# THE PAGEANT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY EDWARD PARROTT

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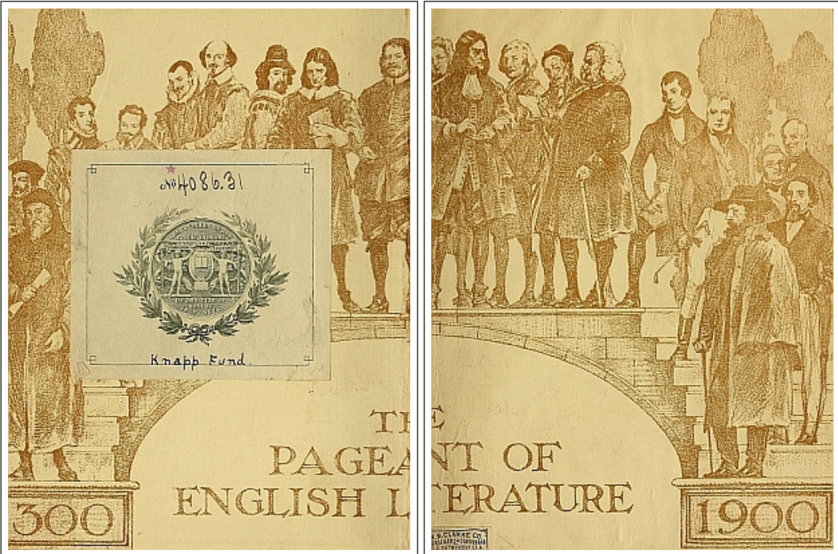
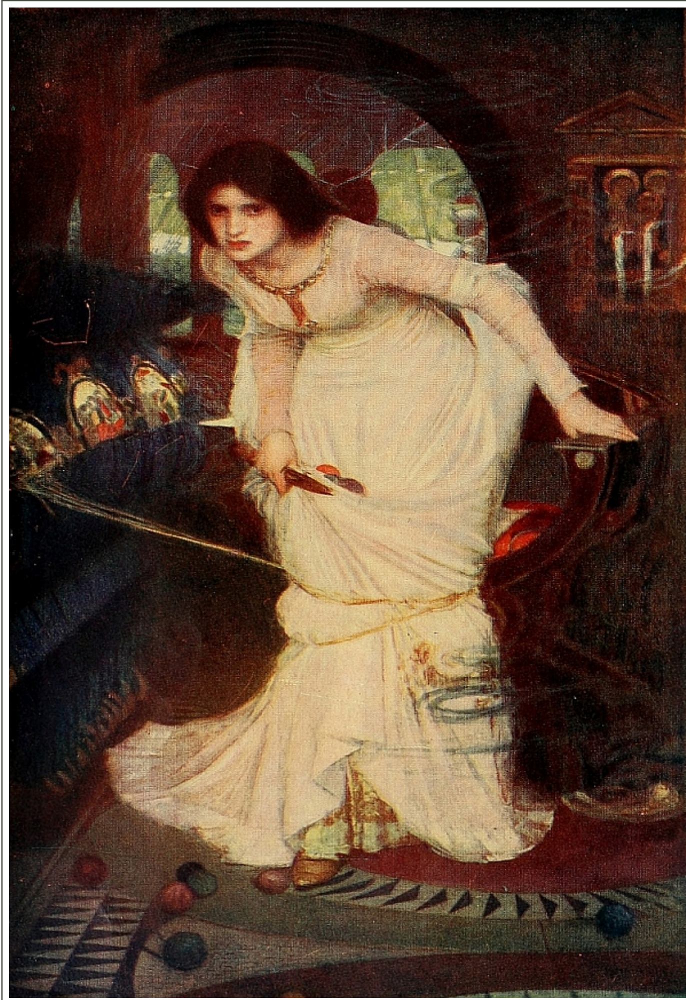
# THE PAGEANT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE





**The Lady of Shalott.**

(***By J. W. Waterhouse, R.A. By permission of the Corporation of Leeds.***) To List

# THE PAGEANT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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**AUTHOR OF “THE PAGEANT OF BRITISH HISTORY,” ETC.**

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**(PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN)**

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# FOREWORD.

THE Pageant, as revived in our time, may move the historian to mirth or wrath, according to his temperament; but such a popular display, however crude in conception, however garish in presentation, may be conceded this saving grace, that it affords an opportunity of arousing a widespread interest in the great deeds and great personages of the past, and of stimulating a desire to become better acquainted with them. The unambitious aim of this book is thus exactly expressed.

The author has endeavoured to compose a series of pen-pictures revealing, he would fain hope, the great masters of our Literature as living, breathing human beings arrayed in the appropriate trappings of their time and circumstance. He sets them forth in what he conceives to be their best and most characteristic aspects, and he dwells upon all that is admirable in them and in their achievements. With such skill as he may command, he directs the attention of "the young and gracious of every age" to "the precious life-blood of master-spirits embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life," and his simple purpose, like that of Goldsmith's Village Pastor, is to

"allure to brighter worlds and lead the way."

"Great thanks, laud, and honour," wrote Caxton in an imperishable passage, "ought to be given unto the clerks, poets and historiographs, that have written many noble books of wisdom, of the lives, passions, and miracles, of holy saints, of histories of noble and famous acts and feats, and of the chronicles with the beginning of the creation of the world unto this present time, by which we be daily informed and have knowledge of many things of whom we should not have known if they had not left us their monuments written." In this age of print, when every day brings its insistent reading matter, there is a very real danger that the grand old things of literature may be submerged beneath an ever-rising flood of novelties. Not to know these "books of all time" is to suffer a deprivation which has no compensations in this life, and surely he who, however ungracefully, acts as their chamberlain in the court of letters serves an office of humble worthiness. To such a rôle does the writer of this book aspire.

A modern statesman who equally adorns the strangely diverse arenas of politics and high philosophy has complained that in the days of his youth none of his professional teachers ever thought of instilling in him a love of literature for its own sake. Modern educators have enlarged their sphere since his nonage, but still it may be doubted whether the formal studies of the schoolroom send men and women with joyous delight to browse on the "fair and wholesome pasturage of good old English reading." Too often the formality of the teaching and the pemmican of

the text-book have precisely the contrary effect. The present writer is not singular in believing that the surest way to send a young reader to a classic is to interest him in the man or woman behind the book. He therefore retells the life-stories of those who have endowed us with the priceless heritage of our literature, in the hope that the reader will turn from his pages to those of the masters, not merely whetted by curiosity, but furnished with a clue to interpretation. If one reader of this book be so inspired, the author will have good cause to rejoice in the success of his labours.

E. P.

Edinburgh, *July 1914*.

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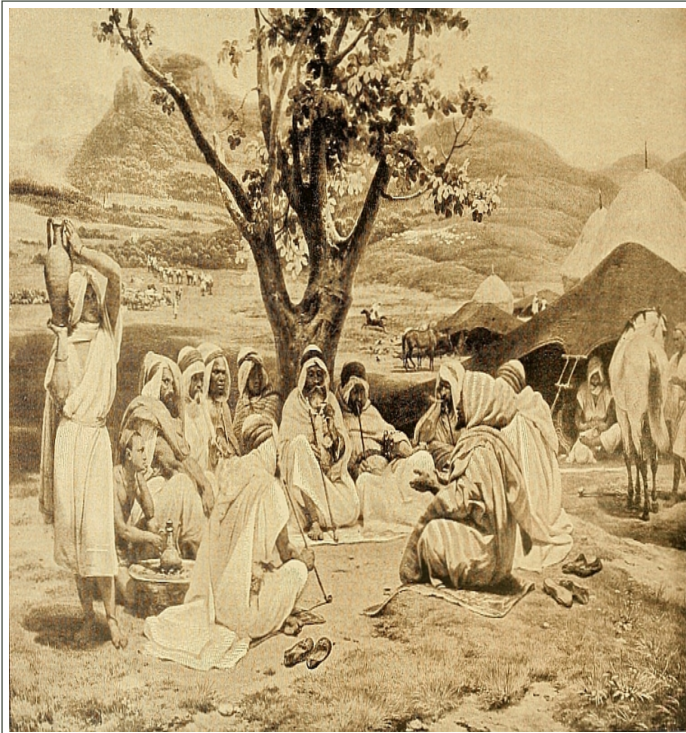


**A TELLER OF TALES.**

(***By Horace Vernet. From the Wallace Collection.***) To List

# THE
# PAGEANT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

# Chapter I.

## THE DIM PRIMÆVAL WORLD.

"*In even savage bosoms*
*There are longings, yearnings, strivings,*
*For the good they comprehend not.*"—Longfellow.

Our pageant opens humbly. Certain wild, uncouth men, rugged in feature, misshapen in form, and furtive in gait, pass before us. Their long, unkempt hair hangs upon their shoulders; they are half-clad in skins that betray the animals which provided them, and they bear in their hands stone hatchets, flint-or bone-tipped spears and arrows, and bows of pliant wood. They and their mates and offspring are our remote ancestors, denizens of the dim, mysterious primæval world.

All the knowledge we possess of these distant forefathers has been slowly garnered from those relics of their weapons, household implements, and sepulchres which kindly earth has preserved from the tooth of time in river-beds, limestone caves, and lake-bottoms. By diligent groping and by the observation of races still deeply sunk in savagery we are able to picture, as in a glass darkly, the main features of their rude society.

As yet the earth was unsubdued; man strove with the brute for lordship. Monstrous and incredibly fierce beasts, "red in tooth and claw," possessed the earth. The huge mammoth crashed through the forest like a tornado; the cave bear and the sabre-toothed tiger were the bloodthirsty tyrants of the jungle. Nevertheless, man had already begun that ceaseless warfare which was slowly but surely to dispossess the brute and to give to human beings mastery over the whole wide earth.

In this warfare he had special advantages over his foes. He alone amongst the animals walked wholly erect; he alone had hands to hold things large and small, to hurl them with force and sure aim, to shape wood and stone to serve his needs. Then, too, he possessed a higher order of brain than the brutes, and thus could defeat their mighty strength by cunning plot and artful device. They floundered into his concealed pits, and wrought their own destruction in his deadly snares. Further, he had the gift of speech, which enabled him to communicate with his fellows, and thus to co-operate with them in means of offence and defence.

In this unsubdued world he had to kill or be killed, and this fierce and constant struggle for life sharpened his wits and senses. He could see like the eagle, and hear like the stag. His eye was so true that he could bring down a flying bird with a

hurled stone or with an arrow from his bow, and transfix with his spear the darting fish of the streams.

He and his fellows with their wives and children dwelt in caves. To these lairs they dragged their prey; here they ate and slept, cooked their food, fashioned their weapons, and prepared skins for clothing. They were not as yet strong enough to come out into the open; they had no skill to build houses of wood and stone; no knowledge of the means whereby they could ensure a supply of varied food without dangerous encounters and long searches for the berries and fruits of the forest.

Though they were skilful hunters and knew the haunts of beast, bird, and fish, their minds were as simple and childish as that of the infant who beats the table against which he hurts himself. They had life and being, and they could conceive of nothing that was not similarly endowed. They saw the spark leap from the flint; they saw the flame burn fiercely when fed, and flicker and die when deprived of fuel. They perceived the sun mounting in the heavens and descending to his nightly rest; they glanced fearfully at the shadow that lessened towards noon and lengthened towards sunset; they noted the waxing and waning of the moon, the slow passing of the stars across the dark heavens, the changeful clouds drifting across the sky, the mysterious mist that enfolded them and vanished when the masterful sun shot his glittering arrows earthward. They saw the trees put on their first green livery, break into blossom, glow with fruit, and robe themselves in scarlet and gold, ere they passed into the stark lifelessness of winter.

Primitive man perceived that the spirit of life was in all these things; they were as he was, different in form, but the same in essentials. He saw them living; he heard their voices. The rustle of the leaves, the waving of the grass, the moan of the reeds by the mere, the babble of the brook, the roar of the torrent, were ever in his ears. The wind came and went; its moods were more fickle than his own. Now it was soft and sighing, now it fretted in shrill petulance; now it roared in mighty rage, and now it tore up the forest oaks in its mad fury. Nothing was inanimate; even the big stones were the parents of the lesser stones. All had life; all had parts and passions just as he had.

When he lay down to rest after gorging himself with broiled flesh, another phase of existence opened to him. He made long journeys, he feasted and danced with his friends afar off, he fought with monsters and struggled with horrors. He awoke in his cave, and his squaw told him that he had never left his couch. Other men had the same experiences, yet he knew that their bodies did not accompany them in their wanderings. What was the meaning of it all? There must be another self, a spirit within every man that gave him life. When the spirit left the body it was dead. The body seemed to die every night, but the spirit returned from its wanderings ere the morn. When, however, it failed to return, the heart ceased to beat, the pulses to throb, and the body perished in corruption.

It was the other-self, the spirit, then, that gave him and everything round him life. He lived in a world of spirits, ever present though unseen, and all the more awe-

inspiring because unseen. Some spirits were vastly powerful; others were feeble. Some could reave his own spirit from him in a clap of thunder and a flash of lightning. Of these he was terribly afraid.

The birds, beasts, fishes, and insects were much less to be feared than the unbodied spirits whose voices he heard and whose vengeance he dreaded. They were all his kin, though not of his kind, and from them or from the tree-spirits he believed himself to be descended. He would not in the least have marvelled had any of these creatures addressed him in his own speech. What could be more natural?

Now let us see primitive man in another aspect. He rests in his cave at nightfall, the flames of his wood fire leaping and crackling, and throwing monstrous shadows on the rocky walls. He has satisfied his hunger and has looked to his weapons, and now he sits at leisure. To while away the time, he seizes a sharpened flint and on a bone or an antler begins to scratch the outline of a mammoth, a horse, or a deer. How spirited and faithful is his drawing! His eye is so keen, his memory so retentive, that he can reproduce the exact posture of a running horse or a leaping hart, and portray the creature in phases only revealed to us dull-eyed moderns by the instantaneous photograph.

It may be that on the walls of the cave one of his fellows has ventured on even higher flights of pictorial art, and with brown and red earths has depicted the incidents of a memorable chase. Yes, strange as it may seem, these untamed, spirit-haunted savages feel within them the stirrings of that genius which will one day inspire a Phidias, a Raphael, a Michelangelo.

And now, to entertain his comrades, one of the throng begins to relate the story of his latest adventure in the forest, or, perhaps, describes the terrifying visions of a nightmare, or invents some fiction to explain the mysteries of sun, moon, stars, earth, air, fire, or water. Speech comes slowly to him, and is eked out by plentiful grimace and gesture. But with every recital his words flow more readily, and he gradually gains power to communicate the ideas struggling for expression, in a kind of measured song. His comrades listen. One day a certain rude lay, it may be of imminent peril and hairbreadth escape, fixes their wandering attention. They listen with parted lips and flashing eyes, and when the recital is over, the cave resounds with their guttural cries of satisfaction.

In succeeding hours of leisure they demand the same song. It is recited again and again, and each time the author improves on his original, adding a lifelike touch here, introducing a new incident there, until at last it assumes a fixed form and becomes a legendary ode, easily retained in the memory and handed down from father to son.

At all times these men of the ancient world feel themselves impelled to implore the more potent spirits to save and defend them. Some one of the group may call upon the spirits in a rhythmic appeal which his fellows recognize as most expressive

of their needs, but beyond their power to imitate. This call to the spirits may become the prayer-song of all, and the maker of it the suppliant priest of his tribe.

In some such way we can also conceive these primitive men fashioning songs to win the hearts of women and to celebrate the deeds of heroes famous in hard-won fights. Tales of the spirits, of mighty hunters, of cunning tricksters, of talking birds and beasts, similarly arise. Groping guesses at the meaning of life and death grow into myths which the tribe believes and cherishes and hands on to future generations.

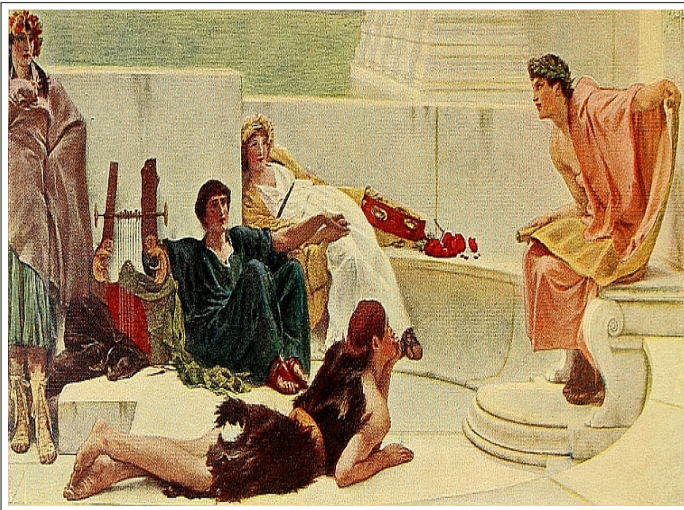
Thus we see the beginnings of literature even in the caves of primitive men. Their songs are the beginnings of lyric poetry; their legends, acted in weird dance or sung in barbaric strain, are the first forms of the drama. Their explanations of natural phenomena are the germs of fairy-tales which, in turn, give rise to the novel. Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, and Scott are as yet far down the ages, but they are already in the making.

# Chapter II.

## BARDS AND MINSTRELS.

"*I love such holy ramblers; still*
*They know to charm a weary hill*
*With song, romance, or lay;*
*Some jovial tale, or glee, or jest,*
*Some lying legend at the least,*
*They bring to cheer the way.*"—SCOTT.

OUR pageant now reveals an ancient Greek banquet. You see the guests arriving, attendant slaves removing their sandals, washing their feet, and presenting water and towels for ablution of the hands. The guests greet their host, and seat themselves at little separate tables. A signal is given, and huge smoking joints of flesh are borne in and distributed to the feasting throng in generous measure. In three great bowls the juice of the grape is mingled with water, and, when libations have been offered to the gods, the ruddy sweet wine is ladled into goblets which are filled and emptied in quick succession.



**A Reading from Homer.**

**(*From the picture by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, R.A., O.M. By permission of the Berlin Photographic Company.*)** To List

The feasting is over, and a man steps forward bearing a lyre and carrying in his hand a branch of laurel as the sign of his profession. He is a *rhapsodist*, one of the bards and minstrels of ancient Greece, and without him no feast is complete. The Greeks love nothing better than to sit in silence, listening to his singing and recitation as they quaff their wine. He has an amazing store of poesy in his memory,

and hour by hour he pours it forth. He recounts the mighty deeds of the ancient heroes; he invokes the gods on high Olympus; he sings of the vintage, the sheep-shearing, the rustic merry-making, the loves of man and maid.

He and his fellows wander from place to place, and are alike welcomed in the granges of prosperous farmers, the halls of chieftains, and the courts of princes. Hours of leisure and occasions of rejoicing are empty of delight when his voice is not heard. He commits to memory the old songs, composes new ones, learns the best of other men's productions, and excels in the art of combining voice and melody into strains that enrapture the ear and lift the spirit to ecstasy.

As yet the wondrous art of writing is unknown, and these bards and minstrels are the only books of the age. Many of their songs die with them, but the most popular of their compositions live on and are transmitted from memory to memory until the great day when a blind bard shall gather them from a thousand lips and weave them into a continuous whole, ready for the patient scribe to give them a life that ends only with the great globe itself. They will then be a possession for all time, more enduring than brass, more permanent than the infinite monuments which kings and princes have vainly reared in the hope of perpetuating their fleeting greatness. Far down the ages man will study and love these ancient Greek legends and lays, and will reverence the great name of the blind bard, Homer,

> "who on the Chian strand
> By those deep sounds possessed, with inward light,
> Beheld the Iliad and the Odyssey
> Rise to the swelling of the voiceful sea."

---

Between the days of the rhapsodist and those of primitive man beating out his rude verses in the shelter of his cave, countless ages have elapsed. Men gradually achieved lordship over their brute rivals, and in favoured regions, such as those surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, abandoned the perilous and precarious life of the hunter for that of the shepherd and herdsman. They caught and domesticated sheep, goats, cattle, and other useful animals, and thus ensured a ready supply of food at all seasons. Familiarity with wool led to the invention of the arts of spinning and weaving, and with the increase of possessions came the desire for more. Man had already emerged from the caves and holes in the rocks; the days of "hand-to-mouth" living had passed, and the first steps towards civilization had been taken.

The discovery that certain grains sown in the ground would sprout and produce seed after their kind, marked the beginnings of the next stage in man's upward progress. He became an agriculturist as well as a herdsman, and thus was fixed to the soil of a particular place. As food supplies increased, and flocks and herds multiplied, new needs arose: more permanent dwellings of wood or stone were required, better clothing was demanded, conveniences and comforts and ornaments were desired. No longer was it possible for a single individual to turn his hand to each and every task of the day; division of labour became necessary, and

each tribe developed its builders, its potters, its weavers, its leather-workers, and so forth.

All these craftsmen would naturally establish themselves in some convenient spot where they could be readily found when their services were needed, and in this way villages and towns would grow up. To such centres farmers and herdsmen would bring the produce of field or flock to exchange for the commodities which they needed or the services which they desired, and so markets would be established and traders would be evolved.

Man cannot live by bread alone; he needs sustenance not only for his body, but for his mind and spirit. As wealth increased it became possible for communities to support those who showed themselves specially capable of ministering to these needs. Men were set apart to serve as priests and law-givers; others found their occupation in lifting men's minds from the cares and anxieties of daily life and gratifying their desire for things pleasing to the senses. The bard and the minstrel, the painter and the craftsman, then became specialized members of the community.

Very early in the history of all races we find bards and minstrels holding an important place in society. Men in all ages have loved to hear stories told, and in Eastern lands even to-day groups of men and women may be seen squatting in the dust, listening for hours together to the long-drawn-out fictions of professional story-tellers. In every Japanese town the booths of the story-tellers are set up, and people flock to them to hear the old legends retold and new inventions related. The children who cluster round a mother's knee and demand a story obey an instinct of mankind which has been dominant since the world began. The bards and minstrels gratified this instinct, but they also played a much more important part in the history of nations.

They were the only professional literary men of the long ages before writing; in their trained memories was stored up all the legendary lore of their race. They were thus the guardians and custodians of tribal history as enshrined in ancient song and story. Travelling to and fro and reciting these legends to all classes of the community, they served the political purpose of keeping a sense of national unity alive and vigorous. Men were constantly reminded that they not only dwelt in the same land and under the same ruler, but that they were united by their common descent from the gods and the heroes who had founded and ennobled their race. How powerfully these makers and preservers of song have swayed the minds of their fellow-countrymen and inspired them to resistance is seen as late as the days of Edward the First, who could not make his conquest of Wales complete until the bards were slain. The poet Gray pictures the last remaining bard lamenting as follows:—

> “Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,
>     Dear as the light that visits these sad eyes,
> Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart,
>     Ye died amidst your dying country's cries.—
> No more I weep. They do not sleep.
>     On yonder cliffs, a grisly band,

I see them sit, they linger yet,
    Avengers of their native land;
With me in dreadful harmony they join
And weave with bloody hands the tissue of thy line."

How true is the saying of Fletcher of Saltoun: "If a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation!"

The bards and minstrels of the ancient world were all poets and reciters of poetry. Why they couched their legends in poetry rather than in prose is not difficult to understand. The measured beat of poetry always arrests and holds the attention of untutored minds better than prose, as may be seen in the case of children delighting in nursery rhymes. As the bards wished to move their audiences, they chose their words with great care, and as they sang their compositions to the music of the lyre or harp, it was necessary that they should have a rhythmic form. Then, again, poetry is easier to remember than prose, and memory-aids were very desirable in the days when no exterior prompting was possible.

In the next chapter we shall see how the art of writing arose. When men were able to set down their thoughts in writing and communicate them by simple transmission of manuscript to distant persons and distant ages, the bard fell from his high office and estate. Those who possessed books and could read needed him no longer; he therefore, by slow degrees, became a mere purveyor of amusement, to be classed with the mime, the juggler, the buffoon, the flute player, and the horde of those who "set on the groundlings to laugh."

Still his reign amongst even civilized races was a long one, for only in quite modern times has the art of reading become general, and the book sufficiently cheap to find its way into every home. We meet the bard, "courted and caressed," "a welcome guest," in the halls of princes and chiefs far down in the history of our own land. Scott, in the well-known lines which open *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, describes a survivor lingering in Scotland until wellnigh the close of the seventeenth century.

"The way was long, the wind was cold,
The Minstrel was infirm and old;
His withered cheek, and tresses gray,
Seemed to have known a better day;
The harp, his sole remaining joy,
Was carried by an orphan boy.
The last of all the Bards was he,
Who sung of Border chivalry;
For, welladay! their date was fled,
His tuneful brethren all were dead;
And he, neglected and oppressed,
Wished to be with them and at rest.
No more, on prancing palfrey borne,
He carolled light as lark at morn;
No longer courted and caressed,
High placed in hall, a welcome guest,
He poured, to lord and lady gay,
The unpremeditated lay;
Old times were changed, old manners gone;
A stranger filled the Stuarts' throne;
The bigots of the iron time

Had called his harmless art a crime.
A wandering Harper, scorned and poor,
He begged his bread from door to door,
And tuned, to please a peasant's ear,
The harp, a king had loved to hear."

# Chapter III.

## THE ALPHABET.

> "*Littera scripta manet, verbum ut inane perit*" (*The written letter remains, as the empty word perishes*).—
> LATIN PROVERB.

WE are now transported to a rock-hewn burial chamber of ancient Egypt. Within the chamber stands a stone sarcophagus containing the mummy of one who

> "walked about (how strange a story!)
> In Thebes's streets three thousand years ago."

Our attention is at once attracted by the multitude of figures carved upon the stone coffin. A closer inspection reveals not mere ornament, but a series of rude pictures so arranged as to convey a meaning which the learned can interpret, and all can partly guess. The figures represent more or less clearly some familiar object—the rising sun, a bird, a fish, a human eye, a bowl, and so forth—and it is clear that these pictures tell the life-story of the person who lies buried within.

**ISRAEL IN EGYPT.**

(*From the painting by Sir E. J. Poynter, P.R.A. By permission of J. C. Hawkshaw, Esq.*) To List

You perceive that the age to which this sarcophagus is ascribed has made a vast step forward in the march of civilization. It is on the highroad to what Mirabeau calls the first of the two greatest inventions of the human mind—the art of writing. The sands of long centuries will run out before the art is sufficiently advanced to record all the complex and countless dealings of men; but here we see it developed from its crude beginnings, and moving towards the triumph which awaits it in the future.

The cave man who scratched the outline of a familiar animal on a bone, or made rude drawings with coloured earths on smooth-surfaced stones, was the father of this wondrous art. Ages, however, passed away before his primitive mind glimpsed the idea that pictures could be made to communicate intelligence to men who dwelt afar off. Let us briefly recount the stages by which the human mind advanced to picture writing, and thence to the alphabet, that series of symbols which enables men to record everything that the mind can conceive and the tongue can utter.

