness of the old northern verse with its dual movement, and the musical pliability introduced from the south, through Latin, Italian, Provençal, and Norman channels. The question of rhyme is not so easy to settle. It would have been interesting to work out at length the argument from the Celtic side; in the attempt to prove that, as the present writer believes and documents like the *Book of Cerne* serve to prove, the interaction between Celtic and English prosody was all through the Saxon settlement much closer than the literary historians have thought. But that is a difficult subject, and a large one, and not to be settled casually in a book intended to be non-disputatious and to deal only with English verse. If the effect of the pages as they stand be to re-open some of these questions, while enhancing the office of the lyric in our literature, they will have fairly served their purpose.

Some portion of the following record, it may be explained, is drawn from a series of studies in English poetry, undertaken many years ago, and printed in various books and periodicals with an eye to final collection. In certain chapters the substance of what was then said is repeated, although with a different estimate of the bearings and relative values of the art; while the attention given to some typical poets, and to the effect of their history on that of their common craft, which was part of the former design, justifies itself because the lyrist of all artists needs to be known in his environment.

These pages finally owe much to the writers who have worked upon English poetry soon or late, including Swinburne, Mr Stopford Brooke, Mr Edmund Gosse, Mr Austin Dobson, Mr Watts-Dunton, and Mr Saintsbury. In addition, the author's thanks are due to Miss E. Colles, Mr W, Hughes Jones, and Mr Lloyd Vaughan for critical aid in texts and proofs.

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# LYRIC POETRY

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

LYRIC poetry in English begins, we may almost say, with the first accents of Anglo-Saxon verse that rise above the narrative pitch. We trace its congenial element long before it has arrived at any recognised forms; there are signs of its oncoming in *Widsith*, and in *Beowulf* it seems about to emerge wherever the epic movement of that poem becomes quickened, and the narrator grows invocative under stress of memory and personal emotion—as in one famous North Sea passage—

> "Then we together on the sea faring
> Five nights forth fared; by floods hurl'd apart;
> Welt'ring the waves; weather the coldest,
> With darkening night, and northern wind,
> Battle-grim billows, rough-crashing breakers,
> The mood of the sea-beasts turn'd into rage."

There are lines in this rugged epic of the sea-change and prior wanderings of the immigrant race, if not their settlement in this island, which are more lyrical than those I have quoted. But *Beowulf* is still at a literary remove from the warriors' and seafarers' tales and folk-songs out of which it is freely compounded; it is, we soon detect, the work of a Scôp who is also a writing man; and when at the outset of the inquiry into the lyric art we attempt to get at the instinctive origins, such poems do not carry us back far enough. Indeed, in English, a relatively late tongue, it is hard to get at the primitive note, in some echo of the first song emerging from

chaos, which supplies a key, or offers a ruling principle likely to be of use in the later record.

What, then, was the character of the impulse that gave the breath and the spirit of life to song, and moulded from the beginning of things the genius inspiring lyric poetry? We need not in seeking an answer attempt any complete philosophy of the lyric. We can leave it to the folklorist to elaborate the theories of the communal strain in folk-song, and may be satisfied as lovers of verse to accept provisionally the old idea of a savage confronting fate and the elements, with his squaw and her babe by her side. He, we perceive, must soon have taken to uttering ejaculatory syllables; long before he had learnt to use his words with any syntax, or anything but a rude assonance and a rhythm dictated by the sustaining power and the suspiration of a single breath. When the wild man had named the first things—earth, fire, water: man and woman; sun and moon; quick and dead: we know that he must have also felt the need of expressing his joy and terror and other direct emotions. We cannot think of him at a stage where the mother's love for the child or the youth's for the maid, the brave's challenge or the squaw's lament, did not prompt an outcry, however rude and artless. In that cry which at the first iteration tended, according to a well-known law, to become modulated, we have the essential atom out of which has grown all the intricate melody of words which we agree to call lyrical.

It does not greatly matter that in building up our convention, and all that goes with the lyric "make-believe," we first subtracted music from the art in one form, and then re-added it in another; or that the lyre presently became only a figurative instrument, and afforded only an imaginary accompaniment (on which, however, still depended a certain part of its effect). So far we are occupied with the primary emotions that conditioned song before it was a literary art at all; and there we cannot mistake the nature of the impulse. Dealing with it at that stage, we see that man's utterance fell naturally from the beginning into two modes, the first of which had

the spoken, and the second the sung, or high, resounded word, quickened by irrepressible emotion, for its unit. By the same economy, wrought upon by man's vocal powers, by the law of kind, and by the very law of sound itself, it came about that in the second mode the increased vibrations called inevitably for the aid and sustenance of rhythm. Later, when men arrived at the writing down of words, it was a matter of course that the two modes should perpetuate themselves as prose and verse, which brings us down to the rough formula that prose was at the first beginning of literature written speech, and verse written song.

But we have now to go behind our books, to the poetry that is before literature and is unaffected by the writing habit, and to do this effectively we are driven to countries where the folk-note can be heard in less diluted or less sophisticated verse than we get it in English. In the East, among the Arab tribes, or in Japan or Malay, we surprise it in something like its original wild state, recapture the primordial atom we look for in a savage love-song, child's rhyme, or lullaby like the Japanese—

" Nénne ko yo, Nénne ko yo ! "

which might have been sung by the very first mother who put babe asleep. Here, for instance, is a Coorg rhyme, collected in Southern India,[1] which gives us the savage use of iteration and alliteration in its crudity, echoing the crow's "caw"—

" Kak, kakeka !
Kakera mangale kek ? "

which is, being interpreted, something like—

" Call the crow's sister :
When is the crow's wedding ?
To-morrow, or Sunday ? "

Or in a Rain-Charm : *e.g.*—

" While Benga doth praise thee,
And Padi sings to thee,
Stop, rain, stop ! "

[1] *Folk-Songs of Southern India*, by C. E. Gover.

Or in an Indian onomatopeic pot-boiling rhyme—

" Chakke kari
' Chada, chada,' beva.
Kambala kari
Guda, guda,' beva."

That is—

" The Jack-tree boils and ' Chada, chada,' sings '
Kambala boils and ' Guda, guda,' sings."

Such instances do not unlock the secret of the lyric; but they give you its artless beginning, and show rhythm in its naked infancy. They show, too, that childish play upon words and use of imitative assonances which at length grew into the haunting iteration of the ballad-refrain.

A step, a long step further, and we come to some of those songs of the Indian hill-poets, in which if the singer is yet an unconscious artist, he is quivering with individual emotion: take this, which suggests a form akin to the " triban "—

" Lalo ruptaghan
Galo gwashtaghan
Durra suptaghan.

Phairi phanagha
Dithom dil-rava,
Uzhroa misal." [1]

" I have gathered a ruby,
I have uttered speech,
I have pierced a pearl.
The night before last
I saw a heart-binding vision,
Like a flying dream, . . ."

Here, you will note, the lover's ecstasy is already consciously turned on the tongue, relished in the utterance and in the very pang of its over-much delight. The spirit of primitive song is changing and growing into deliberate, developed art. Another link, another step, and we are within hail of the recognised master—and the poet who is conscious of his instrument, while keeping (what it is so important and so hard to keep) something of the savage ecstasy. The last was

[1] *Popular Poetry of the Baloches*, by M. Longworth Dames, M.R.A.S., No. xlix.

a song from the Leghari Hills. This is written by a poet called Durrak, in a neighbouring tribe.

" I saw her," says the lover, " come swaying towards me; her head raised like the wazir of the birds (the peacock)." In another verse he invokes, as folk-singers do, her direct image; she stands before him, overwhelming in her beauty: " Thou hast passed thy hand over thy lips, and slain this poor wanderer. . . . Turquoises are in thy hands, and thou art in my heart." Again he drops his appeal, to wring his hands figuratively as he recounts her features: " Her starry eyes are like flowers in her face. . . . The steps of her feet are gracious. . . Her locks are scimitars that cut through my armour." He has read deep, he declares, in a Book of Blood, and a flame gleams in his eyes.

The figurative imagination is master of the poet in this Arab love-song. His beloved is present-absent; she has " slain him and given him new life "; she has made him fluid and creative in his relation to the visible world and its phenomena. Here you seem to have the " divine madness " which Plato, speaking through the mouth of Socrates, refers to in his *Phædrus*; which comes, he declares, of the Muses taking possession of a man's soul, and awakening and bacchically inspiring it.[1]

There are other songs in these Arab books which are real as flesh and blood can make them, yet charged with a kind of heavenly winged lightness. Their ecstasy can mount, as all ecstasy tends to do, to the region of the unconditioned world.

While in India, we might have watched the application of poetry to the custom of the country, and seen how the folk-poetry songs of death, of love, or of light, mounting and triumphant at the return of Spring, were turned into " the dirges and raptures " of religious observance. But for this adaptation of the lyric art we had better turn to Greece itself. There the primitive element, enlarging, enriching itself at every turn, gathering up the richest ingredients the

[1] Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*.

folk-life could offer, seemed more congenially than elsewhere to take on functional habits, and at length to pass into literature itself, without losing anything of its early impulse. And since it is to Greece that we owe the very name of the lyric, and to its influence over later poetry that we owe an almost incalculable store of replenishing ideas, we cannot avoid a brief glance over the record it affords.

There is no space here to recount all the phases by which the Greek lyric took shape after the Greek epic had conquered the earth for poetry ; yet some account is needed, since English verse cannot be treated apart from its foreign lien, any more than the English people can be understood without realising their British, Saxon, Norman, and other affects. Not one of the races that has been mixed in their blood has been without some influence on their verse, which at this very moment is being acted upon, consciously or unconsciously, by European forces.

We realise the classical reaction in particular, even when we are looking only for the English tradition, at points where it seems to be reinforcing itself with the north-country idiom and strong local colour. So, when Piers and Cuddie discuss the art in the *Shepherd's Calendar,* the twain pass easily from Tityrus to Tom Piper ; and in the note that succeeds, Plato is invoked for an account of the first Invention of Poetry.

This note refers to the infinite number of youth who usually came to " their great solemn feasts called Panegyrica, (when) some learned man, being more able than the rest for special gifts of wit and music, would take upon him to sing fine verses to the people in praise either of virtue or of victory, or of immortality and such like. At whose wonderful gift all men being astonied, and as it were ravished with delight, thinking (as it was indeed) that he was inspired from above, called him 'vatem' : which kind of men afterwards framing their verses to lighter music (as of music be many kinds, some sadder, some lighter, some martial, some heroical, and so diversely eke effect the minds of men), found out lighter matter of Poesie also, some playing with love, some scorning at men's fashions,

some poured out in pleasures: and so were called Poets or Makers."

What is remarkable in the case of Greece is that the poetry, so applied, so varied, was right singing stuff, and a genuine expression of the life of the Greek folk. The changes of the year, the harvesting, the vine-dressing, the sacred and the secular feasts, the mourning for the dead, the praise of heroes—all are remembered in the lyric ritual. When we look to-day at the Parthenon frieze in the silent and lifeless courts of the Elgin Marbles, we little realise the rich sound, the accompanying festal strains that were their fit music; the singing heard by the damsels who—

> "Pour libations to the Muses, Memory's daughters,
> And the Muse-leading son of Leto."

The prosodia sung at the Greek festivals were in character very like those of the earlier Asian ritual, and to the East, accordingly, they have often been traced; when we listen to the songs of death, or a harvest-song like that of Linus, or the laments for Hylas or Adonis, we are once and again carried back to the childhood of the art, though the art is already Hellenic and perfect in kind. And one thing, vital to our inquiry, we note especially—how in the Greek lyric the musical idea was kept alive in all its varied forms.

Our word "melody" rather than "lyric" best recalls the term the Greeks used, for they call a lyric poet "melopoios," and his song "melos"; and with the rise of their melic poetry we have to connect the flute, and not the lyre. Epic poetry, we gather, was dropping the musical accompaniment of which Aristotle spoke, just as lyric poetry or melic poetry was taking it up with renewed effect, after flute-music had been improved and made possibly more exacting in its accompaniment. One can imagine that while a simple piping, kept to its undertones, would serve the narrative poet's purpose, any increase of the tonic range would tend to give the music too much power. At any rate it gave way in time to recitation; and meanwhile the Ionians, who gave to the epic new life,

made of the elegy a distinct and very beautiful thing. But the elegy, first of all a dirge sung to a flute, did not keep the character with which we associate it in English, and it soon learnt to take on other than melancholy tones. It could be gay and triumphant as well as sad; could serve Eros, and become a hymn to the gods. In the end the elegy, and iambic verse too, like the epic before them, left the musical accompaniment to be supposed, and so dropt it altogether.

Here lay an anticipation of our own disuse of music. But the elegy is one of those sublyrical forms that may easily become too meditative, or too reminiscent, for song. We look elsewhere in Greece for the expansion of the primary lyric forms, where they are being converted into the secondary forms by a process not unlike some of the enlargements and constrictions of English verse.

Pass now from the flute to the cithara which Terpander brought to aid the music of poetry, and so helped to make the Lesbian mood proverbial. If ever there was a lyric school to which the English poet looks back with a certain pang of envy, it must have been the school at Lesbos. There the spirit of the art was in the very air, and the form moved to its perfection, helped by passion and Æolian airs, without losing anything that an Indian or Arab impulse could have given to it. Sappho and Alcæus show by fragments what poetry could do, while the ancient impulse was still undiminished; and Anacreon turns a page where fancy has taken the seat of imagination in the Ionian verse, graceful as Tom Moore and quite passionless. A very different English poet to Moore has spoken of—

> "Æolian charms and Dorian lyric odes."

In the latter the song grows choral, and Alcman is singing-master.

In its first stages the Dorian song became, as Professor Jebb has it, "a lyric interpreter of epic tradition." The mythical figures, such as Heracles and Odysseus, were among its subjects. A narrative vein emerged too in its use of love-

tales like Daphnis and Chloe, which held the germ of the Greek novel. In view of the interaction of lyric and narrative modes to be observed in English, this is not without interest.

Finally, to show the musical essence of Greek lyric verse unimpaired even in its greatest elaboration; to show, too, how in one man all voices could culminate, in him attaining a multitudinous sound, there is Pindar, "master of every lyric form in turn." If we might say with Sidney of some blind crouder's ballad "what would it work trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar?" we might ask, too, what some of our modern themes would be, if music were impulsive in their writers and poets, as it was in him? His *Odes of Victory*, like all the Greek lyrics in that kind, had instrumental accompaniment—flute, or lyre, or both together. The music was accorded with the theme; and the joyous Æolian, and the Dorian, grave and stern at need, and "tender Lydian airs," were waiting to give the last grace the lyric could receive in Greece: that of the kindred art.

These are the brief memoranda of a great lyric record, only intended to sum up enough of the Hellenic tradition to show the influence it had, through literary channels, upon the English tradition, early and late; and to show how, under the intensive culture of an artistic civilisation, it grew from folk-song to choric ode, and lost nothing of its original impulse.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ENGLISH INDUCTION

TURNING to the earliest English verse, we find there a poetry born as of the struggle with the elements, and marked by a distinctive northern and unmelodic note. The poet is singing long after the event, or at a North Sea's remove from the original circumstance of his tale, and knowing what we do of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, we expect to hear an echo of the things and the songs that existed before the great change: a verse that is charged with memory. Such conditions were not well designed to aid the earliest type of poet, a Scôp drawing upon tradition to grow lyrical. One of the original differences between epic and lyric verse lies in the division between past and present, and the epic poet remembers, while the other sings what now is; and accordingly a poet such as he who wrote *Beowulf* is not well equipped for song.

But therein appears the elusiveness of the lyric element, which upsets the categories, converts memory into new sensation, and breaks in upon the epic when by strict agreement it ought not to be in epic at all. Already as we read *Widsith* and *Beowulf* we are faced with the necessity of allowing for the irregularity of its advent, and driven to recognise that it has this power of turning ancient history itself into matters of vivid present emotion. Such is the moving passage in *Beowulf*, Canto XXVIII., which utters the cry of old age to youth: "Then some old warrior will say at the ale-drinking, when he beholds the ring—one that remembers, his heart grim and stern, the death by the spear—sad of mood will he begin to try and arouse the mind of the young warrior, to waken in him the lust of war; and this word he will say—

Can'st thou, my friend, recognise the sword thy father bare to the fight, under his closed helmet for the last time, when the Danes slew him, and the bold Scyldings gained the field since withergyld fell, after the fall of heroes.'"

The emotion here has overleapt the barriers. The verse is not mere recitative, and causes the listener to reflect that when the narrator telling his saga is carried out of himself, and takes to dilating with personal feeling about the scene or character in hand, that moment he tends to grow lyrical. This, too, though the whole tendency of Anglo-Saxon verse, as mainly a poetry of the past, is against melody, against even intermittent lyric. The Scôp was not imaginatively at home in the new prospect, and kept like a man in exile hârking back to the old land, making out a pedigree for the leaders who had crossed the sea, and substantiating the great tradition of the race—

"We are of the kin of the Gaetae (Goths) people
and Hygelac's hearth-enjoyers.
My father was to all folk known
the foremost man Ecgtheow hight
(he) abode a number of winters ere he on his way departed."

The man who turned to such verse as his natural mode was one who had one foot on the past, and took his rhythm from tradition. *Widsith's* closing lines tell us something of the custom of the gleeman who had sung such verse in the other country—

"So the gleemen go + as falls our fate
through many lands + forth wandering
and wants declare + and thank words speak
still south or north + some draw near,
that give gifts freely + their fame to shew."

Its course before it reached these islands does not belong to this record; and it is enough to refer to Tacitus and the interesting passage which Mr Stopford Brooke has pointed out to us in *Germania*, which shows that the old northern warriors, like any marching regiment to-day, knew the heartening effect of martial strains. "They sing in their songs," he says, "their god Tuisco and Mannus his son, the prime

forefathers of their race." And "They call on the name of Hercules above all others when they march to battle." Their battle-songs were accompanied by "the beating of their spears on their shields, or by the roaring sound the warriors made when they laid their lips to the upper rim of their shield and hummed into it and over it. With this they kindled the battlefire in themselves, and, according to its tone, foretold the issue of the fight."

In the early poems, we are not very far musically, it may seem, from the shield-rim and the warrior's alternating step. We have to look closely into *Beowulf* and *Widsith* and their successors before we detect any signs of change, any new growth of melody, any advance towards the impulsive pliancy of English song. It is still the battle-cry and the fighting energy, or the laments for the dead, that lift the song out of retrospective vein—

"Hail, bright cup!
Hail, mail'd warrior!
Hail, prince's pride!
How has time gone:
Darkened under night-helm
As it 'twere not.

"There standeth now + where the warrior-lovers trod
a wall wondrous high + worm-like shining
The earls foretaken + the ashtree weapons
on these stone slopes + the storms beat,
and falling snow + the earth blinds;
Winter's terror + night's wan shadow—
darkens the night sky + northern descended
fierce hail-storms + bring trouble on men."

There is the old heroic note, heard in *Widsith*, in *Beowulf*, that sounds with undiminished resonance in the battle-piece of the Fight at Maldon, the finest war-song carried over from the Saxon to the English tradition, a song that may be compared with other battle-pieces in Homer, the *Gododin*, and elsewhere without losing weight. We need not ask whether the feeling in these war-songs becomes personal enough to satisfy the modern critic. The war-poet, like the saga-man whose kinsman he is, thinks of his whole tribe and kin, and the fighting-men

on whose hopes and fears, centred in his own, he relies. But when thought grows poignant, it does not greatly matter whether it be the feeling of one or of a hundred that is engaged ; being uttered, the thought grows lyrical.

Another passage, not of that strain, will help us to understand the reality of the experiences wrought into these old poems. "All is hardship in the earthen kingdom," says the poet ; "and on wend the fateful words in the world that is under heaven's "—

> " Here be wealth gone, here be friend gone,
> here be man gone, here be woman gone,
> all this earth's standing—empty become now."

The last three lines are of that unmistakable lyric quality which tells of emotion wrought into its essential outcry : man calling against fate ; Rachel crying for her children, and refusing to be comforted. The sincerity, the reality, the intensification of all human experience, cast into a single personal lament, that are found in it, lie very near the heart of the lyric impulse. It is in the nature of such an expression to make us reflect that the poet capable of such lines, while bound by so strict a mode, must have consciously used his musical iteration and cadence in so writing.

When we come to Caedmon, a poet of Northumbria, who belongs to the latter part of the seventh century, we get a single delightful glimpse of the harp-custom. The story of how he came to sing it is so familiar that it need hardly be re-quoted. But the Song of the Beginnings, that is usually associated with the episode, is too good an instance to be omitted—

> " Now shall we praise + heaven-regions ward
> The maker's might + and his mind's thought,
> Works of the glorious Father + how in wonder's beginning
> The Eternal set fast + and fixed fast,
> First shaped + for the children of men,
> Heaven for a roof + Holy Creator !
> Then Middle earth + mankind's ward,
> The Eternal + thereafter built,
> And for men, fields too + the Lord Almighty."

The primitive Anglo-Saxon feeling for the struggle with the elements, and the carving out of a dwelling-place for man-roof, ward, middle-earth and floor, is here maintained; but there is a new religious surcharge upon it. The war-song is giving way, and the mythical imagination which went into nature, and made a Grendel out of a sea-cave and a half-drown'd man's terrors, and a visible monster out of a deadly storm, was to be tamed by a new Divine Idea. How powerfully this Idea was to take hold of English poetry, and how radically both the Hebrew genius and the Christian faith were to affect the English poets, we first begin to realise as we turn the pages attributed to Caedmon. We hear the two accents, old and new, blended in the outcry of Caedmon's Satan from the abyss; and the note so produced, with savage and Christian echoes in it, was to be re-echoed long afterwards by the anonymous poets of the mystery-plays played in the northern circuit at York, Beverley, and elsewhere, who sustained a Saxon folk-spirit in the Normanised church—

'That is to me of sorrows the greatest,[1]
that Adam
Who of earth was wrought
shall my strong
Seat possess
and be his delight
while we endure this torment—
Misery in hell.
Oh, if I had the power of my hands!

Then with this Host I . . .
but around me lie
iron bonds;
presseth this chain-cord;
I am powerless!

---

[1] "That me is sorga maest
That Adam sceal
That waes of eorthen geworht
Minne stronglican
Stol behealdan
Weran him on wynne
& we this wite tholien
Hearm on thisse helle
Wa la ahte ic minna handa geweald."

The clasps of hell
Have me so hard
So firmly grasped!
Here is a vast fire
above and underneath;
Never did I see
loathlier landscape,
With flame unassuaged,
hot over Hell "

Unlike in this to Celtic poetry, we see how stubbornly unstanzaic Anglo-Saxon verse was. It kept an uninterrupted strong current, without any but line-pauses. The two notable exceptions are *Deor*, dated seventy years later than *Widsith*, and a *Song of Earth*. In *Deor* we come upon distinctly patterned lyric, with a refrain, possibly the first heard in Anglo-Saxon poetry:

"Weland for a woman+knew too well exile!
Strong of soul that earl+sorrow sharp he bore.
For his mates he had+care and heavy longing
Winter-freezing misery+woe over and again
After that Nithhad+in a Need had laid him
Staggering sinew-wounds+sorrow smitten man
*That he overwent: this also may I.*"

The *Song of Earth* is one to which Cynewulf himself might have listened:

"Erce, Erce, Erce+Mother of Earth
May the All-wielder+ever: Lord grant thee
Acres a waxing+upward or growing
Pregnant and+plenteously strong
Hosts of (grain) shafts+and glittering stalks
Broad barley+blossoms
White wheat+ears waxing
Of whole earth+the harvest
Guard the grain+against all ills
Sown over soil+by the sorcerers
Nor let wise woman change it+nor crafty man."

You note that in the old spell-verse the refrain also appeared—

"Out little spear+if herein thou be."

Save for such amenities, the movement of the lyric is unchanged; and we shall hear it, still unchanged, in Cynewulf. This means that it lasted on, from the Saxon to the Norman invasion, a stretch of some five hundred years, which points to a very stubborn backbone in race and language.

What gave its character to this Northern art of verse, that kept its mode for so long unaltered? The fragments and passages quoted have showed us its tough rhythmical fibre. In plain terms, it is unstanzaic, unrhymed verse, with a break mid-way—sometimes printed with its two halves treated as a couplet. So far as it has a tune, it is of the sing-song kind; or, it may be likened to a plain march-step: right—left; right—left. The counting is, One, two; three, four; and though there is no true rhyme, there is insistent alliteration. Its methods may be understood at a glance by taking up again the passage already quoted from a typical page of *Beowulf*—

> " Wado weallende, + wedera cealdost,
> nithende niht + and northan wind."

Here in the first line " wedera," and in the second " northan," are the words which give the verse its dominant. If you prefer to make each line into a couplet, as Thorpe did in his *Beowulf*, you discover, after reading a few pages, that what seemed almost too monotonous has at the end of each couplet (or dual verse) just so much of a pause, followed by a quicker beat, as gives it an effect of narrative fluency. But you have in it nothing akin to the melodic group to be found in some kinds of epic where the movement is intended to be regulated by pauses and accelerations. To take a more violent image, there is nothing in it, no periodic movement, like the huge waltz-rhythm lurking in the orchestral torrent of Strauss's *Elektra*. As for the slight variations allowed in the initial assonances, we need not analyse them in detail. But it ought to be noted, they were not confined to a single assonance in every binary or couplet. They might have alternate echoes, as in the line—

> " ac ic *me* be *h*ealfe + *m*inum *h*laforde,

where " me " is echoed by " minum " and " healfe " by " hlaforde." Or the run-on letter might be buried, as in the *Battle of Maldon*—

> " Nu eow is gerymed + gath ricene to us
> (Now for you is room made + come quickly to us),"

where " gath " echoes " ge-," and " ricene " " rymed." Again, the alliteration not only ruled its consonants; a vowel echo would do, and *e* could echo *i*, and *a* could echo *æ*.

In the old manuscripts, *Beowulf* and its kindred poems are written as prose; but there can be no mistaking the verse-lineage and its stresses. In the northern economy of verse, we recognise that words counted by weight, not by scale. The Scôp weighed his words, and used them vehemently (as Scherer suggests), but did not lengthen out his syllables, as we do. So when we try to fit the harp to the verse of Caedmon, we seem at best to distinguish a rude plucking of the strings for emphasis at the dominant words. Indeed, the modern reader, unused to old English, is often forcibly reminded by this verse, despite Scherer's and other prosodists' comments and elucidations, of the twenty-eighth riddle in the Exeter book—

> " My head is + with a hammer beaten;
> With war-darts wounded + rubbed with a rasp."

But in fact there is an organic consistency in this northern verse; the sense and the sound alike tend to throw the accent on the same word or syllable of the line. This gave to it strength and directness, at least, if not the pliancy it obtained afterwards from its commerce with the Latin and Celtic tongues.

With Caedmon pointing the way, we approach the long gap where Saxon English ends and island English uncertainly begins, and cannot neglect the landmark given us by his biographer, the Venerable Bede of Jarrow. Bede's own work was chiefly in Latin; but he translated John's Gospel into English, and powerfully reinforced the literary inspiration that sprang in the early Church. He wrote indeed with an exalted intelligence, and he had the faculty of endowing with life the words he used. He was one of those constructive men who decide the accents of a literature to come, as may be told by his influence over Alfred.

People read him now only in his greater work, considered as literature, his *Ecclesiastical History*. But here he asks

space for his little-known tract, *De Arte Metrica*, first of its kind that we possess, written in this country. In it, treating of Latin verse, he quotes Vergil and the Latin poets freely; and when he sums up at the end the three categories of poetry, he is drawing on Plato's *Republic* for his definitions. When he states his general ideas of metre and rhythm, he is largely summarising those of other prosodists; but he does it with a difference. Rhythm he regards curiously as a kind of irregular movement of verse, which he says is not metrical, but aurally tested by the number of syllables—"*numero syllabarum ad judicium aurium examinata.*" He further defines metre as order with modulation, that is, dependent on a regular system of time-beats; while rhythm is modulation without any such order. Yet it may chance that we find in rhythm a system at work, however unconsciously applied. Whether in this passage and others he is thinking also of Anglo-Saxon verse is doubtful. When he speaks of the "*carmina vulgarium poetarum,*" he has in mind only the more popular writers like Aldhelm, who were already beginning to write songs in freer rhythm for the unlearned, and who, it is clear, engaged his sympathies. But remembering Bede's influence over those who followed him, we may, without stretching the area, trace something of the mediæval interaction of Latin upon English verse to this first tract on metrics.

The Church in this country felt the Latin Church's influence long before the Normans came and equipped her anew. There was in the early Middle Ages what we may almost describe as a kind of ecclesiastical republic administered from Rome, which counted Celtic Britain and the Saxon churches among her outlying provinces, very much as the Roman military power had before held sway. The commerce between these churches was much more intimate than we have usually accounted it. The Irish monks went everywhere as missionaries, the most fearless spiritual knights the world has known; and wherever they went they carried their art of song, and an incorrigible love of rhyme: they taught it in Iceland, in Italy, in the South of France. From the early Middle Ages,

almost from the first settlements, there was an almost constant exchange going on in liturgical art, especially music. M. Pierre Aubry, in his *Musicologie Médiévale*, tells us how soon the development of music began. The age of St Gregory at the close of the sixth century is marked by tradition, he says, as "the glorious epoch of the liturgical chant." Those were early days, and in succeeding centuries the musical tradition of the Church did not sleep, and it was soon felt in English verse. The lyric art, it is hardly too much to say, was in English kept alive for nearly three centuries by the hymns of the monks and lay-brothers.

The Latin "proses" or church hymns treated by the musicologists serve to bring us to the use of rhyme, and its first appearance in English. The custom of the poets, and the temper of Anglo-Saxon poetry, rather incline us to rank the tongue as one not naturally inclined to melody or disposed to rhyme; and, as a matter of fact, rhyme only appears as a chance guest in Anglo-Saxon. The famous exception is the Rhyme Poem—the fifteenth in the *Exeter Book*, and there Icelandic influences are at work. Whether it was the Irish settlers who taught the use of rhyme to the Icelanders or not, it is inconceivable that the Celtic and Saxon monks could consort together, as they did, in these islands without the modes of the one reacting upon those of the other. From the first contact of the races, Dane, Saxon, Welsh, and Irish writers undoubtedly borrowed from one another; and the religious houses encouraged the use of any device of learning or of song that could trick the ear of the native folk.

The visit of Adamnam, the monk of Iona who wrote St Columba's life, to Bede at Jarrow proves how actual that intercourse was. Adamnam showed an open mind, agreeing with Bede on a delicate point (that of the Celtic tonsure), and aiding thereby the monks of Jarrow and Iona to work together. The Rev. George Cormack has pointed out that Adamnam's style owes something of its peculiarity (it is not nearly so clear as Bede's) to the fact that he thought in Gaelic and wrote in Latin; and his life of Columba may profitably

be compared with Bede's St Cuthbert. The passage in cap. xxxvii. about Columba's chanting the Psalms and silencing the Magi or Druids, leaves us wondering about the primitive church-music, in Iona or Jarrow, which fostered the first hymns.

One needs to remember in passing down Tyneside to-day, and listening to the Northumbrian speech amid the grime of Bede's Jarrow, that the dialect still holds words and idioms preserved from his time. In Bede we realise Latin and Anglo-Saxon interacting, and with him, Alcuin at York, in whom Latin waxed yet stronger—Alcuin, who became Charlemagne's minister of education in 781—and Aldhelm at Malmesbury, hand on the tradition. Alcuin marks the international culture of the time; Aldhelm is an English forerunner in the direct road. Alcuin's lines on Winter and Spring have accents of Northumbria lingering in them. Through Aldhelm we get at that connection between the Church and the songs of the common folk which did much to strengthen the stock on which the new poetry was to be grafted.

It is good to know from William of Malmesbury that the people there in Aldhelm's day were much of the same temper as ourselves. They liked to slip away when mass was over and take the sermon for granted. Thereat Aldhelm showed how shrewd he was; he worked with the one unfailing charm. As they went, he stood on the bridge, and sang songs that made them draw around him to listen. In the intervals he pressed words of counsel upon them, using much the same kind of suasion—hymn and brief homily—perpetuated in the streets and common resorts to-day by those folk-salvers and lay-preachers, the soldiers of General Booth's army.

Aldhelm wrote curious Latin at times with a verse-usage that recalls Bede's account of free rhythmical forms. In fact, he experimented in verse, both Latin and English. The opening of his version of Psalm cxxxvii. will tell how he used the alliterative line—

> "Ofer Babilone brâdum streâme thoer we sittad and sâre wepad, thonne we Sion gemunan swide georne."

He too, like Bede, wrote on prosody. "He intercalated," says Ten Brink, "his collection of enigmas in a prose epistle to King Aldferth of Northumbria, which is essentially a dialogue on the hexameter and the different kind of metrical feet."

With Bede, and with Jarrow as an abode of learning, to maintain the true tradition, we still attach the main stem of literature to the North.

Aldhelm and his letter to Aldferth remind us that the shifting of the centre to Wessex has already begun. We must turn the pages of the *Exeter Book* and conjure up the name of Alfred as a foster-father of poetry, to appreciate what the change meant.

## CHAPTER III

### WESSEX—THE POETS OF THE "EXETER BOOK"—AND THEIR SUCCESSORS

BOTH for its own sake and its office in illustrating the change of venue from the North to Wessex, the *Exeter Book* is remarkable in the calendar. It is the first genuine anthology of English poetry, and its lyric pages are among the most beautiful it contains. Many of them tell unmistakeably of the growing Latin influence; as we see in the *Phœnix*, a paraphrase of the *Carmen de Phœnice* ascribed to Lactantius—under whose Anglo-Saxon text runs the Latin script:

> "Est locus in primo felix oriente remotus
> Qua patet æterni janua celsa poli," etc.

It is a poem near akin to the *Voyage of Bran*; for, needless to say, it is not in Celtic literature alone that we hear of Paradise and the Isles of Youth. In a later page occurs what Thorpe calls the Scald's or Scôp's Tale, a Saxon "variant" of the Welsh transmigration song of Taliesin. The Scôp says—

> "Therefore can I sing + and tell a tale;
> relate before many + in the mead-hall
> how to me the noble folk + were wondrous kind—
> . . . . . .
> I was with the Huns + and the Hreth Goths
> with the Greeks I was and the Finns + and with Cæsar."

Compare it with the Welsh poem, where the transcendent phantasy fairly takes wing.

> "I was with my Lord in the highest sphere,
> On the fall of Lucifer into the depth of hell
> I have borne a banner before Alexander:
> I know the names of the stars from north to south;
> I have been in the galaxy at the throne of the Distributor:
> I was in Canaan when Absalom was slain;
> I conveyed the Divine Spirit to the level vale of Hebron;
> I was in the court of Don before the birth of Gwdion."

The *Exeter Book* represents Wessex versions, for the greater part, of Northumbrian poems, including the Caedmon *Genesis* and *Exodus, Widsith, The Seafarer* and the Rhyming Poem so called, *The Panther* and certain Gnomic verses, and holds many of the secrets of early English verse, including that of the lyric provenance, locked up in its manuscript.

The opening set of poems represents the work of Caedmon's true follower, the poet who has gradually been individualised for us under the name of Cynewulf ; who had a note of ecstasy not unlike Caedmon's, with more radiance, and distinct melody in his verse. Two or three passages from his *Christ* cycle will make good the succession, and relate him both to Cædmon before and Layamon after him. In addition to this group, four lives of the Saints were either written by him or by another poet working under him. In the last of the four, *Juliana,* as Mr Saintsbury points out, that name is used with a conscious melodic insistence, so as almost to sound like a refrain. But to return to the *Christ* poem—

> " . . . that other, which erst I ascended
> With my own will, whenas thy misery
> rued me so much at heart, when I drew thee from hell."

Compare it with the lovely invocation to Earandel, the Winter Star (probably our " Orion "), which sounds like a Hymn to Happiness—

> " Hail Earandel ! brightest of the angels, that upon middle-earth is sent to men : and with soothfast sunlight beams over other stars. Thou thyself the tides of time with thy bright seeming enlightenest."

This poem, the second in the *Exeter Book,* still bears in its lines the ring of the old northern song, but with a distinct increase of melody ; and in Cynewulf's vision of Paradise, the " Heofonrice," or Heavenly Kingdom, the new note of ecstasy is heard triumphantly—

> " There is angels' song, endless bliss :
> There is seen their dear Saviour,—
> He that is to the saved like sun-light
> There is beloved's love ; life without end
> Hosts of bright-arm'd men ; health without death,
> Crowds of immortal ones ; peace without war-hurt."

Save that there is more variety in Cynewulf's lines and less sound of the hammer, his verse has not fundamentally changed. He is still where Cædmon was so far as prosody goes; it is the letter, not the syllable, reverberating in the line, that defines his music. It says much, then, for his poetic grace that using fixed rhythm he yet often sets melody free. Thus it is that Cynewulf helps to supply the place of any recognised lyric writer in the century before Alfred's reign.

For the growth of lyric feeling, still expressed in the old poem, read the *Phœnix*—

> " It useth its song-craft wonderfully
> With voice clearer than ever child of man
> Heard under Heaven since the High King,
> Creator of glory, founded the world,
> Heaven and earth. The sound of its voice,
> Sweeter and fairer than any song-craft,
> Winsomer far than any song whatever—
> Trumpets nor horns may outgo that sound,
> Nor the harp's tune, nor hailing of men,
> Nor any on earth; nor organ's tone,
> Nor melodious song, nor wing of the swan,
> Nor any sound the Lord hath created
> For delight to men in this sad world.
> So it warbles and sings, eager and blest,
> Till in the south heaven the sun is sunk
> Then it is silent. . . .
> It listens there; it lifts its head,
> Bold, bethinking; and thrice it shakes
> Its plumes for flight. Then it is still."

The change here is marked from poems like the *Wanderer*, which is in the elegiac regretful strain—the lament of an exile, says Thorpe, for the death of his friend and chieftain. There lines and imagery seem to look backward; all is behind " the beloved wanderer." But in the *Phœnix* the lines are radiant; the ecstasy and desire lead the reader forward. These two elements of past and future, mingled or rather separately expressed in the *Exeter Book*, give it a unique office in the early record. It is the genuine testament of the inherited ideas and the forward thoughts of the race. The wars, the northern invasion of England, the mixing of the tongues and the interaction of races, the crossing of the pagan and Christian

beliefs, all are echoed here; and the two elements into which these things are resolved are those that most affected poetry during the three centuries between Bede and Chaucer. The first gave voice to some heroic songs, that lasted and served to inspirit later poets. But the line between these songs and the later poetry of the love of country and the war to keep it is broken in many places. The religious poetry is, on the other hand, although much threatened here and there, fairly sequent. Even when the thread seems broken, we can secure the connecting strand after a little search. It is through the Church and its religious lyrics that we find we are able, as we advance, to bring the pre-Norman and post-Norman times poetically into touch.

Aldhelm was spoken of as one of the writers who connected the north country with the west, Jarrow-on-Tyne with Malmesbury. He may serve indirectly to connect Exeter too with Canterbury, where Honorius had brought the Roman liturgical music; one would give a good deal to be able to identify some of the *Exeter Book* poems with his name, a task not more difficult than the unearthing of Cynewulf. The coming of the Danes, remorseless destroyers of the island literature, especially in the south, lends a curious interest to the aspirations and the futurist ideas that appear in the *Exeter Book*; the Danish Terror helped to increase both the love of country and the Christian Idea, and even perhaps to account for the disguise thrown over some of the poems that sang of the other region and the Heofenriche.

Of the old survivals, old enough to be even pre-Danish, the most precious, as holding in them the lyric germs of an immemorial folklore, were the spell-poems. In these again you often have a refrain word, such as this which (through his friend Wright) may have given Charles Kingsley a cue for his verse in the *Sands of Dee*—a charm to find cattle—

> Gardmund, god's thegn,
> find those cattle and fetch those cattle
> and have those cattle and hold those cattle
> and bring those cattle home!"

Others have effects that suggest a ballad-opening, as in the Charms for a stitch or a deadly spear-wound.

It was in the songs of Northumbria that the love of the new country by the immigrant stock first sounded clearly, but they were transferred with no loss of accent to Wessex. A fresh impulse may be traced to the years when Alfred appeared in the annals, and when the *Saxon Chronicle* turned attention to their record. The *Chronicle* began to be written in the fourth and fifth year of his reign and at his instance. Eginhard's *Annals of Charlemagne* were in some degree the example; and Charles the Great suggests the rekindling of literature at large, and under Alfred the Great in this country. The Moors in Spain in the years before Charlemagne, and—after him the Norsemen in France—caused movements that affected the world and reacted with power upon literature; but to-day we cannot realise what that changing of the regions abroad meant to literature here, or to a man of Alfred's time.

We think of him in Wessex, figuring him after the pleasant old folk-tale of the King and the Burnt Cakes, a diminishing islander; diminished in the ratio of Europe to the "Isle of Britain," and of Britain to the Isle of Athelney. But under him the avenues were widened which threw the North open to the South, and Anglo-Saxon to the Latin inroad and to new foreign influences. The sign of it lies in verse like that of the interspersed passages in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and that of the pages to which Alfred set his own hand—transcripts from Boethius and others. Indeed, through him and his Wessex redactions of the earlier Northumbrians, their pages grow much more clear and intelligible. In him we have a true foster-father of song, who did the most that any man, prince or poet, can do, first for its safeguarding, and then for its liberation in art when the moment comes. That is, loving poetry, and believing in its intrinsic virtue, he did what he could to give it nurture, and the right atmosphere for its encouragement. Under him the Northumbrian accent, and that sturdy directness of speech that belonged to it, and that still survives, were gradually softened and modulated. But

the new dialect kept the relish of the old speech, while in Wessex, with Alfred's help, the conditions were secured that were to make English what it became—a free amalgam of other tongues, with a salient Saxon base. The King, says Asser, amid all his wars and trammels; ill-health, the fighting, hunting, building and the rest, never failed to read the Saxon books. "Especially he learnt by heart the Saxon poems," and caused others to read them. In an earlier page reference to his version of *Cáedmon's Hymn* was made. But note also Alfred's versions of Bede. The Venerable Bede not only used Latin for his history, as custom was, but wrote (or dictated) in the Saxon of his day. Cuthbert, in the account of Bede's death, says that at the end he turned into English verse a brief homily on man's dread last "neidfaerae," or need-faring to death. But Alfred turned into the old English of Wessex many of the Latin pages of Bede and others, and his versions attain in their prose to a curious sublyrical effect at times, as in the simile, after St John, which is like a song of coeval Light and Fire—

> "Fire begets of itself brightness, and the brightness is as old as the fire. Not is that fire of that brightness, but the brightness is of the fire. That fire begets the brightness, but it beeth never without its brightness. Now seest thou that the brightness is old as the fire of the which it cometh. Agree now, by this, that God might get a Son so old as (coeval with) Himself."

A monument to Alfred's intellectual royalty and his care for his people and his region, the *Saxon Chronicle* has some notable passages of interspersed verse; and some lines of these have become part of what we may call the "Great Lay of Britain," which begun with Beowulf, went on in Layamon, was added to by poets as far apart as Spenser and Tennyson, and is not yet done writing.

> "Then too was driv'n
> Oslac beloved
> an exile far
> from his native land
> over the rolling waves,—

over the gannet's-bath,
over the water-throng,
abode of the whale,—
The fair-hair'd hero,
wise and eloquent,
of home bereft!

Then too was seen,
high in the heavens,
the star on his station,
that far and wide
wise men call—
lovers of truth
and heav'nly lore—
*cometa* by name.
Widely was spread
God's vengeance then
throughout the land, . . .

These lines from the old chronicles make us think of Freeman's words—

"If there is anything truly national in the world, it is the old heroic songs of the English folk. They are indeed our own, from the first words of recorded English which tell how, while the Roman still reigned in York and London, the English traveller had made his way to the Court of the Gothic Eormanric —from the song next in age which tells of the deeds of the Gar-Danes and the Scyldings—down to the songs in which the last voice of English freedom told how Harold clave the shield-wall of Norway by the banks of the Derwent, and how Waltheof smote down the quaking Normans at the gate of York."

Two passages from the *Song of Maldon Field* must suffice here. One is from the close of the poem, a lament for a slain "Ealdor," where the elegiac strain is merged in the lyrical—

"Her lith ure ealdor+eall forheawen
God on greote+a maeg gnornian. . . .

"Here lieth our leader, all forhewen,
good-man on ground; and may that man rue
who from the war-play weeneth to wend there.
Old of my years now+hence, will I not,
but here by the side+of my lord and master,
by the well-loved man+lie too henceforward."

And the other, the battle-call of Brighthelm's son—

" Ongan ceallian tha + ofer cald water . . ."

" There he began calling + over cold water
Brighthelm's bairn ; + that men could hear him,
'Now for you is room made + come quickly to us
War-man to battle.' + God alone wots
Who there on the warfield + will with might wield him."

Alfred died at the opening of the century, the tenth, to which the Maldon song belongs. Brunanburgh falls between them. Two further pieces are required here to carry on the tradition, to the time when the Eddic Lays were heard in the remoter north, and the first " Chansons de Geste " were being written in the South : both of them influences of much sway in English and Celtic poetry. One is the *Song of Cnut* : only four lines, but very memorable at that—

" Merie sungen the muneches binnen Ely,
That Cnut Ching rew thereby :
Roweth cnihtes naer the land,
And here we thes muneches saeng."

" Merrily sung the monks within Ely,
When Cnut King rowed thereby ;
Row knights near the land,
And hear we those monks' song.

The other forms a memorable, sombre close to the score, with the lightest possible foreshadowing in it of the metrical inflections to come. This is in the remarkable short poem known as *The Grave*.[1]

" For thee was a house built
Ere thou wast born ;
For thee was a mould meant
Ere thou of mother camest.

But it is not made ready
Nor its depth measured,
Nor is it seen
How long it shall be.

. . . . .

Doorless is that house
And dark it is within,
There thou art fast held ;
Death hath the key."

[1] Englished by Longfellow in the *Poets and Poetry of Europe*.

There is in this song of the grave a note heard unmistakeably in the old English verse; based upon the instinctive thoughts that mortal man derives from his overwhelming sense of the inevitable end. We hear it, attached to consoling piety, in some of the religious verse, and in devotional writers like Richard Rolle and William of Shoreham, but rarely enough at any time in all the long chronicle. Still, remembering, as we must in reading *The Grave*, the northern survivals in the old poetry, we may recall that not so long before it was written, a Norse poem, *Voluspa*, was being written in England: and we are left conjecturing when we hear of a Norseman who called a squirrel by an English name "Ratatoskr"—rat-tusk—and of old folk who still invoked "the Sons of Muspell"—the beings who are to waste the world with fire, how far the traditions of the Eddic poems influenced Englishmen on the eve of Hastings.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NEW POETRY

So far we have had the promise of an art, rather than the art itself; lyric fragments broken from the early saga-like verse and lines full of the Scôp's energy, but not a single complete lyric, not one, that is, in which the fluid element has gained for itself a fit and transparent vessel so devised as to enhance its ideal content. Now we are to observe, under difficulties, what is one of the most interesting processes in all the chemistry of literature—the forming of a new poetry, along with the growth of a new language. As a crystal takes up a drop of liquid, and so frames it that it becomes the tenement of an atom, perfect in light and clear colour, so it is with the precipitation of a lyric. But it is not easy to discover how the rhythmic impetus of the idea that informs and combines the fluid words is obtained. It is mysterious as the fragrance that follows the "Voice" (in the Panther poem of the *Exeter Book*):

> "After the voice + an odour comes
> from the plain + a perfumed steam
> more sweet and strong + than every smell
> blooms of plants + and forest leaves."

To explain the growth of the English lyric in the interval between the two poetries, the poetry of Cynewulf and the poetry of Chaucer, with all their differences, artistic and metrical, we ought first to look to the literary influences that affected the men who wrote the earliest instances we have of separate lyric with a regard for form and some feeling for melody. As we come upon their remains, we almost feel as boatmen do who, descending the Wye from Monmouth, see the walls of Tintern Abbey.

Near to Layamon we perceive a ruined choir of men who were " poets without a name," religious poets who were in the tradition, using the music of the Church, and the ritual and imagery of the Church, to give their verse support. They contrived to maintain something of the old folk-spirit too; and were in a sense communal in their art, their form of song being a hymn—that is, a congregational and not merely an individual pious utterance.

The late Ferdinand Brunetière taught his students to try in the end all lyric art by the test of individual emotion; doubtless a useful test for resolving the foreign or doubtful ingredients in such verse. But it is not only individual emotion that counts. One need not cite the emotion that the late Professor W. K. Clifford called " cosmic," but it is plain enough that the emotion of a body of people, like the worshippers in a church, may be lyrical, yet common to many. The indispensable thing is that the emotion should rise to the point where it becomes ecstatic and fluid. Religious verse has its own chronicle in this series, and there is no need to tell here in detail the hymn-modes that have reacted on English poetry. But some account of the mediæval religious lyric is required to fill the interval between Alfred and the Norman English. We have had one example from Aldhelm of a psalm in its earliest English setting, and now we reach a time when the rhythm has undergone its thirteenth-century change and the Latin influence is dominant.

" I seiz a Clerk a book forth bringe
That prikked was in mony a plas;
ffaste he sorizte what he scholde synge
And al was *Deo Gracias*.

Alle the queristres in that qwer,
On that word fast gon thei cri.
The noyse was good, and I drou neer
And called a prest ful priueli."

When the Normans settled here, and began to build churches they called up all their liturgical resources. Their music had, with that of France, been gradually developing, and the door had opened for a lay-cleric like Adam de Saint Victor,

presumably a Breton monk, who in his "proses liturgiques" gave to rhymed Latin verse an exquisite singing quality and a new sonority. Take as an example this opening of one of his Marian hymns; a beautiful "Stella Maris." It gives you the chosen form he used, which became a favourite in Church lyric—

"Ave, Virgo singularis,
Mater nostri salutaris
Quæ vocaris Stella Maris
Stella non erratica
Nos in hujus vitæ mari
Non permitte naufragari
Sed pro nobis salutari
Tuo semper supplica."

Adam was a monk in the famous abbey founded by Guillaume de Champeaux; and he wrote "proses" sung there in the choir, with no thought of posthumous fame. He was "the greatest liturgical poet of the middle age," says the one appreciator of his art who has studied it intimately. Certainly his influence on the Latin Church lyric both in France and in England was remarkable.

The Vernon MS.[1] gives us several "Hail Marys," of which this *Orison to Our Lady*, illustrating the English and Latin modes in close contact, is a good example—

"Heil beo thou, Marie
Mylde qwen of hevene
Blessed is thi Nome:
And good hit is to nemene.
To the I make my mone
I prey the, here my stevene
And let me nevere dye
In non of the synnes sevene.

Lady ful of grace
Joyful was thi chere
Whon Jhesu Crist from deth upros
That was the lef and dere.
Marie, for the love of him
That lay thyn herte so nere,
Bring us out of synne and serwe
While that we aren here.

[1] Part I., *E. E. T. S.*, 1892.

Ladi seinte Marie
Corteis, feir and swete
ffor love of the teres
That for thi sone thou lete
Whon thou seye him hongen
Nayled honden and fete
Thou sende me grace in eorthe
Mi sinnes forte bete.

Ladi, for the joye
That thou thi-self were inne
Whon thou seye Jhesu crist
Fflour of al monkinne
Steih in to his riche
Ther Joye shall never blynne,
Of Bale thou beo my bote
And bring me out of synne."

Some of these lines appear to be transferred with small change from the Latin; and we detect in it, what is to be often felt in the religious lyrics of the twelfth and thirteenth century, the music pulling hard upon the metre. To Latin influence and the Church music, English verse owed its quickening pulse; and the slower Saxon beat was gradually, but not absolutely, discounted in prosody. The conversion, so to term it, is to be seen actually at work in some of the religious lyrics to be found in the Vernon MS., Part I.[1] For example, in a stanza (the third) of a *Preyer at the Levacioun*—

" Heil god, blest the be
Heil Blosme vppon tre,
Heried beo thi sonde!
Heil fruit, heil flour;
Heil be thou, Saueour
Of watur and of londe!"

The Latin resonance is here. Not so clearly in No. IX. of the same cycle: *The Fyve Joyes of O'r Ladi*—

" Haue Joye, Marie, Modur and Maide,
As the Angel Gabriel'(s) Message to the saide."

In the same manuscript, you have hymns like *Stella Maris*, with an English version appended—

[1] *E. E. T. S.*, 1892.

" *Ave Maris Stella, Dei Mater Alma,*
*Atque semper virgo, felix celi porta.*

" Heil, sterre of the Sée so briht !
Thou graunt vs to ben vr gyde,
Godes holi Moder riht."

In these instances you can distinguish the Saxon mode interacting with the Latin. Both alliteration and rhyme are used ; and the stanza is clearly an adapted Latin form, that liturgical verse used in our hymnals, with some change in the number of lines and alternation of rhymes, from the tenth century to the present time. Turn to No. XII. in the same delightful collection for another variant of the form—

AN ORISON TO O'R LADY.

" Ledi seinte Marie : gif thi wille ware,
As thou art ful of Ioye : And I am ful of care,
Schild me from synne and schome : that I falle no mare
And send me hosul and schrift : Ar I hethene fare."

Here the Saxon mode and the Latin appear to be striving for the metre ; and in the Sawley Monk's version of Grosseteste's *Castle of Love* the colloquial idiom based on the Saxon and the cleric's voice sound side by side—

" Ay, sais Seint Austyn sothfastly
Man suld forsake resonably
All the welthes of this warld evermore and aye
Ffor to haue the joye of heuen only a day."

Looking back on the gap between Alfred and William of Normandy, and taking up the threads that lie loose or broken, you perceive, having come so far, that there is more continuity in language, poetry, and literary usage, than the historians have commonly allowed. The Latin irruption through the church door did not wholly drive away the old Saxon verse idiom. The Norman-French did not break the stubborn fibre of the old tongue. But both helped to supple it, and make it more pliant, more responsive to the lyric note. The break in the tradition is not so absolute as we usually take for granted.

There is an unmistakeable relationship between lines like this in the *Exeter Book*—

"Thaer is leofra luf—lif butan ended eadhe,"

and a stanza like—

"Lutel wot hit anymon,
hon derne love may stonde;
Bote hit were a fie wymmon,
that muche of love had fonde.
The love of hire ne lesteth on wyht longe,
Heo haveth me plyht, ant wyteth me wyth wronge.
*Ever ant oo, for my leof icham in grete thohte,*
*Y thenche on hire that y ne seo nout ofte.*"

No doubt there are symptomatic changes to be observed in it. Rhyme has come in, and the rhythm has grown freer, instead of harder, with the deciding of the metrical beat. Chiefly from the Latin hymns, and partly from Celtic prosody, the verse has gained in plasticity, but the Saxon backbone is still there.

To trace the development of the old rhythm into the modulated verse-forms would require that one should almost write a history of the *cesura*. We know how decisive in various languages was the use in poetry of the line break or pause. In Arab poetry, the line or *beit* (which means a tent's-space) is divided into halves—two hemistichs of equal length, with two, three or four feet of two, three or four syllables, and the break is a vital part of the rhythm. In French verse, the fixity of the *cesura* in the Alexandrine was, we know, for long a fundamental point in prosody. Even Ronsard, daring verseman as he was, never thought of interfering with the *cesura* as he found it. The feat of moving it on a space was left to his successor Regnier. However, to speak of these things is to walk on egg-shells. M. de Souza declares that Ronsard might have—had he studied more closely the old poetic cycles—found a less rigid Alexandrine, of more various rhythm than that he accepted as inevitable, with its *fixation absolue* of the *cesura* (at the sixth syllable). If, then, the original French duodecasyllable was, as is said, based on the rhythmic Latin verse of the Middle Ages, and Latin

hardened its *cesura*; how was it that Latin helped to relax the long rhythm of the English tradition? Possibly it was aided by the Celtic leaven; moreover, Latin has this curious property, that it can become, according to the medium and to the language it is affecting, either fixative or solvent as the assimilating verse may require.

Poetry in this country, we must repeat, felt the Latin influence long before the Normans came and equipped her anew. There was in the earlier centuries what we may almost describe as a primitive republic of letters, which counted Latin, Celtic, and Saxon folk in her outlying provinces. The commerce maintained through the churches and religious houses ranged wide, from Iceland to Italy and the South of France. From the Dark Ages, indeed from our first settlements, there was a gradual diffusion of church hymns, verse and music, in the various countries. As M. Pierre Aubry tells us, the language of words and the other language of sounds have had in the Church the same history. In succeeding centuries the care of the Church for its devotional art went on growing. We perceive its effect in an old prayer-book like the Book of Cerne with its invocation of the Seven Archangels.

"In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti:
Gabriel esto mihi lurica
Michahel esto mihi baltheus
Raphahel esto mihi scutum
Urihel esto mihi protector
Rumihel esto mihi defensor
Plannichel esto mihi sanitas.
Et omnes Sancti ac martyres deprecor."

Again, the record of Jocelind of Brakelond (who inspired Carlyle to write *Past and Present*), supplies us with an intervening piece of evidence to carry on the tradition into the twelfth century:—

". . . and there was put upon the coffin, near to the angel, a certain silken satchel, wherein was deposited a schedule in English containing certain salutations of Ailwin the monk (as 'tis believed), which schedule was first found close by the golden angel when the coffin was uncovered."

We have seen how the invasion of 1066 affected the religious culture, and gave Latin as the ecclesiastical common tongue new power; and the Normans brought into English the cult of the *amour courtois* which was also for long to have paramount effect on the treatment and matter of lyric verse. The *lai*, written in England by Marie de France, reacted less noticeably on the literary mode, as opposed to the popular expression in verse. But the Latin influence, through the church lyric and the liturgy, still continued, while the Norman-French poesy, and under its charge the southern Provençal art, were taking hold in England; and still the root of the ancient tongue was too stubborn for its idioms to be entirely got rid of.

"Thus,"—says Robert of Gloucester, whose Chronicle bears in itself plain evidence of the mixing of the tongues, French and English—

" Thus come lo! Engelonde with Normanes honde
And the Normans ne couthe speke tho' bote her own speche
And speke French as dude atom and her children dude also teche.
So that hey men of thys lond that of her blod come
Holdeth alle thulke spech that hir of hem nome.
Vor bote a man couthe Frenche, men tolth of hym well lute
As how men holdeth to Englyss and to her kund speche yute
Ich wene ther be ne man in world contreyes none
That ne I holdeth to her kund speche, but Englond one
Ac wel me wot vor be conne bothe well yt ys
Vor the more that a man con the more worth to ys." [1]

If the effect of the French *lai* on the English lyric was at most an oblique one, the writings of Layamon, who followed Geoffrey of Monmouth, pointed to an influence of romance, which bears

[1] Thus lo! England came into the hand of the Normans: and the Normans could not speak then but their own speech, and spoke French as they did at home, and their children did also teach: so that high men of this land, that of their blood come, keep all the same speech that they took of them. For unless a man know French, men talk with him but little, and low men hold to English and to their native speech (*i.e.* of their kin or kind), yet I ween there be no people in any country of the world that do not hold to their native speech but in England alone. But well I wot it is well for to know both; for the more a man knows the more worth he is."

closely upon Robert of Gloucester's argument; and if we do not realise the mixture of the peoples, and the tongues and dispositions of those peoples, in the making of the English lyric, as we can in romance, it is because the verse-forms and idioms that give effect to a song are harder to trace than the fashions of narrative. But composite as English is, its lyric was bound to be composite too; and it was gathering, just as British romance was gathering, its ingredients from all corners of the known globe, during this Norman disruption and reconstitution. Yet the tough Saxon fibre remained in the one, as it did not remain in the other: remained to give it something of that occasional stiffness of English poetry, which is apt to affect her verse-writers when they are not inspired, or wittily endued with some substitute for inspiration; and at the same time to give it that grip on the earth, which we found first in *Widsith* and Cædmon.

## CHAPTER V

### THE HARLEIAN ANTHOLOGY—THE NORMAN ADVENERS—THE "CUCKOO" SONG

ROBERT OF GLOUCESTER brought us to the eve of the fourteenth century, in which English poetry found its true measure. After him we come upon a group of songs that sound like the awakening of spring and keep their impulsive notes while achieving for the first time an artistic use of melody. They occur in another of the early Anthologies (the first was the *Exeter Book*), one of the Harleian treasures lodged at the British Museum. There occurs Alison—

"Bytuene Mershe ant Averil
When spray beginneth to sprynge
The lutel foul hath hire wyl
On hyre lud to synge;
Ich libbe in love-longinge
For semlokest of all thynge
He may me blisse bringe;
Icham in hire baundoun.
An hendy hap ichabbe y-hent,
Ichot from hevene it is me sent,
From alle wymmen mi love is lent
Ant lyht on Alysoun."

There must always seem to be something of miracle about a lyric that moves to its tune and bends to a lover's mood so naturally as this. The wonder is the greater here, because the song was written when Norman-French was threatening to break for a time the native idiom and turn for melody. Indeed, if we get rid of our later knowledge of all that the Gallic strain did for English, and put ourselves back into the twelfth century, or to any time after the Normans had brought in that strain while the struggle between the tongues was going on, we should find ourselves considering, probably,

that English verse appeared to be in peril. Another song, *Blow, northern wind!* forms a new achievement and proves the lyric sure of its future. Its opening is well known—

" Blow, northern wind,
Send thou me my sweeting:
Blow, northern wind:
Blow, blow, blow.

" I shot a bird in bower bright
That sully seemly is on sight,
Menskful maiden of might
Fair and free to fond.
In all this wurnliche won,
A bird of blood and of bone
Never yet I knew none
Lissomer in lond
A better burd never was.

She is dear worth by day
Gracious, stout and gay,
Gentle, jolly as the jay;
Workliche when she waketh:
Maiden, merriest of mouth
By east, by west, by north, by south,
That is not fickle nor trouth
That such mirths maketh.

She is coral of goodness
She is ruby of rich fulness,
She is crystal of clearness,
And banner of bealtie
She is lily of largesse
She is parnenke promesse,
She is salsicle of sweetness,
And lady of lealtie."

Now this love-song holds in its verses the lineage of the group to which it belongs. As the Mistral overwhelms the northern wind, so you can trace in it the southern melody overtaking the northern. Some of its lines are modelled after the French; others recall the Latin of the liturgical hymns: the jewelled similes of the stanza last quoted (there are two more in the MS.) are very like those used of the Virgin Mary in some of the " proses liturgiques " abroad, and their kindred church-songs at home.

It would be valuable to trace, if it were possible, the

further process by which the old rhythm was being relaxed and then readjusted in English. The metric sequence, although erratic, is to be traced, sometimes in lyric, sometimes in other verse, from *Deor* right on to the Tudor song; but until the tests in literature are as sure as they are in chemistry we must not look for a scientific prosody. The lightening of the Saxon beat was due, we may agree, to the interaction at this stage of the songs and hymns of the Church: but we need not labour the point on the technical count.

The change of movement may be best detected, at this stage of the conversion, in some of the love-songs written without excess of artifice, yet distinctly touched by the new prosody—

"With longing y am lad
On molde y waxe mad,
A maide marreth me;
Y grede, y grone, un-glad,
For seldom y am sad
that semly forte se;
levedi, thou rewe me,
To routhe thou havest me rad;
Be bote of that y bad
My lyf is long on the.

Lovedy, of alle londe
Les me out of bonde,
brocht icham in wo . . ."

These songs, in which north and south meet, form the melodious spring garland of the early English lyric, and they touch notes that have been sounded again and again since they were written, with every variation of word and thought, impulsive idea and accordant rhythm. But they have lost none of their freshness; they are of the early morning and the New Spring of the race and language; reading them, we anticipate the songs of the Elizabethans, and think of Herrick and *Rosseter's Song-Book.*

Thus English lyric, taking both strength and pliancy, instead of losing ground in the commerce with Norman-French, showed a sensitiveness to new forms and an assimilative faculty, which could hardly have been foretold of it from any tendency in the aboriginal stock. By this grace and adaptability it

was that the poetry grew ; as if there were really something in the old transcendental idea that this country by its island fortune could receive contrary airs from all lands, yet harmonise them to form its own atmosphere. As we watch the change, and hear the French and Provençal melody accorded to the English note, the wonder lies in the art by which the southern song recreated the northern without destroying its fibre ; for the Norman adveners, who formed the court and its circle, were quite ready to use an English purge at need—

> " William Bastard was above and
> Harald bineothe was "

(as an early life of St Wulfstan has it).

There seemed every reason for a time to think the two languages, as well as the kings, would be violently readjusted, and that English would go beneath. And in fact it had to submit to discipline. Norman-French became the tongue of the great, of the lords and conquerors. School-children in some districts were not allowed to learn to read the mother-tongue ; Norman became the vehicle for polite society. Even the scribes began to change the Saxon script for Norman. Holcot, a Dominican, said that in the reign of Edward III. there was no teaching of children in English : they first learned French, and from French, Latin. Robert of Gloucester has been quoted to much the same effect in an earlier chapter, and his namesake of Brunne (Bourne in Lincolnshire), Robert Manning, is another witness, who said in the prologue to his translations of Grosseteste's *Manual de Peche*—

> " For lewed men I undyrtoke
> In Englysche tongue to make this book."

It was a Christian office that he undertook in behalf of t' common folk ; and such instances can easily be multiplied

The common people in the end saved their tongue it took on some new inflections and changed some col this intercourse. " Strange English "—that is, Ne English—became a reproach and a cautionary w time, if we may judge by contemporary allusions

" I made nought for no *diseurs*
Ne for singers nor harpers,
But for the love of simple men
That strange Inglis cannot ken :
For many that hear that strange Inglis
In rhyme wot never what it is :
I made it not for to be praised,
But that the lewed men be eased."

The romances involved a custom of minstrelsy, and the use of the harp as a periodic, or an occasional, aid to recitative, which affected and reacted upon the art of the song. They helped to keep up the lyrical tradition : the same minstrel who recited the story of Yseult was ready to make a love-song of an Elianor, just as in after time a scribe wrote love-letters for illiterate lovers. This accounts for a certain iteration ; and the use of stock-phrases, stock-rhymes, stock-metaphors, which were looked upon as fair currency, very much as the actual words themselves were. Only now and again did a singer appear who had more than a gleeman's or ordinary performer's command of the instrument. Then he reinforced the imagery and dilated the rhythm, and achieved a new-old thing like the song of Bernard de Ventadour, who wrote—

" Quand ieu vey la lauzeta mover
De joi sas alas contral ray " :

" When I see the lark a-moving
For joy his wings against the sun ;
Who forgets himself, and lets himself fall
For the sweet pang that strikes into his heart. . . ."

Bernard it was who followed over to England Elinore of Guienne, afterwards Queen of Henry II. His name for her was Conort. 'n the end Bernard became a monk, and died at the monastery Dalon ; but the monk's habit may hide a lyric poet as we v.

far as the monks were to be counted poets or agents e, they stood to maintain the balance between the orman and the popular Saxon modes : since, whatever they had a desire to make the liturgy of the Church common folk. Hence " Mestre Robert Grosse-

testes' " allegory, the *Castel of Love*, turned to English " for lewde mennes byhove "—

> " Nouther French, ne Latyn ;
> On Englische I chulle tullen him
> Wherefor the world was, I wroht ;
> Thereafter how he was bitauht
> Adam, ure ffader to ben his
> With al the merthe of paradys, . .

Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, himself wrote in English, as well as in Latin and French ; and he held in mind, could we but make him speak, precisely what we most wish to know about the triple usage of this time. He, too, teaches us with a writer's knowledge that in England poetry had to reach the common folk in their own tongue, and not merely to satisfy the fine taste of the courtly people who spoke French. This had a steadying effect ; kept the verse from growing too artificial, and threw it back upon nature and human nature, the return of day and night, and the change of winter and summer. There is a strain in it at times, a note of humour, and the accent of an island folk who make much of their region and countryside, which remind one of that simplest of all patriotic songs sung by Leicester's soldiers in the 1173 campaign—

> " Hoppe Wyllikin, hoppe Wyllikin,
> England is thine and mine ! "

Robert Manning is a witness, as we have heard already, of some service in this transition, and tells us much that throws light on the Norman and English exchanges of the time. In his picture of Bishop Grosseteste he shows how the custom of the harp was kept up by a great prelate of taste. Its value in the lyric record is that of a piece of evidence at first-hand disclosing music and verse in intimate relationship—

> " Y shall you tell as I have herd
> Of the bysshop seynt Roberd,
> His toname is Grosteste
> Of Lyncolne, so seyth the geste.

He lovede moche to here the harpe,
For mans witte yt makyth sharpe.
Next hys chamber, besyde hys study,
Hys harper's chamber was fast the by.
Many tymes, by nightes and dayes,
He hadd solace of notes and layes,
One askede hem the resun why
He hadde delyte in mynstrelsy ?
He answerde hym on thys manere
Why he helde the harpe so dere.
' The virtu of the harp, thurgh skyle and ryght
Wyll destrye the fendys myght ;
And to the cros by gode skeyl
' Ys the harpe lykened weyl—
' Thirefore, gode men, ye shall lere
' When ye any gleman here,
' To worshepe God at your power,
' And Davyd in the sauter.
' Yn harpe and tabour and symphan gle
' Worship God in trumpes and sautre :
' Yn cordes, yn organes, and bells ringying,
' Yn all these worship the hevene kyng,' . . ."

William of Shoreham, almost a direct contemporary of Robert of Bourne, marks the growing use in English of foreign verse forms ; he was a bold experimenter in adapting them to sacred subjects. He took his name from Shoreham, near Otford, and he became Vicar of Chart-Sutton in the early years of the fourteenth century. His song of *The Seven Sacraments* will give an idea of his verse-making and use of the Latin pattern in English material—

" And be a man never so sprind,
Ef he schel livve to elde,
Be him wel siker, ther-to he schel,
And his dethes dette yelde ; to gile
Yet meni yong man weneth longe leue
And leveth wel litle wyle.

Yet many a young man weeneth long to live
And liveth but little while."

two lines suggests the growing use of religious songs
proverbial tag, which we observe in the thirteenth
And we see, too, in his *de Baptismo* the device of
fore the close—

" This be the wordes of cristninge
Bi thyse Englissche costes.
'Ich cristni the in the vader name,
And sone, and holy gostes
And more.'
Amen ! wane hit his ised ther-toe
Confermeth thet ther to fore."

William of Shoreham is a pioneer and an early user of certain forms ; but he is hardly to be called a poet in the inspired sense. We part from him and Robert of Brunne, however, with a distinct feeling of something added to his resources of the tongue and the congenial powers of verse. Lines like the memorable invocation, calling a blessing on " alle por men " in Robert's version of the *Manuel des Pechiez,* " Handlyng Synne," take hold on the ear and show the change in the line-melody then in progress—

" Blessed be alle pore men,
For God almygty loveth hem ;
And wel ye hem that pore are here
They are wyth God bothe lefe and dere
And y shal fonde, by nygt and day,
To be pore, gyf that y may."