Everybody remembers Robinson Crusoe setting up a post on the seashore and carving notches on it to record the flight of time. Very early in the history of the world similar devices were adopted to enable men to remember something which they did not wish to forget. This reckoning by notches has continued almost to our own time. Old cricketers still talk of a man scoring so many "notches," and down to the last century the British Exchequer kept accounts by means of notched tallies or squared sticks of well-seasoned hazel or willow. The message-stick still used by the Australian black-fellow is notched in the presence of the messenger, each notch

representing some particular point of the message which he is to convey. It is merely an aid to the memory, and without the verbal explanation of the messenger conveys little or no meaning.

Even to-day we see persons tie a knot in a handkerchief as an aid to memory. The use of knots for this purpose goes back to very early times. Herodotus tells us that when Darius bade his Ionians remain to guard the floating bridge over the Ister, he tied “sixty knots in a thong, saying, 'Men of Ionia. . . do ye keep this thong, and do as I shall say:—so soon as ye shall have seen me go forward against the Scythians, from that time begin and untie a knot on each day; and if within this time I am not here, and ye find that the days marked by the knots have passed by, then sail away to your own lands.'”

The quipu of the ancient Peruvians was a development of this simple device. It consisted of a main cord, to which were attached shorter cords of diverse colours, knotted at intervals with single or double knots, or combinations of single and double knots. By means of the cords and the knots, reckonings were made, the laws and annals of the Incas were preserved, orders were transmitted to the army, and biographies of deceased persons were recorded. So intricate, however, was the method of the quipu, that special officials, known as knot-officers, were required to interpret it, and even they were seldom able to elucidate its meaning without the assistance of those who had some memory of the matters recorded.

Thus we see that notches and knots, even in their most developed forms, could not transmit knowledge. They could merely recall to the memory of the man who made them things which he already knew. They did not supersede word of mouth, and so they could not serve the purpose of writing.

In the next stage we see pictures being used to communicate knowledge. A picture is drawn to suggest a thing or an action, and a series of such pictures affords information which he who runs may read, no matter what his particular form of speech may be. Pictorial writing was largely developed amongst the North American Indians, and continued amongst them down to modern times. Longfellow in a poem which relates the legends and traditions of the Red Men, and describes Hiawatha as their great culture-hero, tells us that—

> “From his pouch he took his colours,
> Took his paints of different colours;
> On the smooth bark of a birch tree
> Painted many shapes and figures—
> Wonderful and mystic figures,
> And each figure had a meaning,
> Each some word or thought suggested . . . .
>     Life and Death he drew as circles—
> Life was white, but Death was darkened;
> Sun and moon and stars he painted,
> Man and beast, and fish and reptile,
> Forests, mountains, lakes, and rivers.
>     For the earth he drew a straight line,
> For the sky a bow above it,
> White the space between for day-time,
> Filled with little stars for night-time;

On the left a point for sunrise,
On the right a point for sunset,
On the top a point for noon-tide,
And for rain and cloudy weather
Waving lines descending from it.
    Footprints pointing towards a wigwam
Were a sign of invitation—
Were a sign of guests assembling;
Bloody hands with palms uplifted
Were a symbol of destruction—
Were a hostile sign and symbol . . . .
    Thus it was that Hiawatha
In his wisdom taught the people
All the mysteries of painting,
All the art of Picture-writing,
On the smooth bark of the birch-tree,
On the white skin of the reindeer,
On the grave-posts of the village."

The obelisks, tombs, and sarcophagi of the ancient Egyptians everywhere display writing which betrays its pictorial origin. As the Egyptians used some seventeen hundred pictorial signs in their writing, ability to portray these forms would require long training and some natural capacity. Even the production of a simple statement would involve much time and labour. Further, picture-writing at its best could never be explicit; nor could it exhibit abstract ideas, such as vice and virtue, time and space, health and sickness without the use of signs which were ambiguous to the untutored mind. For example, the bee became the symbol of kingship and industry, a roll of papyrus denoted knowledge, an ostrich feather, justice, and so on.

We have now arrived at the stage when the eye picture no longer suggests the thing, but becomes a symbol for a particular idea. Then comes the final and most momentous step, when the sign no longer calls up an object or an idea, but indicates a particular sound. Signs were made for each of the sounds in the language, and these sound-signs formed an alphabet. The old pictures became simplified into conventional signs which could be made easily and rapidly, and thus the art of writing was evolved, and the age of books began.

The changes briefly indicated above occupied many centuries, and in Egypt pictures and sound signs were used side by side for thousands of years. The Babylonians had, however, passed the picture stage long before the Egyptians, and had developed their cuneiform or wedge-shaped characters as far back as eight thousand years ago. Their clay tablets and cylinders, closely inscribed with writing, are to be found in every museum.

Whence comes our alphabet, the series of characters in which the noble works which make our literature the most glorious in the world have been written? The Phœnicians, those restless traders and colonists of the ancient world, derived their alphabet from the Hebrews who settled in Lower Egypt and adapted the Egyptian alphabet to their own needs. This Semitic alphabet was carried by the Phœnicians to the Greeks, who further modified it. Their colonists took it to Italy, and the Latins adopted twenty-one of their twenty-six letters. Rome in due time became the

mistress of the world. Her armies and traders carried her civilization into every known land, and when she became the home of the Christian religion, her missionaries penetrated far and wide, and carried the learning of the mother city to the dark haunts of barbarism. The religious teachers of Rome brought the Roman alphabet to Britain, and it became, with the addition of three new signs, the alphabet which we write to-day.

Before closing this chapter, let us glance for a few moments at the materials on which ancient records were made. Probably the earliest inscriptions were scratched on stone or metal. The Ten Commandments given to Moses were graven on stone, and the Nicene Creed was similarly inscribed on silver by order of Pope Leo III. Prepared skins were also used, as the passage from “Hiawatha” reminds us. Another very early material for writing was the wood or bark of trees. It is interesting to note that the Latin *liber*, a book, signifies the bark of a tree, and that *book* originally meant a beech tree and beechen boards. The clay tablets and cylinders of Babylon have already been referred to.

The writing material specially associated with Egypt is the pith of the papyrus reed, which grew abundantly in ancient days on the banks of the Lower Nile. The inner rind of the reed was cut into thin strips, some long, some short. The long strips were placed on a board side by side, and across them the shorter strips were laid. The board was then placed in the Nile water, and the adhesive matter in the pith glued the strips together and formed a sheet, which when pressed, hammered, dried, and smoothed, assumed a surface fit for writing. Papyrus, thus made, continued to be the material of books until such time as the supply of reeds began to fail. Our word *paper* is derived from papyrus, and from the Greek name of the strips comes the word *Bible*, signifying *the* book.

Papyrus books were in the form of a long roll which might be 150 feet in length. As a rule, some twenty sheets of papyrus were joined together, and the place of each sheet was determined by its quality; for example, the first sheet was always the best, and was followed by the second best, the third best, and so on. The sheets were then rolled together, beginning with the worst sheet, and this arrangement made the strongest and best sheet the outer protection of the book. To this day the Books of the Law which are read in Jewish synagogues are inscribed on rolls.

A far more satisfactory material for the inscription and preservation of writing was parchment, the prepared skin of the sheep and the calf. The name of this substance contains its history. In the first half of the second century before Christ, the King of Pergamum conceived the laudable idea of founding a great library, but owing to the jealousy of the Ptolemies could not obtain for his copyists a sufficient supply of papyrus from Egypt. He was, therefore, thrown back on the old but superseded practice of using skins, which he caused to be washed, dressed, and rubbed smooth. Because such skins were first prepared at Pergamum they became known as *parchment*. Until the invention of printing the use of parchment was almost universal. Paper made from linen rags reduced to a pulp and poured out on a frame

in a thin watery sheet which was dried and hardened by the action of heat, did not come into use in England until the reign of Edward the Third.

For keeping private accounts and for the writing of notes, wax tablets were used in all parts of Western Europe, even down to the days of Queen Elizabeth. Every one remembers the mention of such tablets in the New Testament—"They made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing-table, and wrote, saying, 'His name is John.'" For the inscription and preservation of Roman wills, two or three of these tablets were joined together with a ring or hinge. Obviously they then resembled the modern book, and suggested a method of binding up leaves of parchment into a far more convenient and compact form than the awkward and bulky roll. It is said that the desire of Christians to possess the whole Bible in one volume led to the abandonment of the roll and the adoption of the modern form of book.

**Phœbus Apollo.**

**(*From the painting by Briton Riviere, R.A. By permission of the Corporation of Birmingham.*)**

[Phœbus Apollo was one of the great divinities of the Greeks. He was the sun-god who daily drove his flaming chariot across the sky. He was also the god of prophecy, song, and music, the patron of poets, and the leader of the choir of the Nine Muses.] To List

# Chapter IV.

## THE MUSES.

"*The glory that was Greece.*"—Poe.

A gracious and graceful spectacle now presents itself. Nine tall maidens, daughters of the gods, "divinely fair," pass before us, clad in the white clinging robes of Attic Greece, their beautiful hair bound with the fillet, their shapely feet shod with the sandal. These are the benign goddesses whom the Greeks figured in their glowing imaginations as the patrons, the inspirers, and the guardian deities of all who set down in language of truth and melody the thoughts and fancies of the human mind and the aspirations and passions of the human heart.

She who leads the throng is Calliope, the noblest of them all, the Muse of Epic Song. She it is who wings the pen of those who celebrate in stately verse the name and fame of heroes, who kindle generous ardour with the torch of ancient glory, who bid men crave for that "crowded hour of glorious life" which is "worth an age without a name."

Next comes Clio, bearing a scroll. She is the goddess of those who extol all that is great and good in the days of long ago. She is the Muse of History, and it is her part to inspire men to delve into the past, and to give to the present the long story of bygone ages, so that they may learn salutary lessons of warning and guidance for the present and future. Hope shines in her countenance—the steadfast hope that knowledge may "grow from more to more," and that men may rise "on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things."

Euterpe, she who gladdens, now advances. Her double flute indicates that she is the Muse of Lyric Song, of those soft, melodious warblings which speak of piping birds, blossoming hedgerows, babbling brooks, moonlit groves, sighing zephyrs, and scented flowers, all the tenderly happy and the gently melancholy fancies of those who throb to every impulse of Nature. Her sweetest flutings and her most dainty measures have power to stir the heart-strings of men and women yet unborn.

She who follows is Thalia, the Muse of those who delight in comedy and the poetry of rustic delight. In one hand she carries the comic mask, and in the other a shepherd's staff. Her ivy wreath symbolizes the ever-green nature of humour, which continues unfading year by year and age by age. Her votaries look on life through the tinted window of a genial and whimsical temperament, and perceive in the conduct and speech of men a thousand incongruities, which call up the spirit of merriment either as a ripple of joy or as a resounding wave of laughter.

Stern MELPOMENE, the Muse of Tragedy, succeeds. She is deep in thought, and joy is banished from her countenance. She inspires those solemn plays in which "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" beset mankind, in which the bitterness of human life is revealed, and the human soul is depicted in torment, blood, and tears, pursued by the Fates to inevitable doom. She waves her gentler sisters aside, and points the moral of the Preacher: "All, all is vanity." The club, the sword, the tragic mask with its fixed look of horror, accompany her.

But relief is at hand. TERPSICHORE, the Muse of Choric Dance, trips by to the lilting of her lyre. She is the patron of those who blend poetry and music and the harmonious movements of the body into a drama expressive of mirth and joy.

Near at hand is ERATO, the Lovely One, she who touches the lips of those who sing of love. Then comes POLYHYMNIA, the spirit of the highest wisdom, her lofty, serene looks kindling the fire of genius in those who draw knowledge from contemplation and invoke the gods with strains of humble adoration and holy joy.

Last in the fair throng is URANIA, the Heavenly, the Muse of Astronomy. You see her listening with bowed head to the music of the spheres, pondering on the majestic architecture of the universe, and pointing to the celestial globe, whereon are blazoned the shining orbs that "move in mystic dance, not without song."

Such were the deities whom the Greeks fabled as presiding over all the departments of that literature which they were destined to lift to the highest pinnacle of glory. Circumscribed in extent, scanty in population, poor in material blessings, forced to struggle incessantly for national existence, yet most favourably situated in time and space, with the pure azure sky above, and the soft limpid air around, the Greeks in the course of three pre-Christian centuries gave to the world such triumphs of art and literary expression as have never been transcended in any literary epoch of the world's history.

The Greeks were the first of all nations to set themselves the task of systematic thinking, and their language in the course of time became the finest instrument of human utterance that men have ever known. Thus equipped, and endowed with unerring taste, the Greeks were enabled to give elegance, symmetry, and sublime simplicity to every conception of their original and creative genius.

What a galaxy of great names shines in the firmament of Greek greatness!—HOMER, to whom we owe the supremest epic of the world, the epitome of human life in its unchanging essentials; ALCÆUS and SAPPHO, who sang with unquenchable and unequalled ardour of love and wine; THEOCRITUS, the first of all pastoral poets; ÆSCHYLUS, EURIPIDES, SOPHOCLES, and ARISTOPHANES, master dramatists of the ages; HERODOTUS, the father of history, and THUCYDIDES, the greatest of the world's historians; PLATO and ARISTOTLE, the founders of that philosophy which is the mother of all the sciences.

The inspiration which thrilled ancient Greece still throbs through the world to-day. Greek ideas of history and philosophy, and Greek taste with its love of cold beauty,

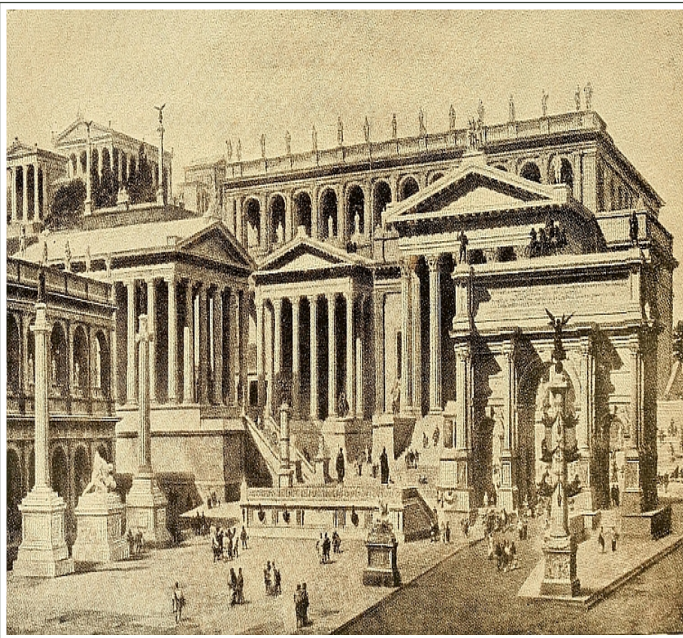
and its hatred of false ornament and meretricious glitter, still dominate the finest minds of the Western world, and impel them to emulation of that perfection of form which they can never hope to surpass. From ancient Greece, as from the fabled fountain of the Azores, have issued those fertilizing streams which roll in shining splendour through the happy fields of all lands where the Muses dwell.

# Chapter V.

## THE AUGUSTAN AGE.

"*The grandeur that was Rome.*"—Poe.

The scene changes to Rome in her Golden Age, the age of Augustus, first and most happy of emperors. The Eternal City is even now rising to that glory of temple, basilica, portico, column, trophy, and arch which will ere long make her the wonder of the world. Roman dominion enrings the Midland Sea, and includes the fairest parts of Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa. The riches of a tributary empire, embracing the whole civilized earth, pour into her coffers; she adorns herself with the spoils of plundered nations. At home, Roman citizens are peaceful and contented; for though they live under a military despotism, it is subtly masked and veiled by the forms of republican government. Abroad, Rome is supreme; a hundred millions of people of all races, creed, and colour own fealty to Cæsar.



To List

**THE FORUM AT ROME.**

Roman arms have triumphed in Hellas as elsewhere; but captive Greece has conquered her conquerors. Greek art, Greek sculpture, Greek architecture, and Greek literature hold sway in the Eternal City. Rome subdues, administers, makes

roads, aqueducts, fortifications, and harbours, and fashions a majestic scheme of scientific law; but in art and literature she has no creative force. She builds on a solid and practical foundation; but it is her Greek slaves who adorn her works with that beauty which she loves but cannot originate.

Greece has handed on the torch of learning to Rome, but it is Greek fire that burns on the Seven Hills. In poetry, tragedy, comedy, philosophy, and oratory, Greece supplies the models and the inspiration. In satire alone the Romans are original. This form of writing is all their own; it springs from the peculiar constitution of the Roman government and the native spirit of the Roman people. All the greatest and best of Roman literature flourishes in these Augustan days. So fruitful and vigorous is the period in the literary history of Rome that the age has become proverbial of every literary epoch. Augustus himself is a patron of letters, and the foremost writers of the time are the companions of his leisure.

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It is the year 10 B.C., and our scene reproduces the street Argiletum, not far from the Golden Milestone, which stands at the foot of the ascent to the Capitol, and is the centre of the known world, the landmark from which all distances in the empire are reckoned. The street Argiletum is the book-selling and book-making quarter of Augustan Rome. Prominent among the publishing establishments is that of the Sosii Brothers, the rendezvous of wits and sages, and of the fashionable folk who affect their company.

In front of the shop is a pillar with the interesting announcement that to-day the Brothers Sosii will offer for sale the Epistle to Augustus by Quintus Horatius Flaccus, the most admired satirist of the age, the darling of polite society, the man of the world who strolls through life as its easy-going but keenly observant critic. He sings of “love, regret, and flowers” with graceful negligence, and pictures the follies and vices of the city as in a kinematograph; yet he wields the lash of his scorn so impartially that even his victims smile under the operation. “I write sermons in sport,” he says, “but sermons by a fellow-sinner.”

**Ancient Rome.**

(***From the painting by J. M. W. Turner, R.A.***) To List

There is more than a mild flutter of interest in Roman court and literary circles to-day. Horace has a vogue; his well-bred, cultured, worldly verses, full of personalities, ironies, and anecdotes, touched with the keenest wit and irradiated with the most human sympathy, are read and re-read even by those who are indifferent to the great and grave achievements of literature, but an additional interest surrounds to-day's publication. Everybody knows the story. The first man you meet in the Forum will tell you that the “majestic” Augustus has stooped to beseech an Epistle from “this most lovable little bit of a man.” “I am vexed with you,” said Cæsar, a few weeks ago, “vexed that you have never addressed one of your Epistles to me. Are you afraid that to have appeared as my friend will hurt you with posterity?” Such a gentle, self-deprecating remonstrance from the foremost man in all the world is a command that must be obeyed. To-day, if you are in time, you may purchase the volume containing this Epistle, and discover for yourself how Horace has accomplished his difficult and delicate task.

You are naturally desirous of seeing the poet whom even moderns read with delight and affection; but you must wait, for Horace is not given to early rising: the left-handed game of ball in the Campus Martius, the bath, and the light midday meal will detain him for some time yet. To fill up the interval, let us enter the establishment of the Brothers Sosii and look around. The well-filled shelves attract us. Here, carefully stored in metal boxes, are the works of all the great writers of Roman renown. At a very reasonable price you may buy the plays of Plautus and Terence, the rough-hewn satires of Lucilius, the commentaries of Julius Cæsar,

the vigorous histories of SALLUST, and the orations, essays, and epistles of that prince of Latin letters, CICERO.

But you will probably be more eager to possess yourself of the works of living authors. Well, they are here too. Here are the scrolls that contain the vigorous verses of CATULLUS and the great epics of VIRGIL,

> "Wielder of the stateliest measure
> Ever moulded by the lips of man."

He is secure on the pinnacle of literary fame, though his "Æneid," which is to be the national epic of Rome, and remains the richest achievement of Roman poetic genius, has not yet seen the light, and will never be completed. Here, too, are the elegies of TIBULLUS and PROPERTIUS, the legends and fables of OVID, the histories of LIVY, the philosophical writings of SENECA, who dwells in far-off Spain, the Satires, Odes, and the first and second books of Epistles of HORACE, together with the works of a host of less renowned authors. All are to be found on the well-filled shelves of the Brothers Sosii.

The brothers are rich men, and the copyists whom they employ are their slaves. For weeks past these men have been busy engrossing Horace's new book, and now you see the finished scrolls ready for sale. Take one of them in your hand. Note the neat handwriting; admire the wonderful ink used for the text and the red-lined columns, and observe the fine sheets of papyrus, stained yellow with cedar-oil to prevent the ravages of moths. The pages have been carefully trimmed and blackened at the edges; the ends of the scrolls have been strengthened with thick strips of bone or wood, finished off at the top in the shape of a knob or a horn. A strip of parchment neatly inscribed in red and attached to the roll indicates the title.

Two of the scrolls you may see and admire, but not handle. They are glorious with purple parchment covers and gilded knobs. One of them is designed for Augustus himself, and Horace will carry it to-day to the palace of the Cæsars, and present it with his own hands for the perusal of the emperor. The other is meant for Mæcenas, his patron. It may be we shall see him before the day is over.

There is a stir in the shop. A little stout man, puffing and blowing with the exertion of walking, and followed by a single slave, now appears. It is the poet himself, and the brothers hasten to welcome him with low bows and repeated salutations. They hand him his new book, and smilingly await his commendation. A thousand copies have been prepared, and to-morrow they will be eagerly canvassed by the cultured and fashionable of the city. By that time some of the copies will have begun their long journey to the confines of the empire, where proconsuls and generals will gloat over them in windy halls or torch-lit tents, and sigh, as they read, for the distant and oft-recalled delights of the dear city by the Tiber.

The poet is interrupted in the examination of his new book by the entrance of a visitor—a middle-aged man of strikingly noble appearance, though somewhat marred by signs of ill-health. Genius, sincerity, and goodness of heart shine in his eyes, and you do not wonder that all men love him. He is renowned through all Italy

for the purity of his life, and his soul is well known to be animated by the loftiest spirit of patriotism. It is Virgil, the bosom friend and benefactor of Horace. He has no spark of envy in his composition; the success of his friend is a genuine pleasure to him. Twenty-five years ago he read and admired the verses of Horace, then a clerk in one of the public offices, and praised him to the princely Mæcenas, who speedily endowed him with that modest competency which has enabled him to become the smiling philosopher of Rome.

The two friends—the foremost literary men of the Roman Empire—greet each other with warm regard, and as they converse the noise of shouts is heard in the street. Both smile; it is Mæcenas approaching in his litter, borne on the shoulders of sturdy slaves. Before him and around him is a swarm of needy parasites clearing the way, and endeavouring by their zeal to secure his favouring smile.

As he lolls back, foppishly wearing the white toga with its broad purple stripe, his hair curled and scented, his carefully-tended hand hanging listlessly by his side, he seems nothing more than an idle, effeminate lover of good living and easy pleasures. But make no mistake; he is the adroitest and most subtle diplomatist of his time, acute in foresight, sage in counsel, a pillar of the throne, the confidant and trusted agent of Augustus, to whom he is never weary of preaching the virtues of tact and moderation. He goes down to history, not for these merits, but because he is fortunate enough to smooth the path and secure the peace of mind of two great Roman writers. Right nobly do they repay him. They rear an imperishable monument to his fame in their verses, and hand him down to posterity as the ideal patron of struggling genius.

**THE EMPEROR COMES!**

**(*From the picture by Sir Alma Tadema, R.A., O.M. By permission of the Berlin Photo Co.*)** To List

The great historian Gibbon, in his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," opens his book with the reign of Augustus. Brilliant as it was, its glory was suffused with the autumnal tint of approaching decay. Already the barbarians of Gaul had inflicted a severe defeat upon the armies of Augustus, and four years after Horace's epistle appeared, the Goths annihilated his ambushed legions. The men of the North were gaining strength and unity even then, and Rome was ultimately to go down in blood and anguish before them.

The military despotism which Augustus established was the undoing of the empire. The army made and unmade emperors; it conquered and bestowed the *imperium* on whomsoever it would, on plain, blunt soldier, gentle moralist, madman, and monster alike. The emperors and the army between them governed Rome largely by fear and favour, by the sword and a bounteous provision of bread and

circuses. The fierce strength and courage, the passion for life and possession which had made Romans the conquerors of the world, was sapped away in an atmosphere of luxury and corruption; and as time went on the army which had made and unmade emperors became a horde of mercenaries fighting for wages and plunder, and careless of the fate of Rome.

With the reign of Diocletian, two hundred and seventy years after the death of Augustus, Rome ceased to be the seat of empire; and at length, in the days of Constantine, the government was removed to New Rome, Byzantium. Some thirty years later the empire was rent in twain, and rival monarchs ruled East and West. Upon the devoted Western Empire the barbarians swooped down like wolves on the fold, and finally took possession of Italy. Five hundred years after the death of Augustus, Rome perished as a world-empire, her universal sceptre was snatched away, and she became "her own sad sepulchre."

But if the reign of Augustus contained the seeds of Rome's decay as a political power, so also did it contain the germ of its more blessed revival as a spiritual force. In the reign of Augustus, Christ was born, and slowly and almost imperceptibly, at first amongst slaves and outcasts, Christianity grew like an interlacing vine, sweet and wholesome in its early fruits. Persecution gave it strength; the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church, and three hundred years after the death of Augustus a Roman emperor placed the cross upon his banner and embraced the formerly despised creed.

Twenty-six years later he built the first basilica of St. Peter on the site of the circus in which thousands of Christians had received their crown of martyrdom. Rome became the metropolis of Christianity, the Bishop of Rome became the head of the Christian Church, and so he remains to two hundred and fifty millions of the children of men to this day.

What was the legacy of Rome to the modern world? Her impress upon succeeding ages was broad and deep, and can never be effaced. The incomparable roads which her engineers drove through the empire have wellnigh disappeared, though here and there a farmer's wain still rumbles over the stones which legionaries trod. Her aqueducts, bridges, walls, and amphitheatres are ruins, but the practical and constructive genius which they embody has given principles to the modern sciences of civil engineering and architecture. The Roman art of war persisted through the Middle Ages, and the spirit of Roman imperialism still survives. Far more important, however, was the scientific system of law which Rome elaborated and extended to the confines of her empire. In a greater or less degree it is embedded in every civil code of modern times, and there is no student of law in any part of the world who does not give close attention to Roman law as the basis of his professional studies.

It is, however, the Latin language which is the greatest legacy of Rome to the modern world. Less elegant, less pliable and poorer in vocabulary than Greek, it, nevertheless, is a language of weight and dignity, and was admirably suited to the

needs of law, administration, and warfare—the true spheres of Roman genius. Wherever the Roman went he carried his speech with him, and even when Latin ceased to be the tongue of Italy it continued as the international language of scholars. Until the seventeenth century it was also the language of states in their communications with each other.

Latin is the mother of the Romance languages spoken in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Rumania to-day. Teutonic languages, such as our own, have adopted innumerable words either directly or indirectly from Latin, and every liberal scheme of education includes an adequate knowledge of the old Roman tongue.

# Chapter VI.

## BEOWULF.

> "*Lo! we have heard of the glory of the Spear Danes' warrior-kings in days of yore—how the princes did valorous deeds!*"—Opening Lines of "Beowulf."

Rome is far distant; the lovely landscapes of Italy, the genial warmth and the pure azure sky of that favoured land have disappeared, and another and far different scene presents itself. We are in the cold, gray north, on the shores of the Baltic Sea, in the original home of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes who are shortly to begin those settlements in Britain which in the course of time will transform the larger part of the island into England. It is a land of marsh and waste, with immense forests and a poverty-stricken soil. Mists hover above it; the sky is dun, and the north wind swirls down in angry shrieks and howls along the low level of the land. Sluggish streams crawl through it; the black sea, like a beast of prey, gnaws incessantly at it; gannets scream and sea-mews cry. Fog, rain, hoar-frost, and tempest succeed each other.

**The Coliseum.**
(*From the picture by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, R.A., O.M. By permission of the Berlin Photographic Co.*) To List

It is a joyless land, and the inhabitants reap a hard and precarious livelihood from marshy meadow and boisterous sea. They are brawny and ruthless, but hidden beneath their stern, hard exteriors are nobler virtues than were ever known to the Roman world. They “scorn delights and live laborious days;” they love strife for strife's sake; they are fiercely independent, sombre and tenacious, gloomy in their dreams and fancies, inspired in their energy and mad in their rage. Yet they are frank and simple in their lives, and their word is their bond; home is their empire; the wife is sacred; they marry but one woman, and keep faith with her.

Gory combats and wild bufferings with the stormy sea are their delight; to them life is a warfare, and heroic death a boon to be craved. When a peaceful death seems imminent, they will wound themselves with knife or spear, throw themselves

from the cliffs, or set sail in a little boat, and wrestle in their last moments with wind and wave. Death has no terrors; Christianity, preaching forgiveness of enemies and the abandonment of vengeance, is unknown to them. They are pagans with the pagan creed—“An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” “The spoils to the victor,” and “Woe to the vanquished.”

Fierce, warlike, and bloodthirsty is their religion. Their gods are many. Tiu is the god of war; Wodin, the wise father of victory, sits enthroned above them all; Thor is the thunder-god, and Freya, the goddess of love—names still retained amongst us as those of the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth days of the week. Ogres and giants dwell beneath the ground, forging magic weapons and fashioning charmed rings; every wood, meadow, and well has its guardian elf. Their heaven is Valhalla, the hall of Wodin, which cowards may never enter. A sure passport to its fierce joys is to die gloriously “facing fearful odds.” In Valhalla the blessed ones cleave helmets and hack limbs every day, and when evening comes their wounds are magically healed as they sit feasting on a great boar whose flesh never grows less, and quaffing inexhaustible mead from the skulls of their enemies.

But Valhalla itself will pass away, and another heaven will receive them. This, too, will disappear. All passes, nothing is permanent. Monsters will devour the sun and moon, tear up mountains and trees, and blot the stars out of heaven until one wide shoreless sea shall cover the whole wide earth. Then, after a terrible fight, a huge wolf will devour the gods, but the jaws of the destroyer will be torn asunder; everything will perish and dissolve into utter nothingness.

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Now let us witness a familiar scene in this stern, gloomy land. It is nightfall. Tall, blue-eyed, reddish-haired thanes are met in a great wooden hall dimly lighted with flickering torches. The evening meal is over, and the guests, seated on their stools, quench their heroic thirst with copious draughts of ale. Now the *scop*, the smith of song, steps forward, seats himself before the silent revellers, and cries *Hwaet!* to arrest their attention. He strikes his harp, “unlocks the word-hoard,” and begins the Iliad and Odyssey of the English—the great romance, history, and epic of *Beowulf*, a poem of 3,182 lines, which is preserved for us practically complete in a manuscript of the tenth century, now in the British Museum. Probably it was first carved on tablets of beech or ash in those early Germanic characters which are known as *runes*, and were believed by the rude, unlettered warriors of the age to be magical signs by which the dead might be raised, the sick healed, rain or thunder called down, and life preserved or destroyed.

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It is from the song now being sung that the manners and sentiments of the early English may best be gleaned. What does this fierce old epic tell us? Beowulf was a

hero of the Geats, a knight-errant before the days of chivalry. He “rowed upon the sea, his naked sword hard in his hand, amidst the fierce waves and coldest of storms, and the rage of winter hurtled over the waves of the deep.” He slew nine sea-monsters after a terrible fight, and the fame of his god-like courage spread far and wide. News reached him of the scourge which afflicted Hrothgar, king of the North Danes, who had built a splendid hall, called Heorot, for the lodging and entertainment of his great retinue. But while the warriors slept after a feast a monster named Grendel, “a mighty haunter of the marshes,” entered the hall, and devoured thirty of them. Again and again for twelve years Grendel came and went until the hall was shunned and deserted.

Then, with fourteen companions, appeared Beowulf, the bravest and strongest of living men, and heard the dismal story from Hrothgar's own lips. The hero offered to lie in the hall that night and grapple with the fiend without the aid of a sword or shield, for he “learned also that the wretch for his cursed hide recked not of weapons.” One condition Beowulf made with Hrothgar. If death should overtake him, his corpse should be borne forth and buried beneath a mound, and the best of the war shrouds that guarded his breast should be sent to Hygelac, his chief.

Beowulf, “trusting in his proud strength,” lay with his companions in the hall awaiting the coming of the monster. With the mists of night came Grendel. He burst the strong iron bands of the door, seized a sleeping warrior, “tore him unawares, bit his body, drank the blood from the veins, and swallowed him with continual tearings.” Then Beowulf seized the monster in turn.

> “The lordly hall thundered, the ale was spilled. . . both were enraged; savage and strong warders; the house resounded, then was it a great wonder that the wine-hall withstood the beasts of war, that it fell not upon the earth, the fair palace; but it was thus fast. . . . The noise arose, startling enough; a fearful terror fell on the North Danes, on each of those who from the wall heard the outcry. . . .
>
> “The foul wretch awaited the mortal wound; a mighty gash was seen upon his shoulder; the sinews sprang asunder; the joinings of the bones burst; success in war was given to Beowulf. Thence must Grendel fly, sick unto death, among the refuges of the fens, to seek his joyless dwelling. He all the better knew that the end of his life, the number of his days, was gone by.”

Grendel had left behind him his “hand, arm, and shoulder,” and in the lake of Nicors, where he was driven, “the rough wave was boiling with blood, the foul spring of waves all mingled, hot with poison, bubbling with warlike gore.” Still remained a female monster, Grendel's mother, who “was doomed to inhabit the terror of waters, the cold streams.” She came by night and devoured the king's best friend, whereat there was great lamentation and renewed terror. Again Beowulf came to the rescue.

He and his friends mounted their horses, and rode across the wild moor and along narrow, lonely paths until they reached the monster's den, near windy promontories, where a mountain stream rushed downward under the darkness of the hills, a flood beneath the earth. “There may one by night behold a marvel, fire upon flood.” . . . Strange dragons and serpents swam there; “from time to time the horn sang a dirge, a terrible song.”

Beowulf donned his armour, and taking a magic sword in his hand, plunged into the wave, descended deep, passing monsters who tore his coat of mail, until he came to the ogress, who seized him in her grasp and bore him off to her dwelling. A pale gleam shone brightly, and Beowulf saw before him—

> “The she-wolf of the abyss, the mighty sea-woman; he gave the war-onset with his battle-bill; he held not back the swing of the sword, so that on her head the ring-mail sang aloud a greedy war-song. . . . The beam of war would not bite. Then he caught Grendel's mother by the shoulder; twisted the man-slayer that she bent upon the floor. . . . She drew her knife, broad, brown-edged, and tried to pierce the twisted breast-net which protected his life. . . .
>
> “Then saw he among the weapons a bill fortunate with victory, an old gigantic sword, doughty of edge, ready for use, a work of giants. He seized the belted hilt, the warrior of the Scyldings, fierce and savage whirled the ring-mail; despairing of life, he struck furiously, so that it grappled hard with her about her neck; it broke the bone-rings, the bill passed through all the doomed body; she sank upon the floor; the sword was bloody, the man rejoiced in his deed; the beam shone, light stood within, even as from heaven mildly shines the lamp of the firmament.”

Then he saw Grendel dead in a corner, and cut off the monstrous head. Taking it by the hair, he left the hall, plunged again into the water, and reached the shore. Four of his companions with difficulty raised the huge head and bore it in triumph to Hrothgar.

This was the second labour of Beowulf, and the remainder of his story is cast in the same mould. Plenteously rewarded, he returned to his own land, to be joyfully welcomed and extolled by his king. In after-days he succeeded to the throne, and reigned fifty years in peace and honour. Then a winged, smoke-breathing dragon, who had been robbed of treasure, wasted the land with “waves of fire.”

The old hero, his courage undaunted, yet sad at heart “because he was not fated to abide the end,” approached the dragon's lair alone. The beast attacked him, but his sword would not bite. A solitary companion passed through the poisonous smoke of the beast's nostrils and came to his succour. In spite of the hero's exhortations, the rest fled with loud cries. As the dragon darted forward again Beowulf smote it on the head, but his brand broke in his hand, and its poisoned fangs met in his neck. The wound was mortal, and Beowulf, well knowing his end was nigh, commanded that the treasure should be brought from the dragon's lair. Then, presenting his faithful companion with his armour and necklace, he bade him burn his body on a headland and raise a burial mound over his remains:—

> “Which may for my folk, for remembering of me,
> Lift its head high on the Hrones-ness;
> That sea-sailing men, soon in days to be,
> Call it 'Beowulf's Barrow,' who, their barks afoam,
> From afar are driving o'er the ocean mists.”

---

Such in brief outline is the story which the *scop* sang in the rude alliterative verse of the early English. When these grim, fierce pagans crossed the North Sea to the

“promised land” of fair and plenteous Britain, and with sword and battle-axe dispossessed the Celtic inhabitants, *Beowulf* was sung by transplanted minstrels in many a rude hall on the Northumberland moors. In due time it was written down, and thus rescued from oblivion.

The work as we possess it to-day contains Christian references; but these were in all probability inserted in later days, when the English had changed their faith. The Christian elements in *Beowulf* plainly testify to the wondrous hold which this stark, grim poem had on the affections of the English even when the mild influences of a new religion were softening and sweetening the national character. To this day their descendants possess something of the virtues of Beowulf: the same steadfastness of purpose; the same love of combat, real or mimic; the same fearlessness in the face of danger; the same readiness to play the champion's part; the same passionate love of the sea.

*Beowulf* and two or three fragments of lay and religious poetry constitute all the literature that has come down to us from the pre-Christian singers of early England. *Widsith*, one of these fragmentary poems, is specially interesting, because it seems to commemorate the memory of a far-travelled minstrel who in the fourth century visited the court of the Gothic king Eormenric. The last verses of the poem have thus been rendered:—

“So wandering on
the world about,
Gleemen do roam
through many lands;
They say their needs,
they spake their thanks,
Sure, south or north,
some one to meet,
Of songs to judge
and gifts not grudge.”

Scops and minstrels were very numerous in these early days, and no doubt a great body of popular poetry existed. It died with those who gave it birth, and we now seek it in vain.

**Hrothgar and his Warriors.** To List

# Chapter VII.

## CÆDMON.

*“The first English poet in our England.”*

A CENTURY and a half have taken wing since we heard the *scop* singing of Beowulf in the original homeland of the English. Now their conquest of all South Britain, save the rocky fastnesses of Wales, is complete. They have exchanged the swamps and forests of the Baltic shore for the broad meadows and fine hill pastures of Britain. From hard grinding poverty they have emerged into the rich plenty of flocks and herds, orchards, vineyards, and wheatfields. The land has been parcelled out amongst the tribes, and all over the country townships and timbered houses, byres and barns appear. Britain has become England.

Ease and plenty have dulled the edge of old English ferocity, and minds always susceptible to the serious and the sublime are ready for the new and wondrous influence which Christianity wields. Scottish missionaries from Iona precede Italian missionaries from Rome, and preach the mild gospel of mercy and peace with consuming zeal and untiring energy. In many a Northumbrian village the cross becomes the symbol of a brighter and more blessed hope.

At length a great meeting of nobles is held to discuss the new faith. The high priest of Northumbria rises in their midst, and, declaring the powerlessness of the old gods, proceeds, lance in hand, to demolish their temple. Then an old chief gives his testimony in words of eloquent melancholy that betray a yearning for the hope beyond:—

> “You remember, it may be, O King, that which sometimes happens in winter when you are seated at table with your earls and thanes. Your fire is lighted, and your hall warmed, and without it is rain and snow and storm. Then comes a swallow flying across the hall; he enters by one door and leaves by another. The brief moment while he is within is pleasant to him; he feels not rain nor cheerless winter weather; but the moment is brief, the bird flies away in the twinkling of an eye, and he passes from winter to winter. Such, methinks, is the life of man on earth, compared with the uncertain time beyond. It appears for a while; but what is the time which comes after—the time which was before? We know not. If, then, this new doctrine may teach us somewhat of greater certainty it were well that we should regard it.”

Regard it they do; the king and his nobles are converted; wooden churches arise; religious houses are established, and amongst the monks who dwell therein literary culture finds its earliest home in England.

A noble figure now graces our pageant. Tall and stately, robed as an abbess, Hilda of Whitby passes by. Her royal lineage appears in her fearless gaze and her noble features. She is beloved and revered, a queen among women, and a model of Christian wisdom and grace. She presides over her monastery at Streoneshalh with lofty benignity and large discretion. She teaches the brothers and sisters "to practise thoroughly all virtues, but especially peace and love, so that, after the pattern of the primitive Church, no one there was rich and no one was poor, but all had all things in common, for nothing seemed to be the property of any individual."

Her monastery becomes the most celebrated house of religion in all England, and so marked is her practical wisdom that not only ordinary folk resort to her in their necessities, but even kings and princes and bishops seek counsel of her and find it. When she is gathered to her fathers, legend will long linger about her name. Centuries will pass before Northumbrian peasants forget to relate that when she descended from her wind-swept promontory laden with creature comforts for the sick and distressed, the very sea-birds flocked around her and bowed themselves at her feet.

Why does Hilda of Whitby find a place in our pageant? She it was who discovered, drew from obscurity, and fostered the genius of the first English Christian poet whose work has come down to us. Let the story be told in the oft-quoted words of Bede, the great historian of the early English Church:—

> "In the monastery of the abbess Hilda at Streoneshalh there was a certain brother specially distinguished and honoured by divine grace, for he was wont to make songs such as tended to religion and piety. Whatsoever he had learned from scholars concerning the Scriptures he forthwith decked out in poetic language with the greatest sweetness and fervour. . . . Many others also in England imitated him in the composition of religious songs. He had not, indeed, been taught of men, or through men, to practise the art of song, but he had received divine aid, and his power of song was the gift of God. Wherefore he could never compose any idle or false song, but only those which pertained to religion and which his pious tongue might fitly sing.
>
> "The man had lived in the world till the time that he was of advanced age, and had never learnt any poetry. And as he was often at a feast when it was arranged, to promote mirth, that they should all in turn sing to the harp, whenever he saw the harp come near him, he arose out of shame from the feast and went home to his house. Having done so on one occasion, he left the house of entertainment and went to the stables, the charge of the horses having been committed to him for that night.
>
> "When, in due time, he stretched his limbs on the bed there and fell asleep, there stood by him in a dream a man, who saluted him and greeted him, calling on him by name: 'CÆDMON, sing me something.' Then he answered and said, 'I cannot sing anything, and therefore I came out from this entertainment and retired here, as I know not how to sing.' Again he who spoke to him said, 'Yet you could sing.' Then said Cædmon, 'What shall I sing?' He said, 'Sing to me the beginning of all things.' On receiving this answer, Cædmon at once began to sing in praise of God the Creator verses and words which he had never heard."

Then the historian goes on to tell that when Cædmon awoke he remembered the verses which he had sung in his dream, and so wonderful did the circumstance appear to him that he opened his heart to the steward of the household, who led him to Hilda and told her the whole story. She called the brothers together, and they

listened in rapt amazement to the magical verses which flowed from Cædmon's lips. They cried out that God had touched the lips of this poor ignorant man and had given him the divine gift of song. Hilda then urged him to abandon his worldly calling and become a monk. He did so; the brothers read the Scriptures to him, and

> "all that he could learn by listening he pondered in his heart, and, ruminating like some clean beast, he turned it into the sweetest of songs. His song and his music were so delightful to hear that even his teachers wrote down the words from his lips and learnt them. He first sang of the earth's creation and the beginning of man and all the story of Genesis, which is the first book of Moses, and afterwards about the departure of the people of Israel from the land of Egypt and their entry into the land of promise; and about many other narratives in the books of the canon of Scripture; and about Christ's incarnation, and His passion, and His ascension into heaven; and about the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the teaching of the apostles; and again about the day of judgment to come, and about the terror of hell to men, and about the kingdom of heaven he composed many a song. And he also composed many others about the divine blessings and judgments."

Cædmon sang of Eastern saints and sages, Oriental peoples, strange lands, and distant scenes quite unknown to him, and he sang of them all in the Old English way. The spirit of the *Beowulf* was in all his verse; it had the same metrical form, the same rugged northern vigour and grim, ruthless power. Christ and His apostles became English kings and chiefs, with English habits and modes of life. Southern Christian and Northern pagan commingled in his verses. The learning and literature of the Continent met and coalesced with the speech, ideas, and points of view of an earlier, fiercer, and more fatalistic age. The ancient dreams of the old pagans inspired him as he recounted the beginnings of things; his Satan was the fierce northern warrior of the old minstrelsy; his hell of fire, broad flames, smoke, and darkness was an ancient dream of the sagas. In like manner centuries later did Milton take up the same strain in his *Paradise Lost*.

One other song-smith of Old English Christian poetry is known to us, but only by name. He is CYNEWULF, who is said to be the author of four well-known poems marked as his own by the insertion of his signature in a kind of acrostic written in runes. His *Crist*, which has been preserved for us in the Exeter Book, is full of spring-like joy at the certainty of the new revelation. His *Elene*, his masterpiece, tells the story of the discovery of the true cross by Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine. Pagan and Christian ideas are strangely blended in this work; the fierce delight of his sires in the pomp and glamour of war, the gleam of jewels and the sight of ships dancing on the waves still inspire the Christian bard. Thus he ends his poem:—

> "I am old and ready to depart, having woven word craft and pondered deeply in the darkness of the world. Once I was gay in the hall and received gifts, appled gold and treasures. Yet was I buffeted with care, fettered by sins, beset with sorrows, until the Lord of all might and power bestowed on me grace and revealed to me the mystery of the holy cross. Now know I that the joys of life are fleeting, and that the Judge of all the world is at hand to deal to every man his doom."

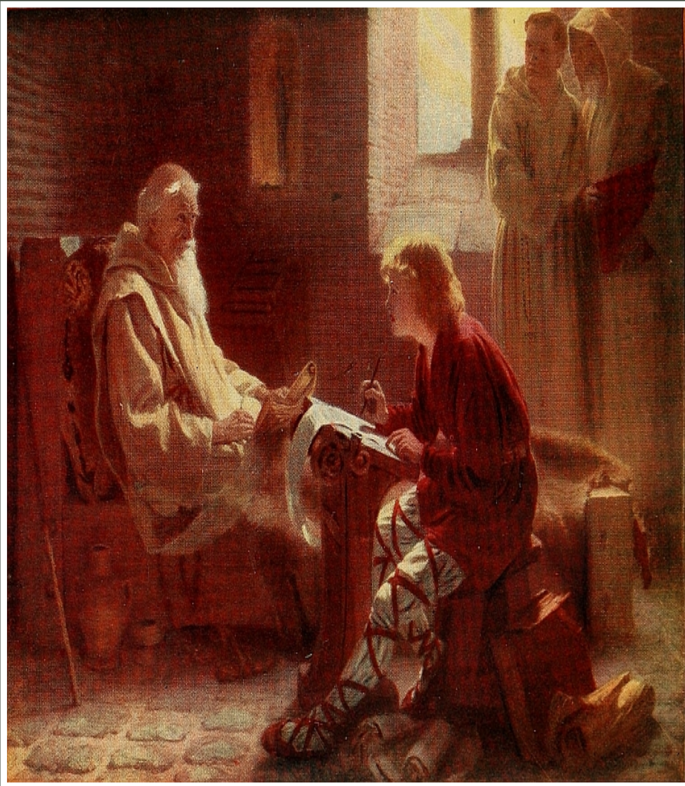
# Chapter VIII.

## THE VENERABLE BEDE.

“*Bede I beheld, who, humbly and holy,*
*Shone like a single star, serene in a night of darkness.*”
SOUTHEY.

A PATHETIC scene diversifies our pageant. A venerable figure, noble and commanding, though dim of eye and feeble of frame, reclines on a rough wooden couch, holding in his withered hands a Greek scroll of the Gospel of St. John. Around him rise the cold, bare walls of his monastic cell; comforts he has none, and the angel of death is hovering near. He knows that his end is fast approaching, for a few days ago he addressed his sorrowing companions in the following words:—

> “It is time, if so it seem good to my Maker, that I should be set free from the flesh, and go to Him who, when I was not, fashioned me out of nothing. I have lived for a long time, and my merciful Judge has ordained my life well for me. The time for me to be set free is at hand, for indeed my soul much desires to behold my King Christ in His beauty.”


**The Last Chapter.**

(*From the picture by J. Doyle Penrose. By permission of the Autotype Company.*) To List

Long indeed has the Venerable BEDE served his Master within houses devoted to His praise. For fifty-five years he has lived a monastic life, and no single day has passed without a glad cry of gratitude to the God who ordained it so. He was but seven years of age when he became the ward of good Benedict Biscop, who founded the monastery in which he now lies a-dying. Full well he remembers the foreign artificers who filled the windows of the church with the pictured forms of saints, and painted on the walls in blue and purple and scarlet and gold those wondrous scenes of sacred history on which his young mind ever dwelt. Above all, he remembers the noble array of books which the good bishop brought from across the sea, and his eagerness to learn the Latin tongue in which they were written. Library and church were his world; he found all his joy of life in the one, and all his hope of eternity in the other. If ever there was a monk born and bred, it was Bede.

Never boy so eager and persistent in devotion to duty. Long ago a pestilence so thinned the ranks of the brotherhood at St. Paul's, Jarrow, that there was not one monk left who could read or answer the responses save the prior and this little son of the Church. For a whole week the services were sung without responses, save at vespers and matins, but, wearying of the monotony, prior and child laboured day by day through the whole services, singing each in his turn alone, until the new

brothers had learned to take their part. And the same spirit glowed within him throughout life.

He became a monk at nineteen, and in every succeeding year grew in holiness and knowledge. Learning he loved and absorbed. His fame reached even to Rome, and Pope Sergius begged him to abandon England and live with him. But Bede could not be persuaded to quit his native land. Learning, teaching, writing, observing diligently the discipline of his order and never neglecting the daily services of his church, his days sped by. Men from afar flocked to him for instruction, and knew not which to admire the more, his skill as a teacher or his gentle and kindly sympathy as a man.

All the learning of the time was his—the grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, and physical science. Much he knew and much he wrote, chiefly in Latin, the language of the Church, but he did not despise the rough native speech of his own beloved land. Worthy and pure songs of the minstrels were stored in his memory, and when the spirit moved him he would burst into impromptu lays.

His greatest work, “The Ecclesiastical History of the English Race,” was written in Latin, but was successfully translated into English, and its literary virtues, its sincerity of purpose, and love of truth have impressed themselves on scholars in all subsequent ages. The beautiful story of the swallow flying from the winter night into the brightly-lighted hall, and out again into the dark, and the account of Cædmon, both of which find a place in these pages, are taken from this noble book. Many other important works fell from his industrious pen, amongst them translations of parts of the Scriptures into English.

Well does Bede deserve a place in our pageant. Though he wrote mainly in the language of the Church, he taught men to love learning. He set the model of a simple direct English style, and gave his unlettered brethren some of the words of God in their own tongue.

---

And now the faintness of death is upon him, and his task is not yet done. Before he goes hence and is no more seen he longs greatly to finish his translation into English of the Gospel of St. John. “I do not want my boys,” he says, “to read what is false or to have to work at this without profit when I am dead.” So he labours on while the cold dew gathers upon his brow, and his breath comes short and fitful. His young scribe is alone with him, for to-day is a festival and there is a procession in the church.

“Dearest master,” says the boy, “there is one chapter wanting, and it is hard for thee to question thyself.” “No, it is easy,” replied the dying man; “take thy pen and write quickly.”

So the day passes. The evening shadows are falling when the scribe announces, “There is yet one sentence, dear master, to write out.” Again comes the answer, “Write quickly.” A few strokes of the pen and the boy cries joyfully, “Now it is finished.” “Thou hast spoken truly,” responds Bede; “it is finished!”

Then he bids his friends place him where he can look upon the spot where he has been wont to kneel in prayer. And lying thus upon the pavement of his cell, he chants the *Gloria Patri*, and as he utters the words “The Holy Ghost,” he breathes his last, and so passes to the kingdom of heaven.

# Chapter IX.

## ALFRED THE GREAT.

*"A thousand years the Earth cried, Where art thou?*
*And then the shadow of thy coming fell*
*On Saxon Alfred's olive-cinctured brow."*—SHELLEY.

THE busy activities of Bede's monastery at Jarrow furnish us with a picture of intellectual life that seems full of promise for the future of learning in England. Dotted over the land, like green oases in a desert of semi-barbarism, were many similar institutions filled with men who gave their nights and days to the study of everything that could possibly increase the influence of the Church. Books were multiplied, libraries grew, and the two great monastic schools at Canterbury and York were thronged with eager and zealous students. It is true that Latin was the language in which they wrote, and that they only employed the native speech for the simple admonition of their flocks, but there was good hope that in an atmosphere of learning other and more glorious Cædmons might ere long appear. The dawn of better things had apparently arrived.

ALCUIN, who was born in the year of Bede's death, filled the place which his far greater predecessor had vacated. He himself was a writer, though not a great one, and the numerous poems, letters, controversial and church books which he indited are of less importance in the history of our literary progress than the inspiration which he breathed into men by his spoken word. He quitted York, happy in the hour of his departure, for the court of Charlemagne. A few years later a long and devastating storm broke upon England, blotting out the rising sun from the heavens and plunging the land into a tumult of strife that almost destroyed its civilization and wellnigh exterminated its learning and literature.

Heathendom had flung itself in a last desperate rally on the Christian world. Thor and Wodin were arrayed against Christ, and for the best part of a century the pagan gods rode in the whirlwind and directed the storm. The Vikings had begun those raids which were to end in conquest, and at their coming men's hearts failed them for fear. In character, disposition, and mode of life they were the English before England, ferocious barbarians, ruthless, piratical sea-rovers, nursing a Berserk frenzy of hatred for the new faith which their kinsmen had adopted.

Crossing the North Sea in their long ships, they sailed up the river mouths, threw up stockaded earthworks, and scoured the country far and wide for booty. They carved blood-eagles on the backs of priests, plundered and defiled churches, and gave to the flames all the priceless treasures of minster and monastery. The whole

civilized world groaned beneath this scourge of God, and the rumoured approach of the raiders sent terrified peasants to their altars with the pitiful appeal, “From the fury of the Northmen, Good Lord deliver us.”

History seemed to be repeating itself. The English conquest of Britain in the fifth century seemed to be reproducing itself in the Viking conquest of England in the ninth century. Raid was succeeded by conquest and settlement, and one hundred and forty years after the death of Bede all opposition seemed to be at an end, and the English king was forced to take refuge in the marshes of Athelney.