It is interesting to observe in the lyric verse henceforward the struggle to maintain the English note, while the foreign fashions are being adopted, the new tunes being learnt. The writers themselves came to have a divided relationship to their audience. In some, the folk-consciousness and the sense of the common folk were strong. They said with Robert de Brunne, " Blessed be alle pore men ! " In others the literary consciousness—the sense of a polite audience, and of fine people who knew the Norman fashion, who were in their way the cosmopolitans of that time—was paramount. It is easy to distinguish the writing of the latter ; not so easy to recognise at once for what it was the verse, with its insouciant folk-song air and its natural grace, of the men who wrote with an ear for folk-rhyme and popular rhythm and yet eagerly adopted all they could get from the foreign minstrelsy. The result was the new-grafted English lyric of this period and the delicious melody of *Lhude sing, cuccu.*

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TRANSITION—THE REFRAIN—FOLK-SONG SURVIVALS

In the *Cuckoo Song* and in some of the Harleian verse, we have seen the lyric gaining symmetry and structural form. It only needed that the tongue itself should be developed a stage further and made reliable. For in poetry, and in lyric poetry especially, while an indestructible innocence of thought is a precious thing, too innocent a speech may cause trouble. If the words are unfixed, changeable of sound and shaky of accent, they are like keys out of tune ; and the player who in this case is the lyrist has no security in his playing. He tries over his melody at a venture, and cannot trust to the keyboard even for a single transposition of his dominant motive or phrase. Hence, as James I. said, of later verses than those before us—" the maist of them keeps na kind na rule of flowing."

Fortunately the Englishmen had the example of French and Latin verse before them, where the instrument was reliable, with a secured prosody ; and we discover them boldly experimenting, trying new effects or further developing old ones, in order to attain the melody of tongues that had already a fixed metric.

Thus anything in the nature of a refrain, or iterative phrase like a monochord, that gave steadiness to a tumbling rhythm and regularised the cadence, was a godsend to these song-writers of the transition ; and music itself was a distinct aid to them. We may say of them—as M. Jeanroy said of the lay-writers in France—when they were in face of two possible ways of shaping their verse, it was music that settled their doubts, " la phrase musicale " that finally guided their choice. Whether that phrase took the shape of a refrain, or a recognised

close to the stave, it had a certain authority in English before the French artists brought it to perfection.

Some of the Spell-verses in Old English, like that of *Garmund's God Thegn*—verses which have survived almost up to our own day in mutilated forms and child-rhymes, show traces of it. And now the antiphonic songs of the Church and the fashion of adding Latin and French tags to English verse gave it new effect, as a natural expedient for heightening the melodic colour. Indeed one has only to pick out some of the most marked refrains of this time to recognise at once their hold on the ear. In the volume of *Songs and Carols*, edited for the Warton Club in 1868, by Thomas Wright, you find three notable instances—

I.—

" Gay, gay, gay, gay,
Think on drydful domis day ! '

II.—still more simple in effect : —

" Now go ! guile, guile, guile ;
Now go, guile, guile, go ! "

and III., this borrowed rose-repetend :—

" Of a rose, a lovely rose,
Of a rose is al myn song."

The " Rose " motive is almost as ancient as love-song itself. Another, of immemorial ancestry, is that of the Earth Song, which in its Mid-English form Richard Rolle set or adapted. It occurs, even in this form, with a hundred and one slight variations. The following is from the *Early English Miscellanies*, which were edited for the Warton Club by J. O. Halliwell, in 1855—

" Earth upon Earth would be a king
How Earth shall to Earth, he thinkest nothing;
When Earth biddeth Earth his rent home bring
Then shall Earth fro' the Earth have a hard parting,
With Care ;
For Earth upon Earth wots never where therefore to fare.

Earth upon Earth wins castles and towers,
Then saith Earth to Earth, all this is ours
When Earth upon Earth has built all his bowers,
Then shall Earth fro' the Earth suffer May's showers,
And smart.
Man, amend thee betime ; thy life is but a start." [1]

We have noticed the Latin repetends, used in much variety through all the collections of transition verse; and Scriptural tags were common too.

In the Lambeth MS. occur these lines—

" *Revertere !* is as myche to say
In englische tunge as, *Turne agen !*
*Turne agen*, man, I thee pray,
And thinke hertili what thou hast ben ;
Of thi livynge bethinke thee ryfe,
In open and in privite,
That thou may come to everlastinge lyfe,
Take to thi mynde, Revertere ! "

In *The Develis Perlament* you find a most impressive use of refrain—another of the poems in the same MS.—with a suggestion of buried assonances—

" Strong god and king of myght
I am lord and king of blis,
Over-comer of deeth, myghti in fight,
*Everlastinge gatis, openeth wight,*
Bothe pees, mercy, trouthe and right,
I brought them at oon and made them to kis ;
*Everlastynge gates, openeth on hight*
And lete in youre king to take out his."

The Latin invocation is used effectively at times with the alliterative line, quickened as it is in rhythm—

" *Surge mea sponsa* ; swete in sigt
And se thi sone thou gave souke so scheene ;
Thou schalt abide with thi babe so brig(h)t
And in my glorie be callide a queene
Thi mammillis, moder, ful weel y meene,
Y had to my meete that y myg(h)t not mys ;
Above alle creaturis, my moder clene,
*Veni, coronaberis.*

[1] Six centuries later these gave Emerson the cue for his poem, which ends—

" When I heard the Earth Song
I was no longer brave :
My avarice cooled
Like Lust in the chill of the grave "

*Veni de libano*, thou loveli in launche,
That lappid me loveli with liking song——"

The last verse reminds us of the *Genesis* and *Exodus* of the *Exeter Book* and sounds, too, like a far-off anticipation of the triple rhythms of another northern poet who learnt from the south—A. C. Swinburne.

The use of the full refrain grew more and more common in the Church songs at this period; as in the song only five staves long into which the whole gospel story is wrought with the refrain, *Redemptoris Mater*—

"As I lay upon a night
My thought was on a berd [1] so bright
That men clepen Marye full of might,
*Redemptoris Mater*."

It is against our whole experience of the common-folk of England, racially at this time three-quarter Saxon, and a quarter Celtic, to believe them songless in the long gap of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They must have gone on repeating charms and songs of their forbears, adapting Welsh and Irish songs, and by the usual incidence of invention making up some odd verses of their own. That in the latter these may have been patched with odd words stolen from the church script, or from the psalter itself, does not affect the contention. The point is, that the people, being human, vocal and fond of music, needed an expression of their own and found it.

Gaston Paris, an authority on the Norman literary invasion of England, said in one of his lectures that during the twelfth century the literature of England was French, and in another page, that it was French for *two* centuries. This is largely, but not wholly, true. Else what would become of Layamon, and Orm, and of trifles like the *Proverbs of Hendyng*.

In the mixing of the tongues, and in the search of the poet who wished to make a song conforming to the new fashion, but in English, for ingredients that should readily assimilate with

[1] burde, maiden.

Norman verse, he was bound to make much of any popular burden he could get, as in the *Proverb*—

> "'God biginning maketh God endyng,'
> Quoth Hendyng."

Rolle of Hampole's *Pricke of Conscience* is a remarkable testimony to the value of the old speech, and the old north-country proverbs and sayings, in the making up of poetry with Latin Texts—and moral arguments to be illustrated—

> "For dred of ded mast pyns wythin
> A man that here es ful of syn!"

> "For dread of death must pinch within
> A man that here is full of sin."

But the refrain, like the stanza, gained upon English lyric by the imported verse-forms too; and they bring us nearer the probable line of its growth. The origin of the repetend probably lies hidden in some early dance-song, or "shanty" of concerted labour, where there was an antiphonic balance to be maintained between men and women or leader and chorus. Then, when verse-craft came it was much too tuneful a device to be thrown aside. Originally, one supposes, it was, as Gaston Paris and others have argued, the women who made up the burden, as it was undoubtedly women who made most of the folk-songs. To this day the refrain bears the sign of that origin. But when the folk-song became the popular song, that is song deliberately devised for the people by an Autolycus, and not created impulsively all hot out of the unconscious ferment of the folk lore, it was the man who took over the art.

It is not easy to get a folk-song in England of the primitive, instinctive note, of which we can be quite sure, however; usually it has been touched at one access or another by some literary reagent. The nearest approach to it is in old ditties like the earliest setting of the Holly and Ivy Carol. In this song of Holver and Hewy, the burden is, "In londes where

they go," and the last stave rather suggests, despite the gender, a woman's fancy—

> " Then spak Holver and set him downe on his knee
> I pray thee, jentil Hewy,
> Sey me no veleny,
> In londes where we go ! "

How old this really may be, none of us can tell. In the Harleian version, which has a refrain, " Nay, my nay, hyt shall not be, I wys," the third stanza has the line—

> "Ivy and hur maydyns, they wepyn and they wryng,"

which again points to the woman's side. The custom on which the song is based was reported in Kent as late as 1779. There, according to " Kitty Curious," who reported it to Sylvanus Urban, the girls of a small village burnt at Shrovetide an uncouth image or effigy which they called a " holly boy," while at the same time the boys, in another spot, burnt an " ivy girl."

The woman's voice, as it sounds in the old nursing songs and lullabies, is the same all the world over—

> " Lollai, lollai, litil child,
> Whi wepis thou so sore ?
> Nedes mostou wepe
> Hit was iyarkid the yore
> Ever to lib in sorrow
> And sich and mourne evere,
> As thine eldren did er this
> Whil hi alwes were.
> *Lollai, lollai, litil child,*
> *Child, lolai lullow*
> *Into uncouth world*
> *I commen so ertow.*"

An excellent instance of a poem with a refrain, which sings the praise of women as framed by a male-writer conventionalised in mediæval verse, occurs among the Thirty Poems with Refrains of the Vernon MS.

The *Proverbs of Hendyng* give us an instance which marks the same fondness for the refrain—

" Riche and pore, yonge and olde,
Whil ye habbeth wyt at wolde,
Secheth ore soule bote,
For when ye weneth al the best
For to have ro ant rest:
The ax ys at the rote.
Hope of long lyf
Gyleth mony god wyf:
*Quoth Hendyng*"

" Hope of long life beguileth many a good wife," quoth Hendyng. This is very like some of the Welsh proverb-songs and Hendyng may be, as supposed, a corruption of Welsh *hen,* old; ***dyn,*** man.

It is but natural to think from this and other evidences that we must have lost many of the rhymes and snatches of folk-song, which, had they lasted, would have helped to show us the working of the old English leaven in French verse. The period when they most needed to be sustained and set down, when the minstrel was supplanting the folk-singer, was, as we have seen, one when English fell into contempt; and the writing folk and the men who convert rustic into literary stuff, were prejudiced against English things.

The refrain in one duodecade runs—

*" Of Women cometh this worldes Weal "*

Note the change from *weal* to *welle* in the last line, proving the ductility of the medium—

" In worschupe of that Mayden swete,
Mylde Marie, Moder and May,
Alle god wimmen wol I grete
That god fende hem from vch afray;
With muche menske mote their mete
And wel worthe alle wymmen ay!
All vr Bale thei may beete
Serteynliche, I dar wel say;
And hose blameth hem niht or day
With Bale mot heore tonge belle
I preue hit wel, ho-euer seith nay;
*Of wimmen cometh this worldes welle.*"

Later, when we come to watch the process of shaping the sonnet, which is the final step in the conversion of melodic song into literary lyric, we may be reminded of this stanza.

But to recall the English lineage, crossed with the French, we must choose a love-song with both strains distinct in it—

" My deth I love, my lyf ich hate,
For a levedy shene ;
Heo is briht so daie's liht
That is on me wel sene :
Al I falewe so doth the lef
In somer when hit is grene
Yet mi thoht helpeth me noht
To whom shall I me mene ? "

That surely was written by a poet who had in mind both the old recoiling Saxon verse and the new septenary that Walter Map favoured—

" Mihi est propositum in taberna mori,"

and dreamt of the dancing octaves of Provence.

Change the measure and you have another adaptation of the two musics—

" A wayle whyt as walles bon,
A grein in golde that godly shon,
A tortle that min herte is on
In tounes trewe :
Hire gladshipe nes never gone
Whil y may glewe.

When heo is glad
Of al this world namore y bad
Then beo with hire myn one bistad
With-oute strif :
The care that ich am yn y brad,
Y wyte a wyf."

We have hardly made enough of these early songs, a lyric treasure of which any race might be proud. Written with most innocent art, they have an exquisite freshness, as of the word not too much used, the thought not too much turned over ; like the freshness of the grass before the sun has drawn off the dew. The rhyme-word springs out of the thought, and, if it should be humoured a little, and a vowel dropt or indulged, that does not spoil the tune. The rhymes come insouciantly and by nature ; they are not forced or strained—

" Mirie it is while sumer ilast
With fugheles [1] song;
Oc nu necheth windes blast
And weder strong.
Ei, ei, what this night is long,
And ich with wel michel wrong
Soregh and murne and fast."

After we have compared these songs with those of France, north and south, *estrif, rondet, chanson de carole, aube, reverdie, pastourelie*, and made the utmost deduction for their borrowed music, we are left aware of a residue which can only be traced to the survival of the folk-spirit of the Anglo-Celtic stock in west and north country; not nearly so dour and melancholy a stock as some historians have made out. Their adoption of the southern melody shows, moreover, that it was congenial to them, as indeed their whole growth and racial history in this island, under Saxon, Celtic, Norse, French influence, was in favour of their lyric survival.

In the new music, the northern idiom was plainly heard—

" Wynter wakeneth al my care,
Nou this leves waxeth bare;
Ofte y sike ant mourne sare
When hit cometh in my thoht
Of this worldes joie, how hit goth al to noht.

Now hit is, ant now hit nys,
Also hit ner nere y wys,
That moni mon seith soth hit ys,
Al goth bote Godes wille
Alle we shule deye, that us like ylle."

No doubt much of the old popular verse perished by the way, as much of the old Celtic verse perished, in the rage for Norman things. But its accent survived; and when a minstrel of English blood in the first rally of the tongue after the Norman came, listened to a *reverdie* or an *estrif*, he was able to relate it to a spring song in Leicestershire or Northumberland. Straightway he grafted the foreign slip on the English stock; and the result was the exquisite offshoot of the twelfth and thirteenth century found in the Harleian and other collections.

But now we come to a lyrist in whom the ingenuous accent

[1] Birds, fowls

of his day, and all the affecting uncertainty of transition verse, were represented, along with the sure proofs of original inspiration—Richard Rolle of Hampole. After Layamon he is the first clearly individualised poet with whom the spoilt ear of the modern reader, puzzled over the old spelling and the accentual differences of the verse from our own, is likely to strike up any acquaintanceship.

## CHAPTER VII

### RICHARD ROLLE OF HAMPOLE

In William of Shoreham we had a good verseman who helped to naturalise the foreign lyric forms; and now we have in Richard Rolle of Hampole a true poet in whom fervour and imagination grew lyrical by necessity of nature. His *Pricke of Conscience* is the only one of his writings that has become proverbial; and it is that which least counts to us here. Going back to his pages (as collected by Mr Horstmann in the volumes of 1898) we are aided in getting on terms with him and his unusual pitch of voice and highly emotional verse, by the poet's own account of himself.

He was born at Thornton, near Pickering, in Yorkshire, towards the end of the thirteenth century, about the time when the war tax was pressing hard on the common folk, and the churchmen were growing bold enough to fling in the teeth of Edward the First the Bull of Pope Boniface the Eighth. He went to Oxford, but like Shelley long afterwards, if for a different reason, never completed his terms there. Whatever other results the schoolmen and their philosophy had upon him, they could not alter his radical impulse, which was that of a passionist and quietist in one, and a born poet—

> " For the right way to that bliss,
> That leadeth man thither, that is this,
> The way of meekness principally
> To love and dread God Almighty,
> This is the Way unto Wisdom."

At nineteen he left Oxford, having determined to take up the hermit's life in good earnest. Boy-like, he borrowed or appropriated a garb from his sister; that is, he took two of

her gowns, white and grey, the white for his under-robe, the grey for an upper. He cut the sleeves off the grey, and took a hood of his father's for head-dress. His sister did not like either his strange attire or the way it was procured. Indeed she thought he had gone mad, and loudly protested as much, and possibly her outcry helped to drive him from home. Some friends, the Dalton's, had a house not far away, and to them he betook himself. It was the Eve of the Assumption, and the family were at church, and the strange boyish apparition in grey-and-white made its way into their pew. They received him, thanks to the understanding of Lady Dalton, with the one form of hospitality which mattered to him. He had been quite satisfied to hide himself in an outhouse; and a cell or lodging was assigned to him; and when the spirit moved him, the boyish hermit was even allowed to go up into the pulpit and preach, and he did so with a fervour that told his grace was from Heaven. There is an impulsiveness about these first adventures of Richard Rolle, which one finds reflected in his hymns and songs, written with quickening beat and at times with almost excessive fervour.

"Love is a light burthen; Love gladdens young and old,
Love is without-en pine; as lovers have me told;
Love is a ghostly wine, that makes men big and bold
Of love shall he nothing tyne, that it in heart will hold

Love is the sweetest thing, that man in earth has ta'en,
Love is God's darling, Love bind(e)s blood and bane
In Love be our liking; I wot no better wane [1]
For me and my Loving, Love makes both be ane."

The melody here proves to be, as you will see on examination, a curious impulsive adaptation of the old English transliterative double rhythm, elaborately rhymed; the rhymes being added both at the line-break and the line-end. It stamps Rolle of Hampole at once as a continuer of the northern tradition, and a writer with an ear finely susceptible to the new music.

For further comparison take two stanzas of a poem, which

[1] Won; won through, in the north-country sense.

might be called "Hampole's Quest," in which the melody is identical with the other—

"My sang es in syghyng, + whil I dwel in this way ;
My lyfe es in langing, + that byndes me nyght and day,
Till I comm til my kyng, + that I won with hym may,
And se his fayre schynyng, + and lyfe that lastes ay.

"Luf es lyf that lastes ay, + thar it in criste es feste,
For wele na wa it chaunge may, + als wryten has men wyseste :
The nyght it tournes in til the day, + thy travel in till reste :
If thou wil luf thus as I say, + thou may be wyth the beste." [1]

You can detect in these verses, remembering the contributions of writers like William of Shoreham to English religious verse, the plain adaptation of the Old English *cesura* as a device in melody. The writer's use of north-country dialect helps to knit up the tradition, as we find it perpetuated in him ; and his evident relish for some of the old phonological effects of the north-country, as they may be still heard in parts of Yorkshire, gives a deeper tint of individual colour to his writing.

He was much influenced by earlier religious poets, including the Franciscan monk, Thomas de Hales, whose *Love Rune* was quoted in another page ; and he was born in a time congenial to his phantasy. He was an original, nevertheless, as originality goes in poetry. What he borrowed from others, he made as Coleridge did intrinsically his own,—the minister to his ecstasy.

He presently moved from his early retreat to another abode within the shire, and finally to Hampole (from which he takes his name) near Doncaster. While at the Dalton's he made acquaintance with Margaret Kirkby, a recluse who lived at Anderby. For her he wrote a short religious manual—*The boke maad of Rycharde hampole to an ankeresse,* with pieces of prose in English ; to which we may add a part of his most impassioned verse. She gave him freely the most valuable thing one soul can give to another : spiritual companionship, and the demand upon the mind arising from it.

In his autobiography, scattered in his remains, Latin and

[1] MS. *Cambridge Dd.* V., 64

English, he dwells upon the *Calor, Canor, Dulcor,* that were the inductors of his inspiration. The *Canor* in especial is his inevitable theme, and he dwells with rapture on the *Musica Spiritualis,* the melody of the Choir Invisible, and the *Sonus Cœlestis.* In his Latin tractate, *De Incendio Amoris,* he has a passage about the descent of the lyrical inspiration, which is, though written in prose, itself a song of ecstasy: a lyric fragment of unmistakeable quality:

"I was in a chapel, delighting in the sweetness of prayer or meditation, and felt in me, suddenly, an unwonted and blissful ardour. After I had long wavered, doubting whence it was, I learnt it was from the Creator and not from any creature. It burned sensibly, and with unspeakable sweetness, a half-year, three months and some weeks, to the inflowing and the perceiving of the Celestial sound and Spiritual Music; that which belongs alone to the Eternal Hymn of Praise and to the sweetness of the unearthly Melody. For it cannot either be sung or heard save by them that have first received it, and they must be made clean, and withdrawn from the world. And while I was in the same chapel, on Easter Eve, and sang there as I could,—lo, a sound of playing the psaltery, or rather of those who sang above me. And while I prayed in my longing to those Heavenly Ones, I felt, I know not how, in myself a wondrous concord, and received a most delicious Harmony from Heaven, which tarried with me. And thereafter my thought was continually changed into the music of song, and my meditation into hymns; and in prayers and in psalmodies, I gave out the same sound from me. Furthermore, that ardour of which I have before told you broke forth from the very affluence of sweetness into song, sung in secret, only before my Creator. This was unknown to them with whom I lived; and indeed, had they known, they had honoured me overmuch; and I should have lost the most beautiful part of that grace, and fallen into desolation. . . ."

There is Richard Rolle of Hampole's lyric testament in short; the account of his becoming inspired; and there

is nothing quite like it, as explicit in its individual self-confession, to be read elsewhere in English. It drives us to his psalmody and spiritual songs, born of those moods and ardours, the heaven-sent melody of the *Canor*, with a wondering, if slightly incredulous, sense of his powers, like to the hesitation he himself felt in the chapel. But his rarer notes are still to be heard, making good his childlike innocence of belief, and his declaration, often repeated in his pages—

> " & there is grete myrthe, as I saied ore,
> and melodie that never shal wone."

Something of his inspiration and artless art we may relate to his love for old country *dictes* and proverbs, which he wrought into his melody. But the best of it is so rare, so inexplicable, that it seems to have fairly dropt from Heaven.

Such is the strangely beautiful melody, in which he attained at a stroke rhythmical effects that eluded his followers in the melic art for some five centuries—

> " My trewest tresowre sa trayturly taken,
> So bytterly bondyn wyth bytand bandes :
> How sone of thi servandes was thou forsaken,
> And lathly for my lufe hurld with thair handes.
>
> My hope of my hele sa hyed to be hanged,
> Sa charged with thi crosce, and corond with thorne,
> Ful sare to thi hert thi steppes tha stanged
> Me thynk thi bak burd breke, it bendes for-borne."

Take these lines again of a plainer metrical cast, but touched with the same poignant force—

> " Twa and thyrty yere and mare
> I was for the in travel sare
> With hungyr, thirst, hete and calde ;
> For thi lufe bath boght and salde ;
> Pyned, nayled and done on tre :
> All, man, for the lufe of the."

In his manuscript these poems are written as if in prose, which, while it follows a fashion usual in old English verse, helps rather to confirm one in the idea of the artistic unconsciousness of his gift.

Here is a "Hail Mary!" attributed to him on fair grounds—

"Heil lok, heil love, heil Marie!
I heile the with herte and thout;
I heil the with mouth and eize.
ffor my wilde werkes han bes nouht;
I heile the and Merci crie,
With al my bodi I have mis-wrouht;
I heile the whon I schal dye,
And help to blisse that we be brouht.
Pray thi sone, that us deare bouht
Graunt us grace for his pitë,
Though synnes have us thorwh-souht,
Bring us to thi blis that ever schal be; Amen. Ave!"

These are the final twelve lines of a poem which is just over the length that Edgar Poë thought the perfect limit.

No doubt there is a temptation to make too much of Rolle of Hampole, as of a wonderful single apparition starting out of the darkness. But, in fact, he too was a child of his time, and he drank in eagerly the accent and rhythm of his time, before he added to it his new note. To relate him to his own day, you have many odd fragments and popular rhymes, over and above the church phrases and the liturgical allusions that abound in his verse, that show his poetical lien. Sometimes he plays upon an old proverb—

"When Adam dalfe and Eve spane,—go spire if thou may spede:
Where was thane the pride of mane,—that now merres his mede?"

He had, in fact, the art, no easy one in verse, of making the commonplace thing and the exhortatory phrase sound proverbial and hold the ear—

"Mon, if thou will to heven wynne.
thorou love to god thou most begynne."

And many of the impressive verses and refrains that were taken up from the folk-currency, and passed into literary use, were given his seal: notably the "Earth upon Earth" canticle, which will be found in the account of the popular lyric of this time that follows next.

The *Pricke of Conscience* recalls the *Cursor Mundi*, and that again, the Church plays and interludes. There are many passages

evidently intended to be sung, and many interspersed songs, in the York and Chester plays: and these plays are in subject and treatment of verse often nearly related to the *Cursor Mundi*. This "best book of all," as it describes itself, *The Course of the World*, was one of those old stock-books of poetry which devoured many others and helped to inspire many more; and its effects, either directly borrowed or much revised, can be traced in poets as far apart as the writer of the second Shepherds' play and Spenser.

Enough here to give an illustration of its simple fashion of accelerating its narrative beat, as in an occasional couplet which suggests a ballad-movement—

"The mickle light that he sagh thar
A brennand fire he wend it ware."

[The mickle light that he saw there,
A burning fire he wend it were.]

Or a passage that affected a writer like Malory—

"Thai sal be cedre, ciprese, and pine;
O tham sal man have medicen,
The fader in cedre thou sal take
A tre of heght that has na make;
And cipres, be the suete savur
Bitakens our suete sauveur:
The mikel suetnes that es the sun;
The pine to bere a frut es won;
Mani kirnels of a tre mast
Gain gifes o the Holi Gast."

There is nothing in these lines of the hardness of narrative written in couplets which is often found in English verse. They move with an innocent fluidity that helps to explain the new modulation of Chaucer's *Tales*. The *Cursor Mundi* had indeed a melody of its own whose echoes may be heard in many unsuspected places, lingering long after its day. It was another of the old popular works, vitally devotional, in which the folk tradition and the literary tradition met, and produced a ware fit for common use—

" This tre was of a mickel heght,
Him thoght than at the thrid sight
That to the sky it raght the toppe
A new-born barn lay in the croppe,
Bondon wit a suethee band
Thar him thoght it lay suelland*
He was al ferd wen he that sei
And to the rotte he kest his he
Him thoght it raght fra erth til helle." [1]

This is from the Oil of Mercy episode (which Richard Morris, an uncommonly good chooser, chose for his *Specimens of Early English*) where the " Cherubin " shows Seth the mickle tree within the gates of Paradise, growing by the wall beyond the world,—the well that is " utenemes," uttermost, out of which ran the four great streams—

" Tyson, Fison, Tigre, Eufrate."

that make all this earth " wate " or wet. Under it, he sees Abel—" In his soul he saw him there," and as for the bairn, wailing in the crop of the tree in its swaddle-bands, that is God's own Son.

" Mi fader sin now wepes he
That he sal clens, sum time sal be."

My father's sin, Adam's sin, he tells Seth, he now beweeps, " that he shall cleanse some time shall be." We appreciate, as we read, how such legends as that of the *Oil of Mercy* and the *Three Apple-Pips*, told with much charm, would delight the folk of that day; and how the mode of their telling, and the easy sing-song of the lines, would take the ear of the religious playwright and the folk-poet and linger in the popular currency of verse.

[1] This tree was of a mickle height;
He thought, then, at the third sight,
That to the sky it reached the top.
A new-born bairn lay in the crop
Bounded with a swaddle-band.
There he thought it lay suelland.*
He is afraid when he that sees,
And to the root he casts his eyes:
He thought it reach'd from earth to hell.

* squealing, crying.

The *Cursor Mundi* is a witness of some weight when we are gathering evidence for the European range of English poetry at this time. The writer roved freely over mediæval Church lore, Latin, French and English; he dipped even into Celtic. He certainly drew upon Grosseteste and Wace, Peter Comestor and Isidore de Sevilla, adding, on occasion, much as Layamon did, material at first hand out of the floating legendry that surrounded every kirk door in that day. From his faculty, his wit and real learning, his bible-lore and folklore, his sense, above all, of the English folk and their needs, we get an idea of the kind of man who was the typical English poet of the early fourteenth century. Take away the abstruser part of him, and heighten his feeling for an audience that wanted everything put into terms of scriptural plainness, and you have the writer of the miracle plays who has the market-crowd and Everyman before him—

"Peace! I bid every wight:
Stand as still as stone in wall,
Whiles ye are present in my sight,
That none of ye clatter nor call . . . "

So Pilate, playing the Showman, calls out to the crowd at the opening of the Wakefield "Crucifixion Play." In the fatal scene as the drama unrolls, Mary's speech with Jesus as he hangs on the rood turns into the true singing, sighing cadence in another song of Death—

"Alas, Death! thou dwell'st too lang,
Why art thou hid from me?
Who bid thee to my child to gang?
All black thou mak'st his ble.
Now, witterly, thou workest wrang,
The more I will wyte thee,
But if thou wilt my heart now stang,
That I may with him dee,
And bide!
Sore sighing is my sang,
For piercéd is his side."

The most tuneful of all the lyrics in the old miracle plays are those in the "Coventry Nativity Play," which contains two interspersed songs worthy of any anthology: besides a lullaby

of much tenderness, with an affecting turn in it, sung by the women—

"Lulla, lulla! thou little tiny child!"

One of the Shepherds' songs runs—

"As I out rode this enderes' night,
Of three jolly shepherds I saw a sight,
And all about their fold a star shone bright;
They sang, Terli, terlow;
So merrily the shepherds their pipes can blow.
. . . . . .
"Down from heaven, from heaven so high,
Of angels there came a great company,
With mirth, and joy, and great solemnity;
They sang, Terli, terlow;
So merrily the shepherds their pipes can blow."

The second Shepherds' play in the Towneley series has an invocation which is of older origin and no less delightful in movement—

*1st Shep.* "Hail, comely and clean!
Hail, young child!
Hail, offspring, as I mean,
Of a maiden so mild!
Thou hast warded off, I ween,
The warlock so wild
The false guiler of teen,—
Now goes he beguiled.
Lo! he merry is,
Lo, he laughs, my sweeting,
A welfare meeting:
While I hold my 'heeting,'—[1]
Have a bob of cherries."

Other passages might be given from the York plays, which tell of a remarkable command of melody in their writers. But enough has been drawn from this early dramatic literature to show that, like in later plays, it abounded in true lyric and depended not a little on musical relief in its dialogue. Its effect upon the growth of song in English cannot indeed be overlooked.

[1] 'Heeting'—hat.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LYRIC ELEMENT IN THE MEDIÆVAL ROMANCES

LAST of the mediæval influences to react sympathetically on the practice of English verse, the Arthurian and other romances not only helped to create an atmosphere favourable to poetry in all its kinds, but greatly encouraged the new cult of love-song that was being pursued in the forms of the *amour courtois*. Further, there was in the romances the kindred element that waits to start to life in a phrase or a single evocation; the element which tends to produce what has elsewhere been called "interspersed melody." It is impossible to follow the development of lyrical expression in English, or any other literature, unless its sporadic growth in these allied forms be observed. The romances, whether in verse or prose, offered continual lyric openings which were very necessary to form the right mood in the hearer; and they used either invocation, or melodious association, to procure the desired effect—

> "There was myrth and melody
> With harp, cytron and sautry
> With rote, ribible and Clokarde
> With pypes, organs and bombarde
> With other mynstrelles them amonge
> With sytolphe and with sautry songe."

It is but a step from this to the use of melody itself—as you have it in several of the verse romances. There the lightening of the medium and the quickening of the recitative by invocation and interjected music are, plainly, a recognised part of the tale-telling. Chaucer, in the *Rime of Sir Topas*, speaks of the story of the Squire of Low Degree who loved a King's daughter, and that romance, quoted by Ritson[1]

[1] From the quarto edition of the romance printed by Wyllyam Copland.

offers an excellent instance of the lyrical heightening of the page. The King of Hungary is comforting his daughter for the loss of her lover—

> " When you come home your menie amonge
> Ye shall have revell, daunces and songe,
> Lytle chyldren, great and smale
> Shall syng as doth the nyghtyngale
> Thair shal ye go to your evensong
> With tenours and trebles among
> Threescore of copes of damask bryght
> Full of perles they shal be pyghte.
> Your sensours shal be of golde,
> Your quere nor organ songe shall want
> With countre note and dyscaunt
> The other half on orgayns playing
> With yong chyldren full fayn synging. . . ."

Then she shall go to supper, and sit in a green arbour, and have a hundred knights to play bowls in " alleys cold." Or she shall watch the fish play in the ponds ; and when she would take to the water, music shall wait on her—

> " A barge shall meet you full ryht
> With xxiiii ores ful bryght
> With trompettes and with claryone,
> The fresshe watir to roew up and downe.
> Then shall you, daughter, aske the wyne
> With spices that be gode and fyne,
> Gentyll pottes with genger grene
> Wyth dates and deynties you betweene.
> Fortie torches brenynge bright
> At your brydges to bring you lyght.
> Into youre chamber they shall you brynge
> Wyth much myrthe and more lykynge."

The melody of this is innocent enough ; but it shows how inevitably the lyric vibration, the musical element, came into these tales.

" The Squire of Low Degree " is a good, if late, witness of the accepted custom of the romancers, one which was to affect afterwards the balladists who drew indifferently from folk-song, and popular tradition, and the common repertory of the professional folk at court and castle in their balladry. Not only this : they serve to remind us first of the persistence of the old alliterative habit of verse, and then of the super-

imposing of Gallic refinements upon even the most insular of the English forms.

Innumerable examples of the use of melody in these old tales in verse may be given. One is the early morning passage in "Sir Gawaine and the Grene Knight" where the familiar device of window and love-chamber is turned to effect. In this scene, Sir Gawaine lies at the castle, "the comeliest knight ever ouned." It is a frosty winter's morning, and the knights and men, including the master of the castle, have all gone hunting: while Sir Gawaine sleeps on soundly within his curtains. Then he is visited by the lady of the Castle, who has thrown a fur mantle about her so as to enhance the loveliness of her bare neck and throat, and the azure stones clustered in her tresses. She opens the window to the early morning air—

"Ah, man, how may thou sleep?
This morning is so clear.
He was in drowsing, deep;
But therewith did her hear."

The ensuing verse gives expression in its alliterated sub-lyrical lines to an episode of the *amour courtois* worked with fresh colours, as when the lady says—

"Though I have nought of yours,
Yet should ye have of mine!"

In the rhymed *Merlin* of the Auchinleck MS. the inductions of the cantos are in the true Provençal mode—

"Listeneth now, fele and few:
In May the sunne felleth dew;
The day is miri, and draweth along;
The lark arereth her song
To meed go'th the damisele
And faire flowers gadreth fele."

In another, a March *reverdie*, the note brings us upon the very traces of the writer of the *Cuckoo Song*—

"March is hot, miri and long:
Fowles singin her song;
Burjouns springeth, medes greeneth
Of everything the heart keeneth."

As a hot March is not an English experience it is clear we must go further south for this. In the romance of Blaunchefloure, the lines that describe the magic orchard, the "fairest of all middelard" (A.S. middle-earth) and the Tree of Love, are in the pure romantic tradition, and at the very point of breaking into melody—

> "At the well-heved there stant a tree
> The fairest that may on earth be;
> It is y-cleped the tree of love
> For flowers and blossoms beth in above."

The first writer in England of French lays and romances was Marie de France, whose influence over her contemporary verse-writers and their followers still waits to be fully traced. But this and her curious interest as interpreter of Breton and Celtic legend lie outside this history—

> "Les contes ke jeo sai verrais
> Dunt li Bretun ont fait les lais,
> Vus conterai asey briefment," . . .

As briefly as you please; yet she had time for many exquisite dilatations of her themes, as in the lovely song-passage at the opening of *Ywonec*. Of the earlier translations of her Lays into English the *Lay le Fraine* (again in the Auchinleck MS.) has one episode which asks a place. The English version in recalling the old legend, and making an atmosphere for it, as in Marie de France's original, gets into its lines something of the melody of the one poem in modern English, which brings the narrative and the lyrical modes together perfectly infused —Coleridge's *Christabel*. These lays, says the romancer, preluding, were to be sung to the harp, and they touched on all manner of themes; war and woe, "joy and mirth also," treachery and guile; bourdes and ribaudry; and "many there beth of fairy." But—

> "Of all thinges that men seth,
> Most of love, forsooth, there beth."

In this *Lay le Fraine* (*frêne*) or *Adventure of the Ash*, the maiden who has promised to hide the unlucky twin-babe,

carries it out at even-tide, and goes by a wild heath, and through field and wood, all that winter-long night—

"The weather was clear, the moon was light:
So that she com by a forest side
She wox all weary, and gan abide.
Soon after, she gan in heark
Cockès crow, and dogs bark
She arose and thither wold;
Near and nearer she gan behold
Walls and houses fele she seigh;
A church, with steeple fair and high;
Then n'as there nother street no toun
But an house of religion: . . . "

There an order of nuns served God day and night, and the maiden goes to the church door, and kneels, "weepand her orisoun"—

"'O Lord,' she said, 'Jesu Christ
That sinful mannes bedes hearst,
Underfong this present
And help this seli innocent
That it mote y-christened be
For Mairie's love, thy mother free.'"

Then she looks, and sees the ash growing there, fair and high and well y-boughed, but hollow; and in it she lays the babe wrapt in fur—

"Therein she laid the child, for cold,
In the pel, as it was, byfold,
And blessed it with all her might.
With that it gan to dawe light.
The fowles up, and sung on bough
And acre-men yede to the plough:"

And leaving the child there in the hollowed ash, the maiden returns on her way.

In these lays and rhymed romances, we surprise the echoes of the enchanted close of the Middle Ages within which the rude folk-song of the rustic lover suffered its lyric change. Their pages, too, anticipate the ballad on both its lyric and narrative side; in them we come upon the very phrases and adjurations that went to supply the ballad-monger's repertory. So in *Sir Bevis of Hampten* we read—

" 'Awake, awake!' he said, 'Sir Mile,
Thou hast islepen a long while!' "

And in *Sir Guy of Warwick*—

" He rode half a mile the way
He saw no light that came of day;
Then came he to a water broad,
Never man over such one rode;
Within he saw a place green
Such one had he never erst seen."

And in *Sir Otuel*—

" King Claree came, in form of peace,
With three fellows, ne mo ne less!"

As for *reverdies*, they occur in every variety; or rather, they ring the changes on the same old tune. So in *Richard Cœur de Lion*—

" Merry is, in time of May,
When fowlis sing in her lay,
Floweres on apple-trees and perry,
Small fowlis sing merry.
Ladies strew their bowers
With red roses and lily flowers.
Great joy is in frith and lake
Beast and bird plays with his make;
The damiseles lead dance. . . ."

We see by this how imitative, how conventional, the romancers and the love-poets were; and understanding it, we have to consider how yet the instinctive delights of men—in love, in song, in the forest, in the return of the May, though they led to the same tunes—were so truly felt, that they still kept their freshness when expressed for the thousandth time.

" It befell, between March and May
When kind corage beginneth to prick
When frith and field waxen gay
And every wight desireth her like:
When lovers slepen with open eye
As nightingales on greene tree,
And sore desire that they could fly
That they mighten with their love be."

The climax of the old romances, Arthurian and other, is for English folk in Malory's book, and there prose was allowed, it seems, to grow lyrical without growing ashamed of itself.

The accent is unmistakeable: the King's lament at a parting of the Knights for the Quest of the Sancgreal offers a passage with an unforgettable cadence—

> "And therewith the tears filled in his eyes. And then he said, Gawaine, Gawaine, ye have set me in great sorrow. For I have great doubt that my true fellowship shall never meet here more again. Ah, said Sir Launcelot, comfort yourself, for it shall be unto us as a great honour, and much more than if we died in any other places, for of death we be sure. Ah, Launcelot, said the king, the great love that I have had unto you all the days of my life maketh me to say such doleful words, for never Christian king had never so many worthy men at this table as I have had this day at the Round Table, and that is my great sorrow. When the queen, ladies, and gentlewomen wist these tidings, they had such sorrow and heaviness that there might no tongue tell it, for those knights had holden them in honour and charity. But among all other queen Guenever made great sorrow."

Take any song with a burden of sorrow, written in verse, any elegy you like, and put it beside this: you will hardly find one more affecting, more really melodious.

But the noblest of the *Morte* laments is that to be found at the close, Ector's lament for Launcelot—

> "And now, I dare say, thou Sir Launcelot, there thou liest that that were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courtliest knight that ever bare shield; and thou were the truest friend to any lover that ever bestrode horse; and thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman, and thou were the kindest man that ever strake with sword, and thou were the goodliest person ever came among press of knights; and thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies; and thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest. Then there was weeping and dolour out of measure."

A tale that is sung, or recited, whether it take an accompaniment for granted or not, is bound indeed to use melody at its emotional pauses, and sooner or later to cross the line that divides the two categories. It was in the nature of romance in its early stages to invoke music; for the idea of song was always at hand; and from dealing in its congenial effects in story the narrator inevitably passed to the lyrical heightening of his page, whether over a death song, or a spring episode, or a love scene.

For a last instance take another *reverdie* theme, a May song in prose from Malory. It is at the close of the eighteenth book and forms a complete chapter in itself—"How true lo e is likened to summer."

> "The month of May was come, when every lusty heart beginneth to blossom and to bring forth fruit; for like as herbs and trees bring forth fruit and flourish in May, in likewise every lusty heart, that is in any manner a lover, springeth and flourisheth in lusty deeds. For it giveth unto all lovers courage, that lusty month of May, in some thing to constrain him to some manner of thing, more in that month than in any other month, for divers causes. For then all herbs and trees renew a man and woman, and in likewise lovers call again to their mind old gentleness and old service, and many kind deeds that were forgotten by negligence. For like as winter rasure doth always arase and deface green summer, so fareth it by unstable love in man and woman. For in many persons there is no stability, for we may see all day, for a little blast of winter's rasure, anon we shall deface and lay apart true love for little or nought, that cost much thing.

No need to complete the chapter. Taken to pieces its love-litany in movement and detail rather suggests an antiphonic origin, and the praise of love sung by two shepherds or lovers in alternate staves. A modern verse-writer has attempted to translate its terms into the lyric form—a reconversion, which may serve in passing to illustrate the adaptation of *reverdie* and love-song motives by these old romancers—

> "Like as herb and tree in May
> Flourish from the root,—
> Every lusty heart must rise
> And start to love and fare likewise
> Flower first, then fruit."

These early romances show us, in fact, the perfect interaction of the lyric and narrative modes; and they are of signal value in the account as forerunners of the ballads, whose repertory and whose lyric dialect they helped to form.

## CHAPTER IX

### CHAUCER—GOWER AND LYDGATE—THE PRINTED BOOK

It used to be the custom to make English poetry begin with Chaucer, or to draw at his name a line sharp as that separating the Dark Ages from our own era. However far such a break in continuity is warranted in the case of English poetry at large, and there is no doubt it is a great convenience to use Chaucer in that way—with lyric verse it is different. There the new developments, even when the tests are those of the changing value of words and the advance of prosody, were gradual. The older innocence of speech, so far as it affected English song and gave it freshness but no sure control of line and metre, was taught the grammar of verse by slow degrees, through Celtic, Latin, French, Italian influences. And instead of a single great reformer we have an intermittent and perplexing line of small and inconclusive modifiers, and we follow its erratic advance in a Rolle of Hampole or in the work of anonymous song-writers, and gradually outline a pedigree stretching from "Summer is y-cumen in" to "When daisies pied." But that is only a single branch of the tree; and Chaucer's is a poetry of vital importance when you come to the relation between the old unconscious or half-unconscious verse and the new with its measuring rod and its exact code. Much of Chaucer's quality as a verse-writer comes of his mixed artlessness and particularity. He was the most delicately syllabic verseman who ever wrote in English, so that, reading him after the later poets whose fashion is more like our own, we are impressed as by the clear but unusual enunciation of a child that tries to make every accent, slurred in common speech, individual and distinct. It was impossible that English should go on being spoken in that way; but it was of

immense service to have it at this time passed over the tongue of a poet born and made. He used the privilege of genius in bringing the innocence as of a child in time to an unexpected mastery of the instrument, without dulling his freshness of utterance.

What then was Chaucer's virtue, as a continuer of the tale-writers who enlarged, too, the singing scale. We do not usually think of him as a lyric poet at all. Yet if the sheer gratification afforded by his *Tales* be examined, a very considerable share of it may be traced to his habit of " breaking the epic " whenever his invention suggests it. The sense of music is present to him as it was to the verse romancers before him. And in his first period, before he had artistically found himself, he experimented in the French forms as in the three roundels first printed by Percy in his *Reliques* and rediscovered by Dr Skeat in *Rawlinson, Poet*, 163. The first may be quoted—

> " Your yën two wol slee me sodenly
> I may the beaute of hem nor susteyn
> So woundeth hit throughout my hertè kene. . . ."

Though only conjecturally his, they have the savour of his verse, and are not less like him, in their mixed tenderness and coyness, than the Saint Valentine roundel in the *Parlement of Fowles*, which is undoubtedly his—

> " *Now welcome somer, with thy sonne softe*
> *That hast this wintrës weders over-shake*
> *And driven away the longe nightes blake.*
> Seynt Valentyn, that art full hy in lofte,
> Thus singen smale foulës for thy sake
> *' Now welcome somer with thy sonnë softe*
> *That hast this wintres weders over-shake.'*
> Wel hav they cause for to gladen ofte
> Sith ech of hem recovered hath his make :
> Ful blisful may they singen whan they wake
> *' Now welcome somer with thy sonne softe*
> *That hast this wintrës weders over-shake*
> *And driven away the longë nightës blake.'* "

Chaucer, while still a prentice to his craft, liked to take out the pipe and break into song, and so it was with him

all through his poetry. In the *Boke of the Duchesse* the thought of May crosses the page, and in morning dream the small fowl sing up the sleeper—

> " Thorgh noyse and swetnesse of her songe
> And as me mette, they sate amonge
> Upon my chambre roof wythoute
> Upon the tylës al aboute;
> And songen everych in hys wyse
> The moste solempne servise
> By noote, that ever man, Y trowe
> Had herd."

These verses are a reminder of the immemorial May usage of the poets which Chaucer confirmed. Some critics have even declared it began in English with his translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose*. It went back in fact to days long before the French poem, or the English version, appeared.

But again, in *Troylus and Criseyde*, the song of "here wommanhede" and "here beautë" has the note in it of the heavenly concord. It forms part of a lyric interlude in the fable, exquisitely paraphrased from Boethius, where the given tune is elaborated into a figure of eight—the first instance in English of the Grand Lyric—

> " Love, that of erth and se hath governaunce
> Love, that with an holsom alliaunce
> Hath peples joyned, as dyd list hem gye!
> Love, that knetteth law and compaignye
> And couples both in vertu for to dwelle
> Bynd this accorde, that I have told and telle."

Chaucer was one of the most resourceful of versifiers, and no less loth to take advantage of a text than of a "leit-motiv" or a cue from the church office, when a chance occurred to do so with good grace. Many instances might be given; one will do, most deliberately contrived; but there are others which are not less effective. It is to be found in the *Prioresse Tale*, and the motive word is supplied by the hymn "O Alma Redemptoris"—[1]

[1] See ch. vi., p. 51.

"This litel child, his litel book lernynge,
As he sat in the scole in his primere,
He 'O alma redemptoris' herde synge,
As children lerned her antiphonere,
And as he durst, he drough him ner and neere
And herkned ever the words and the note
Til he the first vers couthe al by rote"

Of interspersed melody, you cannot read far in the *Canterbury Tales* without discovering how truly Chaucer understood its value; he used it too without over-sentiment or any wrenching of the narrative style. A delicious instance is that lyric remark about the Yong Squyer in the *Prologue*—

"He sleep no more than doth a nightingale"

One may think that not a lyric line at all, but in fact it is an enhancing of sound and sense alike by the poet's conscious and tuneful exuberance of pleasure in the fact he is communicating, and there lies the essence of the lyric principle.

Add to this the all but "ballade" in the *Legende of Goode Women* with the refrain of "My lady cometh"—

"Hyde, Absalon, thy gilte tresses clere;
Ester, ley thou thy mekenesse al adown;
Hyde, Jonathas, al thy frendly manere;
Penelopee, and Marcia Catoun,
Make of your wifhode no comparysoun;
Hyde ye your beautés, Ysoude and Eleyne,
*My lady comith, that al this may disteyne*"

And when Chaucer has the Pardoner for homilist he can play with an opprobrious word no less effectively than with the rose in his love-songs—

"O *glutonye*, ful of corsidnesse,
O cause first of oure confusion
O original of oure dampnacioun,
Til Crist had borught us with his blood agayn
Lo(keth), how dere, schortly for to sayn
Abought was first this cursed felonye
Corupt was al this world for *glotonye*."

The motive word, label of grace or vice, will not be denied in Chaucer's page. What said the Pardoner again?—

" O cursed synne full of cursednesse !
O traytorous homicity ! O wikkednesse !
O glotony, luxurie and hasardrye ! "
" What needeth it, thereof, to sermon more ? "

We see in Chaucer the metrical resources first of French, then of Italian, verse, fairly applied and naturalised. As for lyric poetry, while he did not deliberately turn song-writer, he put the instrument ready, unstiffened its pegs, increased its vibration and made it capable of arresting all the rhythms that the heart, mind and ear of Europe had discovered and brought into the common stock. He was one of those " makers," like Homer, Virgil, Dante before him, who resolve the essential music that waits in nature and human nature for the true poet who shall put them into intelligible art. The ruling bent in him was toward narrative, and not to lyric. But he kept in nearly all he wrote an ear for every melodious opening. He sang in his *Tales,* " loud and yerne," full pitch—" broking " like Absolon, or under his breath. Take away the lyric exuberance from the *Nonne Priestes' Tale,* or from any other page that is not the plain telling of character and episode, and what is there left ? Something which would be excellent as plain prose fiction, but which is not poetry. Something which is not Chaucer.

By the side of Chaucer we have a second poet who might be called his under-study ; for indeed it almost looks as though the Muse devised two instruments for her office, at certain critical passages of history, in case one should fail her. In this instance it proved, as it has proved at other times before and since, that the second was in willingness and pliability, but not in grace, the mate of the first. The second poet was Gower, a scholarly verseman and an artistic adapter of French forms, who wrote almost equally well in French, Latin and English, and having congenial influences to widen his opportunity, gained a remarkable contemporary fame which affected even Chaucer himself. As Cowley was to Herrick, so Gower was to Chaucer : a more obvious sort of person, when viewed across the barriers of his own day, than the other poet built

for all time. So it has often been in this difficult matter of assigning the crown among living poets; and so, no doubt, it will continue to be.

But to tell Gower's quality and his special office as French and English interactor, let us quote one of his *Cinquante Balades*: yet another "May" poem, written before Chaucer had commenced poet. This is No. xxxvi. The first septet with the refrain will do—

> "Pour comparer ce jolif temps de Maij,
> Jeo dirrai semblable a Paradis;
> Car lors chantoit et merle et papegai,
> Les champs sont vert, les herbes sont floris;
> Lors est Nature dame du paijs:
> Dont Venus poignt l'amant a tiel assai,
> *Qencontre amour nest qui poet dire. Nai.*"

"They are tender, pathetic and poetical," says Warton. We may add, they prove Gower to have been a devoted lover of his art and a thorough craftsman; and they prepare us for a layer beneath his surface-fluency, which is worth uncovering. But Gower has long wastes, in the *Confessio Amantis*, where there is no imagination, no play of life, nor any lyric relief; wastes of which it might be said in his own words—

> "It dulleth ofte a mannes wit
> To hem that shall it al day rede."

He failed in short because he had neither Chaucer's genius nor his power of heightening his medium and inflecting his voice.

His facility, his light gait, his easy superabundance, grow wearisome, but possibly by contrast those rare passages where his fantasy waxes strong are all the more striking: just as after miles of moor a sea-glen is a thing to remember. Such is his account, not quite original, of the Three Mystic Stones "which no persone hath upon erth"—Leucachatis, Astroites and Ceraunus. They are the Stones set in the front of the sun's crown, and there are others that support it—

> "Whereof a Christelle is that one,
> Which that corone is sett upon:
> The second is an adamant
> The third is noble and avenant
> Which cleped is Idriades."

Of the two poets, Gower was a literary distiller, taking his material and idea from books; while Chaucer went to men and women and to life at every turn of his verse, and even when using a book for his groundwork, took his idiom fresh from men's mouths; for he said whoso should "tell a tale after a man" must repeat as near as ever he could every word that man used, though never so rudely. The passage of the Three Stones declares what was Gower's typical way of conceiving verse and writing it. In the *Confessio Amantis* he depends everywhere upon accepted or stereotyped matter. He does not trust his own wit, or his own power of originating anything: it is all, or nearly all poetry at second-hand. That he had other resources we gather from some score of pages out of the hundreds that he wrote. Notably in closing his prologue to the *Confessio Amantis*, where he seems to speak out in his desire for the new accord that only God may stere. So it were good, he says, if every man prayed for the peace—

> "Which is the cause of all increase,
> Of worshyipe, and of worldes welthe
> Of hertes reste and soules helthe."

The most quotably effective passages in Gower are those in which Chaucer's influence is most marked: the two poets reacted strongly on one another, and at first Chaucer seems to have regarded the older man as a leader. Afterwards it was Gower's turn to leave and borrow from his follower. Hence this Chaucerian opening, which may be compared with the *Balade* already cited—

> "Whan come was the moneth of Maie,
> She wolde walke upon a daie,
> And that was er the son arist,
> Of women but a fewe it wist,
> And forth she went prively,
> Unto a parke was faste by,
> All softe walkende on the gras,
> Tyll she came there, the launde was
> Through which ran a great rivere,
> I thought her fayre; and said, here
> I will abide under the shawe:
> And bad hir women to withdrawe:

And ther she stood alone stille
To thinke what was in her wille.
She sighe the swete floures sprynge,
She herde glad fowles synge;
She sigh beastes in her kynde,
The buck, the doo, the hert, the hynde,
The males go with the female:
And so began there a quarele
Betwene love and her owne herte
Fro whiche she couthe not asterte."

We have seen that while a confessedly derivative poet, Gower was a sound craftsman, who worked with pleasure on his instrument and showed real concern for his mother-tongue. His influence, with Chaucer's, undoubtedly helped to fix the new poetic standard; and his chief vehicle, the eight syllable stave in couplets, or the octet line, undoubtedly gained authority in English through his use of it, and the grace with which he invested it. But he had not the individuality, the emotion of life, or the power to create a medium for that emotion. He had not Chaucer's solvent in his rhythm.

We have in Gower an interesting early type of the purely literary verseman; we have in John Lydgate one who had more imagination, and a more impulsive brain, but who was less sure as an artist. He was the avowed humble follower of Chaucer and a translator and adapter of other poets; and a large part of his work shines if at all only by reflected lustre. But there was some gold dust beneath his superabundant streams of Chaucer-and-water. And now and again, he seemed to show gleams of something rarer, which appear to astonish and tantalise the reader in a few pages out of all his hundreds. "Verbose and diffuse" were Warton's epithets for him, and they stick and must stick to his fame. But whenever he managed to condense his ideas and his verse, he achieved an expressiveness which made his lines for that moment memorable. He added one true poem to the London anthology in *London Lickpenny*—

"Then I hyed me into Est-Chepe;
One cryes rybbs of befe, and many a pye:
Pewter pottes they clattered on a heape;
There was harpe, pype, and mynstralsye.

'Yea, by cock! nay, by cock!' some began crye;
Some songe of Jenken and Julyan for there mede;
But for lack of mony I myght not spede.
Then into Corn-Hyll anon I yode,
Where was mutch stolen gere amonge;
I saw where honge myne owne hoode,
That I had lost amonge the thronge;
To by my own hood I thought it wronge,
I knew it well as I dyd my crede,
But for lack of money I could not spede."

And his figure of Bochas (Boccace—Boccaccio) whether by force of association, or the warmth of his conception, or because of something odd in the name stampt itself in the memory as confronted by Fortune. And the note grows at once lyrical and more markedly Chaucerian, as Bochas, seeing her monstrous coloured image, asks himself—

"Is this a creature
Or a monstre transformed agayne nature,
Whose brennen eyen spercle of their lyght,
As do the sterres the frosty wynter nyght.[1]

He speaks with a power of direct epithet, though without Chaucer's creative phrase and insouciant word; of her hair "untrussed, harde, sharpe, and horyble" and her hundred hands. But Lydgate, though he failed with Fortune's "hundred hands," did achieve four lines about the "thousand hands" of God, which became and deserved to become proverbial—

"God hath a thousand hands to chastyse,
A thousand darts of punicion,
A thousand bowes made in divers wyse,
A thousand arlblasts bent in his dongeon.

These are great lines. The hymn of the avenging God was never given a verse more eloquent with threatening words and alarming syllables.

Gray in his *Remarks on the Poems of Lydgate* gives him high praise, not ill-considered, and puts him nearer than any contemporary writer to Chaucer, and prefers him on the score of his choice of expression and the smoothness of his verse to Gower and Occleve. He quotes among others these beautiful

[1] Compare the original simile in Chaucer's *Prologue*—
"His eyen twynkled in his heed aright
As don the sterres in the frosty night."

lines, the song of Canace we might call them, in which she is lamenting to Macareus the evil fate of their child—

" On thee and me dependeth the trespace,
Touching our guilt and our great offence,
But, welaway ! most ângelik of face
Our childè, young in his pure innocence,
Shall agayn right suffer death's violence,
Tender of limbes, God wote, full guiltëless,
The goodly faire, that lieth here speechlèss.

A mouth he has, but wordis hath he none :
Cannot complaine, alas ! for none outràge,
Nor grutcheth not, but lies here all alone,
Still as a lambe, most meke of his visàge.
What heart of stele could do to him damàge,
Or suffer him dye, beholding the manere
And looke benigne of his tweine even clere ? "

Lydgate here, says Gray, " has touched the very heart-springs of compassion with so masterly a hand, as to merit a place among the very greatest poets." In another page he quotes from a Cambridge MS., one of the Lydgate ballads which has a moving refrain and some most telling stanzas. It sounds no less richly in our ears, because the question has been so put by Villon and Dunbar, and the cadence of it is familiar. Where, he asks, is David the King, and where Solomon " of tresour incomparable ? " And where the face of " Absolom most faire ? " Where is Alisaund that conquer'd all ? And " Nabucodnosor, and Sardanapal ? "

" And where is Tullius wyth hys sugyrd tungue,
Or Chrisostomus with his golden mouthe ?
The aureat ditties that were redde or sunge
Of Hòmerus in Grece both north and south ?
The tragedies divers and unkouth
Of moral Seneck the misteries to unclose ?
By many examplys this *matt* is full kowth :
*All stand on chaunge as a midsómer rose.*

Where ben of Fraunce all the dousëperes
Which over allè had the governance ?
(Wowis of the pecok with her prowde chères !)
The worthy nine with alle their beaunce
The Trojan knightes, greatest of àllyaunce ?
The flece of gold conquered in Colchòse ?
Rome and Carthàge most sovereign of puissaùnce ?
*All stand on chaunge like a midsomer rose.*"

By these finer pages of Lydgate we see how it was he, impressed his day and the day afterward as he did. He confirmed men in the sense of poetry as a thing of weight; while he left the art on a lower level than did his teacher.

Another disciple who must not be overlooked was Thomas Hoccleve, presumably a north countryman, and a North-umbrian if he takes, as it is said, his name from the village of Hocclough. He would live in the register if only by his tribute to his "Maister dere" and "Fader Reverent," two stanzas of which have not been surpassed in sheer sincerity of feeling and expression in any poem offered by one poet at the shrine of another—not in *Astrophel*, *Lycidas*, or *Adonais*—

> "O Maister dere, and Fader reverent!
> My Maister Chaucer, floure of eloquence,
> Mirrour of fructuous entendement,
> O universal Fader in science:
> Allas, that thou thyne excellent prudence
> In thy bed mortel myghtest not bequethe;
> What eyled Dethe; allas why wold he sle the?
>
> O Dethe, that didst not harmē singulere
> In Slaughtre of hym, but alle this lond it smerteth
> But natheless yit hast thow no powere
> His name to slee; his hye vertu asterteth
> Unslayne fro the, whiche ay us lyfly herteth
> With bookes of his ornat endityng,
> That is to alle this londe enlumynyng."

This is from the opening of his voluminous poem, a translation from the work of Ægidius, *De Regimine Principium* a translation happily with an accommodatory personal introduction, in which Hoccleve speaks out, shows his face, confesses himself, and grows individual and lyrical. But in England the providence of art and language did not arrange that the example of Chaucer, or his lyric and poetic initiative, should be sustained in the generation that came after him.

Meanwhile an event was taking place which was to react like a new code on the art of verse: that is, the setting up by Caxton of the Printing Press. No one in that day could

have foreseen how much the making and the gradual multiplication of books, and the exigency of the printed page, would affect the art by degrees. For some time printed books were too slow of production, it is true, to make any great difference. It may be noted, however, in the chronicle that the first poetry book of any weight printed in England was Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; for the influence of Chaucer on the more formal side of verse-making was one that coincided, and, as it might appear providentially, with that of the printing press. Both intended to regularise poetry. The Chaucer folio bears date 1476. No song book, no anthology of songs worth note, appeared for some thirty years, though ballads and verse chap-books were issued from time to time.

Warton describes a book printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1497, *The Kalendar of Shepherds*, a medley of verse and prose, a sort of perpetual almanack, in which every month sings. "in a stanza of *balad royal* its own panegyrick." Aristotle, Solomon, Ptolemy are quoted in it, and "Cathon the great clarke" helps to maintain the Catonic tradition which meant so much to our forefathers and mothers in their use of proverbs. For when books were scarce, proverbs and songs, put into idiomatic words and rhymes of easy memory, were the every-day currency of English folk. Wisdom was weighed by the ounce then, not by the page, and a song counted to the hearer's ear, and not to a reader's eye. The *Kalendar of Shepherds* (which was translated from the French *Kalendrier des Bergers* of that time) helped in its own way to carry on the rural ritual of the poets. The accent of May when in turn it announces itself in the verses of the months is the perennial bird-note of the Maiolaters, early and late—Latin, Italian, Provençal, French, English, Welsh, and Scotch—

> "Of all monthes in the yeare I am kinge,
> Flourishing in beauty excellently;
> For, in my time, in virtue is all thinge,
> Fieldes and medes sprede most beautiously,
> And birdes singe with sweete harmony;
> Rejoysing lovers with hot love endewed,
> With fragrant flowers all about renewed."

A handful of these poems grown at home and abroad makes up a May garland whose tuneful freshness and gaiety of colour are remarkable. It is one of the surprises of the *reverdie* that its rapture, though expressed like the blackbirds over and over in recurring springs and summers, never grows old.

Indirectly, we may add, the *Kalendar of Shepherds*, although of French origin, contributed to form the English rural tradition; and as we know, it helped to induct and suggest a title to the completest and most melodiously elaborate pastoral in English—Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*.

Mr Gordon Duff, an authority on Caxton and the early printers, points out that as many of the early issues of the press were small things, pamphlets of a few leaves, and the like, a number of them must have perished. But at first there seems to have been a curious idea that directly contemporary things did not call for the honours of type. Certain it is some notable items, like Dunbar's poem—

"London, thou art the Flower of Cities all,"

which he wrote on a visit there in 1501, have no place in the list.

However, it was only a question of time. Once established, books were destined to make their way, and with their aid men became reading creatures who weighed words by the eye and looked for a poem to be marked off by type. Thus, by degrees, the idea of music, the actual enunciation and the resounding of the verse, and the relative sonority of the syllables, came to seem of less importance than before. Song became a silent art, in which the reader's mind supplied the responsive instrument, more or less vibratory as his was a more or less poetic temper.

A pessimist of the fifteenth century might conceivably have thought that the art of song would suffer by the literary surcharge upon its forms. But as human nature is an amazingly adaptable thing, so now the impulse to melody, allied to the

essential emotions of joy and sorrow, being wrought upon by a new complication of the instrument, readjusted itself and looked for new effects. It began to choose words for their associative value and not for their open resonances; and the language prepared the way for the change.

## CHAPTER X

### THE FIRST SCOTTISH POETS

EXCEPT in the Gaelic districts where the old tongue was spoken, Scottish poetry was to be counted in its mediæval forms a variety of English. But its writers gradually educed a style, racy and idiomatic, unlike the English style, which had its climax at length in Fergusson and Burns.

Of the known poets before Chaucer, a brief account must suffice. We should have, outside their pages, to go to the old folk-rhymes and catches, to find the springhead out of which Scottish song first broke.

From the formal records of the literature, we can only glean a few early instances which have any trace of the true northern spirit of song. Sir George Douglas, who is the latest and should be by right of name, the elect Scotch anthologist, begins his *Book of Scotch Poetry* with a thirteenth-century piece, on the death of Alexander III. in 1286, which must surely have been re-touched later—

> " Quhen Alysander oure kynge wes dede,
> That Scotland led in luwe and le,
> Away wes sons off ale and brede,
> Off wyne and wax, off gamyn and gle ;
> Our gold was changyd into lede :
> Cryst, borne into vergynyte,
> Succour Scotland, and remede
> That stad is in perplexyte ! "

Then comes Barbour, first contriver of a Scotch epic, who was Archdeacon of Aberdeen in 1380. He is prospectively important in the lyric record, both by his influence on the Scotch patriotic verse-writers and for the words and rhythms he gave to the currency. His poem was written in couplets, in the common eight-syllable line ; keeping in the main

to narrative pitch, but attaining in its lament for the death, and final exordium over the life, of its hero an eloquent vocal and lyrical strain. One passage will tell you with what an accent Barbour spoke his verse—

" They sembled all so hardily
That their foes felt their coming well:
For with weapons stallwort of steel
They dang on them with all their might,
Their foes received well, I heght,
With swords and spears, and als with mass,
The battle there so fellon was
And so right great spilling of bloos,
That on the erd the slouces stood,
The Scottish men so well them bare,
And so great slaughter made they there,
And fra so feil the lives they reav'd,
That all the field was bloody leav'd."

And since we have made a point of looking for the May canticle in the early writers, we must not omit these verses. It will be noticed that though they come from a northern poet, almost every stroke, every turn of description, is strictly *à la mode.* Only " ilka spray " and " seir colours " suggest the northern Spring—

" This was in midst of month of May,
When birds sing in ilka spray,
Melland their notes with seemly soun,
For softness of the sweet seasoun,
And leaves of the branches spreeds,
And blooms bright beside them breeds,
And fields strawed are with flowers
Well savouring of seir colours,
And all thing worthis, blyth and gay."

Less impressive and less authentic, but more popular, with some singing lines that, being joined to national themes and heroic names, were lucky enough to become the daily bread of balladry, was the later companion poem by " Blind Harry," *The Wallace.* It was of a fashion—major ballad or minor epic strain—well devised to take the ear and hold the minds of hearers in the days before the books came. At times stirring and martial, it is always alive to the events, and the names of the men and places, that figure in the Wallace

story. And occasionally its doggerel effect is relieved by a finer note, as in the description of the horn-blowing at Gask Hall when Wallace is in flight and in great jeopardy: and the "bousteous noise, bryvely blowing fast," tells him he is seen; and he spies Faw down at the door—"his own head in his hand." Or again, in another vein, where the note sounds out of the shrouds of allegory, and the regions call to the man who is never to enjoy his reward on earth among them. There the hero sees from a high mountain the vision of Scotland, and the verse recalls the old catch of "Scotland's burning, Scotland's burning! Fire, Fire!"

> "Therewith he saw begin a fellon fire
> Which braithly burnt in breadth through all the land,
> Scotland all over, from Ross to Solway sand."

The queen of light descends; so "illuminate," that the fellon fire is fairly put out, in his sight. She casts her fateful love upon him—

> "'Welcome,' she said, 'I choose thee for my love.
> Thou art granted by the great God above,
> To help people that suffer meikle wrong,
> With thee, as now I may not tarry long,
> Thou shalt return to thy own use again,
> Thy dearest kin are here in meikle pain.
> This right region you must redeem it all;
> Thy last reward in earth shall be but small."

But missing the joy of earth, he shall have lasting bliss; and so "she beraught him a book," which is written in gross letters of brass, in gold, and in silver. Wallace takes it to a clerk to have his dream, and the book, expounded. The Queen, he thinks, may be Fortune, or Our Lady. The pretty wand she gave assigns to Wallace rule and cruel judgment: its green colour means courage: the red, "geat battle and blood." Here the romance-element again appears, and it brings with it, as it often did, a congenial touch of fantasy.

"Blind Harry" was a useful factor in the provenance of Scottish verse. No English lay or national song touched the southron folk as did his the people of the north. We should have to suppose Robin Hood a national leader, the

darling prince and redemptor of his country, with the Robin Hood ballad welded into a popular epic, to suggest anything like an English parallel. Wallace was a go-between joining the literature and the folk-life of Scotland,—another instance of a book that stole from books and helped to make folk-song. Its derivatives are to be seen in the Scottish patriotic songs, and in some of the Border ballads, and some of its idioms and phrases passed into the common stock on which they drew.

Wallace's fate, we may note, was the theme of other songs, several of which Fordun mentions. Barbour, in the *Brus*, says of one relating Sir John de Soulis's battle with the English (in which they were defeated), that whoso likes may hear—

> " Young wemen when thai will play
> Syng it amang thaim ilk day."

Fabyan, in his *Chronicle*, says of the Battle of Bannockburn,—" the Scots inflamed with pride, in derision of Englishmen made this rhyme as followeth "—

> " Maydens of Englande, sore may ye mourne
> For your lemmans ye have lost at Bannockysborne !
> (*With heue a lowe.*)
> What ! weneth the Kyng of England
> So soon to have wone Scotland ?
> (*With rumbylowe* !) "

" Thys song," he continues, " was after many daies song in daunces, in the caroles of ye maydens and mynstrellys of Scotland, to the reproofe and dysdayne of Englyshemen, with dyuerse other whych I ouerpasse." This is the counter-blast to Lawrence Minot's ballads.

Who can estimate how much the war-songs and heroic lays of Scotland did for her spirit of patriotic devotion and her character as a nation.

Now we come to the famous band of Scots poets of half a century later, over whom Chaucer threw a fold of his cloak. Princeps, if not prince among them—if we accept the usual credit given to him—was James I. of Scotland, who, born in

1394, was carried off a prisoner to England in 1405. The *King's Quair* (or *Book*) is very much in character as a poem written in the following years, that is, in the latter years of his imprisonment, which ended in 1424. It tells the story, in the Chaucerian fashion, and triply veiled, of his own love for Lady Jane Beaufort, whom he married. One could almost suppose that history had been reading Chaucer, and did its best to imitate the romance of his *Knightes Tale* in its dealings with James I. of Scotland. The May canticle is heard again, for the hundredth time, yet freshly and impulsively attuned as ever—

" Worschippe, ye that loveris bene, this May,
For of your bliss the kalendis are begonne,
And sing with us, away winter, away,
Come somer, come, the suete seson and sonne,
Awake, for schame ! that have your hevynis wonne,
And amourously lift up your hedis all,
Thank Lufe that list you to his merci call."

It is a sure proof of the reality of James I.'s inspiration that he was able to keep the lyric fire bright amid all the mist of allegory. It may seem damped when he has to figure Hope, Free-will, Fortune, the Goddess of Wisdom. But at the close of all the white " turture," love's messenger sets the key as she brings the symbolic flowers—

" ' Awake ! awake ! I bring, lover, I bring
The newis glad that blissful ben and sure
Of thy comfort ; now laugh, and play, and sing,
That art beside so glad an aventure ;
For in the hevyn decretit is the cure.'
And unto me the flouris did present :
With wyngis spred hir wayis furth sche went."

Bale says, what it is interesting to know, that James I.'s *Catilenæ* were sung by the Scotch as songs of great favour, and that he played better on the harp than the best of the Irish and Highland harpers ; and certainly he had the art of surprising the music of words : *e.g.*—

" Heigh in the est a morrow soft and swete : "

There is a line that without effort achieves natural magic.

We may leave the dispute over James I.'s claim to *Christe's Kirk of the Green* and *Peebles to the Play*. He had, it is clear, the art to write them, so far as the verse-making went. The change of temper to be marked in them, as compared with the *King's Quair* is not quite so easy to credit, even when we allow all we can for the difference between the thought of an imaginative man while a prisoner, and that when he is set free again. There are, it is true, some lurking apparent faint resemblances in rhyme, and the turn of the line, to urge the identity of authorship—

" Was never in Scotland heard nor seen
Sic dancing nor deray,
Nouther at Falkland on the Green,
Nor Peebliss at the Play,
As was of wooers, as I ween,
At Christ's Kirk on ane day :
There came our Kittys, washen clean,
In their new kirtles of gray,
Full gay,
At Christ's Kirk of the Green that day."

Here is a different genius to the English gaining its outlet with a gay fury of rhyme and epithet unequalled in the chronicle. You can knit up the pedigree of the Scottish lyric by a pretty clear succession in this kind. These are already anticipated in one or two fragments ; and the line is carried on by later writers like Francis Semple of Beltrees and Alexander Scott to Allan Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns.

You find it well sustained in *Colkelbie's Sow*, which mentions the names of several old songs worth the collector's trouble.

With " stok hornis," pipes made of " borit boutre," and " bagpype's," Copyn Cull and his followers—

" Led the dance and began
Play us *Joly lemmane*
Sum trottit *Tras and Trenass*
Sum baltert *The Bass*
Sum *Perdowy* sum *Trolly lolly*
Sum *Cok craw thou quhill day*
*Twysbank*, and *Terway*
Sum *Lincolme* sum *Lindsay*
Sum *Joly lemman dawis if not day*
Sum *Be yon wodsyd* singis

Sum *Late laite on evinnyngis*
Sum *Joly Martene with a mok*
Sum *Lulalow lute cok*

. . . . . .

Sum *Symon sonis of Quhynfell*
Sum *Maist^r Pier de Conyate.*"

The love-song of the Scottish type which Burns carried to its ultimate, may be traced by the stages of a like honourable descent. We can trace it, roughly, to the end of the fifteenth century. In its beginning, it is to be found in songs like—

" Quhen Tayis bank wes blumyt brycht
With blosvmes blycht and bred,"

which Leyden took to be the song called " Twysbank " mentioned in the *Colkelbie Sow.* Again Gawain Douglas speaks of songs that the nymphs and naiads such as we call " wenches and damosels " sing—" ring sangs, dances, ledes and rounds." One of them sings—

" The schip salis over the salt laem
Will bring their merchandis and my lemane hame."

" Sum vther singis,—
' I will be blyth and licht
My heart is lent poun sa gudly wicht .' "

Again Douglas refers to one of the early morning songs, of which there is a northern cycle that at points touches the southern. Both north and south have claimed—

" The jolly day now dawes
This day, day dawes.
This gentil day dawes,
And I must home gone

In a glorious garden grene,
Saw I sytting a comly quene,
Among the flowris that fresh byn.
She gaderd a floure and sett betwene
The lyly whygt rose methought I sawe
And ever she sang
This day, day dawes
This gentil day dawes."

According to a custom, by which in Scotland profane songs

were made edifying, another version of this song was afterwards prepared as follows—

" Hay now the day dallis,
Now Christ on us callis,
Now welth on our wallis,
Appeiris anone :
Now the word of God rings,
Whilk is King of all Kings,
Now Christis flock sings,
The night is neere gone.

Wo be unto you hypocrités,
That on the Lord sa loudly lies,
And all to fill zour foull bellies,
Ye are noght of Christ's blude nor bone.
For ye preich your awin dremis,
And sa the word of God blasphemis,
God wot sa weill it seemis,
The night is neere gone."

In one of the Scotch ballads, it will be recalled that an alternative reading was supplied for the line : " Now we will take a dram ! " which the ballad-singer could use on occasion, to wit—" Now we will sing a psalm."

A later page will carry on the line of the Scottish song-writers. The more deliberate makers and poets who helped to strengthen that line after James I. included three little masters in their way :—Henryson, Dunbar, and the Douglas who has just been quoted. The first of these three, whom the late W. E. Henley called the " aptest and brightest " of Chaucer's disciples, was indeed a poet of some original quality. He did not, that I know of, write any songs for music that came into the peoples' song-book ; but he wrote with that congenial impulse which shows he had music of the imagination. Its melody is heard in the Mouse's song, sung in the Fable or *Taill of the Lyoun and the Mous*—

" Also, it semis nocht your celsitude
Quhilk usis daylie meittis delitious
To syle your teith, or lippis, with my blude,
Quhilk to your stomok is contagious
Unhailsum meit is of ane sairie Mous,
And that namelie untill ane strang Lyoun
Wont till be fed with gentill vennisoun."

One of the secrets of the born rhymer is that of saying a perfectly simple thing with innocence of word and yet with the inevitable melody that takes the ear almost without the reader's knowing it. There is something infinitely engaging in this mouse's appeal, and her light-lying her own dainty loathsome self—

" Unhailsum meit is of ane sairie Mous "

Henley said the writer's dialect to a modern eye was distressingly quaint and crabbed. And yet, I know not how it is, to the readers who have fortuned to be brought up near enough to the Scottish Border and who have had some acquaintance with Chaucer, Henryson is not really difficult. He had the art that young children have of making familiar words strange, old words new, and common things uncommon, by the slightest change of inflection, or some personal touch marking the speaker's own way of speaking. He was not of the mould perhaps of which the greatest poets are made. But he was a little master in his northern style ; a master in the art that is really most deliberate, but that seems artless as *Marion of the Ewe-Bughts* or *Cow Crumie.*

Take this, in his canny Scots lyric-monitory vein, which occurs in his fable of the Town and Country Mouse—

*The Uplandis Mous and the Burges Mous.*

" O wantoun man ! that usis for to feid
Thy wambe and makis it ane god to be
Link to thyself, I warne thee well, but dreid,
The cat cummis, and to the Mous hes ee,
Quhat vaillis than thy feist and rialtie,
With dreidful hart and tribalacioun !
Thairfoir best thing in eird, I say, for me
Is blyithnes in hart, with small possessioun."

Or this of Orpheus playing—

" Then Orpheus before Pluto sat doune
And in his handis quhite his harp can ta,
And playit mony suete proparcioun,
With base tonys in Ypodorica
With Gemynyng in Ypolerica ;
Till at the last for reuth and grete pitee
They wepit sore, that coud him here and see."

Or, in another vein, try him in *The Preiching of the Swallow*; or in the fable of three Scots wives figured as three hens –

" Quod Sprutock then,
" Cease sister of your sorrow ! "

(the sorrow is for the loss of Chanticleer ;)

" We sall fair weill, I find, sanct Johne to borrow,
The proverb sayis, ' Als gude lufe cummis as gais ! '
I will put on my halv dayis claithis,
And mak me fresche agane this jolie May,
Syne chant this sang, wes never wedow sa gay ! "

" Was never widow so gay ! " There the May note recurs, with a change of setting. Of the three hens—

" Pertok, Sprutok, and Toppok,—

Pertok touches a different key in her lament for her lord—

" Yone wes our drowe, and our dayis darling,
Our nichingaill, and als our orlege bell ;
Our walkynge watche us for to warne and tell,
Quhen that Aurora, with hir curcheis gray,
Put up hir heid betuix the nicht and day."

To a southern reader, William Dunbar's vocabulary, use of the Scottish diminutive, and choice of rhyme-endings, may at first seem very like Henryson's. But he is really of a different build and temper. He was nearer to James the First of Scotland, or the writer of *Christes Kirke on the Greene*. The amazing energy of that verse-fandango is matched by Dunbar's superb *Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sins*.

" Of Februar the fyftene nycht,
Full lang befoir the dayis lycht,
I lay in till a trance ;
And than I saw baith Hevin and Hell:
Me thocht, amangis the feyndis fell,
Mahoun gart cry ane Dance
Off Schrewis that were nevir schrevin,
Aganis the feist of Fasternis evin
To mak thair observance ;
He bad gallandis ga graith a gyiss
And kast up garmountis in the Skyiss
As varlotis dois in France.

. . . . . .

Lat sé, quoth he, now quha begynnis,
With that the fowll Sevin Deidly synnis
Begowth to leip at anis.
And first of all in Dance was Pryd,
With hair wyld bak, and bonet on syd,
Lyk to mak vaistie wanis;
And round abowt him, as a quheill,
Hang all in rumpillis to the heill
His kethat for the nanis:
Mony prowd trumpour with him trippit
Throw skaldand fyre, ay as thay skippit
Thay gyrnd with hyddous granis."

Dunbar is another of the men whose individuality seems to gain by every tag they borrow He was a magnificent borrower; he borrowed from the *Romaunt of the Rose*, *The King's Quair*, *Canterbury Tales*, François Villon, and some say, though it is doubtful, *Piers Plowman*. His life was of a kind to favour his eclectic habit. He enjoyed a rare combination of *lehrjähre* and *wanderjahre*; went to St Andrews, a good beginning, and then thought of becoming a Franciscan friar. But roaming Scotland, England and France, he enlarged his art and so remained a poet instead. Yet fate left him reflecting—

"I knaw nocht how the kirk is gydit,
Bot beneficis ar nocht leil devydit,
Sum men hes sevin, and I nocht ane
Quhilk to considder is ane pane."

That comes from his song to the King—"On the Warld's Instabilitie." His good fortune delayed to appear, as his *Meditation in Winter* and his Petition of the Gray Horse, "Auld Dunbar," tell. We have gained by his sorrows, poured out in language of a force and naturalness, deploring and taunting by turn, such as only his genius and the northern idiom together could, it seems, convey. He set a tune, in fact, that Scotland never forgot—

"He has Blind Harry and Sandy Traill
Slain with his shot of mortal hail
Whilk Patrik Johnstoun might not flee:
*Timor Mortis conturbat me.*"

One cannot picture Dunbar and his fellow "makars"

without calling up Kennedy,—"Good Maister Walter Kennedy," who also figures in the *Lament* just quoted. The "Flyting" of the two poets is a duel to be compared, but not likened, to that between Dafydd ab Gwilym and Gruffydd Gryg; one passage of Kennedy's lyric recrimination will show his command of epithet and rascal-rhyme—

> "Out, out! I showt, upon that snout that snevilles:
> Tailltellar, rebellar, indwellar with the divillis,—
> Spink, sink with stink ad Tartara Termagorum."

Kennedy's "remains" are too slight to account for his whole contemporary fame, which was extraordinary. He had vigour enough, and wit enough, to stand up to Dunbar, though he was much slighter in build. He was not self-critical, we judge, by his terming himself the "Rose of Rhetoric" and other signs. But Douglas and other poets took him at his own estimate, and he helped undoubtedly to strengthen the lyric tradition of his time.

Gawain Douglas, born in the next generation to Dunbar, was a scholarly enricher of the northern strain. He used words with Latin affluence and a fine literary imagination, without much structural idea in his verse. His call to poetry was not abetted, like Dunbar's, by discouragement in other walks: and at the end he turned to state affairs and to politics. Where his poetry tended to grow flat, his picturesque style saved him.

Two passages in his *Palace of Honour* are memorable for their lyric colouring—

> "And sum of thame ad lyram playit and sang
> Sa plesand verse quhill all the roches rang,
> Metir saphik, and also elygie.
> Mair instrumentis all maist war fidillis lang
> But with a string quhilk never a wreist zeid wrang.
> Sum had ane harp and sum a fair psaltrie,
> On lutis sum thair accentis subtelle
> Devydit weill, and held the measure lang,
> In soundis sweit of plesand melodie.
> The ladyis fair on diuers instrumentis
> Went playand, singand, dansand owir the bentis

Full angellike and hevinlie was thair soun,
Quhat creature amid his hart imprentis
The fresche bewtie, the gudelie representis
The merie speiche, fair hauingis, hie renoun,
Of thame, wald set a wise man half in swoun,
Thair womanlines wryithit the elementis
Stoneist the hevin, and all the eirth adoun."

These followers of Chaucer in the north serve to point out the working of the literary tradition in Scottish lyric verse. The development of Scottish song on its more popular side must be left for a later page.

# CHAPTER XI

## NORTHERN SURVIVALS—AN INDUCTOR OF BALLADS—*PIERS PLOWMAN*—HAWES—SKELTON

THE old English accent did not give way entirely under the Norman fashions that ruled from the death of Taillefer to the birth of Chaucer. It survived to be heard vigorously speaking, both in Northumberland and in the Mendips, in two poets who overlapped Chaucer's reign. One was a direct continuer of the old war-poetry, and a notable anticipator and inductor of the north-country and border ballad: Lawrence Minot. The other was of the line of Caedmon and Cynewulf, taking up after the long interval the actual mode, the Anglo-Saxon bisected alliterative line, with something of the religious vision they had used, and reapplying the old verse in the powerful expression of the needs and fears of a new age. These both represent what we are driven to consider as northern survivals, though the latter was of the Mendips, and the main stronghold of the old speech, as we may agree with Freeman,[1] was not only in the north, after the Conquest.

In Langland, it is true, we see the "Great Age of West Saxon Literature" raising its voice again; but that, too, was of the northern tradition, as the *Exeter Book* showed. To the writing of *Piers Plowman*, in the old fashion, we may add the fact that "John Cornwaill changed the lore in alle the gramere scoles of Engelond," in 1385, "and now children

[1] "The strength of the old tongue fled," as he put it, "flowed up into the Lowlands"; and was kept alive in the regions where the new French-speaking castle-roads did not at once penetrate. As Fenland gave the cue to modern English, Northampton, Leicestershire, and the East Midland folk kept up the tradition, and resisted with stout Saxon conservatism the new infusion; but it was the north that in folk-song and ballad did most for the perpetuation of the ancient spirit in poetry.

loveth Frensche and construeth and lerneth in Englische." Twenty years and more earlier than that, at the death of Edward III., "the victory of English was won." An incident of the struggle was the hard fight of the "s" plural ending with the "n" ending and the triumph of the "s," a most unlucky one for English poetry.

Lawrence Minot does not represent the equation between the changes in language and the changes in poetry with as interesting a balance as Langland, and he was less inspired. But he was markedly lyrical in temper, and he vigorously made his theme love of his own country and the praise of Edward III. and his victories. Minot was the father of the Border ballad, in fact, who used the popular rhythm with a mixed lyric and narrative note in his exultant half-barbaric songs of England triumphing. Hear his devout "Amen" in his song *How Edward the King come in Braband,* which turns to the praise of the "Ingliss Men"—

> "Bot sen the time that God was born
> Ne a hundreth yere biforn,
> War never men better in fight
> Than Inglıss men, whils thai had myght.
> Bot sone alle maistri gan thai mis;
> God bring thaire saules untille his blis
> And God assoyl them of thaire sin
> For the gude wille that thair war in! *Amen.*"

The next stanza ends as fervently—

> "Now Jhesu save alle Ingland,
> And blis it with his haly hand! *Amen.*"

No doubt a Northumbrian by birth, he used that dialect; and this nearness to the Scots border only increased, as it did in the unknown balladists who came after him, a hatred for the men on the other side. Among the events he put into his songs and ballads, ranging over some twenty years, may be counted the fight at Halidon Hill (1333), the Brabant expedition already noted, the sea-fight of the following year at the mouth of the Scheldt, the siege of Tournay—one of the most spirited of his vaunting pieces, the siege of Calais, the battle of Neville's Cross, the sea-fight off Winchilsea in 1350,

when the Spaniards and their Biscay privateers lost twenty-four galleons to the Englishmen after a terrific struggle and the Channel was set free again; and the taking of Guisnes. There Minot's contributions to the ballad chronicle of England end abruptly. Probably a soldier himself, he may have fallen either in action or a victim to the Black Death, which arrived in 1349. His song of Bannockburn is retrospective, evoked by the thought of the Halidon Hill triumph for the English side that avenged it.

If you know fairly well the pages of Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* you will note at once in this song of the "Batayl of Banocburn" a strain that is unmistakeable—

"Now for to tul you will I turn,
Of [the] batayl of Banocburn.

"Skottes out of Berwik and of Abirdene,
At the Bannok burn war ye to kene;
Thare slogh ye many sakles, als it was sene;
And now has King Edward wroken it, I wene
*It is wrokin, I wene, wele wurth the while;*
*War yit with the Skottes, for thaier ful of gile.*

Whare er ye, Skottes of St John's toune?
The boste of yowre baner es betin all doune;
When ye bosting will bede, Sir Edward es boune
For to kindle yow care, and crak youre crowne.
*He has crakked youre crowne, wele worth the while;*
*'Schame bityde the Skottes, for thaier full of gile'*."

Hear the echo in the *Fray of Suport*, one of the Border Ballads which it is to be feared Sir Walter delicately doctored. There the ballad invokes "sleep'ry Sim" and others of the English side of the march to "mak sure" all the fords and roads. "For the wily Scot takes by nooks, hooks and crooks." Minot taunts the "Skottes of St John's toune"; and the other calls out his allies against the rough-riding Scots and rude Johnstones—

"Whether they be frae the Tarras or Ewsdale
They maun turn and fight, or try the deeps o' Liddel."

Save that Minot's ballad is more deliberate, more ordered, you might conclude the two to be absolutely of the same

poetic stock. The spirit, the movement, are curiously alike. Take the first stanza from the *Fray of Suport*, and then turn up another of Minot's poems, the *Siege of Tournay*, and the resemblance grows closer—

" Ye are baith right het and fou' ;
But my wae wakens na you.
Last night I saw a sorry sight—
Naught left me o' four-and-twenty gude owsen and kye
My weel-ridden gelding, and a white quey,
But a toom byre and a wide
And the twelve nogs in ilka side.
Fy, lads ! shout a', a', a', a', a'
My gear's a gane."

And here is a stanza of the ballad of *Tournay*—

" When all yowre wele is went,
Yowre wo wakkins full wide,
To sighing er ye sent
With sorow on ilka syde ;
Full rewfull es yowre rent
All redles may ye ride.
The harness that ye have hent
Now may ye hele and hide."

When it is said that Minot was a ballad-provider, it is not intended to claim that he did more than add some of the recognised idioms, phrases, rhymes, and cadences which became part of the repertory. His interest for us in the lyric succession lies in the fact that he stands between the popular minstrel and the literary craftsman, with a note ranging between folk-song and poetry. He is a late instance of a gleeman turning scôp, and a balladist proceeding or beginning to be national poet.

Not only that, Minot carries on the old alliterative habit with a deliberate increase of the alliteration in certain lines ; adding rhyme and a few iterative devices of his own that are by no means ineffective. He contrives his verse, too, in a way that inclines one to expect a tune, a musical accompaniment ; and the showman's couplet to be spoken before the opening ballad-strain, for instance—

" Herkins how King Edward lay
With his men bifor Tournay "

is like the giving out of a hymn by the parson before it is appropriated by the congregation. When we come to the Border Ballads we shall be better able perhaps to realise better how far Lawrence Minot gained by being so decisively lyrical in his flying sagas.

When we look back from his pages we see that his particular strain of English war-lyric was one of a tradition, and did not absolutely originate with him. The echoes of wars which had bred no epic—yet had found occasional singers who were drawn to become minstrels of event and had a rude sub-epical intention in their mind—lingered from the first Edward's time and before it. Why the national English epic never came to be fully written, and only found expression at last under the dramatic mask in the form of history plays, is a question that rises but does not belong to these pages; and it is only necessary here to point out that what looks like the *débris* of promising ballad material is widely scattered in the songs and fragments of these early Edwardian days. A couplet, a rhymed proverb, a lyric catch or saying, was medium enough for its casual preservation, as in that inimitable essay in the Carmagnol or patriotic jig, "Hoppe Wyllikin!"

We find the same feeling, the love of a tune, the good spirits, possibly too the same impatience of sustained art, indicated in many of the old nursery rhymes that are depraved ballads. In Minot's songs on King Edward's Wars and Battlefields like that at Neville's Cross, or the fates of "Sir David the Bruse"—

> "The north end of Ingland
> teched him to daunce,
> When he was met on the more
> with mekill mischance"—

we have many phrases and endings that passed into the same currency. His was the function of the gleemen who sang songs that found their way from hall to kitchen, from kitchen to nursery. The strain runs proverbially, as in his gallant ditty of *Halidon Hill*—

" Lithes, and I sall tell zow tyll
The bataile of Halidon hyll.
. . . . .
A pere of prise es more sum tyde
Than all the boste of Normondye.
Thai sent thaire schippes on ilka side,
With flesch and wine and whete and rye ;
With hert and hand, es noghte at hide,
For to help Scotland gan thai hye.
Thai fled, and durst no dede habide,
And all thaire fare noght wurth a flye."

Through all his short cycle of war-songs he maintains the northern note, while the old English *cesura* is there made into a separate line-break. Indeed by printing his typical stanzas in four lines, instead of eight, this resemblance of his to the old model becomes clear. Minot's songs are so many ties between the old poetic stock represented in *Widsith* and the balladists who went on writing up to the days of Johnnie Armstrong and beyond him.

If the line is knitted up by Minot, the connection is, it must be allowed, more readily seen in Langland and his fellow-poet or poets in *Piers Plowman.* In him and his writing we detect the ancient usage, openly affecting his words and the weight he puts upon them. They recall the idioms of the *Saxon Chronicle*—

" Hwæt mæg ic teollan ? Se scearpa death the ne for let ne rice menn ne heane : seo hine genam : "

" What may I tell ? The sharp death that does not leave nor rich men nor high : it him took."

verses in the same tradition, a century or more later—

" Uncomly in cloystre,—I coure ful of care."

And it relates the history at the point where he takes ıabit
to the advent of John de Wycliffe whose English trans- ines ;
of St Mark was already in Langland's hands when h that
writing *Piers Plowman*— oo, in

" How may Sathanas caste out Sathanas ? And if a rewme be departide in itself, the ilke rewme may not stonde. And if Sathanas hath risen ageins hymself, he is disparpoiled,[1] and he shal not mowe stonde, but hath an ende. . . ."

[1] Scattered.

That accent is in his writing, and the accent too of Caedmon growing lyrical over Lucifer's fall—

> " Lucifer with legions—lerede hit in hevene ;
> He was lovelokest of siht—aftur ur Lord, . . ."

On another side he takes up with imitative ear the note of English folk-song, such as you have in the rudest nursery rhymes—

> " ' Where's your money ? '
> ' I forgot.'
> ' Get along, you drunken sot.' "

In the gluttony episode, as it occurs in the *Vision*, the shriving of the seven deadly sins, you have the same voice—

> " ' Gossip,' says she, ' I have good ale ; wilt taste it, Glutton ? '
> ' What hast then ? ' says he : ' any hot spice ?
> ' Pepper and peony seeds,' says she, ' and a pound of garlic
> And a farthings worth of fennel for your fasting day.' "

It is the old rhyme again of the gossip and the shop-door that reappears in a hundred disguises.

Many reminders of the old folk-life of the country and its proverbial speech are to be found in *Piers Plowman*. The use Langland makes of alliterative verse explains the theory of that rhythm maintained by some writers. For the accent was movable, and the verse was freely modulated, and intended to be humoured in the recital ; it was susceptible of changes, both of time and emphasis. In reading *Piers Plowman* you can clearly discern the movement, and fluidity of the *stabreim*, as you did not in the earlier poets before the long interval. Thus in Passus IX. of Dowe, Dobed, DoBest, you get lines with a " varying " beat—

> " Thus i robed in russet—I romed about.
> Al a somer sesoun—for to seek Dowel,"

which only wait rhyme to be pure melody. The spreading of the accent is a favourite device with Langland—

> " Lat brynge a man in a bote—amydde a brode water,
> And the wynde and the water—and the waggyng of the bot
> Maketh the mon mony tyme—to stomble and to fall."

In Passus XIV. again the lyrical beat keeps rising and falling characteristically—

> " Pore peple, thi prisoneres, Lord—in the put of myschief
> Confort tho creatures—that moche care suffren
> Thorw derth, thorw drouth—alle her dayes here,
> Wo in wynter tymes—for wanting of clothes
> And in somer tyme selde—soupen to the fulle :
> Comfort thi careful, Cryst—in the ryche."

In *Piers Plowman* we have at every turn an individual note and a specific use of what Langland called " Melodyes wordes "—

> " There the pore dar plede and preve by pure resoun,
> To have allowaunce of his lorde by the lawe he it cleymeth,
> Joye that nevere Joye hadde of rightful Jugge he axeth,
> And seith, " lo ! briddes and bestes that no blisse ne knoweth
> And wilde wormes in wodes thorw wyntres thow hem grevest
> And makest hem welnyegh meke and mylde for defaute
> And after thou sendest hem somer that is her sovergne Ioye
> And bliss to alle that ben bothe wilde and tame."

Conning them over, we again detect, for the last time in this immemorial English rhythm, the voice of the common folk seizing on the voice of the interpreter elect and filling it with the emotion, the hope and the despair of a troubled age. " I warne you, alle workmen—wynneth while yo mowe. Hunger hiderward ageyn—hieth him zeorne."

Among the passages that take hold on the ear, with singing iteration, and an effect almost of refrain, is the " Song of Wrath."

> " Now awoke Wrath—with his two white eyes,
> His snivelling nose—and bitten lips."

Hawes, who continued with his *Graunde Amoure* and *Bell Pucell* the southern strain in English verse developed by Chaucer, was still writing in the time of Henry the Eighth. He wrote a poem, indeed, on the accession of that king who we know was susceptible to music and poetry, and had much to do with the lives and deaths of the poets of his reign. Unfortunately Hawes did not take Chaucer but Lydgate for master in the art, and he has at times something of Lydgate's dog-trot gait and untidy habit. Yet when we have decided

that the *Pastime of Pleasure* is impossible, we discover, in turning it over, verse of some charm and colour. He is another writer who has lyrical moments in his narrative. His *Grande Amoure* and his *Bell Pucell* induct ideas of music, as in the contriving of the Tower Melodious.

The movement of Hawes' stanza is often pleasant. He had learnt to strike his iambs like tabors, and when he missed a beat it was perhaps because he did not know how otherwise to avoid the monotony, or how to supple his lines by varying the pause. He has lost Chaucer's secret, like Lydgate before him, but there is in him a foretaste of Spenser. You surprise it in the *Song of a True Knight*, which has fine melody, though it wants Spenser's power of melting his English until the verse flows like Italian into its mould; and there is no Alexandrine, of course, at the end—

> " For knyghthode is not in the feates of warre
> As for to fight in quarrel ryght or wrong
> But in a cause which trouble can not defarre
> He ought himself for to make sure and strong
> Justice to kepe, myxt with mercy among,
> And no quarell a knyght ought to take
> But for a troathe, or for a woman's sake."

The closing couplet of the first septet shows a striking use of a cadence that even as it drops, sustains the music. The complement to this is a verse that is an echo of a noble passage already quoted from Malory [1]—

> " O mortall folke you may beholde and see
> Howe I lye here, sometime a mighty knight,
> The end of joye and all prosperite
> Is death at last, thorough his course and mighte
> After the daye there cometh the darke nighte,
> For though the daye be never so long,
> At last the belle ringeth to evensong."

" That couplet alone should suffice for immortality," said the late Churton Collins; and if we cannot accept his belief in the " complete originality " of Hawes, we can agree that the *Tower Melodious* proves its writers one of those who had something individual to give to the poetical currency; some-

[1] See page 64.

thing to add, though it were only a few pages, to the great repertory of English lyric verse.

With Hawes, convention held very strong. The next poet in the *Chronicle*, John Skelton, was a rebel and an original, who used verse as a whip, made song into a satire, and kept no great reverence in his reverend calling. He had a distinct vein of light melody in him, along with a sense of things disharmonised to be made ludicrous. His *Colyn Clout* is a wild jester, an ironical anti-cleric, who seems to have halted in dancing a malicious galliard at the very door of the Church—

> "I, Colyn Clout,
> As I go about
> And wandryng as I walke
> I heare the people talke.
> Men say for silver and golde—
> Miters are bought and sold;
> There shall no clergy appose
> A miter nor a crosse
> But a full purse.
> A straw for Goddes curse!
> What are they the worse?
> For a simoniake,
> Is but a hermoniake,
> And no more ye make
> Of symony men say
> But a childes play."

"Hermioniake" is an instance of his mad play upon words, and the fashion in which he coins an epithet at random. Apparently he writes ironically to suggest here that a "Simoniac" is only an innocent—half fool of nature, half hermit. But we should not follow the erratic flight of his wit, if we had not the "holy anker" or anchorite in a succeeding line to offer a clue.

This is not the right place to take up the significant question of the place of Skelton in history, his influence over Henry the Eighth, and the effect of his satire in giving that monarch his own contempt for the ancient Church. Skelton's *Colyn Clout* is a portent in his way. His cartoon of the bysshopp on a mule—

> "With gold all betrapped,
> In purple and paule belapped,
> Some halted and some capped,"

the subsequent lines of satire, were not, we know, without effect—

> " Their mayles [1] golde doth eate
> Theyr neighbours dye for meat.
> What care they though Gill sweat
> Or Jacke of the Noke ?
> The pore people they yoke."

Skelton it was assuredly who helped to give Henry's mind its bias against the " bysshopp on his carpet " and the " holy anker "—

> " A man might say in mocke
> Ware the wethercocke
> Of the steple of Poules,
> And thus they hurt their Soules
> In sclaundering you for truth.
> Alas it is great ruthe !
> Some say ye sit in trones
> Like princes aquilonis
> And shryne your rotten bones
> With pearles and precious stones,
> But now the commons grones
> And the people mones
> For preestes and for lones
> Lent and never payde
> But from day to day delaid,
> The commune welth decayd "

Of lyric satirists there have not been so many in English poetry who counted in the contemporary or the ex-contemporary estimate that we can afford to overlook Skelton. He had the singular art of making his apparent carelessness of word and measure tell in the page. But while he seemed like the most heedless of improvisators, he was at will a most crafty verseman. That he has bothered the men who measure poetry with a Latin rod is but natural, for he made light of rule, and created a joyous, hurrying, taunting, mischievous mode of his own, admirable for his purpose. Satirists have often shown little feeling for beauty or lyric melody ; Skelton had it, and could write tunefully as love-song at need ; witness *Mirry Margaret*—

[1] Mules.

" Mirry Margaret
As mydsomer flowre :
Jentill as fawcoun
Or hawke of the towere ;
With solace and gladness,
Moche mirthe and no madness
All good and no badness,
So joyously,
So maydenly,
So womanly
Her demenyng
In every thynge ;
Far, far passynge
That I can endyght
Or suffice to wryghte
Of Mirry Margarete
As mydsomer flowre,
Jentyll as fawcoun
Or hawke of the towre."

In other poems, where he is satirical, he still gets his effect by throwing out a bright image, in order to secure the relief for his pending stroke of caricature—

" Their tabertes of fine silke,
Their stiropes of mixt golde begared,[1]
There may no cost be spared."

Something of humorous fury, and a power of caricature and of impersonating a quality in a type, a type in a man, a man in a gorgeous scarecrow, are seen in his lyric cartoon of *Ryott*. Here, too, you have the northern idiom asserting itself, in contrast to that of Hawes. Skelton is not afraid of hunting the letter without limit, as in his *Lullabye*—

" What dremyst thou, drunchard, drowsy pate !
Thy lust and lykyng is from thé gone :
Thou blynkerd blowboll, thou wakyst to late :
Behold thou lyeste, luggard, alone ! "

Both by his wit and his great fluidity of expression Skelton was one of the few original verse-makers of that time who strengthened the English idiom. There were other signs of its increase on the lyric side. Many of the most beautiful of the old songs and madrigals which have the true country savour date from this period. Henry himself, tradition has it, could write tunefully on occasion, without knowing what

[1] Embossed.

words were singable and what song cadence required. A verse of *Pastance with good companie,* which may be accounted his, will help to prove it true—

" Pastance with good companie
I love and shall until I die
Grudge who will, but none deny
So God be pleas'd, this life will I,
For my pastance,
Hunt, sing and dance ;
My heart is set
All goodlie sport
To my comfort,
Who shall me let ? "

Here is a stave by an unknown song-writer of the time—

" Mekyl mirth was them among
In every corner of the hous
Was melody delycyous
For to here precyus
Of six menys song."

Indeed singing catches, and all sorts of old vocal provender abound in the old music-books of Henry's reign.

" Agincourt ! Agincourt !
Know ye not Agincourt ? "

is a patriotic hymn in six words, sung to a tune more like a dirge to our ears than a challenge.

## CHAPTER XII

### WYATT AND SURREY—THE NATURALISATION OF THE SONNET

THE next southern importation was to prove of lasting effect, and it came through two poets of remarkable force and initiative, Wyatt and Surrey. The elder, Thomas Wyatt, was born at Allington Castle in Kent, son of Sir Henry Wyatt, in 1503; Henry Howard, called Earl of Surrey, was some fourteen years his junior. Wyatt went to St John's College, Cambridge, then newly founded, and took his B.A. in 1518. His first, and it seems his only, visit to Italy was made in 1527 with Sir John Russell, when he was young enough to be highly susceptible. This Italian journey was to prove of extraordinary effect in the history of English verse. It confirmed the treaty or alliance between the poetries of the two countries to which Chaucer has set his hand: one that went on affecting the English poets long after Wyatt and Surrey had gone to their early graves. To Wyatt, as we find him in *Tottel's Miscellany*, a poet of original mind who in his search for an instrument became a zealous imitator and adapter of Italian forms, we owe the sonnet and other refinements. If it is too much to say (as Churton Collins did) that he and Surrey were the "founders" of our lyrical poetry, unless indeed we confine lyrical within Italian bounds, Wyatt did give to English verse a new fashion, and open a source of inspiration which affected every great English poet between the reigns of Henry VIII. and George II. (including Dryden, who adapted Boccaccio).

Most of Wyatt's poems are those of youth; many are in idea and in manner imitative; but wherever he finds his own voice or alters the stops of his Italian music, he is seen to be not only an instinctive verseman of fine power, but a poet who could think, and think lyrically. There are phrases

of Wyatt's echoed from the poets he read abroad, but cast anew in his music, which show in him instinctive melody. If he often appears less musical to us than he did to his contemporaries, it is because of the syllabic uncertainty of English, and his tricks of using two shorts and two longs together in an heroic line, or dropping an accent. Many of his Italian transcripts were roughly done for his own use. Some he corrected afterwards, some were corrected for him. But he never saw them in print, and no doubt some of the copies of his verse were carelessly written. Lines like—

"The sea waterles, and fishe vpon the mountain,"

or the second of this couplet closing one of his Italian octaves—

" But ye, my birds, I sweare, by all your belles,
Ye be my frende, and very few elles"—

mark the uncertainty of Wyatt's verse. The last line is a puzzling one to scan, but it is simple compared to some others that might be quoted. Indeed sometimes one is left asking whether Wyatt did not often in his verse pronounce English as if it was Italian? We all know instances of young men who after a brief while in Paris acquired a distinct Parisian voice.

We must not judge Wyatt only by his sonnets and his experiments and half-corrected exercises. In about a dozen poems he showed himself a master in the lyric, caring to attain a grave stately rhythm that has more of the dignity than the fluency of Italian verse, though it often suggests the use of Italian cadences. Such is his address to his Lute, a perfect instance of a kind of lyric that for long kept its vogue under the Tudors, and might be called Lutanist verse—

" My lute, awake! perform the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste,
And end that I have now begun:
And when this song is sung and past,
My lute! be still, for I have done.

As to be heard where ear is none;
As lead to grave in marble stone,—
My song may pierce her heart as soon;
Should we then sing, or sigh, or moan?
No, no, my lute! for I have done.

The rock doth not so cruelly,
Repulse the wave continually,
  As she my suit and affection:
So that I am past remedy;
  Whereby my lute and I have done.

. . . . . .

Proud of the spoil that thou hast got
Of simple hearts thorough Love's shot,
  By whom, Unkind, thou hast them won;
Think not he hath his bow forgot,
  Although my lute and I have done.

Vengeance shall fall on thy disdain,
That makest but game of earnest pain;
  Trow not alone under the sun
Unquit to cause thy lovers plain,
  Although my lute and I have done.

May chance thee lie withered and old
In winter nights, that are so cold,
  Plaining in vain unto the moon;—
Thy wishes then dare not be told;
  Care then who list, for I have done.—

And then may chance thee to repent
The time that thou hast lost and spent,
  To cause thy lovers sign and swoon,—
Then shalt thou know beauty but lent,
  And wish and want, as I have done.—

. . . . . .

Now cease, my lute! This is the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste;
  And ended is that we begun.
Now is thy song both sung and past;
  My lute, be still, for I have done."

These are full as idiomatic, personal, and expressive of the poet as those better known ones written to a lute-melody—*Forget not yet*—

"Forget not yet the tried intent
  Of such a truth as I have meant,
  My great travail so gladly spent:
    Forget not yet."

The structure of this stanza, built upon a single letter, shows how conscious a craftsman Wyatt was. In the third and fourth, proceeding from "the great assays," the "cruel wrong," to the reminder—

"How long ago hath been, and is
  The mind that never meant amiss"—

the emotion is wrought to a climacteric, while the rhythm is used with a musician's ear for the variety in unity that is most essential in song. Wyatt then, with Surrey to confirm the change, marks a series of experiments towards a new metric, and an art grown aware of itself, and in essence literary. So far as there was a common genius at work in it, this was not the folk-spirit of England, but the new spirit, the new intellectual force, that was stirring in the world at large.

To know all the individual poetic fire that there was behind Wyatt's writing, you must realise his life: that of a man who went as ambassador to Spain, who treated with an emperor, who made love, if only in the fashion of the *amant courtois*, to a princess destined to be queen—Anna Boleyn; who was knighted in the year when she was sent to the scaffold; how himself faced trial and prison, and the mortal suspicions of Henry VIII., and who survived only to die of a fever after a wild ride to Sherborne in the service of that King. A life so crowded, as you see, with event that it must easily have diverted him from poetry, for which he kept instead a faculty fine yet profound—a man of affairs, in short, who remained a man of imagination.

From Wyatt's, turn to Surrey's life, its natural pendant. The writings of both men leave one intensely curious as to their adventures and preoccupations, and the events that help to explain their thoughts. Surrey, moreover, had the fortune to be made into the hero of a romance which was for long accepted as his actual history. It indicates a something unusual and wonder-provoking about his career, sealed as it was by death on the scaffold. This romance, written sixty years after his death by Thomas Nash, and perpetuated by A. Wood, Walpole and Warton, is provided of necessity with the nonpareil mistress who should serve as queen of song. His own lines tell her fame, and help to strengthen the "Surrey" myth—

> "From Tuskane came my Ladies' worthy race:

Geraldine, as they tell—the lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald—was

the daughter of Gerald Fitzgerald, ninth earl of Kildare, who died when she was a small child. She was still a child when she was married to her first husband, Sir Anthony Brown, who was old enough to be her grandfather. He died in 1549, and she became the third wife of Lord Lincoln—Edward de Clinton—whom she survived. Surrey knew her at court, where she was placed under the wing of the Princess Mary after her father's death; and it is thanks to this poetic service that she lives in the Paradise of Imagined Ladies. Surrey's best critic, Mr Courthope, thinks his was purely an artistic and conventional love-suit, and most readers will settle the point by the degree of reality that they find in Surrey's sonnets and *canzoni*. Like other poets, he had his moods, and was now whipping up his verse to her office, and now carried away by the passion he had begun by feigning only. When he is following Petrarch, or when he is citing Cupid, he is often only seeming-passionate; he is using Italian coin, re-minted metal. But when he puts himself into his song, his accent grows clear—

> " Now certesse, Garret, since all this is true,
> That from above thy gyfts are thus elect:
> Do not deface them then with fancies new
> Now change of minds let not thy mind infect.'

We see it in the lines written in Windsor, when he lay a prisoner, telling of the halcyon days spent there—

> " Where I in lust and joy
> With a king's son, my childish years did pass."

The King's son was Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond (Henry VIII.'s illegitimate son by Elizabeth Blount), who was betrothed to Surrey's sister. Fitzroy died before the marriage was consummated; Surrey's sister lived to become an agent in procuring his own death, which took place in 1547: " Notwithstanding his eloquent and masculine defence, he was condemned by a servile jury, and beheaded on Tower Hill." He came, as we have seen, of famous stock, grandson of that Earl of Surrey whom Henry VII. made Duke of Norfolk after Flodden Field. Even if we give up the notion of a childhood

spent chiefly at Windsor, great houses, great occasions, great people surrounded him from the first. He was educated in the spirit of Castiglione's exemplary type, which more than any other served to set the Italian fashions of the time. These supplied a new ritual to English verse, and it remains now to turn to their naturalisation in the sonnet.

How then did Surrey, following Wyatt and improving on his awkward form, contrive to give the sonnet its English mode? Wyatt experimented freely in his translations of the Italian poets, and Petrarch in chief, without getting at the ideal measure of the proportions employed in the architecture of the lines. He seems often to have jotted down the readiest English equivalent he could think of to the sonnets and *canzoni* he read in Italy, and then he struck out a rough and often very expressive compromise between the two. You see the result in the "sonettes" by him that Tottel printed. Their skeleton is composed of an octave, rhymed in the Petrarchan order, *abba, abba*; a quatrain, *cdcd*; and a couplet, *ee*. Now mathematically this looks well enough; prosodically it is all wrong. The octave in the Italian sonnet states the idea; the rest of the sonnet offers in a balancing counterpoint the solution, grateful to the ear, convincing to the mind. Wyatt's model does not do this, but his sense of phrase, his instinct for the word, were often enough to save the verse. Read the sonnets after various Italian authors into which he has put some English grace of his own, and then turn to the sonnets of those who came after him, from Surrey to Sidney, from Spenser to Daniel, to say nothing of Shakespeare, and you begin to realise his initiative. Take the sonnet after Serafino Comino which is entitled *The Lover forsaketh his Unkinde Love*—

> "My hart I gave thee, not to do it pain,
> But, to preserue,—lo, it to thee was taken,
> I serued thee not that I should be forsaken:
> But that I should receive reward again
> I was content thy servant to remain."

Here is the beginning in our poetry of the amoristic sonnets

which confess the heart and look into the mirror of self-pity. A large volume might be compiled of them;—it should have a portrait of Wyatt on the back, and begin with his *Charging of his Love as Unpiteous and Loving Other* or his *Renouncing of Love*—

> " Farewell, Love, and all thy lawes for ever.
> Thy baited hooks shall tangle me no more.
> Senec and Plato call me from thy lord."

" A swete languour, a great lovely desire "—such phrases of Wyatt's tell his curious power, just as lines like the following show how handicapped he was in his verse—

> " Alas the snow ! Black shall it be and scalding."

For the scansion requires that " scalding " should be a double rhyme, whereas the final syllable only rhymes, the mate to it being " partyng." Wyatt meant it to have the rhyme-stress on the " *ing*." So to get the line into the measure, you have to squeeze the other words, and read the last clause—

> " Black shall it be, and scal*ding*."

This means that " scalding " is made up of two long-shorts, which yet are to be reckoned as one long—a manifest impossibility. And apart from rhyme confusions, Wyatt's sonnet introduces a stanzaic confusion in the use of a penultimate quatrain. The couplet, too late, tries then to right the sonnet, and harmonise octave and sestet. Surrey, a true disciple of Wyatt's, who said he had—

> " A hand that taught what might be said in ryhme
> That reft Chaucer the glory of his wit :
> A mark the which (unparfited for time)
> Some may approach, but never none shall hit." . .

recognised clearly what it was he had left " unparfited." Surrey did for Wyatt's sonnet what Shakespeare did for Marlowe's blank-verse ; he suppled it, and made it amenable under English law to the fluidity of thought. If you put side by side a typical sonnet of either writer, you realise at once the service rendered by Surrey—

" The soote season, that bud and blume furth bringes,
With grene hath clad the hill and eke the vale :
The nightingale with fethers new she singes :
The turtle of her make hath tolde her tale :
Somer is come, fore very spray now springes,
The hart hath hong his olde hed on the pale :
The buck in brake his winter cote he slinges :
The fishes flete with newe repaired scale :
The adder all her sloughe away she slinges :
The swift swallow pursueth the flyes smale :
The busy bee her honye now she minges :
Winter is worne that was the flowers bale :
And thus I see among these pleasant thinges
Eche care decayes, and yet my sorrow springes."

In Surrey's, you have a form, three quatrains, cemented by a last couplet, which allows for the greater difficulty of rhyme in English as against Italian verse, and which has a natural progression of its own, and an artistic correspondence of part to part, working up to an idiomatic close. Surrey, the very type of Castiglione's *Courtier*, seems to us as we look back the one poet fitted to naturalize in English this Italian form,—a song put into a casket, a melody carved in marble.

Of Surrey's other discoveries, as of the quatrain form used in Gray's *Elegy* and of blank verse, they affect much less the lyric account. From Wyatt—whose epitaph he wrote, he carried the sonnet to its English mark. He found it in a half-mongrel condition, head and tail at variance, and he made it a comely thing. You get no lines in Surrey so bad as Wyatt's worst. He had quite as fine an ear, if not so originative a mind. His felicity of phrase has rarely been matched and it is often a grace that comes of the heightening and the liberation of the idea by a noble stroke of melody or a trumpet note—

" (Ay me ! whilst life did last that league was tender)
Tracing whose steps thou sawest Kelsal blaze
Landrecy burnt, and battered Boulogne render."

or,

" My lady's beauty passeth more
The best of yours, I dare well sayen
Than doth the sun the candle light."

or those lines in the *Description of the restless state of a Lover*—

> " . . . And I may plaine my fill
> Unto myself, unlesse this careful song
> Print in your hart some parcel of my tene,
> For I, alas, in silence all to long,
> Of mine old hurt yet fele the wound but grene."

Read aloud these lines, and notice how exquisitely they convey the buried melody which it was in the power of the new lyric art to express.

In his sonnets Surrey, it is true, wears a court-suit, and his manners are gracious. Do not judge, therefore, that he was a court-poet only. He lived very fully his thirty-seven years. They were crowded with event. He was betrothed at sixteen, a soldier in youth, twice a prisoner; and in prison he wrote his incomparable song *Pleasure Passed.*

It is easy for us, dipping into Surrey's verse, to range him with the hundred and one other amorists, and note the Petrarchan conceits and Italian metaphor, concluding it to be all factitiously artistic. But the figures that we think artificial, the lines that are like other lines, were for him profoundly expressive, and " charged with his desire "; and it is our fault if we cannot hear it.

Indeed Surrey at his best attains to an accent of reality which tells that the writer's mind is worked upon by great emotion; but it is lyrically of the secondary order. It enabled him to achieve the silent lyric which is written and meant to be read to oneself. With Wyatt's best it marks the beginning in English of the new literary verse which requires the written or printed page, and almost takes the Book itself as the instrument, instead of voice, lyre, or lute.

With Wyatt and Surrey, and the sonnet as Surrey left it, we see the definite conversion of the lyric to an artistic usage, which in a sense cosmopolitan and international, ends in adapting itself perfectly to English. Chaucer set the example, with the genius that takes its own from every country yet keeps its own voice, music and humour. Neither Wyatt nor Surrey was so great an artist in words (or in men and women);

but they too had an Italian horizon to their own region. Then they left their work, unlike Chaucer, half done; they died half-way in their careers. What would they have done had they lived; what would Surrey have done if his noble head had not fallen on Tower Hill?

Surrey left four or five very willing disciples behind him, but none of his quality. One of them, Thomas Churchyard, was actually his servant or "squire" in the old sense, and became a contributor to *Tottel's Miscellany*. He had small lyric faculty, but he had a sense of form, and we may add a sense of direction that often saved him when he seemed to be steering straight for the rocks. So even in gazetteer-verse, like *The Worthiness of Wales*, you have a stanza that sticks in the ear.

> "Both Athens, Theabes, and Carthage too,
> Are names of great renowne:
> What then, I pray you, shall we do,
> For poor Caerleon towne?"

Another disciple with a good ear and no undue originality of any kind was George Turberville, a Dorsetshire man. He helped to carry on the Wyatt and Surrey tradition, if he added little to the stock that could quicken the men who followed. Lord Vaux, who should have been mentioned before, was another of the courtly poets who lived under Henry VIII., and was fortunate enough to go on living after him. He connects the anthology that succeeded Tottel—the *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, with the *Miscellany*; for his poems appeared in both. Possibly this fact helped to work the confusion in which Puttenham and others involved his name with that of his father, Nicholas, the first lord. His own name was Thomas. Warton, who pointed out their error, did so with the aid of a curious poem by Lord Vaux, *I loathe that I did love*. He found it in the Harleian MSS. (he might have found it already in print), with the title: "A dyttye or sonet made by the lord Vaus in the time of the noble quene Marye representing the image of Death." He says it was idly conjectured (by Gascoigne) to have been written on his deathbed,

and adds the very interesting fact that "from this ditty are taken three of the stanzas, yet greatly disguised and corrupted, of the grave-digger's song in *Hamlet*." This is a court pedigree which none of us could have suspected in a song breathing an air apparently of immemorial rusticity. It proves again how fine a borrower Shakespeare was; and shows the hold that the verse of these poetical Miscellanies had on the ear of the next generation.

"For age with stelyng steppes,
Hath clawed me with his crowche:
And lusty life away she leapes,
As there had been none such.

. . . . .

The wrinckles in my brow,
The furrowes in my face:
Say limpyng age will hedge him now
Where youth must geve him place.
The harbinger of death,
To me I see him ride:
The cough, the colde, the gaspyng breath,
Dothe bid me to provide,

A pikeax and a spade
And eke a shrowdyng shete,
A house of claye for to be made,
For such a gest most mete."

Two other poems by Lord Vaux deserve to be remembered—*Like as the Rage of Rain* and *When Cupid first scaled the Fort*. Possibly too another in *Tottel's Miscellany* is his, which opens with "smoky sighs" and bitter tears, for in it the accents of Clown and Courtier seem mingling. Four lines of it are notable as another play upon "holly"—

"I mean thy lover, loved now,
By thy pretended folly
Which will prove like, thou shalt find how,
Unto a tree of holly:"

The two remaining lines of the stanza are absurd. It is significant of the taste of that day that Puttenham should have singled out the martial love-song the *Assault of Cupid* as one written "excellently well," that could not be amended.

Of the poets that bring us nigh to Spenser's hour, George Gascoigne stands marked by his frankness of bearing. Born probably at Cardington, in Bedfordshire, he had the true

English accent, affirmed stoutly his love for old English words, and, in spite of his ventures abroad, did what in him lay to keep the homebred tradition alive. He was the son of a knight of the shire, Sir John Gascoigne; went to Cambridge, and left it to go on to the Inns of Court; lived there a wild enough life — commemorated in his *Dan Bartholomew*— and showed the exuberance of his spirit by improvising poems on horseback in five sundry sorts of metre on five stated themes given him by five friends. Gascoigne turned to poetry as to another kind of adventure; and realised himself as a poet with that touch of personal extravagance which the time allowed and the Elizabethan fantasy encouraged. We hear of him in the guise of a God of the Woods, attending the Queen at Kenilworth and regaling her ears with allegory. Possibly he bored her, for no court favour resulted; and he was left mortified. He was married to a widow, and after his marriage went fighting abroad under William of Orange. While he was at the wars, one of his friends, who seemed collectively to take a pride in his verse-achievements, collected and printed some of his poems, and on his return he issued a second edition. A copy of this book, dated 1575, makes a striking companion-volume to *Tottel's Miscellany*; rather it is what Gascoigne would call a mirror, reflecting the tendencies of the day after that of Surrey and Lord Vaux. There are three beautifully turned lyric poems in it, one of them over-done with allegory, but all sped by true melody—

> 'Jealous the jailer bound me fast,
> To hear the verdict of the bill,
> George (quoth the Judge) now thou art cast,
> Thou must go hence to Heavy Hill,
> And there be hanged all but the head,
> God rest thy soul when thou art dead."

Both in his use of allegory, and in his music, Gascoigne is a true early Elizabethan. He was well thought on by his contemporaries as we know by Puttenham and by E. K.'s notes to the *Shepheardes Calendar*, which speak of the Nightingale "whose complaintes be very wel set forth of Ma. George Gascoin, a wittie gentleman, and the very chefe of our late rymers."

The reference is to his *Philomene*, where he is hardly seen at his best, and E. K. put in a demurrer about his want of "some parts of learning" and his failure, therefore, to attain to the excellency of "those famous Poets," meaning the classic philomelists.

Gascoigne had anticipated the objection in his disclaimer about "borrowing of other languages"; but in fact he had had more ado than most English writers with other languages, having translated or adapted the pages of Euripides, Ovid, Ariosto, Petrarch, and others. His "Notes" on his craft are brief but interesting; and have given us one expressive nickname—

> "The commonest sort of verse which we use nowadays (viz. the long verse of twelve and fourteen syllables) I know not certainly how to name it, unless I should say that it doth consist of Poulter's Measure, which giveth XII of one dozen and XIII for another."

It was in "Poulter's Measure" that Wyatt and Surrey wrote their least successful poems.

Another "miscellanist," Richard Edwards, was the chief deviser of "the Paradyse of Daynty Devices." He is described as sometimes of her Maiesties Chappel; and he was well known as a playwright, and a musician. He was a lyrist who took his impulse from the kindred art. The "Daynty Devices" showed him a genuine poet: his rhymes live in the ear when those of more famous writers are forgotten.

The other contributors to *Tottel's Miscellany* are interesting, but do not advance the standard a pace beyond where Surrey left it at his death. They include Nicolas Grimald, who also wrote sonnets conforming to the Surrey quatrain-and-couplet model, but spoilt by the over-stride of the third and fourth quatrains, and not written with any pliancy. He wrote as he felt, often with an affecting simplicity, as in his *Funeral Song* for Annes his mother—

> "For what is he can quietly sustain
> So great a grief with mouth as still as stone."

It is the naturalness of Grimald that keeps him in mind, and

not anything that he contributed to advance the art of verse.

The anonymous writers in *Tottel's Miscellany* are difficult to individualise; but together they help to sustain the dignity of the craft and make good the stays of the Wyatt and Surrey tradition. Among them was that unfortunate brother of Anne Boleyn, who was drawn into the infamous meshes of her death. Bale, among others, mentions his *Rhythmi Elegantissimi*, which Antony Wood calls "songs and sonnets with other things of the like nature."

The credit of these beautiful eight lines (from the second edition) with the figure of the flitted bird, may be divided between the five remaining contributors—

> "The bird that sometime built within my brest,
> And there as then chief succour did receiue:
> Hath now els where built her another nest,
> And of the old hath taken quite her leaue
> To you mine oste that harbour mine old guest,
> Of such a one, as I can now conceiue
> Sith that in change her choise doth chiefe consist,
> The hauke may check, that now comes fair to fist "

But not many lines remain in the ear when Wyatt's and Surrey's, and three or four of Grimald's best pieces have been set aside. Here and there one seems to promise melody, as, for instance, in the song of all the world—"in maligno positus," where the line—

> "Kind heart is wrapt in heaviness,"

is followed by two others with a dilating cadence—

> "The stern is broke, the sail is rent,
> The ship is given to wind and wave."

Although as a rule they only charm by glimpses, in them we find momently the seed of better things; phrases, figures, epithets, rhymes that other poets used afterwards. *The Testament of the Hawthorn*—one of the poems by unknown writers added in the second edition, has however more in it than this. It has beautiful if imperfect rhythms in it—

"But, or that we depart in twain,
Tell her I loved with all my might:
That though the corpse in clay remain
Consumed to ashes pale and white,
And though the vital powers do cease,
The sprite shall love her, natureless.[1]
. . . . . .
The service tree here do I make
For mine executor, and my friend
That living did not me forsake;
Nor will I trust unto my end
To see my body well conveyed
In ground where that it shall be laid.
. . . . . .
And if you want of ringing bells
When that my corpse go'th into grave,
Repeat her name and nothing else
To whom that I was bonden slave.
When that my life it shall unframe
My sprite shall joy to hear her name."

We are lucky in having a contemporary handbook of poetics in Puttenham's *Art of Poesy*, which serves to illustrate *Tottel's Miscellany*. In it the author keeps the relation of verse to music practically before him. He speaks of "our poeticall proportion which holdeth of the Musical, because as we sayd before Poesie is a skill to speak and write harmonically: and verses or rime be a kind of Musicall utterance by reason of a certain congruity in sound pleasing the ear. . . ."

He goes on then to consider "this our proportion Poeticall" as determined by and resting upon five points: Staff, Measure, Concord, Situation, and Figure. In describing them he keeps the relation of verse to essential melody steadily in mind. "The first of these the Staff . . . is so-called I know not why . . . unless as a bearer or supporter of a song or ballad. The Italians called it stanza. . . ." A whole chapter is devoted to the nice question of "Cesure." Let leisure be taken, he says, in pronunciation—"such as may make our words plain and most audible and agreable to the ear." He gives close attention to the use of pauses, but is rather elementary in his ideas. "In a verse of 12 sillables, cesure ought to fall right upon the sixth," a rule built on the old Saxon custom, which later

[1] "Nathelesse" edition of 1559.

usage changed; but "your three pauses, marked by comma, colon and period, might be of various effect." In a succeeding chapter on "Proportion in Concord," he discoursed of "symphonie or rime," and his definition is well worth remembering—

> "This is called rithmos or numerositie, that is to say, a certain flowing utterance by slipper words and sillables, such as the tongue easily utters . . . which flowing . . . is in some sort harmonical and breedeth to th' eare a great compassion."

And as for cadence—

> "This cadence is the fall of a verse in every last word with a certain tunable sound which being matched with another of like sound do make a concord."

His feeling for naturalness and force of expression is seen in his emphatic remark that "the good maker will not wrench his words to help his rime." Puttenham helped, however, to encourage some of the excesses of pattern-verse. He is especially delighted with the "lozenge" presented by the Lady Kermesine to the Khan of Tartary, Temir Cutzelewe, made in letters of rubies and diamants: a tender of affection, to which the Khan Temir answered in "Fuzie" (the spindle): whose diminuendo runs—

> "O Kermesine, of all my foes
> The most cruel, of all my woes
> The smartest, the sweetest,
> My proud Conquest,
> My richest prey!"

A certain transcendental idea is held to govern these forms. He points out a "general resemblance of the Roundel to God, the world and the Queen"—

> "These be counted as Clerks can tell
> True properties of the Roundell
> . . . .
> All things that ever were, or be,
> Are closed in his concavity."

Reading Puttenham's book with *Tottel's Miscellany*, we are made aware that English poesy has become a recognised craft

and has taken to experimenting and getting at new effects of what he called "symphony" and cadence. And we shall find it interesting to re-consider the special development of the sonnet, along with the regard for the craft itself, and the intellectual respect of the poet for his own art and the soul of created things, to which their pages point, when we reach the next stage of the road. With them began a new episode in the lyric account.

# CHAPTER XIII

## SPENSER AND THE FIRST ELIZABETHANS—THE PRODIGALS

AFTER this the poets, working with a distinct sense of craftsmanship and of tradition behind the craft, felt when they took up their implements that they were maintaining a recognised art, and adding to a noble inheritance. By the concurrence too of the new demands on poetry made in the theatre, with the exuberant life of the people, the lyric energy was twice reinforced. The language had been and was still being continually enriched from abroad. Translators like Sir John Harrington and Fairfax were at work; Chapman was making Homer into an Elizabethan. Thus by the year when Shakespeare was ready in his "Love's Labour's Lost" to take up the elements of the poetry of youth, and the love-song natural and formal, the tougher fibres of the language had been so kneaded, wrought and rewrought in the suppling hands of Spenser and his fellows that the old northern speech had grown plastic almost as Ariosto's Italian, and "strong as antiquity could make it."

Now comes a poet in whom the old style and the new, the classic and the English tradition, meet impulsively. It is the Spenser of the "Shepherd's Calendar" who first affects us in the present recount, and then the writer of the Greater Lyric as we have it in the Bridal and other songs, and then again the author of the *Amoretti*. The *Faerie Queene* only enters incidentally; but there, and in the "Calendar", Spenser brought into play an inexhaustible gift of melody, rising to a supernal note at its best; and in so far these poems belong to the present enquiry, although their full account lies elsewhere. In the pastoral, Spenser united the two strains, native and foreign, northern and southern, that have been traced from very near the beginning of our island-poetry. The fact of his own north-

country forbears and associations makes significant his resumptive use of the older dialect and his love of old words. As "E. K."—no doubt his friend Edward Kirke, acting as his lay-brother, other-self and exponent—tells us, in the introduction to the "Shepherd's Calendar"—

> "Of the words . . . I grant they be something hard, yet both English, and also used of most excellent Authors, and most famous Poetes . . . And having the sound of those ancient Poetes still ringing in his ears, he mought needes, in singing, hit out some of theyr tunes . . . For in my opinion it is our special prayse of many whych are dew to this Poete, that he hath laboured to restore, as to theyr rightfull heritage, such good and natural English words, as have ben long tyme out of use, and almost cleane disinherited."

The *Faerie Queene* has so seized upon the English imagination that Spenser's other poems, enough in themselves for a master's reputation, are comparatively neglected. The "Shepherd's Calendar" was written soon after he left Cambridge, where the chief influence on his verse had been that of Gabriel Harvey, an eccentric classicist whose grand idea was to purge English verse of its natural idioms and rhythms, and replace them by the classical metres. Under Harvey's influence, Spenser had laboured to turn out such lines as these—

> "Unhappie verse, the witnesse of my unhappie state.
> Make thyself fluttring wings of thy fast flying
> Thought, and fly forth unto my love wheresoever she be."

But in going from Cambridge into Lancashire, and taking with him his classical knowledge which was an invaluable artistic stimulus, his love of English verse and above all of Chaucer was reinforced by the north-country songs. "*Tityrus*," says the protonotary again, "I suppose he means Chaucer, whose prayse for pleasant tales cannot dye, so long as the memorie of his name shall live, and the name of Poetrie shall endure."

All that was wanted was a sufficient love motive, and in Lancashire lived by good fortune Rosalind, the "widow's daughter of the glen," who became the inspiration of the "Shepherd's Calendar." Spenser has managed to conceal from us the mysterious lady's identity, though he often comes

near to revealing it. The Commentary to the April eclogue interprets "glen" to mean "a country hamlet or borough;" adding, "For it is well known, even in spite of Colin and Hobbinol, that she is a gentlewoman of no mean house, nor endowed with anye vulgar or common gifts, both of nature or manners."

In the "Calendar" we get a mingling of the northern and the southern strains, a store of classical allusions, and a free use of old English rural words and expressions, which help us to individualise the new poet, fresh from London and Cambridge, seizing eagerly on the country illusion and the rugged speech of the Lancashire dales to replenish his pastoral—

> "Kiddie (quoth shee) thou kenst the great care
> I have of thy health and thy welfare,
> Which many wyld beastes liggen in waite
> For to entrap in thy tender state,—"

and most of all the Fox, she says—"sperre the yate fast" against him. No one who has wandered in north-country sheep-runs can mistake the familiar idiom, or doubt that this is as the glossary expresses it, "northernly spoken."

The "Calendar" is full of new and old metrical devices and the lyric colouring that is wrought into the pastoral fable relieves it from seeming artifice. We see as we pass the foreshadowing of the "Spenserian stanza" of the *Faerie Queene*, as at the end of the first eclogue—

> "By that, the welked Phœbus gan avalle
> His weary waine; and nowe the frosty night
> Her mantle black through heaven gan overhaile:
> Which seene, the pensife boy, halfe in despight,
> Arose, and homeward drove his sonned sheep,
> Whose hanging heads did seem his careful case to weepe"

We get the same thing, though without the Alexandrine, in the other pastoral poem, "Astrophel."

In the May eclogue it is that we have the new Spenserian melody—original but reminiscent, tinged with classic graces and memories of older rhymes in the miracle plays—at its most tuneful pitch—

"Sicker this morowe, no lenger agoe
I saw a shole of shepeheardes outgoe
With singing, and shouting, and jolly chere:
Before them yode a lusty Tabrere,
That to the many a Horne-pype playd,
Whereto they dauncen, eche one with his mayd.
To see those folks make such jouysaunce
Made my heart after the pype to daunce."

What does it recall? Now the Shepherds' song in the Coventry Nativity Play—

"As I outrode this enderes' night
Of three jolly shepherds I saw a sight,"

now again—

"Forth they went, and glad they were;
Going they did sing
With mirth and solace, they made good cheer,
For joy of that new tiding,"

and the Greek pastoral note.

In the July eclogue where Morrell and Thomalin collogue, we have again a fragment of the real old song worked into the text—

"What ho, then jollye shepheards swayne
Come up the hyll to me."

Indeed the folk tradition and the literary tradition run side by side in the "Shepheardes Calendar;" and in it Spenser often touches a deposit of north-country lore older than any old English song relic in Chaucer. This gives Spenser, apart from his inventive genius and his individual effect, his value. He resumes the old poetry and enriches the new. He is steeped in that "unusuall speache much usurped of Lydgate and sometime of Chaucer," and that other speech heard to our own day in Lancashire: and yet, antiquarian as he is, he can be modern as the freshest of the Elizabethans. It is curious that Spenser, most irresistible of rhymers, should have been bitten by the Harvey heresy, as he was; but it is interesting to see that even when he was attempting to write Iambickes for that sturdy pedant ("whom he entirely and extraordinarily believed"), his

ruling passion was too strong for him. Note the second stanza of the set cited already—

> "Whether lying reastlesse in heavy bedde, or else
> Sitting so cheerelesse at the cheerfull boorde, or else
> Playing alone carelesse on hir heavenlie virginals"

In his "Amoretti" Spenser made an attempt, quite in keeping with his love of fluid verse, to give the sonnet form a portamento effect, so that the verse runs free to the close. He was too fine a craftsman not to achieve some brilliant successes with the mode he pitched upon: but it is not in itself to be compared as a form with that of Shakespeare or the Italian model of Milton—

> "Fresh Spring, the herald of loves mighty king,
> In whose cote-armour richly are displayd
> All sorts of flowers, the which on earth do spring,
> In goodly colours gloriously arrayd;
> Goe to my love, where she is carelesse layd,
> Yet in her winters bowre not well awake;
> Tell her the joyous time wil not be staid,
> Unlesse she doe him by the forelock take;
> Bid her therefore her selfe soone ready make,
> To wayt on Love amongst his lovely crew,
> Where every one, that misseth then her make,
> Shall be by him amearst with penance dew
> Make hast, therefore, sweet love, whilest it is prime;
> For none can call againe the passed time"

The quality of the "Amoretti" is poetically unequal too, but among the best we have sonnets remarkable in idea and for their rich melody—

*The Holy Season.*

> "This holy season, fit to fast and pray,
> Men to devotion ought to be inclyned:
> Therefore, I, likewise, on so holy day,
> For my sweet Saint some service fit will find
> Her temple fayre is built within my mind,
> In which her glorious ymage placed is;
> On which my thoughts doo day and night attend,
> Lyke sacred priests that never think amisse!
> There I to her, as th' author of my blisse,
> Will build an altar to appease her yre;
> And on the same my hart will sacrifise,
> Burning in flames of pure and chast desyre:
> The which vouchsafe, O goddesse, to accept,
> Amongst thy dearest relicks to be kept"

As for the two bridal songs, there is nothing elsewhere in English and in that *genre* to be compared with them. They are splendid in diction, glorious in imagery, and give to the reader that finer sensation of music imprisoned, or caught in the word texture, and liberated at every accession and every cadence of the verse. This is the Great Lyric at last, and greatly written—

"Wake now, my love, awake! for it is time;
The Rosy Morne long since left Tithones bed,
All ready to her silver coche to clyme;
And Phœbus gins to shew his glorious hed.
Hark! how the cheerefull birds do chaunt theyr laies
And carroll of Loves praise.
The merry Larke hir mattins sings aloft;
The Thrush replyes; the Mavis descant playes:
The Ouzell shrills; the Ruddock warbles soft;
So goodly all agree, with sweet consent,
To this dayes merriment.
Ah! my deere love, why doe ye sleepe thus long,
When meeter were that ye should now awake,
T' awayt the comming of your joyous make,
And hearken to the birds love-learned song,
The deawy leaves among!
Nor they of joy and pleasance to you sing,
That all the woods them answer, and theyr eccho ring."

By his extraordinary metrical resource, his colour, romance and grace and ease in rhyme, Spenser achieved all a single poet could do in making the language equal to any grace the music of the printed page could ask of it. His gift of melody was invincible; and it appears in almost every page of the *Faerie Queene,* in which poetry in all its kinds is put under a spell.

Ben Jonson named Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, Spenser among his "far-famed spirits of this happy isle." Pope said, "it is easy to mark out the general course of our poetry: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Dryden are the great landmarks." So we might go on collecting the verdicts of the poets, and it is always Spenser we find in the category at large.

John Lyly published his *Euphues* in the year that saw the *Faerie Queene;* and the two books together had much to say to the freer style and the delight in fine words shown by

the earlier Elizabethans. But as the townsman loves the country, not for altogether but for a week-end, and turns to it for relief and contrast, so the new wits were apt to rejoice not in nature herself perhaps, but in the rustic make-believe and the pastoral pageant. "O sweet life!" they exclaimed with Phoun, "seldom found under a golden covert, often under a thatched cottage." Lyly was the Beau Nash of the new mode. We may say that by excess of artifice he learnt to appear natural, as a polished man has the simplest manners. Certainly he could write songs of the most tuneful naturalness. For instance, his variation on a *reverdie* theme, with nightingale, lark, redbreast, and "jolly cuckoos" all accorded in twelve lines—

> "What bird so sings, yet does so wail?
> O 'tis the ravished nightingale,
> 'Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu,' she cries
> And still her woes at midnight rise.
> Brave prick-song! who is't now we hear?
> None but the lark so shrill and clear;
> Now at heaven's gate she claps her wings,
> The morn not waking till she sings—
> Hark, hark with what a pretty throat,
> Poor robin redbreast tunes his note:
> Hark how the jolly cuckoos sing
> Cuckoo to welcome in Spring!"

Even in this sestet of couplets we detect the power he had of taking the ear of his contemporaries. Lyly gave, as we know, ideas, dramatic and poetic, very much as Peele did to Shakespeare.

George Peele, born in about 1559, was another of the university men who made a ring in the drama and warned off trespassers. His mind was vigorous and pliant, and he had a gift for imitative melody which produced delicious snatches of song. Many of these were based on old folk-rhymes, for Peele was one of those who knew how to snare hedgerow tunes, and deck them out for the London market.

Such are those delightful interspersed ditties of "The Old Wives' Tale," based upon the Chopcherry rhyme, and the sowing rhythm of the Black Cock and the Red.