> “Scattered are his stalwart yeomen;
> Danish Guthrum holds his halls;
> Loud the shouts of boasting foemen
> Echo round his palace walls;
> 'Ours,' they cry, 'these meads and rills,
> English bones bleach on the hills!'”

But the darkest hour precedes the dawn. The English made one last despairing effort, and victory smiled upon their banners. The Vikings were forced to consent to a peace which recognized East Anglia as their domain. There the more reposeful of them settled down, and as the years rolled by they became Englishmen, and added a new strain of dogged courage, adventurous daring, and trading instinct to the national character.

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The one great figure of this long, weary struggle is Alfred, best loved and perhaps greatest of all English kings. We now see him building up anew the kingdom which he had brought with great tribulation out of the shadow of death into the light of peace and prosperity. He is seated at a desk in the monastery which he has erected in the marshes where he sought refuge from the victorious Dane. Around him sit Plegmund, the archbishop, Asser, the bishop, Grimbald, the priest, and John, the old Saxon, scholars whom he has enlisted in his great work of national regeneration. His face is pale and lined with care; his health is feeble, but he has no mercy on his infirmity. His countenance is noble, and nobler still is the secret desire of his heart. For eight hours every day he labours with consuming zeal to build up the walls of his Jerusalem.

Where the Vikings have trod, there the embers of learning have been stamped out. Truly will men carve upon Alfred's monument a thousand years later, “He found learning dead, and he restored it; education neglected, and he revived it.” From the days of his boyhood he has loved books and the society of scholars, and with a large unselfishness, not always characteristic of the learned, he now desires to make his unlettered fellows participate in his blessings. But what books shall he give to his people? All the great and worthy books are in Latin; there are no prose books in the English tongue. The King ponders deeply, and then addresses his colleagues as follows:—

> “It seemeth to me that we should take those books that are most needful for all men to be acquainted with, and that we should turn them into the speech which all can understand, that all the youth that now is in England of free men, of those who have the means to be able to go in for it, be set to learning while they are fit for no other business, until such time as they can read English writing; afterwards further instruction may be given in the Latin language to such as are intended for a more advanced education, and are to be prepared for higher office.”

All approve this wise speech, and then comes the choice of a work to be translated. After much discussion the lot falls on Pope Gregory's “Pastoral Care,” a spiritual guide for priests. English priests are now so woefully ignorant that not one can be found south of the Humber to understand his Breviary. The needs of the priests are clamant, so the scholars fall to the work of expounding to the King the Latin text of Gregory's book “word by word, sense by sense;” and when Alfred is fully assured that he thoroughly understands it in letter and in spirit, he begins the humble and laborious work of translation. He is not careful to reproduce the original with accuracy; his aim is to supply a version which shall enlighten his unlettered subjects.

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Gregory's “Pastoral Care” was the first of the series of books which Alfred thus turned into the English of Wessex speech. A very popular book known as the “Consolation of Boëthius” followed, and a “History of the World” by Orosius succeeded, but the most important work which he made accessible to English readers was Bede's “Ecclesiastical History.” For the first time it was possible for Englishmen other than monks to taste the delights of reading. But Alfred did much more than add a new resource to life; he gave the despised English tongue of Wessex a new dignity; he demonstrated to all men that the speech of croft and byre and market-place was capable of expressing the deepest thoughts of the human mind and the tenderest feelings of the human heart, and by so doing he laid the foundations of our English prose.

Gratitude, sincere and abundant, should flow out to Alfred. He might have gratified a pardonable vanity by original authorship in Latin, and so built for himself a literary monument to his name and deeds. This temptation he resisted, and out of a great modesty and a disinterested affection for his people chose rather to interpret for them the wisdom of saints and sages in the homely words of their daily life.

One other achievement of this great and good king must not pass without mention. Before the deluge of blood and strife swept away the old learning, it had been customary for the scribes of the chief monasteries to keep brief records of the important local events which came to their notice. Alfred conceived the idea of a national chronicle which should record year by year, from the earliest times, the story of his kingdom, and under his guidance the work was begun. The volume was chained to a desk in Winchester Cathedral, and added to from time to time. It was continued for two and a half centuries after his death, long after the last English king had been slain and the old tongue banished from court and school. The Anglo-

Saxon Chronicle, as we now possess it, may be described as the finest existing record of the early history of any nation.

Written by many hands and at successive periods, it varies greatly in literary merit. Sometimes it is as bald and monotonous as the simple record of a child; sometimes its narrative is fired with glowing eloquence; sometimes the pages are illuminated with the most spirited poetry. The gloomy story of the years following Alfred's death is nowhere better told than in the Chronicle. It is a story of almost continuous struggle, of burning, plundering, and slaying, of Danish triumphs and rare English victories. The finest poem in the Chronicle, translated into modern verse by Tennyson, celebrates the defeat of a great league of Danish, Scots, Welsh, and Irish Vikings by Athelstane at Brunanburh in the year 927.

> “Five lay
> On that battle-stead,
> Young kings
> By swords laid to sleep;
> So seven eke
> Of Olaf's earls,
> Of the country countless
> Shipmen and Scots.”

Later on, the grim and tragic story of Byrthnoth, an English champion who falls in glorious fray ringed round by the spears of his comrades, is sung in strains worthy of Homer or the “Song of Roland.” In this warfare defeats are more common than victories, and the poetic outbursts of despair are more truly inspired than the songs of triumph.

In these pitiless years of war and tumult letters and learning are again crushed out, save for the time of comparative peace following the victory at Brunanburh, when new monasteries arise and the old life of piety and learning is renewed for a space. In this period Ælfric, Wulfstan, and others appear as writers of English prose. Then war breaks out once more, and England goes down before her Viking conquerors. The minstrels, however, still sing in homestead and hall, and keep the tradition of English poetry alive. English prose, however, disappears and awaits the new birth which is as yet afar off.

# Chapter X.

## IN THE SCRIPTORIUM.

"*This is well written, though I say it!*
*I should not be afraid to display it,*
*In open day, on the selfsame shelf*
*With the writings of St. Thecla herself,*
*Or of Theodosius, who of old*
*Wrote the Gospels in letters of gold!*"—LONGFELLOW.

THE Norman Conquest gave England to the Vikings, but they were Vikings with a difference. Still retaining their old name, they had changed their manners and almost their natures in the course of a hundred and fifty years. Rollo the Ganger, the Viking outlaw who had seized Rouen, threatened Paris, and forced a weak French king to give him a foothold in North France, was a barbarian of barbarians, but his descendants, mingling with the native inhabitants, developed into a race of courtly knights and zealous Christians. The old Norse fighting spirit still animated them; they were turbulent, quick to anger, eager for battle; and, with new weapons and new modes of fighting, were accounted the most masterly spirits of the age.

**IN THE SCRIPTORIUM.**

**(*From a contemporary picture.*)** To List

Mother Church had obtained a great hold on these Normans. Their land was filled with monasteries in which the most learned men of the time spent their days in prayer, study, and good works; glorious cathedrals or splendid churches lifted their towers towards heaven in every village; square, gray strongholds perched high on windy heights overlooked many a league of carefully cultivated meadow and orchard. Normandy, the land of the Normans, was the home of learning and intelligence, of refinement in manners, language, and taste. For the sluggish-minded English, with their gluttonous feasts, their boisterous drinking bouts and shouts of roistering laughter, the Normans had nothing but contempt.

Normandy had a popular literature of its own, consisting mainly of poems of chivalry, versified tales of the adventures of Charlemagne, Roland, and other peers and paladins. Their *jongleurs* and *trouvères* sang in every hall, and embroidered their themes with threads of adventurous imagination. In every castle-yard tourneys were held, and agility and grace of person, skill in the management of horses and weapons, magnificence of dress and armour were daily displayed to feed martial vanity and to win the smiles of ladies fair. All these things were worlds apart from the dull, slow-moving current of old English life.

The Normans sought to make England Normandy. They filled all the high offices of state, and their language became the tongue of court, parliament, tribunal, and army. Only English boors spoke the national speech,

> "in the country places,
> Where the old plain men have rosy faces,
> And the young fair maidens
> Quiet eyes."

Even before the Conquest learned abbots and bishops from Normandy had acquired authority in the English Church; now they dominated it. Latin was the language of church and cloister, as Norman-French was that of noble, judge, war-chief, and landowner. English had never strongly asserted itself as the language of culture and books, but now all chance of advancing it to that honourable position had apparently disappeared. For two centuries the English tongue suffered eclipse; all the written literature was in Latin.

Monastic life flourished greatly; many new monasteries were founded, and learning advanced with rapid strides. Historians, writers on Roman law, medicine, and theology were to be found in every cloister; busy scribes worked six hours a day copying the old books and inditing new ones; libraries were founded and made easily accessible to students. Winchester, St. Albans, Durham, and Glastonbury became great centres of intellectual life. A literary era began in England—but it was not English.

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Let us peep into one of the monasteries of the time and see the work of book-making in progress. The scriptorium or writing-room was either a large chamber over the chapter-house or a number of separate alcoves in the cloisters. Each scribe was provided with a desk, ink, parchment, pens, pen-knives, rulers, pumice-stone for smoothing the surface of the parchment, awls for making guiding marks when lines were to be ruled, a reading-frame to hold the book that was to be copied, and weights to keep down the pages. Every scribe had a window to himself, for all the work was done by daylight. Strict silence was enforced, and only the higher officers of the monastery were allowed to enter the scriptorium.

> "As some method of communication was necessary, there was a great variety of signs in use. If a scribe needed a book, he extended his hands and made a movement as of turning over leaves. If it was a missal that was wanted, he super-added the sign of a cross; if a psalter, he placed his hands on his head in the shape of a crown (a reference to King David); if a book containing the scripture lessons of the day, he pretended to wipe away the grease (which might easily have fallen upon it from a candle); if a small work was needed, not a Bible or service book, he placed one hand on his stomach and the other before his mouth! Finally, if a pagan work was required, he scratched his ear in the manner of a dog!"

When the scale and general style of the writing was fixed, the scribe plotted out his page, leaving spaces for all the work that was to be done in colour. Then, in a very neat handwriting, he began to copy the book before him letter by letter. When

four pages were thus completed, the text was compared by another person with the original copy, and the parchments were handed over to the *rubricator*, who worked in the titles, concluding notes, lists of chapters, head-lines, directions to the reader, and so forth, in red or alternate red and blue letters. When this was done, the illuminator took the volume in hand.

Nothing can exceed the beauty of some of the illuminated books which have come down to us from these times. In many of them we see large decorated capitals, filled with flowers or delicately painted miniatures reproducing some familiar scene which attracted the artist's eye, such as a housewife at her loom, a blacksmith in his forge, a gay chaffering crowd at market.

> “There, now, is an initial letter!
> Saint Ulric himself never made a better,
> Finished down to the leaf and the snail,
> Down to the eyes on the peacock's tail!
> And now, as I turn the volume over,
> And see what lies between cover and cover,
> What treasures of art these pages hold,
> All ablaze with crimson and gold,
> God forgive me! I seem to feel
> A certain satisfaction steal
> Into my heart, and into my brain,
> As if my talent had not lain
> Wrapped in a napkin, and all in vain.
> Yes, I might almost say to the Lord,
> 'Here is a copy of Thy Word,
> Written out with much toil and pain;
> Take it, O Lord, and let it be
> As something I have done for Thee.'
> (*He looks from the window.*)
> How sweet the air is! How fair the scene!
> I wish I had as lovely a green
> To paint my landscapes and my leaves!
> How the swallows twitter under the eaves!
> There, now, there is one in her nest;
> I can just catch a glimpse of her head and breast,
> And will sketch her thus in her quiet nook,
> For the margin of my gospel book.”

**A Page of the Durham Book.** To List

As the art of illumination advanced, every colour used by the illuminator came to possess a special significance. Thus the illuminator reserved liquid gold and purple for the name of the King of Kings.

> “With grand lapis-lazuli, sprinkled with diamond dust, he set down the divine title of Jesus Christ the Saviour. . . . Mary the Immaculate Mother gleams forth with the pearly-white sheen of the dove's breast from a background of purest turquoise. No archangel but has his initial letter of distinctive characteristic splendour, from the glowing ruby of Michael, all glorious Captain of the hosts-militant of heaven, to the amethyst of Raphael, and Gabriel's hyacinth-blue. . . . No China ink is black enough to score down Judas, the betrayer of his Lord. While to the dreadful enemy of mankind are allotted the orange-yellow of devouring hellish flame and the livid blue of burning brimstone; and the verdigris-green, metallic scales of the Snake of Eden diaper the background of the letters, and the poisonous bryony, the henbane, and the noxious trailing vine of the deadly nightshade wreathe and garland them about.”

When the illuminators' work was done, the sheets were handed to the binder, who sewed them together with great firmness and encased them in solid wooden boards with raised bands across the back. In the days of which we are speaking the finest books received an ivory, silver, or even gold binding, and the sides were carved with figures or embossed with jewels.

All the books produced by the scribes were made for the rich and learned. The vulgar many never saw them save in the priests' hands or on the lecterns of their churches, nor could they have read them had they possessed them, for the art of reading was a prerogative of the clergy, and the language in which they wrote was not understanded of the people. The only literature for common folk was on the lips of men—the traditional tales handed down from father to son, the songs and stories of the gleemen or the lives of the saints recited from the pulpits. The age is very far distant when reading will become the commonest of all the arts, and toiling men will be able to consort with the “mighty minds of old” at the expenditure of a few pence.

# Chapter XI.

## THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND.

> "*That gray King whose name, a ghost,*
> *Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,*
> *And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still.*"—TENNYSON.

THE most splendid figure of all romance now appears—ARTHUR, flower of kings, mirror of princes, ideal knight of all the world, whose glory, in the words of Tennyson, was—

> "To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
> To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
> To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
> To honour his own word as if his God's,
> To lead sweet life in purest chastity,
> To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
> And worship her, by years of noble deeds."

"From the great deep to the great deep he goes," a figure of magic and mystery, dimly described on the horizon of history, but sufficiently embodied to catch the eye and kindle the imagination of men. Bard and minstrel claim him as their own; they weave magical garments for him to wear, and create worlds for him to conquer. All the splendour of kingly virtue, all the panoply of knightly achievement, all the wisdom and worth of sages, all the devotion of saints, everything that is great, good, noble, lofty, and triumphant in man "a little lower than the angels," cleaves to him. He grows in glory and glamour through three long centuries, and inspires the legendary lore of many nations.

Then comes one, "in the ninth year of the reygne of Kyng Edward the Fourth," who goes a-gleaning in this wide field, and gathers the sheaves of stories into an imperishable book which fixes for all time the radiant image of this "first and chief of Christian men." Centuries later, English writers will turn to this book as to a treasure house, and again poetic fancy will light up the figures of the king and his knights and invest them with a symbolism that teaches eternal truths to our own and succeeding ages.

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Let us inquire how Arthur first appeared in literature. Some eleven years after the Norman Conquest a Welsh boy named Geoffrey was born in the little town of Monmouth. He was educated for the Church, and as a young man became chaplain

to William, Count of Normandy. Subsequently he was appointed Bishop of St. Asaph, and about the year 1147 completed in Latin a “History of the Kings of Britain” who ruled the land “before the incarnation of Christ.” It was by means of this book that King Arthur was first introduced to the world.

Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle do not mention him, but Nennius, a Welshman who wrote a history some sixty-five years after the death of Bede, tells us that Arthur was the war-leader of the Britons in their struggles with the English, and that he led them in twelve great battles, in the last of which nine hundred and sixty men fell before his single onset. This is all the real evidence we have that Arthur was an actual warrior and not a figment of the imagination.

Old Welsh books that have come down to us contain many stories of the king, and some of these Geoffrey must have heard and stored up in his memory during his boyhood at Monmouth. It is probable that when residing in Normandy he heard new stories of Arthur from the lips of the Bretons, who were of the same Celtic stock as the Welsh, and had long provided a refuge for their harried kinsmen on the other side of the Channel.

Geoffrey tells us in his History that he obtained his information not from legend or hearsay, but from a book in the Breton tongue which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, brought out of Brittany. It is this book which he purports to translate into Latin. Such a book may have existed, but it has never been discovered, and we shall do no injustice to the memory of Geoffrey if we assume that in telling the story of Arthur he drew largely on his own imagination.

Geoffrey was a born romancer, and he knew that nothing appealed so strongly to lords and ladies throughout Christendom as tales of knightly prowess and faithful love. So he turned novelist, and exercised all his skill in inventing a great heroic figure which should be to the British what Odysseus was to the Greeks and Charlemagne to the Franks. The serious historians of the time, such as William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, talked openly of Geoffrey's “fabrications,” but most men held the view which Caxton expressed more than three centuries later, that to doubt the existence of Arthur was almost atheism.

The first six books of Geoffrey's History are devoted to the story of Arthur's predecessors. At the close of the sixth book Merlin, the Enchanter, appears on the scene and begins his weird and fantastic prophecies, one of which foretells the coming of a British chief “who should obtain the Empire of Rome.” Then he relates the mysterious birth of Arthur, and the death of his father Uther Pendragon, after which the kingly boy of due right succeeds to the throne and at once begins his wondrous career of conquest.

Saxons, Scots, and Picts are vanquished, the whole island is subdued, and Arthur weds Guinevere, a noble lady of surpassing beauty. Then Ireland and Iceland are added to his kingdom, the rulers of the Orkneys and of Gothland are forced to do him homage, and a brilliant assemblage of knights gathers around him. His ambitions grow apace and he now desires to subdue the whole of Europe.

Norway, Daria, and Gaul cannot resist him, and he establishes Bedivere, his butler, and Kay, his seneschal, upon tributary thrones. Then he returns to Britain, and at Caerleon-upon-Usk, in his "kingly palaces" which rival those of Rome itself, keeps high court.

Geoffrey says:—

> "At that time was Britain exalted unto so high a pitch of dignity as that it did surpass all other kingdoms in plenty of riches, in luxury of adornment, and in the courteous wit of them that dwelt therein. Whatsoever knight in the land was of renown for his prowess did wear his clothes and his arms all of one same colour. And the dames, no less witty, would apparel them in like manner of a single colour, nor would they deign to have the love of any save he had thrice approved him in the wars. Wherefore at that time did dames wax chaste and knights the nobler for their love."

Magic surrounds the king even in this early recital of his fame. He destroys monsters, kills a Spanish giant at St. Michael's Mount, and lays low another who wraps himself in a cloak made of the skins of the kings whom he has slain. Then he meets the Romans in battle, does prodigies of valour, and marches on Rome itself. In his absence Modred, who is acting as his viceroy in Britain, sets the crown upon his own head and persuades Guinevere, Arthur's queen, to become his wife. When Arthur hears the news, he assembles his British warriors and leads them home. Modred meets him in force but is driven back, and Guinevere flies for safety to a convent. At the river Camel in the west country a final and terrible battle is fought. Modred is slain, and King Arthur himself is wounded unto death, and is borne thence unto the island of Avalon for the healing of his wounds.

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Such in brief outline was the story which Geoffrey told as serious history. Readers of Sir Thomas Malory's "Morte d'Arthur" and of Tennyson's beautiful "Idylls of the King" will notice that Geoffrey gives us the bald story from which the fully developed legend sprang. The Round Table was as yet unknown; Lancelot, Galahad, Tristram, and Iseult had not appeared, and the Quest of the Holy Grail still lay in the imagination of the later romancers. But the elements were all there; the vivid and florid fancy of Geoffrey's successors seized upon and expanded every incident of his story; new characters and new motives were invented, and by degrees the greatest romance of all the world assumed its present form.

Geoffrey's book had an enormous popularity, for it exactly suited the taste of the age. In court and hall knights and ladies listened with rapt attention to the new and entrancing story, and eagerly awaited fresh versions and fuller details. No book before the age of printing had such a vogue. So well were the stories known that it became the mark of a clown to confess ignorance of them.

Geoffrey of Monmouth set out to write history but achieved romance. He takes his place in our pageant not as a contributor to the progress of our native literature, but as the collector and inventor of legends from which English writers were

afterwards to draw plot and inspiration. Some sixty years later his materials passed, as we shall see, into English poetry; and when English literature had come into its own, great writers such as Chaucer, Spenser, Drayton, and Wordsworth were fain to acknowledge their obligation to him in words of gratitude and admiration.

# Chapter XII.

## LAYAMON.

*"The first minstrel to celebrate Arthur in English song."*

LIKE a solitary candle lighting the window of a hut in the darkness of a lonely land, an English book now appears. Long has English, as the language of literature, been submerged; long has it been despised and rejected of all who hold high place and influence in the realm. Not amongst the churchmen of the cloister, nor among the minstrel throng that waits on the pleasure of king and baron, need we look for any encouragement of native prose and verse. The speech of churl and serf is an offence to ears polite, and he who essays to make a book in this tongue must be wanting in worldly ambition, must care nothing for the patronage of the proud and great, must despise the material advantages which it can give or withhold. He must be content with the inarticulate gratitude of the mean and lowly, of those who labour in the sweat of the brow, who guide the plough over the furrow and tend the cattle in the field. He must write for love and not reward; he must sow in faith and never reap his harvest.

Such was the author of the first book of any consequence that broke the long silence of English literature after the Norman Conquest. He was a humble but scholarly priest serving the offices of his Church in the village of Ernley, on the right bank of the Severn, near the Welsh Border, and not thirty miles, as the crow flies, from the Warwickshire town which gave birth to Shakespeare. LAYAMON was his name, and he was a patriot of patriots. To him the rough Old English tongue made the sweetest music on earth; to him the story of his now stricken land was an inspiration.

He tells us that "it came into his mind" to make a history of England in verse; so he made a pilgrimage in quest of materials, and obtained the "English book made by Baeda," that is King Alfred's translation, the same book in Latin, as well as Wace's "*Brut d'Angleterre*." Then he sat down to write, and the first words which fell from his pen were as follows:—

"Layamon leide theos boc,
& tha leaf wende.
he heom leofliche bi-heold,
lithe him beo drihten.
fetheren he nom mid fingren,
& fiede on boc-felle,
& tha sothe word
sette to-gadere:

& tha thre boc
thrumde to ane."

> "Layamon laid before him these books, and turned over the leaves; lovingly he beheld them. May the Lord be merciful to him! Pen he took with fingers and wrote on book-skin, and the true words set together; and the three books compressed into one."

In *thrumming* together these books he made but little use of Bede. His great stand-by was Wace's *Brut*. It was the work of a Norman clerk who had translated Geoffrey of Monmouth's book into French poetry, and had given his imagination full play in the process. The monkish Latin of Geoffrey became the courtly French of Wace, and Arthur blossomed into a flower of Norman chivalry, surrounded with picturesque detail and rich colour. Layamon borrowed most of his matter from Wace, but eschewed the French spirit of his original, and in scrupulously pure English made his heroes Englishmen. Scores of the old, half-forgotten epics of the gleemen, and many rambling stories of old gaffers and crones on the Celtic borderland, flashed into his mind as he wrote, and found a place in his narrative.

Arthur's "Table Round" appeared in Wace, but it was Layamon who first made the king a child of faery. Elf-land was his home at birth and death; elves received him into the world, gave him his magical sword and spear, and enabled him to shine as the goodliest of knights and the king of men; it was to Argante, the splendid elf, that he went to be healed of his grievous wounds. And Layamon told it all in the Old English alliterative line of Beowulf and Cædmon, though not slavishly, but with a desire to better his verse with the rhythm and rhyme of the French poets.

Let us take leave of Layamon with genuine gratitude. He was a poet, vigorous and graphic, and he rescued the English tongue as a language of literature from the oblivion that threatened it. Thenceforward two currents of literary expression flow on side by side; the French, a glittering stream, the English, a humble peat-brown rill, but growing in volume and intensity day by day, until a seeming miracle is wrought: the French stream mingles its waters with the native flood which rolls onward down the ages in peerless majesty and beauty.

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For two centuries after the time of Layamon English literature grew slowly but surely. ORM, an Augustinian canon of the North Midlands, paraphrased the gospels and homilies into a kind of blank verse, and insisted on the proper pronunciation of English; and he was followed by others whose merit is that they exercised themselves in the native language, and thus advanced it in richness of vocabulary and power of expression.

Amongst such works is the "Ancren Riwle," a book of English prose laying down maxims of life and behaviour for Anchoresses—that is, for ladies who lived in religious communities without taking the veil. These ladies are enjoined not to "speak with any man often or long," not to flirt, not to believe in luck, in dreams, or witchcraft. They are not to mortify their fair bodies with iron, nor hair-cloth nor

hedgehog skins, nor are they to flog themselves unless their confessor permits, and they must take care that their shoes are thick and warm.

Then, too, we have odes such as "The Owl and the Nightingale," lyrics as fresh and sweet as "Sumer is icumen in," political songs, metrical chronicles such as that of Robert of Gloucester, devotional books, and scores of romances in rhyme such as those of Tristram, Havelok the Dane, King Horn, Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwick, and Gawain and the Green Knight. In the manuscript volume of the last-named romance occurs the poem *Pearl*, which Tennyson described as "true pearl of our poetic prime." It tells of a father's grief for an infant daughter who died in her second year. The heart-stricken man thus describes his lost child:—

> "Pearl that for princes' pleasure may
> Be cleanly closed in gold so clear,
> Out of the Orient dare I say,
> Never I proved her precious peer:
> So round, so rich, and in such array,
> So small, so smooth the sides of her were,
> Whenever I judged of jewel gay
> Shapeliest still was the sight of her.
> Alas! in an arbour I lost her here,
> Through grass to ground she passed, I wot,
> I dwine, forsaken of sweet love's cheer,
> O my privy Pearl without a spot."

Then in a vision he beholds his Pearl, no longer a child, but a queen of heaven, clad in white, her golden hair crowned with pearls and gold, roaming with other maidens in the gardens of Paradise. Across the fordless river that divides him from her, she tells him that she is not lost; she comforts him with the lessons of faith and resignation, and gives him a glimpse of the New Jerusalem. He plunges into the stream, and then awakes to find himself stretched on the child's grave.

There is genuine lyrical emotion in this and other poems of the period, and in form, feeling, and expression we see that English verse is growing in strength and beauty. Two hundred years after Layamon lighted his little candle in the gloom, the "Morning Star of Song" appears, and with him, the slowly-breaking dawn that ushers in the bright day when English Literature begins to shine like a sun in the unclouded heavens.

# Chapter XIII.

## THE CANTERBURY TALES

*"His to paint*
*With Nature's freshness what before him lies:*
*The knave, the fool; the frolicsome, the quaint;*
*His the broad jest, the laugh without restraint,*
*The ready tears, the spirit lightly moved;*
*Loving the world, and by the world beloved."*

F. T. PALGRAVE, "Visions of England."

A VISION of England in the latter half of the fourteenth century now presents itself, a living picture, full of colour and vivacity, and representative of all the solid and stable elements of English society in the days of Plantagenet glory and decline. As the motley cavalcade flits by we see our forefathers as they lived and moved and had their being in the reigns of Edward the Third and Richard the Second. All the essential classes of the realm are typified; the extremes of the social scale alone are missing. No baron or beggar rides in the gay, chattering throng, but almost every other section of society is fully represented. Such a brilliant mirror of men and manners has never before or since reflected the subjects of any age or realm.