"All ye that lovely lovers be,
Pray you for me.
Lo, here we come a-sowing,
a-sowing,
And sow sweet fruits of love
In your sweet hearts well may it prove.

Lo, here we come a-reaping,
a-reaping,
To reap our harvest-fruit
And thus we pass the year so long
And never be we mute."

II.

"When as the rye reach to the chin
And chop-cherry, chop-cherry ryse within,
Strawberries swimming in the cream
And schoolboys playing in the stream:
Then, O then, O then, O my true love said
Till that time come again,
She could not live a maid."

In another of Peele's songs, that is repeated in the play, we have a variation on the old story of the Princess of Colchester and the Head that comes out of the well; when Zantippa and Celanta in turn go to the Well of Life for water, and as they are about to dip their pitchers, the Head rises. In Celanta's scene, one rises with ears of corn, then a second Head full of gold, both of which she combs into her lap: The second Head says—

"Gently dip, but not too deep
For fear thou make the golden beard to weep.
Fair maid, white and red,
Comb me smooth, and stroke my head,
And every hair a sheaf shall be
And every sheaf a golden tree"

The whole play is an example of the comedy that has sucked up all the rustic lore it can, and put it into a drama with a folkplay leaven. So you have harvestmen and furies, Eumenides and Clunch the smith, Corebus and Wiggen; and almost every fourth line is a proverb. In the very first page Antic proposes the old catch—

"Three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men be we. . . ."

The play, careless mixture though it be, is full of colour and lyric movement, and Shakespeare delighted in it, and got from it ideas about rural comedy and how to transmute his clowns, which he never forgot.

Peele's most original song is that in his play of *King David and Fair Bethsabe*, which has a spondaic movement at the opening of each line, that holds the ear like a bell—

> "Hót sún, coól fíre—tempered with sweet air,
> Bláck sháde, fáir nurse—shadow my white hair:
> Shine sún; búrn fire, breathe, air, and ease me,
> Bláck sháde, fáir núrse, shroud me and please me.
> Shadow, my sweet nurse, keep me from burning,
> Make not my glad cause, cause of mourning.
> Let not my beauty's fire
> Inflame unstaid desire,
> Nor pierce any bright eye
> That wandereth lightly."

We see by this that he was a very conscious artist; and Greene, who stands by him, was a tireless experimenter, attempting new flights of melody, and succeeding often.

The stolen rhymes of Peele tell how responsive were the early dramatists to the floating melodies heard in Arden. The conditions of lyric prosperity were well sustained in the hour of *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Never too late* of Peele and Greene: to wit, a rich concurrent stream of folk-song, and a circle of fellow-poets striving one against another and keenly determined on urging the muse to her limits.

In them, in Lyly, Peele, Greene, Nash, Barnefield, Marlowe, you have the begetters of much that is great in the poetry to come. Greene, at his best, was a lyric master, with a note pure, clear and fluid, one that might be almost any poet's, and saving its expression in a particular tongue, an offspring of almost any poetic age and clime. He triumphed in the pastoral lyric—*Doron's song of Samela*—

> "Like to Diana in her summer-weed
> Girt with a crimson robe of brightest dye,
> Goes fair Samela . . ."—

which is classical as English can make it. He used a French refrain on occasion, easily surpassing all his forerunners in

the art of mingling the savours, in his *N'oserez vous, mon bel Ami*. He added to the London anthology a few monitory lines that it is not easy to forget—

"O, London, maiden of the mistress isle"—

and to the songs of content, which form a distinct group in English also, one proverbial instance. In fact Greene had the gift of the capping word, the epithet, the phrase that tingles in the ear; and if he had only had a measure of intellectual patience and cared to live laborious days for the sake of his art, he might have done almost anything he liked to set himself to. But he was one of the prodigals; he gave himself away, and died before he had achieved half his promise.

In their best work, all these poets were vehicles of the larger emotion of their time. Quick of thought, exuberant of fantasy, they responded to every sensation they met, and their impulses were their religion. No doubt they lived their lives unwisely, followed their appetites, and went to pieces early. Peele was (as Mr Bullen half allows us to call him) a shifty rogue on his worst side; Greene all but died in the streets, and had none but a poor cobbler and a cast-off mistress to befriend him on his death-bed; and Marlowe was held for a blasphemer and a companion of publicans and sinners who was stabbed or hurt to death in a drunken brawl. Their zest for life, their desire to transcend passion, their thirst for the impossible, in fact, carried them beyond themselves.

"Last, a passion of repent
Told me flat that Desire
Was a brand of love's fire
Which consumeth men in thrall;
Virtue, youth, wit and all."

So Greene wrote, with the wisdom of the prodigal.

Turn from Greene to Marlowe, and his *Hero and Leander*. How did he write that first sestet in which the music and imagination of a hundred *amoretti* find their consummation; in which indeed the control of the instrument, the fusion of word with idea, the greater and lesser harmony of rhyme and verse and

stave, are so sure and so fine, that the narrative becomes lyrical and the poet, singing of love's overtaking, unburdens his own heart. We may almost say that the man who was master of that verse was potentially master of all that was to come in Elizabethan poetry. *Venus and Adonis* and *Tarquin and Lucrece*, though twice as mellifluous, are not written with equal reserve of power. Nor have they in the line-melody the same art in foreclosing what the old poets called "the numbers."

In a time like Marlowe's, when the creative energy is strong and fluid, the second life of the drama, which is the lyrical, is always asserting its element and supervening upon the obvious effects of the first. The dramatic idea tends inevitably, as it would seem, to the effusion of lyric life. So in *Tamburlaine*, where the idea is one of eternal magnificence caught in a web of sensual imagination, we hear the world-devouring soldier create his region and build his palace in the air, and sing his exultant *Song of the World-devourer*, Emperor of the three-fold world—

> "Like to an almond tree y-mounted high
> Upon the lofty and celestial mount
> Of ever green Selinus quaintly decked
> With blooms more white than Erycina's brows,
> Whose tender blossoms tremble every one
> At every little breath thro' heaven is blown;
> Then in my coach, like Saturn's royal son
> Mounted, his shining chariot gilt with fire
> And drawn with princely eagles through the path
> Paved with bright crystal, and enchased with stars,
> When all the gods stand gazing at his pomp.
> So will I ride through Samarcanda streets
> Until my soul, dissevered from this flesh,
> Shall mount the milk-white way, and meet him there
> To Babylon, my lords: to Babylon."

In every play of Marlowe's it is the same thing. The dramatist looks for a talisman to break up the hindrances of ecstasy. It is there, even in the *Jew of Malta*. What wind thus drives you here? the Governor of Malta asks Basso; and he replies—

> "The wind that bloweth all the world besides,
> Desire of gold "

And the Governor—

> "Desire of gold, great sir?
> That's to be gotten in the western Ind."

And in the *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, the thirst for the impossible receives its final word in the last scene but one, where doom and desire counter one another. Then Faust sees the vision of Helen—

> "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
> Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss"

What we find in Marlowe we find in the other dramatists. He, to be sure, had no humour to make him smile at his own extravagance; but in others like Peele and Greene, and in the later men such as Dekker, the lyric solvent is to be seen at work freely acting on the dramatic particles. Thus in Greene's play, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, you have this memorable Marlowesque addition to the song of England—

> "The work that Ninus rear'd at Babylon
> The brazen walls fram'd by Semiramis,
> Carv'd out like to the portal of the sun,
> Shall not be such as rings the English strand
> From Dover to the market place of Rye."

All these are of the heightened strain that passes from the ordered dramatic rhetoric, almost imperceptibly, into the fluid element that tends to melody. Wherever the dramatist, being a poet and using imagination, is fired by the action of his play, the development of his chief motive, or the enlarging of himself or his protagonist, to transcend the usual give-and-take of the speakers on the stage, and "steal the mask" of one of them to utter himself; then again the personal ecstasy, the lyric note, is sure to be heard, however it be disguised. So Marlowe in *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus* sang the unappeasable thirst of Marlowe; and some of his most extravagant figures, "disordered lyric" we might call them, were arrived at in that expression of his, which being contraverted turned to agony—

" Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burnèd is Apollo's laurels bough
That sometime grew within this learnèd man."

The cry for the loss of a master-spirit doomed by his own over-much desire was prophetic of him who wrote. In weighing the power of the word in such lines we perceive how Peele, Greene, Marlowe, while they do not explain all the wonder of the Elizabethan art of translating human nature, may help to account for the miracle of a poetic idiom and a speech that took words not as single trajects but breves with the perpetuity and fluidity of music itself. Therein lies half the secret of their principle, that of all true song, which rightly applied can discover the emotional life of any strophe or passage. We learn from their plays that when the dramatist, forgetting his *dramatis personæ*, begins to predicate himself, announce his own belief, his own emotion, through one of them, all but inevitably he will fall upon the idiom nearest the singing mode. Of course if his sense of beauty be small, his temper sardonic, his mind hide-bound, it will only be a poor kind of self-confession; and it is evident that in comedy, where the ideal conditions and the goal of the imaginative energy are not before the writer, the supervening of the lyric is not so likely to occur, unless he is one in whom the fusion of the two modes is congenial and compliant. For the lyrist is his own protagonist, and through personal desire, fired by the creative spirit, becomes one with nature, and against everything that hinders life and the belief in a larger content and a rarer perfection.

The lyric impulse is in itself infinite, because it is always pointing on to the something that lies behind emotion; if it is not ever to be quite gratified, if it is incomplete with something of the touching incompleteness of folk-song—it yet finds a voice in the instinctive singer who passes like a child into song—

" For when I sing, I use my voice,
And so I enter paradise."

## CHAPTER XIV

### SIR PHILIP SIDNEY—THE END OF THE CHIVALRIC VERSE—FULKE GREVILLE—SIR WALTER RALEIGH

SPENSER gave to English verse an almost Italian fluidity in his lyric experiments, and by pouring it back and fore into the magic cup of the *Faerie Queene*. Sir Philip Sidney and the little circle of his friends affected by his example gave it in turn a force and resonance that were hardly less serviceable in weighting the idiom and making good the tonic word that can make even love-song sound virile.

In Sidney the personal radiance that the poets are sometimes supposed to have was enhanced by a hundred circumstances of time and fortune. His birth, his boyhood, his Elizabethan opportunity, his hapless romance, his adventure across Europe, all add to the glamour of his name. Even his early and tragic death, proving him mortal too soon, may be said to help on his poet's immortality. Up to the moment when he fell he was set in a march of events, stirring, irresistible, whose music is so often caught in the heroic ring of his lines—

> "High way since you my chief Parnassus be,
> And that my Muse, to some ears not unsweet,
> Tempers her words to trampling horses' feet
> More oft than to a chamber melody!"

There is more than this in Sidney's note, but this suggests his most distinctive addition to our lyric poetry. It is the note of chivalry in its finer mood, turned to the praise of the divine Stella, but with an echo in it of great affairs and destinies, and of no distant fields of war. Here was a poet who was a man, with his lyric art heightened by his sense of life, with his love-songs set to an heroic accompaniment. And even

if you should, as is rather the way now, care more for temperament than performance, and hitherto have regarded Sidney as simply the most dazzling of Elizabethan puppets, you need not read farther than the thirteen sonnets that Elia cited, to discover what a temperament lies hid in that quondam courtier. It is the old story—you strip the actor and find the man.

Elia apart, not many of Sidney's critics have taken this view. Horace Walpole, long ago, threw a handful of contemptuous epigrams at him; Hazlitt, who provoked Lamb to his incomparable retort, and ought to have known better, in the same way attacked the poet. More recently, Addington Symonds confessed that he found the poet "not an eminently engaging or profoundly interesting personage." In all this there is only just as much of opposition as goes with the proper provocation to literary adventure. Certainly the journey into Sidney's *Arcadia* is not for everybody, and there are difficulties in his poetry. But if you have once felt the charm that so affected his contemporaries, lingering in a sonnet, or a sentence of his, you will find, on entering there, instead of a dusty and superannuated library of old folios, a noble demesne and a green garden, with the roses still growing in the walks that Stella knew.

Sir Philip Sidney's personal presence, which so fascinated and held his contemporaries, we can only remotely refashion for ourselves; but on the other hand he gains now by the glamour of the past, and by the romance of his surroundings. Not one of the English poets has been set in associations so fatal and so attractively commingled.

He was born of a noble family, and in the noble house of Penshurst, in 1554. Ben Jonson has given us in *Underwoods* some memorable impressions of Penshurst — its gardens, woodlands, and the fields where the "painted partridge" lurked. There Sidney passed his boyhood. The presidency of Wales led his father, Sir Henry, to live frequently at Ludlow; so Philip went to school at Shrewsbury, where his close friend and fellow-poet, Fulke Greville, was a school-fellow of his;

from Shrewsbury to Oxford, where he made his second great friendship, with Edward Dyer. The two men, Dyer and Fulke Greville afterwards Lord Brooke, were perhaps his two most intimate critics. He spent little more than two years at Oxford, and left without taking any degree, which, indeed, it was not common for men of his social standing to take at that time.

In 1572, when he was still only eighteen, Philip went abroad, accompanied "by three servants and four horses," as named in the Queen's licence for the journey, and played his part in the brilliant pageantry, and less actively in the dark tragedy, that Paris saw in that eventful year of 1572. He walked in the train at the wedding of Henry of Navarre to Margaret of Valois on the 18th of August. He passed the black night of the 24th, when the Massacre of St. Bartholomew took place, in hiding in the English Embassy, and was one of the few Protestants who escaped the blood-fury which seemed to seize the city, from the Louvre to the slums beneath Notre Dame, on that murderous midnight.

The third great friendship of Sidney's youth grew out of these foreign adventures of his. He met at Frankfort a Huguenot exile of great culture and distinction, Hubert Languet, who had just escaped from Paris, where he, too, had undergone the terrors of the terrible 24th. He was now a man of fifty, quondam professor of civil law at Padua; himself a profound thinker, an urbane scholar and man of affairs who must have tended to establish Sidney's natural intellectuality although he certainly impressed upon him other than coldly intellectual things. "You have too little mirthfulness," he wrote once. Sidney writes to him from Venice, from the whirl of society there, "Better a pleasant chat with you, my dear Languet, than enjoy all the magnificent magnificences of these magnificoes!"

To the foreign passages succeed others, equally full of colour, dating from the court of Queen Elizabeth. What one chiefly cares to insist upon, in all this brilliant chronicle, is that these things are the insistent accompaniment of Sidney's poetry,

and run, like the lines and notes of a music score, betwixt the lines of his songs and sonnets; without them, indeed, half the harmony of great associations, upon which they depend, is lost.

The Elizabethan court, with all its movement, radiance, and reflected light and colour, is the necessary accompaniment to the *Arcadia* and the *Astrophel and Stella*. Sidney's poetry floats on that full stream of history like leaves on a broad river, whose water keeps them fresh. And this recalls us to the rose-garden in which they grew, with its fragrance and romance, its lady with the love-acquainted eyes and golden hair, and its forbidden walks.

It was in 1575 that Sidney first met Penelope Devereux, daughter of the Earl of Essex, who was to marry a *roué*—Lord Rich—and to become the Stella of incomparable memory. She was now a child of thirteen; but there is no doubt that her marriage with Sidney was broached almost immediately. That his sentiment towards her was at this time very romantic, or urgent, or profound, one easily doubts. At this time Sidney was consumed with ambition; and ambition is against love. But the match was a brilliant one, and potential in many ways. However, Essex died, Penelope's mother married again, time passed, and Penelope herself, ere she was eighteen, was married to Lord Rich. And then, at last, Sidney suddenly awoke with a cry to all that Penelope might have been to him; and with the lover's passion for the unattainable aroused in him, our fine courtier was suddenly turned into a poet.

This was in 1581; and we may safely agree in thinking that it was not until after her marriage that Sidney began to indite his sonnets; as, indeed, it was only her marriage which gave him the impulse he needed.

Previous to this he had begun his *Arcadia* in the seclusion of Wilton (in 1580), and, like the *Astrophel and Stella*, quite without any idea of its ever being made public. The difference in directness of expression, and in passion and power, betwixt the *Arcadia* and the *Astrophel and Stella*, is the measure of what Sidney gained in poetic force and spirit by his love for Stella. In the *Arcadia* he is the most

brilliant of amateurs, writing as an idle romanticist, to pass the time.

> "Philoclea and Pamela sweete,
> By chance in one greate house did meete . . .
>
> The one is beautifull and faire
> As lillies and white roses are,
> And sweete as, after gentle showers,
> The breath is of some thousand flowers."

In *Astrophel and Stella* he writes, not because it is a pleasant and accomplished thing to do, but because he must; his sonnets let blood. In the *Arcadia*, delightful as it is, all lies over the confines of reality; it is all holiday, and the relief from life. But Astrophel gives us a writing from the life, at first hand, and this you may trace in the artifice shown in the poems from the *Arcadia* as compared with the songs and sonnets dedicated to *Stella*.

However, one cannot at all agree with those of his critics who find his Arcadian poems of small account. Sidney would rank as a poet if he had written nothing else in verse than the sonnet—

> "My true love hath my heart and I have his."

The *Arcadia*, beside representing in some sense his apprenticeship to poetry, contains some of the most exquisite pastoral pieces in the language. It has a very peculiar interest for students of poetry, moreover, because it is full of the experiments it contains, set going by that Rhymers' Club of the fifteen-eighties—the *Areopagus*. It was Spenser who gave the little circle its rather grandiose name—partly, it has been said, in derision! It took a much stronger hold on Sidney, and influenced his style more positively. The centre of the circle was Gabriel Harvey, who did his best to direct the destinies of English poetry amiss; and who, with all the loyalty of the wrong-headed, desired to have it inscribed on his tomb-stone that he had fostered the hexameter in England.

These "Arcadian" experiments, incited by Harvey and the Areopagites, are interesting, says Addington Symonds, "as

showing what the literary temper of England was before the publication of the *Faery Queene*, and the overwhelming series of the romantic dramas, decided the fate of English poetry." What is important is that they clearly helped to increase that Latin ring in Sidney's later lines, which gives them a part of their strength and not a little of their sonorous note and dignity. They were the tentative exercises, out of which grew that perfected manner of his, clear, resonant, virile, to be detected in the best parts of *Astrophel and Stella*.

> "Soul's joy, bend not those morning stars from me
> Where Virtue is made strong by Beauty's might;
> Where Love is chasteness, Pain doth learn delight,
> And Humbleness grows one with Majesty."

In *Astrophel and Stella*, no doubt, Sidney, while showing himself at every turn a master of words, yet in almost every other sonnet takes the licence of the amateur; yet, when all is said, the whole stands as a most powerful and formative contribution to English lyric poetry. Sidney gave the sonnet a new and more assured position. He finally set the English fashion of those remarkable testaments of love, written in a sequence of sonnets, in which he was followed by Spenser and Shakespeare.

*Astrophel and Stella*, published in 1591, and circulated in manuscript among the Areopagites and other personal friends before that, gave Spenser his precedent and his poetic cue, in his own love passages of the fifteen-nineties, which resulted in his *Amoretti*. These show again and again traces of the style, the idiom, the rhyme even, of Sidney's use of the sonnet, while Shakespeare in his sonnets was at least as much influenced by Sidney as by Spenser. And Milton so far acknowledged the influence of Sidney as to be honourably attached to the same literary pedigree without undue fantasy on our part.

The three poetic testaments, written in this form, by Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare, take a place by themselves in English literature. And whatever Sidney's lack in sustained perfection of style, his testament is by no means the least moving of the

three, as a transcription from human experience, a passionate love-story told at its best in terms at once simple, sensuous, and passionate. In short, as Ruskin has said with that fine, if rather provocative contempt of his (in *Fors Clavigera*, xxxv): "If you don't like these love-songs, you either have never been in love, or you don't know good writing from bad (and likely enough both the negatives, I am sorry to say, in modern England)."

Of the love-story enshrined in these sonnets it is written there too clearly to need much elucidation. That Sir Philip Sidney loved the lady whom we know best as Stella, and loved her when it was too late, and when she was married to an unworthy and profligate husband; that she loved him in return, and yet remained, through all this lingering romance of Sidney's, loyal to her husband, while, wittingly and unwittingly, holding his lover to his high ideals; that, at length, they parted and said a final farewell: that is all. The epilogue is, that Sidney married; and soon after died, and that perhaps it would have been happier if Stella had died too; for her after history was unhappy. A profoundly moving tale, and it loses nothing in Sidney's telling: adorned and heightened as it is by every consideration of love and passion, of virtue, and frailty, and heart-breaking sympathy, of honour, and man's divine destiny, that poets can attach to such histories of men and women.

So much by way of love's interlude. When it was done, Sidney went his way on the high road of warfare and statecraft, which in fact he never left for any long time, until he left it suddenly at last. Verse was poured out over that tragic ending, and most poignantly of all by an unknown writer, who in a rude, unrhymed lyric with a refrain of "Sidney is dead, is dead!" contrives to touch a note of surprising reality.

Sidney's *Astrophel* has been referred to in a previous page. If we re-read Sidney in his *Arcadia* and his *Astrophel and Stella*, and trace him to his forbears, and connect these works with the growth of English romance, pastoral love-song and sonnet, and with the earlier fantasy and expression

of the *amour courtois*, we discover that the historical estimate of his poetry must always outrun the fame in which it is popularly held. We see in him almost the end of an old order; he is, poetically, a new offspring of mediæval modes though his ideas are new and Elizabethan. And there comes in the paradox. He has intellectually his eye on the future; and his use of the language has a modern ring, while he uses knightly terms and chivalric allusions. In fact, we discern in him, and in those of his near contemporaries who had anything of his spirit, and let us add his love for poetry, the signs of the change that was passing over the finer minds of England at this time. Partly it came of the enlargement of idea that went on in the end of the Tudor period; partly of the struggle of the faiths, and the need that men therewith felt to think out afresh their whole circumstance. Add to this the intellectual movement abroad that kindled men like Stephen Languet and at home the movement that affected Sidney and his friends. Two of these, Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, and Sir Edward Dyer, have been named already. They are celebrated in his song and they figured as pall-bearers in the strange cartoon of his funeral. Of the two, the first was a poet by nature, the other, we may think, one more by force of sympathy and weight of association. Dr Grosart, who edited Dyer's works in the Fuller's Library, makes too much of his verse, and a large share of it needs to be discounted altogether. But he stepped free in a few of his sonnets, and also in the mixed verse of the chorus, indifferently rhymed and unrhymed, of his play.

To Phillis the Fair Shepherdess.

"My Phillis hath the morning Sun,
At first to look upon her:
And Phillis hath morn-waking birds,
Her rising still to honour.
My Phillis hath prime feathered flowers
That smile when she treads on them;
And Phillis hath a gallant flock
That leaps since she doth own them.
But Phillis hath too hard a heart,
Alas, that she should have it!
It yields no mercy to desert
Nor grace to those that crave it."

Fulke Greville was a Warwickshire man—a good beginning; born in 1554, he went to Shrewsbury School with Sidney; went on embassy with him afterwards; served Elizabeth to some purpose, since it brought him Warwick Castle and the title of Lord Brooke; survived Sidney by full forty years and wrote his life; survived him to the end of disillusion worse than death—if it be true that he became something of a miser and a misanthrope at the close of his days. Better, if that be true, he had died like Sidney, before time and age had dulled the bright rim of his shield.

"Under a throne I saw a virgin sit,
The red and white rose quartered in her face,
Star of the north, and for true guards to it,
Princes, church, states, all pointing out her grace . . .
State in her eyes taught order how to sit,
And fix confusion's unobserving race."

With Sidney, and after Spenser, we should always read Sir Walter Raleigh, who had the gift of "packing a verse," as against that Spenserian fashion of expanding and alliterating the lines, and with play of diminutives and easy epithet rendering them mellifluous. One of the noblest sonnets in the language is that by Raleigh upon Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* which it is instructive to compare with that poet's sonnets—

"Methought I saw the grave where Laura lay,
Within that temple where the vestall flame
Was wont to burne; and passing by that way
To see that buried dust of living fame
Whose tomb faire Love, and fairer Virtue kept;
All suddeinly I saw *the Faery Queene*:
At whose approch the soule of Petrarke wept,
And from thenceforth those graces were not seene;
(For they this *queene* attended); in whose steed
Oblivion laid him down on Laura's hearse:
Hereat the hardest stones were seene to bleed,
And grones of buried ghostes the Hevens did perse:
Where Homer's spright did tremble all for griefe,
And curst th' accesse of that celestiall theife."

The terse strain and the iron resonance of Raleigh's verse are heard like the gallop of a great horse coming over a down. Such is the effect of his envoying ballad of *The Lie,* in which he bade his own soul be the messenger. In its fourteen stanzas

rhymed throughout in couplets in monotone, save in the last where the note shifts to the opening lines, Raleigh sets up his figures, court and courtiers, zeal, age, wit, physic, fortune, arts, and faith, like men-at-arms, and shoots them down with his bolt of anger and satire. "Thou shalt not preach:" Raleigh preached and made of his homily an unerring piece of music, an unforgettable poem:

"Go soul, the body's guest
Upon a thankless arrant;
Fear not to touch the best,
The truth shall thy warrant;
Go, since I needs must be die,
And give the world the lie."

In Raleigh's verse we have again signs of that influence, foreshown in Wyatt and in Gascoigne, the moralising of the court-poet and the transforming of the amorist into an interpreter of the other love, platonic and spiritual. The breaking of the courtier's ambition, the fickle favour of an Elizabeth, with the loss of court favour, helped again and again in the poets of this time to bring deeper melody, and more serious ideas of life, death and man's destiny into their verse. It helped, too, to bring in an increase of that figurative philosophy which disguised itself as allegory and frequently tended to destroy the reality of the lyric emotion and the power conferred by the imagination upon the lyrist to see in his own predicament the exact assay of joy and desire, the whole incidence of life and death, and to sing it with inspired words.

"Give me my scallop-shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon;
My scrip of joy, immortal diet;
My bottle of salvation"

In Sir Philip Sidney we came on other forms of the same theosophical progression, cut across too sharply by his death for us to tell the probable line of its further development. But the progression was reflected as it was bound to be in the lyric. The poet who began to rhyme lightly and chival-

rously in the vein of the *amour courtois* as another form of gentlemanly pastime, went on as the pressure of time and thought gained upon him, or the real love supervened upon the fantastic, or death threatened, or the King or Queen changed mood, to use the instrument with the force of life itself, and so to gain another melody.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LYRIC DRAMA—SHAKESPEARE—SONG AND SONNET

THE combined powers of Peele, Greene, Marlowe, were enough, we may think, for any achievement. By the fortune of Heaven, a poet was sent to succeed them who had beyond all others the power of arresting the rhythms of an age and making himself the interpreter of more than its received ideas and the themes attempted by the three prodigals. Besides his lyric temperament, Shakespeare had the sympathetic art of taking on him at will the colours of other folk. Like the few favoured men who have something of the originality of a natural force, he began much as other poets do. He copied his forerunners and borrowed their art; he imitated Lyly, Peele, Greene, and enlarged his vocabulary with every epithet, amorist's conceit and old wives' saying he could capture. His ear drank in everything—the lines of the court versemaker and the country song that gains by being never so little over the edge of sense. He was the golden Autolycus who stole from everybody, and yet, like Coleridge, by some strange thrift he made what he stole his own. We heard how he took from Lord Vaux the lines that he made into a song for the clowns at the burial of Ophelia, and we find Peele's *Clunch the Smith* and Lyly's *Watchmen and Fairies* (in *Endymion*) adapted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In his first complete play, *Love's Labour's Lost*, he resumed fashions of Surrey and Wyatt, drew whims from Gammer Gurton, played upon the ballad of the King and the Beggar Maid, and gave Moth and Armado lines full of old reminiscent tags. In the fourth act, he cites King Pippin of France, and "Queen Guniover of Brittaine," and in the next breath recalls an old song with

Rosaline's "Hit it, hit it, hit it! Thou can'st not hit it, my good man."

In *Love's Labour's Lost* we have, in fact, a diploma work or test-comedy: the work of a 'prentice to the craft, who, being a new beginner, wishes to make it clear that he knows his business and the literary fashions. He plays with words as a young writer may, who has a genius for them, but who needs to juggle with them awhile before he can use them for serious art; and Mother Bombie, and the Fools in Love's College, and the wit of Moth help to get the instrument into order. When Moth sings the refrain of "Concolinel," and tells Armado how in love's service he should—

> "Sigh a note and sing a note;—
> Sometime through the throat,"

as if you swallowed love with singing love, and sometime through the nose, as if you snuffed up love by smelling love, the dramatist is lyricising for the sheer fun of it. But elsewhere in these pages he tells by example the whole story of lyric poetry in this comedy of the *Little Academe and the Amorists*. The scene apparently is France, whence the lyric art of the *amour courtois* came to England: really, it is a park in Warwickshire, or even nearer London, with French names and trappings. It brings folk-song, *chanson d'amour*, and love-sonnet into a direct string; is prodigal of old rhymes, like Moth's—

> "If she be made of white and red,"

invokes dances, caroles and branles as every love-comedy should, uses nursery-rhyme, and carries poetic wit and the lover's extravagance to a pitch in Longaville's sonnet which ends—

> "What fool is not so wise,
> To lose an oath to win a Paradise."

Finally, it brings all to a traditional climax with a suggestion of an antique folk-play in the "Dialogue" the two Learned Men compiled of Winter and Spring; couched in an antiphony of owl and cuckoo—

"This side is *Hiems*, Winter.
This *Ver*, the Spring.
The one maintained by the Owle;
Th' other by the Cuckow:
*Ver*, begin."

THE SONG.

"When Daisies pied and violets blew," etc.

What does it recall? Nicholas de Guildford's *Owl and Nightingale*—

"'Hule,' ho seide, 'wi dostu so?
Thu singest awinter wolawo;
Thu singest so doth hen a snowe,
All that ho singeth hit is for wowe,'"

or the Cuckoo song, or the older French songs, where the husband is the butt of the love-singer? Old as the tradition is, it is here knitted up in a new perpetuity. And a page or two earlier, the new poet had shown how the lyric suppling and the imaginative handling of his dramatic verse were to grow to a power by that one brief answer of Biron's to Rosaline—

"To move wild laughter in the throat of death,
It cannot be; it is impossible:
Mirth cannot move a soul in agony."

Before *Love's Labour's Lost* Shakespeare had in *Venus and Adonis* written something of his own early love-story touched with the rustic colours of his nonage, which remained bright on his palette to the end. In that poem, a sensual fancy, a wooer's rhetoric, and a lover's conceit, were drawn out in verse where the narrative and lyric modes were continually supervening one upon another. Bishop's *Bid me discourse* made one of its stanzas famous as a popular song, and attached it to a later tradition on one side; and on the other, such verses as—

"Give me one kiss, I'll give it thee again
And one for interest, if thou wilt have twain,"

knit the poet in the retrospect to Sidney, and in the next

vista to Ben Jonson's lines. And as an instance of the lyric that rings the changes, the stanza—

> " Love comforteth, like sunshine after rain,
> But lust's effect is tempest after sun :
> Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain,
> Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done :
> Love surfeit's not ; lust like a glutton dies,
> Love is all truth ; lust full of forged lies,"

is in an antiphonic mode old as Nicholas and his originals, that produced afterwards the counterpart to it in *Crabbed Age and Youth*. The song that Venus extemporises and that outwears the night, " How love makes young men thrall, and old men dote," and the *aubade*, *Lo, here the gentle lark*, on the next page, are further instances, were any instances needed, of that invincible lyricism in their writer, which stamped all his verse. And the wail of a thousand lost lovers, is condensed in the prophecy at the close of the tale—

> " Sorrow in love hereafter shall attend ! "

It can fairly be claimed that it is in the melodic interspersions of this poem, if at all, that the writer breaks the rhetorical mould and the artifice of its contrivance, and attains something of that larger and sincerer style he was to develop afterwards in his most personal utterance, which is to say, his most lyrical. In the next play he wrote, *The Comedy of Errors*, he was studying stage-craft ; and it has no special lyric interest, unless you care to trace the origin of the refrain, " My gold, quoth he," in the song of the pig descanted by Dromio the First. It is different with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is a play saturated with the floating element of folk-song, filled with melody and laughter, and carried into a region of the unconditioned, where moonlight and folly reign.

In a degree it is a more innocent Witches Sabbath of the English clown, touched with echoes of the Beltane dance, that proves Shakespeare still more than half a countryman when he wrote it ; if a countryman who has drunk the magic elixir and divined all that the poets, north and south, before him

had made of the rustical and the fantastical tradition—" weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in." And if it ends in the fairy orgy of the creative and renascent energies, it is but the nearer to those ancient rites of which the laying of its scene at Athens might, were we fanciful, be taken as a remote clue.

The lyric verse in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is remarkable for its technical variety and change of melody. It ends on the easy trochaic measure that Lyly and others had taught Shakespeare to use. For instance—

> " With this field-dew consecrate
> Every fairy take his gait,"

or,

> " And this ditty, after me
> Sing, and dance it trippingly."

And continue from *The Maid's Metamorphosis*—

> " Trip it, little urchins all,
> As we dance, the dew doth fall :
> Lightly as the little bee
> Two by two, and three by three."

These reminiscent notes are curiously frequent in all Shakespeare's lyric verse ; but there need be nothing disconcerting, except to the extreme idolators in that. He is the genius of English tradition, so far as the lyrical measures are concerned. He used the old tunes, and invented no new one : yet he is an April poet in the calendar.

No need here to register all the continuations of old melody, with the new powers put into the instrument, that may be observed in his whole dramatic work. We ought, however, to test the theory of the personal element in lyric by what we may take to be his account of himself, his own moods, hopes and despondencies, in certain distinctive plays, like *Hamlet* and *The Tempest ;* using the sonnets where the mask is formal, but transparent, as a foil to the other mode.

But first, to end the earlier period, we have to look for the amorists' music in the two Italian plays where Verona and Mantua give the scene, and the rich colouring of the south was laid upon the lyric verse. We find it in the unrhymed

sonnet of Valentine's speech to Proteus—*The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* Act II. Scene iv., which begins—

"I have done penance for contemning love,'

which is borrowed from Petrarch. We might take Proteus for a sign of the changing temper of Shakespeare himself. In *Romeo and Juliet* wit's exuberance in Mercutio, and youth's love-passion in the hero, mark the change. True Juliet says "You kiss by the book"; but the amorist's rhymes are in Romeo translated into an individual dialect. There are many variants of the theme, but the *aube* or song of lover's parting at dawn (in Scene v. Act III.) is more than dramatic. Such songs were commonly written as a duologue, and this is in the tradition; but it is a new setting, written with personal passion.

Some of the figurative and lyrical effects in *The Rape of Lucrece* are like to those in the play, which was written, I suppose, three or four years after it. And the poem reads in many of its stanzas like an exercise undertaken before greater things. Often exclamatory, its manner is too ornate and rhetorical to satisfy the lyric canon, which needs that the outcry should have some real correspondence with the mood of the evocator. Well might Lucrece say—

"This helpless smoke of words doth me no right."

The figurative language, wonderful for its ingenuity, used in Lucrece and repeated in the sonnets, has passed through a sea-change. In the one it is artificial as allegory itself, in the other it is transmuted. "Misshapen Time, copesmate of ugly night" in the one, is, it is true, not far from "Old Time, swift-footed Time, Devouring Time" in the nineteenth sonnet; but many of the figures are cold in the poem, that are warm and natural in the sonnets. The play upon night in the first, the likening of Tarquin to night, are remarkable as literary decoration; but night grows real, though the description be thrice conceited, in the introspective mirror of the other—

" For then my thoughts (from far where I abide)
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see :
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.
Lo, thus, by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for myself, no quiet find."

The stanza of Lucrece readily expands its seven lines into the fourteen of the sonnets, and both are couplet-closed, both frequently developed by the same parallelism and the same trick of antithesis. The growth in symmetry of the sonnet as he wrote is not, and could hardly be, steadily maintained ; but it is there, if one cares to look for it. In No. cvii, one of the sonnets that a master of the sonnet, D. G. Rossetti, took for choice, you have eight lines truly in the great style. But for the form that Shakespeare made his, and used with passion and a feeling for symmetry, carried through from opening line to close, a better instance is that poignant one—

"Tir'd with all these, for restful death I cry."

Put by this the best of Spenser, or any one of the long train of sonnets between Wyatt and Sidney (who was a kindred sonnetteer) and you see how Shakespeare humoured, welded and modulated his verse, made his three quatrains run like an Indian melody, *portamento* as the composers say. You forget the sonnet is a book-song, a lyric in a cabinet, as you read the score or more in which he has most perfectly re-rhymed the ancient and immemorial theme out of his own heart.

Still, no sonnet can be as purely lyrical as a perfect song. In those Shakespeare wrote to be sung in his plays we have the rare flower of the art, one which keeps—hardest conservation of all—the perishable folk-note in the full culture of the art-song.

Seemingly written with less effort than anything he did with the amenable rhythms of his mother-tongue—they have the true singing idiom in them ; the country colour, the bird-note ; yet they are the work of a craftsman who seems to

know all the repertory of the trouveurs, and an Autolycus who roamed from Provence to Normandy, France to Britain.

He kept to the end the impulse that could set free these snatches of song. In *The Tempest,* where he says his farewell, they are no less tuneful though wrought to a graver cadence in the Dirge—

> " Nothing of him that doth fade
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange."

But this is to break the sequence of his mimic confession of himself through the stage-mask. It may be thought that a poet so irrepressibly lyrical must have, in every play, let himself go in at least one character. But there are no " supposes " in history. We have to go, not by what we think, but by the evidence. It is easier to find the songs in *As You Like It,* than the sublyrical " asides " as spoken for instance by Touchstone ; or by Rosalind, who said, " Believe then, if you please, that I can do strange things : I have, since I was three years old, conversed with a magician, most profound in his art, and yet not damnable."

The individual, the lyric protagonist, is clearer no doubt in some pages of Hamlet and the great tragedies. The man's own voice speaks out, we may think, at times in unexpected places, as for example—

> " so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news ; and we'll talk with them too,
> Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out ;
> And take upon's the mysteries of things,
> As if we were God's spies : and we'll wear out
> In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by the moon."

We must not be seduced by this great juggler with the rules, who wielded the modes to his own use, to think he put his own soul into every king and clown. But when we are attaching him to the royal line in poetry, and connecting his art with his poetic forbears and his chosen masters, we

are bound to recognise that he had an individuality too, and that he relieved his emotion, and gave to his own heart's belief, desire and bitterness, what was essentially a lyric deliverance, even in the pages allotted to his creature-subjects. If we must let him go, hearing him say at the end with Cleopatra—

> "I am fire and air: my other elements
> I give to baser life. So, have you done?
> Come then and take the last warmth of my lips.
> Farewell . . ."

finding he has upset the categories by his use of the dual mode, we can only turn for a doubtful consolation to his own account of the functions of music. He believed in its power to liberate the mind from the sensual crust, and relate our thoughts to the Pythagorean harmony, and the something more that connects nature and supernature. In *As you Like It, Measure for Measure*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, the evidence is now clearly, now obscurely presented, as these remarkable lines may show—

> "There's not the smallest orb, which thou behold'st,
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubims:
> Such harmony is in immortal souls;
> But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE LUTANISTS—ELIZABETHAN SONG-BOOKS—THOMAS CAMPION

THE lyric wealth of the Elizabethan plays, whether we look for pure song or for the hidden note, seems endless. But few of us realise even with the aid of anthologists like Ritson, Wright, and Mr Bullen all the grace of the old song-books. John Dowland the lutanist, who was two years older than Shakespeare, and who in the year when *Love's Labour's Lost* was acted before Elizabeth at the Christmas feast, that is 1597, published his *First Book of Songs or Airs*, is the name that first occurs. Like Dr Burney afterwards, he went a long tour abroad; and was a mere boy when he started out. The good fortune of English lyric poetry in its association with him is seen in the fact that, however overwhelmed musically by what he heard in France, Italy, and the famous province of Germany, he did not try to dislodge English in favour of French and Italian in his songs, like the musicians in the days of the opera afterwards. For the words are often of purest lyric quality, consonant, tonic, unforced—

> " Love now no more will weep
> For them that laugh the while,
> Nor wake for them that sleep,
> Nor sigh for them that smile "

Another page from the same book helps to knit up the May tradition, which we have kept in sight in the earlier chapters, with a piping variation on the *reverdie* theme—

> " Then I forthwith took my pipe
> Which I all fair and clean did wipe
> And upon a heavenly ground,
> All in the grace of beauty found
> Play'd this roundelay :—

*Welcome, fair queen of May:*
*Sing sweet air,*
*Welcome fair,*
*Welcome be the Shepherd's queen,*
*The glory of all our green."*

Whether it was that Dowland's music was not attractive enough when not played by himself—for the sweetness of his luting became proverbial, as we know by Barnefield's sonnet,[1] his song-books were, according to their publisher, not a success altogether in the market. In the book which gave the publisher an opportunity to confess as much, issued in 1600, Dowland's Second Book, there is a delightful song, often attributed to Campion—

"Fine knacks for ladies, cheap, choice, brave and new
Good pennyworths; but money cannot move
I keep a fair but for the fair to view,
A beggar may be liberal of love.
Though all my wares be trash, the heart is true—
The heart is true."

Whether his or no, it is admirable for its impulsive melody, its brave singing lines, open accents, and at the end its iteration to enforce the cadence. Its use of alliteration, running to the limit that song permits, is notable. Its play upon words shows how much the words counted in singing at this time. So the two melodies, tonic and verbal, were considered; and the result was an organic thing; a piece of life, a work of art.

There is another lyric, from the same book, in its way incomparable for its poetic grace and the musical accord of word, rhyme, and idea, which must be Campion's—

"I saw my lady weep,
And sorrow proud to be advanc'd so
In those fair eyes where all perfections keep.
Her face was full of woe,
But such a woe (believe me) as wins more hearts
Than mirth can do with her enticing parts.

[1] "If music and sweet poetry agree," in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, where Dowland is chosen to represent the one art and Spenser the other."

Sorrow was there made fair,
And passion, wise; tears, a delightful thing;
Silence, beyond all speech, a wisdom rare:
She made her sighs to sing,
And all things with so sweet a sadness move
As made my heart at once both grieve and love."

Indeed, these songs and lyrics, in their finest flight, do answer better than any other group in the language the ideal commands of the art. They are so devised, that the given theme, and the words, figures, verses and staves in which that is expressed, move as by a lovely principle of their own; and rise and fall so as to accomplish a symmetry that is beyond the draughtsman. For in doing it they set up an image of perfection, although it may be in profane and apparently idle and casual words, an image of that hardly attainable beauty of form in whose proportion is hidden the secret of the balance that every poet strikes between the music of earth and the harmony of the sought paradise. It may be in an image of sorrow, or night and sleep, that it is hinted: more often, it is suggested in the lover's lost happiness, or his song of the unattainable—

"A tree that India doth not yield
Nor ever yet was seen——"

The fact that many of these song-writers are unknown to us, and are only to be identified by the song-book where they occur, adds to our feeling of wonder at their lyric beauty and perfection. It is as if the spirit of their time were the real author, using indifferently a clown, a courtier, a true lover, a visionary, or even a spiritual epicure for the musician. Who wrote the words for the lovely two stanzas set to music by Captain Tobias Hume in 1605, which the best of the anthologists and recoverers of this poetry, Mr A. H. Bullen, used as an induction in his collection from the Elizabethan Song-books—

"Fain would I change that note
To which fond love hath charm'd me,
Long, long to sing by rote,
Fancying that that harm'd me:
Yet when this thought doth come,—

Love is the perfect sum
Of all delight.
I have no other choice
Either for pen or voice
To sing or write.

O, love, they wrong thee much
That say thy sweet 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."

That is an anonymous song, but whoever wrote it was a master-singer. It lay buried for over two hundred years—a fact to console lyric writers whose work seems like to perish, but who may chance on a resurrection.

To understand to-day something of the vocal effect of these songs as they were in their own day, one needs to become a guest of the Madrigal Club. There, seated at long tables, with yellow-paged music books open under the tall candles, the members still sing the numbers that used to be favourites in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or later. A madrigal was an unaccompanied song, and it counted on a public musical enough to join in its singing. It began in Italy, about the year 1500; and like other southern forms of art, worked its way gradually northward. In his volume of *English Madrigals in the Time of Shakespeare*, Mr F. A. Cox speaks of Richard Edwards' song *In going to my naked bed* as one that showed a tendency to the form before it had actually been introduced. The words and cadence are haunting—

"In going to my naked bed as one that would have slept,
I heard a wife sing to her child, that long before had wept;
She sighèd sore and sang full sweet, to bring the babe to rest,
That would not cease but crièd still, in sucking at her breast.

She was full weary of her watch, and grievèd with her child,
She rocked it and rated it, till that on her it smiled.
Then did she say, 'Now have I found this proverb true to prove,
The falling out of faithful friends, renewing is of love!'"

The name *Madrigal* itself sounds Provençal, but there is a town so called in Castile. It was first naturalised in English by Nicholas Yonge who seems to have kept musical open house in the City, and indeed to have already laid the foundation of the Madrigal club. For he speaks of "the exercise of music" daily in his house, and of the books yearly sent him out of Italy and other places, with which he furnished the gentlemen and merchants who came thither. This is in the preface to his Madrigal book of 1588—*Musica Transalpina*; whose songs were all by Italian composers save two, and they were by William Byrd, who can thus claim among musicians to be a pioneer. In the same year indeed Byrd's *Psalms, sonnets and songs of Sadness and Piety* appeared—another sign of the growing love of the art. The list of his fellow-composers up to the death of John Wilson in 1673 includes over ninety names; among them Thomas Campion, Richard Davy (probably the earliest on the register), John Dowland, Richard Edwards, the two Ferraboscos father and son, Orlando Gibbons, Robert Jones, Nicholas Lanier, Milton the poet's father, Thomas Phillips (another early instance), Thomas Ravenscroft and Philip Rosseter may be named. The vogue of the madrigal towards the end of Elizabeth's reign became such that as a writer of about half a century later, Galliard, said, "Nobody who was anybody could afford to be ignorant of the art or unable to sing his part at sight," and it was usual when ladies and gentlemen met for madrigal books to be laid before them, and everyone to sing their part. But the Civil War came, and the Puritan hymn came; and not least perhaps, musical instruments came that made accompaniment easy; and the art gradually fell away. Now, this if the maintenance in poetry of the singing element is to count, was most unfortunate.

It may be a weakness to wish to know the men who wrote these exquisite things; but it is one we find it impossible not to feel. Because in knowing them and their surroundings, such an interior for instance as that at Nicholas Yonge's, or an afternoon given up to madrigal-singing such as Galliard describes, we might, or so we think, surprise the intimate

relation of their art to their everyday habits, and even discover the lost recipe for the perfect melody. The only poet and musician of the time whom we can get to know with any feeling of reality in the natural sequence of his work,—of lyrics written, set to music, approved in his own time and found inimitable in ours, is Thomas Campion, whom we are safe in acclaiming one of the nine lyric masters in English poetry. The beauty of the phrasing, the true responsiveness of the accents, found in these Elizabethan songs and madrigals, so far beyond our present song-writers, is the mark of what we have left behind. This is from Robert Jones' third *Book of Airs or Ultimum Vale* (1608)—

"Sweet love, my only treasure,
For service long unfeignèd,
Wherein I nought have gainèd,
Vouchsafe this little pleasure,
To tell me in what part
My Lady keeps her heart.

If, in her hair so slender,
Like golden nets entwinèd,
Which fire and art have finèd,
Her thrall my heart I render
For ever to abide,
With locks so dainty tied"

The one poet who comes nearest to fulfilling in his work the lyric canon in English poetry, Campion did not write with a theoretic sense only of the correspondence between music and poetry. He wrote as a musician, and his songs were really meant to be sung. His lyre was a real instrument; that is to say, it was represented by real instruments—the lute and the viol, sometimes the orpharion. His lyrics are as perfect an instance, indeed, as we are likely to find, if we keep to the stricter limits of the art, besides having all the natural warmth of word, the charm and inspiration, without which the mere art avails nothing.

Of Campion himself we know little. That he was born midway in the sixteenth century; that he seems to have gone to Cambridge, with the idea of studying for the Bar, and was presently admitted a member of Gray's Inn—in 1586? that

he gave up the law for medicine, took his M.D., and became a practising physician ; and that he contrived to practise, too, as a musician and poet throughout his life : there is in outline all we know. He died in February 1619-20. On the first of March in that year, the entry, " Thomas Campion, Doctor of Physicke, was buried," is made in the register of St Dunstan's-in-the-West, Fleet Street.

His first book, which serves to explain much about him that would else be left dark, and which may explain something too of the Latin ring in his English verse, was his *Poema* of 1595, a book of Latin epigrams. No copy of this edition has been discovered ; but the Epigrams were issued in a later and much amplified collection in the year 1619, the year of his death, so that his first book was in a sense his last.

From it we learn more of the man, his personal effect, temper and way of life, friends, enemies, quarrels, and the rest, than we should else have ever known. Throughout his career, with its vicissitudes of law and medicine, it is clear he moved in the leisured and courtly circles that his particular genius might seem to demand. His troubles seem to have been slight ; enough for maturing the man, not enough for embittering him. His malice, peeping slyly out in his quips at Barnabe Barnes and Nicholas Breton, or in his references to more than one lady of his acquaintance, works in idle vein, showing that his cause of complaint against men and things was at no time very serious. He strikes one as a quite excellent example of that type of cultured physician which we have all known ; whose art of healing only serves as an agreeable basis for the liberal arts of life at large.

One imagines him moving about gaily and pleasantly among his friends and fashionable patients, a privileged guest, carrying his music with him ; often when he came to prescribe, remaining to try over some new air, or recite some new epigram—

> " I to whose trust and care you durst commit
> Your pinéd health, when art despaired of it,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Should I, for all your ancient love to me,
> Endowed with weighty favours, silent be ?

Your merits and my gratitude forbid
That either should in Lethean gulf lie hid ;
But how shall I this work of fame express ?
How can I better, after pensiveness,
Than with light strains of Music, made to move
Sweetly with the wide spreading plumes of Love ?

These lines were addressed to one of his patients, "my honourable friend, Sir Thomas Mounson, Knight and Baronet" ; and the coupling in them of the arts of medicine and music is characteristic. Sir Thomas Mounson, or Monson, had been imprisoned in the Tower prior to this, in 1615-16, on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. Campion, who had already been of service in conveying money to him, and was examined as a friendly witness before his imprisonment, was still allowed to visit him in the Tower as his medical attendant. The lines quoted, acclaiming his release, appeared at the opening of the Third Book of *Airs*, published in 1617 or thereabouts.

This is comparatively far on in his career. The music-book in which he makes what is practically his first appearance as a lyric poet, and in which he had Philip Rosseter as a musical collaborator and editor, appeared about 1601. Campion, then, may be said to emerge with the seventeenth century ; and the opening of the seventeenth century comprised some of the golden years of English lyric poetry—the bridge between Elizabethan and Jacobean times.

In 1601 Spenser had been dead some three years ; Sidney some fifteen. Greene, Peele, Marlowe, were gone ; Lyly, Lodge, Sir Walter Raleigh, Chapman, Drayton, were alive ; and they lead us on to Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. To Ben Jonson, who was at once the last of the Elizabethans and the first of the Jacobeans, succeed the familiar names of the seventeenth century. Campion, like Ben Jonson, though in his different way, is a bridge between the two periods.

This position of his in the chain of English poetry, as one of the few silver links which are purely lyrical, is not of a fanciful importance. He came after the great outburst of Elizabethan energy, and before the classic influence had taught

our natural English note too artificial a grace. Nature and art are as happily balanced in Campion as in Herrick; and if he is less impulsive and less inevitable in airy clearness of lyric style, he has his other qualities, as we may see when he achieves an imaginative flight like—

> " When thou must home to shades of underground,
> And there arriv'd, a newe admired guest,
> The beauteous spirits do engirt thee round,
> White Iope, blith Hellen, and the rest,
> To heare the stories of thy finisht love
> From that smoothe toong whose musicke hell can move "

or a cadence, haunting and mysterious—

> " Where are all thy beauties now, all harts enchaining ?
> Whither are thy flatt'rers gone with all their fayning ?
> All fled, and thou alone still here remayning ! "

Again, Campion came, as Mr Gosse reminded the present writer, before the clearer waters of English poetry were disturbed by the masterful irruption of Donne. Donne was a Welshman on his father's side, and he had something of the eccentric fire that has so often made the men of that mixed blood dynamic and unaccountable, or even lawless, like the inimitable Jack Mytton in another fashion altogether. At any rate, Donne made so great an effect, that one is almost tempted to divide the seventeenth century men into pre-Donne and post-Donne poets. Campion, fortunately, was a pre-Donnean; though what with his musical sentiment, and his feeling for a Latin art of verse, he would probably in any case have held his own, and preserved his individual note unspoilt.

His note has been likened now to Fletcher's, now to Carew's; and he does, for a moment, remind one occasionally of the lyrics of his contemporaries. But though his writing is never mannered, his note is as undisputable as Herrick's own, at its best. Campion's worst, like other poets', we may agree to neglect; it is a very small part of the whole.

No doubt something both of the rarer effect in certain of his poems and of the failure of others, is to be laid to his approach-

ing the art of verse as a musician, rather than as a pure and simple poet.

Take as an instance of a lyric which is exquisitely musical, full of turns which could only have occurred to a musician, full of a lurking melody not likely to have been invented by a mere prosodist, this song of three voices from the Masque given by Lord Knowles to Queen Anne—

" Night as well as brightest day hath her delight,
Let us then with mirth and music deck the night.
Never did glad day such store
Of joy to night bequeath :
Her stars then adore,
Both in Heav'n, and here beneath."

One hears the lute and viol accompaniment plainly in this. The long lines and the short call up to the ear, with charming tunefulness, the effect of certain of his songs as performed some years ago at Mr Dolmetsch's concerts of old English music.

Or take the seventeenth century song in the third Book of *Airs*—

" Shall I come, sweet Love, to thee,
When the ev'ning beames are set ?
Shall I not excluded be ?
Will you find no fainéd lett ?
Let me not, for pitty, more,
Tell the long houres at your dore."

The last line, as set to music in the original gets an added effect by dwelling musically on the first clause—

" Let me not, for pitty, more,
Tell the long, long houres, tel the long houres, at your dore ! "

Take another, one of the songs that proved most effective under Mr Dolmetsch's direction—the song of *Amarillis*—

Icare not for these ladies,
That must be woode and praide :
Give me kind Amarillis,
The wanton countrey maide.
Nature art disdaineth,
Here beautie is her owne.
Her when we court and kisse,
She cries, Forsooth, let go :
But when we come where comfort is,
She never will say No "

This is the simple perfection of song-writing. The rhythm, as poetry, is no more charming than the cadence, as music. The words are as lyrical, the movement as impulsive, as anything in Burns or in Shakespeare. It is finely Elizabethan on the face of it, and it is as clearly a song to be sung: a masterpiece-in-little, then, in its own particular kind.

As an instance of what writing for music, without a sufficiently present feeling for poetry, may lead to, take this verse from another song—

> "Though far from joy, my sorrows are as far,
> And I both between;
> Not too low, nor yet too high
> Above my reach would I be seen.
> Happy is he that so is placed,
> Not to be envied nor to be disdained or disgraced."

It is fair to admit that these words were written for Rosseter's setting, not for Campion's own; and it is evident he wrote in this case perfunctorily enough.

We turn now for a few moments to glean what we can of Campion's rather paradoxical attitude toward his art of poetry. For it is one of the ironies of literature, that the writer who has written some of the most purely artistic rhymed lyrics in the language—the most artistic, that is, in the exact sense of lyrical—should have set out with so striking a manifesto against rhyme. His *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, appeared in 1602, when he had already written some of his loveliest songs. "I am not ignorant," he says, at the opening of his second chapter, "that whosoever shall by way of reprehension examine the imperfections of Rime, must encounter with many glorious enemies, and those very expert, and ready at their weapon, that can if neede be extempore (as they say) rime a man to death."

Campion the pamphleteer has for enemy Campion the rhymer; his own songs are the best reply to his own indictment. Especially may one quote him against himself, where he says, and truly:

"The eare is a rationall sence, and a chiefe judge of pro-

portion, but in our kind of riming what proportion is there kept where there remaines such a confus'd inequalitie of sillables ? "

But the metrical confusion of which he speaks is as far from the true rhymer as from the classic poets who never used rhyme. More finely ordered lyric metres, indeed, we need not see than Campion's own. For instance—

"Give beauty all her right,
She's not to one form tied;
Each shape yields fair delight,
Where her perfections bide
Helen, I grant, might pleasing be;
And Ros'mond was as sweet as she."

And in spite of some charming numbers, such as *Rose Cheek'd Laura*, and his other trochaic lyric, *Follow, Follow !* in the same lady's honour, which he produces in this pamphlet to prove his case, it must be admitted that Campion is a better poet rhyming, than unrhyming.

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

However, after allowing for all that is inconsistent and without argument in his attack, enough remains to make it a singularly appetising dish in the symposium of the poets in celebration of their own art. It leaves one as devoted as ever to "the childish titillation of riming," as he calls it; especially if read, as it ought to be, in a sequence with Daniel's admirable reply. Moreover it has many practical points to make as to the technique of verse, which are well worth reading, as springing from so good a verse-writer.

A companion tract in music, though constructive and not destructive in its original scheme, was Campion's *New Way of Making Fowre Parts in Counter-point, by a most familiar and infallible Rule.* Mr Bullen did not reprint it in his volume: but it is an interesting production, and, at moments, to others than musicians. One comes to some memorable sentences; as for example, "there is no tune that can have any grace or sweetnesse, unlesse it be bounded within a proper key." This

recalls again that feeling for the propriety of word and note, which Campion showed in his practice in both arts.

Some of Campion's prettiest songs are to be found in his masques, which are exquisite in their kind, as full of picturesque effects as of lyrical moments. Indeed, the defect in some of them may have been thought by those who were not musically inclined, that Campion too often interrupted the spectacle in his eagerness to gain yet another lyric opportunity. The first and best of these masques, was that performed at the marriage of Lord Hayes (Sir John Hay).

*Silvan.* "Tell me, gentle hour of night,
Wherein dost thou most delight?
*Hour* Not in sleep.
*Silvan.* Wherein then?
*Hour.* In the frolic view of men.
*Silvan.* Lovest thou music?
*Hour.* O 'tis sweet.
*Silvan.* What's dancing?
*Hour* Ev'n the mirth of feet."

This masque was much the most lyrical of the four that Campion wrote; he seemed to learn, by his practice in masque-writing, to become less lyrical and to leave more to the skilled scenic art of his collaborators as he went on. The *Lord Hayes* masque was performed at Whitehall on Twelfth Night, 1606-7. We do not come upon another masque of Campion's until six year later, in 1613, when he wrote three. The first was the Lord's Masque, "presented in the Banqueting House on the marriage night of the High and Mighty Count Palatine, and the royally descended the Lady Elizabeth." This, though it was not much praised, by some of its spectators at any rate, is full of taking, and often very splendid, spectacle; which we owe, like the spectacular effect in the best of Ben Jonson's masques, to the genius of Inigo Jones.

Mr Bullen, commenting upon the adverse criticism in one of Chamberlain's letters, which speaks of devices, "long and tedious," "more like a play than a masque," says:

"It is to be noticed that Chamberlain himself was not present; he wrote merely from hearsay. The star dance arranged by Inigo Jones was surely most effective; and the

hearers must have been indeed insensate if they were not charmed by the beautiful song, *Advance your choral motions now.*"

Another of the masques of that year was produced by Lord Knowles (Sir Wm. Knollys), at Cawsam (Caversham) House, Reading, in honour of "our most gracious Queene, Queene Anne, in her Progresse toward the Bathe," on the 27th and 28th April 1613. The third was that produced for the marriage of the Earl of Somerset and "the infamous Lady Frances Howard, the divorced Countess of Essex," on the 26th December 1613.

In the same year Campion again showed his close connection with the Court by the little volume, *Songs of Mourning*, in memory of the untimely death of Prince Henry, in November 1612. The songs, in which Campion was not altogether inspired, were set to music by Coprario (*alias* John Cooper). But elsewhere, in his *Divine and Moral Songs*, Campion showed how well he could turn his lyric note to a grave measure. Indeed, he passed with ease and grace from impulsive ditties like his *Amarillis* to such solemn songs as *Lift up to Heav'n, sad wretch, thy Heavy spright!* or those two septenary stanzas beginning—

> "Never weather beaten Saile more willing bent to shore,
> Never tyred Pilgrim's limbs affected slumber more."

One finds, after reading Campion with any artistic sympathy, that he leaves the anthology well replenished with such verse —things far too tender, or true in kind; too rare in melody to be ever forgotten. In purely lyric poetry, he is, perhaps, the most remarkable discovery of our time amid the dust of old libraries, tireless as our zeal of research has been. He is, in brief, a master in his own field; and that field as widely, or as narrowly, determined in its civil bounds, as you care to make it.

## CHAPTER XVII

### SONGS OF THE DRAMATISTS—BEN JONSON—BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

In the plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries and followers, the lyric vein remains rich and apparently inexhaustible. Ben Jonson whose temperament was robust and exuberant, and whose feeling for drama was artistic, if too intellectual and too critical of human nature to be always creative, wrote occasional songs of rare beauty—lyrics carved in marble, or rhymed cameos. In addition, his aggressive and sensitive regard for his own individuality went with an abounding lyrical impulse that often broke through the stated fable of his comedies. In the second of his *Every Man* plays, he quickly puts himself under Asper's mask and says, "I'll strip the ragged follies of the time," and, speaking of the right kind of audience that alas, did not always respond to his voice—

> "For these I'll prodigally spend myself
> And speak away my spirit into air;
> For these I'll melt my brain into invention,
> Coin new conceits, and hang my richest words
> As polished jewels in their bounteous ears."

In the larger number of his plays Ben Jonson's own voice sounds loud, unmistakeably prompting and reinforcing his characters. In *Cynthia's Revels* it is Crites through whom he utters Ben; as in the last act, where his poetic faith speaks in a noble invocation—

> "Phœbus Apollo, if with ancient rites
> And due devotions, I have ever hung
> Elaborate paeans on thy golden shrine
> Or sung thy triumphs in a lofty strain
> Fit for a theatre of gods to hear;
> And thou, the other son of mighty Jove
> Cyllenian Mercury, sweet Maia's joy—

If in the busy tumults of the mind
My path thou ever hast illumined.
For which thine altars I have oft perfumed
And deck'd thy statues with discoloured flowers,
Now thrive invention in this glorious court,
That not of bounty only, but of right
Cynthia may grace, and give it life by sight."

It does not destroy the reality of this utterance that it echoes much older voices than Ben's. The scene immediately succeeding (Scene III., Act V.) opens with the lovely hymn to Diana,

" Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,"

whose lines are symmetrical as the statue of the goddess; Ben Jonson never attained a higher note. It is in a gracious lutanists' measure, and the stage directions expressly say " Music accompanied." Dance and music figure indeed largely in the following pageant of " the right exquisite and splendidious lady " (as Amorphus calls her); and in *Sejanus,* at the ablution of the Flamen, there is music; so in other plays the idea of it is continually there. In the tragedy just named, the most vivid lines of all are they that wax lyrical over Times and Men and the loss of " mighty spirits." We are base, he says—

" Poor and degenerate from the exalted strain
Of our great fathers. . . ."

In *Volpone, or the Fox,* occurs the song to Celia; and in *The Silent Woman* one of the rarest of paraphrases—

" Still to be neat, still to be drest,"

from the Latin lines of Jean Bonnefons, a sixteenth century imitator of Catullus and Johannes Secundus. How effective it was, may be learnt from Herrick and other sons of Ben; and from many humdrum versemen after his day who imitated its tune without any saving touch of new poetic life.

Ben Jonson himself is not an easy poet to judge aright. His personality was huge and irrepressible; yet he was one of the most subservient and imitative of writers. He loved books too well, and men, so far as they did not help him to extend his own estate, too little; and the literary trick of his ear betrayed him often into secondary modes when he could just as well have used his own singing voice. But this taste

or weakness of his for the classical model, for Latin authority and the repeated type, when mingled with his egoism and his lyric power, makes him individually very interesting; and he is through these paradoxical qualities a significant herald of the influences that counted most in the group of men woh succeeded him.

Milton is too large in his poetic dimensions to be made one of any group; but he is like to Jonson in two things; his high literary susceptibility with which his imitative ear has to do, and his magnificent self-assertion. These qualities are more often found together than we suspect; but we must keep now to the dramatic writers in whom the lyric note is evident, Jonson's rivals and immediate contemporaries and disciples on the stage.

Of these Thomas Dekker, with whom he had a dubious quarrel, was a dramatist with a born lyrical gift. He too was of the prodigals, and spent himself and his genius without stint and with little worldly gain. He had an inexhaustible vein of imagination and deliciously soft, sweet melody, very unlike Jonson's music-in-marble. It emerges at all points; on the lips of a Bellafronta, in the fantasy of the Sun's Darling, in a city pageant. It seemed to flow from him, without effort, like the veriest improvisation of an immortal; though perhaps it was the fruit, like other seeming instances of inspired child's prattle, of hard, long-sustained effort? Dekker freely confesses himself and tells his trouble, in some of his pages; and in *Old Fortunatus* without intending it he wrote what is rather like the forecasting allegory of his own life. Parts of it are decidedly Marlowesque, and in enlarging his fantasy, being then young, affluent in ideas, and very near the court-avenues, he is able to use metaphor and indulge his verse to excess. There the two silver doves appear that "give strange music to the elements." This music he kept; but he lost the gold, "the Indian mine in a lamb's skin," the magic purse. One striking sublyrical passage is in prose, with a refrain of *Care*. It opens with a manifest singing line—

"But now go dwell with cares and quickly die"

and ends with a Shakespearean cadence—

" Fortune, I adore thee;
Care, I despise thee;
Death, I defy thee."

The songs in this play, include " Fortune smiles, cry holiday," which has a taking variation in the melodic beat—

" Virtue's branches wither, Virtue pines,"

and there is a Spanish pavan danced by Insultado with a refrain of *Mas alta, mas alta,* in which he called for his tobacco, which must have been a pretty piece of stage bravado. In the second and the best part of the strangely named comedy of Bellafronta and Friscobaldo, there is a reference to a barber's cittern which speaks of the familiar custom of the time and helps to account for the salient musical force of the songs used in the plays. The cittern or lute was part of the usual furniture of a barber's shop then, as the daily paper is a necessity now. So the theatrical audience, who came to hear, was musically primed, and counted on its melody, as in the *Shoemaker's Holiday,* where the First *Three-Men's Song* is yet another *reverdie,* undiminished in its May freshness—

" O the month of May, the merry month of May,
So frolic, so gay, and so green, so green, so green,
O, and then did I unto my true love say:
Sweet Peg, thou shalt be my summer's queen."

We get a distinct breath, a very present sensation, of the London of the Elizabethans, the tavern, the barber's-shop, the theatre, the communal life, and the superabundant spirit of life and its accompanying and congenial lyric utterance, in these plays of Dekker. They tell us that the freer speech of their time was not only figurative and alive and idiomatic, but accommodated at every turn to the generous rhythm that waited to seize on the words of every full-breathed soul in the playhouse. Thus the contemporary rhythm and the common voice reinforced the poet, and his song had his own happiness and the happiness of the whole community in it. For the Elizabethan folk were full-blooded and warm-witted, and they

loved a song, and made an atmosphere in which song could congenially flourish.

Simon Eyre the Shoemaker's words, before the stanzas of the May song are sung, are worth recalling too, since Herrick paraphrased them afterwards. At the time when the play was first acted in London, he was an apprentice in Cheapside in the shop of his uncle.

"Hum, let's be merry whiles we are young," says Simon; "old age, sack and sugar will steal upon us ere we be aware!" and these are Herrick's lines—

"Let's now take our time
While we're in our prime,
And old, old age is afar off;
For the evil, evil days,
Will come on apace,
Before we can be aware of.

Another page or two, and tabor and pipe are brought in; and the shoemakers dance a morris. The whole is a holiday interlude, expressing the spirit of the time and the town that was half country, with the May branch at the door, and pipe and tabor coming up the street. This play belongs to the last years of the sixteenth century; when an exuberance of comic life showed itself on the London stage; and it is one of a series of London plays in which the actual town expresses itself. Ben Jonson's second *Every Man* play was one of these; and the tavern scenes in Shakespeare's *Henry IV.* help to fill up the comic record. The energy of the life affected the language and the flow of words was tremendous, as a Fastidious Brisk reminds us: "Oh, it makes a man all quintessence and flame, and lifts him up, in a moment, to the very crystal crown of the sky, where, hovering in the strength of his imagination, he shall behold all the delight of the Hesperides, the Insulae Fortunae, Adonis' Gardens, Tempe, or what else, confined within the amplest verge of poesy, to be mere umbrae and imperfect figures, conferred with the most essential felicity of your court."

The *Extravagants*, as we may call them, were much to the fore at this moment; and they show us the intoxication of

the men whose brains cannot stand the rhyme of the gods. Fortunately the poets were there to use it, whether in drama or in other ways. Ben Jonson might think only of freely adapting and translating some Latin lines in an epitaph for a boy, like those of Martial's epigram on Scorpus the jockey ; but his good genius fairly turned the stolen silver to real gold—

" Weep with me, all you that read
This little story :
And know, for whom a tear you shed
Death's self is sorry.

'Twas a child that so did thrive
In grace and feature,
As Heaven and Nature seemed to strive,
Which owned the creature."

In these years the new poets were translating the old, making them, as was said, into Elizabethans. From Greek, Latin, Italian, French sources, English poetry was drawing rich sustenance and assimilating the southern to the northern mode. So the spirit of Homer spoke to Chapman, as he reported in his *Tears of Peace*—

" And I, invisibly, went prompting thee
To those fair greens where thou didst English me "

The Spirit told the English poet indeed—

" That he was Angel to me, Star, and Fate,"

which it might well be to English poetry at large. Echoes of the Greek resounding in the English verse caught the ear and affected the rhythm of the period—

" . . . Iris heard The winds were at a feast,
All in the court of Zephyrus, that boisterous blowing air
Gathered together. She that wears the thousand-coloured hair
Flew thither, standing in the porch."

And again, this time from the *Odyssey*,—the passage in the twelfth book which recalls the Song of the Sirens—

" Ulysses ! stay thy ship, and that song hear
That none pass'd ever but it bent his ear,
But left him ravish'd. . . .
For we know all things whatsoever were
In wide Troy labour'd ; whatsoever there
The Grecians and the Trojans both sustain'd
By those high issues that the Gods ordain'd."

If there was in Chapman a note of the transcendent imagination and of the mounting energy that is near to lyric, his work upon Homer did not lessen it. "The rich crown of old Humanity" which he adjudged to that Prince of Wales who died young was his too. There is no need here to enter into the niceties of the quarrel of the playhouses, or "war of the theatres," in which Chapman, Ben Jonson, Dekker, Shakespeare, and Marston were involved, except that it helps to illustrate the classical currency in English verse from 1599, when Chapman's *All Fools* was among the new plays, to the time when his Homer helped, according to Mr Poel, to set Shakespeare writing *Troilus and Cressida.*

Good as the classical echoes sound to us artistically, they yet tended as time went on to artificialise and stiffen English verse. They helped later to spoil for a century or so the natural and impulsive English rhythm, and the wilder lyric note, by making verse too bookish, conscious, and scholastic. Ben Jonson and Chapman, Milton and Dryden, all four poets of marked individuality, true sons of Britain, all by their power helped to enforce classic models, and give them an insuperable hold on the writers that followed. On the other hand, Shakespeare in the main resisted it. Dekker did so usually; while Beaumont and Fletcher held the scales fairly even, the one tending to a Latin grace in his finest lyric verse, the other to a melodic English note touched with the folk-colour. Of the work of the two it has been said that their plays are in spirit of one period, while their songs are, with a few marked exceptions, of another, and those traditionally Beaumont's.

A test song may perhaps be found, if anywhere, in the disputed play, *The Woman Hater*: the melodious lines that open—

> "Come, sleep, and with thy sweet deceiving
> Lock me in delight a while. . . ."

One would swear the first verse, with its soft *ee, ee, de, cei* iteration, to be Fletcher's. We may recall that in fact this very play, the *Woman Hater*, was the first attributed to them. It was acted in 1606-7, and when it was printed only Fletcher's

name appeared. One critic, after applying the usual chemic tests, decided it was really Beaumont's; he did not allow, however, in doing so for Fletcher's freer use of blank verse as he grew older. Four or five years later, and it is certain they were in hot collaboration, and in 1611, a remarkable succession of plays went out from their house on the Bankside, "not far from the playhouse," and were acted on the convenient stage. To this Bankside group belong many of the plays rich in lyric effect, but already we suspect other contributors.

In many cases it would be hard to say whether the accent were more like one man than another. Fletcher was openly susceptible to every breath of influence, and in the end he learnt, I imagine, to reproduce some of his collaborators' finer tones. Three-quarters of the songs and lyrics in the joint-plays are conjecturally his, and they have a limpid melody distinct enough from the terse and resonant lines of Beaumont. The song in the *Passionate Madman*—

> "Hence all you vain Delights,
> As short as are the nights
> Wherein you spend your folly . . ."

has been called Beaumont's; if so, the more faltering pieces among the *Poems* published after his death can hardly be his; nor would it be fair to rest a comparison upon them. But we may take from two poems, the Westminster lines of Beaumont and the Satyr's lines in the *Faithful Shepherdess*, four verses or so, to try the measure of either.

First, from the Westminster lines—

> "Here's an acre sown indeed
> With the richest royallist seed
> That the earth did e'er suck in,
> Since the first man died for sin";

and from the *Faithful Shepherdess*—

> "Here be berries for a queen,
> Some be red, some be green,
> These are of that luscious meat
> The great god Pan himself doth eat."

Set side by side with Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher

may be said to represent, in their plays, a splendid decadence. But as lyric poets, judged not by their plays but by the songs with which the "fifty comedies and tragedies" are so musically leavened, they show little but the hues of exuberant health. The plays, it was said, are in spirit Jacobean; the songs are, with few exceptions, still Elizabethan.

But are the exceptions, such as they are, Beaumont's? Fletcher was born in 1579, just within the Elizabethan pale, just so much earlier than Beaumont, six years in fact, as enabled him to feel its fuller impulse, his own temperament abetting. His fellow-poet, by reason of a graver, perhaps colder habit, is, in spite of some early Shakespearean influences, more distinctly seventeenh century and more truly a son of Ben Jonson. Their difference in this is just enough to lend colour to the old notion, that, of their common entity, Fletcher was the heart and Beaumont the head. As this is too idiomatic a statement of their complementary functions to be exact, it only helps us to doubt whether Fletcher's genius was more emotional and lyrical, or Beaumont's more dramatic, out of the two?

Of the songs and lyrics in the plays, probably five-sixths are Fletcher's. His is that fluent, limpid, natural English note which is struck so often in the plays—

> "There's nought in this life sweet,
> If man were wise to see't,
> But only melancholy;
> O sweetest melancholy! . . ."

or, in the *Beggar's Bush*—

> "Cast your caps and cares away,
> This is beggars' holy-day! . . ."

This is not the tune that Beaumont sings alone: his is the terser note, with a classic, resonant ring in it, instead of the easy Elizabethan lyric movement found in Fletcher. A good example of Beaumont at his best is to be had in his famous, inimitable lines on the tombs in Westminster Abbey, which are quoted above and indeed tempt repeating. Beaumont, at his worst and stiffest, is to be seen in his lyric, *The Indifferent* (if indeed it be his?)—

"Never more will I protest
To love a woman but in jest:
For as they cannot be true,
So to give a man his due,
When the wooing fit is past,
Their affection cannot last."

Fletcher had too much lyric ease, and warmth of poetic style, ever to write like that. But it is fairer to compare both writers at their best; and one may take any of those passages in which Fletcher is following Beaumont to arrive at a fair idea both of their different faculties and their common effect of the poetic currency. Turn again to the Westminster lines—

"Here are sands, ignoble things,
Dropt from the ruined sides of kings:
Here's a world of pomp and state,
Buried in dust, once dead by fate."

The lines in which Fletcher follows the same model are among those that most strongly influenced Milton; and if the test of one poet's catching the ear of another, and permanently affecting him, be a true one, then this double concurrence may be counted both to Beaumont and to Fletcher for grace.

In considering the relationship between the two, it must be remembered that Beaumont was an excessively precocious writer. The *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* (which Swinburne and Mr Gosse agree in considering to be his), freely developed from a passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, imitated as it is more or less from various English masters, is yet a remarkable enough performance to be taken into account. It was published in 1602, when he was barely seventeen; and its quality may be gleaned from the lines which expand Ovid's—

"Hic color aprica pendentibus arbore pomis," etc.

into the lines—

"Then might a man his lively colour see,
Like the ripe apple in a sunny tree,
Or ivory dy'd o're with a pleasing red,
Or like the pale moone, being shadowéd,"

or better, take this pretty conceit, which is not in his original—

> "The early rising and soon singing lark
> Can never chant her sweet notes in the dark,
> For sleep she ne'er so little or so long,
> Yet still the morning will attend her song."

These things show at least the great promise of the young poet, already known to a wide circle as Frank Beaumont, the picture of whose early life at Grace Dieu, in Leicestershire, the family seat, has touched the imagination of Drayton and Wordsworth, and been commemorated by Mr Swinburne.

Born there in 1585–6, Francis Beaumont succeeded to a fortunate family tradition, and one knit up already with rare strands of poetry, as well as with the courtly ties of national life and history. His elder brother was Sir John, author of *Bosworth Field*, and a notable pioneer of the heroic English couplet used in that poem with such effect. Oxford came earlier in a man's life in those days; Frank Beaumont was sent to Broadgates Hall ("Pembroke") when he was eleven, but did not, for some reason, stay out his term. In 1600, he was entered at the Inner Temple, to find in the law mainly, it would seem, a step-ladder to the stage.

As for John Fletcher, he meanwhile was already well arrived in town from Benet College, Cambridge, where one may imagine him reading his famous Cambridge predecessor's *Shepheardes Calendar* (published in the year of his birth, 1579). Indeed, he assimilated so well such images as the "budded brooms" and the "loved lilies" of Spenser's pastoral, that they recurred to him inevitably when he took to writing his own *Faithful Shepherdess*. Of this one may be sure, he did not wait to commence poet until he knew Beaumont; and it is hardly going too far to conjecture that he may have made first at Cambridge the pastoral experiments out of which the *Faithful Shepherdess* was finally shaped. It is quite probable, too, that he had begun play-writing before his first meeting with Beaumont, which we may date approximately 1600.

As it is, we have noticed the first play associated with

their names. It may have been written as early as 1604-5, seeing that it was produced some two years later; for we know how difficult it is for a first play to be accepted, and what a crowd of play-wrights were already buzzing round the two or three available play-houses in London. At any rate, the play was first published in quarto with Fletcher's name only attached to it; and, for a long time, it was credited only to his hand, as by Dyce. But Mr Fleay, in his *Shakespeare Manual*, proceeding mainly on the ground of metrical tests, boldly conveyed it over to Beaumont's side of the account; and a common plan is now to ascribe it to Beaumont alone. Mr Fleay based his test, however, upon the later plays, written by Fletcher alone, forgetting that Fletcher's method of blank verse, like Shakespeare's, was altered considerably, as he grew older, and used an easier pen.

In any case, no sufficient argument stands against a theory midway between the two extreme claims advanced for either poet, that the play was one of the very first in which they collaborated, but that Beaumont's dominant hand is felt to be moving strongly in many passages, and to be guiding the fable throughout with more constructive art than Fletcher had in his own sole right. If this be the conclusion, and the date of the play be roughly assigned to the commencement of their dramatic fellowship, we shall still have to suppose that their closer friendship, extending, on Aubrey's testimony, to a Bohemian community of goods and chattels, did not come to a clinch till some three or four years later. About this time, they became most extraordinarily prolific. The harvest of plays, produced in one climacteric year rich in lyric moments, belong to the Bankside group already mentioned, in which the invention, wanton wit, and high spirits of the two poets fairly ran riot. Of these the *Maid's Tragedy* supplies us in its first act with a "Masque of Night" which is clearly Beaumont's, and in its second act with the exquisite lyric—

"Lay a garland on my hearse,"

which is all but certainly Fletcher's. And the play, written

in alternate parts by either dramatist, seems to show them in the incipient stage of collaboration, when they had not arrived at any more subtle division of labour than that one should write one act, the other another. At a later period, it is often all but impossible to decide whether it was Fletcher or Beaumont, or yet another, who wrote, or whether they planned a play together, and now one, now another, suggested details, entrances and exits, a happy image, a lyric pause, as the exigencies of the pen and the accidents of the moment might happen to suggest.

But so far as their lyrics are concerned, it is easier perhaps to distinguish, from external evidences, Fletcher's pen from Beaumont's. Of the two, Fletcher has more apparent sweetness, colour and fantasy ; Beaumont has a greater sense of form, with more dignity and intellectual quality. He writes as the master of his poetry ; whereas Fletcher is poetry's instrument, and is easily carried away by her emotion and her music. All that we can gather, from contemporary references to the two friends and their personal traits and their temperaments, seems to bear out this simple difference; but in the lyrics, as in the plays, one has often to be content to wonder at a style and an effect due to their common invention. Shirley long ago uttered a warning to possible biographers which it is well to remember. It appears, in his preface to the folio of 1647, which says more in praise of their works than in explanation of how they were written. One trait he does give us on hearsay, of their personal and social effect, but only to use it as a peg whereon to hang the warning aforesaid. "It is not so remote in time," he says, "but very many gentlemen may remember these authors ; and some, familiar with their conversation, deliver them upon every pleasant occasion so fluent, to talk a comedy." It is then he adds : "He must be a bold man that dares undertake to write their lives: what I have to say is, we have the precious remains."

That, after all, is the thing that concerns us ; and to any readers who find the dramatic dregs of these "precious remains" apt to be too gross for comfort in the reading, the lyric

passages in them may be recommended as a daintier substitute ; full of all that various charm, melodious ease, and naïve and inimitable cadence, which one finds only in Elizabethan songs at their best.

Short, then, of writing their lives, it is enough now to recall that their companionship cannot certainly have lasted past Beaumont's marriage to Ursula Isley, in 1613. That was the year too of the notorious marriage of Frances Howard and Rochester (which Lord Bacon and Ben Jonson helped to celebrate with masque and song). Some two years later, Beaumont died, leaving a fame that ate up others.

> "Beaumont is dead, by whose sole death appears,
> Wit's a disease, consumes men in few years."

wrote Bishop Corbet, himself no mean wit, as his poems show. Fletcher outlived his friend nearly ten years, dying, still a bachelor, in 1625.

Some allusion has been made already to the contemporary effect that Beaumont and Fletcher made. Herrick's lines, *Upon Master Fletcher's Incomparable Plays,* show how they affected him ; and since the poem serves to connect so rare a lyric poet directly with another, I gladly appropriate it—

> " Apollo sings, his harp resounds : give room,
> For now behold, the golden pomp is come !
> Thy pomp of plays, which thousands come to see,
> With admiration both of them and thee.
> O volume worthy leaf by leaf, and cover,
> To be with juice of cedar washed all over !
> Here's words with lines, and lines with scenes consent
> To raise an act to full astonishment ;
> Here words of comfort, words of power to move
> Young men to swoon, and maids to die for love :
> *Love lies a-bleeding* here ; Evadne there
> Swells with brave rage, yet comely everywhere ;
> Here's a *Mad Lover* ; there that high design
> Of *King and no King,* and the rare plot thine.
> So that whene'er we circumvolve our eyes,
> Such rich, such fresh, such sweet varieties
> Ravish our spirits, that entranc'd we see,
> None writes love's passion in the world like thee."

Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, it is certain, even though we discount freely Dryden's exaggeration of their comparative

popularity, were in Herrick's time more to the taste of the town than Shakespeare's. They were gentlemen, and fine and fashionable gentlemen, as far as their dramatic function went; they knew the slang of their circle, and used its coarsest trick of phrase, its current quips and *mots*, with an admired freedom. Shakespeare, after all, was a poet and a commoner first, and only a man about town, consulting the fashions of the town, afterwards. Shirley, in the preface already mentioned, calls the playhouse at Blackfriars "an academy, where the three hours' spectacle, while Beaumont and Fletcher were presented, was usually of more advantage to the hopeful young heir than a costly, dangerous foreign travel." And it cannot be denied, he adds, "but that the young spirits of the time, whose birth and quality made them impatient of the sourer ways of education, have, from the attentive hearing of these pieces, got ground in point of wit and carriage of the most severely employed students. How many passable discoursing dining wits stand yet in good credit upon the bare stock of two or three of these single scenes?"

It was this London of wit and fashion that Beaumont and Fletcher had to reckon with, as well as the London of the 'prentices of Cheap whom they sometimes flaunted; and it must be admitted that they contrived a wonderful amount of poetry, even in the passages which ministered to its grossest humours. In some of these wildest scenes, the flower of song blossoms most fragrant, like the rose in Hogarth's most terrible print; while again the song in some passages is the index to a whole vein of lyrical fancy, hidden in the text.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### METAPHYSICAL LYRIC—THE "SONS OF BEN"—THE PURITAN REPRESSION—HERRICK

BEN JONSON'S hold on the poets of his day was well maintained in the day after him. His knowledge of its classic resources could not fail to affect the younger men who looked to succeed him. So "all that had wit, or would be thought to have," they that Falkland described as flocking to him in his last days, continued to dwell upon and repeat his accents. His example in the lyric tended to over-classicise it, and heighten its sense of form to a degree that was bad on the whole for the initiative verseman of small calibre. Along with his masterful influence there were others that ran contemporaneously and helped (by one of the paradoxical developments often seen) to stimulate the play of intelligence on one side, while they restrained its freedom of expression on another. The strongest of these lay in the poems of John Donne, who to a subtle mind joined an individual difficult style and a play of figurative wit that often threw his lyric idea into disorder. What Jonson thought of him and his good opinion we know by the lines—

> "Read all I send; and if I find but one
> Mark'd by thy hand, and with the better stone,
> My title's seal'd. Those that for claps do write,
> Let punys', porters', players' praise delight."

John Donne was another London-born poet. His father, says Izaak Walton, "was lineally descended from a very ancient family in Wales. . . ." He was precisely Jonson's contemporary, born in the same year, 1573, and his writings as a satirist and poet brought him into coterie fame at least while he was still young. In his cycle of love-poems, he moves

from verses that seize the ear and hold it with intense melody to others that fall dull as schoolmaster's jests. One begins, how delightfully—

> " I long to talk with some old lover's ghost
> Who died before the god of love was born "—

while the next stanza says of the young god that—

> " His office was indulgently to fit
> Actives to passives; correspondency
> Only his subject was . . ."

This is metaphysical verse in its very article. But elsewhere Donne is easily master of his new music and makes us admit its fantasy, as in his song—

> " Go, and catch a falling star."

And we have to admit that if lyric was to pass through a second transformation, and assimilate reflective ideas to the primary emotions, it was bound to experiment here and at this stage as Donne experimented. Only, being what he was, proverbial for his wit, quick of thought and subtle to a degree, it is strange that he was not able to perceive where the line between the song of passion confessed and the doctor's diagnosis should be drawn. But he failed as other poets had done who tried to use in their verse, not the philosophical results of thought (for that need not be so fatal) but the processes themselves. Moreover, the fallacy by which he suffered was one that was in the air itself when he began to write, a very young man, much concerned to find the theoretic equation between his own amorous superpropensities and his struggling religious instincts—

> " As our blood labours to beget
> Spirits as like souls as it can,
> Because such fingers need to knit
> That subtile knot which makes us man.
>
> So must pure lovers soul descend
> T' affections and to faculties,
> Which sense may reach and apprehend
> Else a great praise in prison lies.

T' our bodies turn we then, and so
Weak men in love reveal'd may look ;
Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
But yet the body is the book."

If the lyric could ever succeed in fusing subjective, introspective subject-matter, and yet keep true pitch, one would say that Donne of all men was the poet to accomplish it. At his best his achievement is surpassingly fine—finer than we perceive at once ; and although some of his contemporaries lived and admired him for the wrong things, his real mind, his salient word in poetry, affected them too ; his influence is to be traced in many pages where it is hardly suspected. A further word is due to his *Holy Sonnets* which are, though conceited in passages, and erratic in detail, vital in thought and style. The eighth—

" If faithful souls be alike glorify'd
As angels, then my father's soul doth see
And adds this ev'n to full felicitie,
That valiantly I hell's wide mouth o'erstride "—

is characteristic of Donne's religious fantasy and introversion, while the tenth has a Sidneian ring in its lines, and holds its eloquence like the trumpets heard at a state funeral in his own church of St Paul's—

" Death ! be not proud, tho' some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so ;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow me,
Die not, poor Death ! nor yet canst thou me
From rest and sleep, which but thy picture be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow ;
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou'rt slave to Fate, Chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then ?
One short sleep past we take eternally ;
And death shall be no more ; Death, thou shalt die."

Quite as dignified and noble as this verse is his prose which can rise at times to the purest singing rhythms of oratory. Take this extract from Dr John Donne's Prebend Sermons, the concluding passage of Sermon LXVII., in which the text

is Psalm lxiii. 7. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

> ". . . True joy in this world shall flow into the joy of Heaven, as a River flows into the Sea; This joy shall not be put out in death, and a new joy kindled in me in Heaven; But as my soule, as soone as it is out of my body, is in Heaven, and does not stay for the possession of Heaven, nor for the fruition of the sight of God, till it be ascended through Ayre, and fire, and Moone, and Sun, and Planets and Firmament, to that place which we conceive to be Heaven, but without the thousandth part of a minute's stop, as soon as it issues, is in a glorious light, which is Heaven (for all the way to Heaven is Heaven; And as those Angels which came from Heaven hither, bring Heaven with them and are in Heaven here, so that soule hat goes to Heaven, meets Heaven here; and as those Angels doe not devest Heaven by coming, so these soules invest Heaven, in their going). As my soule shall not goe towards Heaven, but goe by Heaven to Heaven, to the Heaven of Heavens, so the true joy of a good soule in this world is the very joy of Heaven. . . . In the agonies of Death, in the anguish of that dissolution, in the sorrows of that valediction, in the irreversibleness of that transmigration, I shall have a joy, which shall no more evaporate than my soul shall evaporate, A joy that shall passe up, and put on a more glorious garment above, and be joy superinvester in glory."

But it was the wit of his verse that so struck his contemporaries first and last. In one elegy, Valentine said the world "is witless now that Donne is dead," and Dryden afterwards said he was "the greatest wit though not the best poet of our nation." And wit that juggles with ideas and words, and surprises by its caracoles, puts out the muse, who does not like her votary to take too much upon himself and offer to supply out of his own reserve what should be sent him from hers. In some editions of Donne occur two poems in sequence—*The Broken Heart* and *A Valediction forbidding Mourning*—which put his forced note and his ideal verse into sharp context, and the difference is amazing—

> "He is stark mad whoever says
> That he hath been in love an hour;
> Yet not that love so soon decays,
> But that it can ten in less space devour.
> Who will believe if I swear
> That I have had the plague a year?
> Who would not laugh at me if I should say
> I saw a flash of powder burn a day?"

That is the opening stanza of the one poem, and these are the curious imaginative passages of the other, the *Valediction*—

" Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears
Men reckon what it did and meant ;
But trepidation of the sphears,
Tho' greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love
(Whose soule is sense) cannot admit
Of absence, 'cause it doth remove
The thing which elemented it

But we, by a love so far refined,
That ourselves know not what it is,
Later-assured of the mind,
Careless eyes, lips, and hands to miss. . ."

From whose torch did John Donne kindle his ? It is hard to decide. He was much affected by Sidney ; he took some ideas from Spenser, Quarles, the Fletchers, and was a delighted reader, it is clear, of the *Passionate Pilgrim* and Chester's *Love Martyr*, and outside English and further than this, there is no need to go.

We leave Donne and his influence now in order to trace the descent from Ben Jonson. One of the tribe, one of the " Sons of Ben," who showed fair promise and died at twenty-nine before he had achieved half he had it in him to do, Thomas Randolph had, like the Master, a dramatic bias. His one best remembered note is that telling of his homage, his—

GRATULATORY TO BEN JONSON.

" I was not born to Helicon, nor dare
Presume to think myself a Muse's bier.
I have no title to Parnassus' Hill,
Nor any acre of it, by the will
Of a dead ancestor, nor could I be
Aught but a tenant unto poetry.
. . . . .
I am akin to heroes being thine—
And part of my alliance is divine
Orpheus, Musæus, Homer too beside
Thy brother from the Roman mother's side."

The *Leges Conviviales* that Jonson drew up for the Apollo Room in the " Old Devil Tavern " at Temple Bar, are to be seen in his works. They forbid the room to idiots, fops

and mopish men, and make welcome the free spirits—" eruditi, urbani, hilares, honesti," and it seems you might bring a lady with you. No standard of poesy was to be kept—*insipida poemata nulla recitantar.* The best glimpse of such tavern nights as these convivial laws suggest is to be had from Herrick—

" Ah, Ben !
Say how or when
Shall we thy guests
Meet at those lyric feasts
Made at the Sun,
The Dog, the Triple Tun ;
Where we such clusters had
As made us nobly wild, not mad ?
And yet each verse of thine
Outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine."

What one gathers from these reminders is that poetry mattered then and was thoroughly alive, and that the maintenance of the craft was held dear in London at the time. Song and the spirit of song were in the community, and the circle at the " Apollo," the " Sun," the " Triple Tun " was privileged. An atmosphere friendly to the art reigned, and when Herrick went off to Dean Prior in Devonshire he carried back reminiscences of the Temple Bar Apollo to stir his fantasy. " Unto the lyric strings the muse gave grace," said Jonson, paraphrasing Horace, after whom his followers loved to call him.

Randolph died in 1639, two years after him. This takes us over the reign of James the First (of England), which we have no right to skip, because that king was himself a poet and a conductor of the poetic element. Presently we must turn to his book of *Rules and Cautels,* to be observed in Poesy ; but that belongs to the north, and at present we have to mark the ascendancy of Ben. One of his sons was William Browne of Tavistock, who, some critics say, wrote the lines long attributed to Jonson on the Countess of Pembroke, Sir Philip Sidney's sister—

" Underneath this sable hearse
Lies the subject of all verse,
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother ;
Death ! ere thou hast slain another
Learn'd, and fair, and good as she,
Time shall throw a dart at thee."

Whalley printed this among Jonson's *Underwoods*, and it is unmistakably the finest lyric epitaph in the language, and alone might give its writer a place with the immortals. If Browne did write it he never again wrote so tersely; but in the fifth song, Book I., of *Britannia's Pastorals*, he speaks again of Sir Philip Sidney, who taught him much, and may have helped to give him the secret of that resonant trochaic note. The muses, he says, in this song—

> " . . . are better fitting his sweet stripe
> Who on the banks of Ancor tuned his pipe:
> Or rather for that learned swain whose lays
> Divinest Homer crowned with deathless bays;
> Or any one sent from the sacred well
> Inheriting the soul of Astrophel."

This brings Drayton and Chapman into the page, as well as Sidney; and in book II., the first song is in Spenser's praise, and the second in Sidney's. When we recall how Keats drew from Browne long afterwards, we are made newly aware of the intimacy of the poetic guild, sustained without regard for time, public fame, or forgetfulness, to which the Mermaid Tavern served as a kind of joyous rallying place. But Browne handed on the music to others before Keats; to Milton, who took from him a cadence or so for *Lycidas* and something more for *Comus*. His " Willy " refrain in the *Pastorals*—

> "Sad Willie's pipe shall bid his friend farewell"—

and his *Song of Tavy* and *Walla*—

> "Walla, the earth's delight and Tavy's love"—

have added words, that the men of Devon at least will not forget, to the vocabulary of the shires and regions.

One of Browne's masters was Wither, whom so sure and fine a critic as Elia has finely praised. He certainly had the art, and more than Browne had it, of writing lyric with a proverbial vigorous certainty of phrase, as in his—

> " Shall I, wasting in despaire,
> Dye, because a woman's fair? "

This famous counterblast to lover's melancholy was, I believe, due to a well-known lute song with a dying refrain in Robert Jones's third song-book—

> " Shall I look to ease my grief ?
> No, my sight is lost with eyeing :
> Shall I speak, and beg relief ?
> No, my voice is hoarse with crying
> What remains but only dying."

Wither's star is crescent, and he has nothing of the puritan " poormouth-melody " about him. One of the heartiest Christmas Carols in the language is his—

> " Rank misers now do sparing shun,
> Their hall of music soundeth ;
> And dogs thence with whole shoulders run,
> So all things here aboundeth.
> The country-folk themselves advance,
> For Crowdy-mutton's come out of France,
> And Jack shall pipe, and Jill shall dance,
> *And all the town be merry.*
>
> Ned Swash hath fetched his bands from pawn
> And all his best apparel ;
> Brisk Nell hath bought a ruff of lawn
> With droppings of the barrel.
> And those that hardly all the year
> Had bread to eat or rags to wear,
> Will have both clothes and dainty fare
> *And all the day be merry.*"

The refrain suggests that the breath of popular song had not yet been diverted. In other poems that still count to us, Wither's own voice and accent are clear. Personal lyric attains to a stoic religious note in his *Prayer of Old Age*—

> " As this my carnal robe grows old,
> Soil'd, rent, and worn by length of years,
> Let me on that by faith lay hold
> Which man in life immortal wears :
> So sanctify my days behind,
> So let my manners be refined,
> That when my soul and flesh must part,
> There lurk no terrors in my heart."

And his *Mistress of Philarete* (in which he speaks of Browne's *Pastoral*) has the same accent of sincerity—

" No, if I had never seen
Such a beauty, I had been
Piping in the country shades
To the homely dainty maids
For a country fiddler's fees,
Clouted cream, and bread and cheese.'

And there is great valiancy in his song, *When we are upon the Seas*—

On those great waters now I am,
Of which I have been told,
That whosoever thither came
Should wonders there behold.
In this unsteady place of fear,
Be present, Lord, with me ;
For in these depths of water here
I depths of danger see

A stirring courser now I sit,
A headstrong steed I ride,
That champs and foams upon the bit
Which curbs his lofty pride.
The softest whistling of the winds
Doth make him gallop fast ;
And as their breath increased he finds
The more he maketh haste."

In Wither we begin to see the repressive force of the Puritan movement upon the song and the music of the country. It is true he had by nature a spirit gallant as any Cavalier's, and one would not exchange his best work for any of theirs. But the verse he wrote in his latter time is drawn too close under devotion's cloak ; it is written under the denying law, and not for the enlarging of the creative idea in man. This is why so many hymns fail : they have the abject idiom of the worm in them, or the unction of preference, not the nobler energy of the *Song of the Three Children*, or the Isaian Psalm of the creatures and the Elements in which Wither rejoiced,—*O sing unto the Lord a New Song*.

An Ode and a Prayer inscribed with Ben Jonson's name, to be found among the later poems of the *Hesperides* leave us in no doubt in which constellation Herrick's star was set. They are both reminiscent. The Ode is brief, written in two decades, and the Prayer still briefer, and in its second stanza

achieves the doubtful rhyme "Herrick" and "lyrick," which the fates themselves must have intended—

"When I a verse shall make,
Know I have prayed thee,
For old religion's sake,
Saint Ben to aid me.

Make the way smooth for me
When I, thy Herrick,
Honouring thee, on my knee
Offer my lyrick.

Candles I'll give to thee
And a new altar;
And thou, Saint Ben, shalt be
Writ in my Psalter."

Herrick was young enough to be a "son of Ben"; but if he learnt from that master to use a Latin resonance and paraphrase classic figures in his verse, he managed to preserve his English note, clear and unspoiled through it all. His good genius, his inborn sense of lyric style, saved him from the taint of the metaphysical and Cowleyite school; and his lyrics are perhaps the happiest combination of the English and the classic traditions the muse can offer us. In the events of his life, interpreted through the spirit of his work, we get an intermittent pageant of the influences which were shaping English poetry in the seventeenth century. He was fortunate as poets go, even in that 'prentice life in Cheapside, against which he rebelled; for there, it may be, his delicate sense of form, of the beauty of ornament, was fostered. "Golden Cheapside" at that time had much in its near surroundings to quicken the sense of poetry. Shakespeare was still writing: *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra* were being produced, and Ben Jonson, to whose train Herrick was to attach his genius, was at the height of his fame.

Herrick's determination to escape from Cheapside to Cambridge University was a natural result of Jonson's tutelage and the doctrine preached by Ben, Beaumont, Randolph and the rest, in conclave in the Taverns; and the readiness with which he converted himself afterwards from a law to an arts

student suggests that he looked upon either profession—Law or Church—as a means to an end. From Cambridge he wrote letters to his guardian about his straitened allowance, which are interesting by their exaggerated Euphuisms, their Latin phrases, and the naïve belief of their writer in their efficacy. When Herrick returned to London in 1620, he brought back a Catullus-like love of form and a marked classic taste for verse without affectation or extravagance. Then for some years he seems to have lived in London upon the few hundred pounds left to him by his father; studying life and his art after the fashion of the time, roystering with the other sons of Jonson, and possibly experimenting in drama without result. It was different with lyric verse, and happily neither master nor sons nursed illusions about any substitute for either inspiration or craftsmanship in Art. Some passages of his verse are highly suggestive—

> " Wild I am now with heat;
> O Bacchus, cool thy rays!
> Or frantic, I shall eat
> The thyrse, and bite the bays.
>
> Round, round, the roof does run;
> And being ravishes thus,
> Come, I will drink a tun
> To my Propertius!"

His *Farewell unto Poetrie* is still more explicit. They kept it up in those days morning, noon, and night; nay, " past noon of night," and on through " the fresh and fairest flourish of the morn "; fleeting the time—

> " With flame and rapture, drinking to the odd
> Number of wine, which makes us full with God.
> And in that mystic frenzy, we have hurled
> (As with a tempest) nature through the world,
> And in a whirl-wind twirl'd her home, aghast
> At that which in her ecstacy had past."

If Ben Jonson lent a voice in this frenzy he did not let the illusions of sack disguise the true severity of poetry. He laid down the law for his sons with no uncertain sound. No son of

mine, he said in effect, and how plainly one seems to hear him say it!—will think "he can leap forth suddenly a poet by dreaming he hath been in Parnassus, or by having washt his lips, as they say, in Helicon. There goes more to his making than so; for to Nature, Exercise, Imitation, and Study, Art must be added, to make all these perfect. And though these challenge much to themselves in the making up of our maker, it is Art only can lead him to perfection." This is very good gospel, and in Herrick's case it fell on elastic ears—

> "Let's strive to be the best! the Gods, we know it,
> Pillars and men, hate an indifferent poet."

To these follies and Jonsonian sermons over sack and the vintage of the *Underwoods* and the *Forest,* Herrick had to bid good-bye in 1629 when he was presented to Dean Prior.

His *Farewell unto Poetrie,* was written at this time; but, as a matter of fact, his own poetry was only at its beginning. Almost all the poems which have done most to win him a familiar name in our own time—such lyrics as *To Daffadils, To Blossoms,*—were produced after he went—

> ". . . to banishment
> Into the loathèd West."

It was there, in the "dull Devonshire" which bored him often to extinction, that the lyric moments came which inspired the rhymes of the country life, its festivals and its flowers by whose charm he holds his fame. The *July Flowers,* the village maids and rural feasts, did the rest.

Dean Prior lies by the "rude River called Dean Bourne," and there in his vicarage, with his maid and housekeeper Prue, his spaniel Tracy, his pet lamb or pet pig, his hens and his geese; and, if we take the plain testimony of his *Thanksgiving,* his cows,—he settled down to the pastoral life which suited his genius better than it did his London-bred taste. Both his disgust and his delight are vigorously expressed by him at different moments, according to his mood. His

memories of Golden Cheapside, and of Fleet Street, and the tavern nights of old, continually haunt him—

> " London my home is ; though by hard fate sent
> Into a long and irksome banishment ;
> Yet since call'd back, henceforward let me be,
> O native country, repossess'd by thee ! "

This he wrote in 1648, when, with his fellow parsons, he was ejected on the coming of the Commonwealth. He was then fifty-seven, and he returned to town, only to find it sadly changed. It seems the thought of London, and the necessity of reminding his friends there of his existence, and his present predicament, prompted him at last to collect his poems, previously only published (to the number of some sixty pieces) in *Wit's Recreations*. In 1648 his book *Hesperides* and *Noble Numbers*, was published—not with any conspicuous success. His old circle, indeed, was by this time broken up. Ben Jonson was gone, and his influence had waned. So the *Hesperides*, anything but " timely fortunate," as their poet wished, must be counted among the books that have missed, in their author's lifetime, their golden moment.

Three years before Herrick's return to London, Milton's earlier poems had appeared. It was not Milton, however, but Cowley, who marks for us the taste and fashion in poetry of the time. Cowley's poems ran through edition after edition in this period. Herrick's passed all but unnoticed. The same thing goes on in every period ; and no doubt we have our admired Cowleys and our undiscovered Herricks to-day.

With the publication of the *Hesperides* and the *Noble Numbers*, Herrick's career as a poet closes. The years intervening, ere the Restoration restored him, too, to his living at Dean Prior, were not clearly fortunate ones for him. His income, in spite of the stated provision for outlawed parsonry, soon dwindled almost to nothing. He had rich relations, it is true ; but what is the proverbial lot of the poor relation ? And Herrick had a restless wit, quite apt to revenge itself for meagre hospitalities. In the end he was as glad to get back to his

parishioners, and to his dull Devonshire, as he had previously been to leave them. He died there, at Dean Prior, in 1674, at the ripe age of eighty-four.

Herrick quite accepted the theory that lyric poetry must hold to music as well as to prosody. He was not, like Campion, a musician himself, but he shews in numerous places in the *Hesperides* how much music counted to him. To Henry Lawes, in particular, who set some six poems of his, Herrick wrote eight lines, in which he mentions also Jacques Gouter, and other famous lutanists and musicians of the time—

> " Touch but thy lyre, my Harry, and I hear
> From thee some raptures of the rare Gotiere :
> Then if thy voice commingle with the string,
> I hear in thee the are Larniere to sing,
> Or curious Wilson. Tell me, canst thou be
> Less than Apollo, that usurp'd such three,
> Three unto whom the whole world gave applause ?
> Yet their three praises praise but one : That's Lawes."

A natural ear for music, in both kinds ; a lyrical fancy ; a consummate sense of words ; a fortunate schooling at the hands of Ben Jonson and certain Elizabethans, or of Catullus, Horace, and Martial ; a congenial life for poetry, although in a London that was perhaps too lively, and a Devonshire that was too dull : all these were Herrick's, and went to make him what he was. Like Campion, he had a taste for music, but he never sacrificed a single song to the exigencies of a lute or theorbo. Like Donne, he had a subtle wit, but he rarely sacrificed a poem for the sake of even a finest conceit. And if his pastoral tunes have a classic accompaniment, and his love-lyrical note recalls other Julias than those of a Jacobean London, everything he wrote, good and bad, is unmistakeably " toucht " (like lawful plate), as he claims ; indisputably and inimitably his own.

In English lyric poetry there are few to compare with him. You may begin with Tennyson, and count only a score of names backwards, and then reduce the score to a scant half dozen, and still Herrick's note is heard, clear, distinct above all. Indeed, that note, so long neglected, is now grown almost

too familiar, so that we are in danger, perhaps, of forgetting how fine it is. This as it may be, Herrick, as much as Burns or Shelley, can count to-day on that greater public who know not Campion and to whom his rare master, Ben Jonson, is little more than a name.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LATER AMORISTS—FASHIONABLE LYRIC—THE HERBERT GROUP

THE Jacobean amorist's note grew stale at last, tedious in its gallantry as the spoilt psalmody of the Puritan, and its decline is heard in many of the later songs that found their way into the anthologies of the Restoration. When the singer was Suckling or Lovelace, the mere flow of energy saved the verse. A better test is Carew, whose art is more obvious. He is a good mortise-poet in the constructing of periods, seeing that he was born an Elizabethan and wrote Jacobean songs in the fashion of the cavalier poets. He carried on the town pastoral with due regard to the model—

*Shepherd*

" This mossy bank they pressed.

*Nymph*

That aged oak
Did canopy the happy pair
All night from the damp air.

*Chorus*

Here let us sit, and sing the words they spoke,
Till the day breaking, their embraces broke."

Time has winnowed out one song of Carew's as worthy to be given a place in the lyric anthology—

" He that loves a rosy cheek."

And his song of Celia singing is well worth having, although a little too ingenious. Indeed, when you have decided that his lute is only a toy, two lines start to life which speak of the fading rose and save the reproach—

" For in your beauty's orient deep
These flowers, as in their causes, sleep."

And in one of those ubiquitous Messenger love-poems, first written in India by Arab poets, and much favoured by Provençal, French, and Welsh poets—a poem to the Wind—we have passion cooling to economy: a typical thing of its kind. What is metrically interesting, too, it is written in the fluid trochaic couplets so often associated with these poems—

> "Thou canst with thy powerful blast
> Heat apace, and cool as fast;
> Thou canst kindle hidden flame,
> And again destroy the same. . . ."

Twenty years younger than Carew, William Habington uses the lutanist note also. But he was of different temper. In his pattern-poems of Castara, the melody, grown too familiar, is often tiresome; but change the test and you findeth has unexpected quality—

> "Come then all,
> Ye beauties to true beauty's funeral."

Habington's *Castara* was Lucy, daughter of William Herbert, Lord Powis; and from her Wordsworth probably took the name for his maiden of the *Springs of Dove*—

> "Like the violet which alone
> Prospers in some happy shade,
> My Castara lives unknown."

The religious strain heard in some of Habington's later poems is not unlike George Herbert's, which may have influenced it. There the imagination flashes out of a sombre mind, as in his *Starlight*—

> "For the bright firmament
> Shoots forth no flame
> So silent, but is eloquent
> In speaking the Creator's name."

Suckling is a poet who in this gallery of tame pigeons sits apart, with blood upon his gay feathers. His story moved on by surprising bounds, by comedy, inordinate wealth, extravagance, to war, the terrors of the Spanish Inquisition, and an early death; that gay, irrepressible spirit broken beyond recovery.

There was the undoubted lyric leaven in his brain. Else, with all his wealth and his worldly preoccupations, and alternating court and foreign diversion, how should he have troubled to sing at all? It is not surprising, either, that his verse should be careless at its worst. We may let that go, and turn to his best, and there he is delightful—and although he may have been imitated, inimitable. His *Ballad of a Wedding* is a little triumph in a difficult genre—

> " Her feet beneath her petticoat,
> Like little mice, stole in and out,
> As if they feared the light."

Moreover, his song from " The Sad One " shows an entirely original use of the melody—

> " Hast thou seen the down in the air,
> When wanton blasts have tossed it?
> Or the ship on the sea,
> When ruder winds have crossed it? "

And Orsames' song from his drama, *Aglaura*—

> " Why so pale and wan, fond lover! "—

is in the very pitch of love's raillery: perfect antidote to the sentimental fever. The younger Hazlitt thought the " Dick " of Suckling's ballad was Lovelace, who was some nine or ten years younger. He, too, was unlucky, was born rich, fortune's darling, the " handsomest man extant " in his time, and a true lover; but he missed his way in the end. His Althea, believing him dead, married another; and his courage was not equal to this blow. He threw himself after his misfortune then, and died at forty in a cellar. One wishes Dr Jonnso had written the lives of these two before he proceeded tc Cowley and Denham.

Lyric poetry, in becoming gallant in the mouths of courtiers and fine gentlemen, and growing polite, took on some charming airs and graces, but she did not quite get in the process the " retrieval of simplicity " of which one of the sons of Bet., Cartwright, spoke. He was a typical Royalist poet, to whom the Civil War came with a face rather like that of the Yellow

Beast betokening the plague, and taught him another music. The two accents mix in his dream—

> " I dreamed I saw myself lie dead,
> And that my bed my coffin grew ;
> Silence and sleep this strange sight bred,
> But waked, I found I lived anew.
> Looking next morn on your bright face,
> Mine eyes bequeathed my heart fresh pain
> A dart rushed in with every grace,
> And so I killed myself again."

Ben Jonson said of him : " My son Cartwright writes, all like a man." Born in 1611, he went to Oxford, and when still an undergraduate probably visited London, and attended some of the Jonson nights at the " Triple Tun " or elsewhere. He took Holy Orders in 1638, and was imprisoned by Cromwell's forces when they reached Oxford. Next year he became junior proctor of the University, and reader in philosophy. The excitement of the war, and the presence of Charles I. and the Court, only seemed to make him work harder. Devout, musical at his best, he breathed transcendent airs into his modish-seeming lines to Chloe—

> " There are two births ; the one when light
> First strikes the new-awakened sense ;
> The other when two souls unite
> And we must count our life from thence :
> When you loved me and I loved you
> Then both of us were born anew."

At the end of 1643 Cartwright took the " camp-disease "—a malignant form of typhoid then raging at Oxford—and died. The King, who was there at the time, went into mourning for him, and his posthumous book shows how great an impression his qualities and his early death made on the Royalists. Randolph, Cartwright, Suckling, Lovelace, Cleveland, Crashaw and Herbert himself—how few of these poets lived out their time. Cleveland, two years younger than Cartwright, was a Cambridge tutor, who was also made a prisoner by the Roundheads at Norwich in 1655. Three years later he died. His Phillisian couplets say almost the last words in

the Wit's walk to Helicon; this of trees and tree-trunks for instance—

> "The trees—like Yeoman of her guard,
> Serving more for pomp than ward
> Ranked on each side with loyal duty—
> Wave branches to enclose her beauty.
> The plants, whose luxury was lopped,
> Or age with crutches under-propped,
> Whose wooden carcases are grown
> To be but coffins of their own,
> Revive, and at her general dole,
> Each receives his ancient soul."

And here the Civil War, and York and Lancaster suggest yet finer conceits—

> "The flowers, called out of their beds,
> Start and raise up their drowsy heads;
> And he that for their colour seeks,
> May find it vaulting in her cheeks,
> Where roses mix; no Civil War
> Between her York and Lancaster."

It might be thought the disruption of the war would have spoilt the tricks and graces of these seventeenth century poets; and no doubt it did much to lend weight to the verse of the more seriously and spiritually affected among them, and changed the note even of a Herrick's light-hearted litany of town and country. It gave Shirley the trumpet-note of his *Death's Conquest,* ending with a cadence that Herbert might have found—

> "He hath at will
> More quaint and subtle ways to kill:
> A smile or kiss, as he will use the art,
> Shall have the cunning skill to break a heart."

But with the Restoration came Wit's orgy. Charles II. was fate's revenge for Charles I.'s death, and the lyric in his reign was cut off from two vital springs of melody. One, that which lies in the concurrent happiness of a whole folk; the other, a passionate love that seeks for the beauty that is behind beauty.

We learn from these post-Jacobeans that, with song tied to wit and a sensual court, fashion was like to drive away

the larger powers of art. The change had begun long before. The play of wit, as against the real play of the poetic mind, was seen in the *Paradyse of Daynty Devises*; and even a true poet like Southwell, who wrote the *Burning Babe*, could also write—

> " Yet pikes are caught when little fish go by,
> These fleet afloat, while those do fill the dish "—

and his colleague Shakespeare's minor ingenuities are often factitious to a degree. But there it was only the gymnastic that prepared the way for the grand assault, and got the man ready: here it was the end and aim of the verse, and love was made into a courtier and song dressed out for masquerade. It affected, so strong is literary fashion, a religious poet like George Herbert; it was heard in Crashaw.

> " This foot hath got a mouth and lips,
> To pay the sweet sum of thy kisses "

A passage in Izaak Walton's life serves to relate George Herbert to the lutanists and song-writers of Campion's time, and to mark that feeling for the lyric reality which we discern in his poems—

> " His chiefest recreation was music, in which heavenly art he was a most excellent master, and did himself compose many divine hymns and anthems, which he set and sung to his lute or viol; and though he was a lover of retiredness, yet his love to music was such, that he went usually twice every week on certain appointed days to the cathedral church in Salisbury; and at his return would say, that his time spent in prayer and cathedral music elevated his soul, and was his heaven upon earth But before his return thence to Bemerton, he would usually sing and play his part at an appointed private music meeting; and, to justify this practice, he would often say, religion does not banish mirth, but only moderates and sets rules to it."

One would give much to recover a single tune that Herbert composed. Possibly some of his scores were among those remains and " private writings " that his widow (who became some years after his death the wife of Sir Robert Cook of Highnam) had collected, and which were burnt together with Highnam House " by the late rebels and so lost to posterity."

In one of his Easter poems, we have the mingling of the two arts definitely and consciously expressed—

> " Awake, my Lute, and struggle for thy part
> With all thy art."

" Little ballads of the soul " his poems have been called, and it exactly describes their unusual adaptation of the personal narrative-note to the lyric and melodic forms of two kinds. So far as he was a " Priest to the Temple " in his verse, he was apt to remember that he was singing his hymn vicariously So far as he was a Herbert, brother to Lord Herbert of Cherbury, with a share of the princely egotism of that hero, which not even the austerest religion could drive out, he still used the individual note. It is passionately and poignantly heard in the opening of his *Longing*, and in many other of his cries for grace.

On his distinctively religious side, Herbert is not treated here ; what we need to mark here is his part in the lyric succession of the seventeenth-century men : the debt he owed to those that went before, and the influence he had on those that came after. Undoubtedly he owed much to the poets who were writing while he was at Cambridge. Izaak Walton speaks too of " the long and entire friendship betwixt him and Sir Henry Wotton and Dr Donne " ; and the dates of those writers, one his elder by fifteen years, the other by about ten years, are significant when we are looking for the omens of change. Donne had probably the largest influence upon him of any of English verse-writer, teaching him some of his subtleties and conceits and his mixed poetic licence and ingenuity. The effect of Donne in religious lyric is hardly to be measured : it was almost equal to that of Jonson, in secular lyric ; and if Herrick was the " son of Ben," Herbert was assuredly of the Dean's tribe. If he did not closely imitate him, he took cues from his verse which he developed after his own fashion. For example, take Donne's *Message* and *Broken Heart*, and see how out of them Herbert spun his own gold and crimson, or the curious Herbertian lines of *The*

*Primrose,* which bear the significant addition "being at Mountgomery Castle, upon the hill on which it is situate"; or again *Love's Deity,* the *Hymn* at "the author's last going into Germany," and the later *Hymn to God, my God,* and you find that you are very near the secret of Herbert's lyric pupilage. This being so, the connection between the "metaphysical school" so-called and the Herbert group is not hard to distinguish, and Donne's lines—

> "We think that Paradise and Calvarie,
> Christ's Cross and Adam's tree, stood in one place,
> Look, Lord! and find both Adams met in me"—

were the clue to the next turn of the labyrinth.

George Herbert had a sense of lyric form which is rather wanting in some of his nearer associates in poetry. A poem was wrought with an eye to something beyond the mere concatenation of stanzas that run to a certain term which is not settled, either by the logic or the combined and cumulative melody of the poem regarded as a complete and symmetrical thing. Many of his characteristic poems are written in four stanzas—as for instance his *Virtue* (which Izaak Walton quotes in the *Compleat Angler*); the *Pulley,* one of his loveliest extravagances, the Donne-like meditation which begins—

> "While that my soul repairs to her devotion,
> Here I intomb my flesh, that it betimes
> May take acquaintance of this heap of dust"—

that queer piece of imagery—*Justice,* with *Affliction, Decay, Prayer, Conscience,* etc. But of rhymer's devices, and verbal artifices, Herbert has store enough to make him worth note as a verse-carver alone. His conscious quest for ingenuities is seen in poem after poem. His Aaron, it has been pointed out, is constructed with an interlinking of the lines and rhymes that suggest Provençal verse. His lyric sense, when it gets rid of his conceits, is exquisite, so much so that one wishes he had never been tempted by Donne and the metaphysical versemen to be so over-ingenious. For what he did, his power as a verseman was enough to ensure others doing after him, and he in turn is responsible for misleading Vaughan and

Crashaw, who had both the genius and the ingenuity to gain and lose by everything that was good and bad in his example.

Some thirty poems of Herbert's are his real estate, and among them is a lyric of perfect opening on the music of Holy Church, which is not sustained in its own music unfortunately to the end of its brief twelve lines.

> " Sweetest of sweets, I thank you ! When displeasure
> Did through my body wound my mind,
> You took me hence, and in your house of pleasure,
> A dainty lodging me assigned."

Another poet of the same stock, George Herbert's disciple, greater and less than he, Henry Vaughan the Silurist, contributed a note much less sure but at its best original and touched with the very innocence of imagination. If it had not been that a spirit of Welsh whimsicality, added to the Donnean wit, often interfered with the logic of his song—increased perhaps by his singing latterly without any thought of his audience or of his criticism—he would have left a body of poetry behind him, individual in character and transcendent of expression. As it is, his music often breaks down, and his fancy plays tricks with his imagination, and he takes every advantage of Herbert's bad example in the way of oddities and tricks of style—

> " Here I join hands, and thrust my stubborn heart
> Into thy deed,
> There from no duties to be freed.'

But these are only the thorns of the stem, and one soon discovers how to avoid or discount them in his lines. With him they are part of the concrete fancy that often leads him to an image in every verse. We see the working of his mind in a strophe of his *Son-Days*, which in the fifth line ends on the climateric stroke—

> " . . . God's parle with dust.'

His mode there and elsewhere is not unlike that of some Welsh poets who wrote in Welsh, long after him, in the same part of the country—Ossian Gwent for example.

Henry Vaughan has, like Richard Rolle of Hampole, a power

at times of distilling in his verse a rhythmic life, a melody within the melody that ever evades analysis. You hear it in his *Mary Magdalen* lines—

> " Dear beauteous Saint ! more white than day
> When in his naked, pure array ;
> Fresher than morning flowers which shew
> As thou in tears dost, best in dew,—
> How art thou changed ! "

But he does not always quite attain to it ; and sometimes you find him making experiments which seem to be all but failing, when at the last moment he achieves the magic drop of the *aqua solis* he desires (if his brother's alchemy may suggest such a figure ?)—

> " There's not a wind can stir
> Or beam pass by,
> But straight, I think, though far,
> Thy hand is nigh."

More often, his lyric openings are delightful, but the expression flags at the end. Only in his finest poems does he succeed in achieving that starry or " chrystalline " perfection at which he aimed. He did attain it in his *Song of Peace*—

> " My soul, there is a country
> Far beyond the stars,
> Where stands a winged sentry
> All skilful in the wars :
> There, above noise and danger,
> Sweet Peace sits crowned with smiles,
> And one born in a manger
> Commands the beauteous files " ;

and still more exquisitely in the lovely untitled poem which opens—

> " They are all gone into the world of light
> And I alone sit ling'ring here ; . . "

and again in the oft-quoted *Retreate*.

That poem is famous as having caught Wordsworth's ear. Its special melody haunted its author too, who experimented with it in *Olor Iscanus* and his paraphrases from Boethius—

" Happy that first white age ! when we
Lived by the Earth's mere charity.
No soft luxurious diet then
Had effeminated men,
No other meat, nor wine had any
Than the coarse mast, or simple honey. . . ."

There is a suggestion of it too in the memorable couplets of another poem, *The Request,* in *Thalia Rediviva* ; there included among his *Pious Thoughts and Ejaculations*—

" O Thou who didst deny to me
This world's ador'd felicity,
And ev'ry big imperious lust,
Which fools admire in sinful dust,
With those fine subtle twists, that tie
Their bundles of foul gallantry—
Keep still my weak eyes from the shine
Of those gay things which are not Thine ! "

The lyric genius of Henry Vaughan has not yet been appreciated to the full, in spite of what critics like H. C. Beeching and Miss Guiney have said in his praise. With the return of interest to the lyric of adoration and of mystical delight in nature, he is bound to be counted high in the House of Fame.

Add to Vaughan's note of adoring and deploring innocence, wondering at its own fall, a something of personal passion, and an accent intensive and even dramatic, and you have the temper of Crashaw, who stands near him in time. Some six years Vaughan's senior, born in 1615, Richard Crashaw was educated at Charterhouse and Cambridge, whence he was expelled in 1644. Two years later he signalised his going over to the Roman Catholic Church by his book *Steps to the Altar,* in which the fervour and imagination of his verse are much increased. Previously in going to Italian, like other English poets, for artistic stimulus, he had chosen a very bad model in *Marino.* The result was a fanciful extravagance of diction and a flow of conceits which spoil many of his pages. The passage from that stage to his real achievement is extraordinary, and would be hard to credit if one could not trace the same hand in the painted stucco of *The Weeper* and a lyric of delightful grace and naturalness like the lines in the *Not Impossible She.* In other poems Crashaw appears in both his moods.

As Pope suggested, Crashaw often wrote, like a fine gentleman, for his own amusement; wrote gracefully or affectedly. But even amid his worst trifling, and sentimental bad taste, we come upon verse of superb passion, "which becomes a glowing vehicle for the thought it expresses." At the end of the poem on the *Flaming Heart*, after a long, fanciful descant on Saint Teresa's heart and the arrow of the seraph, we have this magnificent invocation—

> "O thou undaunted daughter of desires!
> By all this dower of lights and fires;
> By all the eagle in thee, all the dove;
> By all thy lives and deaths of love;
> By thy large draughts of intellectual day,
> And by thy thirsts of love more large than they;
> By all thy brim-filled bowls of fierce desire,
> By thy last morning's draught of liquid fire;
> By the full kingdom of that final kiss
> That seiz'd thy parting soul, and seal'd thee His;
> By all the Heav'n thou hast in Him.
> (Fair sister of the seraphim!)
> By all of Him we have in thee;
> Leave nothing of myself in me.
> Let me so read thy life, that I
> Unto all life of mine may die."

Take again his lines in another vein on the death of *The Most Desired Mr Herrys*—

> "Therefore if he needs must go
> And the Fates will have it so,
> Softly may he be possest
> Of his monumental rest.
> Safe, thou dark home of the dead,
> Safe, O! hide his lovéd head.
> For pity's sake, O hide him quite,
> From his mother Nature's sight."

There he touched greatness, and we realise as we put down his book that in him, and in Henry Vaughan and George Herbert, to whom we should add Crashaw's inspired forerunner Southwell, the religious emotion brought to English lyric its finest collective inspiration.

## CHAPTER XX

### LYRIC AND EPIC—MILTON—MARVELL—THE POST-PURITANS

In Milton's art we are bound first to recollect that he had the Elizabethan playwrights behind him; next, that he kept the feeling for music which sustained the Elizabethan lyrists in their verse, and had an ear accustomed to the lute and madrigal-singing. His father wrote music, and composers like Henry Lawes figure intimately in the other life real and ideal, which the poets contrive to make out for themselves, and which he early set himself to find. His dæmonic energy irresistibly bent upon its free expression soon showed itself. His "vacation exercise" written at nineteen naïvely confesses it—

> "I have some naked thoughts that rove about
> And loudly knock to have their passage out."

It was an unusual boy who, out of the humdrum academic invocation, struck a lyric incident, like the young poet's glimpse of the deities lying before the thunderous throne—

> "Listening to what unshorn Apollo sings":

or who rhymed the rivers at the close. But there is nothing in that verse to explain the *Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, whose melody was based on vocal rhythms of high resilience, sustained with power throughout the twenty-seven strophes. The imagination, too, responds at every turn to the call for figurative life, and does not tire.

> "Such music as 'tis said,
> Before was never made,
> But when of old the sons of morning sung,
> While the Creator great
> His constellations set,
> And the well-balanced world on hinges hung,
> And cast the dark foundations deep,
> And bid the weltering waves their oozy chanel keep.

Ring out, ye crystal spheres,
Once bless our human ears,
If ye have power to touch our senses so ;
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time ;
And let the base of Heaven's deep organ blow ;
And, with your ninefold harmony,
Make up full concert to the angelic symphony."

Had the poet who could achieve this at twenty only gone on with a development of those lyric reserves that were in him, what might he not have achieved ? We may leave to the records of epic the triumphs of his highest note in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, and, as valuers of lyric estate, say that, however much he accomplished there, it is less than that the boy of twenty promised to do in the plane of song.

Milton was born in 1608, and he began early to read acquisitively ; and he had, as his sense of poetry and its needs grew on him, not only Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Chapman ; but Giles Fletcher, Browne of Tavistock, Donne and Wither at command. He lived in London for the first sixteen years of his life ; it was on going to Cambridge that he seemed to realise his own force. He remained there, with one or two short intervals, until 1632 ; and there wrote, in twenty-eight lines of noble harmonies, his lyric testament—*At a solemn Music*. The companion poem on Time is, like it, written in verse of a daring and successful alternation of dominant and cadent effects. Both suggest to the listener that the poet who had been writing sonnets broke, under the spur of music, the sonnet form, and achieved a Pindaresque triumph.

On leaving Cambridge, and going to live at Horton, he wrote *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in a form of descriptive lyric, for which the halting Jonsonian Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester reads like a first experiment. The development of the measure, from crude beginnings in Nicholas de Guildford—

" Ac thu singest alle-longe night
From eve fort hit is dai-light,
And evre seist thin o song
So longe so the night is long "—

through the romances and other writers who used it or adapted it—Nicholas Breton, Lyly, Spenser, Fletcher and others—is a record for the prosodists to keep. The musical resource in these two poems and the art of varying the emphasis, or retarding or accelerating the beat, were new however to English verse. They have, like organ-grinders' tunes, been repeated to weariness in our day; but they are actually fresher than last night's newspaper, or the new verse of the latest amorist.

During the years at Horton, Milton wrote *Comus* and *Lycidas*; the first intended for a masque to be given at Ludlow by the children of the new President of Wales, my Lord Bridgewater. Henry Lawes wrote the music for the singing parts; but the most exquisite melody is in the lyric speech of *Comus* at the opening, where the lengthening verse rings new changes upon that of *L'Allegro* and its fellow poem. And for larger measure, note the strophic verse of the Spirit, where he describes the Sorcerer, with its characteristic break and resumption with the fourth beat—

> ". . . This have I learnt
> Tending my flocks hard by i' the hilly crofts
> That brow this bottom glade . . ."

Again—

> ". . . But ere a close
> The wonted roar was up amidst the woods
> And filled the air with barbarous dissonance, . . ."

The continuing passage touches the height of English verse, for in it imagination, truth of idea and great language are accorded so as to produce not exact melody, but the utmost lyric harmony blank verse can reach without growing dithyrambic.

Sir Henry Wotton, no mean judge of the art, as Isaak Walton's relics of him tell, in a letter to Milton (13 April 1638) about *Comus*, spoke of being ravished with "a certain Doric delicacy in your songs and odes." In fact these same songs of *Comus* are like Milton's other verse of a noble order, new to English, different in tone to the lyric written before him, although recalling by many a phrase or cadent line the work of other

poets at home and abroad. You feel, as in the Elizabethan lyric, the voice-chords strong in them: and possibly because of the music intended to accompany them, for which they were written, you feel too—what is one of the cordial powers of true lyric—that there is an actual present music of the sounds apart from the syllabic and intelligible pattern of the words. There is a spell behind the lines, as there are stars behind the moon, that is woven—

> "By Leucothea's lovely hands,
> And her son that rules the strands;
> By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet
> And the songs of Sirens sweet;
> By dead Parthenope's dear tomb
> And fair Ligea's golden comb; . . ."

The same may be said of *Lycidas*, which is the work of a composer designed for a region where poetry is not judged only by phrase and line and direct idea, but by groups, majestic progressions, large passages of sound. It does not signify that Milton has borrowed, like other poets, details of his music. They are assimilated to his true canon; they express his fantasy; they have his timbre of voice; intensive, yet full of those reverberating over-tones that he loved.

Within a few months of his writing *Lycidas*, Milton, who was already deep immersed in Italian, went to Italy. He carried, we may say, his Muse there in potential state; and he brought her back thrice replenished; only to be confronted with dire misfortune, the breaking out of the Civil War. Let those who believe in war, as an inspirer of poetry, explain what it did for him. When in Italy he had been reminded of his possible grand theme, which originally he designed to be Arthurian. It is useless to ask whether he would have caught the right mediæval illusion or the old charactry? Long after him, Tennyson failed in both, but succeeded in producing a Victorian substitute. For Milton was, and always must remain, the orator, or the lyric agent, of his own passion. He was a great symbolist, moreover, ranging over nature, art, history, and philosophy for the accents, the allusions, the figures of speech that should enable him to deliver his message.

"But much latelier, in the private academies of Italy whither I was favoured to resort, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabouts—for the manner is, that every one must give some proof of his wit and reading there—met with acceptance above what was looked for; and other things which I had shifted, in scarcity of books and conveniences, to patch up among them, were received with written encomiums which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps, I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home; and not less to an inward prompting, which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined to the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written, to after-times, as they should not willingly let it die. These thoughts at once possessed me, and these other, that if I were certain to write as men buy leases, for three lives and downward, there ought no regard be sooner had than to God's glory, by the honour and instruction of my country. For which cause, and not only for that I knew it would be hard to arrive at the second rank among the Latins, I applied myself to that resolution which Ariosto followed against the persuasions of Bembo, to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end, that were a toilsome vanity; but to be an interpreter . . ."

With *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* we have only to do incidentally. The famous invocative passages are more akin to oratory than to poetry; but there are occasions in *Paradise Lost*, more especially where the verse does break into a kind of strophic music, as in the *Hymn of Creation* (Book VII.), where it attains to lyric character. Such is the cry of Adam—

"Oh might I here
In solitude live savage, in some glade
Obscured, where highest woods, impenetrable
To star or sunlight, spread their umbrage broad,
And brown as evening! Cover me, ye pines
Ye cedars, with innumerable boughs
Hide me, where I may never see them more."

And such is, by association, the effect of the lines in Book IV. telling of indicative airs which—

"Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune
The trembling leaves, which universal Pan,
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance
Led on the eternal Spring. Not that fair field
Of Enna, when Proserpine gathering flowers
Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world. . . ."

If it be asked, is this really lyrical? we may answer, it is so because the singing idea, with what we may call the essential lyric imagery, has supervened upon the narrative mode of Milton. That at other times is broken by oratorical invocative, eloquent in its way, but mannered, and over-rhetorical with a kind of pulpit rhetoric.

In *Paradise Regained*, there is less both of the lyric effusion, and of the rhetorical embroidery. Only, at rare intervals, some idea of beauty, or thought of morning, that for Milton always called up a note of auroral ecstasy, threatened to break the pace—

" . . . till Morning fair
Came forth with pilgrim steps, in amice grey "

In *Samson Agonistes*, Milton made a very deliberate attempt at lyric drama according to the classic model. He kept the unities and broke the dialogue by classic odes. But severe and exclusive of all ornament and emotional indulgence and theatrical sensation as he chose to make it, he yet could not exclude from it the vehement lyrical assertion of his own individuality and his own predicament. Thus *Samson Agonistes*, while artistically one of the most austere poems in the language, is yet at bottom one of the most passionately personal; the irrepressible song of the man's own soul, facing destiny, circumstance and old age.

We have still to speak of Milton's contributions to the sonnet; and this again leads us to consider his part as a conductor of Italian Art into English verse. His Italian sonnets, which he wrote when young, have not the quality of his Latin verse: but they show how finely his ear was affected by the southern melody. The form of the English sonnets in which he attains his idea is marked by architectural symmetry combined with something of the Petrarchan fluidity. Sonnet XVIII., on the *Late Massacre in Piedmont*, and the last of the series, prove how strong and sure was his touch.

Andrew Marvell, in his lines on the poet, spoke of his fears that Milton would ruin,—" for I saw him strong "—his chief theme, and sacrifice it " to fable and old songs." His strength,

he likened to Sampson's, groping the temple's posts to revenge his loss of sight. There is something Herculean in his struggle for mastery, something a little superhuman. His whole poetry resolves itself into heroic lyric; temperamentally and in his art, he was a Sampson. There is a castle in northern France, Chateau de Couçy, in which the stairs and doors and the walls are designed as for a race of giants: fit expression of the overweening, undauntable power of the Norman race who built them. So it was Milton designed his work—large, massive, contemptuous of ordinary standards. Reading him in the direct succession of the lyric poets, you discern in him a new expression of the transcendent faith they live by, but one that prefers to use old figures and approved symbols when it can get them, rather than new: drawing upon that lyric vocabulary which is like another dialect or another language—the *lingua poetarum* of which one of his followers spoke, and enriching it as he went on. But in judging his whole effect, we are driven to recognise too that his masterful and arrogant insistence on that dialect, and on the Latin constructions and un-English idioms with which it is furnished, helped to form the artificial mode of the eighteenth century set up a "poetic diction," too artificial, too wanting in life-likeness, too stiff for melic use. This is perhaps the nemesis that overtakes the giants in poetry who neglect the innocence of song.

After Milton, Marvell, whom a poet of our own day once fancifully called a "Miltonic Herrick." He, too, had his lighter touch, and could be graceful in the extreme; and *per contra* he accepted the fashion in verse of the wit-makers who played with ideas instead of expressing them. But when his imagination was moved, and his lyric faculty saw its way clear, he wrote like a master and, although with an iron pen, in a style delicate, sure and resonant.

It has been questioned if the *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland* be really his? There were only two poets who could have written it, that is certain; and he was one of the two. Moreover, there are resemblances in certain of his less-known verse, and a particular use of epithet, which

bring its burden to his door if to anybody's. In his *Last Instructions to a Painter*, one of his satires, he has lines, rhymes, phrases, that, differently set and attuned, yet recall the other—

> " The timber rots, the useless axe does rust ;
> The unpractised saw lies buried in the dust
> The busy hammer sleeps, the ropes untwine
> The store and wages all are mine and thine."

Or, take the nocturnal vision of King Charles in the same poem which alone should have kept the late Goldwin Smith from saying, with characteristic dogmatism, that in Marvell's satires " there is no amber : they are mere heaps of dead flies "—

> " Paint last the king, and a dead shade of night,
> Only dispersed by a weak taper's light,
> And those bright gleams that dart along and glare
> From his clear eyes, (yet those too dark with care ;)
> There, as in the calm horror all alone,
> He wakes and muses of the uneasy throne,
> Raise up a sudden shape with virgin's face,
> Though ill agree her posture, hour or place ;
> Naked as born, and her round arms behind,
> With her own tresses interwove and twined."

It would not be worth while to urge the authorship of the martial Ode, but that it is so noble a poem—the noblest in English. One could wish it had been written of other victories than those which left two countries embittered with a hatred that has lasted for over three hundred years. Marvell's *Nymph Complaining for the death of her Fawn* is a poem of feigned innocence. It can be read, like some Indian poems, symbolically too ; and it forms, with his *Thoughts in a Garden* and the induction to his Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and created Pleasure, substance enough to fix his claim to a seat for ever in the poets' paradise. Were more needed to strengthen his hold, it would be his song of the *Emigrants in the Bermudas* which he realised no doubt from the description in Hakluyt by May (who was wrecked there in 1593).

The problem of making song bear the weight of philosophy which had been too much for Donne, and, sadly, too much for Quarles, exercised also a near contemporary of Marvell—Henry More the Platonist. Six years older than Marvell, he

was a fellow of Christ's, Milton's College, at Cambridge, and became there deeply infected by Neo-Platonic ideas. There is an image of Archimedes, used as argument in one of his prose-tracts, which corresponds to the strange history of the man himself. He pictures Archimedes, " with the same body he had when the soldiers slew him, safely intent upon his geometrical figures underground at the centre of the earth ; far from the noise and din of this world, that might disturb his meditations, or distract him in the curious delineations he makes with his rod upon the dust. . . ." That figure of abstraction may serve to paint More himself, in love with his own thoughts. He turned from the world to solitude, refused the bribe of a bishopric, and kept his geometric centre ; and the spirit of this proud abstrusion is expressed in his writings ; especially in his verse, which might be called " poetry for a man's own soul "—

> " And while this flesh her breath expires
> My spirit shall suck celestial fires
> By far-fetched sighs and pure devotion.
> Thus waxen hot with holy motion,
> At once I'll break forth in a flame ;
> Above this world and worthless fame
> I'll take my flight, careless that men
> Know not how, where I die, or when—
> Yea, though the soul should mortal prove,
> So be God's life but in me move
> To my last breath—I'm satisfied
> A lonesome mortal God to have died."

And a few lines of his *Charity and Humility* will make good the rarer note in his verse—

> " Could I demolish with mine eye
> Strong towers, stop the fleet stars in sky,
> Bring down to earth the pale-faced moon,
> Or turn black midnight to bright noon ;
> As parched, as dry as the Libyan sand
> Would be my life, if charity
> Were wanting."

Henry More believed that the inspiration of the Hebrew prophets had descended to Pythagoras and, through him, reached the mind of Plato. It followed that in the writings of Plato and his disciples the vital principles of a spiritual

philosophy were to be found. In More's work we trace, as we do in other ways in Milton's, the effect of the Hebrew scriptures, as collected in the English Bible. Tyndall's translation of the Bible succeeded in wedding to idioms and to rhythms, which are a part of the natural expression of the English tongue, the imagination and the spiritual vision that marked the Hebrew race beyond all others. This is no place to speak of its effect on English prose, but its hold upon the verse writers from the time of Elizabeth to those of our own day, and the reaction of its prose rhythms upon the practice of English verse, can hardly be overestimated.

We might have noticed at an earlier stage how freely writers like Peele and Greene drew upon it, and how Spenser borrowed figures and melody from its superabundant poesy—

> "Open the temple gates unto my love,
> Open them wide that she may enter in,
> And all the posts adorn . . ."

Indeed the English lyric, from Rolle of Rampole to Rochester, Blake, and Swinburne, has gained incalculably from the Old and the New Testament. The poets soon learnt that their own art might take fire from the Hebraic idiom, and discovered that the very parallelism it induced was only another kind of rhyming—a rhyme of the phrase instead of a rhyme of the word or syllable—

> 'I will bring thy seed from the east,
> and gather thee from the west;
> I will say to the north, Give up:
> and to the south, Keep not back."