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You are standing in the yard of the old Tabard Inn at Southwark, one bright April morning in the year 1382. Ostlers and grooms, cooks and scullions, have been busy since early dawn, for there are nine-and-twenty guests in the inn, and nine-and-twenty horses in the stables. The twenty-nine guests are pilgrims bound for the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury, and the twenty-nine horses will carry them for three or four days over the fifty-six miles of undulating road which lie between the Tabard Inn and the city of St. Augustine. Every year thousands of such men and women traverse the Pilgrims' Way, and for the sake of sociability and protection they travel in troops, the favourite season for such pious jaunts being the spring of the year.

"Whan that Aprillë with his schowrës swoote
The drought of Marche hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertue engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swetë breethe
Enspired hath in every holte and heethe
The tendre croppës . . .
Thanne longen folk to gon on pilgrimages."

**London in the Time of Chaucer.**

(***From the picture by J. T. Eglington. By permission of the Corporation of Liverpool.***) To List

Last night, when all were assembled and supper was done, Mine Host addressed the company as follows:—

> "Ye goon to Caunterbury; God yow spede,
> The blissful martyr quyte you your mede.
> And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,
> Ye shapen you to tell tales and to play;
> For trewely, comfort nor mirth is none
> To ride by the weye dumb as a stone;
> And therefore wol I maken you disport. . . .
> This is the poynt, to speken short and pleyn,
> That each of you, to shorten our weye,
> In this voyage shall tell tales tweye,
> To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so,
> And hom-ward he shall tellen othere two."

"He who tells the best of the tales," continued the host, "shall have a supper here at the Tabard Inn when we return from Canterbury. I myself will ride with you, at my own cost, and be your guide." The guests gladly agreed to this proposal, and begged the host to arrange the matter for them, and be the judge of the best story that should be told.

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And now the bustling hour of departure has arrived, and after much marshalling of riders and reining in of impatient horses, the whole nine-and-twenty guests are clattering out of the inn yard into the streets of London. Stand by the gate and watch them as they pass.

First comes a *Knight*, riding a good horse, but making no display; well but plainly dressed, and wearing a jerkin stained with the rust of the armour which he has but recently doffed. From the days of his squirehood he has loved chivalry, truth, honour, freedom, and courtesy. As a soldier he has distinguished himself in fifteen battles, but there is no vainglory or arrogance in his bearing; he carries himself as meekly as any maid. Wise, dignified, pure in heart and mind, he is a “verray parfit gentil knight.”

Riding by his side is his son, a young *Squire* of about twenty years of age, tall, active, and strong. He is a lover and a bachelor, and his curly locks are carefully tended. His gay doublet, with long, wide sleeves, is spangled with flowers, white and red, like a meadow in springtime, and he himself is as fresh as the month of May. He sits his horse with an easy grace, and has already borne himself so well in battle that he hopes to win favour in his lady's eyes. Nor is he unpractised in the gentler arts. He can compose songs and verses, paint pictures, dance, and play the flute. So hotly is he in love that he sleeps no more than a nightingale.

> “Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,
> And carved before his father at the table.”

A *Yeoman*, clad in a coat and a hood of green, with a sheaf of arrows by his side and a mighty bow in his hand, attends upon the Knight and the Squire. His head is cropped, his face is brown. Upon his arm is a gay bracer, and by his side hang sword, buckler, and dagger. From his green baldrick depends a horn, and this, with the silver figure of St. Christopher on his breast, proclaims him a forester.

Next comes a *Prioress*, one Madame Eglantyne, smiling coyly as she ambles along. She is very careful of her speech, and “her greatest oath” is by St. Loy, the patron saint of smiths. She sings the divine service in the chapel of her nunnery in a somewhat nasal tone, and she speaks English-French which would not be understood in Paris. Her table manners are perfect.

> “She leet no morsel from her lippes falle
> Nor wette her fingres in hir sauce deepe.
> Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,
> That no drope ever fell upon hir breste.”

She wipes her lips after eating, and when she drinks, no spot of grease can be seen in her cup. Amiable and pleasant, she takes pains to be courtly in manner, and to be esteemed worthy of reverence. So tender-hearted is she that she will weep to see a mouse caught in a trap or a hound beaten, and she feeds her pet dogs on roasted flesh, milk, and cake-bread. Her nose is long and shapely, her eyes are gray, her mouth is small, her lips are soft and red. The white wimple about her neck is gracefully arranged, and her cloak is neat; she carries on her arm a rosary with

green gauds, and hanging from it is a golden brooch with the Latin motto, *Amor vincit omnia*. With her ride a nun and a priest.

Behind the Prioress and her attendants comes a *Monk*, a lover of hunting, with many a fine horse in his stable. When he rides to hounds you may hear his bridle jingling as loudly and as clearly as the chapel bell. The rule of St. Maur and St. Benet is too strict for him; he dislikes the studious retirement of the cloister and that field labour which St. Augustine enjoined upon his monks. He loves the life of a country gentleman far better; he is a hard rider, and he spares no cost to provide himself with swift greyhounds for the chase. The rigorous simplicity of the monkish garb is not for him; the sleeves of his gown are embroidered with costly fur, the finest in the land, and his hood is fastened under his chin with a gold pin. His head is bald and shining, and his face glows as though it had been anointed. Portly and bright-eyed, he certainly is "a fair prelat."

> "A fat swan lovede he best of eny roost.
> His palfrey was as broun as is a berye."

A *Friar* comes next, a lively, pleasant fellow, who begs alms within a district specially assigned to him. He is "the beste beggere in his hous," a gossip, a flatterer, and a marriage-broker, but a pillar of his order. The franklins and worthy women of the town hold him in high esteem, for

> "Ful swetely herde he confessioun,
> And plesaunt was his absolucioun."

He carries knives and pins to sell; he is a good singer, with a large repertoire of folk-songs, and he knows every tavern in the towns of his district. His cloak is of double worsted, and he never goes threadbare. To make his English sound sweet upon his tongue he lisps a little, and when he plays upon the harp his eyes twinkle like stars on a frosty night.

Next comes a *Merchant* with a forked beard, dressed in motley, wearing a Flemish beaver hat, and riding a tall horse. He talks much of his gains, and is greatly concerned about keeping the sea between Orwell and Middleburgh free of pirates. By exchanging his crowns in the different money markets of Europe he makes good profit; he employs his knowledge to the best advantage, and so dignified is he in business that nobody knows that he is in debt.

The *Clerk of Oxenford*, who follows, rides a horse as lean as a rake, and he himself is in the same condition. His short overcoat is threadbare, for he has no living as yet. He cares little for luxuries, however, and would rather have "at his bed's head twenty books bound in black or red of Aristotle and his philosophy" than rich robes, fiddles, and harps. Philosopher as he is, he has not discovered the philosopher's stone that can turn base metal into gold, and he spends all the money that his friends give him on books and learning. He is chary of speech; but what he says is well expressed and pithy, and he strews his infrequent talk with moral maxims.

> "And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche."

A *Sergeant of the Law*, wary, discreet, and seeming wise, follows. He rides a homely nag, wears a coat of mixed colours, girt about with a silk girdle and adorned with small bars. He is held in such high renown that his fees and robes are many. Busy though he is, he pretends to be much busier. He knows cases and judgments from the time of the Conqueror down to the present, and no man can find fault with his written opinions.

Then comes a *Franklin*, or old English freeholder. His beard is white as the daisy; his face is red; of all things he loves good living, and is, indeed, Epicurus' own son. A powerful magnate in his own county, and most hospitable, it “snows in his hous of mete and drinke.” Every dainty finds its way in due season to his table—partridge, bream, and pike—and if his sauce is not sufficiently piquant, there is trouble in store for the cook. His table stands covered with good things all day long; he plays his part worthily at sessions, and has been sheriff and knight of the shire.

Five well-to-do tradesmen follow—a *Haberdasher*, a *Carpenter*, a *Weaver*, a *Dyer*, and an *Upholsterer*, all dressed in the livery of their trade guilds, cleaned and trimmed for the occasion. They carry knives adorned with brass, and their girdles and pouches are ornamented with silver-work. Each of them is a burgess worthy to sit on a dais in the guildhall as an alderman. They have sufficient property and income to qualify for this office; their wives will be right well pleased to be addressed as “Madam,” and to have their mantles carried before them at vigils, as a mark of honour.

A *Cook* accompanies these worthy tradesmen in order to boil their chickens with the flavourings which tickle their palates. He can roast and seethe, and broil and fry, make soup and blancmange, bake a pie, and toss off a draught of London ale with any man of his craft.

A sunburnt *Sailor*, riding a hired horse in sailor-like fashion, comes next. He probably belongs to Dartmouth, and is a “good felawe.” He wears a coarse serge frock down to the knee, and carries a dagger by his side. Full many a draught of Bordeaux has he drunk on board his ship while the supercargo lay asleep, for he takes little heed of nice points of conscience. When he fights and wins, he makes his prisoners “walk the plank.” There is no better pilot between Hull and Carthage; he has shaken his beard in many a tempest; he knows all the havens from Gothland to Cape Finisterre, and every safe anchorage in Brittany and Spain.

A *Doctor of Physic*, unequalled in his profession, now ambles by. He is well grounded in astrology, and, therefore, is able to cast horoscopes for his patients. He is attired in blood-red and bluish-gray robes lined with silk. He knows the cause of every malady, and is a “verray parfit practisour.” His study is “but litel on the Bible,” and because gold is a cordial in physic he is specially fond of it!

The merry *Wife of Bath*—“bold was hir face, and fair, and reede of hewe”—now appears on the scene, well wimpled, wearing a riding petticoat and a hat as big and round as a shield. She is spurred, and sits her palfrey with practised ease. She is a little deaf, and that is her misfortune. Cloth-making is her trade, and her wares

surpass those of Ypres and Ghent. Of so much consequence is she in her own parish, that no woman dares precede her to the altar at festivals. The kerchiefs with which she adorns her head on Sundays are of a very fine texture, and are so laden with gold ornaments that they weigh at least ten pounds; her hose are of scarlet, and her shoes supple and new. She has had five husbands already, and has visited many famous shrines—at Jerusalem, Rome, Boulogne, Compostella in Galicia, and Cologne. Her pilgrimages are a great social delight to her.

And now comes a poor *Parson* or parish priest, rich only in holy thought and work, a learned man who preaches Christ's Gospel truly, and teaches his parishioners devoutly. Benign, diligent, patient in that adversity which too often afflicts him, he is very loath to excommunicate those who will not pay him their tithes, but gives freely of the offerings which he receives to the poor of his flock. His parish is wide; the houses are far apart; but he allows neither rain nor thunder to prevent him from trudging, staff in hand, to its farthest limits in order to visit the sick and the sorrowful.

> "This noble ensample to his scheep he yaf,
> That first he wroughte, and afterward he taughte."

He believes that unless the priest keeps himself unspotted from the world, he cannot expect his flock to be virtuous. Unlike many of his cloth, he does not engage a curate and betake himself to St. Paul's to seek preferment, nor does he join a brotherhood, but dwells at home and keeps his fold faithfully that no wolf may devour his sheep. Although he is holy and virtuous, he is not contemptuous of the sinful, but affable in speech and easy of approach to all men. If, however, a sinner is obstinate, no matter whether rich or poor, high or low, he sharply upbraids him.

> "Christe's love and His apostles twelve,
> He taughte, but first he folwed it him-selve."

**Chaucer reading to Edward III.**
**(*From the picture by Ford Madox Brown.*)** To List

His brother, a simple *Ploughman*, dressed in a smock-frock, rides on a mare by his side. He is a hard-working, good man, loving God with his whole heart, and living in peace and charity with all men. Generous and warm-hearted, he will thresh and dyke and delve with all his might and without pay for any neighbour who needs his help.

And now you hear the sound of bagpipes and see the player, the *Miller*, a stout carl, big of brawn and bone, famous for wrestling, a coarse man and cunning, but with a “thombe of gold.” Behind him comes a *Manciple*—that is, an officer who purchases provisions for a college or an inn of court; a *Reeve*, or bailiff of a manor; a *Summoner*, or official of an ecclesiastical court whose duty it is to summon delinquents to appear; and a *Pardoner* with his wallet “bret-ful of pardon come from

Rome al hoot." Finally, *Mine Host of the Tabard Inn*, a large man with bright, merry eyes, brings up the rear.

And so the party clatters over the stones of the London streets towards the fair fields and blossoming orchards of Kent. Arrived at the watering-place of St. Thomas, a halt is called, and lots are drawn to select the first to "biginne the game." The lot falls on the Knight, who, "with right a mery chere," cries,—

> "Now let us ryde, and herkneth what I seye."

# Chapter XIV.

## GEOFFREY CHAUCER.

> *"The pupil of manifold experience,—scholar, courtier, soldier, ambassador,—who had known poverty as a housemate, and been the companion of princes, he was one of those happy temperaments that could equally enjoy both halves of culture,—the world of books and the world of men."*—LOWELL.

THE fourteenth-century panorama which we have just witnessed forms the Prologue to "The Canterbury Tales" of GEOFFREY CHAUCER, "the morning star of song." We have now reached that epoch in our literary history when the first great English book appears. The few English works so far produced make no appeal to modern readers except scholars and philologists, but "The Canterbury Tales" may be read by twentieth-century men and women with genuine delight. It is this power of delighting for its own sake which is the true test of a literary masterpiece, and the outstanding merit of "The Canterbury Tales" has never been called in question. The appearance of Chaucer marks the beginning of our English literature, properly so called. For the first time an English poet sings in strains that attract attention and awaken respect beyond "the narrow seas."

Two centuries before Chaucer, Norman and Englishman were poles asunder: the one belonged to an aristocratic governing caste; the other, held down by force of arms, was a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. But all this has suffered a "sea-change into something rich and strange." The Norman kings and nobles of England have lost their lordship in France; their English estates alone remain to them: they must become English or nothing.

Norman knight and English archer have long fought together against Scot and Welshman on many a tented field, and this comradeship of arms has tended to weld together the discordant elements of the nation into something like unity. Now France is the national enemy, and the magnificent prowess of the English archer achieves victories so brilliant that the Norman becomes contemptuous of his old kinsmen, and proud to adopt the once-despised name of Englishman. The old miracle of captive Greece is repeating itself in England; Saxondom is rapidly absorbing its conqueror, and in the days of Chaucer the fusion is wellnigh complete.

With the assertion of the English character comes an uprising, a development, and an enrichment of the English speech. No longer do Northerner, Midlander, and South-countryman speak dialects which are almost incomprehensible to each other; no longer are English books written which can only be fully understood in a

particular territorial district. By the time of Edward the First a unified English speech—that of London and the Midlands—is rapidly becoming the standard language of Englishmen from the Tweed to the Channel. And all the time the language has been growing richer and richer in its vocabulary. Before the coming of the Normans it had lost its power of self-development, and could only enrich its scanty stock of words by borrowings from foreign sources. The Norman Conquest introduced into England Norman-French, a finer literary speech than Old English, and it became the second language of the land. In course of time it gave to the native tongue that copiousness which otherwise it could never have acquired.

In Chaucer's day Norman-French was still spoken in baronial hall, law court, and parliament house; but when the close connection with France was broken, it degenerated into “the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,” and was affected by the Madame Eglantines of the period as a mere garnish of gentility. By the second half of the fourteenth century the mother tongue was supreme, and was ready to prove itself a competent language of literature. And in this happy hour Chaucer was born.

His name would seem to indicate Norman descent, and certain it is that from boyhood he associated with the aristocracy of the nation. His father had a court connection, and was a man of substance, dwelling in Thames Street, London, where the poet was born in or about the year 1340. War with France was then raging, and Crécy and Poitiers, two of the most famous victories in all our annals, were won on French fields before Chaucer was sixteen years of age. We are not stretching historical probability too far if we assume that as a lad of sixteen he witnessed the brilliant pageant in which the captive King of France and his train of nobles rode through the London streets to grace the triumph of the national hero—the Black Prince.

Chaucer received a good education; he was clever and well read in French, Italian, and Latin. The warlike temper of the times, however, could not fail to awaken martial longings in his breast, and in his seventeenth year we find him entering the usual portals to a military career. He became a page in the household of the Princess Elizabeth, wife of Lionel, the king's third son, and it is still on record that seven shillings were paid for the red and black breeches and the cloak and shoes of his livery. In the household of the princess he learned the courtly graces of the time and the elements of military discipline.

In his nineteenth year he crossed over to France along with an inglorious expedition which failed to take Rheims and Paris, vainly devastated the country, and returned home empty-handed at the Peace of Bretigny. Somewhere, not far from Rheims, while engaged in foraging, young Chaucer was surprised and captured. For the best part of a year he remained in durance vile; then his ransom, towards which the king gave a sum equivalent to £200 of our money, was paid, and he was free to return to England. The amount of the king's contribution raises the presumption that the youth had acquitted himself satisfactorily on the field, and that considerable influence was exercised on his behalf in exalted circles.

In his twenty-seventh year we find him *Dilectus valettus*, well-beloved yeoman, to the king, and the recipient of a pension from his Majesty. Probably this pension was granted on the occasion of his marriage with Philippa of Hainault, sister of Katherine Swynford, who ultimately became the third wife of John of Gaunt. Speedily he was promoted to be one of the king's squires; another campaign in France followed, and then he became one of the king's men of business to be employed abroad on various missions, two at least of which were secret.

In November 1372 he visited Italy to treat for the establishment of a Genoese commercial agency in England, and this visit had probably a great influence on the development of his genius. Italy was then the foremost literary country of Europe. Dante, the greatest of all Italian poets, had been dead for half a century, but he had fixed the literary language and had given to his successors an undying inspiration. When Chaucer arrived in Italy two of her greatest writers were at the zenith of their fame—Petrarch, whose exquisite lyrics still command admiration, and Boccaccio, who was greatly admired as a poet of passion and a teller of tales.

Petrarch had been crowned with laurel by the Roman senate, and was now the most splendid literary figure in all Europe. Chaucer may have met the Laureate when he visited Italy for Prince Lionel's wedding in 1367, and it is possible that he now journeyed to Padua or Arqua to renew the acquaintance. Whether he did or not, he could not escape from Petrarch's influence in a land which was thoroughly permeated with that poet's lyrical spirit. He *did* meet Boccaccio, and was greatly influenced by him, as we shall see.

The “Decamerone,” the book on which Boccaccio's chief claim to immortality rests, opens with a prologue, which relates that while the plague was raging in Florence during the year 1348, seven maidens and three youths of noble birth repaired to a villa near the city, and to while away the time began to tell tales to each other. Each of the company told a tale on ten successive days, and thus a hundred tales were told in all. The narratives were not invented, but were retold from Eastern, classical, and French originals, or were recitals of contemporary events, anecdotes, and scandals. Everybody of education, not only in Italy, but in other parts of Europe, read and enjoyed these famous tales. Chaucer not only borrowed the machinery of “The Canterbury Tales” from the “Decamerone,” but some of the stories as well.

Shortly after his return from Italy he received a post in the customs, and settled down in the gate-house at Aldgate, when he found time to study and to write. In following years we find him again employed abroad on royal business, and receiving rich gifts from the king who had consistently befriended him since the days of his captivity in France.

With the death of the old king evil times fell on England; the minority of Richard the Second was a period of intrigue at court and unrest in the country, the latter culminating in Wat Tyler's insurrection. John of Gaunt, “time-honoured Lancaster,” had succeeded Edward the Third as Chaucer's patron. Now he fell, and with him fell

Chaucer, who lost his offices and emoluments, and for a time knew the bitterness of poverty. When, however, John of Gaunt was restored to royal favour, Chaucer's fortunes began to mend.

By this time he was advanced in years; his hair and beard were flecked with white, and his friends dubbed him “Old Grizzle.” On the accession of Henry the Fourth he addressed a set of playfully melancholy verses to his empty purse, and sent them to the new king, who responded in royal fashion by doubling “Old Grizzle's” pension, and thus securing his declining years against privation. In 1400 he died, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. Fifteen years later the altar tomb which now stands in Poets' Corner was erected.

It must be confessed that the fragments of history thus pieced together throw very little light on Chaucer as a poet and a man. In his “Canterbury Tales” he supplies us with an excellent picture of himself. The host of the “Tabard”—Harry Bailly—looked upon him,

> “And seyde thus: What man art thou? quod he,
> Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an har;
> For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.
> Approche neer, and looke up merrily,
> Now beware, sires, and let this man have place;
> He in the waist is shape as wel as I;
> This were a poppet in an arm t' embrace
> For any womman, smal and fair of face.
> He seemeth elvyssh by his countenance,
> For unto no wight doth he daliaunce (gossip).”

**A Story from Boccaccio.**

(***From the picture by Sir James Linton, P.R.I. By permission of the Fine Art Society.***) To List

Thus Chaucer described himself, his eyes downcast, small and fair of face, but withal portly, and a big armful for any lady's embrace, silent in company, and with something elfish in his countenance. We know from other sources that he was cheerful and pleasant, and that he possessed the genius of friendship. As for his shy humour, that is depicted on almost every page of his writings. Books he loved and silent contemplation; but he was no studious recluse. He loved the society of his fellow-men, whom he closely and shrewdly and tolerantly observed, and, of all seasons of the year, he loved the annual miracle of springtime, with its piping birds,

budding trees, green fields, and blossoming hedgerows. His favourite month was May, his favourite flower the daisy:

> "That of all the floures in the mede,
> Than love I most these floures white and rede,
> Soch that men callen daisies in our toun. . . .
> That well by reason men it calle may
> The daisie, or els, the eye of the day.
> The emprise and floure of floures all."

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It was quite natural that the young poet, living in an atmosphere of French poetry and romance, listening nightly to the songs and recitals of French "menestrels" and *trouvères*, should be attracted by the *Roman de la Rose*, a famous French allegory of Love begun a century before his birth, and added to by later bards until it attained enormous length and "a spirit far from chivalrous." Some time between his twentieth and twenty-fifth year Chaucer translated a portion of this poem into English. It was the first fruits of his pen, and an experiment in adapting English words to French measures.

Some years later his poem on the *Dethe of Blannche the Duchesse*, wife of John of Gaunt, revealed the traits that are characteristic of his prime, a love of nature, and a deep and reverent appreciation of womanhood. Other poems followed in this experimental period, the subjects being drawn, according to his wont, from books rather than from his own imagination. With his *Troilus and Cressida*, written after his famous visit to Italy, he definitely entered into his kingdom. In this work, and in his uncompleted *House of Fame*, the impress of Italy is strong upon him. "There, in the gate-house of Aldgate," writes M. Jusserand, "all he had known in Italy would return to his memory—campaniles, azure frescoes, olive groves, sonnets of Petrarch, poems of Dante, tales of Boccaccio; he had brought back the wherewithal to move and enliven Merry England herself."

Adversity, that unfailing touchstone of lofty spirits, could not sour and embitter the soul of Chaucer. In a group of ballads, written in his days of poverty, we find him withstanding fortune's buffets in a brave, sensible, and shrewdly humorous spirit. In his *Ballad of Good Conseil* he rises superior to the accidents of circumstance, and rests upon the essentials of all true happiness:—

> "Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
> Know thy contree, look up, thank God of all;
> Hold the hye way, and lat thy gost thee lede;
> And trouthe shal delivere, it is no drede."

It was in years of financial stress and "litel business" that he reached the maturity of his powers, and consummated his career with "The Canterbury Tales." We have already made acquaintance with the Pilgrims, have noted the thoroughly English character of the work, and have admired the Shakespearean-like delineation of his various characters. We parted company with them as the Knight began his story.

We cannot now follow the cavalcade and hear the tales, nor dare we spoil them for the intending reader by a bald summary. They range “from grave to gay, from lively to severe,” from the old romance of Thebes and Athens which falls from the lips of the Knight, and the saintly legends of the Man of Law, the Second Nun, and the Prioress, to the coarse comedy of the Miller and the Reeve. The stories are almost as varied as humanity itself. Everywhere they are told in the melodious music of English verse, which was then almost as liquid as Italian.

And so we leave Chaucer: “the first great figure of modern English literature, the first great humorist of modern Europe, and the first great writer in whom the dramatic spirit, so long vanished and seemingly extinct, reappears.”

# Chapter XV.

## WILLIAM LANGLAND.

*"To se moche and suffre more, certes," quod I, "is Do-wel."*—LANGLAND.

CHAUCER, the urbane and tolerant Horace of his time, has passed by, and now our pageant reveals a strange figure resembling a fourteenth-century John the Baptist. His tall, gaunt form is wrapped in the black, threadbare robes of a needy chanting priest; his face is haggard, and the true apocalyptic fire burns in his sunken eyes. There is nothing of the genial mellowness of Chaucer about him. Grim and sardonic, moody and discontented, he broods on the manifold vices, follies, frauds, and miseries of the age, and the world is to him a vale of tears and gloom, faintly chequered by transient gleams of hope. You recognize in him WILLIAM LANGLAND, the author of that amazing Old English poem, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, a dream of England festering with rottenness, and, save for the mercy of God, doomed to speedy perdition.

Truly, in his day, the England which Chaucer so blithely describes was in a deplorable condition. Chaucer saw it from above, from the vantage-ground of an aristocrat to whom the world, on the whole, was very good. Langland looked at it from below, from the point of view of the toiling man, and found it very evil, lawless, false, luxurious, idle, greedy, and full of sin. He saw an England beggared by the French wars, ravaged by the Black Death, tumultuous with the unrest of labourers and the brigandage of outlaws, harassed by the grasping greed of the great, and fetid with the wealth and licentiousness of depraved Churchmen.

Langland was a Shropshire man from Cleobury Mortimer; he was well educated, married, and in minor orders. He tells us in *Piers Plowman*:—

"I live *in* London, and I live *on* London,
The tools I labour with, to get my living by,
Are the Lord's Prayer, my Primer, my Dirges, and my Vespers,
And sometimes my Psalter, and the Seven Psalms;
I sing masses for the souls of those that give me help,
And they that find me food, welcome me when I come,
Man or woman, once a month, into their homes."

When he is asked why he does not labour with his hands for a better living, he replies,—

"I am too weak with sickle or with scythe,
I am too long, believe me, to stoop low down,
Or to last for any time as a working man."

Yet he constantly preaches, in the spirit of Thomas Carlyle five centuries later, the glory and blessedness of manual labour. Indeed, the motto of his great poem might almost be,

> "Each man must plough his half acre."

*The Vision of Piers Plowman* is an allegory seen in a confused dream. It opens thus:

> "On a May morning on Malvern hills
> A marvel befel me—sure from Faery it came—
> I had wandered me weary, so weary, I rested me
> On a broad bank by a merry-sounding burn;
> And as I lay and leaned and looked into the waters,
> I slumbered in a sleeping; it rippled so merrily,
> And I dreamed—marvellously."

He dreamed that he saw a wilderness with the Tower of Truth on a hill, and beneath it the dark dale of Death containing a dungeon, the abode of the Father of Falsehood. Between the hill and the dungeon was "a fair field full of folk," and there were assembled men and women of every class and condition—tramps, beggars, mean thieves, pilgrims, palmers, hermits, "great long lubbers that loth were to work," friars of all the four orders, pardoners, priests, knights, lawyers, barons, burgesses, tradesmen, cooks, taverners, and the King. He shows these folk working, idling, praying, lying, singing, cheating, falsely crying their wares and knavishly selling their goods.