## CHAPTER XXI

### WALLER—COWLEY—DRYDEN AND THE FORMALISTS

LIKE Cromwell in the arena of politics and great affairs, Milton was in poetry one of those powerful eruptive forces which disturb the usual order. Contemporary with him were other poets, better appreciated than he in his own day, who have carried on the line of development "according to the book." Two of these, Edmund Waller and Abraham Cowley, were fine craftsmen who well maintained their art, adding to it distinctive qualities of their own.

At a first glance Waller, who was born in 1605, seems but another writer of the well-known group; like one bloom more in a bed of tulips, but in fact he is enough of an innovator to be given a place slightly in front of that group. Fenton spoke of him as "the maker and model of melodious verse," and while seeming to write like an amorist and a fine gentleman, without passion, and without any stroke of absolute inspiration, he yet used his instrument so well that he added a distinct feeling for perfection in verse to the language. His command of verse is seen in his use of the couplet, which he contrived to make fluid and easy of movement. The ten lines he wrote on a girdle recall with what ease and grace, breaking the monotony of the rhymes, he used the form—

> "That which her slender waist confined
> Shall now my joyful temples bind:
> It was my heav'n's extremest sphere,
> The pale which held that lovely dear;
> My joy, my grief, my hope, my love,
> Did all within this circle move!
> A narrow compass! and yet there
> Dwelt all that's good, and all that's fair.
> Give me but what this ribbon bound,
> Take all the rest the sun goes round."

We perceive at once on reading this lyric what it was Waller really did in his verse. He took the mode that other men of courtly tradition had already lightened by combining melody—that is, the lyric as affected by the singing exigency—with the colloquial idiom, and he added to it a touch more of delicate precision and metrical finesse.

If he had not been a man born to fortune, he might possibly have developed power beyond that he showed, but that we cannot attempt to decide now. His life, as it was, had some stimulating ingredients in it; he was, to begin with, related to both sides in the Civil War: distantly related to Oliver Cromwell and cousin to Hampden. His mother was a sturdy royalist, not afraid of speaking plainly to Cromwell after the death of Charles I. Her son, the poet, was still a boy when he went into parliament, and it would seem, in the same year, went into poetry. He was hardly more than a boy when he married an heiress who left him a widower the same year, and thereupon he began his suit to the lady who became the Sacharissa of his lyrics, Lady Dorothea Sidney.

But as one of his songs, *Say, lovely dream*, discovers, Sacharissa was proud and had higher aims—

"But, ah! this image is too kind
To be other than a dream;
Cruel Sacharissa's mind
Ne'er put on that sweet extreme.

Fair Dream! if thou intend'st me grace,
Change that heavenly face of thine;
Paint despised love in thy face,
And make it t' appear like mine.

Pale, wan, and meagre, let it look,
With a pity-moving shape,
Such as wander by the brook
Of Lethe, or from graves escape.

Then to that matchless nymph appear,
In whose shape thou shinest so;
Softly in her sleeping ear
With humble words express my wo.

Perhaps from greatness, state, and pride,
Thus surprised, she may fall;
Sleep does disproportion hide,
And, death resembling, equals all."

Nearly half a century later, so runs the story, Sacharissa met her poet again and asked him when he would again write her such rhymes, whereupon he took his revenge, "When, madam, you are as young and as handsome as you were then."

It must be confessed that Waller's behaviour as a citizen and as a man of that troubled time favours the suggestion of a want of stronger fibre in his character. He could be and he was an effective agent in the popular movement; his speech against ship-money in the House made him for the moment famous as a politician (twenty thousand copies of it were actually sold in one day), but very soon afterwards he took part in a pretty plot to surprise the London militia and let in the King's forces, and on his trial, his fine of ten thousand pounds and his sentence to prison of one year, the temper he showed was anything but heroic. Leaving prison, he went to France and lived the life of a Sybarite; but he came back before Cromwell's death and wrote a notable panegyric on that event—

> "Your drooping country, torn with civil hate,
> Restored by you, is made a glorious state;
> The seat of empire, where the Irish come,
> And the unwilling Scots, to fetch their doom.
>
> The sea's our own; and now all nations greet,
> With bending sails, each vessel of our fleet;
> Your power extends as far as winds can blow,
> Or swelling sails upon the globe may go."

On the Restoration, Waller's muse easily grew congratulatory and as unofficial poet-laureate, he wrote an address to Charles II.; but the King, who was enough of a critic to detect differences, himself told Waller that he did not think it as good as the Cromwell lines, to which Waller replied: "Poets, sire, succeed better in fiction than in truth." His poems of ficton in that sense, his poetry of occasion and his official verse we have agreed to forget; but those he wrote, when seized upon by his true feeling for perfection of form and the transparency of the medium, still maintain him in his place.

His best song and best couplet would, were there nothing else of his left to us, keep his name alive in the roll—

GO, LOVELY ROSE.

" Go, lovely rose !
Tell her that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows,
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be

Tell her, that's young,
And shuns to have her graces spied,
That, hadst thou sprung
In deserts, where no men abide,
Thou must have uncommended died.

Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired ;
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired

Then die ! that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee,
How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair ! '

The couplet occurs in his two stanzas on *Old Age and Death*—

" The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed
Lets in new light through chinks that time has made."

To our day, Cowley may seem all but a negligible poet. In his own day we find that, allowing for other circumstances and change of audience, he was relatively as popular as Tennyson in ours—a time's reversal to make us hesitate over the crying up and crying down of the fames of poets and men. Son of a Cheapside stationer, Abraham Cowley was some ten years Milton's junior. However, he was so precocious that he brought out a first book, *Poetical Blossomes,* at fifteen, full twelve years before Milton. Cowley knew as well as anybody in what the last reality of poetry and lyric poetry consisted. In his *Ode of Wit* by which he means the wit major, the *force majeure,* not the wit minor and minimus of the jest books, he

expresses that reality with a touch even of the more transcendent faculty which usually escaped him.

In it we see how aptness of phrase and colloquial grace, set on a level between the tones of song and the prose usage, were beginning to take the place of the sheer lyric note. If it would be too much to say that Cowley was the type of the poet of talents and intelligence, as against the poet of genius, it is yet true that with all his fervour he was more a finely directed than a finely inspired verseman. And this is why time has so far forgotten him, who seemed once the one authentic contemporary voice. Pope asked in the next century, "Who now reads Cowley?" but he was read, as we have seen, long after 1737. And as he gave the cue to Dryden and taught him something of his terse prosody, he made the road clear for Pope's coming.

As for Gray, his *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* would never have been written save for the Harvey lines. The rhythmical gait of the one is startlingly like that of the other; and the latter elegy is by the herald's college of poets ranked indispensable, so often have its tattered colours and smoky hatchments been copied. The same idea is latent in the verses written *On the Death of Mr Crashaw*, which strike a note of vivid personal emotion—

> "Thou most divine
> And richest offering of Loretto's shrine,
> Where, like some holy sacrifice t' expire,
> A fever burns thee, and Love lights the fire.
> Angels, they say, brought the famed chapel there,
> And bore the sacred load in triumph through the air.
> 'Tis surer much they brought *thee* there, and they
> And thou, their charge, went singing all the way.
> Pardon, my mother-church, if I consent
> That angels led him when from thee he went;
> For even in error sure no danger is,
> When joined with so much piety as his."

And he calls on him, triumphant in heaven, to think and give some care to the "poets militant" on earth—

> "And I myself a Catholic will be,
> So far, at least, great Saint, to pray to thee . . .
> Opposed by our old enemy, adverse chance,
> Attacked by envy and by ignorance,
> Enchained by beauty, tortured by desires."

These lines of Cowley's, his *Ode on the Death of William Harvey*, and his vivacious Chronicle of the mistresses of his heart, keep his name green. But his one impulsive piece of imagination is in prose—

> "I was interrupted by a strange and terrible apparition; for there appeared to me—arising out of the earth as I conceived—the figure of a man, taller than a giant, or indeed than the shadow of any giant in the evening. His body was naked, but that nakedness adorned, or rather deformed, all over with several figures, after the manner of the ancient Britons, painted upon it; and I perceived that most of them were the representation of the late battles in our civil wars, and, if I be not much mistaken, it was the battle of Naseby that was drawn upon his breast. His eyes were like burning brass; and there were three crowns of the same metal, as I guessed, and that looked as red-hot, too, upon his head. He held in his right hand a sword that was yet bloody, and nevertheless, the motto of it was *Pax quæritur bello*; and in his left hand a thick book, upon the back of which was written, in letters of gold, Acts, Ordinances, Protestations, Covenants, Engagements, Declarations, Remonstrances, &c."

In the winnowing of another century or more, it may be Cowley's verse will be blown away altogether, while this and a few other passages of his prose will have weight enough to keep the floor.

From the faded pages of many of the books of verse, that appeared at this time, we collect here a line and there a poem, that may seem to have had some effect on the currency. There was Sir John Denham, for instance, who wrote *Cooper's Hill*, and whose most memorable poem was his elegy on Cowley. His Cowley couplets need hardly be quoted here, but they are useful as a reminder of the pedigree which Cowley's successors thought fit to make for him. For he is mentioned in a sequence in which Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher appear. But Denham cannot be said to have added to the lyric anthology in any way. Not so with Sir William Davenant, his senior by a few years, who wrote a tremendous body of absolutely impossible verse, which was gathered into the folio of 1673, and which no one to-day, it is certain, will take the trouble to read through. But in two pages out of all those hundreds, Davenant has touched a note which is still resonant

and clear. One is the morning song which is a distinct addition to English Matin verse—

" The lark now leaves his watery nest "—

and the other is the set of quatrains on the captivity of the Countesss of Anglesea, which opens—

" O ! whither will you lead the fair
And spicy daughter of the morn ?
Those manacles of her soft hair
Princes, though free, would fain have worn.

What is her crime ? what has she done ?
Did she, by breaking beauty, stay,
Or from his course mislead the sun,
So robbed your harvest of a day ? "

With a like exemption from forgetfulness, we may be tempted by Elia to recall the morning-song for the New Year of Charles Cotton, Izaak Walton's friend—

" Hark the cock crows and yon bright star
Tells us the day himself's not far ;
And see, where, breaking from the night
He gilds the western hills with light."

We must not forget Elia's other idolatry for Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, who died in 1673. Her pastime and recreation of queen of the Fairies had a kind of fanciful and aerial kind of delicacy, which holds the ear ; and her lyric picture of melancholy which one might choose for contrast is painted in sincere and radiant colours.

Several years younger than she, Mrs Catherine Philips, better known by her poetical name of Orinda, adds an accent, that, caught from her time, has still a distinct flavour of her own individuality. No less a man than Jeremy Taylor addressed a discourse to Mistress Philips on friendship.

In the same flight we might almost mention Aphra Behn, who twice or thrice in the course of her strangely debased conceived art, touched a surprisingly clear lyric note. If she debased her art, the Earl of Rochester, her immediate contemporary, went a distinct step further down the road. For all that, he was a genuine song-writer, and has left four or five

songs, in which the musical pulse is strong, resonant, well worth listening to. Beyond a single verse or couplet very little more can be gleaned from the versemen who were writing on the eve of Dryden's advent which can be said to have had any formative effect upon the lyric. One turns back to Otway or to Sir Charles Sedley and their different modes, finding only an odd page or two that stand out as significant.

The Earl of Dorset, who was born in 1637, wrote a Phyllisian lyric that deserves to stand in the poetical record of that name, and what is much more remarkable, a *Song written at Sea*, which is of an incomparable gaiety and valiancy—

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

For though the Muses should prove kind,
And fill our empty brain ;
Yet if rough Neptune rouse the wind,
To wave the azure main,
Our paper, pen, and ink, and we,
Roll up and down our ships at sea."

With the Restoration and the decay of Puritan psalmody began a new St Martin's summer of popular and anonymous songs. From the *Mysteries of Love and Eloquence* in 1659 comes a charming fairy-queen song—

" Come, follow, follow me,
You, fairy elves that be ;
Which circle on the green,
Come, follow Mab, your queen
Hand in hand, let's dance around,
For this place is fairy ground.

When mortals are at rest,
And snoring in their nest ;
Unheard and unespied,
Through keyholes we do glide ;
Over tables, stools, and shelves,
We trip it with our fairy elves."

And from the song-books of that and the succeeding generation might be given many songs which have not, it is true, anything like the spirit in music of their Elizabethan forerunners, but which yet breathe something of the same note of country pleasure, and have the quality of verse really intended to be sung, and not merely accommodated to the printed page.

It seems worth note that the refrain rather fell away from the better usage of the Elizabethans and either degenerated into a jingling fa la la as in Dorset's song, or was used without rhythmical warranty. But here and there one comes upon a song or poem in which the refrain is effective; indeed more so at times than the accompanying verse. In a Cambridge ballad by Dr Wild which appeared in the *Iter Boreala*, 1668, a refrain is used which caught the ear of that generation and was repeated north and south—

" Cambridge, now I must leave thee,
And follow Fate,
College hopes do deceive me;
I oft expected
To have been elected,
But desert is reprobate.
Masters of colleges
Have no common graces,
And they that have fellowships
Have but common places;
And those that scholars are,
They must have handsome faces:
*Alas, poor scholar! whither wilt thou go?*

I have bowed, I have bended,
And all in hope
One day to be befriended:
I have preached, I have printed
Whate'er I hinted,
To please our English pope:
I worshipped towards the east,
But the sun doth now forsake me;
I find that I am falling;
The northern winds do shake me:
Would I had been upright,
For bowing now will break me:
*Alas, poor scholar! whither wilt thou go?*'

A northern variant of it may be found in *Hallo, my fancy!*

by William Cleland, who wrote a satire on the Jacobite army called *The Highland Host*, 1678—

> Ships, ships, I will descry you
> Amidst the main;
> I will come and try you
> What you are protecting,
> And projecting.
> What's your end and aim.
> One goes abroad for merchandise and trading,
> Another stays to keep his country from invading,
> A third is coming home with rich and wealth of lading.
> Hallo, my fancy, whither wilt thou go?"

And in some of the profane ditties that the seventeenth-century editors and collectors, and Dryden, the master-anthologist among them, swept into the miscellanies, there are occasional rhymes, poetically poor, but touched with a vocal quality that gives them a certain value.

The power of Dryden is not seen at full stroke in all his lyric verse. To know it in its control of word and idea, the reader of to-day will do well to look for its sign in the pages where, not attempting song, he is, so to say, beating his tabor and "using a drone." He gets a resonance there that is often next thing to lyrical, effecting iterations and echoing assonances with relish of the song-smith's art. Such is the satiric verse with which he conjures his superseder in the Poet Laureate's office, Shadwell, into the Inferno of bad poets—

> "Og from a treasure-tavern rolling home,
> Round as a globe, and liquored every chink,
> Goodly and great he sails behind his link,
> With all this bulk there's nothing lost in Og,
> For every inch that is not fool is rogue:
> A monstrous mass of foul corrupted matter,
> As all the devils had spewed to make the batter.
> When wine has given him courage to blaspheme,
> He curses God, but God before cursed him."

That is superb writing, which gives its author at once a note to posterity, and sends us back with avidity to some of those critical prefaces and occasional essays in which he has told us what his ideas were about the exercise of his art. In the preamble to his Opera, *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*,

discussing Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence over the heads of some favourite poets, he divulges the canon of his own art. He enters there indeed upon what becomes for us, who read him now under new order, indirectly a defence for the poetry he so often wrote: a poetry of and from literature, or a poetry distilled from poetry, rather than a poetry from the life. For he confesses that his *Fall of Man* was borrowed—"its entire foundation, part of the design and many of the ornaments," from Milton's *Paradise Lost*; and what immediately follows shows that he rather considered the tropes and figures invented by the classic poets as in a degree free currency which it was open to all the craft to use after them. However, in the succeeding pages he works his way to a great definition which proves him fully aware of the last virtue in the poet—

> "Imaging is, in itself, the very height and life of Poetry. It is, as Longinus describes it, a discourse which, by a kind of enthusiasm, or extraordinary emotion of the soul, makes it seem to us that we behold those things which the poet paints, so as to be pleased with them, and to admire them."

The odd defence, under the shield of Virgil and with Cowley for excuse, he offers in the following page is typical. It tells us how "habitually he trusted to his masters and forerunners." "I wish," he says, "I could produce any one example of excellent imaging in all this poem. Perhaps I cannot; but that which comes nearest it is in these four lines, which have been sufficiently canvassed by my well-natured censors—

> "Seraph and cherub, careless of their charge,
> And wanton, in full ease now live at large:
> Unguarded leave the passes of the sky,
> And all dissolved in hallelujahs lie."

I have heard (says one of them) of anchovies dissolved in sauce, but never of an angel in hallelujahs. A mighty witticism! (if you will pardon a new word) but there is some difference between a laugher and a critic. He might have burlesqued Virgil too, from whom I took the image: *Invadunt urbem, somno vinoque sepultam.* A city's being buried is just as proper, on occasion, as an angel's being dissolved in ease and

songs of triumph. Mr Cowley lies as open, too, in many places—

"Where their vast courts the mother waters keep," etc.

The use he made of Cowley's—"our admirable Cowley" as he styles him—drives us to wonder how far Dryden was hurt in his lyric writing by his curious imitativeness? His weakness there would be more astonishing if we did not remember that other poets before him (Ben Jonson for instance) had combined originality and immense energy with a literary subservience that destroyed the instinctive rhythm. The accent of Cowley is heard in the remarkable *Ode to the Memory of Mistress Anne Killigrew*, which Dr Johnson, the recognised connoisseur and appraiser in that school of verse, declared to be "undoubtedly the noblest ode that our language ever has produced"—

"O gracious God! how far have we
Profaned thy heav'nly gift of poesy?
Made prostitute and profligate the Muse,
Debased to each obscene and impious use,
Whose harmony was first ordained above
For tongues of angels, and for hymns of love?
O wretched we! why were we hurried down
This lubrique and adulterate age—
Nay, added fat pollutions of our own—
T' increase the steaming ordures of the stage?
What can we say t' excuse our second fall?
Let this thy vestal, heaven, atone for all;
Her Arethusian stream remains unsoiled,
Unmixed with foreign filth, and undefiled;
Her wit was more than man; her innocence a child."

The *Ode on Alexander's Feast* is better known, and lives in the anthologies; and its trumpet note and brazen resonance have an undeniable artificial splendour of their own. Moreover, it is important for its long enduring hold on the ears of other poets. The eighteenth century thought it a supreme lyric achievement.

Two more passages from Dryden's Essays and Prefaces are required to show why he succeeded and why he failed as he did. The first is particularly interesting, since it bears upon the writing of musical drama, that is the writing of verse for music—

> " 'Tis no easy matter, in our language, to make words so smooth, and numbers so harmonious, that they shall almost set themselves. And yet there are rules for this in Nature, and as great a certainty of quantity in our syllables, as either in the Greek or Latin : but let poets and judges understand those first, and then let them begin to study English. When they have chawed a while upon these preliminaries, it may be they will scarce adventure to tax me with want of thought and elevation of fancy in this work ; for they will soon be satisfied that those are not of the nature of this sort of writing. The necessity of double rhymes, and ordering of the words and numbers for the sweetness of the voice, are the main hinges on which an opera must move ; and both of these are without the compass of any art to teach another to perform, unless Nature, in the first place, has done her part by enduing the poet with that nicety of hearing that the discord of sounds in words shall as much offend him as a seventh in music would a good composer."

The other passage helps us to understand what the poets of his school and the school before him designed as wit, which is the interplay of imagination, fancy, memory and invention, required in the writing of a poem. For by the canon of that school the play of wit, in the sense in which he used it, was commonly guided by precedent, and by the writing of some previous verseman. Hence the literary surcharge upon Dryden's verse, a surcharge which it is always difficult for lyric verse to carry gracefully—

> " The composition of all poems is, or ought to be, of wit ; and wit in the poet, or *Wit writing* (if you will give me leave to use a school-distinction) is no other than the faculty of imagination in the writer, which, like a nimble spaniel, beats over and ranges through the field of memory, till it springs the quarry it hunted after ; or, without metaphor, which searches over all the memory for the species or ideas of those things which it designs to represent. *Wit written* is that which is well defined, the happy result of thought or product of imagination."

Whether it was that *Wit Writing* was inclined to be too self-conscious, Dryden rarely attained in lyric that fluidity of movement which he seemed to get without difficulty in his prose, although there are passages of his narrative verse in rhymed couplets which achieve the same unmistakeable ease and sustention of style.

In fact, the mode of perceptivity which he and his school

cultivated ties the imagination to the fence, and no matter how the wind blows, the range is determined by the rope. The lyric impulse in the Dryden sense was a strictly conditioned one; it asked everywhere for literary precedent, and for the pragmatic sanction; the "well-defined" was the test of grace. It was well in keeping with this theory of his that he should attain individually his master-note, where his critical and disintegrative powers were thoroughly engaged (I mean in satire). There, through a sort of rage of "wit," a passion of angry disdain and delight in his subject, he does fairly achieve a song of contempt, written in comparatives, which holds the ear like a music heard in poets' purgatory. This is the binding spell of the son of Flecknoe—

> "My warbling lute, the lute I whilom strung,
> When to King John of Portugal I sung,
> Was but the prelude to that glorious day,
> When thou on silver Thames didst cut thy way,
> With well-timed oars, before the royal barge,
> Swelled with the pride of thy celestial charge;
> And, big with hymn, commander of a host,
> The like was ne'er in Epsom-blankets tossed.
> Methinks I see the new Arion sail,
> The lute still trembling underneath thy nail.
> At thy well-sharpened thumb, from shore to shore,
> The trebles squeak for fear, the bases roar:

By force and command of words, epithet and tell-tale rhyme, this does reach the stage of all but a lyric deliverance. How vivid and how real it is, we understand by contrasting it with some of the accepted love ditties of the time, written in great abundance, with every grace the formal sentimentalists could lend. This for example—

> "I Sigh'd and I Writ,
> And employ'd all my Wit,
> And still pretty *Sylvia* deny'd;
> 'Twas Virtue I thought,
> And became such a Sot,
> I ador'd her the more for her Pride.
>
> Till mask'd in the Pit,
> My coy *Lucrece* I met,
> A croud of gay Fops held her play,
> So brisk and so free,
> With her smart Repartee,
> I was cur'd and went blushing away.

William Walch, whose *Letters and Poems, Amorous and Gallant,* were printed in 1716 at the end of the Fourth Part of Dryden's anthology, *Miscellany Poems,* supplies another, of which only two stanzas need be quoted—

"Cælia, too late you wou'd repent:
The off'ring all your Store,
Is now but like a Pardon sent
To one that's dead before.

While at the first you cruel prov'd,
And grant the Bliss too late;
You hinder'd me of one I lov'd,
To give me one I hate."

But, as suggested above, there is better stuff than this to be had in some of the broadsides, song-sheets, and popular song-books which circulated in Dryden's day. Such is the joyous May doggerel of *The Comber's Whistle,* with the familiar adaptation, common in these songs, of the old binary verse—

"All in a pleasant morning, in the merry month of May,
Walking the fragrant meadows, where the Comber took his way:
And viewing round about him, whereas he did remain,
At length he spyed a fair maid upon the flowery plain.

. . . . . .

Then he pull'd forth his whistle, and plaid a note or two;
The maid she was so over-joy'd, she knew not what to do.
And well she was contented with him to bear a part;
'A blessing,' said this maiden fair, 'light on this Comber's heart!'"

The last word in a Dryden chapter, however, must go to the songs in his plays, which have surprising force and at times beauty, as appears by the lovely "Zambra Dance" in the *Conquest of Granada*—

"From the bright Vision's Head
A careless Veil of Lawn was loosely spread:
From her white Temples fell her shaded Hair,
Like cloudy Sun-shine, not too brown nor fair;
Her Hands, her Lips, did Love inspire,
Her every grace my Heart did fire:
But most her Eyes, which languish'd with desire."

## CHAPTER XXII

### PERCEPTIVE VERSE—THE INFLUENCE OF POPE—GRAY AND COLLINS

DRYDEN died May 1st, 1700, and after him the age grew too precise to require any inspiration beyond what he had called "Wit," or imagination *a la mode*. Verse became more exact, but in doing so refused to serve as conductor to the "might which is in musicke," or that "extraordinary emotion of the soul" which Longinus helped Dryden to recognise. Pope, who had the art of definition in verse beyond any other English writer, himself knew what the supernal forces were, as his comment on Homer, on the strong glowing Homeric expression, and the power over "living words" in the *Iliad* tell us. But Pope more than anyone helped to fix poetry in that straight groove from which the successive jolts of Burns, Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth were required to shake it free. Lyric was bound to suffer more than the rest of poetry by this dispensation; for it became a custom of the art, as practised by the writers after Dryden, to turn from the concrete image to the generic idea, thus reversing the natural line of creative activity. And where they did take concrete things, they took by preference those that were urban and bookish, which destroy by their formality the aspirations of the true song-bearer. And the loss was not compensated by any increase of imagination, or of buoyancy sufficeint to lift the verse over the town-top and the Queen Anne chimneys.

We see the limitation clearly in Addison. He had a genius for prose, but he tended to secular sing-song in verse. His intelligence was too large, it is true, for him to fail altogether in any mode of expression he attempted with conviction. Where he failed, it was because there was no kindling

in his page. His invocation to Liberty is not an unfair test—

> " O Liberty, thou goddess heavenly bright,
> Profuse of bliss, and pregnant with delight!
> Eternal pleasures in thy presence reign,
> And smiling plenty leads thy wanton train;
> Eased of her load, subjection grows more light,
> And poverty looks cheerful in thy sight;
> Thou mak'st the gloomy face of nature gay,
> Giv'st beauty to the sun, and pleasure to the day."

Addison did not like Spenser, whom he thought extravagant, almost as trying as the Alps which made him feel giddy; and here he is certainly free from over-exaltation. Yet there was dignity, and fine phrase, in his religious songs and odes—

> " In foreign realms, and lands remote,
> Supported by thy care,
> Through burning climes I passed unhurt,
> And breathed in tainted air."

Matthew Prior, eight years Addison's senior, was of lighter intellectual build, but more of a verseman by nature and habit. His rhyme runs free, and his humour is seen in sublyrical mood in the song of himself that he wrote for his own grave—

> " Fierce robbers there are that infest the highway,
> So Matt may be killed, and his bones never found;
> False witness at court, and fierce tempests at sea,
> So Matt may yet chance to be hanged or be drowned.
>
> If his bones lie in earth, roll in sea, fly in air,
> To Fate we must yield, and the thing is the same;
> And if passing thou giv'st him a smile or a tear,
> He cares not—yet, prithee, be kind to his fame."

Prior was saved from the too literary note in his verse by the vigorous unconventional kind of life that he lived which enabled him to reflect in his writing something of the popular rhythm of the time. He was fond of low company, and Arbuthnot declares at the time of his death he was thinking of marrying a certain Bessy Cox who kept an ale-house in Long Acre. To Bessie and a man-servant he left his estate. One of his love-songs, *To Chloe,* was inspired by a certain *Flanders Jane,* and Bessie, after his death, claimed to be his Emma; but the note by

which we may prefer to remember him is that of his ballad, *The Thief and the Cordelier*, of which a first verse will serve as sample—

To the tune of *King John and the Abbot of Canterbury.*

"Who has e'er been at Paris, must needs know the Grève,
The fatal retreat of th' unfortunate brave;
Where honour and justice most oddly contribute
To ease heroes' pains by a halter and gibbet.
Derry down, down, hey derry down."

With that ballad Prior continued that gay and spirited song of the street and the tavern to which Suckling contributed before, and writers as late as Thackeray contributed after him. His contemporary Swift can hardly be counted as a lyric poet at all; but it happens in the verses on his own death, his wit, crossed by his personal emotion, arrived at a music which is like song in strings—

'Behold the fatal day arrive!
How is the dean? he's just alive.
Now the departing prayer is read;
He hardly breathes. The dean is dead.
Before the passing-bell begun,
The news through half the town has run;
'Oh! may we all for death prepare!
What has he left? and who's his heir?'"

Swift was not a poet nor even a great verse-maker. Alexander Pope, who was both, hardly contrived, any more than he, to touch the lyric reality; the opening couplet of his *Messiah*—

"Ye nymphs of Solyma! begin the song:
To heavenly themes sublimer strains belong"—

puts off the muse of song like a notice to trespassers; nor is his *Address of the Dying Christian to his Soul*, when we consider the quality of the theme, profoundly impressive, although it has a kind of metallic force and that propriety of diction that never failed him. In satire and in narrative Pope could be so masterly that it may appear at first hard to account for his want of song. When we try to analyse his faculty, we find in it an enormous intelligence of the surface, but his verse, his words, his particular rhythm, even where he is most brilliant,

lack the power to convey those secondary or internal meanings and imaginative implications which are like second life in poetry. And so it is with nearly all the poets of this time; the finish and the surface value of their work are beyond praise, but their writing does not carry the reader into that region to which all song seems naturally trying to rise.

We may pass by the pages of Parnell, Blackmore, Garth and others; we should leave Savage out, too, save for four or five lines which break into momentary song; and we may turn now on to Gay, author of the *Beggar's Opera* and the *Shepherd's Week*, who again succeeds as Prior did, by contriving to tap, not the wine of the gods, but the small ale of humanity. His *Black-eyed Susan* is a triumph in its kind, not only because of the good humour, tenderness and heartiness of the theme, but because of the unmistakable spirit and wit of the man who wrote it. The measure of Gay's success in this may be seen by comparing it with other songs and ballads of the time which attempt the same vein of sentiment without calling in anything of Gay's joyous reality. Thomas Tickell's *Colin and Lucy*, an Irish ballad of some grace, but without the remotest Celtic sparkle in it, may almost pass for a typical product of the day—

> "Of Leinster, famed for maidens fair,
> Bright Lucy was the grace,
> Nor e'er did Liffey's limpid stream
> Reflect so sweet a face."

And now turn to *Black-eyed Susan*, which is too well known to need quoting. Tickell was Addison's friend, and wrote for the *Spectator* and *Guardian*, and a pleasant reflection of Addison plays through his verse and prose. He felt the touch of Pope's satire, for he too had attempted the *Iliad*, an unpardonable sin. A much greater victim of Pope's, Ambrose Philips, who was born in Shropshire in 1675, had some real faculty but could not rise above the convention of his time. Thomson's *Miscellany* for 1709 opens with his *Pastorals*, while Pope's formed the last contribution in the book. The misguided Tickell declared Philips's *Pastorals* the best in the language, which led Pope to

deliver an ironical attack in the *Guardian*. It was after this little episode that Philips vowed to take personal vengeance on his little critic with a rod, which he hung up for that ostensible purpose in Button's Coffee-house. His *Pastorals* are unreadable to-day, but it is well to us to know that he pleased his contemporaries. Their taste and his may be judged by a fragment of *Sappho*, which he reduced to the eighteenth-century currency —"a poetical gem so brilliant," says one critic, that Wharton thought Addison must have "assisted in its composition!"

> 'Blessed as the immortal gods is he,
> The youth who fondly sits by thee,
> And hears and sees thee all the while,
> Softly speak and sweetly smile."

It was Henry Carey, the song-writer, who called Philips "namby-pamby," because of what Pope termed his "eminence in the infantile style." When one thinks of the lyric art as Sappho really conceived, and then compares it with this bound travesty, one sees to what a level English verse was in danger of falling. In the prologue to his *Satires* addressed to Arbuthnot, Pope asks—

> "Does not one table Bavius still admit?
> Still to one bishop Philips seem a wit?
> Still Sappho——?

when his friend stays him. In the same pages Pope gains his freest expression—one indeed which, if we were to accept Brunetiere as our guide, we should call the real lyrical note of this time, because in it the emotion of the writer utters itself with distinctive and individual voice. Listen to this—

> "Is there a parson, much bemused in beer,
> A maudlin poetess, a rhyming peer,
> A clerk, foredoomed his father's soul to cross,
> Who pens a stanza when he should engross?
> Is there, who, locked from ink and paper, scrawls
> With desperate charcoal round his darkened walls?
> All fly to Twit'nam, and in humble strain
> Apply to me, to keep them mad or vain.
> Arthur, whose giddy son neglects the laws,
> Imputes to me and my damned works the cause:
> Poor Cornus sees his frantic wife elope,
> And curses wit, and poetry, and Pope."

This is the new *Song of the Stork*—wit against the frogs, and its rhyme is deadly. All that it wants is that the movement should not be merely from one leg of contempt to the other, and that the frog-pond should not also drown the muse. We dare not ask more than that, for when Pope tried to fly, his flight was apt to end somewhere very near Grub Street. Even when he sang the moral *Song of Virtue*, it was by comparatives and opposites, not by vision, he set it out—

"What's fame? a fancied life in others' breath—
A thing beyond us, even before our death.
Just what you hear, you have; and what's unknown,
The same, my lord, if Tully's, or your own.
All that we feel of it begins and ends
In the small circle of our foes or friends;
To all beside as much an empty shade,
An Eugene living, as a Cæsar dead;
Alike or when or where they shone or shine,
Or on the Rubicon, or on the Rhine.
A wit's a feather, and a chief a rod;
An honest man's the noblest work of God."

Let us, before we leave the Popean galaxy, remember to make note of the songs in the Restoration comedies, so unlike, by a world's remove, those in the Elizabethan plays. My Lord Worth's song in Congreve's *Double Dealer* is typical as any; it adds yet a stave to the Phyllisian anthology—

"Ancient Phyllis has young graces;
'Tis a strange thing, but a true one;
Shall I tell you how?
She herself makes her own faces,
And each morning wears a new one;
Where's the wonder now?"

The Restoration playwrights knew the value of a popular refrain; as we discover in Farquhar's *Recruiting Officer*, where *Over the Hills and Far Away* becomes almost a comic *leitmotiv*.

*Scene*—The Street.

*Enter* KITE, *with* COSTAR PEARMAIN *in one hand, and* THOMAS APPLETREE *in the other, drunk.* KITE *sings*:—

"Our 'prentice Tom may now refuse
To wipe his scoundrel master's shows,
For now he's free to sing and play
Over the hills and far away.
Over the hills and far away!
(*The mob sings the chorus.*)

Of other occasional contributors, two must not be forgotten: one Daniel Defoe, for his better and valiant *Hymn to the Pillory*, which is a thing of power, though obviously written by a man whose habitual rhythm was that of prose:

> Thou art the state-trap of the law,
> But neither can keep knaves nor honest men in awe
> These are too hardened in offence,
> And those upheld by innocence.

The other was Bishop Berkeley, who added some prophetic verses to the Song of the regions oversea. The close attains a great note—

> "There shall be sung another golden age,
> The rise of empire and of arts,
> The good and great imspiring epic rage,
> The wisest heads and noblest hearts.
>
> Not such as Europe breeds in her decay;
> Such as she bred when fresh and young,
> When heavenly flame did animate her clay,
> By future poets shall be sung.
>
> Westward the course of empire takes its way;
> The four first acts already past,
> A fifth shall close the drama with the day;
> Time's noblest offspring is the last."

Berkeley carries us half-way through the eighteenth century, and away from the group of occasional song-writers who did much to keep the lyric tradition alive, while English poetry was at the most unlyrical stage of its history. Berkeley himself may have had some half-conscious lurking idea of its need of replenishing when he wrote to Pope from abroad about the uses of travel in order to store a poet's mind "with strong images of nature." He added: "If you would know lightsome days, warm suns and blue skies, you must come to Italy."

However, songs, full of an English gaiety, tuneful above everything, were produced in abundance at this time; and a few of the best of them have survived from the broadsides and half-sheets of Queen Anne's and George the First's reigns. *Here's a Health to the Queen*, better known as *Down Among*

*the Dead Men*, perhaps the best drinking-song in the language, is almost too good to be typical. The opening stave will serve to recall both the gallantry of the words and the correspondent force of the music [1]

> " Here's a health to the Queen, and a lasting peace,
> To faction an end, to wealth increase.
> Come, let's drink it while we have breath
> For there's no drinking after death.
> Down among the dead men.
> Down, down, down, down,
> Down among the dead men let him lie."

In many songs of this day we have that cordial unanimity of expression which suggests that words and music were born together. But it is not always safe to accept the plain evidence of the ear in such correspondences. Take the case of Henry Carey's *Sally in Our Alley*, now associated with the air of *The Country Lass*. It is hard to think of the one without calling up the other, so absolutely interlinked are the two things. But in fact Carey, who was a boy of fifteen at Dryden's death, wrote his own music for the song,[2] and his tune it was that originally appeared on the old broadsides, and in his *Musical Century*. It was not until after his death that *Sally* and the *Country Lass* were brought together.

The love for " a good song " was an instinctive thing with English folk, and Puritanism had only diverted the taste for a season ; and those humbler craftsmen, the song-fitters, who know how to find a tune to a set of words and put them together, just as a locksmith finds a key for an old lock, were busy, and made many happy hits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A more doubtful instance may be had in the classical *Vicar of Bray*, which belongs to George the First's reign. The tune is found in some of the ballad-operas of the earlier eighteenth century—*The Quaker's Opera*, for example, and *The Grub Street Opera* ; and it was known as

[1] Dr Samuel Wesley, it is said, often extemporises fugues upon the melody. *Eng. Mel.*, p. 148.

[2] Both airs can be seen in Augener's *Minstrelsy of England*, vol. i., pp. 46, 47. *Eng. Mel.*, p. 159.

*The Country Garden.* As for the words, they are said to have been written by a soldier in Colonel Fuller's Dragoons, and if so, an unknown rhymer and a wit of no mean order was hidden in the ranks. But whether the tune inspired him first, or whether auspicious fate, or the song-fitter, afterwards, welded the *Vicar of Bray* to the music, "the book" does not say.

Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* offer a natural induction to the next group; and we may take from him first some account of a typical half-poet, John Hughes, a man of Wiltshire stock, who was in the way of writing *Pindarick* and *Royal Odes.* In 1699 he wrote a piece on the return of King William, which he called *The Court of Neptune,* and in the same year produced a timely song on the Duke of Gloucester's birthday. "He did not confine himself to poetry," says Dr Johnson, "and about this time, shewed his knowledge of human nature" by an Essay, "On the pleasure of being deceived." Then in 1702, on the death of King William, he wrote an ode, *The House of Nassau.* This was over four hundred lines long, and though somewhat perfunctory, not contemptible. Its opening lines, four or five of which may be quoted, are hardly a fair test of its effect—

> "Goddess of numbers, and of thoughts sublime
> Celestial Muse! whose tuneful song
> Can fix heroic acts, that glide along
> Down the vast sea of ever-wasting time,
> And all the gilded images can stay
> Till Times vast sea itself be rolled away;
> O now assist with consecrated strains!
> Let Art and Nature join to raise
> A living monument of Praise
> O'er William's great remains."

In a letter to Pope, Swift styled Hughes as "too grave a poet for me; and I think among the *mediocrists.*" And to this Pope replied dryly, "he was of the class you think him."

Hughes was a contributor to the *Spectator* and *Tatler,* and may be considered as one of the last of the Addisonians. The best of his lines are those which remind us he was also a musician, and wrote verse on occasion with a feeling for the singing accents—

" The wanton fugues each other chase,
And swift division's run their airy race!
Thro' all the travers'd scale they fly,
In winding labyrinths of harmony;
By turns they rise and fall, by turns we live and die."

Now enters a very genuine poet in James Thomson, author of *The Seasons*, but save for one or two delightful occasional passages, and for the song of *Rule Britannia*, to which his full claim has been doubted, he is hardly seen in full character in the songs of this time. But Thomson had a command of rhythm which even those who do not tolerate easily the artificial mode of the eighteenth century will recognise as unstrained. When his note grows individual, he gets less formal—

" You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace,
You cannot shut the windows of the sky,
Through which Aurora shews her brightening face;
You cannot bar my constant feet to trace
The woods and lawns, by living stream, at eve."

The generic note is not far off, it is true, and the classic figure is always at hand in the descriptive lyric of this time, but the emotion is genuine and the music true. It is not when Thomson is launched on his high invocative strain, using all his rhetoric, borrowed from Pope, and from Dryden, Pope's master, and Milton, Dryden's master, especially from Milton, that he gets his one rare distinctive accent of under-song. When winter is in the picture, he catches something of the old northern note, in singing the fate of the lost woodman, the " disastered " swain—

" What black despair, what horror, fills his heart!
When for the dusky spot which fancy feigned,
His tufted cottage rising through the snow,
He meets the roughness of the middle waste,
Far from the track and blessed abode of man;
While round him night resistless closes fast,
And every tempest howling o'er his head,
Renders the savage wilderness more wild."

With Thomson we see the breaking of the urban tradition which Collins after him helped to wear down. It needed a lyric deliverance finally to change the fashion of a muse in peruke and paste-buckles. Collins wrote natural melody

again, and it is plain to be heard in the ode, in quatrains, upon Thomson's death. It will be recalled that Collins had moved to Richmond to be near Thomson, and there a kind of Rhymers' Club used to meet at the "Castle," and indulge in Wartonian orgies. Thomson's early death was a blow to his friend, ominous indeed, whose own shadow was coming near.

In his *Persian Eclogues,* one of which, *Hassan,* is delicately artificial and melodiously set to its refrain, we find a double artifice typical of his day; for his shepherds are not only urban and polite; they suggest the Mall, while accommodated to the ladies of Tauris. *Selim,* in the first eclogue, was

> "Wise in himself: his meaning songs conveyed
> Informing morals to the shepherd maid."

But a later verse may be read, like some real oriental poems, in two ways; and its deeper sense is, if a little adapted, that of the return of the maid of song and the daughters of wisdom to Nature and England, or, say, Richmond Hill. "Lost to our fields," says the poet,

> "The dear deserters shall return again.'

And in the *Ode to Pity,* which succeeds the *Eclogues,* Collins unmistakeably signals to the scouts of reality; and recalls us home to the Sussex fields—

> "But wherefore need I wander wide
> To old Ilissus' distant side?
> Deserted stream and mute!
> Wild Arun, too, has heard thy strains,
> And Echo 'midst my native plains
> Been soothed by Pity's lute."

As he goes on, Collins sheds more and more of his artifice; he gives up the generic note of his forerunners and the eighteenth century; and in doing this he is before his day. Three years after the publishing of the *Eclogues* he brought out his volume of *Odes,* and to his great mortification it failed to attract any notice. According to one of his biographers, he recalled all the copies and offered them up as a burnt sacrifice. In these *Odes* we trace the first real change to affect poetry

after Dryden and Pope. The *Ode to Simplicity* can still refer to "the honeyed store on Hybla's thymy shore" and "to old Cephisus deep," but it ends with an evocation of the sons of nature. In every successive ode Collins draws nearer to that melodic simplicity in which survives just so much of the tradition of the school before him as gives an air of distinction to his verse; that is, he is still using the dialect of Dryden and Pope, but he is speaking it with an accent that is masterly and undeniably his own. Swinburne has spoken of the power and harmony that mark his ode on the *Passions*, and on the *Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland*. In the latter, it is true, readers who have been trained in the subtleties of the Neo-Celtic school will find the combination of Classic and Gaelic allusion a little deterrent. Our real interest in Collins is due to his being a child of his time; who, using an instrument of his time, yet achieved an unmistakeably individual expression. The opening strophe of his *Ode to Liberty* is an exquisitely modulated piece of verse, that bears the closest test you can give it; but in his rarer masterpiece, the *Evening Ode*, which is unapproached in austere grace by any other English poet, he threw away his "war-denouncing trumpet," threw away even the supports of rhyme and the Dryden rhetoric, and attained his most perfect expression. In its stanzas, the words, the rhythm, the music that is in the line, and the music that is behind the line, are so wrought as to re-create the thing expressed in the very medium expressing it. The transmutation there is one that the poets who seek to personify the elements, the emotions or the forces and apparitions of nature, have rarely achieved as Collins did.

As we read the *Evening Ode*, we cannot help speculating about the influence he might have gained if, instead of being cut short at the time when he had reached his climacteric, he had been able to continue his art. In fact, he did little after the publication of the volume of 1746. Thomas Warton, who knew him well, speaks of him in 1754 when he went to visit friends at Oxford, and says that he was not then suffering from alienation of mind but from general laxity and feebleness.

"What he spoke wanted neither judgment nor spirit; but a few minutes exhausted him, so that he was forced to rest upon the couch, till a short cessation restored his powers, and he was again able to talk with his former vigour." There was a tradition at Chichester of his wandering up and down the aisles and cloisters of the Cathedral in the intervals of his last illness, and accompanying the music with melancholy outcries of his own. White of Selborne, who knew him well, says that he was "warm in his friendships, and visionary in his pursuits . . . very temperate in his eating and drinking . . . of moderate stature of a light and clear complexion, with grey eyes." Others make the eyes black, and very black. He died in 1759, the year when Burns was born. "The fairy valleys fade," as he said in his lines on Thomson's death, with the passing of Collins; but Gray, who was five years older than he, carried on a practice of verse not unlike his to within two or three years of the birth of Wordsworth. Thus the typical poetry of the one century overlaps that of the other; and we must not forget that the earliest poems of Blake and of Burns were not far away in 1771, and that Gray might, with a stronger constitution, have lived to read their pages.

We may recall Swinburne's opinion that as a lyric poet Gray was unworthy to sit at the feet of Collins, without being further tempted into the misleading business of criticism by comparatives. The relation between the two, in literary history, is not unlike that between Addison and Steele. Gray, like Addison, bulks more weightily in the estimate than his fellow-writer. And this is not because of the *Elegy* alone. His odes on *Spring*, on *Eton College*, on the *Progress of Poesy*, on the *Bard*, would assure his place. Moreover, they leave one with a sense that where they fail it is from their writer's mistaken economy, and not from any want of poetic genius in him. Or, it would be fairer to say they suffered from his want of health, and that determining current of blood to the brain, which gives lyric energy to subserved ideas, and fertilises them. It is felt in the stanzaic movement of his odes; each stanza having to be commenced afresh, with a distinct effort, as it were,

instead of being lifted on the impulsive stream of the whole poem.

Still, allowing for the neatness of the poetic dialect and the overwhelming academic graces of his time, we must see that he was, when his imagination and his style were at one, a genuine old master in lyric, too. His style, his finish, often seem too hard and bright to us for pure song; but then our ears are averse to rhetoric and spoilt by indulgence.

If we detach some of his lines where he attains the fluidity of lyric, without losing his form, we perceive in them the grace of the artist who may have thrice deliberated on his effect, but who is none the less heaven-directed. Try those at the opening of the *Progress of Poesy*—

> " The laughing flowers that round them blow
> Drink life and fragrance as they flow."

Or the affecting minor strain lifted to the true lyric plane in *The Bard*—

> " Mountains, ye mourn in vain
> Modaed, whose magic song
> Made huge Plinlimmon bow his cloud-topt head."

This is, indeed, a remarkable evidence of Gray's command of pure music, his delicate and consummate art. But usually in these odes the preponderance of rhetoric over what we may call the natural idiom of poetry, which is clear, spontaneous and unconscious, rather spoils our enjoyment. For it is a sad fact that one artificial verse may spoil a poem, just as one factory chimney may spoil a landscape; and in both cases it is not so much that the thing in itself is hideous, as that its associations are of the wrong kind, relatively and emotionally considered.

In the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, the seventh and eighth stanzas offer a capital instance of the annoying way the eighteenth-century men had of using labels instead of true symbols in poetry. Gray had a real theme in that ode, and he was moved by it to the lyric pitch; but his academic muse was too much for him. Elsewhere, as in the *Elegy*, where his meditative spirit is in its proper element, the grace

of Heaven saves him from these things; he uses, not the dialect of his time, but the universal dialect of his art. That he himself was aware of what mattered and did not matter, what was poetically true and what false, we know by many references in his letters and essays. In one letter to his friend West, he writes—

> " The language of the age is never the language of poetry; except among the French, whose verse, where the thought or image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose. Our poetry, on the contrary, has a language peculiar to itself; to which almost every one, that has written, has added something by enriching it with foreign idioms and derivatives. Nay sometimes words of their own composition or invention. Shakespear and Milton have been great creators in this way. and no one more licentious than Pope or Dryden, who perpetually borrow expressions from the former. Let me give you some instances from Dryden, whom everybody reckons a great master of our poetical tongue—' Full of *museful mopings*—unlike the *trim* of love—a pleasant *beverage*—a *roundelay* of love—stood silent in his *mood*. . . .' But they are infinite: And our language not being a settled thing (like the French) has an undoubted right to words of an hundred years old, provided antiquity have not rendered them unintelligible. In truth, Shakespear's language is one of his principal beauties; and he has no less advantage over your Addisons and Rowes in this, than in those other great excellencies you mention. Every word in him is a picture. Pray put me the following lines into the tongue of our modern Dramatics—
>
> ' But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
> Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass:
> I, that am rudely stampt, and want love's majesty
> To strut before a wanton ambling nymph:
> I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
> Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
> Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world, scarce half made up '—
>
> And what follows. To me they appear untranslatable; and if this be the case, our language is greatly degenerated."

It is significant that in arraigning Dryden he says nothing of still other sins of commission which are worse, lyrically or poetically, than any he remarks. But he does, in citing Richard III.'s speech, get near the difference between verse rhetoric and poetic idiom. And elsewhere in his *Observations on English Metre*, writing of the cesura and the lyric usage, he turns characteristically from the sameness of sound that

Dryden and Pope get in their verse, to the practice of his master in harmony—

> "The more we attend to the composition of Milton's harmony, the more we shall be sensible how he loved to vary his pauses, his measures, and his feet, which gives that enchanting air of freedom and wildness to his versification, unconfined by any rules but those which his own feeling and the nature of his subject demanded."

That enchanting air of freedom and wildness was just what it was Gray needed; for his muse at her worst smelt of the college candles, and at her wildest never reached, as her master did, the mountain-side or the forest. But he was a rare craftsman, a fine artist in lyric if not a great one, and a lover of his art, who, like all poets who are also creatively critical, had a vision of high possibilities beyond any attained in his own writing. To this extent, he may be said to anticipate the very men who revolted from the code set up by his verse, and to signalise in his Cambridge epicurism the coming of Wordsworth, and the Romantic vein of the next age.

# CHAPTER XXIII

## THE TRANSITION—GOLDSMITH—COWPER—BLAKE AND THE ROMANTIC REVOLT

LYRIC by temperament, Goldsmith chiefly expressed himself under the cloak of description or by indirection, in his poetry. Like other poets of the mid-eighteenth century, he was ruled by the prevailing style. The muse must be formal and didactic; and her servants must be in the fashion. In the *Citizen of the World,* Goldsmith sketches a brief dialogue between a bookseller and his hero, in which this very question is hinted. "Uninstructive simplicity" is, according to the bookseller, a dangerous commodity in an author. That very simplicity, it appears, might, according to the fashion of the time, be made to look wholly out of keeping. "'Erroneously sensible' would be the cry; we should hunt you down like a rat." "'Head of my father,' said I, 'sure there are but the two ways; the door must either be shut or it must be open. I must either be natural or unnatural.'"

It is true that the bookseller in this colloquy would have us infer that the author would fail to please the critics either way; but in other references by the *Citizen* references to Gray and to his predecessors, we gather that Goldsmith was, in spite of himself, much influenced by the very tradition he wished to challenge. His admiration for Gray was almost unbounded; but he saw that the sensation of life, and the vigour of writing from the life, were often wanting in the kind of poetry that Gray produced. It all resolved itself into this: you must study not only literature and literary precedent; you must refer your poetry (it is Goldsmith's own conclusion) to actual life; you must study the people.

But two things combined to prevent his applying the formula

of the return to life and human nature, as under other circumstances and with his temperament he might have been able to do. The first was, that he did not begin to write poetry until his most lyrical years were past. The second was, that he was so far a writer of his time as to accept to the full the didactic heresy which is in the nature of things anti-lyrical.

Born at Pallas, County Longford, Ireland, in 1728, Goldsmith did not publish his first poem *The Traveller*, the result of his wanderings abroad, till 1764. And there the nature of the subject was not one to engender lyric emotion. When he came to writing the *Deserted Village* some years later, his memory was touched by earlier associations and kindled to a slow fire. Auburn is undoubtedly the village he had known in his most susceptible years, the village of Lissoy. When the couplets, which superficially appear to us modish, are examined closely, they are seen to be wrought with a delightful recurrent melody, the melody of old and intimate emotion. The poem has been so spoiled for our ears by being set as a school task that the ordinary reader is not able to depolarise it sufficiently or to relate it intrinsically to Goldsmith's art. But the magic of lines such as these no familiarity can wear down—

> Along thy glades, a solitary guest,
> The hollow-sounding bittern guards his nest;
> Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies
> And tires their echoes with unvarried cries.
> Sunk are thy bowers, in shapeless ruin all
> And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall."

Goldsmith's extreme sensibility, his wanderings, his early experiences of poverty in Ireland, and his struggles with it, the uncertainties of his calling afterwards in London, had all helped to give a tenderness to his writing which often goes oddly enough with his formal didacticism. It is like a picture of poverty, love and hospitality, painted on Dresden china. The same formality marks his one ballad *Edwin and Angelina*; formality relieved by the sense of escape from the coldness of the outer world into the hermit's retreat where the lover receives the wandering maid and Edwin and Angelina are made one.

In Goldsmith, we see already the beginning of the constitutional change which was to affect lyric poetry like a new spring. He felt it, although he was still under the autumn star, so far as poetic influence went; and used the generic idiom, the didactic note, the satirist's rhythm, as his masters required. We trace the break-up of the tradition in several of his successors, who worked a tinge more of nature and actuality into their verse.

Christopher Smart, a man of Kent, born in 1722, appears to us all but the poet of a single poem, the *Song to David,* which he wrote, it is said, while he was in prison; that is, in a mad-house. It is notable that the song was rejected by his first editor who diligently collected his now forgotten verse into two volumes. When he was at Cambridge, Gray was tempted by Smart's wildness and prodigality (sustained like Goldsmith's Vicar on forty pounds a year) to foretell that he would end in jail or bedlam. Dr Johnson's account of him when he had given some earnest of this prophecy is well known. Tradition declares he wrote the *Song to David* with a key on the wainscot of his room in the mad-house; and possibly he did write snatches of verse in that way. But the *Song* has the effect of a long-considered theme, thought out with even something of the added formality that a man who is not quite sure of himself uses to safeguard his utterance. So at least one is tempted to think by the categorical resumption of the twelve terms of the key-stanza in the following twelve stanzas. The fervour of the verse in some of its passages is irresistible, and Rossetti and Swinburne have paid tribute to its lyric splendours—

"He sang of God—the mighty source
Of all things—the stupendous force
On which all strength depends;
From whose right arm, beneath whose eyes,
All period, power, and enterprise
Commences, reigns, and ends.

Angels—their ministry and meed,
Which to and fro with blessings speed,
Or with their citterns wait;
Where Michael, with his millions, bows,
Where dwells the seraph and his spouse,
The cherub and her mate."

The drinking custom of the time, the mania of the wine-cup, is no doubt responsible for a part of Smart's madness. His religious ecstasy followed. It was different with Cowper, whose temperamental melancholy was fed by his religion. It is interesting in him to watch the struggle of an over-sensibility, pointing to disordered nerves, with the demure style of the post-Dryden versemen. Much of his verse reads to us now like an anodyne ; it is so soothing, equable and bereft of passion. This is not to say that he wrote without fire or emotion, for he had both ; but he fell back on the sober rhythm and the gentle monotone of a poet who is afraid of his own nervous excess. This style he kept with some intervals, all through his longer poems ; and there, we may say, twisting a notion that he suggests in some lines of *The Task* to fit his own economy, he muted the instrument.

Yet there are pages like that of his winter night's apostrophe where he takes off the mute and becomes confessional. He sings his vespers there, the lay of the hermit self, withdrawn from the world. Let them laugh, more mercurial than he, " that never felt a stupor, knew no pause, nor need one ! " He has nursed his mood and grown a spiritual epicure—

> " . . . Meanwhile the face
> Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask
> Of deep deliberation, as the man
> Were tasked to his full strength, absorbed and lost.
> Thus oft, reclined at ease, I lose an hour
> At evening, till at length the freezing blast,
> That sweeps the bolted shutter, summons home
> The recollected powers ; and snapping short
> The glassy threads with which the fancy weaves
> Her brittle toils, restores me to myself."

" The frost and the rough wind " without increase his parlour ecstasy. The further passage is beautiful—

> " I saw the woods and fields at close of day,
> A variegated show ; the meadows green,
> Though faded ; and the lands, where lately waved
> The golden harvest, of a mellow brown,
> Upturned so lately by the forceful share.
> I saw far off the weedy fallows smile. . . ."

The last line shows the intimate fantasy he had at call, anticipating the art of Wordsworth and the romantic naturalists; while the line succeeding betrays again the stale convention of his irromantic preceders.

In the verse where he is openly lyrical, Cowper is master in several distinct kinds—in the grotesque ballad of the road, *John Gilpin*; the sea-ballad of the *Castaway*, figuring his own despair, cast out from salvation; the sea-dirge for *The Loss of the Royal George*; and the sonnet and the lines to Mary Unwin, although the refrain in the last poem becomes like a dead note, and palls at the fifth repetition. All these can be read in Palgrave's book, and need not be repeated here. But it is to be said that Cowper, in *John Gilpin*, and again in the *Royal George* lines, attained that sheer sincerity of diction to which lyric art inevitably points—

> "A land-breeze shook the shrouds
> And she was overset;
> Down went the Royal George,
> With all her crew complete.
>
> Toll for the brave!
> Brave Kempenfelt is gone;
> His last sea-fight is fought,
> His work of glory done."

This is the very economy of words. Every syllable tells, as it can only be made to tell by a master of language.

It is natural to pass from such essential verse to the songs of Blake. The wonder of Blake's emergence need not, however, at any point be diminished; we have but to remember that he trained his pencil upon such conventional subjects as Blair's *Grave* and Young's *Night Thoughts* afforded. His *Poetical Sketches*, written when he was a boy, seem, where they have any traceable line of descent, like an impulsive resumption of the Elizabethan songs. But the individual note is new. "My silks and fine array"; "How sweet I roamed from field to field," and the lines from the *reverdie* in blank verse, "Come o'er the Eastern hills," may breathe a childlike fantasy; but

they tell of that immemorial wisdom which Heaven gives to poetry. And the invocation to the Muses has the great melody accent and an assured classic note, though Blake had scarcely read a line of the Latin poets whose verse it half recalls.

"'Tis hard to believe," says Gilchrist, "these poems were written in the author's teens"; but in fact, Blake, writing at the end of the century, did in the innocence of his mind the service of an inspired child to English lyric. It was the deliverance it most needed, after the high rhetoric and formal graces of the recognised masters a generation before him. He achieved for the aspiring element in song, what Burns, his northern contemporary, did for human passion. Both affirmed the right of the lyric spirit to its own law, its own forms, undeterred by the ritual of the schools and the fashions of the town. Both were at odds with the code of their day, and of our day. Blake escaped from London into his own region—his own pictures; Burns, who was no seer, followed his appetites, and drank Scots poison.

It is remarkable how often in these songs of Blake we are made to think of our earliest verse. The *Land of Dreams*, in the poems first published by Gilchrist, recalls the thirteenth-century *Pearl; To Tirzah* recalls two poems in the Harleian MSS. (which Blake never saw), and the *Nurse's Song*, an immemorial nursery rhyme. This was not because Blake was dipped in that mediæval stream. It was because in him was re-created that childhood of the world, and innocency of mind, which more than anything beget the spirit of wonder and delight in beauty and rage at its unfulfilment.

"I slept in the earth
In the silent night;
I murmured my fears
And I felt delight."

From Goldsmith—who one day walked into Basire's shop in Great Queen Street when Blake was an apprentice of fifteen or sixteen—from Cowper, Chatterton and a few forgotten writers of the time, we pick up the devious tracks of the by-road

by which lyric verse was returning to nature. One book which helped to fertilise Chatterton's mind, and bring in afresh that store of older rhythms and idioms which Dryden and Pope, by their masterful accomplishment, had made to look archaic and old-fashioned, appears in Gilchrist's account of Blake's writings, and ought to be noted—*Percy's Reliques*. Blake and Chatterton drew thence much boyish sustenance, and Chatterton's faculty might have led him to achieve almost anything, if the rot of the town and the fashions had permitted. Useless, however, to ask " what Chatterton might have done ? " had he lived out his natural life. His powers were extraordinary ; he even had, what might have helped him to hold his own, a precocious worldly knowledge beside his genius for verse ; we cannot tell what would have happened to his genius, once the impulse of youth was gone. One thing is clear from his verse in either kind—he had a feeling for his own class, the tribe of the " have-nots," and he had the pride of his poverty. It is stated ironically in more than one of his strictly contemporary poems—Kew Gardens for instance.

Chatterton was five years Blake's senior and two years younger than another poet, Robert Fergusson, who was unlucky as himself. There is no need here to account for or excuse his boyish make-believe in the Rowley poems ; he felt that they needed an artistic atmosphere for their full effect, and he did not hesitate to produce it by his chemistry, having a cynical feeling, it may be, about the antiquarian tastes of the Bristol busybodies of his day. What really counts in him is the new colour and power he was able to put into his imitations. And his return to older forms is significant. He, too, like Blake, like Fergusson, skipped the century in which he was born and went back to the fresher art of the prime. It is true his one popular ballad, *The Bristow Tragedy*, which is far from his best poem, has reminiscences of Goldsmith, Mallet and others ; but usually he digs in a remoter stream. Two of the stanzas taken at random from this Bristol ballad will show its movement ; the usual ballad-rhythm, modified by the demure eighteenth-century sing-song—

In London city was I born
Of parents of great note;
My father did a noble arms
Emblazon on his coat:

I make no doubt but he is gone
Where soon I hope to go,
Where we for ever shall be blest
From out the reach of woe."

But in other passages his archaism and his own genius set him free, and we get traces of the music that affected Coleridge, and even lent a stray note to the *Ancient Mariner*—

" In different parts a godly psalm
Most sweetly they did chant;
Behind their back six minstrels came
Who tuned the strange bataunt."

If Chatterton sometimes roughly drafted his imitations of the antique in modern verse, afterwards working in the archaic colours, he was, none the less, genuinely attracted to the illusion he wished to obtain. No doubt parts of it do betray the 'prentice hand, and recall that " manufacturer's stock of old oak dressers " once offered for sale in Wardour Street. But there is a recreative touch in it, that saves it from seeming Wardour Street antique only. That is, when you have taken away the pasteboard, and the " eftsoons " and " ekes " and Ingoldsby Legend particles, which tend to spoil his verse as, for instance, the *Excellent Ballad of Charity*, something real, something born of the true temper of the author, is left.

One other poem of his antique, and one of his modern, style may be noticed. The minstrel's song, " Ælla, the darling of futurity," as he calls him, has a glorious lyric movement. *The Prophecy* takes us again to the eighteenth century, and recalls Defoe's *Hymn to the Pillory*, Churchill and others.

Another revertive writer at the end of the century, Macpherson, gained by his Ossianic poems an effect that is at first sight hard to account for. He was quoted by kings and queens. Napoleon read his pages in an Italian version—foreign poets copied him. In fact, he succeeded in doing a very remarkable thing—bringing over the footlights of the eighteenth century

just so much of a wild Highland savour as it could tolerate, reducing the wilder concrete figures to polite imagery, and translating poetry into a medium that may be called for want of another and better word—biblical pindarics. But there was a real poetry upon which Macpherson drew, and he had a faculty of representment amounting almost to genius. The famous passage on the *Desolation of Balclutha* shows it, and this song of a grave in *Selma* rings true in rhythm and accent—

> "Narrow is thy dwelling now; dark the place of thine abode! With three steps I compass thy grave, O thou who wast so great before! Four stones, with their heads of moss, are the only memorial of thee. A tree with scarce a leaf, long grass which whistles in the wind, mark to the hunter's eye the grave of the mighty Morar. Morar! thou art low indeed. Thou hast no mother to mourn thee; no maid with her tears of love. Dead is she that brought thee forth. Fallen is the daughter of Morglan."

But in other pages, it is clear the writer gets his eloquence from Hebrew, or classic sources, not from Celtic—

> "My years will have an end. Thou shalt sleep in thy clouds careless of the voice of the morning. Exult, then, O sun, in the strength of thy youth."

He had learnt the secret of the true and natural rhythms into which the English translators of the Bible put the Hebrew—

> "O my brother, my brother? Why hast thou slain my Salgar? Why, O Salgar, hast thou slain my brother. . . . Thou wert fair on the hill among thousands. He was terrible in fight. . . ."

You see here, and you will see it more clearly if you look up his Celtic originals, how ingeniously he embroidered his Highland and Norse yarn with Oriental tissue; or in other passages how he took a phrase from Gray, from Mason's *Caractacus*, from Young's *Night Thoughts* and Blair's *Grave*, and worked it into the neo-celtic stuff. But he had the art of giving that kind of verisimilitude to his writing, which is very near the other art of making old things new and contemporary. As we see it now, his Celtic refacimento is of a part with Horace Walpole's sham-Gothic. It betrays the desire felt by the eighteenth century, the least romantic in English literary

history, for a savour of Celtic or any other romance that should break up the monotony of the town-verse and of formal poetry. We may, if we are fanciful, relate this desire to get some sensation of the wonder and beauty of antiquity, through the romance symbols, with the further need of getting back to nature itself. Wordsworth pointed out with some force what he considered the false ingredients in Macpherson's *Ossian*, but if he had known it, the mountain raptures of *Selma*, as Macpherson redrafted them for his day, were the forerunners of that romantic divination of man's circumstance in, and relations with, Nature, which is at the heart of the new poetry of nature that followed.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE NORTHERN POETS—ALLAN RAMSAY—FERGUSSON—BURNS

WE go back to the beginning of the eighteenth century in order to pick up the northern threads in the first verse of Allan Ramsay. One almost needs to have spent some years in the north country to do justice to him and the effect he had on his next successors. He had humour, vigour, and some sense of the realities of poetry. He wrote from the life and to the life. His power is seen in the first sketch for his *Gentle Shepherd,* the eclogue he printed in 1720. There we have the rudeness of the old carole and the peasants' unabashed love-rhyme. It was traditional in the north, and Allan Ramsay had every chance of knowing the popular songs in country and town. His Edinburgh wig-maker's shop was as good as a London tavern for collecting humours ; his first songs and ballads were sent out in broad-sheets, and he did service in publishing an edition of *Christ's Kirk at the Green* with a canto of his own added (he wrote yet another canto for a later re-issue). Then for his book of nurture, he had Watson's anthology of *Scots Songs, Ancient and Modern,* which spurred him, like other northern rhymers, to write. In his writings he brings actual life back to the pastoral, but he wants imagination. Burns was wise in preferring Fergusson to him. The *Tea Table Miscellany* is, no more than some other eighteenth-century collections, an unmixed pleasure to the reader of to-day. Parts of it read like uninspired Burns ; but in other parts the melody, especially where it is built on an older foundation, is genuine and inspiriting. The song of Peggy in the *Gentle Shepherd* moves one like one of the old Scotch airs—

" My Peggy is a young thing,
Just enter'd in her teens,

Fair as the day, and sweet as May,
Fair as the day, and always gay.
My Peggy is a young thing,
And I'm not very auld,
Yet well I like to meet her at
The wauking of the fauld."

Elsewhere we find Ramsay content to spoil an old refrain, as in *Corn-Riggs are Bonny*, which opens—

"My Patie is a lover gay,
His mind is never muddy,[1]
His breath is sweeter than new hay,
His face is fair and ruddy.
His shape is handsome, middle size;
He's stately in his walking;
The shining of his een surprise;
'Tis heaven to hear him talking."

Allan Ramsay came early, and has the pioneer's merit. We recall that he was exactly Pope's contemporary; and then we see that northern song was taking a flight of its own, though with one eye on the distant London chimneys.

Of the Scots song-writers after Ramsay, Robert Crawford, a contributor to his *Tea-Table Miscellany* and ten years his junior, rang the changes proverbially on *Leader Haughs* and *Yarrow*, on the *Cowdenknowes* and the *Bush aboon Traquair*. His best song is *Down the Burn, Davie*, a typical medley of the real and the artificial style—

"When trees did bud, and fields were green,
And broom bloom'd fair to see;
When Mary was complete fifteen,
And love laugh'd in her eye;
Blyth Davie's blinks her heart did move
To speak her mind thus free,
Gang down the burn, Davie, love,
And I will follow thee."

William Hamilton, an Ayrshire poet, was another of the "ingenious young Gentlemen" who wrote for Ramsay in the *Miscellany*; and he, too, has his rhyme of Yarrow. A more affecting note than his is heard in *Annie Laurie*, a simple, tender-foolish song which set to its affecting tune has gone all the world over. It was written by an unlucky lover, Douglas

[1] "'His mind is never muddy' is a muddy expression indeed." —Burns.

of Fingland, whose Annie Laurie repaid him by marrying his rival. Another irresponsive she appears in Lord Binning's song of *Ungrateful Nanny*—

"To Nanny's poultry oats I gave,
I'm sure they always had the best;
Within this week her pigeons have
Eat up a peck of peas at least.
Her little pigeons kiss, but she
Will never take a kiss from me."

David Mallet has been mentioned already; his songs are conventional, like his ballad. For the very thing he lacked turn to Lady Grissel Baillie's song and refrain—

"Were na my heart light, I wad die,"

or to the song of *Tintock Tap* and the cumulative wooing.

We come now to the Scots Jacobite group, which provides a few unmistakeable scraps of melody, taken up in some instances from an older currency. Such is the song of the *Keel Row*, which Cromek said had "a Jacobitical rose growing among its love sentiments." A Tyneside variant exists of this song, in which the Sandgate takes the place of the Cannongate. Of the same genre is the song, *I hae nae kith, I hae nae kind*, which has a wildish note of Celtic symbolism at the close—

"The adder lies i' the corbie's nest,
Aneath the corbie's wame;
And the blast that reaves the corbie's brood
Shall blaw our good king hame.
Then blaw ye east, or blaw ye west,
Or blaw ye o'er the faem,
O bring the lad that I lo'e best,
And ane I darena name."

One of the most tinkered of the Jacobite songs—Burns himself added verses to several of them—was *Johnie Cope*. "No song in existence," said Cunningham, "has so many curious variations." It gets into its staves humour, adventure, and a kind of taunting bravado that is enhanced by the morning refrain—

"Hey, Johnie Cope, are ye waking yet,
Or are your drums abeating yet?
Wi' claymore sharp and music sweet
We'll make ye mirth i' the morning."

There are many writers in the generation before Burns who rather fit the description he gave of one of them—Robert Dudgeon to wit—"a poet at times." They, like the Jacobean poets in the south, had the faculty for verse which was what we may call common stock. But it was only at rare intervals that it led to any individual triumph in the art. Dudgeon's one best lyric is hardly that, though it is the real utterance of a poet at times. A rarer note is that of *Logie of Buchan*, another of the songs Burns retouched, which bears within it tokens of its multiple authorship; it has been attributed to George Halket and to Lady Anne Lindsay.

Another Scots song whose authorship has been disputed is *There's nae luck about the house*. It was claimed for Mickle, to whom Sir George Douglas assigns it: Minto gave it to Jean Adams. It was sung as a broadside in the streets and fairs before it went into any song-book, and Burns gave it his fervent word. Jean Adams was a poor schoolma'am, who died an almswoman. Possibly she had heard an old refrain, and wrote a stave or two in character; and then Mickle took it over, revised and enlarged it, and felt it to be his own. From internal evidence, one would say it was a woman's writing; and it is worth note that in Scotland, the songs nearest the folk-strain were often, like the earliest folk-song, made by the goodwife. Another Jean, nothing so respectable as a school-dame—Jean Glover—wrote a song of the moor and the heather, natural as a mountain-linnet's, which should be, with a precious wallet-full of others, kept for the open air and the open road, and not put into books. It is a mere jingle of the northern summer day, playing on heather (which becomes the refrain-note), bonnie lassie, the ewes, the moor, the Craigs o' Kyle, the sea and sky. There is nothing in it; yet the smell of the moor and the heather is there—

> "But aye the burden of the song
> Was, O'er the moor amang the heather!" [1]

[1] Burns has this note upon the song—
"'Coming through the Craigs o' Kyle,' is the composition of Jean Glover, a girl who was not only a —— but a thief, and in one or the other character had visited most of the Correction Houses

A song which changes ominously the "bonnie blue e'en" into the blue stains or marks beneath, that tell of weeping, is the *Brucket Lassie,* by James Tytler, the drunken foster-father, according to Burns, of the Britannic Enclycopedists. At least he took the two old lines, that give the motif and completed them—

> "The bonnie brucket lassie,
> She's blue beneath the e'en."

Only two of his own lines are quite worthy of the radical couplet: but they, the cry of the broken lassie, are wonderful—

> "O could I live in darkness
> Or hide me in the sea!"

For poignant feeling, cast in inevitable rhythm, turn now to *The Flowers of the Forest* by Jane Elliot of Minto (1727-1805), which Sir Walter at first took to be really old. The other version by Miss Rutherford (Mrs Cockburn) has a lovely opening, but little more. *Auld Robin Gray,* by Lady Anne Lindsay, was another song by an unsuspected author—Lady Anne was a mere girl when it was written, and long kept its origin a secret. The Rev. John Skinner's *Ewie wi' the Crookit Horn* and *Tullochgorum,* belong to the same Scots' garland. Burns again sounds the praise of both. He, to be sure, took the Ewie to be *vrai mouton,* and did not know it referred to a whisky-still that fell a victim to the followers of his own fatal profession, the Excise.

Reference has been made already to the effect of the English Jacobean lyrists upon the Scottish Tea Table Miscellanists. A Lovelace-like note was sounded even after the time of the Miscellany; it is heard very clearly in Graham of Gartmore's song—

> "If doughty deeds my lady please."

Born in the same year as Graham, an Edinburgh poet, destined to have a remarkable influence on Burns, appeared in Robert

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in the West. She was born, I believe, in Kilmarnock. I took the song down from her singing, as she was strolling through the country with a sleight-of-hand blackguard."

Fergusson. He had original power; keen imagination; a fine brain to aid his humour. But judging him, we have to remember he died, like Chatterton, before he had made sure of his genius. The test of his quality lies in his bold figurative style; and that is unmistakable. But it must be confessed he is hard reading to the southener—

> "Waesuck for him wha has nae fek o't!
> For he's a gowk they're sure to geck at,
> A chield that ne'er will be respekit
> While he draws breath,
> Till his four quarters are bedeckit
> Wi' gude Braid Claith."

One cannot read Fergusson without being reminded of Chatterton. Both of them tried to find the equation between their own idiom and the accepted style by resorting to what was an older, more uncouth dialect. So doing, they secured that atmosphere which every young poet wishes to get for his fantasay; they got it at some expense to their pages. Fergusson, it is true, did not go very far away in time for his archaic colours, but his diction is grotesque beyond anything in the Edinburgh speech of his time. No doubt such a diction may suggest to young poets a rarer melody; or a different instrument, whose notes are just enough unlike the too familiar fiddle to procure the delicate intemperance needed for lyric belief or lyric illusion.

But there can be no mistake about Fergusson's being a born maker and a free spirit in poetry, who must range Scotland or at need dip into the gutters of the Cannongate for the one word, the live idiom he needed. He shows it at every other turn of his verse. He may write only an ode for the King's birthday (and we know by the *Coronation Odes* of 1911 how perfunctory that can be), but his frolic humour is not to be tied by any string or red tape of blue riband—

> "Sing, then, how, on the fourth of June,
> Our bells screed aff a loyal tune,
> Our ancient castle shoots at noon
> Wi' flag-staff buskit,
> Frae which the soldier blades come down
> To cock their musket.

Oh willawins! Mons Meg, for you;
'Twas firing crack'd thy muckle mou;
What black mischanter gart ye spew
Baith gut and ga'?
I fear they bang'd thy belly fu'
Against the law."

This address to the Tron Kirk Bell is in the sextain (four four-foot and two two-foot stanzas) which became Burns's favourite form; one adopted from Provençal verse long before.

Burns paid generous tribute to Fergusson's genius, and well he might. Phrase after phrase that we have learnt to associate with the vocabulary of Burns was recommended by the magic of Fergusson's verse. One sees how valid was his office of poetic conveyancer, and word-and-rhyme purveyor. on taking up the *Farmer's Ingle* of the one and comparing it with the *Cottar's Saturday Night* of the other. There is more poetic life in the one, the rustic cartoon is better finished in the other. Take the two stanzas that end—

"Wi' eild our idle fancies a' return
And dim our dolefu' days wi' bairnly fear;
The mind's ay cradled when the grave is near."

There is nothing in the *Cottar* so fine. Burns had no doubt of the superiority of Fergusson to Allan Ramsay, and he was right.

Possibly it was the outcome of his championship that led to the curious public debate in verse, represented by a forgotten pamphlet: "*The Laurel Disputed, or the Merits of Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson contrasted in two poetical essays delivered in the Pantheon at Edinburgh on Thursday April 14th* 1791." The debaters were E. Picken and H. Wilson, and the first led off in approved eighteenth-century English dog-trot, and the next in rhymed Scots; and there can be no doubt which was the better pleader—

"But when I saw the freaks o' *Hallow-fair*,
Brought a' to view as plain as I'd been there,
An' heard, wi' teeth maist chatterin i' my head
Two kirk-yard Ghaists rais'd goustly frae the dead.
. . . . . .

Poor Will an' Geordy mourning for their frien',
The Farmer's ingle, an' the cracks at e'en,
My heart cry'd out, while tears war drappan fast,
O Ramsay, Ramsay, art thou beat at last."

Fergusson put his seal on Burns, taught him his accents, metres, favourite epithets; even something of his lyric idiom. But in lyric he had not the irresistible force of his disciple. He left nothing in pure singing melody, and there is no evidence of his power to write it. His real genius for verse lay elsewhere. This may seem to be giving rather much attention to a poet who died at twenty-four. But he was, with Dunbar, Henryson and Douglas, among the older Scots poets, and two successors at most among the new, one of the little masters; and his office of candle-bearer to Burns is a decisive claim.

We have watched, in the verse of Allan Ramsay, and the poems of Fergusson, the opening of the road for the coming of Burns. But if we wish to realise, beyond their effect as poetic conductors, how much the folk-life, and the north-country love of song as a part of that life, did to beget in him the lyric spirit, we must turn to the opening pages of his autobiography. There we discover that the spring of his genius lay very near the providence of the original folk-singers, figured in an old dame of the very type of the first song-maker. In his childish and boyish days he owed (he relates) much to an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. "She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry." She taught him the country currency; old rhymes based upon still older ones, such as Chambers collected afterwards;—a lark song for instance—

"*Lariki, Lariki, li!*
Wha'll gang up to Heaven wi' me?
No the lass that lies in her bed,
No the doolfu' lad that dreeps his head";

or a " bourtree " rhyme—

" Bourtree, bourtree, crooked rung
Never straight and never strong :
Ever a bush and never a tree,
Since our Lord was nailed to ye " ;

or a bone-setting spell handed on from early tradition—

" The Lord rade,
And the foal slade ;
He lighted,
And it righted :
Joint, to joint,
Bone to bone,
Sinew to sinew,
Heal now, in the Holy name ! "

These are the unconscious reminders, heard at the hearth, or by the cradle, that give a poet lyric sustenance.

Then for the less fortunate literary influence of his century he continues : " The earliest composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was *The Vision of Mirza,* and a hymn of Addison's beginning ' How are thy servants blest, O Lord ! ' I particularly remember one-half stanza which was music to my boyish ear—

' For though in dreadful whirls we hung
High on the broken wave—— '

I met with these pieces in *Mason's English Collection,* one of my school books. The first two books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read since, were *The Life of Hannibal* and *The History of Sir William Wallace.* Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn, that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier ; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest."

A page later we find Burns touching on the hardships of his youth in terms the more convincing because they are so simply told. They again had much to do with the reality of his verse where it touches on our common mortal and human predicament. The struggle with unkind earth, and unkinder men—

that struggle which Millet has so powerfully shown us in his picture of Barbizon peasant-life—was too much. Burns's words sadden as he writes of it—

"My father's generous master died; the farm proved a ruinous bargain; and to clench the misfortune, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my tale of *Twa Dogs*. My father was advanced in life when he married; I was the eldest of seven children, and he, worn out by early hardships, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more, and to weather these two years we retrenched our expenses. We lived very poorly; I was a dexterous ploughman for my age; and the next eldest for me was a brother (Gilbert), who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thresh the corn. A novel-writer might, perhaps, have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I; my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel factor's insolent threatening letters, which used to set us all in tears.

"This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley slave, brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn, my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language, but you know the Scottish idiom; she was a 'bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass.' In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell; you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, etc.; but I never expressly said I loved her. Indeed, I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones

of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan, when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sang sweetly; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sang a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for, excepting that he could smear sheep, and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself. Thus with me began love and poetry; which at times have been my only, and till within the last twelve months, have been my highest enjoyment. My father struggled on till he reached the freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm, about ten miles farther in the country."

This farm was Lochlea, where Burns lived from his eighteenth to his twenty-fifth year—memorable years in any man's history; and years which showed him clearly where his strength and where his weakness lay. But while Burns was passionately spending his heat of youth there, his father was in decay, fighting stubbornly to the end.

"In my seventeenth year, to give my manners a brush, I went to a country dancing-school, although father forbade. My going was, what to this moment I repent, in opposition to his wishes. My father, as I said before, was subject to strong passions; from that instance of disobedience in me, he took a sort of dislike to me, which, I believe, was one cause of the dissipation which marked my succeeding years."

The dancing-school was, as it were, the symbol of all that side of life—the gaiety, the music, the romance, which not all the grey winters and bleak uplands of Ayrshire could drive out of Burns's lyric fancy. Once love had entered, by the harvest-field, and the dancing-school, the rest was matter of

course. His account of the rural cult of which he became the lyric exponent cannot be omitted—

"My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other: and, as in every other warfare in this world, my fortune was various; sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse. At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook, I feared no competitor, and thus I set absolute want at defiance; and as I never cared farther for my labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evenings in the way after my own heart. A country lad seldom carries on a love adventure without an assisting confidant. I possessed a curiosity, zeal, and intrepid dexterity that recommended me as a proper second on these occasions; and I dare say, I felt as much pleasure in being in the secret of half the loves to the parish of Tarbolton, as ever did statesman in knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe. The very goose-feather in my hand seems to know instinctively the well-worn path of my imagination, the favourite theme of my song."

A summer—his nineteenth—spent at Kirkoswald, then a notorious district for smugglers, threw down other boundaries. The smugglers were great roysterers, and gave Burns fatal lessons in the one art which is easier than love-making. So, little by little, his pastoral innocence went, and experience came.

A later stay in Irvine, another town of smugglers' fame, procured Burns a mentor, "a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune. His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself where a woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had regarded with horror. Here his friendship did me a mischief, and the consequence was, that soon after I resumed the plough, I wrote the *Poet's Welcome.* Rhyme, except some religious pieces that are in print, I had given up;

but meeting with Fergusson's Scottish Poems, I strung anew my wildly-sounding lyre with emulating vigour."

Fergusson's *Poems* was distinctly, as we have learnt, one of the half-dozen books or more, which went to the making of Burns. The others, so far as they may be selected from the account he and his friends and family give of his reading during the years that most count to a man of letters and a poet, were —the Bible, an old collection of English songs in two volumes entitled *The Lark*, Allan Ramsay, *Tristram Shandy*, and Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*. Perhaps we ought to add the *Spectator*, and a collection of eighteenth-century letter-writers, upon which Burns formed, not altogether happily, it must be allowed, his epistolary style. Of all these books, the collection of songs referred to—*The Lark*, which it is extremely interesting to ransack now with an eye to Burns and his lyric note—did most for him at this susceptible stage, on his own account. This book of songs was "my *vade mecum*," he says; "I pored over them driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic craft, such as it is."

With so much of literary colouring, and with what we know of the years before he had attained, to be gathered in his *Life and Letters*, we may be content to leave his portrait. We gather up for convenience in a handful the chief remaining facts of his life. After his father's death, he moved to Mossgiel in 1784; and in the spring of that year came to know Jean Armour. In August 1786, he published his poems; and projected an escape from his overtaking ill-fortunes to Jamaica. That winter saw him, instead of an exile and outlaw, the lion of Edinburgh. In 1787, he published at Edinburgh the second edition of his Poems; in 1788, married Jean Armour, and moved to Ellisland—a ruinous undertaking; in 1790, turned gauger; and in 1791, left the country for Dumfries, where his story draws painfully on to its bitter end, amid their small streets, small talk, and the roystering of a small town. His poems may tell the rest. In them is to be read clearly the

chronicle of all that went to make up the lyric life of Robert Burns.

Of the many judgments passed upon Burns, one is inclined to quarrel with three—those of Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and a critic who if of much less weight than they, was yet a man of culture and sensibility, whose verdict has had its effect, Principal Shairp. Carlyle upon Burns is Scot upon Scot, and Dumfriesshire critic upon Ayrshire poet; and, moreover, one man of imagination writing upon another, and his alone need be treated in any detail. But Carlyle was a stern preacher; the Calvinist paste was in him; and not all his culture, not all his dramatic imagination could save him, when he fell into the vein admonitory. In this vein he turns, towards the end of his Burns essay, which is really, for the main part, a very powerful thesis; and after saying "Poetry was the celestial element of his being," which is very true, he continues: "Lifted into that serene ether, whither he had wings given him to mount, he would have needed no other elevation: poverty, neglect, and all evil, save the desecration of himself and his Art, were a small matter to him; the pride and the passions of the world lay far beneath his feet." But where should we find the dynamic impulse that is behind Burns' songs, but in that very pride and passion which, being a poet, he felt ten times more keenly than other men? Hear what his brother Gilbert said,—"the agitations of his mind and body exceeded anything of the kind I ever knew in real life." He had more love, pride, jealousy, passion and bitter despair than ten ordinary men. Take away this fine excess, and you might take away the energy that placed him so high; one of the most elemental and irresistible of his lyric kind.

It is still to Carlyle, however, we must turn for the plaudit to Burns. "A virtue," says Carlyle, "a virtue as of green fields and mountain breezes, dwells in his poetry; it is redolent of natural life and hardy natural men. There is a decisive strength in him, and yet a sweet native gracefulness; he is tender, he is vehement, yet without constraint or too visible effort; he melts the heart, or inflames it, with a power which

seems habitual and familiar to him. We see that in this man there was the gentleness, the trembling pity of a woman, with the deep earnestness, the force and passionate ardour of a hero. Tears lie in him, and consuming fire; as lightning lurks in the drops of the summer cloud. He has a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling, the high, and the low, the sad, the ludicrous, the joyful, are welcome in their turns to his 'lightly-moved and all-conceiving spirit.'"

We should add he was fortunate, poetically, in having the common speech and the every-day rhythm and idiom thoroughly at one with him in his song-writing. He was the last poet of the northern stock in whom the old spirit of folk-song moved powerfully and congenially as part of his mother-impulse; and with him closes or pauses the age-long folk tradition so far as the northern current of lyric poetry can now be estimated.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE REVOLUTION—" LYRICAL BALLADS "—THE NEW POETRY—SOUTHEY AND LANDOR

TURNING south after the death of Burns, we have nothing to equal his lyric energy in the poets born there during his lifetime, though both Coleridge and Wordsworth had intellectual powers and an imaginative horizon far transcending his. With him the art of the song, the song written to and induced by music, and related to the old forms of sung-verse, almost came to an end. The " philosophic mind " and the demands of a poetry that should be related to the insensory self, drove away the lyric of passion and the vocal idea, and set in its place something subjective and meditative. You may compare two things, which tell the change and tell it at a glance, by looking up Burns's *Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet*, and then to Wordsworth's lines on Chatterton and on Burns himself in the *Leech-gatherer*—

" Of a' the thoughtless sons o' man,
Commen' me to the Bardie clan ;
Except it be some idle plan
O' rhymin' clink,
The devil-ha'et, that I sud ban
They ever think

Nae thought, nae view, nae scheme o' livin',
Nae cares to gie us joy or grievin' ;
But just the pouchie put the nieve in,
An' while ought's there,
Then, hiltie, skiltie, we gae scrievin',
An' fash nae mair.

Leeze me on rhyme ! its aye a treasure,
My chief, amaist, my only pleasure,
At hame, a-fiel', at wark, or leisure,
The Muse, poor hizzie !
Tho' rough an' raploch be her measure,
She's seldom lazy."

Wordsworth's lines need to be read in direct context—

> " I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
> The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride ;
> Of Him who walked in glory and in joy
> Following his plough, along the mountain-side :
> By our own spirits are we deified :
> We Poets in our youth begin in gladness :
> But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness."

Hazlitt who had shown an early enthusiasm for Wordsworth, but was instinctively and by natural bent much nearer Burns, has in one of his lectures drawn a measure between the two. " Nothing," he says, " can be more different or hostile than the spirit of their poetry." Burns's, he describes as " a very highly sublimated essence of animal existence." As for Wordsworth, he is a recluse philosopher, and in his poetry there is " a total disunion and divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body ; the banns are forbid." Elsewhere, Hazlitt's praise is, allowing for his temperament, generous if by no means unmeasured or overstated. With Wordsworth, we may think the converting of the lyrical to the sublyrical, the verse of sung-melody and pure vocal rhythm to that of reflective and meditative expression, was complete. It remained, however, for two poets of more vigorous melic impulse than his—Shelley and Swinburne—to give new effects, new rhythms, new cadences struck out of the rapture and sympathy of the soul in and with nature, to English poetry, which should compensate it for the loss of the old singing verse.

To understand Wordsworth's feeling for his art, and the theory he laid down in regard to it, we must turn to his own account of the influences that went before him and the new deliverance he sought. It is stated duly and philosophically in the much debated Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). There he puts his own case with an argument for the natural idiom in poetry which might be based on the actual verse-practice of Burns—

> " The Reader," he says, " will find that personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes ; and, I hope, are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose. I have proposed to myself to

> intimate, and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men; and assuredly such personifications do not make any natural or regular part of that language. They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such; but I have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a mechanical device of style, or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription. I have wished to keep my Reader in the company of flesh and blood, persuaded that by so doing I shall interest him. . . . There will also be found in these pieces little of what is usually called poetic diction; I have taken as much pains to avoid it as others ordinarily take to produce it; this I have done for the reason already alleged, to bring my language near to the language of men, and further, because the pleasure which I have proposed to myself to impart, is of a kind very different from that which is supposed by many persons to be the proper object of poetry. I do not know how, without being culpably particular, I can give my Reader a more exact notion of the style in which I wished these poems to be written, than by informing him that I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject, consequently, I hope that there is in these Poems little falsehood of description, and that my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. Something I must have gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense; but it has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets. I have also thought it expedient to restrict myself still further, having abstained from the use of many expressions, in themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad Poets, till such feelings of disgust are connected with them as it is scarcely possible by any art of association to overpower."

His principal object, he says again, was

> "to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way."

He ran this theory of his to extremes, so that even Coleridge was driven to protest; but one does not judge a poet by his theories; and Wordsworth's were not the sole guide of his inspiration; he often deceived himself into thinking he had used them, when he had simply been following his genius. And when he really let himself go, as in the best of the *Lyrical*

*Ballads*, and was a poet first and a theorist afterwards, the spirit and the effect of his poems are all that Coleridge could have claimed for them, or he himself desired.

The *Lyrical Ballads* were chiefly written, not in the north country but amid the Quantock hills, at Alfoxden. Since his day the house has been altered and enlarged; but a more delightful retreat it would be hard to find; with its shy road deer-park, and the Quantocks shadowing it to the south and south-west.

Hazlitt's account of his visit there in the days of the Wordsworths' residence, when the *Lyrical Ballads* were still in MS., may be coloured a little highly; but it has all Hazlitt's spirit, and is extremely vivid: "Wordsworth himself was from home," he writes, "but his sister kept house, and set before us a frugal repast; and we had free access to her brother's poems, the *Lyrical Ballads*, which were still in manuscript." His description of the reading of Coleridge and Wordsworth helps one to realise what kind of accompaniment they had to offer, in place of the old musical one, in their *Lyrical Ballads*—

> ". . . We went over to Alfoxden again the day following, and Wordsworth read us the story of 'Peter Bell' in the open air; and the comment upon it by his face and voice was very different from that of some later critics! Whatever might be thought of the poem, 'his face was as a book where men might read strange matters,'" and he announced the fate of his hero in prophetic tones. There is a *chant* in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth, which acts as a spell upon the hearer and disarms the judgment. Perhaps they have deceived themselves by making habitual use of this ambiguous accompaniment. Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained, and internal. The one might be termed more *dramatic*, the other more *lyrical*."

On leaving Alfoxden, Wordsworth and his sister spent a winter in Germany, at Goslar, where some of his finest lyrics were written, notably the Lucy series. At Goslar, too, he planned, and just began *The Prelude*, leaving then the Hartz forest for England, and in 1799 he settled in the Grasmere cottage. Dorothy Wordsworth's journals make the natural commentary upon the Grassmere poems. One Thursday in

April (the 15th) 1802 has this passage referring to *The Daffodils*, which is itself of the nature of lyric poetry in solution—

> "It was a threatening misty morning, but mild. . . . When we were in the woods close to Gowbarrow Park we saw a few daffodils close to the water side. We fancied that the sea had floated the seeds ashore, and that the little colony had so sprung up. But as we went along there were more, and yet more; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about and above them; some rested their heads upon these stones, as on a pillow, for weariness; and the rest tossed and reeled and danced, and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind, that blew upon them over the lake; they looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing. This wind blew directly over the lake to them. There was here and there a little knot, and a few stragglers higher up; but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity, unity and life of that one busy highway."

In the last chapter of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge states the six excellences of Wordsworth's poetry at length, and with liberal examples; and it may be well to summarise them briefly—

THE SIX EXCELLENCES.

*The First:* "An austere purity of language,—in short, a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning."

*The Second:* "A correspondent weight and sanity of the thoughts and sentiments; won not from books, but from the poet's own meditative observation. They are fresh, and have the dew upon them."

*The Third:* "The sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs: the frequent *curiosa felicitas* of his diction."

*The Fourth:* "The perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions, as taken immediately from nature, and proving a long and genial intimacy with the very spirit which gives the physiognomic expression to all the works of nature."

*The Fifth:* "A meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility."

*The Sixth:* "I challenge for this poet the gift of Imagination, in the highest and strictest sense of the word. In the play of fancy, Wordsworth, to my feelings, is not always graceful, and sometimes recondite. . . . But in imaginative power, he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own."

In regarding Wordsworth as a lyric poet, we do well to remember what his own stipulation was as regards the lyrical effect of his poems; in much the greater part of which, he told us, he required "nothing more than an animated or impassioned recitation, adapted to the subject." And this is certainly all that could be appropriately used for nine-tenths of his poetry, even of that smaller part of it which can be proffered as lyrical.

Wordsworth, in fact, is almost the extreme instance at one end of the lyric line, as Campion at the other. Campion was a musician, writing songs for music; he is the purest instance of the lyric poet we could possibly have; he used the lyric form pure and simple. Wordsworth, on the other hand, who could hardly distinguish one tune from another, wrote poetry at a second remove from music. He truly knew the music of the mind; the mere tonic music of the ear, as a thing apart from poetry, he did not know, and his own lyrics often touch the extreme limits of their art.

It is the more remarkable then, that having perforce to discount music as an actual present lyric accompaniment, he chose further to discount so many of those traditional expedients of rhetoric and of what he called "poetic diction," which poets had used before him. It is remarkable, too, that writing as he did, he should, as much as any simplest lyric poet, have gained his effects by plain vowelled words and combinations of words, instead of by consonantal alliterative sounds; for one of the first conditions of song writing, as we know, is to make the vowel dominant.

This is to wander into the technical side of things—the last that Wordsworth would have us dwell upon in reading him. Whether he is treated purely as a lyric poet or not, one comes back at last to what was said of him by Coleridge—that he had a noble message, and a rare instrument for its expression.

In accounting for his use of it, Wordsworth cited Gray, it may be remembered, who had made the discovery that poetry was a language in itself. Wordsworth broke with the usage to which Gray and his period were inevitably committed; but there was more in the break than a change of taste or the

process of disseizin that so often affects the poets of one era or one tenure with regard to those of another. It was part of the greater Revolution that was upsetting the old order in society and politics in France. The question of a change of idiom is involved in the break with custom. The eighteenth-century idiom is an urban, polite, and to use a favourite word of that day, elegant one, evoked by the habit of an urban class—a people that liked nature tamed and trimmed as the background to Strawberry Hill or Ranelagh. Take a poem of his most uncompromising fidelity to subject, and you see how deep Wordsworth's naturalism and insight went—

" The valley rings with mirth and joy ;
Among the hills the echoes play
A never, never-ending song,
To welcome in the May.
The Magpie chatters with delight ;
The mountain Raven's youngling brood
Have left the Mother and the Nest ;
And they go rambling east and west
In search of their own food ;
Or through the glittering Vapours dart
In very wantonness of heart.

Beneath a rock, upon the grass,
Two Boys are sitting in the sun ;
Boys that have had no work to do,
Or work that now is done.
On pipes of sycamore they play
The fragments of a Christmas Hymn ;
Or with that plant which in our dale
We call Stag-horn, or Fox's Tail,
Their rusty Hats they trim :
And thus, as happy as the Day,
Those Shepherds wear the time away."

But the lyric impulse decaying, as it did, early with him, he was bound to fall back upon reflective literary modes, which have their convenient brief form in the sonnet. The sonnet may be a literary song in a conventional quatorzain mould, or only a repeated pattern. There was Wordsworth's snare ; and he has bundles of sonnets that are doomed to be forgotten by all but Wordsworthians and students of literature. His share in giving to poetry a new impulse and a control of

that transcendent imagination of nature which was to urge Shelley to his chief theme and affect the thought, consciously or unconsciously, of the nineteenth century, is beyond question. We have seen how Coleridge identified himself with the battle for the new poetry. In temperament there was wide variance between him and Wordsworth; they were different as Devonshire is from Cumberland. The stream runs warm, like that in a southern coomb, in the one; in the other, it flows cold as mountain water. However, there was a subterranean adit between the two, and Coleridge understood Wordsworth, without being led away by his extremes of theory. When we examine Coleridge's lyric verse, in view of his prosody and the solvent that he in his turn applied to the texture of English verse, we cannot but be reminded again of the approximation of verse to prose rhythm. But Coleridge's reform arose from the need felt by a poet of genius with an ear of supernatural fineness to take his own way, and then, being of philosophic habit, to theorise his departure from rule, and make a formula to account for it.

Coleridge began most unpromisingly with artificial reflections of the eighteenth century mode, only relieved here and there by a glimpse of poetic reality caught from the mild sincerity of Bowles's sonnets. A verse or a couplet alone serves to break the heavy mould—

> "He struggled to escape awhile
> And stamped his faery feet";

or,

> "The tall tree's shadow sleeps upon his breast";

or,

> "On leaves of aspen trees
> We tremble to the breeze."

But such marks of the grace to come are lost in the modish context. Even Ossian only confirms his bad boyish habit which resisted up to the time of his meeting Wordsworth, who did him the invaluable service of dilating to him on the natural as opposed to the literary idiom in verse. The artificial paste still stiffens his *Monody on the Death of Chatterton*, passion-

ately felt as that was ; nor is there any figurative life, or strength of epithet to relieve it : " Smiling Peace," " Grinning Scorn," " the gloomy hour," and " the convulsive throe " are all there. And yet he had this in hand, off and on, for six years from 1790 to 1796. There is better work in the sonnets and a clearer note of expression. The *Autumnal Moon* has signs of the approach to Coleridge's magical style, and others appear, although uncertainly enough, in the Brockley Coomb lines (of May 1795). These are both in advance on the *Religious Musings,* which are lyrical at intervals, but barely catch a note of the divine rapture they wish to convey or the poetic individuality of their writer. The exception lies in four lovely verses that describe how

> " The massy gates of Paradise are thrown
> Wide open, and forth come in fragments wild
> Sweet echoes of unearthly melodies
> And odours snatched from beds of amaranth."

To turn from the unfired clay of most of these verse exercises to the *Ancient Mariner* is to step from a schoolroom into the magic castle with windows looking upon that Sea of Severn which lent the poem aquatints and mysteries. In the fifteenth chapter of his *Biographia* Coleridge throws some light on the choice of the ballad-mode, diction and subject of his poem in discussing Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece.* He speaks of the delight in richness and sweetness of sound even to excess, and the perfect adaptation of the verse to the theme, as marks of grace. " A second promise of genius," he adds, " is the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself." The latter will seem a doubtful condition to most of us, but it serves to explain what was in fact one of the symptomatic traits in Coleridge. His desire to escape from himself into other states of thought than his own and to transcend the common bounds of life was indeed of a part with his romanticism and his intellectual irresolution. On the next page occurs another passage worth note. " Images," he says, " however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet.

They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; . . . or when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit,

'Which shoots its being through earth, sea, and air.'"

He returns again and again to this test of consistent imagery —that "moulds and colours itself to the circumstances, passion, or character" that are present in the mind of him who poetises them.

We need not dispute the right of the *Ancient Mariner* to be called lyrical, since Coleridge himself made it his signal contribution to *Lyrical Ballads*; since also the lyric interspersion in a narrative poem has been admitted. But it may be claimed that the musical delight, aided by the wild and surprising and lovely imagery of this ballad, is quite enough to carry it over the line. Two or three instances may serve for reminder of the singing element in the verse—

"The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the light-house top."

Again—

"Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mixed, now one by one.

Sometimes, a-dropping from the sky,
I heard the sky-lark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air,
With their sweet jargoning!

And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song,
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune."

The *Ancient Mariner* depends, and openly depends, on the lyric acceleration of its narrative pace, and in this, it is the true legatee of the old ballads. It came of a tendency that was inwrought in Coleridge. He could not translate a play of Schiller without enriching the verse with a piece of himself, or a strain of personal melody. Thus in *Wallenstein* he enlarges when the moment occurs. Fable, he says, paraphrasing, dwells with fays, talismans and spirits—

> ". . . And delightfully believes
> Divinities, being himself divine.
> The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
> The fair humanities of old religion,
> The power, the beauty, and the majesty,
> That had their haunts in dale, or piny mountain,
> Or forest, by slow stream, or pebbly spring,
> Or chasms and watery depths; all these have vanished,
> They live no longer in the faith of reason!
> But still the heart doth need a language; still
> Doth the old instinct bring back the old names;
> And to yon starry world they now are gone,
> Spirits or gods, that used to share this earth
> With man as with their friend; and to the lover,
> Yonder they move, from yonder visible sky
> Shoot influence down; and even at this day
> 'Tis Jupiter who brings whate'er is great,
> And Venus who brings everything that's fair."

When he writes autobiographical blank verse—*Fears in Solitude*, for example—he uses repetitives and internal melody to dilate the line, as in the closing passage which begins—

> " But now in gentle dew-fall sends abroad
> The fruit-like perfume of the golden furze";

a passage which would set richly to music. In the first part of *Christabel* he achieved the miracle of making a tale sing and a song tell a tale by a use of verse which, while he did not absolutely invent it, he stamped with his own individual seal and conferred, so doing, a new gift on his contemporaries and on poetry for good. There are lines and cadences in *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan* of a music that is beyond words and behind the metrical web.

> "Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise"

These accents have become part of that " language of poetry " which is compounded and enriched century by century, though not entirely as Gray conceived it; which learnt words alike from Gray and from Wordsworth and Coleridge who succeeded him.

We think of Southey as everything that was conservative in poetry, and to associate him with Landor may seem almost an impiety. But Southey commenced poet, like all the greater men of that time, as a revolutionary; and he was, and he regarded himself as, a bold innovator, who was if anything before his time and must look to posterity to understand him and recognise his true genius. Unluckily he did not see that poetry, however largely designed and well invented, is in vain if written with the literary and not the imaginative fantasy. Except indeed for a few moments in his youth, he never gave his imagination a fair chance. Here, with only the shorter poems to balance the account, we are saved the expense of resurveying the extents of *Thalaba, Kéhama* and *Madoc*. But we have in the first the one beautiful thing in lyric that Southey achieved, written like the rest of the poem in irregular unrhymed verse—

" How beautiful is night!
A dewy freshness fills the silent air;
No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,
Breaks the serene of heaven:
In full-orbed glory, yonder moon divine
Rolls through the dark-blue depths.
Beneath her steady ray
The desert-circle spreads,
Like the round ocean, girdled with the sky.
How beautiful is night!"

As for his ballads, they are of their schoolroom kind, excellent and quite admirable as narrative art. The lyric colour in them counts for less in the estimate, but those who were reared in mid-Victorian diet will allow that *Mary, the Maid of the Inn* must have life, to survive all the blackboard-or-ruler associations. The *Battle of Blenheim* strikes a more classic note, and has the salt of humour in it; *The Holly Tree* is as good as Victorian didactic lyric can ever be; and *Gooseberry Pie* came near to something fine, but did not quite attain it.

Among the anthologies we ought to reckon the two volumes which Southey edited, and published—the earlier of them in the same year that gave us the *Lyrical Ballads*. They might profitably be studied by those who care to watch the change of fashion in poetry.

Among the contributors Southey was chief, with Coleridge and Charles Lamb, and others like Robert Lovell, who are mere names to us. But Lovell wrote a sonnet on the French Revolution that is interesting, since it is couched in the old dialect, while it apprehends the force of the new idea. It speaks of "the portentous storm" about to burst; and Fair Nature, Indignation high, "Fear with fierce precipitation," blind ruin, and Freedom's sunbeams are among the lyric properties. The *British Anthology* is in its way a signpost at the turning of the centuries; and another volume of 1799, Monk Lewis's *Tales of Terror*, led the way to his *Tales of Wonder* two years later, which ought to be set up at the cross-roads too. Its effect can be gathered from the fact that it was like *Ossian*, read and pirated abroad, and that Southey wrote for it, and Sir Water Scott himself was helped by it on his way to ballad-romancing. Scott said of Lewis (who was of tiny stature and childish over-sensibility)—

> "He was a child, and a spoiled child, but a child of high imagination; and so he wasted himself on ghost-stories and German romances. He had the finest ear for rhythm I ever met with—finer than Byron's";

which is not perhaps saying very much. Two staves of *Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogine* are enough to keep clear the succession of style and no style—

> "Then first with amazement Fair Imogine found
> A stranger was placed by her side:
> His air was terrific; he uttered no sound—
> He spake not, he moved not, he looked not around—
> But earnestly gazed on the bride.
>
> His visor was closed, and gigantic his height,
> His armour was sable to view;
> All pleasure and laughter were hushed at his sight;
> The dogs, as they eyed him, drew back in affright;
> The lights in the chamber burned blue!"

But we must return to Southey's friend, Landor, before we enter upon the northern domain of Sir Walter Scott. In the *Imaginary Conversations*, Southey and Landor are twice introduced, talking on their one inexhaustible theme; in this case it is on Milton's and Shakespeare's sonnets. Milton and Pindar, it may be recalled, were two of Landor's chosen masters, and this tribute helps us to understand what he meant by classical.

"The great poet," he says, "is sometimes recumbent, but never languid, often unadorned—I wish I could honestly say not often inelegant. But what noble odes (for such we must consider them) are the eighth, the fifteenth, the sixteenth, the seventeenth, and above all the eighteenth. There is a mild and serene sublimity in the nineteenth. In the twentieth there is the festivity of Horace, with a due observance of his precept, applicable metaphorically—

"Simplici myrto nihil adlabores."

This is among the few English poems which are quite classical, according to our notions, as the Greeks and Romans have impressed them. It is pleasing to find Milton, in his later days, thus disposed to cheerfulness and conviviality. There are climates of the earth, it is said, in which a warm season intervenes between autumn and winter. Such a season came to reanimate not the earth itself, but what was highest upon it.

"A few of Milton's sonnets are extremely bad; the rest are excellent. Among all Shakespeare's not a single one is very admirable, and a few sink very low. They are hot and pothery; there is much condensation, little delicacy—like raspberry jam without cream, without crust, without bread, to break its viscidity. But I would rather sit down to one of them again than to a string of such musty sausages as are exposed in our streets at the present dull season. Let us be reverent, but only where reverence is due, even in Milton and in Shakespeare."

This does, for Landor, less than justice to Shakespeare's sonnets, especially seeing that he was among the Shakespeare idolaters, and once said that one of his limbs would make

Milton, and one of Milton's all the poets who had appeared after them. However, this did not blind him to the men to whom he stands nearest in time, to Wordsworth especially, to Shelley, Keats and lesser poets. He is their contemporary, and yet he moves free of time, relating English lyric to Pindar and Horace, and subjecting poetry to the bright antiquity that shines in his *Hellenics*. Thus, in the literary succession, as one born in the eighteenth century and destined to have a unique, artistic and almost esoteric effect on the nineteenth, he has an important although not a central place. He has this curious interest, moreover, that he follows the classicism of the century into which he was born with a freer and more direct classicism of his own, which neglects the letter and the terminology, and gets at the spirit instead. So doing, he cures like with like, and in his choicest verse, lyric and epigrammatic, achieves as much for the true dialect of poetry as did the other revolutionaries. As one takes up his poems, it is to hear a high-bred voice, touched with something very like British arrogance and markedly individual, but charged with an unmistakeable accent of the South. The poetry of the South is in *Thrasymene and Eunoë* which is, in effect, the invocation to his *Hellenics*. "Who will to Athens," he cries—who

> "Loves choral songs and maidens crown'd with flowers,
> Unenvious? mount the pinnace; hoist the sail.
> I promise ye, as many as are here,
> Ye shall not, while ye tarry with me, taste
> From unrinsed barrel the diluted wine
> Of a low vineyard or a plant ill-pruned,
> But such as anciently the Ægean isles
> Pour'd in libation at their solemn feasts,
> And the same goblets shall ye grasp, embost
> With no vile figures of loose languid boors,
> But such as gods have lived with, and have led."

No English poet has caught the aroma of that godlike wine as he did. Doing so, he added another to the many graces and qualities that English, the most receptive and emendatory of tongues, and English poetry, the most individual and imitative of all the poetries, have learnt from Athens and from Rome. Unluckily he had more than his share of the impatience of the

lyric temperament, and very often he tired of his verse and finished in haste lines that seemed destined for perfection. In others, like *Rose Aylmer*, he achieved the consummate lvric with the very simplicity of inspiration—

" 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."

And in the *Hellenics* he attains in blank verse once or twice, no more, the same grace—Greek loveliness untouched by age, exquisitely translated to English music as in *The Death of Artemidora*—

" Artemidora ! Gods invisible,
While thou are lying faint along the couch,
None tied the sandal to thy slender feet
And stand beside thee ready to convey
Thy weary steps where other rivers flow
Refreshing shades will waft thy weariness
Away, and voices like thy own come near
And nearer, and solicit an embrace.

Artemidora sigh'd, and would have prest
The hand now pressing hers, but was too weak.
Iris stood over her dark hair unseen
While thus Elpenor spake. He lookt into
Eyes that had given light and life erewhile
To those above them, but now dim with tears
And wakefulness. Again he spake of joy
Eternal. At that word, that sad word, *joy*,
Faithful and fond her bosom heav'd once more :
Her head fell back : and now a loud deep sob
Swell'd thro' the darken'd chamber ; 'twas
Not hers."

A few, a very few, pages will probably contain all that time will thresh out of Landor's verse, for seed in the coming generations. In this residue, let us hope, will be found the lines he wrote to Mary Lamb on the death of her brother, which open :—

" Comfort thee, O thou mourner, yet while !
Again shall Elia's smile
Refresh thy heart, where heart can ache no more.
What is it we deplore ?

Elia himself learnt something of his art of richly allusive prose—who can doubt it, from his practice of verse. He has left three lyric poems that are part of our emotional vocabulary. *To Hester, To a Babe dying as soon as born,* and the unrhymed song with refrain, *The Old Familiar Faces,* in which the Elian idiom is heard with almost startling intimate clearness—

> " I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
> Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom-cronies ;
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.
>
> I loved a love once, fairest among women ;
> Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her ;
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

It is but a step from this to one of the lyrical passages in the essays, as in the elegy or memory of Alice W——n—

> " While I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech ; ' We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father. We are nothing ; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages, before we have existence, and a name.' "

Lamb's opposite in temperament, Thomas Campbell, was one of those writers who are strictly conditioned by the taste of their day. He, too, was moved by the revolutionary fervour, and he has written a handful of heroic ballads, with a strong valiant rhetorical note in them, which are almost the model of what schoolboy poetry ought to be. His power of dramatic and imaginative suggestion, as it is seen in the dozen or so of his best battle stanzas, is allied to a sort of trumpet tone, in which he excells every other British balladist. But he puts buckram into steel armour on occasion without scruple. Try the famous third stave of the *Battle of the Baltic.* Laura Matilda might have written the first four lines at a Cowes Regatta ; only Campbell could have written the last five—

" ' Hearts of oak ! ' our captains cried ; when each gun
From its adamantine lips
Spread a death-shade round the ships,
Like the hurricane eclipse
Of the sun."

And the stanza before is magnificent—

" Like leviathans afloat,
Lay their bulwarks on the brine ;
While the sign of battle flew
On the lofty British line :
It was ten of April morn by the chime :
As they drifted on their path,
There was silence deep as death ;
And the boldest held his breath,
For a time."

Campbell was the poetic leader of a troop of versemen of some energy, who used rhetoric freely, and wrote moral and exemplary songs without any pull on the creative faculty. There is no need to name them individually, since they had no permanent effect. The didactic lyric was written with small force and a certain sincerity by another writer who connected the centuries, Robert Montgomery, whom Macaulay slaughtered in the *Edinburgh Review*, and who was for a time the most popular verseman of his day, a day that might have read, and did not read Shelley or Keats. One should read Montgomery before taking up Mrs Hemans, who used on occasion to be ranked with him, usually as his inferior. She had, although she followed at times the same fashion which used a poetic diction much feebler than Gray's, a genuine lyric note and genuine lyric feeling—

" I have passed o'er the hills of the stormy North,
And the larch has hung all his tassels forth,
The fisher is out on the sunny sea,
And the reindeer bounds through the pasture free,
And the pine has a fringe of softer green,
And the moss looks bright where my step has been."

Children will not let Mrs Hemans die, and they can confer an immortality that survives a thousand critics.

It is harder to find any reprieve for John Wilson—

"Christopher North" — Tennyson's "Crusty Christopher," unless it be rested on his one fine sonnet, *The Evening Cloud.* And "Barry Cornwall" lives at most now in a song, a stanza, a line, or by association with other poets like Landor and Browning.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE IMPROVISATORS—SCOTT AND BYRON—TOM MOORE

NORTH of the Tweed, the new poetry found a mighty romanticist in Walter Scott, who began his verse-writing with ballads sped by Percy's *Reliques* and Monk Lewis's *Tales of Wonder*, and nourished with Scottish lore like that of old *Satchells* (described in the second chapter of Lockhart's *Life*). The author of the *True History* in question describes himself on the title-page as Captain Walter Scott, "an old Souldier and no Scholler"—

> "And one that can write nane
> But just the Letters of his Name."

Lockhart says that a copy of this *True History* was in all likelihood about the first book of verses that fell into the poet's hand. How continually its wild and uncouth doggerel was on his lips to his latest day, all his familiars can testify; and the passages which he quoted with the greatest zest were those commemorative of two ancient worthies, both of whom had had to contend against physical misfortune similar to his own. The former of these, according to Satchells, was the immediate founder of the branch originally designed of Sinton, afterwards of Harden—

> "It is four hundred winters past in order
> Since that Buccleuch was Warden in the Border;
> A son he had at that same tide,
> Which was so lame could neither run nor ride.
> John, this lame son, if my author speaks true,
> He sent him to St Mungo's in Glasgu,
> Where he remained a scholar's time,
> Then married a wife according to his mind.
> And betwixt them twa was procreat
> Headshaw, Askirk, SINTON, and Glack."

Ossian, Spenser—"Spenser I could read for ever," and Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*—"through the flat medium of Hoole's translation," are mentioned by Scott in his *Autobiography* among the earlier books that counted to him for grace. "But above all," he says, "I then first became acquainted with Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*. I remember well the spot where I read these volumes for the first time. It was beneath a huge platanus-tree in the ruins of what had been intended for an old-fashioned arbour in the *garden* I have mentioned. The summer-day sped onward so fast, that notwithstanding the sharp appetite of thirteen, I forgot the hour of dinner, was sought for with anxiety, and was still found entranced in my intellectual banquet. To read and to remember was in this instance the same thing, and henceforth I overwhelmed my school-fellows, and all who would hearken to me, with tragical recitations from the ballads of Bishop Percy."

Further episodes of his story show him a tireless ballad-hunter; and in this hunting he went to Liddesdale as well as to the old book-shops in Edinburgh. "I fastened like a tiger," these are his words, "upon every collection of old songs or romances which chance threw in my way." His translation of Burger's *Lenore* brings us near the preparation for his *Border Minstrelsy*."

In 1797 he made a translation of Goethe's *Erl-König*, and about a couple of years later, wrote his *Glenfinlas*, which was criticised as being a German and Bürger-lich use of Scottish materials. From these items and from the pages of the *Border Minstrelsy*, with its invaluable prose interludes, we get our idea of Scott's original verse equipment, which was of a kind to develop afresh in him the old northern tradition of the Scôp, the singer of moving events and heroic figures, who is passionately attached to his country and countryside, by nature having more of a traditional, than a critical or literary feeling for art. One thing he had not, which the old minstrels had—he was wanting in "musical ear" like Swinburne after him. The lack of it did not prevent his becoming

—pen and paper serving for gear—almost the last of the old minstrels, and a superb improvisator.

He was lucky in finding ready to his hand the two verse instruments supplied first by the old ballad measure, and by the elastic octosyllabic narrative verse that Coleridge borrowed from the old romancers, and re-informed with his suppling melody. He never quite attained—how should he—the innocent and unearthly notes of the one, the subtle and incalculable magic of the other. But he put his robust and tender spirit into his verse, and took poetry as he took life,—a great adventure upon which it did not do to hesitate, look back and grow over-critical. And was he not well repaid? Now and again it seemed that the very voice of old Tradition spoke through him, as in the ballads—

> "And ne'er but once, my son, he says,
> Was yon sad cavern trod,
> In persecution's iron days,
> When the land was left by God.
> . . . . . .
> Yon spell-bound den, as the aged tell,
> Was hewn by demon's hands;
> But I had lourd melle with the fiends of hell,
> Than with Clavers and his band";

or in the *Song of Meg*—

> "Trefoil, vervain, John's-wort, dill,
> Hinders witches of their will;
> Weel is them, that weel may
> Fast upon St Andrew's day";

or in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*—

> "When summer smiled on sweet Bowhill,
> And July's eve, with balmy breath,
> Waved the blue-bells on Newark heath;
> When throstles sung in Harehead-shaw,
> And corn was green on Carterhaugh,
> And flourish'd, broad, Blackandro's oak"

The only contemporary who can be set by him, as working with a mind of irresistible energy, and with even less care to criticise the result of that energy, was Lord Byron. Scott's *Lay* was published early in 1805. Byron then was at Cambridge. In 1806 Scott was in London, and being received as a "lion,"

and the way was open to masterful ambition in poetry. In 1808 *Marmion* appeared, and in 1810 *The Lady of the Lake.* In 1811 Byron showed the opening cantos of *Childe Harold* to Dallas. Byron's narrative verse had less of the gallop in it, but in lyric gift they were about equal. The love-strain in either's verse is, allowing for difference of colour, curiously similar; compare two songs, Scott's—

" Where shall the lover rest
Whom the fates sever
From his true maiden's breast,
Parted for ever ? . . ."

and Byron's—

" When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted,
To sever for years,
Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
Colder thy kiss ;
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this."

In one of his letters, writing about Tapaleen, Byron recalls the effect made upon him by Scott's *Lay* and the description of Branksome Castle.

The connection between the success of the older poet and that of the younger is unmistakeable. As Scott's vein was exhausted, and began to run dry, Bryon opened a new one. Moreover, his poetry went abroad, and had much of the fashionable effect of the Grand Tour. The music of the verse seems commonplace to-day, but it was wonderful to the readers of that generation—

" Adieu, adieu ! my native shore
Fades o'er the waters blue ;
The night-winds sigh, the breakers roar
And shrieks the wild sea-mew.
Yon sun that sets upon the sea
We follow in his flight ;
Farewell awhile to him and thee,
My native Land—Good Night ! "

It is curious to note how little Byron was able to take of the fine elements of Greek poetry. He went to Greece in

his zeal, but he remained a Goth. Only the obvious effects in the songs of her revolt against fate appealed to him—

" Sons of the Greeks, arise !
The glorious hour's gone forth,
And, worthy of such ties,
Display who gave us birth.

*Chorus.*
Sons of Greeks ! let us go
In arms against the foe,
Till their hated blood shall flow
In a river past our feet."

He was better inspired lyrically in his *Hebrew Melodies*, little Hebraic though they are. Two memorable songs, songs of open melody, prove their quality, *She walks in Beauty like the Night*, and its companion piece, *Oh, Snatched away in Beauty's Bloom*. A poet who could improvise so finely had the promise of a greater music in him than he achieved, dying still young, the spoilt child of the Muses. His finest lyric, *So we'll go no more a-roving*, is built on an old rhyme ; but it conveys perfectly his own emotions. He was fortunate in being able indeed to attach his poetry from the first to those idioms and rhythms, new and old, that his own time found most telling. As it is, a passage in Byron's journals leaves one with a sense of his lyric perception, that his verse rarely conveys :—

" . . . The same evening I heard one of Lord Grey's daughters (a fine, tall, spirit-looking girl, with much of the patrician, thoroughbred look of her father, which I dote upon) play on the harp, so modestly and ingenuously, that she *looked music*. Well, I would rather have had my talk with Lawrence [1] (who talked delightfully) and heard the girl, than have had all the fame of Moore and me put together."

After Byron, Tom Moore—a true lyric poet in that he sang his own songs to an instrument ; a mistaken one in that he often mistook facility of rhyme for the real concurrence of melody. At the same time it can be believed that when he was in the prime of his singing days, warbling his lyric to an old Irish tune, the effect he made was for the time being genuine

[1] The painter.

and irresistible. Dryden, he says, "has described music as being 'inarticulate poetry'; and I have always felt, in adapting words to an expressive air, that I was bestowing upon it the gift of articulation, and thus enabling it to speak to others all that was conveyed, in its worldless eloquence, to myself."

Put a song like *When he who adores thee has left but the name,* into its congenial setting, and add the perfume of occasion, and the result is the fame of Tom Moore. When he used his imagination, writing a song really intended to be sung, he could achieve a lyric effect, simple but charming of its kind; not nearly so easy a thing to achieve as it looks.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY—LEIGH HUNT—JOHN KEATS

AMONG the lyric poets, Shelley, who was a lyric poet before everything, needs no longer to have his claim reaffirmed. If we judge him by the verdict of those English poets who, coming after him, have famously sustained his ideals, we have from three of the four nearest him, Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne, his undivided praise, while from the fourth, Matthew Arnold, if we have a doubtful note, it was struck in the dangerous pursuit of comparative criticism, set going in this instance by the rival claims of Byron, of all men. Time, moreover, and the spirit of the time, have so far certainly not strengthened Arnold's criticism, as he thought they would. If we judge Shelley by his critics, as apart from the poets, again, there is no question of the balance in his high favour. And if by the love of those idolaters of poetry, the saving remnant who exist among men and make its pursuit and maintenance possible, there is still less doubt of his fame.

To the lyric realm he may well serve as gate-keeper, though if we choose him so, it is for reasons in no way disparaging to his fellow-immortals. In taking him as the type of his lyric race and kind, we would convert his praise into a tribute to his whole order, as we might turn his own praise of Dante into a tribute to himself: "His very words are instinct with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought."

Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, from which the above sentence comes, provides us with a characteristic prose testament, explaining to some extent the effluence of his sacred spring, and his art of using it. Shelley, as one would have him, believed in the dæmonic possession of the lyric poet:—"Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determina-

tion of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry. The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconsistent wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure, Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force. it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day, whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study."

Every evidence that can be given of Shelley's practice of the lyric art agrees with this theoretic account of it in such passages as these. If you turn to his life, you may gather up crumbs from the feast in plenty; familiar details, bearing on the history of one poem after another, which are now enshrined fairly in the lyric anthology. Take the lyrics from *Prometheus Unbound*, which are surcharged with music and ardour—

" From unremembered ages we
Gentle guides and guardians be
Of heaven-oppressed mortality;
And we breathe, and sicken not,
The atmosphere of human thought:
Be it dim, and dank, and gray,
Like a storm-extinguished day,
Travelled o'er by dying gleams;
Be it bright as all between
Cloudless skies and windless streams,
Silent, liquid, and serene;
As the birds within the wind,
As the fish within the wave,
As the thoughts of man's own mind
Float thro' all above the grave;
We make there our liquid lair,
Voyaging cloudlike and unpent
Thro' the boundless element:
Thence we bear the prophecy
Which begins and ends in thee!'

The account of Shelley's writing of this extraordinary poem is in itself of the nature of poetry. During his Italian wanderings he had been making the Greek tragedians, Mrs Shelley tells us, "his most familiar companions, and the sublime majesty of Æschylus filled him with wonder and delight." Previous to this, on his memorable journey to Italy in the spring of 1818, in making the passage of Les Echelles, there occurs a mention by Shelley of the Alpine steeps, which seems, as it has been suggested, to hold the germ in it of his Prometheus. "The scene," he wrote, "is like that described in the Prometheus of Æschylus. Vast rifts and caverns in the granite precipices, wintry mountains with ice and snow above; the loud sounds of unseen waters within the caverns, and walls of toppling rocks, only to be scaled, as he describes, by the winged chariot of the Ocean Nymphs." This scene may conceivably have been the origin of his own Prometheus among the crags of the Caucasus—

> "Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain,
> Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured."

In the preface to his poem, Shelley refers to the lost drama of the same name by Æschylus in a way to show that the thought of it had curiously stimulated his imagination, though fortunately not to the point of wishing only to restore a great work by an old master. But as every poet needs a poet for foster-father, so Æschylus served Shelley; and Italy and his lyric blood did the rest. "This poem," he tells us in the same preface, "was chiefly written upon the mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, among the flowery glades and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees, which are extended in ever-winding labyrinths upon its immense platforms and dizzy arches suspended in the air. The bright blue sky of Rome, and the effect of the vigorous awakening spring in that divinest climate, and the new life which it drenches the spirits even to intoxication, were the inspiration of this drama."

It was the second and third acts which he completed at the Baths of Caracalla. Prometheus had haunted him all through

his wanderings during the early months of 1818, with the villa at Este (which Byron had placed for a time at Shelley's service) for centre.

This villa, I Cappucini, deserves to be well remembered by those who love Shelley. Here it was that the first act of *Prometheus* was composed; here the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*, a more personal and direct tribute to the beauty of the place, were all but completed; and from here, too, *Julian and Maddalo* dates, with its ideal reflection of recent memorable days at Venice with Byron. A more perfect environment for a lyric poet could hardly be conceived. The villa stood high among the Euganean Hills, the wide plain of Lombardy below, not far from Petrarch's Arqua. Shelley worked in a summer-house at the end of the garden, with a vine-trellised pathway leading thither from the hall door. Below the garden ran a narrow ravine hiding the road, and beyond this, again, rose the hill on which stood the ruins of the castle of Este. The outlook across the plain, the "wide range of prospect—infinitely gratifying to the eye," the whole spirit and circumstances of the place, were inspiring to a degree; and they are exquisitely commemorated in the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*. But as the lurking insistent melancholy in that poem, or the spirit of unappeasable revolt in *Prometheus*, equally suggest, the poet carried his restless spirit and his troubles always with him. So his vagarious household did not long rest even here. The *Lines* are dated October 1818. Twice in that month we hear of Shelley in Venice, and on November 5th the little camp at Este was broken up, and a carriage with six occupants, Shelley, his wife and child, Claire Claremont, and two servants, set out for Ferrara and Rome.

The fourth act of *Prometheus*, which was not included in the original conception of the poem, was written at Florence towards the end of 1820—"a sublime after-thought," Professor Dowden has called it. For the sentiment and colour of the days that produced it, we have a further witness in his *Ode to the West Wind*, unequalled in its kind, which was written in

the late autumn of 1820. *Prometheus Unbound* was finished in the December of that year. There is the same elemental force, the same spirit in them both.

*Prometheus Unbound* may be taken as typical of the working out of Shelley's faculty, by processes not at all deliberate, but impulsive, unconstrained to a degree. He did not, could not, write by rule and order. His was a muse of fire, ascending the heaven of invention by a flight of its own, leaving the earth behind at times, it may be, too readily.

The alternation of lovely places and unwonted occurrences with the direct event of poetry in Shelley's life give it much of that fascination which it has peculiarly among the lives of the poets. The charm of Italy, the antique magic of Pisa and Rome, the fortunate finding of Byron in Venice, the friendship of men, the love of women, the mystery of the sea—how much of the lyric poet that we know is really owing to these things, how much of what we call Shelley resides in the oftentime rare and exquisite circumstances of his poetry?

Shelley, often unhappy in his dealings with men and women, was usually fortunate in his surroundings, and in his dealings with places. We have seen him already at Este, at Venice and Rome, during the making of *Prometheus Unbound*. On the way to Como, in the spring of 1818, we find him reading Schlegel, and Leigh Hunt's *Foliage*,[1] to his fellow-travellers, and at Milan he is reading *Dante* in the Cathedral. "There is one solitary spot among those aisles, behind the altar, where the light of day is dim and yellow, under the storied window, which I have chosen to visit, and read *Dante* there." In the same letter to Peacock, he writes about Como and a house on its shores, the Villa Pliniana, which he had thought of taking, but which he failed to secure. After describing the house, once a magnificent palace, and its ruinous great rooms, and its surroundings, "the most extraordinary at once, and the most lovely that eye ever beheld," with mountain-terraces,

[1] Keats, too, was reading *Foliage* at the same time. The volume might recall to both Leigh Hunt's cottage at Hampstead, where they had met heretofore; they were not to meet again save in their graves, at Rome.

and lake, "speckled with sails and spires," and a waterfall, and hanging cypress and laurel groves, he turns off to speak naively enough of his newly stirring dramatic ambition. He announces to his correspondent, indeed, a first experiment, the tragedy, *Tasso*, which at this time he thought of writing and did begin. "But you will say," he adds, "I have no dramatic talent; very true, in a certain sense, but I have taken a resolution to see what kind of a tragedy a person without dramatic talent could write."

A year later, and Shelley, if he had laid aside *Tasso*, had taken up and finished *The Cenci*.

Many other such glimpses of the real Shelley there are which one would not willingly let pass. Now it is, as he is pausing in his pursuit of destiny at Florence, and breakfasting one August morning on bloomy peaches, "whose smell was like what one fancies of the wakening of Paradise flowers." Or it is at Venice, where Byron is patronising with every good will his friend and fellow-poet, who had nothing but admiration for him when he recited the famous fourth canto of *Childe Harold*; or again, where the two poets are riding on the Lido, and talking on life and poetry—a ride commemorated afterward in *Julian and Maddalo*—

> "I love all waste
> And solitary places; where we taste
> The pleasure of believing what we see
> Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be:
> And such was this wide ocean, and this shore
> More barren than its billows; and yet more
> Than all, with a remembered friend I love
> To ride as then I rode;—for the winds drove
> The living spray along the sunny air
> Into our faces; the blue heavens were bare,
> Stripped in their depths by the awakening north;
> And from the waves, sound like delight broke forth
> Harmonising with solitude, and sent
> Into our hearts aerial merriment."

One other passage, written in 1816, may be cited, because he has often been thought to have no feeling for the simpler homely associations: "The shrines of the Penates," he says, "are good wood fires or window frames intertwined with

creeping plants; their hymns are the purring of kittens, the hissing of kettles, the long talks over the past and dead, the laugh of children, the warm wind of summer filling the quiet house and the pelting storm of winter struggling in vain for entrance."

There was another side, and a sorrowful one, as we know too well, to Shelley's history, quite as indispensable to his feeling for life, and his passionate expression of it. "I thought," said a poet of another school and a younger generation, "I thought Shelley was all skies and sunsets; and I find, re-reading him, he is really the voice of a hundred misfortunes, and of a man in trouble." Is it not his own history that he states in three lines of *Julian and Maddalo*?—

> "Most wretched men
> Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

Far from Shelley's being the merely aerial, unconditioned creature that he has been thought, it is enough to turn to any one of those songs of defeat, which abound in his poems, to see how humanly his sympathies were turned. Take his invocation to the *Spirit of Delight*, which strikes the key-note to his whole poetry, with which his individual testament opens, or the *Lines to Edward Williams*, or the *Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples*. The human sentiment and its convincing accent in poetry were growing in him all the while, and making themselves more and more felt in every one of those last years, from 1818 to his death. And he died in 1822, let us remember, before most poets and men have half served their probation, before he was thirty.

Beside his life as a poet, pure and simple, Shelley had his part to play, and he did it as strenuously as he knew, in the revolutionary movement of his time. Matthew Arnold, indeed, of whose discouraging view of Shelley's contribution to poetry we have already spoken, thought that herein was his final significance: "Byron and Shelley will be long remembered," he says, "long after the inadequacy of their actual work is clearly recognised, for their passionate, their titanic effort

to flow in the main stream of modern literature; their names will be greater than their writings; *stat magni nominis umbra.*" We may agree it will be counted to Shelley that he did so strive; and we recognise the stirring of the new forces of his time, that helped to quicken his lyric pulse to a finer heat. But this is not all; his poems will live, if they are still to outwit the centuries, as we think, because they not only hold in them the spirit of their own century, but hold too that larger spirit of poetry which he recognised in Homer and Dante, and which, as he knew, endures by reason of its universal, and not of its special, office. The lyric poet in his understanding was not for an age, but for all time.

That his poems do sometimes fail of absolute justness of expression, of the pre-ordained word, the classic fitness of phrase, may be admitted. They will live in spite of it; and if certain of them, touched and irradicated by the spirit of loveliness, strive at times after the all but inexpressible, are we so likely to have them attempted for us in other and perfected ways by better poets, that we can afford to discount them? That quest after the ideal in nature and life we have all followed, and the measure of our past desire is the measure of our appreciation of whatsoever Shelley won for us by his wrestling with the angels.

> "To thirst and find no fill—to wail and wander
> With short uneasy steps—to pause and ponder—
> To feel the blood run through the veins and tingle
> Where busy thoughts and blind sensation mingle;
> To nurse the image of unfelt caresses
> Till dim imagination just possesses
> The half created shadow. . . ."

There, in this imperfect fragment of seven lines, one of the many that he left, is the characteristic Shelley, fully mounted in his restless pursuit of the unattainable. But it is a pursuit in which poets engage when they are young, that is to say, when they are most poets. And the radiant forms of poetry which in he essayed it—whose charm and beauty, after all is said, we shall not readily find again—will always attract while youth and poetry last.

It is, in fact, with his poetry as with his life. The very excess of spirit that is blamed in him, that made his style sometimes too unrestrained and his accent too unhesitating, yet gave the one much of its radiance and magic, and the other much of the fatal eagerness which lends melodic fascination to it. It is for colder poets than he to write correctly, and be forgotten; and for tamer lines than his to pass without error, and end in librarious dust. Of Shelley too, we may say, as of Burns: the same force that led him astray will keep his lyrics alive.

In *Adonais* the last of the Mountain Shepherds who are figured around the bier of the dead poet is Leigh Hunt. He did the service of a provider of new, and a maintainer of old, ideas to his fellow-poets; and Keats owed to his influence both good and doubtful elements of style. In his own practice of verse he is interesting, because he draws freely upon Italy and the South, and uses classic and foreign modes along with the lightest of colloquial idioms, in the attempt to get a poetic diction that shall be easy, immediately attractive, and individual. His note is heard clearly in his well-known sonnet on the Grasshopper and the Cricket; and in his *Rimini* he has added some lines to the May anthology that are notable, since they show his manner of lyricising his narrative, and serve to connect him with his forerunners and his direct contemporaries—

> "The sun is up, and 'tis a morn of May
> Round old Ravenna's clear-shewn towers and bay.
> A morn, the loveliest which the year has seen,
> Last of the spring, yet fresh with all its green;
> For a warm eve, and gentle rains at night,
> Have left a sparkling welcome for the light,
> And there's a crystal clearness all about;
> The leaves are sharp, the distant hills look out;
> A balmy briskness comes upon the breeze;
> The smoke goes dancing from the cottage trees;
> And when you listen, you may hear a coil
> Of bubbling springs about the grassy soil;
> And all the scene, in short—sky, earth, and sea,
> Breathes like a bright-eyed face, that laughs out openly
> 'Tis nature, full of spirits, waked and springing:
> The birds to the delicious time are singing,
> Darting with freaks and snatches up and down,

Where the light woods go seaward from the town
While happy faces, striking through the green
Of leafy roads, at every turn are seen ;
And the far ships, lifting their sails of white
Like joyful hands, come up with scattery light,
Come gleaming up, true to the wished-for day
And chase the whisking brine, and swirl into the bay."

A delightful sonneteer, he did much to give the form its new vogue ; and his sonnet on the Nile, which he wrote in friendly emulation with Shelley and Keats, is exquisitely conceived. " Pleasure and exaltation," he said, were the true ends at which poetry must aim ; and he defined poetry itself as " imaginative passion." It was because fancy appealed to his own temperament, more than imagination, that his verse too often runs to prettiness and fails in real substance.

There was no want of that reality in Keats, who at one time wrote as his disciple, and threatened to adopt some of the " conceits " of the so-called " Cockney " school.

Hunt's trick of forcing the melody, and getting a facile lyric movement into verse that needs a steady pulse, is repeated in *Endymion*—

" A well-known voice sigh'd, ' Sweetest, here am I ! '
At which soft ravishment, with doting cry
They trembled to each other.—Helicon !
O fountain'd hill ! Old Homer's Helicon !
That thou would'st spout a little streamlet o'er
These sorry pages ; then the verse would soar
And sing above this gentle pair, like lark
Over his nested young : but all is dark
Around thine aged top, and thy clear fount
Exhales in mists to heaven. Ay, the count
Of mighty Poets is made up ; the scroll
Is folded by the Muses ; the bright roll
Is in Apollo's hand : our dazed eyes
Have seen a new tinge in the western skies :
The world has done its duty. Yet, oh yet,
Although the sun of poesy is set,
These lovers did embrace, and we must weep
That there is no old power left to steep
A quill immortal in their joyous tears."

But on other occasions of the same poem, Keats uses his lyric intervals with rare judgment and sure melody—

"O Sorrow!
Why dost borrow
The mellow ditties from a mourning tongue?
To give at evening pale
Unto the nightingale,
That thou mayst listen the cold dews among?

O Sorrow!
Why dost borrow
Heart's lightness from the merriment of May?
A lover would not tread
A cowslip on the head,
Though he should dance from eve till peep of day.
Nor any drooping flower
Held sacred for thy bower,
Wherever he may sport himself and play

To Sorrow
I bade good morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind;
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly;
She is so constant to me, and so kind:
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But ah! she is so constant and so kind."

Compared with Shelley's, his note is fuller, more sensuous, less aerial and transcendent. He is related to tradition as Shelley is not; yet what he did write was affected curiously to his own mood. In one of his letters to his friend Reynolds, he pours out in boyish confidence his thoughts about the office of the Imagination, and the passage from sensations to ideas, in a way to suggest the line of his own development, broken at his death—

"I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the heart's affections, and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth, whether it existed before or not;—for I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty. However it may be, O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts! It is 'a Vision in the form of Youth,' a shadow of reality to come—and this consideration has further convinced me—for it has come as auxiliary to another favourite speculation of mine—that we shall enjoy ourselves hereafter by having what we called happiness on earth repeated in a finer tone. And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation, rather than hunger, as you do, after Truth. Adam's dream will do here, and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal

reflection is the same as human life and its spiritual repetition. But, as I was saying, the simple imaginative mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness. To compare great things with small, have you never, by being surprised with an old melody, in a delicious place, by a delicious voice, *felt* over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul ? "

Happy in his equation of truth and beauty, he was able to accept his own sense impressions with a finality that makes them convincing, yet with a rapture, however unlike Shelley's, that momently grows lyrical. Thus he contrived in *Endymion* to write invocations and songs of Love or of Beauty, which, although not put into strictly lyric form, achieve casually an irresistible melody—

" O love ! how potent hast thou been to teach
Strange journeyings ! Wherever beauty dwells,
In gulf or aerie, mountains or deep dells,
In light, in gloom, in star or blazing sun,
Thou pointest out the way, and straight 'tis won.
Amid his toil thou gavest Leander breath ;
Thou leddest Orpheus through the gleams of death ;
Thou madest Pluto bear thin element :
And now, O winged Chieftain ! thou hast sent
A moon-beam to the deep, deep water-world,
To find Endymion."

In *Endymion* Keats was working with rhyme to tempt him to melody ; and in *Hyperion*, writing blank verse, he still uses lyric colours to enhance his medium. The advance that he showed in style between the two poems is no measure of what he might have been able further to achieve in lyric. As regards lyric form, he had already, in the poems published in 1820, and in the Odes to the Nightingale and to a Grecian Urn, attained to something like perfection. There he used a medium that had often became over-artificial in the hands of other English poets, and gave it an impulsive and natural melodiousness which never forced the rhyme or strained the idiom. Again, in his *Ode to Fancy*, following a Miltonic model, he managed his trochaic couplets with a charmingly fluid movement ; in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* he wrote a dramatic lyric of incomparable fantasy, and in his best sonnets employed

the stated form as if it were the one urgent, inevitable vehicle of his thought. Finally, in *The Eve of St Mark,* he wrote what has been called "descriptive lyric" with a use of imaginative detail and a suggestion of impending melody that point to a yet subtler music of verse. It was one that his successors were to use, but hardly to equal. This poem, too, was destined not to be completed, and it confirms the idea that there were qualities in his mind even beyond those that can be strictly inferred from his actual achievement. As it was, he left the poetic currency of his time thrice enriched, and helped to strengthen the new impulse by which the English lyric was to meet the conditions laid down by the literary usage, and to maintain its life and melody even in cold print.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### TENNYSON AND BROWNING

WHEN we think of Tennyson, it is to realise him in his lustre, and in that mid-Victorian day whose accents in prose and poetry are almost too familiar. He was already then a crowned head, a recognised master-singer, and his art and fame were secure on their base, accepted as we accept Church and State and the British Navy. As a result, of late years he came to be remembered by his longer poems, and those which first lent his name a sound of promise were taken for granted. But it is the early volumes that are, in the lyric count, the real title of his fame. There are poems like *The Lotus Eaters* and *The Lady of Shalott*, which are of the very essence of his art, belonging to the book of his youth and early prime, which have lost nothing through time and use, and will always live in the heart of his achievement.