> "All this I saw sleeping; nay, seven times more."

With a Hogarth-like touch he describes all these folk, but reserves the bitterness of his scorn for the careless, greedy, loose-living clergy of the time. He deals but sparingly in commendation; condemnation is more to his taste, though for the honest "swinker" he can always find words of praise.

To him, as he lies upon the hillside wrapped in slumber, appears a lovely lady, who is none other than Mother Church. She discourses with him of Truth, and when he asks, "Where is Falsehood?" she bids him turn and see. Falsehood, it appears, is about to marry Lady Meed, who personifies Reward or Bribery, and Langland perceives that the bribers and corrupters rejoice plenteously in her bounty, while poor, honest men go lacking. Falsehood, her chosen husband, brings in his train Flattery, Simony, Lust, Civil Law, Covetousness, Envy, Lechery, and so forth—a most unholy company.

Theology now comes forward and forbids the banns, and all the parties forthwith hie to London, where there are lawyers who for goodly fees will overcome Theology, and attest the marriage as lawful. Soothness outrides them, and coming first to court, reports the matter to Conscience, who informs the King.

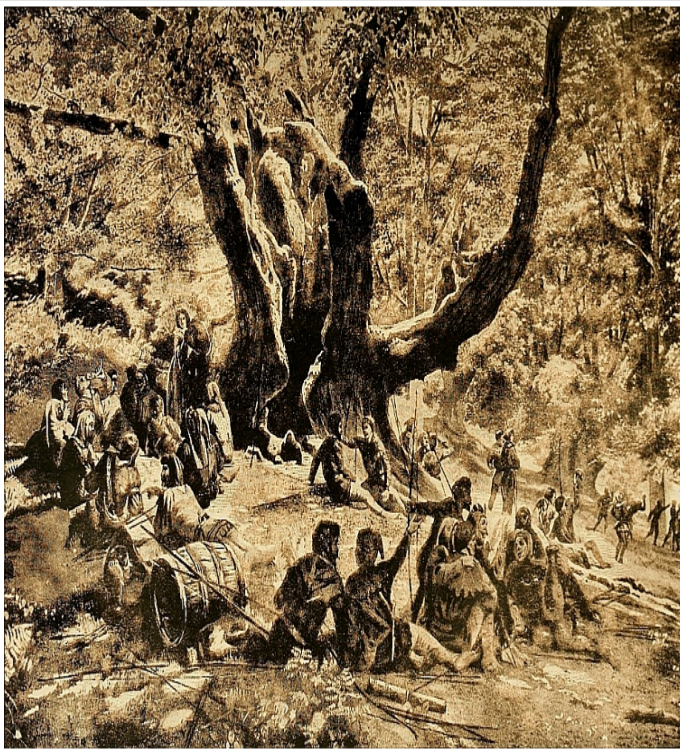
> "Now, says the King, by Christ, if I can catch
> Falsehood or Flattery or any of their fellows,
> I would wreak vengeance on wretches that do so,
> And hang them by the neck, and all that maintain them."

At this Falsehood and his companions flee, and the Lady Meed is arraigned before the King. He offers to pardon her if she will espouse Conscience; but though the lady is willing, Conscience indignantly refuses the match. He proclaims her faults, and prophesies that one day Reason will rule the world. Whereupon the King sends for Reason, who decides against Wrong and Meed, and the King bids him remain at court as his chief counsellor.

Four divisions or *passus* of the poem are thus occupied. The fifth introduces the Seven Deadly Sins—Pride, Lechery, Envy, Wrath, Covetousness, Gluttony, and Sloth; each of them makes his confession, and in so doing pictures in the most striking fashion the vices of the time. Repentance admonishes them, prays for them, and bids them "for grace to go to Truth."

And now as the penitents go forth to seek Truth, the mystic figure of Piers Plowman appears—the type of "poor humanity adorned with love, hard-working humanity armed with indignation, sympathetic humanity clad in the intelligence that knows all, and makes allowances." Piers Plowman sets all who come to him to the hard work of the field, and a wonderful picture is presented of the labouring poor and the evils that then afflicted them.

The seventh *passus* describes how a bull of pardon was sent to Piers. A priest reads it, and declares it of no avail. Then discussion waxes so hot that the Dreamer awakes, and the first part of the poem concludes with an outburst against indulgences, and an exhortation to Christian souls to put their trust in God's mercy and in good works.


**ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY MEN IN SHERWOOD FOREST.**
**(*From an old lithograph in the Mechanics' Institute, Nottingham.*)**
Langland tells us that he saw Robin Hood in the “fair field full of folk.” To List

The second part of the poem consists of the visions of *Do-well*, *Do-better*, and *Do-best*. It is in the third vision that Piers Plowman is fully identified with the “people's Christ.” His coming is thus described:—

> “One like the good Samaritan, and somewhat like Piers Plowman,
> Came barefoot, bootless, without spur or spear,
> Riding on an ass's back, brightly he looked,
> Like one that cometh to be dubbed knight,
> To get him gilt spurs, and his slashed shoes.
> Faith sat in a window high, cried, 'Hosanna, Son of David'
> As a herald crieth when the adventurous come into the tourney,
> And Jews sang for joy,
> 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'”

When Piers Plowman returns, he triumphs over the forces of Satan; Righteousness and Peace kiss each other, and the dreamer awakes for the last time weeping bitterly. Then he and his wife and daughter creep to the foot of the cross and “do reverence to God's resurrection.”

Such, in brief and imperfect outline, is the strange compelling poem which Langland wrote. He flashed a searchlight on the social shames, the inequalities and the injustices, of his time, and revealed with unshrinking realism the cankers that were gnawing at the heart of the nation. Some have regarded him as

foreshadowing the great upheaval in Church and State that was even then preparing, but Langland was no revolutionist; he looked for improvement, not in new modes of government or in violent change, but in the reformation of men's hearts.

Langland was the last of the Old English poets. His spirit was that of Old England, and the form of his verse was that of Beowulf and Layamon, but while standing on the old ways, he could not escape from the literary influences of his time. His Old English speech was plentifully intermingled with foreign elements, and the *rim*, *ram*, *ruff* of his alliterative line occasionally broke into the new rhythms. The new English and the new metrical forms had come to stay. *Piers Plowman* was the final poetic effort of the old, hard, unyielding style; it was the last flicker from the embers of a dying fire.

# Chapter XVI.

## FROM GOWER TO MANDEVILLE.

> "*Devise, wit; write, pen; for I am for whole volumes in folio.*"
> SHAKESPEARE.

A GROUP of writers—learned men, worthy and talented versifiers all, but overshadowed by Chaucer, and for the most part lacking the authentic fire of his inspiration—now passes before us. Foremost in the throng is "Moral GOWER," friend and companion of Chaucer, whom he describes in a suppressed line as "my disciple and my poet." A page bears before him the three tomes which he has written in the three tongues then affected by lettered men. The same volumes in stone now pillow the head of his effigy in the Cathedral Church of St. Saviour's, Southwark.

The third of them, *Confessio Amantis*, is his chiefest pride; he has written it in English for England's sake, and it still remains a treasure-house of legend and old romance, though as a poem—dead as Cæsar. He bears himself with the self-consciousness of a celebrity, and his friends assure him that he equals Chaucer in renown. The unerring assay of time, however, reveals infinitely less gold in the mintage of his verse, and moderns place him far below his great rival. So let him pass.

Pass, too, may the voluminous JOHN LYDGATE, windy and verbose, with his forty volumes all "flat, stale, and unprofitable;" and with him may wend OCCLEVE, a better poet, though a worse man, "a crimeless Villon," reeking of the tavern. But the Scottish Chaucerians, JAMES THE FIRST, HENRYSON, DUNBAR, and GAVIN DOUGLAS, demand far more respectful attention. Amongst them Dunbar easily holds pride of place. Coarse and vigorous, a merciless satirist, a master of the horrible and grotesque, his genius, nevertheless, has a strain of gentle melancholy and tender pathos. Though those Scottish "makars" look to Chaucer as their master, they are no mere "sedulous apes;" they carry his tradition into realms which their master never knew.

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A gay and anonymous company of BALLAD SINGERS succeeds. Like Parson Sloth in *Piers Plowman*, they can sing you rhymes of *Robin Hood and Randolph*, *Earl of Leicester*, as well as a score of other legends in halting metre and rude rhyme, such as *The Tale of Gamelyn*, *The Battle of Otterbourne*, *The Hunting of the*

*Cheviot*. Theirs is the true poesy of the people, the naive, artless stories of open-air life which enshrine deeply and truly the elemental emotions of love, hate, fear, shame, and grief. As yet, no scribe has exercised his pen upon them; the only scroll upon which they are inscribed is the memory of countless gleemen, ploughmen, milkmaids, and simple folk of every degree who love and cherish them, and modify and perhaps degrade them as they hand them down the ages.

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**THE DAWN OF THE REFORMATION.**

(***From the picture by W. F. Yeames, R.A. By permission of Messrs. Henry Graves and Co.***) To List

The poets have passed by, and now the rare and welcome figure of the first man to make English prose the vehicle of literature since the days of King Alfred comes upon the scene. He is John Wyclif, a simple, ascetic, quick-tempered, ardent soul with the frosted hair and beard of many winters. He is in revolt against the doctrines, "the principalities and powers" of the Church, and Oxford has expelled him from his Mastership of Balliol. Now he abandons the scholastic controversy, which has so long engaged his pen, and appeals to the common people in the tongue which they use and understand, and in accents which go home to their "business and bosoms." His voice, and that of his "poor priests," is heard all over the land, in churchyards, at fairs, in market-places, and, for the first time, religious thought and religious strife adopt the homely speech of the people. Tracts and sermons innumerable fall from his pen, and are read to the rude and unlettered in the alehouse, at cottage doors, or under the oaks of the village green.

Then he turns to a far greater task and begins the monumental work of giving the English people what they have never yet possessed, the Scriptures in their own tongue. He himself labours at the New Testament; his assistant translates the Old; he revises and simplifies all, and a great volume of English prose is the result. Never before has English prose exercised itself on such varied themes—history, prophecy, poetry, argument—and Wyclif demonstrates its capacity to sound the full gamut of literary expression. There is no note of distinction in his writing, but a start has been made, the foundations have been laid, and the glorious edifice of our developed English prose is already foreshadowed.

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A dimly-descried figure, of uncertain nationality and obscure history, now takes the stage. He dubs himself knight, and gives himself out as a very Odysseus of travel. For thirty years, so he says, he has wandered in Tartary, Persia, Armenia, Libya, Chaldæa, the land of the Amazons, and Ind; and his book—"The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevill, Knight"—is proffered as the record of his personal experiences. As a matter of fact, it is an unblushing literary forgery of stupendous magnitude, a compilation from a medley of sources, from all the pilgrimage, travel, and history books then extant, tricked out with copious legend and sheer fiction. Sir John raises a smile as he passes, and must regretfully be styled the Baron Munchausen of the fourteenth century.

In his *Voiage*, the most famous book of the age, three hundred manuscripts of which are said to be still in existence, Mandeville purported to give an account of his journey to the Holy Land by way of all the fabled countries known to his authors. *En route* he saw great rivers which entered the sea with such force that the waters were fresh twenty miles from the shore, and mountains whose shadows darkened the earth for threescore miles. So still was the air over them that letters traced by the fingers in the dust of the rocks went unobliterated by rain or wind for twelve months at a time! In the Holy Land he saw a tree which dropped its leaves every year as the day of the crucifixion came round, and would never become normal until Jerusalem was reft from the heathen. To the monasteries came birds with olive leaves in their mouths, feathered partners in the olive oil industry.

In Egypt he found trees which bore seven different kinds of fruit, and apples of Paradise marked in every part with the figure of the Cross. In Ethiopia he saw men with a single foot so enormous that it served the purpose of an umbrella to shade them from the sun! According to his own account, he spent more than a year in Cathay at the court of the Khan, and the information which he gives of that marvellous land is the most veracious part of his book. Probably he was happy in his authority.

Of course, he never lost an opportunity of incorporating legend, however fabulous. For example, he tells us of the Castle of the Sparrowhawk, and of the fair lady who dwells in the island of Lango in the likeness of a dragon six hundred feet

long. She will remain in this guise until a knight shall be bold enough to kiss her on the mouth, when she will resume her natural form and features.

Prester John in all his magic and mystery was bound to find a place in the book, and so were the anthropophagi, the men whose heads grew beneath their shoulders, the phœnix which rejuvenated its youth in a bath of fire, the weeping crocodile, the vegetable lamb, the gold-digging and gold-working ants, the Fountain of Youth, the pebbles of light and invisibility, the salamander that wove the flame-resisting robes of the "Great Elder" whose kingdom contained no poor, no robbers, no misers, and no sinners, and who went forth to war behind thirteen great jewelled crosses, each followed by 10,000 knights and 10,000 footmen.

Truly an amazing book, which exactly hit the popular taste of a marvel-loving and marvellously credulous and uncritical age! But Mandeville does not appear in our pageant as a marvel-monger, but as the first English teller of prose tales. His narrative style was easy, fluent, and wondrously discursive, and he possessed the Defoe-like capacity of giving verisimilitude to his fictions by the introduction of details, numbers, and measurements. Before we part with him let justice be done to the character which he reveals in his book. He was no egoist or braggart; he was honest and broad-minded, without a taint of sordidness or greed, and yet men have summed him up in the single word—Liar!

**Caxton's Printing Office in the Almonry at Westminster.**

**(*From the picture by Daniel Maclise. By permission of Lord Lytton.*)**

1. Earl Rivers, Caxton's patron. 2. The Abbot of Westminster. 3. Duke of Clarence. 4. Queen of Edward the Fourth. 5. King Edward the Fourth. 6. Richard of Gloucester, slain at Bosworth 1485. 7. William Caxton, died 1491. 8. Princess Elizabeth of York. 9. The young Princes, murdered in the Tower 1483. 10. Compositors and Pressmen. 11. Bookbinders, Wood Engravers, Illuminators. To List

# Chapter XVII.

## WILLIAM CAXTON.

> "*Whereas, before, our forefathers had no other books but the score and the tally, thou hast caused printing to be used.*"—SHAKESPEARE.

RIGHT worthy of a prominent place in our pageant is WILLIAM CAXTON, the man who, in the winter of his age, gave to the land of his birth almost the greatest of its many blessings. Let us hail him as the Columbus of English letters. The Genoese seaman "found a new world to the old unknown;" the English printer did more—he revealed to the many a whole universe of light and joy, a boundless realm of

> "wit and sense,
> Virtue and human knowledge; all that might
> Make this dull world a business of delight."

We who live in an age which is literally dominated by the printed word, when an hour's enforced leisure is intolerable without the companionship of a book, a newspaper, or a magazine, can scarcely conceive the social life of the world as it was before the typographical art became a commonplace. In earlier pages of this book we have seen diligent scribes engaged in the slow and laborious business of transcription. From the dawn of letters to the close of the fifteenth century every book reproduced was a separate and distinct piece of manual labour, calling for precisely that amount of physical effort which was expended on the original work. Book production in the days before printing might be expedited by increasing the number of scribes, by division of labour, by the use of contractions and similar devices, but a limit was soon reached beyond which no further advance was possible. The cost of books was bound to remain high, and by no known method could they be so cheapened as to find their way into the hands of the multitude. The book was, therefore, the monopoly of a caste, either of wealth or of profession; to the many it simply did not exist.

When books were only to be found in the halls of the wealthy, or chained to desks in churches, colleges, and monasteries, the art of reading was wholly superfluous to the great mass of the nation. As long as books were inaccessible, the illiteracy of the populace was assured; a book-reading people could not come into existence, and a class of professional writers depending for their livelihood on the sale of books could not arise. The invention of printing broke the bonds that fettered the book; when the page lay open, a general desire to read was awakened, and the appetite grew by what it fed upon. Men of talent were then assured of an ever-growing audience, and thus were stimulated to devote themselves to literature.

He who climbs to the heathery moorlands of our northern hills finds, here and there, trickling streamlets which, after devious wandering, run together and form a brook which goes helter-skelter down a valley and foams along a boulder-strewn bed until at last it becomes a fair, broad river, meandering through green meadows, fringed with noble trees.

Somewhat in the same way we may trace the course of our English literature. There were many boulders to impede the stream until the invention of printing. When, however, it became an everyday art, our literature was enabled to flow on as a broad, fair river to fertilize and refresh the land and to serve the needs of men.

So, let us honour him who removed the greatest of all obstructions to the spread of learning. To him, in large measure, we owe the two greatest glories of our land—our literature and our liberty. The printed page, which he was the first to produce in England, not only stimulated and nourished letters, but set forth in imperishable form the political rights of the nation, so that all might know them and, strong in knowledge, stand fast in their defence.

William Caxton, the first English printer, was born some twenty-two years after the death of Chaucer, in Kent, the county which

> "in the commentaries of Cæsar writ,
> Is termed the civillest place of all this isle."

We know little of his boyhood, except that his education was not neglected, and that he had a great love for the songs and ballads of the countryside. In the prologue to a book which he printed in his sixty-third year, he wrote: "I am bounden to pray for my fader and moder's souls that in my youth sent me to schoole, by which by the sufferance of God I gete my living, I hope truly." His "fader" was a farmer, but the boy had no desire to follow the traditional occupation of his sires. The town called him, and, in accordance with the practice of well-to-do Kentish parents, it was decided to apprentice him to a London mercer.

In his sixteenth year we find him bound to a mercer of high reputation in the city of London, one Master Robert Large, who had already filled the office of sheriff, and seven years later was to rise to the dignity of Lord Mayor. Attired in the flat round cap and long cloak of the London "prentice," young Caxton busied himself in all sorts of tasks in his master's warehouse. Master Robert Large not only dealt in cloth and silk from Holland and France, but in spices, drugs, ivory, jewellery, and other imported articles of luxury, and it is quite possible that the parcels which came from abroad contained some of the precious books then being printed on the Continent. Caxton was a studious lad with a distinct literary turn, and, no doubt, these books fascinated him.

The art of impressing on paper the form of figures in relief was known to the Chinese in very early ages, and in the first quarter of the fifteenth century wooden blocks carved with texts and pictures were frequently used in Europe. "Block-books" so produced became fairly common, and though the carving of the block was a slow

and expensive process, the price of reading matter was so greatly reduced by this means that an illustrated Bible for the poor was produced.

The really important development for which the world was waiting was the use of separate and movable types in place of the solid block. When these came into use the old scribe was superseded by the compositor, who “set up” the book in type—an even more laborious operation than mere transcription, but when once accomplished the source of myriads of rapid reproductions. In the most modern methods of book production the scribe is reintroduced—with a difference. He transcribes the text by working a machine which punches variously placed holes in a roll of paper, and this record, transferred to another machine, manufactures the types as they are needed and “sets” them up in proper order.

Everybody has heard the story of Laurence Coster, the custodian of a church in Haarlem, who carved wooden letters on pieces of bark and discovered to his amazement that they had printed themselves on the parchment in which they were wrapped. The story is probably the work of a reckless patriotic antiquary who desired to give Holland the glory of this great invention. We are on much surer ground when we claim Johann Gutenberg, a burgher of Mainz, as the first to use movable types of metal.

We first hear of him in 1450, when he was engaged in printing a great Latin Bible in his native town. For twelve years the art of printing was almost solely confined to Mainz, and it had only spread in a small degree to Strassburg and to Bamberg when a contest for the archbishopric between rival prelates scattered the workmen of Mainz all over the Continent. This dispersal introduced Italy, France, and Spain to the new art.

Now we must return to Caxton. Master Robert Large died when his industrious apprentice was thirty years of age, and bequeathed to him as a token of esteem the sum of twenty marks. With this sum and his savings he proceeded to the cloth-working town of Bruges in the Low Countries, and there set up on his own account. His shrewdness and business ability won for him the governorship of the English wool merchants settled in Belgium, and in this highly responsible capacity he acted for some years as the agent of his government.

In 1468 Caxton resigned his post and became secretary to Edward the Fourth's sister Margaret, who had married the Duke of Burgundy. “As a preventive against idleness,” he now set himself to translate into English the “Recueil des Histoires de Troie” of Raoul Le Fèvre. The book was highly popular in its French form, and an English version was greatly desired. Caxton's translation was “ended and fynysshed in the holy cyté of Colen (Cologne) the XIX day of septembre the year of our said lord God a thousand foure honderd sixty and euleuen”—that is, according to our modern reckoning, in the year 1471.

Caxton had promised copies of his book to “dyverse gentilmen and frendes,” so now he began to consider the important question of reproduction. Inquiry showed that handwritten copies would cost him eight times as much as copies produced by

the new art. After pondering the matter in a business light, he decided to become a printer himself and, when expert, to produce his own book on his own press. At “grete charge and dispense” he entered upon his typographical labours, and about the year 1474 returned to Bruges, where, in association with Colard Mansion, he produced the “Recueil,” the first book ever printed in English. Several other books followed, and probably in 1476 he returned to England, carrying his type with him.

The house at Westminster in which he established himself was still standing in a ruinous condition in the year 1844. It was within the precincts of the Abbey, and was rented at an annual charge of ten shillings from the Dean and Chapter. Here, at the sign of the Red Pale, he began his great work, and in the year 1477 the first English book ever printed in England issued from his press. It was the “Dictes and Sayenges of the Philosopheres,” a translation from the French by no less a personage than Earl Rivers, brother-in-law to the King, and governor to the little Prince of Wales, for whose future edification the translation was probably made.

We need not follow the story of Caxton any further. For fifteen years he laboured at the sign of the Red Pale in the Almonry at Westminster, and during that time printed one hundred and two books, all of which show good plain work. At last, when he was nearly eighty years of age, there came a day when the noisy press was silent and the door of the busy workshop was closed. At midnight, to the light of torches and the tolling of the bells, Wynkyn de Worde and a faithful band of fellow-printers bore him to his last resting-place in St. Margaret's Church, where a tablet and a stained-glass window now honour his memory. Caxton was dead, but his work was done; the printing-press was securely established in England.

We have dwelt upon the career of Caxton the printer, but Caxton the man of letters deserves more than a moment's notice. He was his own editor and, generally, his own translator, and his literary gifts were by no means inconsiderable. His method of translation was that of King Alfred—no slavish rendering of the text, but a free paraphrase for readers unacquainted with the original. Gratitude specially flows out to him, for his translations enriched the language and gave new life to English prose. We rejoice to know that our first English printer was emphatically a printer of English. For Chaucer, who, as he tells us, “made fair our English” which was aforetime “rude speech and incongrue,” he had a special admiration, and not only printed his “Canterbury Tales,” but the works of his disciples, Gower and Lydgate. That glorious storehouse of romance, the “Morte d'Arthur” of Sir Thomas Malory, was first given to the world by Caxton, who himself revised it and introduced it with a noble prologue.

So passes the great and good man who gave to England that art which is the conserver of all arts.

**Sir Thomas More visited by his Daughter in Prison.**
(*From the picture by J. R. Herbert, R.A., in the National Gallery.*) To List

# Chapter XVIII.

## SIR THOMAS MORE.

> *"Unsoftened, undismayed*
> *By aught that mingled with the tragic scene*
> *Of pity or fear; and More's gay genius played*
> *With the inoffensive sword of native wit,*
> *Than the bare axe more luminous and keen."*
>
> WORDSWORTH.

THE two young and courtly gentlemen who now appear make no pretension to a conspicuous place in our pageant. They are stars of the fourth or fifth magnitude, but they glitter bravely in the long poetic night that enveloped the literary firmament after the meteor of Chaucer had ceased to glow and the new day was as yet unborn.

The first of them is SIR THOMAS WYATT, a courtier of King Henry VII., the lover of Anne Boleyn, one who has travelled much in Italy and has steeped himself in the poesy of Petrarch. In the intervals of business and pleasure he indites sonnets, rude and halting, after the Italian manner, and, for the first time in England, impresses poetry into the service of love. He sings, as do his successors, of the joys and woes of amorous swains, and he sets a fashion that will not die out for a full century. It is his part to chasten the rugged national speech to new and exquisite modes, rhymes, and measures, and to herald the day when England shall become a "nest of singing birds."

Follows closely the EARL OF SURREY, who handles his metres far more gracefully than his friend, especially in the sonnet, and warbles in a sweeter and livelier strain. He, too, goes to Italy for new forms, and in striving to nationalize blank verse reveals to his successors the glorious possibilities of that "mighty line" which in the hands of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Milton will become the most majestic measure ever devised by man.

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Less than ten years after Wyatt and Surrey ended their lives came the Renaissance, that "intellectual, moral, spiritual, and artistic rebirth of Europe" which marked the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern world. When Constantinople fell to the Turks, Greek scholars fled to Italy, and in Florence began to reveal to the Western world the long-forgotten glories of their language and literature. The Italians seized upon the "new learning" with remarkable enthusiasm;

the Greek classics opened new realms of knowledge and inspiration to their scholars, writers, theologians, and artists. For ages the schoolmen had delved in a thankless and unfruitful soil; now they were enabled to till virgin fields yielding “some sixty, some an hundred-fold.”

In the midst of this intellectual ferment came the amazing news that a new geographical world had been discovered; that unknown lands, peoples, and modes of life had been revealed; and that the world was not worn out, but full of unsuspected wonders. An eager, absorbing curiosity was aroused, and Western Europe awoke from the sleep of centuries.

The fame of this new learning reached Oxford, and some of her choicest scholars crossed the Alps to sit at the feet of the Greek teachers. Grocyn and Linacre and Colet returned to Oxford fired with enthusiasm, and gathered around them the best and brightest intellects of the land. The great Erasmus, greatly desiring to visit Italy, but too poor to gratify his desire, repaired to the banks of the Isis and found there complete solace. “I found at Oxford,” he wrote in one of his letters,

> “so much polish and learning that now I hardly care about going to Italy at all. When I listen to my friend Colet, it seems like listening to the great philosopher Plato himself. Who does not wonder at the wide range of Grocyn's knowledge? What can be more searching, deep, and refined than the judgment of Linacre? When did Nature mould a temper more gentle, endearing, and happy than the temper of Thomas More?”

Thus introduced, let the counterfeit presentment of Sir Thomas More grace our pageant. He was the finest flower of the English renaissance, the most brilliant man of his time. As a boy his merry wit, mental alertness, and unfailing good-humour attracted the attention of Archbishop Morton, who prophesied that he would prove a “marvellous man.” At Oxford he imbibed the “new learning” with wondrous facility; at the bar he sprang into immediate prominence; in the House of Commons, when apparently no more than “a beardless boy,” he “clean overthrew” the King's demands by sheer force of argument.

At forty-five he was Speaker; at fifty-one he was the first lay Lord Chancellor of England, the bosom friend of the King, the chosen orator at state ceremonials, the first of all Englishmen in the eyes of foreign observers. Yet all this did not save him from a long, cruel imprisonment and the doom of Tower Hill. His story fills a remarkable page of history, and must be sought elsewhere. Here we pass over his achievements in the senate, the council chamber, the seat of judgment, and dwell for a few moments on the literary work which occupied the leisure hours of a busy official life.