The first of the volumes which count in this estimate, the *Poems*, chiefly lyrical, of 1830—for the *Poems by Two Brothers* has only a biographical interest, and *Timbuctoo* is in blank verse—was mainly the work of a boy of nineteen or twenty. The volume of 1830 contained, among other things, the wonderfully designed poetic tapestry of *Mariana*, *The Sea Fairies*, *The Ballad of Oriana*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. There was a boyish excess of fancy and a glittering turn of phrase and rhythm in verses of the *Lilian* and *Adeline* order, which prevented, or helped to prevent, a full appreciation of the book on the part of some critics. But three years later, in the *Poems* of 1833, the new poet showed that while he had lost nothing of lyric exuberance, he had resources of style and of thought not hitherto credited to him. There was, moreover, in this volume, a very significant exchange of fancy for imagina-

tion, and a willing increase on his part of the hard discipline of art. To realise this development, one can take at random a typical early verse of Tennyson's, such as sprang naturally from his boyish fantasy, and compare it with the stanzas which with imagination and power of ideas he put into form, when his art was fully and consciously turned to account. There is all the difference between the prentice and the master-singer in the two.

It is hardly fair, perhaps, to take the early verse which Tennyson's mature taste rejected, but in order to mark the full measure of the change in him, hearken to the Indian Queen Anacaona in her purple island—

> " In the purple island
> Crown'd with garlands of cinchona,
> Lady over wood and highland,
> The Indian queen, Anacaona,
>
> Dancing on the blossomy plain
> To a woodland melody,
> Playing with the scarlet crane
> Beneath the papao tree. . . ."

And turn from Anacaona to the *Lady of Shalott*—

> ' Lying, robed in snowy white
> That loosely flew to left and right—
> The leaves upon her falling light—
> Thro' the noises of the night
> She floated down to Camelot. . . "

We trace in these poems of 1833 a surer touch; in his measures, just as much as in his ideas. Coleridge, perhaps the greatest metrist English poetry has known, had not, it may be remembered, been ready to sanction some of the younger poet's experiments in the 1830 volume. " The misfortune is," wrote Coleridge, " that he has begun to write verses without very well understanding what metre is; . . . what I would, with many wishes of success, prescribe to Tennyson—indeed without it he can never be a poet in art—is to write for the next two or three years in none but one or two well-known and strictly-defined metres; such as the heroic couplet, the

octave stanza, or the octosyllabic measure of the *Allegro* and *Penseroso*. He would probably thus get imbued with a sensation, if not a sense of metre, without knowing it, just as Eton boys get to write such good Latin verses by conning *Ovid* and *Tibullus*. As it is, I can scarcely scan his verses." One ought in justice to set against this, his friend Arthur Hallam's appreciation, contributed about this time *apropos of* the same volume[1] to the *Englishman's Magazine*. In his list of the five excellences of Tennyson's poems, he counts *fourthly*: "the variety of his lyrical measures, and exquisite modulation of harmonious words and cadences to the swell and fall of the feelings expressed." In face of this tribute Coleridge was, it may seem, too severe, especially as Tennyson was always a curious student of prosody and all its technical apparatus, and a conscious "poet in art," to use Coleridge's fine phrase. But the latter, in this case, was so far right; and the new poet was to gain his full powers in a graver practice of verse and in other measures than the dancing lyrics which abound in the *Poems* of 1830 appeared to the severer critics of that time to promise.

A young poet is interesting, however, because of his probation, and his search after a manner and a vesture all his own, as well as because of his final achievement. And one is tempted to cast about for the young Tennyson's line of development, starting from the basis given him by his favourite predecessors in poetry, because one hopes the better to understand his qualities and defects in these volumes of 1830 and 1833, and his feelings both then and thereafter for his art. We must return for a moment to the *Poems by Two Brothers* to trace the earliest of these influences, and we find the chief interest of the book, as another critic writes,[2] "in its evidence of the poetry which was most congenial to the taste of the young authors." A large proportion of the work is imitated, and the principal influence is Byron's. Here and there we catch echoes of Scott and Moore—

[1] "On some characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson."

[2] *Alfred, Lord Tennyson: A Study*, by Arthur Waugh, pp. 19-20.

"Oh! Harp of my Fathers!
No more in the hall
The souls of the chieftains
Thy strains shall enthrall.
One sweep will I give thee
And wake thy bold swell;
Then, thou friend of my bosom,
For ever farewell."

But it is Byron whose note is predominant, and accounts for many of the poems. This was in the time of the Lincolnshire school-days. On proceeding to Cambridge, the first poem Tennyson wrote there was *The Lover's Tale*, that is, the first two parts of it; and these parts show almost as strongly the influence of Shelley.[1] To Shelley succeeded Keats, a much stronger influence, and one that was to last—for Keats was, if not the one poet to whom, according to Mr Gosse, Tennyson has stood directly in the relation of a disciple, at least his most intimate early master. It was certainly to Keats that Tennyson owed liberal suggestions of his coloured sensuous, descriptive verse; to Keats's example may be attributed the kind of "lyric picture," if the term may be allowed, in which Tennyson learned to excel.

It is these lyric pictures, full of Keatsian fervour and colour and a deliberate magnificence of words, which make the *Poems* of 1833 so memorable; and the order of critics and reviewers who had assailed Keats, still unrepentant, used its weapons too on his successor. One of them acclaimed the new poet sardonically as another star in "that milky way of which the lamented Keats was the harbinger." And the one poet suffered well nigh as much as the other had done. Tennyson had, in addition to the poems in the volume of 1833,

[1] *E.g.*—". . . the cavern mouth,
Half overtrailèd with a wanton weed,
Gives birth to a brawling brook, that passing lightly
Adown a natural stair of tangled roots,
Is presently received in a sweet grave
Of eglantines, a place of burial,
Far lovelier than its cradle; for unseen
But taken with the sweetness of the place,
It makes a constant bubbling melody
That drowns the nearer echoes. . . ."

prepared his *Lover's Tale* for publication, and sent it to the printer. But now he withdrew it. On the 20th November 1832, prompted, it would seem, by a letter of Hallam's, referring to his critics, he wrote to Moxon, the publisher, that after consideration he had decided not to publish it, as he felt it to be "too full of faults." Forty-six years later, revised, and completed by a third part (which had already seen the light in the *Holy Grail* volume of 1869), it was sent out as a singular witness of the changes that a generation and a half, aided by good fortune, can work in the avenues of a poet's fame.

Meanwhile, death entered to divert the current of Tennyson's poetry, as it had entered to break off altogether that of John Keats. Keats published his *Endymion* in 1818 and his *Hyperion* in 1820; and in 1821 he died. In the year following the publication of Tennyson's second volume of poems, in 1833, the one dearest friend who had lent him all that a friend can give of stimulus and critical instant sympathy, and of enthusiastic praise—Arthur Hallam died.

With that event Tennyson's youth, and his impulse of youth, appeared to go suddenly from him, only to revive with another love motive which was to last all his life through. To realise what the loss was, one must recall the extraordinary emotion of the poet as he visited Arthur Hallam's grave at Clevedon afterwards, an emotion which, briefly and directly expressed in one of his intensest lyrics, is recalled and dwelt upon, and returned to again and again with calm iteration of melancholy in the pages of *In Memoriam*. Clevedon, the Severn, and the Welsh harbour under Penarth Hill, recall his two modes—

> "And the stately ships go on
> To their haven under the hill."

> "The tide flows down, the waves again
> Is vocal in its wooded walls;
> My deeper anguish also falls,
> And I can speak a little then."

Tennyson's first period, associated with Hallam and Cambridge and the volumes of 1830 and 1833, ends here with the

latter's death. He went next to London, and began there to work slowly at the poems which appeared eventually in 1842, and at *In Memoriam*. London was probably the best consoler he could have had in the mood then upon him. He found friends there—Milnes (Lord Houghton), Spedding and others. Among them, Edward Fitzgerald read in his horoscope not only past achievement, but great potential things, and recognised the value of the stress of London as an influence making for the humanities. "When he has felt life," said Fitzgerald, "you will see him acquire all that at present you miss; he will not die fruitless of instruction as he is."

It was like Fitzgerald, or indeed any poet disappointed in a particular conception of a contemporary and that contemporary's future, to stultify his prediction just as freely afterwards. He complained that Tennyson never returned to the "champagne flavour of his earlier lyrics," and he spoke of 1842 as the year "when the press went to work with, I think, the last of old Alfred's best." As for *In Memoriam*, it was to his thinking monotonous—"evolved by a poetic machine of the highest order." However, both in the volumes of 1842 and in *Maud* and *In Memoriam*, there are many signs of a graver experience, and many interesting insistent echoes and reminiscences freighted with the new emotion of these days of half solitude in the great crowd. There are direct transcripts from the London of fifty years ago and its humours, in poems like *Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue*. But one feels the presence, the imagination of the place, even more when it is not the explicit theme, as in those lines of *In Memoriam* (cxix.)—

> "Doors, where my heart was used to beat
> So quickly, not as one that weeps
> I come once more; the city sleeps;
> I smell the meadow in the street.
>
> I hear a chirp of birds; I see
> Betwixt the black fronts long-withdrawn
> A light-blue lane of early dawn,
> And think of early days and thee."

London, and its pressure of life, and its strong intellectual forces, acted on his contemporary sense in subtle, and in

intensive ways. He tasted of its best; he met there the men who were working for intellectual liberty and the humanities in its midst—Carlyle, Landor, Dickens, Thackeray, John Stuart Mill; and in meeting them, and realising through them the spirit of the age, he realised himself. Then came the two volumes of 1842, with their freight of poems old and new; and the probation, which had seemed hard, was virtually over. Among the new were the beginnings of the Arthurian poems, and many of those pieces which, like *Locksley Hall*, caught the sentimental spirit of English life. With the music that he could command in these poems, he was bound to take the English ear; so one feels, wondering a little at any delay in their full appreciation. But the delay was well ended. That chorus of praise, in which poets and critics like Edgar Poe, R. H. Horne, and Elizabeth Barret joined, was not to fail him now until his laurel was fully won, or while, through all the rest of his life, it was honourably worn.

But as we return to the days when it was gained, and inquire into the gradual creation of his audience, by a fellow-poet's tribute here, the conversion of an obstinate critic there, we cannot but be impressed afresh by the part the lyric poems of his youth played in it. And still in these poems with which Tennyson first seized on the floating spirit of English thought and whatever there was of habitual imagination, culture and grace in the English country-life which he loved, there are many who, with Fitzgerald, will find most truly the poet's individuality. Whether the current tradition of English poetry would have been as fully maintained, and as surely wedded to his name, if he had never lived to give us *In Memoriam*, or his idyllic *King Arthur*, there is no need to decide. It is enough to know that if Tennyson, like Keats, had died at twenty-five, we should still have his real legacy to English lyric in our hands. That he lived to add to it was his fortune; but let us not forget how much we owe to the lyric imagination of his youth. For the present we are not, perhaps, in a state to appraise him finally. We are in the lee of his immense reputation, and our only chance of getting back

our interest is to remember him not as a mid-Victorian, but an early Victorian; and relate *The Lady of Shalott* to the days when he recited *Clerk Saunders* and *Oriana* to the Cambridge "apostles."

If we agree that Tennyson carried the English lyric to a point at which the break between the old and the new forms was emphasised, we find on turning to Browning's poems that he brought in a still more complex fantasy, intimate and subjective, yet dramatic, to affect lyric verse. Browning, unlike Tennyson, was a close student of music and the theory of music, and he recognised, as Tennyson did not, the psychological relationship between the reader and the poet—the song-writer "new-style." That is, if we are to consider that the reader is supplying something when he reads lyric verse, which takes the place of any instrument or declared accompaniment, we perceive that Browning used this understood accompaniment with infinite subtlety and variety, though his sense of poetic style did not equal his play of idea. Even in his earlier poems when he was feeling his way, in *Pauline* and in *Paracelsus*, we come upon the traces of the new understanding that poetry, to fulfil his ideal, must establish with its readers. Many of the speeches of Paracelsus and of Festus in the poem are so charged with individual emotion that the expression, although introspective in colour, tends at every turn of personal disclosure to become lyrical or sublyrical. But Browning in *Paracelsus*, which is for the main part written in blank verse, still distinguishes between what we may call the old lyric and the new, by using on occasion a rhymed octosyllabic passage for variety or the quickening of the verse. Take the striking passage in which Paracelsus and Festus have been discussing themselves, their human predicament and their philosophy, and Paracelsus calls for a story—"anything, only your voice"—that shall beguile the intensity of their preoccupation with themselves. Then it is that Festus uses the figure of the Mayne River almost with the effect of a lullaby—

Sleep's no softer : it proceeds
On through lawns, on through meads,
On and on, whate'er befall,
Meandering and musical,
Though the niggard pasture's edge
Bears not on its shaven ledge
Aught but weeds and waving grasses
To view the river as it passes,
Save here and there a scanty patch
Of primroses, too faint to catch
A weary bee . . ."

In *Sordello,* which was published five years later than *Paracelsus,* Browning took another step toward that complex lyric instrument which he improved upon later in his dramatic lyrics. We do not usually think of *Sordello* as lyrical at all, but if we admit the descriptive lyric into the category, we have to allow that in passages like that describing Verona he contrived to make a song of his picture, and to inform that song with a spirit intimate and finely adjusted to the mood of the describer, which quite fell within the lines of the art as he understood it.

" That autumn eve was stilled :
At last remains of sunset dimly burned
O'er the far forests like a torch-flame turned
By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand
The woods beneath lay black. A single eye
From all Verona cared for the soft sky."

It is true that in his use of the rhymed couplet in *Sordello* Browning fell upon that mode of breaking up the natural rhythms controlling verse, which often lessened the musical force of his later poems. His rhymes are often at cross-purposes with his rhythms, and make the effect, which James the First (of England) cannily objected to in his *Cautelis,* of being forced by the writer. But when we pass from *Sordello* to the verse of the dramas and the *Blot in the 'Scutcheon,* we discover that Browning can use a song for a dramatic foil to the action of his play not only with richness of melody, but with a fine suggestion of the singing strain of that melody.

The *Blot in the 'Scutcheon* was fifth in the series of *Bells and Pomegranates,* and it was produced at Drury Lane in 1843.

Next year Browning went abroad again, and in continuing his experiments he dropped back very effectively upon the old mode in his Cavalier Tunes: *Marching along—Give a Rouse—Boot and Saddle.* With this series of poems, Browning entered upon that field of dramatic lyric which he cultivated in a fashion peculiarly his own. "Such poems as the following," he says in commenting upon them, "come properly enough under the head of dramatic pieces, being, though for the most part lyric in expression, always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine." We have already, in the chapters on the Elizabethan dramatists, touched upon the question of how far the lyric feeling can supervene upon the dramatic texture. But Browning's conversion of the two elements is more intimately contrived than that in use by the Elizabethan playwrights. It is clear that if the poet or dramatist can, as Browning did, so identify himself with his character that to all intents and purposes he becomes that character, he can use his individual emotion, which is essentially lyrical, quite warrantably and effectively under the dramatic guise. Browning penetrated into his characters, and not only into the surface moods and what we may call the animal dispositions, but into their souls and spirits. Sometimes indeed the idiom in which those characters are made to express themselves are so markedly Browningesque that we feel he is only using them as a mask for the emotion of his own mind wrought out of his own experience. But this does not affect the value of his service in adjusting lyric verse to meet all the complexities and the subtleties required of it by his theory. We may take as instances of his art in this kind his poems, *In a Year, De Gustibus* and *Love among the Ruins.*

In his essay on Shelley, he offered a clue to his own poetic faith, which may help us to mark the difference between their genius, which was a vast one, and that between their practice in verse. "The objective poet," he says, "chooses to deal with the doings of men (the result of which dealing in its pure form is what we call dramatic poetry), while the subjective poet, whose study has been himself, appealing through himself to

the absolute Divine mind, prefers to dwell upon those external scenes which strike out most abundantly his inner light and power, selects that silence of the earth and sea in which he can best hear the beating of his individual heart, and leaves the noisy, complex, yet imperfect exhibitions of nature in the manifold experience of man around him, which serve only to distract and suppress the working of his brain."

Shelley had his region in the aerial plane and that emotional photosphere, in which the greater and lesser lights, shadow and substance, and the elements play upon the spirits of men and women—and the regularising harmony is the principle of love. Browning had a greater feeling for our human intercourse upon earth, and in order to generate a sufficient artistic excitement when treating it, he required some grotesque or fantastic stimulus or other, mediæval or picturesque, as in certain of his dramatic romances. With Shelley everything was lyrical and transcendent first and by instinct; he was the singing apostle of man in nature and supernature, and his verse has that fiery and exquisite and aspiring quality which tends to outrun verbal melody altogether, and to seek an outlet only to be attained in pure music. In this, he was only doing what the Greek lyrists seemed to hint at—using a tongue which sounds like the voice of nature herself growing articulate in the throats of men. The cloud, the wind, the torrent, the Euganean Hills, the Acroceraunian Mountains, are heard in his verse.

With Browning, these things count, but they are all incidental to the Human Comedy. Usually he is extensive, instead of ecstatic; and to get his lyrico-dramatic illusion he freely uses the colloquial idiom. But either from some factitious turn in his invention, some defect in the inner ear, or some perverse theory of rhyme, he often misses the way in the end. Possibly, as he wrote an extremely neat manuscript, he was misled by the symmetry of the lines as written into believing they had organic symmetry—the true poetic symmetry. At any rate, after his climacteric year, the year of *The Ring and the Book*, 1868, he did not greatly advance the lyric art by his verse, although he always wrote like a poet

of original force and rare individuality. He so handled the language, further breaking with the convention that ties the tongue of formal poets, that he left it progressive, more responsive yet to the changing needs of any new generation. Thus he led the way, indirectly, to a superb natural lyrist like Swinburne, who had the qualities he lacked, lacked many that he had, and discovered new and unsuspected qualities in the English tongue.

With Browning, we can best perhaps consider the effect of his wife's poetry. She was nearly three years his senior, and gained some contemporary vantage while he was still only a coterie poet by repute. Her lyric mode is quite unlike his, and has often the defects of an improvisator's verse; but their writing strongly affected each other's pages during the eleven years of their life together, passed chiefly in Italy. We see it in her lines on the unappeasable desire—

> "What's the best thing in the world?
> June-rose, by May-dew impearled;
> Sweet south-wind, that means no rain;
> Truth, not cruel to a friend;
> Pleasure, not in haste to end;
> Beauty, not self-decked and curled
> Till its pride is over-plain? . . ."

And in *Lady Geraldine's Courtship* there are evidences both direct and indirect of the same thing. But the decisive tribute that Elizabeth Barrett paid to the genius of her fellow-poet is to be found in what is, poetically and lyrically, her most real achievement, the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, so called because of the name which he had sometimes given her, "The Little Portuguese," not because they were in any sense translations from that tongue. They make in their fluid, impulsive treatment of the quatorzain a remarkable contribution to the sonnet-sequences in English, which have used the form as a literary disguise for the freer music of love-song. Her disposition of the octave and sestet may be seen in the opening sonnet—

> "I thought once how Theocritus had sung,"

which for grace and tender dignity of style is not to be matched

in Victorian verse. It is curious to remember, in view of Browning's profound admiration for these sonnets, which was not bounded by his love for the writer, his undisguised contempt for the form in general as a vehicle of poetic ideas—

> "Did Shakespeare write sonnets?
> The worse Shakespeare he."

It was Edgar Poe who said of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Cry of the Children* that it could not be scanned, and pointed out the usual extreme uncertainty of her rhythm. As he said, she thought nothing of forcing the cesura in the middle of a word, or playing fast and loose with her rhymes. But in spite of her heedlessness, she has left verses, as in the *Cry of the Children*, which have authentically passed into the currency; and in *Aurora Leigh* she has written a personal epic, or a lyrical autobiography, which has broken every rule, yet is often superb.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### SWINBURNE—THE PRE-RAPHAELITES—PAINTED LYRIC—GEORGE MEREDITH

In recalling Swinburne's early poems we are apt to think first of *Atalanta in Calydon*; but the first series of "Poems and Ballads" is a better guide to the influences that equipped him at the opening of his career. In this lyric book of the genius and the extravagance of youth, we have a curious instance of what may come of a young poet's reading the old poetry, classic and medieval, not in an academic, but in a new, perfervid way. Its strange music forcibly broke with the accepted method; for the new-comer felt it a reproach that, as he said in *Dolores*—

> "Old poets outsing and outlove us,
> And Catullus makes mouths at our speech."

The most marked poem in the book, the *Laus Veneris*, offered a new setting of the ancient fable, which was intensely sensual, yet intensely imaginative. The pride of deadly sin sustained to perdition, the knight's tragedy, the winter's interlude, provide colours curiously and wonderfully wrought into the tapestry—

> "Lo, this is she that was the world's delight;
> The old grey years were parcels of her might;
> The strewings of the ways wherein she trod
> Were the twain seasons of the day and night. .
>
> Outside it must be winter among men;
> For at the gold bars of the gates again
> I heard all night and all the hours of it
> The wind's wet wings and fingers drip with rain."

Written before *Atalanta in Calydon*, probably before the year 1862, it was recited one day of that winter on the sands of Tynemouth, then a comparatively lonely place on the

Northumbrian coast, when its writer, not long escaped from Oxford, was on a visit to the Bell Scotts.

These years of his emergence were pitched in a time of many agitations, a time when some signs of revolution were to be counted. Ruskin was, in his own way, a herald of its advance; and many things that look innocent enough now, appeared ominous then. In prose fiction, works unconventional as Charles Reade's *Griffith Gaunt*, and Hugo's *Travailleurs de la Mer*, were carrying new ideas afield; and George Meredith's *Vittoria* was running in the *Fortnightly Review*. Still more notable, Browning's *Dramatis Personæ* had appeared in 1864, and that strenuous verseman, Robert Buchanan, then regarded as potential in the art, issued his *London Poems* in 1866. In science, Tyndall, Huxley, Darwin, and Herbert Spencer were revolutionaries. With Ruskin and Jowett at Oxford; William Morris writing his *Earthly Paradise* and working his way to his protest against an order of life where paradise was impossible; Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Millais, Madox-Brown, Holman Hunt bringing romance into art: one realises how full of new ideas were those days of the early sixties.

Any attempt made to trace the influences that gave Swinburne his early colours and rhythms must take stock of his Oxford associations with D. G. Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and William Morris. There is an equivalent in poetry to the early Pre-Raphaelite manner in painting; its worst and best characteristics are alike seen in *Chastelard* and in the most mannered pages of the *Poems and Ballads*. But when all is said that can be said of the conceits in the one and the almost angry sensuality in the other, there is so fine a residue, large in melody and creative in phrase, that the attitude of the critics who saw no merit in them is incomprehensible. What one does see in these ballads, under the garb of the Pre-Raphaelite and the Pre-Spenserite, is an almost barbaric force allied to the tempestuous sincerity of the young visionary who thinks to startle dull morality by revealing the naked passions. In all this earlier verse it is lyric force that first strikes one when estimating its comparative value. He could

pass from the *Masque of Queen Bersabe* to the *Song in Time of Revolution*, and from new effects in hendecasyllabics to still more exacting pages of sapphics. And in the sea-sonorous lines of the *Hymn to Proserpine* are to be surprised many of those notes and cadences, typical of his art, which he used afterwards to excess—

"Thou art more than the day or the morrow, the seasons that laugh or that weep;
For these give joy and sorrow; but thou, Proserpina, sleep.
Sweet is the treading of wine, and sweet the feet of the dove;
But a goodlier gift is thine than foam of the grapes or love.
Yea, is not even Apollo, with hair and harpstring of gold,
A bitter God to follow, a beautiful God to behold?"

In one page Swinburne speaks of *Chastelard* as an academic exercise, dating back to his last year at Oxford; but it has something of the unacademic excess of all his early writing. He is preoccupied with the amorist's theme, love's tragedy, and tends to reduce all the play of life to a lover's litany or a lyric duet, with some variations. His Mary Stuart has been called a Scottish Hesione.

"I am the queen Hesione.
The seasons that increased in me
Made my face fairer than all men's.
I had the summer in my hair;
And all the pale gold autumn air
Was as the habit of my sense.
My body was as fire that shone;
God's beauty that makes all things one
Was one among my handmaidens."

*Chastelard* and some two-thirds of the first series of *Poems and Ballads* ought to be read before *Atlanta in Calydon* in the artistic succession of these earlier writings. Two old poetries, Hebrew and Greek, are there united with the English, and a yet finer commixture is in *Atlanta in Calydon*, many of whose lyric passages are full of biblical colour—

"Not with cleaving of shields
And their clash in thine ear,
When the lord of fought fields
Breaketh spearshaft from spear,
Thou art broken, our lord, thou art broken, with travail and labour and fear."

This radiant chorus suggests how naturally Swinburne's discipleship in song led to his resumption of Shelley's methods and ideas; and "the Acroceraunian sword" in another verse is a clear reminder. A hater of tyrants in all things, he soon broke with "the tyranny of Iambe," so far as she threatened his own metrical freedom, even more conclusively than Shelley had done, but never more magically than with this form of winged stanza, often repeated—

> "Would the winds blow me back
> Or the waves hurl me home?
> Ah, to touch in the track
> Where the pine learnt to roam
> Cold girdles and crowns of the sea-gods, cool
> blossoms of water and foam."

If *Atalanta in Calydon* enlarged the lyric dialect of English poetry, the book with which he crowned his first period, *Songs before Sunrise*, represents a yet harder, more modern deliverance. In its pages one sees him taking up the revolutionary argument touched in at least two poems of his first book of *Poems and Ballads*, and made articulate in his *Song of Italy*. Four or five of the *Songs before Sunrise* have passed into the very fibre of that revolt which saved the nineteenth century, or its latter half, from the oncoming of an intellectual decline. The rhetoric and crudity of some denunciatory passages were saved by the live rhythms of the litanies and marching-songs. In this period we must not forget to include his first prose-book—on William Blake. The fashion of antithetic prose which Swinburne afterwards over-elaborated is not yet apparent; but he lets us into some notable secrets of his art, and discovers many of his literary sympathies.

Three years after *Songs before Sunrise* came *Bothwell*, most interminable of play-books! *Mon drame épique* he called it in commending it to his French master in song.

It, too, has its lyric pages. Darnley's dream in Act II., where, responding to Nelson's "You have slept seven hours," he says, "I have been seven years in hell"; and his last cry for mercy,

> "Out of her hands, God, God, deliver me!"

form one instance ; and the Queen's speech to Lady Lochleven, in a later passage, is another—

> " Ay, we were fools, we Maries twain, and thought
> To be into the summer back again
> And see the broom blow in the golden world,
> The gentle broom on hill. For all men's talk
> And all things come and gone, yet, yet I find
> I am not tired of that I see not here—
> The sun, and the large air, and the sweet earth,
> And the hours that hum like fireflies on the hills
> As they burn out and die, and the bowed heaven,
> And the small clouds that swim and swoon i' the sun,
> And the small flowers."

After *Bothwell*, *Mary Stuart* ; but first came his *Studies in Song* and *Songs of Springtides*, with the *Study of Shakespeare* and *Heptalogia*, while *Tristram of Lyonesse*, one of the most sumptuous of all the Arthurian tapestries woven by the English poets, quickly followed.

The impression gains upon one, in ransacking the collected poems, that, after *Tristram of Lyonesse*, Swinburne injured by an excess of metrical artifice, especially by his use of the accelerated beat in the line and his love for dancing measures. His earlier verse had, through its power to enforce his favourite idioms on the ear, made it extremely difficult for him to continue the same method without an undue strain on his hearers. There were allusions, rhetorical mannerisms, inversions, and definite tunes, which he could, as a still practising craftsman, only go on repeating at his peril.

If we turn to one of the poems in the early volumes, the *Forsaken Garden*, in which his double rhyming and euphonic strategy are in force, we see how inevitably its writer must, as he went on, exhaust the lyric interest of its rhymes and cadences—

> " All are at one now, roses and lovers,
> Not known of the cliffs and the field and the sea.
> Not a breath of the time that has been hovers
> In the air now soft with a summer to be.
> Not a breath shall there sweeten the seasons hereafter
> Of the flowers or the lovers that laugh now or weep,
> When, as they that are free now of weeping and laughter,
> We shall sleep."

Here are many effects of what Professor Sylvester would have us call "syzygy" (an ugly word not to be confused with the original term applied by the Greek prosodists to combined "quantities"); and while they are applied after a fashion more in keeping with a Celtic than an English tradition of poetry, their use is warranted in this poem, as in many other of Swinburne's poems, by the success of the lyric illusion they enabled him to obtain. But in this particular instance the poet, delightfully accorded and possessed with his subject, brings his stanzaic melody to a natural close at the tenth return. In other poems, drawn by a too fertile theme, or exalted by his own great pleasure over some self-imposed feat beyond what ordinary poets would deem the last endurance of "poetic pains," he forgot the limits, and multiplied his rhymes to the brink of distraction. Probably he did not realise that ears, not sensitive like his own to a tune within a tune, or to a delicate vowel echo made the bell-leader to a "syzygy" of consonants, soon tire. We discover this in several of the poems of the Sea, that Master Spirit that has both inspired his highest lyric achievement and urged him to overleap his art.

> "Thou wast father of olden
> Times and adored,
> And the sense of thy golden
> Great harp's monochord
> Was the joy in the soul of the singers that hailed
> thee for master and lord."

The Sea's is the influence that has been felt most, and has lasted longest, in his history, for good and evil. We find it in an unpublished love-poem of 1860, where the idea of refluent seaweed is used, and leads on to a wonderfully musical line of refluent cadences:—

> "Thine eyes that are quiet, thine hands that are kinder, thy lips
> that are loving."

We find it distinctly in his first volume, and we find it strong and resonant almost to the very end of the last. Indeed, *A Midsummer Holiday* contains some of the most memorable passages that can be quoted from his sea's argument; and nothing

in all his exuberant prose-writing is more striking than the page in which he contrasts Victor Hugo's poems of the joy of earth with his sea-songs, and turns them from the lines that begin—

> " La terre est calme auprès de l'océan grondeur ;
> La terre est belle, . . ."

to those in which the sea's defiance is cast as a challenge to the hopes and dreams of mankind—

> " Je suis la vaste mêlée,
> Reptile, étant l'onde, ailée,
> Étant le vent,
> Force et fuite, haine et vie,
> Houle immense, poursuivie
> Et poursuivant."

The motion of the sea, he said, was " never so perfectly done into words as in these three last lines ! " But he detects that in Hugo the sea-passion was not an inborn one, as it certainly was in himself. For, the son of a great sea-captain and admiral (and a friend, by the way, of Hugo's Admiral Canaris), he could claim that the sea-passion was his birthright. " Friend," he might have said to Hugo as he said it to a more congenial sea-lover afterwards—

> " Friend, earth is a harbour of refuge for winter, a covert where-under to flee
> When day is the vassal of night, and the strength of the hosts of her mightier than he ;
> But here is the presence adored of me, here my desire is at rest and at home.
> There are cliffs to be climbed upon land, there are ways to be trodden and ridden ; but we
> Strike out from the shore as the heart in us bids and beseeches, athirst for the foam."

Another page in the same volume gives us the poem, *In a Guernsey Bay*, which not only tells of his sea-obsession, but the sea-change in his verse-writing from the iambic to the fluid metres which ran riot in his later verse. If there was a particular accent in his verse when he wrote of the sea, it is felt in other themes. His lyric invention since *Mary Stuart* was exhausted in providing lyric change for the most monotonous theme in existence. The sea, in truth, is a dangerous master

for the imagination because of its monotony; and that is perhaps why some sailors lose their mental range after a few voyages and become reduced to two ideas.

If Swinburne's effect in the chronicle is too individual to let him be referred to a group, his poetry was much influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites. Of these, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's was the imagination that gave light to the others, although he did and could not direct all the activities that sprang out of the concurrence of their powers. Certainly Swinburne's first book of *Poems and Ballads* would not have been written as it was unless Rossetti had shown the way, and hinted at the new delight to be got by interpolating the arts; weaving what might be called tapestries in verse, and elaborating those lyric pictures to which Tennyson, following Keats and Coleridge, had lent his art. Probably he thought little about the actual singing value of the songs he did write. He did not mind turning a short line of an Italian street-song—"Guardalo in viso"—into an English equivalent in which the line fairly hisses with s's—"soft as music's measure." He did, on occasion, write with open vowel-effects, getting a movement into the stave that was tunable; but he relied usually on the consonants for his music. Try the opening of *The Stream's Secret,* however, for his subtle art of verse—

> "What thing unto mine ear
> Wouldst thou convey,—what secret thing,
> O wandering water ever whispering?
> Surely thy speech shall be of her,
> Thou water, O thou whispering wanderer,
> What message dost thou bring?"

or *A New Year's Burden*—

> Along the grass sweet airs are blown
> Our way this day in Spring.
> Of all the songs that we have known
> Now which one shall we sing?
> Not that, my love, ah no!—
> Not this, my love? why, so!—
> Yet both were ours, but hours will come and go."

Here the leaven of the South was newly at work. In Rossetti himself, mainly Italian by blood, a born poet, an artist of

unusually concrete imaginative faculty, the ages and countries seemed to meet. Mediæval Italy, Old France, Provençe, Chaucer's and Shakespeare's England, and some unsuspected tracts of Victorian Britain were brought to a narrow circuit in his studio in Blackfriars. He was an inspired boy. His *Blessed Damozel*, written at nineteen or twenty, is one of the rare instances of original lyric fantasy. It has notes of ballad-like directness, and a strain of supernal music, with surprising cadences, that spring of the very innocence of the ear. These are but imperfectly explained by conjecturing that Rossetti had by grace of his Italian descent a new sense of English, and that for him the tongue recovered something of the freshness it had for Chaucer, and the poets who wrote before its accents were stereotyped by long usage—

> " Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
> No wrought flowers did adorn,
> For a white rose of Mary's gift
> For service meetly worn :
> Her hair that lay along her back
> Was yellow like ripe corn.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The sun was gone now ; the curled moon
> Was like a little feather
> Fluttering far down the gulf ; and now
> She spoke through the still weather,
> Her voice was like the voice the stars
> Had when they sang together."

Mr W. M. Rossetti, in the brief memoir prefixed to the collected poems, gives us the main facts in his brother's literary pedigree. Shakespeare, Scott and Byron came earliest ; and the Bible—Job, Ecclesiastes and the Apocalypse in especial—was another foundation-book. Byron gave way in due course to Shelley, and it is significant that in the end he preferred Keats to Shelley, though with some " compunctious visitings." The *Border Ballads* and Mrs Browning are named too, and as for Dante, there " he drank deep " ; but after his boyish period Tennyson followed, and then Browning, who affected him intimately and for a time almost exclusively. Coleridge should be added, whom in the end he loved beyond all modern poets ; and there are some less-known books such as Bailey's

*Festus* and Charles Wells' *Stories after Nature*, to be counted. There are traces in his verse too of his study of Tom Hood's serious poems, and still more signs of William Blake's influence. There are some remarkable omissions in this list, and they too tell us something of his tutelage. His sonnets on *Five English Poets* confirm the account already given of his preferences, and add the name of Chatterton who, with Burns, seems to have been among his later favourites.

When, in the light of these associators of his genius, we turn to his verse, we come upon pages there that we relate easily to poems like Keats's *Eve of St Agnes*, which an original critic, who kept her criticisms for the delectation of her friends, once called "Pre-Raphaelitism in a Nutshell," Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, Browning's *Dramatic Lyrics*, Tennyson's *Mariana in the Moated Grange*, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and—less obvious example,—Tom Hood's *Dream of Eugene Aram*. The question that most affects us in the lyric count of his verse turns on the balance to be struck between the pictorial and the melodic elements it contains. Not much of it demands to be sung; most of it gains by being read aloud and given due vocal recital. Some poems have been successfully set to music. But in the main, Rossetti's lyric is written for the inner ear, and requires only to be mentally accompanied. At its worst it loses by neglecting the true English idiom and laying stress on the thin syllables which amounted to a mannerism in his poorer verse.

Much of Rossetti's characteristic verse is verse for the eye and the page of the book. He left the lyric rhythms softened, just as Swinburne left them strengthened—although by his figurative imagination and his concrete fantasy he added to the English store a wonderful portfolio of original romantic verse.

His younger associate, William Morris, wrote delightful balladry in his first book, *The Defence of Guinevere*. He, too, visualised the things he rhymed—saw them in colour before he arranged them in music. He, too, by dropping the conventional and expected mode, often gained an archaic picturesqueness; while the particularity and the exactness of the Pre-

Raphaelite ideas in painting led, when transferred to verse, to concrete and vivid effects wholly unlike those gained by generalising and moralising the theme after Gray's fashion—

> " My arms lay back behind my head ;
> Over my raised-up knees was spread
> A samite cloth of white and red ;
> A rose lay on my face."

The early poems of William Morris are lyrically the most interesting part of his work. He never excelled the jingling stanzas of *The Sailing of the Sword*—

> " Across the empty garden-beds,
> *When the sword went out to sea,*
> I scarcely saw my sisters' heads
> Bowed each beside a tree.
> I would not see the Castle leads
> *When the sword went out to sea.*"

But there are sublyrical interludes in the *Earthly Paradise* that ask to be remembered, and notably the lyric prologue to *The Wanderers*, which calls upon the hearers to think of the pack-horse on the down—

> " And dream of London, small, and white, and clean.'

If Rossetti painted pictures in verse, and wrote poetry with a brush upon canvas, Morris wove his poetic ideas into tapestry ; but he stopped now and again to indulge in memorial undersong.

In his days of warfare he wrote some " Chants for Socialists," of which the *Message of the March Wind* has a strong, even a noble melody in it, with a tender and humanly felt cadence that is hardly heard in any of his verse elsewhere.

The name of D. G. Rossetti calls up that of his sister Christina, who had a simple and exquisite gift of song. No poet of her time has expressed as she has simple emotion in the approach to ecstasy ; and she did it by relying, as her instinct directed, on the sheer sincerity of her verse. Her poems, those in which she most individually expressed herself, are sure of their effect. The song *When I am dead, my dearest,* the *Next of Kin* lines, and *The Bourne* venture on a sentiment that often becomes

dangerous in verse, because it is so easily overdone. But her hand, having reached the limit, knew how to pause—

THE BOURNE

" Underneath the growing grass,
Underneath the living flowers,
Deeper than the sound of showers
There we shall not count the hours
By the shadows as they pass.

Youth and health will be but vain,
Beauty reckoned of no worth :
There a very little girth
Can hold round what once the earth
Seemed too narrow to contain."

Association of name and date, nothing else, brings Sir Lewis Morris into range with William Morris. He wrote didactic lyric, of an agreeable Tennysonian flavour, with sincerity and often with charm. What he lacked was precisely the quality one might have expected of him—any saving grace of creative imagination or touch of Celtic magic. It seemed that the spirits directing these rarer things of poetry never forgave him for deliberately turning away from the poetry and the subject-matter of his own country-side and shire, in his salad days. He became a Tennysonian instead. The most striking poem that he wrote was an unrhymed ballad of *London*—

" There were two poor young girls, little older than children,
And they passed thro' the midnight streets of the city,—
Singing "

And some of his *Songs of Two Worlds*, those relating especially to his Carmarthen vale, have the lyric atmosphere and a pure clear vein of melody.

Another poet of a finer imagination, but uncertain of touch, was George Macdonald. He has left a few poems of the spiritual moods and heavenly desires that are unlike any others produced in his own time ; and they are quickened, never so slightly, by an incalculable Celtic fantasy at their best.

His *Diary of an Old Soul* has in its gentle self-torment and grave melody contrived at times a beautiful septet—

> " My surgent thought shoots lark-like up to thee
> Thou like the heaven art all about the lark :
> Whatever I surmise or know in me,—
> Idea, or but symbol in the dark,
> Is living, working, thought-creating power
> In thee, the timeless father of the hour ;
> I am thy book, thy song—thy child would be."

And some of his occasional child-rhymes entrap the irresponsible grace that is in the only unconscious imaginers we have left among us.

It was another plane upon which the author of *Modern Love*, George Meredith, worked. Sir Lewis Morris had too little self-criticism ; Meredith too much, and the critic was too wide awake in him to let his impulse freely declare itself. But the impulse is there ; none can doubt it who reads the concluding sonnets of *Modern Love*, which have an idiomatic force rarely attained in the Victorian sonnet.

Again, in Meredith's *Poems of the English Roadside* there are fine snatches of melody ; and *Juggling Jerry*, though he does use allusions too bookish for his calling, begets a real ballad of the open road. *The Woods of Westermain*, *Bran*, and *The Lark Ascending* are musically sped, and in one poem he reaches absolute melody, *Love in the Valley*, and in another, an *Autumn Evensong*, the rarer note—

> " Pale the rain-rutted roadways shine
> In the green light
> Behind the cedar and the pine :
> Come, thundering night !
> Blacken broad earth with hoards of storm ;
> For me yon valley cottage beckons warm."

There the rhythm carries him with it ; in other poems he does not trust himself to the natural movement but checks and breaks it, losing way at each stroke. Partly this was because he distrusted anything like obvious cadence, and objected to anything like prettiness in verse, as a reference to Tennyson in one of the letters goes to prove. From his letters we gather that what we may call the creative impulses were often

thwarted by the nervous critical misgivings bred in the hard struggle against Victorian taste and the literary conventions of his day; so his music was broken.

George Meredith, with his mixed blood, difficult beginnings, intense self-consciousness and cosmopolitan education, was a typical child of his time; and in him all the uncertain restless energies of his time seemed to find an artistic scapegoat. Lyric rhythms, as he could control them, were not his most congenial mode of utterance. He needed something more epigrammatic; and by an ancient paradox of the art of expression we may even say that he was most individual—in a sense most lyrical when he was occupied with his characters, and evoking his own emotion over them. And his real lyric is to be found in *Richard Feverel*, or in that curious autobiography, *Evan Harrington*. Take the memorable induction to a chapter, with a flying coach in an April sou'wester to set the note, which occurs towards the end of the last novel—

> "The coach went rushing against the glorious high wind. It stirred his blood, freshened his cheeks, gave a bright tone of zest to his eyes, as he cast them on the young green country. Not banished from the breath of heaven! . . . Not banished from the help that is always reached to us when we have fairly taken the right road; and that for him is the road to Lymport."

There the rhythm is with Meredith and not against him.

# CHAPTER XXX

## MATTHEW ARNOLD—THE LATER VICTORIANS —THE LITERARY LYRIC

BORN in the decade after Tennyson, Matthew Arnold reflected in his verse the interaction of criticism and of poetic ideas which accompanied the intellectual awakening of Oxford. An academic poet by nurture, bounded by classic landmarks, he was taught by Wordsworth during his long vacations in the north-country to look at Nature with his own eyes, while abroad Goethe, Heine, Obermann and others helped him to find his new outlook on the current of his time. His lyric impulse, though affected by his temperamental diffidence and his theories, was genuine, when fired by life or by contact with those natural influences of which he was keenly susceptible. In his earlier poems we perceive already some of the difficulties that threatened verse in its uncertain adjustment between the creative and the critical activities of his time and still threaten it in ours. Only an overpowering emotional energy like that of his contemporaries, Swinburne in England or Victor Hugo in France, it seems, could break the new barriers set up in what used to be open ground. Bounded as he was, Arnold's doubts and fits of intellectual rebellion were not in themselves enough to give his verse lyric life, and it often tends to the minor. But his fastidious sense of words, the love that Wordsworth had helped to give him for the clear accent and the open vowel, and the rare touch of genius, helped to endow him at his best with individual melody and forms of verse intimately tinged with classical or English colour—

> "Haply, the river of Time,—
> As it grows, as the towns on its marge
> Fling their wavering lights
> On a wider, statelier stream—

May acquire, if not the calm
Of its early mountainous shore,
Yet a solemn peace of its own

And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the grey expanse where he floats,
Freshening its current and spotted with foam
As it draws to the Ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast;
As the pale waste widens around him—
As the banks fade dimmer away—
As the stars come out, and the night-wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite Sea."

The English note is more distinct in some of the early love-idyllic pages—*Parting*, for instance, in the Switzerland cycle. The fifth poem of the same series ends on a strain in which Arnold's individual accent, the specific note of his contribution to the spiritual dialect of the nineteenth century, is heard like a voice from the Oxford of two—or is it three?—generations ago—

"Who order'd that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
Who renders vain their deep desire?
A God, a God their severance ruled!
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb'd salt, estranging sea."

One of Arnold's truest critics, Swinburne, speaking of his *Callicles*, said—

"It is a model of grave, clear, solemn verse; the style plain and bare, but sufficient and strong; the thought deep, lucid, direct. We may say of it what the author has himself said of the wise and sublime verses of Epictetus, that 'the fortitude of that is for the strong, yet the few; even for them the spiritual atmosphere with which it surrounds them is bleak and grey'; but the air is higher and purer, the ground firmer, the view clearer; we have a surer foothold on these cold hills of thought than in the moist fragrance of warmer air which strips the meadows and marshes of sentiment and tradition. . . . It is no small or common comfort, after all the delicate and ingenious shuffling of other English poets about the edge of deep things, to come upon one who speaks with so large and clear and calm an utterance."

Much of Arnold's verse is too cold to satisfy the lyric canon. Its effects, even when really impulsive and tested with "the singing flame," are too electile, too subtle, to be readily understood. They are assured nevertheless; and as time goes on, they do not seem to lose in weight. In the unrhymed lyric he was, on his own ground, and he still is, unrivalled. And it is certainly significant that his magical strain, where his Celtic blood seemed to kindle his melody and imagination together, in *The Forsaken Merman*, is now grown almost too familiar by repetition.

With Arnold it is natural to think of Clough, who, with an accent of his own, did something to find the equation, agnostic and humanist, that troubled many thinkers of his time. Still, interesting as his contributions were, he rarely gained his lyric freedom; he wrote in what we now perceive to have been a dialect of that time, hardly the true *lingua franca* of the poets of all time. But those who in their salad days read Clough still find his accent affecting, eloquent, and morally inspired.

"For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright."

If Clough is in doubt, what shall be said of other poets of his and Arnold's generation, who had not their play of ideas or their part in what Arnold called "the war of liberation of humanity."

The "Spasmodics," Sydney Dobell and Alexander Smith, are interesting to verse students because of their forcible rhythms and intoxicated diction; if they did not help to advance the lyric art. They may be considered, with Mrs Abab and Mr Gigadibs, among those vigorous sub-agents of the muse who exist in every period and do real service in their own day. If they are not like "poets at times,"

they are the versemen who serve their turn and succeed to-day, and to-morrow are dropped behind in the race.

It was otherwise with a lyrist like William Allingham, who has written, perhaps, half-a-dozen songs that will, or that may, live. Indeed, it is possible that as Lafcadio Hearn once said, there are a few snatches of his song that may outlast many pages that appeared to his contemporaries of weight; and his *Dream* is a ballad which keeps its own pace, and attempts no archaism.

A typical poet, who was born in the year after Arnold, the author of *The Angel in the House*, Coventry Patmore, succeeded by play of brilliant fancy and the keenest metrical resource in giving to the lyric a new domestication. The facility and the occasional triviality of his verse make it hard for us to follow it at all times with sympathy, but there are passages in *The Angel in the House* which hold in them the genuine emotion of the experiences out of which they were distilled. In the twelfth canto of Book I. there is a passage describing the imaginative inexperience of the heroine, which has true fantasy and genuine melody.

> "She wearies with an ill unknown;
> In sleep she sobs and seems to float,
> A water-lily, all alone
> Within a lonely castle-moat;
> And as the full moon, spectral, lies
> Within the crescent's gleaming arms,
> The present shows her heedless eyes
> A future dim with vague alarms.
> She sees, and yet she scarcely sees,
> For, life-in-life not yet begun,
> Too many are its mysteries
> For thought to fix on any one."

And in the seventh canto of Book II. there is a May Song which deserves to be added to the Spring Anthology. Coventry Patmore always worked with a certain sense of the classical models of verse, and in *The Unknown Eros* he applied to his verse a kind of Pindaric varying melody, which enabled him to achieve new effects and subtler cadences. The *Winter Poem* in this volume of 1877 may almost be said to introduce

some new rhythms into English, or if that is to say too much, it may be claimed that it succeeds in discovering the medium for the expression of those highly elusive feelings which it is hard to express in lyric without endangering the music by too introspective a note. It may be fairly claimed that Patmore added a faint accent of his own to the lyric vocabulary, although as we hearken back to the full cry of the Victorians, it is very easy to overlook its value.

One of the same generation, indeed one born in the same year with Patmore, William Johnson-Cory, has left two or three perfect lyrics tinged with classic reminiscence, in the genre of which Landor was master. His *Invocation*—

" I never pray'd for Dryads, to haunt the woods again,
More welcome were the presence of hungering, thirsting men. . . ."

His *Dirge* for Anterôs and his *Heraclitus* lines are unexcellable of their kind—

" They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.
I wept as I remembered how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky

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."

In the chorus of versemen who succeeded at this time, the names of many occur who made lyric contributions to the Victorian Anthology (well represented in Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Book of Victorian Verse*). But in looking for the note that is distinctive and likely to be permanent, and for the form of verse destined to affect other poets and advance the tradition, we do not find many that can be held individual or strong enough to count in the record. There is an individual but crude melody to be heard in the *Studies of Sensation and Event*, by Ebenezer Jones, whose temperament was fiery and revolutionary; and his *Invocation to Death*, one of his last poems, has three remarkable stanzas. The forces that

reacted on him, and helped both to stifle and develop his ardour, were represented in other writers before him, like Tom Hood, who used his wit with imagination.

The same forces affected Charles Kingsley, if chiefly his prose work—*Yeast* and *Alton Locke* for instance. His lyrics, fortunately, are free from his polemical fervour; four or five of them will probably serve to keep his memory alive when all else that he wrote is forgotten; or perhaps we ought to reduce the four or five to two or three—for choice, *Airley Beacon, The Sands of Dee, The Three Fishers.* We must pass among others the work of William Brighty Rands, who wrote *Lilliput Levee*, and achieved some songs with an inimitable mixture in them of nonsense and imagination. By the same hard law we can no more than mention Robert Brough's *Songs of the Governing Classes*; Gerald Massey's *Ballads of War*, and Walter Thornbury's *Jacobite Ballads.* Thomas Edward Brown, the author of *Fo'c'sle Yarns*, who created *Betsy Lee*, and William Barnes, the Dorset poet, who carried on the Wessex tradition, are surer of their mark.

One of the younger writers who profited early by Swinburne's example in the use of fluid rhythms was Arthur O'Shaughnessy, who died young, but left a few songs to keep his name alive—

> "We are the music makers,
> And we are the dreamers of dreams,
> Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
> And sitting by desolate streams;
> World-losers and world-forsakers,
> On whom the pale moon gleams:
> Yet we are the movers and shakers
> Of the world for ever, it seems.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> We, in the ages lying
> In the buried past of the earth,
> Built Nineveh with our sighing,
> And Babel itself in our mirth;
> And o'erthrew them with prophesying
> To the old of the new world's worth;
> For each age is a dream that is dying,
> Or one that is coming to birth."

Robert Louis Stevenson attained his apparent ease and naturalness of expression, alike in prose and verse, by intense artifice, and an almost uncanny power of bringing the literary idioms that had struck his fancy in other authors to aid the personal melody he gave to all he wrote. We see it in his *Requiem,* which opens and closes with a cue based on the old rhyme of "the sailor home from sea," and "the hunter home from the hill."

> "Under the wide and starry sky
> Dig the grave and let me lie.
> Glad did I live and gladly die,
> And I laid me down with a will."

W. E. Henley, who knew him too well to allow all his fame to go unquestioned, was another original of the like sub-literary habit. If we can admit that an age or a time can have a dialect of its own, expressive of its peculiar moods, we must certainly look to Stevenson and Henley for some of the phrases that made up the argot of their day. Henley's *Book of Verses,* published in 1888, belongs as idiomatically to that year as Allan Ramsay's *Tea-table Miscellany* to the eighteenth century. In order to range him with his precursors, it is necessary to quote two or three stanzas of his realistic impressionism from his Hospital poems—

> "You are carried in a basket,
> Like a carcase from the shambles,
> To the theatre, a cockpit,
> Where they stretch you on a table.
>
> There they bid you close your eyelids,
> And they mask you with a napkin,
> And the anæsthetic reaches
> Hot and subtle through your being.
>
> And you gasp, and reel, and shudder
> In a rushing, swaying rapture,
> While the voices at your elbow
> Fade—receding—fainter—farther. . . . "

Another page, bearing marks of the same solvent influence that has touched the votaries of *vers libre* in France, is inscribed "R. L. S." Its movement may be recalled by the four opening and six closing verses—

"A child,
Curious and innocent,
Slips from his Nurse, and rejoicing
Loses himself in the fair

Thus, thro' the World,
Seeing, feeling and knowing
Goes Man, till at last,
Tired of experience, he turns
To the friendly and comforting breast
Of the old nurse, Death."

We might have quoted, too, a sonnet of the earlier series, for preference his *Staff-Nurse: Old Style*, or *The Chief*, in order to show the endless adaptability of the old form to new uses—

"The greater masters of the commonplace,
Rembrandt and good Sir Walter—only these
Could paint her all to you: experienced ease,
And antique liveliness, and ponderous grace;
The sweet old roses of her sunken face;
The depth and malice of her sly gray eyes
The broad Scots tongue that flatters, scolds, defies
The thick Scots wit that fells you like a mace.
These thirty years had she been nursing here,
Some of them under Syme, her hero still.
Much is she worth, and even more is made of her.
Patients and students hold her very dear.
The doctors love her, tease her, use her skill.
They say 'The Chief' himself is half-afraid of her."

These lines have an aroma of their own, new in the record of the sonnet. The death of Andrew Lang, another occasional associate of that little group, which occurred when the main text of this volume was already complete, may remind us how quickly fashions change. He helped in his day the revival of Old French forms of verse, and so increased the wit and savour of his art; but his best contribution to lyric is his sonnet on Homeric criticism, which opens—

"The sacred keep of Ilion is rent . . .

There for once he attained a trumpet-note that must have astonished himself.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE LYRIC CANON—CONCLUSION

THERE with the death of Andrew Lang we must break off, for to deal with recent writers is not the office of a book intended to trace the long recount, which must beware of the contemporary estimate. What it is important to do at the end of the chronicle is to note the strength of the original elements, still prevailing in our verse, and bring together in closer context some of those scattered instances which have helped to build up in English the Lyric Canon.

Throughout its history two great adaptations are to be noted that have affected the stock. One is that connected with the names of Cnut, and of St Godric, prime "rebel against Anglo-Saxon versification," as he has been called, who died about 1170. Before them the Teutonic stave still governed the idiom and verse-movement of the tongue, whose measure we took in *Beowulf* and *The Seafarer*. The first step toward a new scansion and to melody in early English is to be traced in the Ely lines and those of Godric calling on St Nicholas, which end—

> "At thy burth, at thy bare
> Saintë Nicholas, bring us wel thare!"

The Cnut lines have already been quoted.

The other adaptation was a much longer and more complex business, which indeed is still going on. It has to do not with a change in the master rhythm of a tongue; but with the effects of the printed book and the literary habit in cloistering song and giving poetry an unsocial or exclusive habit in place of the old folk-custom. This later modification is closely associated with that other, which M. Jeanroy has helped us to realise in his study of the Lyric origins in mediæval France,

and the relation of the "poésie populaire" to the "poésie courtoise." For in truth in both the formula of conversion is, when we look into it, much the same. It may be thought that the affiliation of song to a mother church would previously have tended to its over-refinement too. But the spirit of the faith that lived, not for a class, but for the good of souls at large, was against any such diversion of the art, as the case of Adam de St Victor goes to show. A hymn, in his idea, says his biographer, was not a literary composition intended to be read *sous le cloître*, or admired by the *beaux esprits*. It was a joyous chant that needed to be sung by the choirs on fête days instead of the ancient Jubili and Alleluia. If the offices of the Church helped so far to keep the vital balance and did little to hasten the literary conversion, it did much to induce the other change, by which the Anglo-Saxon rhythm and the old *stab-reimvers* was led to yield to the solvent. But the northern idiom and the old accent, as we had them in the *Exeter Book* and at the beginning of our sea-poetry in *Beowulf* and *The Seafarer*, have never been quite destroyed. We have seen how, long afterwards, mediæval poems like *Sir Gawaine* and *the Greene Knight* and *The Pearl* were affected by them, even when the verse was manifestly looking for its new attire, and using curious vocal rhymes, as in the lines—

> "Swangeande swete the water con swepe
> Wyth a rownande rourde ray-kande aryght
> (Swinging sweet, the water can sweep
> With a murmuring noise running aright)."

We can trace it at another stage in the early love-song which tells of the coming change—

> "She was brighter of her blee than was the bright sun;
> Her rudd redder than the rose that on the rise hangeth;
> Meekly smiling with her mouth, and merry in her looks,
> Ever laughing for love, as her liking was: . . ."

and we find it in another line of the same poem which gets to the very heart of imaginative melody—

> "And the grass that was grey greened belive: . . ."[1]

[1] Forthwith.

But one more step, and we find rhyme supervening by what seems the inevitable road—

"When the nightingale sings—the woods waxen green,
Leaf and grass and blossom—spring in Averil, I ween;
And love is to my heart gone—with a spear so keen:
Night and day, my blood it drinks—my heart doth me tene." [1]

This asks to be interpreted by the tune to which it was sung; but we are still aware in reading it of the Old Northern rhythm. Another page and we feel the melic impulse strengthening in the verse of Rolle of Hampole. Further north the old rhythm went on influencing the folk-poets for generations to come. There, as Schipper pointed out in the Teutonic stave, the rhythmical *ictus* coincided with the word-accent, while the southern and Latin verse was decided syllabically.

So in Scotland we come comparatively late upon proverbs in rhyme with the old dependence on word emphasis—

"Full moon, high sea! Great man s'alt thou be;
But ill death s'alt thou dee."

But to return to the main descent, we may take from the Vernon MS. a fresh variety of the old music in *Seemly Susan*—

"In the season of summer—with Sybil and Joan
She begat her to her garden—that growëd so green."

These lines rhyme o-e, o-e; and there we have the clear suggestion of the ballad-melody that was direct heir to the old *stabreim*.

The new music sounds out loud and sweet for the first time in the best Spring song in all literature—the *Cuckoo Song*—

"Summer is y-comen in
Loud sing cuckoo,"

which we may date roughly, in order to get our European bearings, between Dante and *Aucassin et Nicolette*; or at home between *Orm* and the *Cursor Mundi*—that is to say, the year 1280 or thereabouts. There is not room here to tell at length its musical history as related in the *Oxford History of Music*. The extreme beauty of the interlinked music, like two tunes strung together on one chain, is only to be appreci-

[1] Pain.

ated when it is sung by three or more singers who can individualise the distinct strains. It is indeed startling to find such consummate workmanship in the musical setting of a song written before Chaucer.

The only other early song of that day, whose music survives, is altogether cruder in effect—

" Fowles in the frith.
The fisses in the flod,
And I mon waxe wod
Mulche sorus I walke with,
For beste of bon and blod."

The music to this is interesting, however, because one surprises in its rude-rhythm the movement of a primitive dance-tune mingled with an echo of the first Gregorian chant. Dance rhythms and church themes were, in fact, two prime inductors of the lyric, and helped to bring it musically within hail of its ideal form: that of a carol or love-song in three passages. First the theme; then an access of emotion, a pensive variation, or an enlargement of the theme; and lastly, the recoil, or the fulfilment, of the melody.

Needless to say the model was often varied, often altered in days when the art was not too deliberate or fast bound by any rules. But one finds it coming to its mark in songs like—

" Lenten is come with love to toune ";

or the winter's carol unearthed by Ritson—

" Wynter wakeneth al my care;
Nou this leves waxeth bare;
Ofte I sike and mourne sare,
When hit cometh in my thoght
Of this worldes joie, hou hit geth al to noht.

Nou hit is, and nou hit nys,
Also hit ner nere ywys.
That moni man seith, soth hit is,
Al goth bote Godes wille.
Alle we shule deye, thah us like ylle.

Al that gren me greveth grene
Now hit faleueth al by dene.
Jesu, help that hit be sene,
Ant shild us from helle
For I not whider I shal, ne hou longe her duelle! "

The same pattern helped afterward to decide some of the elect forms of converted song that adopted it, with a note of artifice in the recurrent mode. We see it in Chaucer's rondel of *Seynt Valentyn*[1]: and his balade—

"Madame, for your newe fangalnesse";

The old *Boar's Head Carol*, first printed in Wynkyn de Worde's *Carolles* (1521)—

"The Boar's Head in hand bring I,"

is a plainer example, built on an old church melody. Gradually a free use of refrain helped to extend the melody beyond the three-stanza return, and to increase the narrative element in lyric.

Refrains like the *Kyrieleyson* of *Joly Jankin* (which however is another triple lyric), *But bring us in Good Ale, God speed the Plough Alway*, and *Hey go bet, hey go howe*, mark the repertory of the transitional sung verse, which is between folk-song and art-song. The tunes again are often a clue to the pedigree. Mr Vincent Jackson, in his *English Melodies*, prints several of rare quality, including *Sellenger's Round*, *Trenchmore*, *Greensleeves*, and *Crimson Velvet*. It was to the last tune that the *Lamentable Complaint of Queen Mary* was set long after the music was first heard. As sequel to the pages on Lawrence Minot and the ballad beginnings, the fifteenth century duet of Agincourt, for alto and tenor with bass added in the chorus, may also be noticed. There we are near to *Chevy Chase*—"a genuine minstrel ballad," which Sidney's tribute in the *Apologie* will not let us forget. The *Kynge's Balade*, "Pastance with good company," for which Henry VIII. wrote the music, has already been quoted: the air, says our authority, is "characteristically sturdy." With it may be recalled the earliest of "The Hunt's up" songs, which Puttenham mentions as written by "one Gray," who

[1] See p. 77.

gained Henry's favour by his "merry ballads" and this in particular—

> "The hunt is up, the hunt is up
> And now 'tis well nigh day;
> And Harry our King is gone hunting
> To bring his deer to bay"

The tune "Trenchmore," it seems, was a favourite in the hunting repertory. Burton speaks of it in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, "Who can withstand it, be we young or old, though our teeth shake in our heads like virginal jacks, or stand parallel asunder like the arches of a bridge—there is no remedy; we must dance *Trenchmore* over tables, chairs, and stools." In one setting the opening lines are—

> "To-morrow the fox will come to town,
> *Keepe, keepe, keepe, keepe, keepe,*
> O keepe you all well there!"

The tune itself is marked by a taking rhythm, but it is of an almost plaintive gaiety, as we should now think it. The old song-book, *Deuteromelia*, has a setting of the humorously intended song—

> "We be soldiers three
> *Pardonna moy, je vous an pree*;
> Lately come forth of the Low countrie,
> With never a penny of money."

In another book we come upon a song of the *Clown's Wooing* by a love-sick maid, with a dance movement, set to the Tune of *The Nightingale*—

> "'I prithee, sweet,' she said,
> 'Regard a love-sicke maide,
> 'Tis thee alone
> Must ease my mone,
> Or else I comfort can get none
> O be not so obdure,
> O sit not so demure, . . .'"

This brings us to the *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, a true canon-book. There, among others, Richard Edwards adds to the May music, if it must be admitted that for a trained song-writer he occasionally abused the sibilant, and failed to remember his own warnings, "Let woordes be woordes!"

and "Trust words as skilful Falconers do trust Hawks that never flew."

'When May is in his prime, then may each heart rejoice,
When May bedecks each branch with green, each bird strains forth his voice:
The lively sap creeps up into the blooming thorn,
The flower which cold in prison kept, now laughs the frost to scorn.

All nature's impēs triumph whiles joyful May doth last,
When May is gone of all the year the pleasant time is past."

"Maister Edwards" went to extremes of May folly in another song—

"Thus must I play in pleasant May till I may May at will,
With her in May whose May my life now may both save and spill."

One of the refrains in these pages again breathes the French note: it occurs in another allegorical lyric, *The Judgement of Desire*. The singer tells how he fared out—

"And in the meads I met a knight
Clad in carnation colour faire."

He salutes the knight and asks his name, who replies—

"I am Desire,
Laradon, tan, tan, Tedriton teight."

Now we come to *England's Helicon*, the perfect lyric testament of that day, which kept the natural and the artificial modes in poise. One of its pages allegorically calls up Venus and Cupid in peascod time—

"In Pescod time when hound to horn
Gives ear till buck be kill'd,
And little lads with pipes of corn
Sit keeping beasts afield."

That opens a brief Pastoral or Morality, *The Shepherd's Slumber*, which had in it classic and French colours mixed with English. The same volume contains Drayton's *Daffadill*, marked by the natural melody of a master melodist.

'She's in a frock of Lincolne greene
The colour maydes delight;
And never hath her beauty seene
But through a vayle of white.
. . . . .
Whose presence as along she went,
The pretty flowers did greete;
As though their heads they downe-ward bent
With homage to her feete."

Those who care to learn the secret of the art, without grammar or use of the prosodies, should give their most susceptible moods to *England's Helicon*. There, and in the Lutanists' verse, in Barnefield and Lodge, the songs from the Elizabethan plays and song-books, in Campion and Herrick, the English lyric attains its artistic meridian. Take two pieces by unknown hands—the first from *Robert Jones's Song-Book*—

" The sea hath many thousand sands,
The sun hath motes as many;
The sky is full of stars, and Love
As full of woes as any:
Believe me, that do know the elf,
And make no trial by thyself!

It is in truth a pretty toy
For babes to play withal:—
But O! the honeys of our youth
Are oft our age's gall!
Self proof in time will make thee know
He was a prophet told thee so;

A prophet that Cassandra-like,
Tells truth without belief;
For headstrong Youth will run his race,
Although his goal be grief:—
Love's Martyr, when his heat is past,
Proves Care's Confessor at the last."

The other is from *Thomas Bateson's English Madrigals*, which suggests a London that was still a country town, and still able to catch in its urban poetry the echoes of folk-song and the May country-dance—

" Sister, awake! close not your eyes!
The day her light discloses,
And the bright morning doth arise
Out of her bed of roses.

See the clear sun, the world's bright eye,
In at our window peeping,
Lo, how he blusheth to espy
Us idle wenches sleeping.

Therefore awake! make haste, I say,
And let us, without staying,
All in our gowns of green so gay
Into the Park a-Maying."

That still has the southern note in it. For the northern, we must turn to the old song-books that Fergusson and Burns prized, or to Pinkerton's collection; this for example—

THE REEDS IN THE LOCH SAY—

"Thoch raging stormes move us to schaik
And wind mak water us owrflow:
We yield thairto, but doe not brek,
And in the calm unbent we go.

So, Baneist men (thoch princes raige),
And Prisoners, be not disparit:
Abyde the wind, quhill that it suaige,
For Tyme sic causis hes reparit."

The two modes meet in *Westron Wind* which, when heard well sung, perfectly fulfils one's idea of what song ought to be—

"Westron wind when wilt thou blow?
The small rain down can rain;
O gentle death when wilt thou come
For I of my life am weary.

Mart'mas wind when wilt thou blow?
The small rain down can rain;
The green leaves fall from off the tree,
And I to my love do call in vain."

By these instances from the English anthology we are able to gain, if not a single conclusive type, a clear sense of the impulse that makes for lyric life and the organic forms to which the music inevitably tends. We have seen it adjusting itself at every stage of growth to the instinctive delight in the forces of nature, the escape from winter, the May's return, the summer's pleasure, and the love that harmonises the visible world. It is because it has in the exercise of its functions

given a voice to the creative instinct and the generous energies of men—whether in verse to be sung or in a piece of lyric, a silent song intended for the book—that one is tempted to set it apart among the kinds of verse. "It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration."[1] It is directed by that "Musicke" spoken of in the *Paradise of Daynty Devises*—

> "A heavenly gift that turnes the minde
> Like as the sterne doth rule the ship."

Its vitality is proved in the chronicle by the reinstative power it maintained during the second great adaptation that threatened it in its long growth, under which the poets were driven to seek out the literary equivalent for the old open forms of song. If this has been found, with the aid of the genius of writers like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Swinburne, we are compelled to recognise that it has only been so in proportion to the degree in which the lyric principle and the relation of the written to the vocal idiom has been held in mind. Nothing in their achievement, nothing in the literary usage, early or late, has upset the authority of the old canon which insists on the two prime factors in the lyric art, Music and Imagination. From it we learn—

I. That no song or lyric can hope to reach the ear of the common people which cannot draw, as the old folk-songs did, on the congenial living rhythms of its own day.

II. That no poem can attain lyrical life under the new order which neglects the original conditions of the art and the law of the correspondence between the vocal and the ideal harmony.

So much being granted, we may agree that the lyric kind allows for every possible variation that the new poets and individual artists can devise in their song. Instead of any hard rule to be enforced at the end, accordingly, the last

[1] Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*.

words should go to enhance the lyric idea and leave it still potential. One may be taken from Bartholomew Anglicus de Glanville—

> "But according voices sweet and ordinate gladden and move to love, and show one the passion of the soul, and witness the strength and virtue of the spiritual members and show pureness and good disposition of them, and relieve travail, and put off disease and sorrow. . . . And pleaseth not only men but also brute beasts as it fareth in oxen that are excited to travail more by sweet song of the herd than by strokes and pricks. . . . Also by sweet songs of harmony and accord of music, sick men and frantic came oft to their wit again and health of body. . . . This is the ordinance of music that is known above the sweetness of the soul."

Another from an Elizabethan song-book—

> "Come, Sorrow, come!
> Come, come sweet Scale;
> By the which we ascend
> To the Heavenly Place;
> Where Virtue sitteth smiling,
> To see how some look pale, look pale,
> With fear to behold thy ill-favoured face,
> Vaine shews their sense beguiling,
> For Mirth hath no assurance,
> Nor warranty of durance,—
> nor warranty,
> Nor warranty of durance."

If the account these tributes bring to a close should appear suggestive rather than complete, we must remember it is not meant to be a history of lyric poetry, but an attempt to trace the broad lines along which the art has developed in England. As it is, many poets are omitted, not because they did not write anything of value, but because they did not considerably affect the growth of the verse. For the rest, we may be content to take encouragement with Bartholomew Anglicus, believing that as the English lyric has survived for over six centuries, it is not likely to fail while human nature remains sound and needs to utter its joy of life and "relieve travail and put off disease and sorrow." It is in the nature of the lyric argument to lie open, and to point forward.

*

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