More wrote many controversial works in English, all of them disfigured by the personal abuse which was so characteristic of his age. He also began, but left unfinished, a “Life of Richard the Third,” but his literary fame is bound up with his “Utopia”—a vision of the perfect commonwealth which is to be found “Nowhere” save in the realms of Fancy, though More indicated its whereabouts as somewhere between Brazil and India, “south of the line Equinoctial.”

More's “Utopia” was one of the first fruits of the Renaissance in England. It was suggested by Plato's “Republic,” and it embodied the new curiosity concerning problems of life, society, government, and religion. In More's day the labourers of England were in a most unhappy condition, and something of the spirit of Piers Plowman stirred in him. His “Utopia” was a thinly disguised satire on the England which he knew and deplored, and a plea for reform addressed to the reason and fancy of the avaricious rich and the indifferent great.

At the beginning of his book More tells us that in the house of his friend Peter Giles of Antwerp he met the sailor, Raphael Hythloday, who described the island of Utopia as the model country of the whole earth. The island itself was shaped like the new moon, and its protected waters were favourable to sea traffic. There were many large and fair cities in the land, and no two of them were more than a day's journey apart.

A limit of 6,000 inhabitants to each city was established; and when exceeded, families were drafted to less populous cities, or new cities were built. All the cities were similar in plan—foursquare, built on the side of a low hill, and having access to the ocean by means of a fair broad river. Sanitation was especially cared for. Fresh clear water was brought by canal from the head-springs of the rivers; the streets were all twenty feet broad; and every house was warm, light, and well-built, and had a large garden at the rear. As in apostolic times, the Utopians had all things in common.

Every man and woman had to spend two years in one or other of the country granges, where a knowledge of practical agriculture was acquired. In addition they had to learn another trade, such as weaving, building, or working in cloth or iron. All had to work; there were no idlers; tasks were apportioned according to the physical capacity of the workers. A six-hour day was established by law—three hours' work before the noonday meal, and another three hours after an interval of two hours. Meals were served at a common table in great halls, and the other necessaries of life were procured from common barns and storehouses. Money was unknown; gold and silver ornaments were the dishonourable badges of idleness or disgrace. After supper, one hour was devoted to recreation; music was specially encouraged, but no base or foolish games were permitted.

The education of old and young alike was a matter of the greatest national concern, and the early hours of the morning were set apart for instruction, so that men might study and think before being tired out with the work of the day. Religious toleration was permitted; each man might profess what faith he pleased—a strange ideal for More to set forth, for the only blemish in his character was his bitter hatred of Protestants and his cruelty towards those who attacked the doctrines of Roman Catholicism.

Such in brief outline was More's “Utopia,” the prolific precursor of many subsequent dreams of perfection and a text-book for modern socialists. Lamartine tells us that “Utopias are often only premature truths,” and some of More's

suggestions are now the commonplaces of social reformers. Strange to say, his great contribution to English literature was not written in English at all. It was meant for the learned world, and was, therefore, couched in Latin. An English translation, however, appeared sixteen years after More's death, and the “Utopia” took rank as an English classic.

# Chapter XIX.

## TWO NOBLE FRIENDS.

> "*Thus Raleigh, thus immortal Sidney shone*
> *(Illustrious names!) in great Eliza's day.*"
>
> THOMAS EDWARDS (1699-1757).

Two noble friends, both on the sunny side of thirty, are strolling beneath the spreading oaks of Penshurst, engaged in high and pleasant converse. Around them is a glorious English pleasaunce; behind them rise the gray towers of a stately home.

The younger man's noble bearing and lofty serenity of countenance, "the lineaments of gospel books," attract you at once. He is none other than Sir Philip Sidney, the "jewel" of Elizabeth's realm, the very mirror of knightly chivalry, courage, and grace.

> "Sidney as he fought
> And as he fell, and as he lived and loved,
> Sublimely mild, a spirit without spot."

It is a reign of great men—great in counsel, great in action, and great in letters. England has responded to the spirit of the Renaissance; her perils have roused the most daring bravery in her sons; her achievements in naval warfare and world-wide exploration have awakened a marvellous enterprise; high romance whispers in every breeze that blows. At Elizabeth's court is a bevy of Englishmen, mighty alike with the pen and the sword. Never before has such a miracle been seen. Not here do "arms to the gown and laurels yield to lore;" the sons of Mars are Apollo's votaries also.

Steeped in the culture of Greece, Rome, France, and Italy, far travelled and highly accomplished, Sidney vibrates to the breath of poesy like an Eolian harp. "I never heard," says he, "the old song of Percy and Douglas, that I found my heart moved more than with a trumpet." He has already poured forth his passionate love for "Stella" in a series of notable sonnets; he is even now meditating a "Defense of Poesie" against the attacks of kill-joy Puritans. It will be a labour of love to him; all his exquisite breadth of mind, his enthusiasm and his instinct for the music and fitness of words will be engaged in the task, and hereafter men will speak of it as the best critical essay of Elizabeth's reign.

Still later will come his pastoral romance of *Arcadia*, wherein he will speak of "the shepheard boy, piping as though hee should never be old," and describe the "young

shepheardess, knitting and withal singing," so that "it seemed that her voyce comforted her hands to worke, and her hands kept time to her voyce music." And then Sidney will crown a life of high endeavour with a death of moral grandeur. Ages yet unborn will tell the story of the characteristic generosity that led to his wound, and the noble self-abnegation that gave the longed-for cup of cold water to his wounded fellow; it will give immortality to his dying words, "Thy necessity is greater than mine."

But what of his companion? He is *Edmund Spenser*, that gentle Bard,

> "Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State—
> Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven
> With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace,
> I called him Brother, Englishman, and Friend!"

Epitaphs are commonly hard of belief, but there is no exaggeration in the lines graven on Spenser's tablet in Poets' Corner—"The Prince of Poets in his Tyme, whose Divine Spirit needs noe other witnesse than the works which he left behinde him." Let the story of his life and works be briefly told.

EDMUND SPENSER, the first poet of the Renaissance and the forerunner of the greatest poetic era our land has ever known, was born in London, his "most kindly nurse," when Ben Jonson was a child, Marlowe and Shakespeare were at school, and Bacon was about to begin the study of the law. The son of a journeyman cloth-maker, he was a "poor scholar" of Merchant Taylors' School, and subsequently a sizar of Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he drank deep of renaissance lore and suffered from a chronic ill-health which tended to develop the dreamy and reflective side of his nature. He early displayed his poetic gift and fell under the influence of Gabriel Harvey, a fellow of his college, a formal and somewhat pedantic scholar who had a contempt for "the rude and beggarly habit of rhyming," and urged his young poetic friend to make his English verse conform to the stiff rules of classical prosody.

Spenser left Cambridge after taking his master's degree in 1576, and went north to reside with his Lancashire kinsfolk. Here he began his emotional education by falling in love with "Rosalind," "a fair widowe's daughter of the glen." His love was not returned, but "Rosalind" remained his poetic flame for many years. Disappointment drove him south, and in 1579 he entered the service of the Earl of Leicester and became known to Sir Philip Sidney, who exercised upon him the greatest personal influence that ever came into his life.

It was under the oaks at Penshurst that Spenser wrote his first great poem, "The Sheppeardes Calender," and dedicated it to his patron and friend "the president of noblesse and chevalrie." While the example of Theocritus and Virgil impelled him to adopt the traditional rôle of a shepherd and couch his verses in pastoral form, Chaucer was his master. Harvey's admonitions were thrust aside and the poem was thoroughly English. "Why," exclaimed Spenser, "why a God's name may we not have the kingdom of our language." "The Shepheardes Calender" emphatically

belongs to that kingdom; Greeks and Romans and Italians might give it scholarship and ornament, but it was Chaucer that gave it inspiration.

"The Sheapeardes Calender" contains a poem for each month of the year, and allegory, prophecy, fable, dialogue, the pangs of despised love, and references to current events all find a place in it. Spenser hesitated to give his work to the world lest he should be guilty of "cloying the noble ears" of his patron. Sidney, however, praised it highly and with justice, and on its publication Spenser at once became the first poet of the day. All felt that a new Chaucer had appeared, just as fresh, just as original, but with a greater range of learning and metrical art. Take, for example, the two following melodious stanzas:—

> "Colin, to heare thy rhymes and roundelayes
> Which thou wert wont on wastful hylls to singe,
> I more delight than larke in Sommer dayes;
> Whose Echo made the neyghbour groves to ring,
> And taught the byrds, which in the lower spring
> Did shroude in shady leaves from sonny rays
> Frame to thy songe their chereful cheriping,
> Or hold their peace, for shame of the swete layes.
>
> I saw Calliope with Muses moe,
> Soone as thy oaten pype began to sound,
> Their yvory Luyts and Tamburins forgoe,
> And from the fountaine, where they sat around,
> Renne after hastely thy silver sound;
> And when they came where thou thy skill didst showe,
> They drewe abacke, as halfe with shame confound
> Shepheard to see them in theyr art outgoe."

"The Shepheardes Calender" brought Spenser preferment, though it was not the preferment which his soul desired. He was appointed private secretary to Lord Grey, the new Lord Deputy of Ireland, and in the year 1580 he bade farewell to the brilliant court of Elizabeth and crossed over to the Emerald Isle, which was then an inferno of barbarism and rebellion. With brief and occasional visits to London, Ireland remained his home for the rest of his life. He felt his exile bitterly —"banished," he writes, "like wight forlorn, into that waste where he was quite forgot."

Grey was a zealous Puritan, and to him the Roman Catholics of Ireland were Amalekites, ripe for the sword. The story of his rule in the "distressful Island" is a piteous record of massacre, scourging, hanging, mutilation, and famine. In a two years' campaign his blood-red harvest was "1485 chief men and gentlemen slain, not accounting those of the meaner sort, nor yet executions by law, which were innumerable."

Spenser, no doubt, accompanied his master in all his expeditions. We gather from the vivid picture which he drew of the poverty and destitution of the island, that he was an eye-witness of this reign of terror and that he endorsed Grey's policy. For eight years he remained in government service, and then received as his reward three thousand acres of the forfeited estates of the Earl of Desmond along with the old castle of Kilcolman in County Cork. About the year 1588 he removed to his new

abode, and here, relieved from the arid labours of official life and endowed with the plenteous leisure of a country gentleman, he returned to his old love. Before leaving England he had begun the great poem which was to be the crown of his genius; he now resumed the work with the utmost zest, and rapidly completed the first three books.

# Chapter XX.

## THE FAERY QUEENE.

“*The gentle Spenser, Fancy's pleasing son!*
*Who, like a copious river, poured his song*
*O'er all the mazes of enchanted ground.*”—THOMSON.

OUR pageant reveals a pleasant apartment in the tower of Kilcolman Castle. From the mullioned window a fair prospect of hill and vale, green pasture and shining river presents itself. Down below is—

“the coolly shade
Of the green alders of the Mullæ's shore.”

It is a calm and beautiful scene, and the poet who now gazes upon it drinks in its every feature and peoples it with the creations of his teeming fancy. Not a tree but shelters an errant knight or a fair damsel in distress; not a shadow but hides a foul monster; not a grove but enfolds an enchanted palace; not a thicket but is peopled with the dwarfs and elves of faery.

He gazes long at the scene, but his reverie is broken by the arrival of a visitor—SIR WALTER RALEIGH. See him, as he advances, one of the most brilliant figures of any age or country. His handsome person, his courtly grace, his ready wit and graceful speech have won him the love of his fickle and imperious queen, though, sooth to say, he is now supplanted by a younger rival. Fiery and indefatigable, his life has so far been brimful of adventure and high achievement, and so it will remain to the end.

He has fought for the Huguenots in France, rivalled the daring of Frobisher and Drake on the high seas, made persistent and costly efforts to lay the foundations of a colonial empire in America, pursued the ill-fated Armada, and now is about to give Ireland the staple food of her peasantry by planting potatoes from Virginia on his Irish estate. In the words of Macaulay, he is “the soldier, the sailor, the courtier, the orator, the poet, the historian, the philosopher, whom we picture to ourselves sometimes reviewing the queen's guard, sometimes giving chase to a Spanish galleon, then answering the chiefs of the country party in the House of Commons, then again murmuring one of his sweet love songs too near the ears of her Highness's maids of honour, and soon after, poring over the Talmud or collating Polybius with Livy.” His versatility is marvellous, and almost defies the power of the pen to depict it.

Spenser greets Raleigh warmly, for he loves and admires this brilliant man, “the completest representative of the Elizabethan spirit;” their minds are wholly attuned; both worship the spirit of chivalry, and both are linked in a common friendship with that prince of paladins who fell at Zutphen three years ago. What glorious hours of intimate converse the visit portends!

The friends talk mainly of the poesy which they both love, and then Spenser produces a bulky manuscript and begins to read aloud the opening stanzas of *The Faery Queene*. Raleigh—happy man!—is the first of his race to hear the entrancing melody of its verse, the first to fill his mind with the wondrous pictures of beauty, splendour, gloom, and horror with which it abounds.

“A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine
Y cladd in mightie armes and silver shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,
The cruell markes of many a bloudy fielde;
Yet armes till that time did he never wield:
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:
Full jolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,
As one for knightly jousts and fierce encounters fitt.

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

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

Raleigh listens entranced; he cannot but perceive the supreme merits of the poem; he is warm and generous in praise, and prophesies unfading laurels for the brow of his poetic friend. Then he bids him hasten to London, print his book, and present it to the great queen, who shines as the orb of heaven in the firmament of her court.

Spenser is nothing loth; the friends set sail together, and ere long arrive in London, where, thanks to Raleigh, the queen gives the poet courteous welcome. And now, while he is basking in the brief sunshine of royal favour, Raleigh passes out of his life to pursue that will-o'-the-wisp which ultimately brings him to the scaffold. The poet may wait while the unhappy conclusion of his friend's story is told.

**Edmund Spenser reading “The Fairy Queen” to Sir Walter Raleigh.**
(*From the picture by John Claxton. By kind permission of W. Burdett-Coutts, Esq., M.P.*) To List

Raleigh feeds his romantic mind on visions of an El Dorado, a city of gold which is fabled to stand somewhere near the head springs of the Orinoco. He embarks his all in an expedition to discover it, but is baffled in his quest, and solaces himself with the plunder of Spanish settlements. When Elizabeth is dead, and a Scottish king sits on the English throne, he is consigned to the Tower on a charge of treason, and condemned to death. The sentence is not carried out, and for twelve years he remains in captivity, speeding the lagging hours by writing his great “History of the World,” from the creation to 130 B.C. It is a work of great vigour and ample knowledge, illuminated by the author's wide experience of men, and glorified by passages of lofty eloquence which resound like the pealing of an organ. Take as an example his majestic address to Death,—

> “O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! When none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised. Thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man; and covered it all over with these two narrow words—*Hic jacet*.”

El Dorado still dominates him; he begs the king to let him make one more search for it, and offers his head as the price of failure. Alas! failure is his portion. Desperate, bereft of his son, with sentence of death hanging over him, he again falls on Spanish settlements, and on his return is claimed by the Spanish king, who promises to hang him as high as Haman in the public square of Madrid. The English

king covets the friendship of his Spanish brother, and as the price of propitiation, Raleigh's head falls amidst the bitter and loudly-expressed anger of the English people. So ends a career full of enviable successes and pitiable reverses; so passes from our pageant one of the most renowned and attractive figures in all history.

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Now let us return to the fortunes of Spenser. The success of *The Faery Queene* was remarkable, not only by reason of its glorious verse, but by virtue of its dedication to “The most high, mightie, and magnificent Empresse renowned for pietie virtue and all gratious government—Elizabeth.” Never was so superb a monument reared to regal vanity. The queen responded with a pension of fifty pounds a year, which the poet had some difficulty in collecting, and the first three books of his poem were published.

Spenser confidently anticipated the reward of substantial preferment, and lingered at court for about a year; but his ambitions were unrealized, and in bitter disgust he shook the dust of London from his feet and returned to Ireland, leaving behind him a volume of “Complaints.” This book contains nine “sundrie small poemes of the world's vanity,” lamenting the neglect of the arts and the degeneracy of the times, and scornfully exposing the misery of those who “hang on princes' favours.” One notable passage from *Mother Hubberd's Tale* must be quoted:—

> “Full little knowest thou, that hast not tride,
> What hell it is in suing long to bide:
> To loose good dayes, that might be better spent;
> To waste long nights in pensive discontent;
> To speed to day, to be put back to morrow;
> To feed on hope, to pine with feare and sorrow;
> To have thy Princes grace, yet want her Peeres;
> To have thy asking, yet wait manie yeeares;
> To fret thy soule with crosses and with cares;
> To eate thy heart through comfortlesse dispaires;
> To fawne, to crowche, to waite, to ride, to ronne,
> To spend, to give, to want, to be undonne.
> Unhappie wight, borne to desastrous end,
> That doth his life in so long tendance spend.”

But the first fruits of his return to Ireland, *Colin Clout's come Home Again*, was much more cheerful in tone.

> “I from thenceforth have learned to love more deare
> This quiet lowly life, which I inherit here.”

From the “pensive discontent” of a neglectful court he withdrew into that paradise of fair imaginings within himself, and as the gorgeous fancies crowded upon his mind he grew more and more content with his lot. Additional books of *The Faery Queene* were written, and then he wooed and won a wife, and recorded the emotional history of his courtship and marriage in a series of sonnets and in *Epithalamion*, undoubtedly the most exquisite nuptial ode ever written, and certainly his highest poetic achievement. Never was the music of his verse sweeter than in

this poem; never was the free and ardent joy of a lover so shot through with deep religious feeling and tender reverence. It has been well said that if *The Faery Queene* and all else that Spenser wrote were lost, the *Epithalamion*, and the *Prothalamion*—his swan-song, which he wrote in honour of the espousals of the two daughters of the Earl of Worcester—would win for him the crown of the chief of English poets before Shakespeare.

He paid a last visit to London in the winter of 1595-6, but was back at Kilcolman in 1597, and a year later the nemesis of Grey's “iron hand” descended upon him.

In the north the great Irish chieftain, Hugh O'Neil, defeated an English army, and everywhere the dispossessed native Irish arose and proceeded to pay off old scores. In October all Munster was in their hands, Kilcolman Castle was fired, and one of the poet's children perished in the flames. He and his wife and the remaining children were forced to take refuge in Cork, whence he was sent to London with despatches. The anxieties and hardships of this “killing time” had undermined his health, and a month after his arrival in London he died in a humble lodging. Ben Jonson declared that he perished for “lack of bread,” and that he returned the “twenty pieces” which the Earl of Essex sent to him in his dying hours, with the playful remark, “he was sorrie he had no time to spend them.” A contemporary epigram seems to corroborate the story of his destitution:—

> “Poorly, poor man, he lived; poorly, poor man, he died!”

He asked for bread and they gave him a stone. A stately funeral was accorded him, and his last resting-place was in Westminster Abbey, only a few yards from the tomb of Chaucer, his poetic master. A goodly company of poets stood by his grave and threw into it the mournful elegies which they had composed to his memory, and the pens with which they had written them. In a burst of unwonted generosity Elizabeth ordered a monument, but the sum allotted for it was embezzled by an avaricious courtier. Not until twenty-three years later was the present memorial erected.

In his “Ruines of Time,” Spenser writes:—

> “For deeds die, however noblie donne,
> And thoughts of men do as themselves decay;
> But wise wordes, taught in numbers for to runne,
> Recorded by the Muses, live for ay.”

Amongst all the created things of men such masterpieces alone remain imperishable; they renew themselves from age to age, and those who fashion them need no “storied urn or animated bust” to perpetuate their memory. So it is with *The Faery Queene*, which remains as the greatest monument to Spenser's genius.

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In his prefatory letter to Raleigh, Spenser tells us that he contemplated writing twelve books, each of which should recount the adventures of a knight, typifying

one of the twelve “private virtues.” These knights were to go forth from the court of Gloriana, Queen of Fairyland, and do battle with foes impersonating the vices and errors opposed to their respective virtues. Prince Arthur, the perfect man, compact of every virtue and every grace, was to appear, and finally was to wed Gloriana, the image of the divine glory of God. In the six books which Spenser completed, Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy are the virtues embodied, and opposed to these are such vices as Falsehood, Wrong, Self-indulgence, Despair, etc.

Side by side with this moral allegory runs a historical allegory: Gloriana is Elizabeth; Duessa, who typifies Falsehood, is Mary Queen of Scots; Prince Arthur is now Sidney and now Leicester; while Lord Grey, Raleigh, and Philip the Second are various other characters. Subsidiary allegories slip in, and the project becomes so confused and complicated and bewildering that the reader is forced to abandon all attempt to comprehend the purpose of the poet, and simply wander amidst the pictured splendours of a world of dreams.

In so far as the poem was intended to be narrative it must be confessed a failure. Spenser lacked the dramatic instinct, without which his story, “like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.” But as a rich and glowing pageant, as a gallery of highly-wrought pictures, as a sensuous dream of beauty, it is a triumph, “not for an age but for all time.” Scattered through it are noble passages that call like a clarion to high endeavour, lofty enthusiasm, and spiritual grandeur; but beauty of soul and body is his main theme, and the whole vision is suffused with colour, form, and music.

Those moderns who peruse *The Faery Queene*, not of necessity but with sheer joy, may rightly claim kinship with the inspired throng that has gone singing down the ages. Spenser is the poets' poet; his music “like bars of gold ringing one upon another;” his magical word-painting, his love of loveliness, his delicate observation, his mastery of the simple emotions, and his own unique and graceful personality appeal unerringly to all who love poetry for its own sake. There are spots on the sun, and there are blemishes in *The Faery Queene*. Sometimes the poet is trite and commonplace, prolix and over-elaborate; but for the most part he is truly inspired, and then he leads us into gardens of endless delight,

> “exceeding spacious and wide
> And sprinkled with such sweet variety
> Of all that pleasant is to ear and eye.”

# Chapter XXI.

## A MIRACLE PLAY.

PRÆCO: "*Come, good people, all and each,*
*Come and listen to our speech!*
*In your presence here I stand,*
*With a trumpet in my hand,*
*To announce the Easter Play*
*Which we represent to-day.*"—LONGFELLOW.

DR. JOHNSON once described an actor as a man who red-raddles his face and makes-believe to be somebody else. This love of "make-believe," of mimicking the speech, gesture, gait, and general demeanour of another, or of ourselves in certain important or critical circumstances, is innate in human nature; it is a deep-rooted and universal instinct of mankind. We see it revealed in the capering and posturing of a savage celebrating his prowess in the chase or in warfare; we see it in children playing "at school" or "at soldiers."

Not only do men and women delight in this simulation, but they experience a special kind of pleasure in witnessing it, especially if the performers are skilful and their relation to each other seems so probable as to resemble an interesting phase of real life. In no other department of art is so compelling an appeal made to our emotions. We are all strangely moved when we perceive actual living human beings revealing the ebb and flow of ideas and passions, and the secret tumult of the soul by facial and bodily expression, by the gloomy or joyous visage, the flashing eye, and the varying tones of the voice. We are presented with such living pictures as can alone give the illusion of actual reality.

Out of this innate love of mimicry arose the drama, which in ancient Greece, more than two thousand years ago, was carried to the highest pitch of perfection both in tragedy and in comedy. Rome borrowed the art from Greece, but did not advance it, and in the days of her decadence it became so vulgar and vile that the early Church exerted all its power to abolish it. For centuries the dramatic art ceased to exist. Then came the age when the Church, eager to impress the truths of religion upon an unlettered populace in the most striking and effective manner, resorted to the art which it had formerly destroyed.

> "Any one who enters a Catholic church at Christmas time is likely to see near one of the altars a coloured illumination representing the infant Saviour in His cradle, St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin watching Him, and an ox and an ass munching their food hard by. The children delight in it, and it brings home to them the scene at the manger-bed at Bethlehem more vividly than a thousand sermons. . . . At any primitive little Italian town, when the members of the different religious guilds and confraternities walk in procession on

> Corpus Christi Day, little children toddle among them, dressed, some with a tiny sheepskin and staff to represent John the Baptist; others in sackcloth as St. Mary Magdalene; others in a blue robe, with a little crown, as the Blessed Virgin; others, again, with an aureole tied to their little heads as the infant Saviour. . . .
>
> "The shepherds who at Christmas time come into Rome from the Abruzzi, and pipe before the pictures of the Virgin, or the German peasants who, down to the beginning of the present century, used to go round their village in the guise of the Three Kings from the East, illustrate the way in which the efforts of the Church were seconded by the common people. Not from vapid imitations of Euripides and Terence, but from such simple customs as these did the religious drama take its beginnings."

In the ninth century it became customary to introduce into the services held at the great festivals of the Church certain ceremonials of a dramatic character, such as the solemn burial of the crucifix on Good Friday, and its triumphal disinterring on Easter Day. In Westminster Cathedral during the tenth century a dramatic scene illustrating the Resurrection was performed at Matins, and later on we hear of Christmas and other seasonable plays being enacted by monks and choir boys in the churches. No such church play, however, was known in England prior to the Norman Conquest.

The earliest play of which mention is made has been assigned to the reign of William Rufus. One Geoffrey, a Frenchman then resident at Dunstable, projected a play in honour of St. Katherine, and borrowed various valuable copes from the abbey of St. Albans wherewith to array his performers. Unhappily, these copes were destroyed by fire during the performance of the play, and Geoffrey was so distressed at the disaster that he abandoned the world and became a monk of St. Albans, and afterwards its abbot.

By the thirteenth century religious plays had become very popular, and were performed in nearly every part of England. As yet, however, they were acted in or near churches by priests and their assistants. We are now to see how the laity took them over from the clergy, and ultimately gave them a secular character.

In the fourteenth century all the tradesmen of a town belonging to a particular craft were united in a brotherhood or guild which not only protected the common interests of its members and regulated their employment, but helped them in old age, sickness, and poverty, and provided masses for the repose of their souls. Each guild had its patron saint, and on its special saint's day held a procession and a feast. When religious plays became very popular the procession developed into a dramatic performance dealing with some incident in the life of the saint who specially watched over the guild. No longer were the priests and choir boys the actors, but the members of the guild.

Early in the fourteenth century a great impetus was given to the performance of these plays by a decree of the Church strictly enjoining the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. The guilds adopted Corpus Christi as their great day of festival, and instead of holding separate plays on

particular saints' days, united in the production of one grand play, each craft or group of crafts being responsible for a separate scene.

The guilds vied with one another, and much time and money was spent in the purchase of dresses and accessories and in the training of players. We read, for example, of the following payments: “Paid for making three worlds, 3d.; two yards and a half of buckram for the Holy Ghost's coat, 2s. 1d.” To meet the expenses entailed, a yearly rate, varying from a penny to four-pence, and known as “pageant-silver,” was levied on each craftsman.

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Let us in imagination transport ourselves to the fifteenth century, and witness one of these processional plays. We descend upon the ancient city of Chester in the merry month of June, and find the streets thronged with citizens in holiday attire and in holiday spirits. Rustics have trudged into the city from all parts of the Vale Royal, from Ellesmere Forest, from the Wirral, and from the Welsh-speaking country across the Dee.

For weeks past the guilds have been preparing for this great day. Early and late they have been at work erecting their movable stages, devising and constructing rude scenery and suitable dresses. Honest tradesmen have spent many weary hours in committing to memory the words of their parts and in being drilled into the gestures and movements appropriate to the characters which they are to represent.

When we arrive, the play has already begun. One of the “pagiantes” is just lumbering off to its next station at the corner of yonder street, where the scene for which it is responsible will be enacted all over again. Another “pagiant” is just arriving. It consists, as we observe, of a high scaffold placed on wheels, and divided into two “rooms,” the lower one being the retiring and dressing-room, the upper one, the actual stage. The upper room is a rude representation of Noah's Ark, and we learn that, appropriately enough, the boat-builders and watermen of the river Dee are to perform the episode of the Flood.

The Almighty, wearing a white coat and having the face gilded, opens the scene.

> “I, God, that all this worlde hath wroughte,
> Heaven and eairth, and all of naughte,
> I see my people in deede and thoughte
> Are sette fowle in synne.”

He regrets “that ever I made mon,” and announces that the whole world shall be destroyed with “watter,”

> “Save thou, thy wife and children three,
> And ther wiffes also with thee
> Shall saved be for thy sake.”

He bids Noah, “that righteous man arte,” construct the ark according to the plan and dimensions which He details. Noah thanks his Creator for sparing him and his

house, and declares, “Thy byddinge, Lorde, I shall fulfill.” Then he turns to the members of his family.

> “Have done, you men and women all
> Hye you, leste this watter fall,
> To worche (work at) this shippe, chamber and hall,
> As God hath bidden us doe.”

Shem declares himself ready to assist with his axe, “as sharpe as anye in all this towne,” and so does Ham with his “hacchatt,” while Japheth offers to make the wooden pins and drive them in with his “hamer.” Noah's wife and the wives of his three sons proffer their assistance, the first to bring timber, the second to shape it, the third to prepare the material for caulking and pitching, and the fourth to gather chips, make a fire, and cook the dinner.

Then Noah begins to build the ark, and in a few moments (while he is engaged in reciting fifteen lines of verse) announces—

> “This Shippe is att an ende,
> Wyffe, in this vessel we shall be kepte;
> My children and thou, I woulde in ye lepte.”

Noah's wife refuses to enter the ark, and though the patriarch tries to coax her she remains obdurate, whereupon he denounces her sex:—

> “Lorde, that wemen be crabbed aye,
> And non are meke, I dare well saye,
> This is well seene by me todaye.”

The Almighty now reappears, and bids Noah gather together the beasts and fowls that are to be his shipmates. He thus concludes:

> “Fourtye dayes and fourtye nightes
> Raine shall fall for their unrightes,
> And that I have made through my mightes
> Nowe thinke I to destroye.”

Noah responds, and when his speech is ended the stage direction runs as follows: “Then Noye shall goe into the Arcke with all his familye, his wife excepte, and the Arcke must be borded round about, and one the bordes all the beastes and foules painted.” Noah's family give a catalogue of the creatures thus illustrated, and then the patriarch complains,—

Wiffe, come in, why standes thou their?
Thou arte ever frowarde, I dare well sweare;
Come in, one godes halfe! tyme yt were
For feare leste that we drowne.

*Noye's Wiffe.* Yea, sir, sette up your saile
And rowe forth with evill haite (health)
For withouten anye fayle
I will not oute of this towne;
For I have my gossippes everyechone,
One foote further I will not gone:

| | |
|---|---|
| | The shall not drowne, by Sainte John!<br>And I may save ther life.<br>The loven me full well, by Christe!<br>But thou let them into thy chaiste (chest—*i.e.*, ark)<br>Elles rowe nowe wher thee liste<br>And gette thee a newe wiffe. |
| *Noye.* | Shem, sonne, lo! Thy mother is wrathe<br>Forsooth, such another I doe not knowe. |
| *Shem.* | Father, I shall fetch her in, I trowe,<br>Withouten anye fayle—<br>Mother, my father after thee sende,<br>And byddes thee into yeinder shippe wende.<br>Look up and see the wynde<br>For we bene readye to sayle. |
| *Noye's Wiffe.* | Shem, goe againe to hym, I saie,<br>I will not come theirin todaye. |
| *Noye.* | Come in, wiffe, in twentye devilles waye!<br>Or elles stand their without. |
| *Ham.* | Shall we all feche her in? |
| *Noye.* | Yea, sonnes, in Christe blessinge and myne!<br>I woulde you hied you be-tyme<br>For of this flude I am in doubte." |

Meanwhile Noah's wife is with her "gossippes," one of whom sings a song bidding the obstinate dame drink a "pottill full of Malmsine, good and stronge." Japheth now beseeches his mother to come into the ark, but she again refuses. Then Shem carries her in by bodily force, and she greets her loving husband with a blow on the head. Noah receives it with the remark:

"Ha, ha! marye, this is hotte!"

He pays little heed, however, to the assault, for he perceives that the ark is now floating. With a prayer for preservation, he shuts the window, "and for a littill space" is silent. After looking round about he announces:

"Now fortye dayes are fullie gone."

He sends forth the raven, which returns not again, and the dove, which comes back with the olive leaf in its mouth. "This," says Noah,

"betokeneth God has done us some grace
    And is a sign of peace. . . .
All this water is awaye
Therefore as sone as I maye
Sacryfice I shall doe in faye (faith)
    To thee devoutlye."

The Almighty now appears, and commands that Noah, his family, the beasts, and the fowls shall come forth to multiply and replenish the earth. After an appropriate

response the patriarch and the family leave the ark and offer sacrifice. The play concludes with a long speech, in which God promises:

> "With watter, while this worlde shall leste
> I will noe more spill.
> My bowe betweyne you and me
> In the firmamente shal be,
> By verey toeken that you shall see,
> That suche vengance shall cease. . . .
> My blessinge, Noye, I geve thee heare,
> To thee, Noye, my servante deare;
> For vengance shall noe more appeare,
> And nowe farewell, my darlinge deare."

The scene is over. The gaping spectators, who have been striving to recognize their friends in patriarchal disguise, applaud lustily as the "pagiant" is drawn away to the next station, to be immediately replaced by another, on which a subsequent episode is enacted by other performers. So the day wears on, scene succeeding scene until every guild in the ancient city has demonstrated its ingenuity and dramatic capacity, and the Corpus Christi play is over for the year.

# Chapter XXII.

## THE UNIVERSITY WITS.

"*Marlowe's mighty line.*"—Jonson.

Out of the naive representations of Scripture incident and saintly legend described in the former chapter a new type of drama arose in which the Virtues and Vices were personified. The characters in these moral plays or moralities were abstract ideas such as Pleasure, Folly, Wisdom, Sloth, and the like, and the individuals who represented them were mere mouthpieces for the utterance of moral maxims. The characters being uninteresting in themselves, it was necessary to invent a plot to sustain interest, and thus the very weakness of the moral play became a source of dramatic strength. Later on, the playwrights endeavoured to give flesh and blood to their characters by depicting real persons thinly disguised by a moral label, after the manner of Spenser in his *Faery Queene*.

The most famous of all these moralities was *Everyman*, a play of remarkable power, which has been revived in our own time. The head title describes it as "A treatyse how the hye fader of heven sendeth dethe to somon (summon) every creature to come and gyve acounte of theyr lyves in this worlde, and is in maner of a morall playe." "Here shall you see," says the Messenger who speaks the prologue, "how Fellowship, Jollity, Strength, Pleasure, and Beauty shall fade from thee as flower in May." When Death as God's summoner bids Everyman appear before the judgment-seat, he thus delivers himself:—

"O to whom shall I make my mone
For to go with me in that hevy journay?
First Felawshyp said he wolde with me gone;
His wordes were very plesaunt and gay,
But afterward he lefte me alone.
Then spake I to my Kinnesmen all in dispayre,
And they also gave me wordes fayre;
They lacked no fayre spekynge,
But all forsoke me in the endinge.
Then went I to my goodes, that I loved best,
In hope to have comfort, but there had I leest;
For my goodes sharply dyd me tell
That he bryngeth many into Hell.
Then of myselfe I was ashamed,
And so I am worthy to be blamed.
Thus may I well my-selfe hate.
Of whom shall I now counseyll take?
I thinke that I shall never spede
Tyll that I go to my Good Dede.
But alas! she is so weke
That she can nother go ne speke.

Yet will I venture on her now.
My Good Dedes, where be you?

*Good Dedes.* Here I lye, colde on the grounde,
Thy sins hath me sore bounde
That I can not stere.

*Everyman.* O Good Dedes, I stande in great fere,
I must you pray of counseyll,
For helpe now sholde come ryght well."

The last part of the play shows how Everyman is directed by Good Deeds to Knowledge and Confession, and so is enabled to make a fitting end. Good Deeds abides with him to his last breath, and pronounces the prayer for the dying:

"Shorte our ende and mynyshe (diminish) our payne;
Let us go and never come agayne."

A deep solemnity distinguished this and other early moralities; we see nothing of the comic element which was apparent in the Scripture play, and was highly relished by the spectators. Nothing delighted the crowd more than the rude buffooning of the comic devil, the horseplay of Herod, and the adventures of Mak the sheep-stealer amongst the shepherds in the Christmas Eve scene. In the later moralities, the "Vice" became a combination of clown and devil; it was his part to supply humour by making mischief, setting men against their neighbours, laying on lustily with his sword and lath, and finally disappearing through "Hell-mouth," riding on the back of his friend Lucifer.

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A third kind of play known as the Interlude now appeared. It was, at first, a short farce or comic dialogue sandwiched in between two serious scenes of a miracle play or morality. The characters were not personifications but representative of real life. The most important of these interludes were the work of JOHN HEYWOOD, a wit, musician, and poet of Henry the Eighth's court. His interludes were performed before the king, not as part of a religious or moral drama, but as independent plays.

It was the interlude which led up to the regular drama. The old religious and moral plays had accustomed the people to dramatic performances, and had fostered a national love of play-going. Now, greater attention was given to the development of the plot and to careful division of the play into acts and scenes, and playwrights began to turn to the Roman dramatists for guidance. About the year 1540 the first regular English comedy was produced.

In Elizabeth's day there were four different species of drama in existence in England. First, there were the allegorical plays, no longer treating of moral themes, but founded on the loves and hates of the classical gods and goddesses, and often intended as elaborate compliments to the queen or the great lords. Naturally such plays were very popular at court, or in the halls of the nobles. Then there were tragedies, some of which had elements of real grandeur, but were disfigured by coarseness and extravagance and a love of crude horror. There were also

comedies, but most of them were little better than carnivals of noisy and witless foolery; and finally, arising out of the intense patriotic pride which welled up in the days when the Armada was beaten back from our shores, there were historical plays, in which the might and majesty of England was extolled often in verse of great eloquence. “Look!” cried the historical playwright,

> “Look on England,
> The Empress of the European isles,
> The mistress of the ocean, her navies
> Putting a girdle round about the world.”

The old chronicles were ransacked for incidents to feed national vanity and stimulate the national spirit; but the plays so produced lacked unity, and consisted of little more than disconnected scenes. The Elizabethan drama, which ranks “not only amongst the most glorious but among the most characteristic of national achievements,” was, however, already in the making. With the advent of Shakespeare the drama was to be lifted from triviality, purged of grossness, fashioned into the very age and body of time, and sublimated by such genius as the world had never seen before.

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Before our pageant reveals the towering figure of Shakespeare, let four of his predecessors appear. First comes John Lyly. He wears the gown of an Oxford scholar, and is a bookman among bookmen, yet has deservedly a great reputation as a wit. He has written many plays for “the children of Pauls”—that is, for the choristers of St. Paul's Cathedral—and some of them have delighted Elizabeth and her courtiers. Their great merit lies in this—they demonstrate to the dramatist of the future that plays need not be written wholly in verse, that it is quite possible to write bright, lively, and pointed dialogue in prose. Lyly's actors were choir boys, and for their clear, trained voices he interspersed his dialogue with charming songs, such as:—

> “Cupid and my Campaspe played,
> At cardes for kisses, Cupid payed;
> He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows,
> His mother's doves, and teeme of sparrows;
> Loses them too; then down he throwes
> The corrall of his lippe, the rose
> Growing on's cheek (but none knows how);
> With these the cristall of his brow,
> And then the dimple of his chinne;
> All these did my Campaspe winne.
> At last hee set her both his eyes;
> Shee won, and Cupid blind did rise.
> O Love! has shee done this to thee?
> What shall (alas!) become of mee?”

His contemporaries set great store by his verse; but it is his novel, “Euphues and his Anatomie of Wit,” together with its sequel, “Euphues and his England,” which makes him important in the history of our literature. The style of these books is so remarkable that he is hailed as the creator of a “new English.” He appeals with his

love-tales and love-letters and fanciful conflicts of wit especially to the ladies of the court; all are his scholars, and the beauty who cannot speak this “new English” is but little regarded. And a strange, artificial English it is!—full of alliterations and antitheses, plays on words, fantastic conceits, and similes drawn from the natural history of ancient fable. His affectations of style will hereafter expose him to a storm of caricature, and men will speak of over-florid and high-flown writing as *Euphuism*. Nevertheless, he brings a new element of richness and splendour into book prose, and his method has a very considerable effect on writers for generations to come.

Those who follow are no fit companions for the courtly Lyly. They are men of genius, and boast a university education; they are capable of the purest poetic dreams, and of the most delicate and touching fancies, yet they are haunters of the taverns, boon companions of the reckless and the vicious, careless and improvident, living lives of wild licence which bring them inevitably to sordid poverty and miserable death.

First comes ROBERT GREENE, who, though born to comfortable estate, has plunged into vice and dissipation amidst ruffians, sharpers, and outcasts, yet still retains a wonderful literary facility, and can boast that nothing gross or vile has fallen from his pen. In foul lodgings or amidst the brawling of ale-houses, he writes plays, poems, and stories which are popular with all classes. There is genuine poetry in his plays, and no writer of the time can better blend the comic and the serious into a pleasing whole. His most entertaining comedy, *Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay*, contains a tender love-story, and country scenes which in their wholesome freshness remind us of Shakespeare.

A gluttonous supper of Rhenish wine and pickled herrings will carry him off, and the humble folks amongst whom he breathes his last will bury him at the cost of six-and-fourpence; but a woman who has befriended him will fulfil his dying bequest, and crown him with bays. After his death, his *Groatsworth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance* will tell the story of his downfall, warn his cronies against a similar fate, and preserve for us a vivid picture of the wild Bohemian existence of those who wrote for bread in the days of Elizabeth.

GEORGE PEELE, who succeeds, is of the same kidney, and is specially called to repentance by his dying friend. His *Arraignment of Paris* contains dramatic verse more musical than any which has yet been written, and here and there it reveals the Shakespearean magic of flashing upon the inward eye a beautiful picture in a line or two of exquisite diction. He, too, goes the way of his kind.

Then the greatest of the trio, the real forerunner of Shakespeare, and his chiefest rival, limps on to our stage. He is CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, acclaimed in modern days as one of the great poets of the world. Passionate, ambitious, young—he will never see his thirtieth year—the wine-stains of the tavern on his doublet, the marks of dissipation on his countenance, he ruffles it amongst the “rogues and vagabonds” who call themselves the Lord Admiral's men, yet numbers amongst his intimates some of the loftiest spirits of the time. He has the real poetic frenzy; but his

rebellious irreligion and denial of God expose him to Greene's rebuke—“Why should thy excellent wit, God's gift, be so blinded that thou shouldst give no glory to the Giver?”

His first great play, *Tamburlaine the Great*, mingles, with much rant and fustian, passages of great beauty and grandeur, and in it he first gives “our song a sound that matched the sea.” His *Jew of Malta*, perhaps, furnishes Shakespeare with hints for Shylock; his *Dr. Faustus* reveals that longing for the unattainable, that overmastering desire to satisfy his soul, which is the chief mark of his restless nature:—

> “Nature that framed us—four elements
> Warring within our breasts for regiment,
> Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds;
> Our souls whose faculties can comprehend
> The wondrous architecture of the world,
> And measure every wandering planet's course,
> Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
> And always moving as the restless sphere,
> Will us to wear ourselves and never rest.”

At the close of this play he rises to a tragic horror that has never been surpassed. In his *Edward II.* he gives us the first great historical tragedy produced in England, and heralds the coming day when Shakespeare shall make this field his own. So he passes—a master of high and lofty seriousness, and the creator of blank verse as the instrument of drama.

# Chapter XXIII.

## SHAKESPEARE, THE BOY.

“*Sweet Swan of Avon!*”—Jonson.

We are now transported to the very heart of England, to the clean, pleasant country town of Stratford-on-Avon, amidst gently-swelling uplands, tall woods, green hedgerows, rich pastures, and fertile fields. The broad streets of the old town slope gently to a fair and placid river, which meanders westward through many a league of willow-fringed meadow, past old-world villages and sleepy market towns, to mingle its waters with the Severn.

This Stratford is *the* literary Mecca of the English-speaking world. Wellnigh half a hundred thousand pilgrims visit it annually. “From the four corners of the world they come,” not merely to rejoice in the beauty of the Warwickshire lanes which surround the town, not merely to revel in lush meadows spangled with a wealth of wild flowers, or to float amidst swans and water-lilies on the bosom of the Avon, but to pay homage to the memory of the greatest poetic genius of the British race—nay, of the whole modern world—William Shakespeare.

To his birthplace they wend, to the much-restored sixteenth-century homestead in which he first saw the light three hundred and fifty years ago. As we stand before the timbered dwelling, with its pent-house and dormer windows, let the first scene of our Shakespearean pageant be unfolded.

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The shadow on the dial lies midway between five and six on a sunny July morning in the year of grace 1575. A square-built, active lad of eleven, brown-eyed, chestnut-haired and rosy-cheeked, with wallet in hand, is about to step into Henley Street, from the house of his father, Master John Shakespeare, glover, maltster, wool, skin, and leather merchant, and formerly chief alderman of the borough.

The lad is good to look upon. His hazel eyes are deep and ever changing, one moment twinkling gaily with fun, the next, sad and serious. His forehead is high and white, fitted for great thoughts, and his mouth is as sweet as a girl's. It is a face you will turn again to observe as you pass him by.

As he stands beneath the pent-house, lithe and trim in doublet and hose, pressing his flat cap on his curls, his face is somewhat clouded, for he finds school

a dreary place, and his master's hand very heavy. How sweet, he thinks, to "prove a micher" to-day, to play the truant, to wander by the river-side where the willows droop to the water and the pigeons coo in the branches, where the feathery reeds sway in the summer breeze and the swans glide by like stately ships.

How delicious it would be, he thinks, to go a-black-berrying on the Welcombe Hills, to make hay in the meadows at Wilmcote, or to roam in Charlecote's tall woods, where the squirrels are leaping from bough to bough, and the antlered deer stand watchful in the shade! A vision flits across his mind of a far-famed pool on the river where fat trout lie waiting to be caught. Wood and field and stream attract him like a magnet.

But, better still, how glorious it would be to set off on a twelve-mile walk to Kenilworth, where the great Earl of Leicester is even now entertaining Her Gracious Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, with princely pleasures. The boy sighs, and recalls with flashing eyes a wondrous vision which he gazed upon only a week ago, when his father took him to the castle to see the revels.

Oh, how wonderful they were! How well he remembers Triton and the mermaid Arion on a dolphin's back, the drums, the trumpets, the dwarfs, the heathen gods, and the ancient heroes—what a medley of sound and colour, and form and wonder! It was a glimpse of fairyland itself! And then there was the play which the Coventry folk performed—the old Hock Thursday play, in which the women proved themselves doughty warriors, and drove back the Danes. It was good enough, in its way, but he remembers another play that was far better. Four years ago, when his father was chief alderman, London players visited Stratford, and he was taken to the Guildhall to see them perform.

Though he was then but little more than a baby, he has never forgotten that play. He recalls the organ-like tones of the deep-voiced men, and the clear treble of the boys who played the parts of gentle maidens and high-born dames. He remembers that he hung upon every word, even though he understood little or nothing of what was said; his eyes were glued to the stage during the whole performance. It was all real to him, as real as the life of the street which he now looks upon. Some day, he thinks to himself, he too will fashion such stirring scenes for the delight of thousands. So dreaming of the future, he goes "creeping like snail unwillingly to school."

The hour of six draws nigh, and the school door stands open. Dismissing his wandering thoughts, he turns the corner of Henley Street, and passes into High Street. Here he meets his school-fellows, and the quiet thoroughfare rings with their boyish greetings and rough horseplay. On they troop, a mischievous throng, past New Place, the largest house in the town, to the Grammar School hard by the Guild Chapel.

The lads race up the outer staircase into the schoolroom, with its black oaken beams, its wainscotted walls, and small high windows. The wallets are opened on the rough desks, books, pen, paper, and ink are produced, and the boys fall to the

preparation of their lessons. They are scarcely completed before a knocking on the door is heard, and stern Master Roche, clad in his rusty gown, advances to his desk. Master Roche begins by hearing the exercises, and it is not long before the sounds of weeping are heard. The schoolmaster, in common with most parents and all pedagogues, believes,

> "Be they man or be they maid,
> Whip 'em and wallop 'em Solomon say'd."

So school is a woeful place, where canings and birchings are to be hourly expected. Let the truth be told, Will Shakespeare's mind does not turn gladly to his book. He is dreaming of the plays which he has seen in the Guild Hall down below when he ought to be poring over Lilly's Latin Grammar, translating the "Colloquies" of Erasmus, or working exercises in "arethmetike." He will probably feel the weight of Master Roche's arm before the day is over.

The morning drags on until nine sounds from the tower of the Guild Chapel, and the boys clatter down the steps for the breakfast half-hour. Then school begins again, and continues until half after eleven, when the boys disperse until one. Morning school has thus lasted a full five hours.

Arriving home, Will salutes his parents with reverence, says grace, makes a low curtsy, and wishes "Much good may your dinner do you." Then he brings the food to the table, and waits upon his parents, and when their meal is over, clears away. Then the hungry boy is at last free to take his own wooden trencher, seat himself upon a stool, and eat his dinner.

Back he goes to school at one, and lessons proceed until three, when half an hour's play is permitted. The boys spend the time in wrestling, scourge—that is, whip top—in playing hand-ball, and in leaping. Once more they return to their books, and continue their studies until half-past five, when the day's work concludes with a reading from the Bible, the singing of two staves of a psalm, and evening prayer.

'Tis a long business this schooling—nearly ten hours of study, and nothing in all the livelong day to touch the lad's heart and stir his fancy. But out of doors on the Thursday half-holiday he is the happiest boy in all the world. Then he goes fishing or bird-nesting, attends sheep-shearings or harvest-homes, runs with the harriers, watches the hawking of the gentles, or roams amidst the fields, where

> "Daisies pied and violets blue,
> And lady-smocks all silver-white,
> And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,
> Do paint the meadows with delight."

# Chapter XXIV.

## THE STAGE IN SHAKESPEARE'S DAY.

"*Then to the well-trod stage anon,*
*If Jonson's learned sock be on,*
*Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,*
*Warble his native word-notes wild.*"—MILTON.

"THE world knows nothing of its greatest men," and it must be confessed that, despite the long-continued and patient researches of many scholars, our certain information regarding Shakespeare may be packed into very small compass indeed. "The whole matter," says Professor Saintsbury, "is a great 'Perhaps,' except in two points: that one William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon was, as a man of letters, actually the author of, at any rate, the great mass of the work which now goes by his name, and that, as a man, he was liked and respected by nearly all who knew him." It is true that no biography of our poet may be constructed without recourse to tradition, conjecture, and argument from probability, yet the world has generally accepted the story now to be told.

**The First Performance of "The Merry Wives of Windsor," 1599.**
**(*From the picture by Edgar Bundy, R.I. By permission of the artist.*)** To List

Shakespeare's schooldays came to a sudden end when he was about thirteen years of age. The tide of his father's fortunes had ebbed, and a few years later we find the erstwhile bailiff of Stratford unable to pay his town dues. Mary Arden, Shakespeare's mother, had brought her husband the valuable property of Asbies at Wilmcote, but now it had to be heavily mortgaged, and was subsequently lost to the family. The boy was, therefore, obliged to begin the business of life with the poorest of prospects.

How he employed himself, we do not know. The garrulous old writer Aubrey tells us that he helped his father in the butchering part of the business, and that when he killed a calf, he would "do it in a high style, and make a speech." Some say he became an "A B C-darius"—that is, a kind of pupil teacher; others, an attorney's clerk; others, again, an apothecary's assistant; but all this is the merest conjecture derived from the special knowledge which he shows of these professions in his plays. No one really knows what his early employment was, and on this question "there is namore to seyn."

We next hear of him when he was eighteen years of age, and a married man. When or where the marriage was solemnized, again we do not know. His wife's name was Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a substantial yeoman, whose picturesque homestead at Shottery now belongs to the nation, and is a frequent place of pilgrimage. From the inscription on her tomb we learn that she was eight years older than her husband, and it has been assumed, without much justification, that the marriage was not a happy one.

In his twenty-first year Shakespeare left Stratford, and, like many another young countryman, turned his steps towards London. An old legend tells us that he was forced to leave Stratford because he had "fallen into ill company, and, among them, some that made a frequent practice of deer-stealing, engaged him with them more than once in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote." A late seventeenth-century writer gives the same testimony, and adds that Shakespeare was "much given to all unluckiness in stealing venison and rabbits, particularly from Sir Thomas Lucy, who had him oft whipt, and sometimes imprisoned, and at last made him fly his native county, to his great advancement." It is said that he afterwards caricatured Lucy as Justice Shallow in *The Second Part of Henry IV.*, and that the dozen white luces on the foolish old man's coat refer to the pike or luces which are still to be seen on the family arms above the great gateway at Charlecote.

Whatever the reason of his departure may have been, we know that he journeyed to London, probably by way of Oxford, "the city of the dreaming spires," and the Thames valley. Whether he walked or rode, no man knows; but whichever he did, he would spend the nights in one or other of the clean, comfortable inns for which England was then renowned. We may picture the auburn-haired, brown-eyed young fellow sitting at eve in the ingle-nook of inn kitchens, listening to the travellers' tales told by his wayfaring companions, studying them with that marvellous penetration with which he was gifted, and storing up in his memory their

every aspect and turn of speech, ready for the day when the great work of his life should begin.

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And now Shakespeare reaches his goal and gapes open-mouthed at the novel and wondrous sights of the great metropolis, “lovely London,” as Peele calls it. But a man cannot live on wonders, and some kind of work must be found to provide him with the necessaries of life. What that work was we do not know. For seven long years Shakespeare's life is a complete blank to us. His biographers are full of conjecture; some tell us that he must have travelled abroad to acquire the remarkable knowledge of sea, shipping, courts and camps, men and manners which he afterwards displayed. Perhaps so, for in the first play which he wrote he observes that “home-keeping youths have ever homely wits.”

No doubt before long he gravitated to one or other of the two theatres which London then boasted—“The Theatre” in Shoreditch, or “The Curtain” in Moor Fields. A writer of 1753 first recorded the story that he made a livelihood by holding the horses of playgoers outside the theatre, and Dr. Johnson improved upon the tradition by representing him as organizing a service of boys for the purpose.

Probably before long he was offered employment inside the theatre, perhaps as a call boy, and from this humble post his capacity and amiability won him membership of the company, how or when no man knoweth. Possibly some player may have fallen ill, and the young man who had shown such an intelligent interest in the performance may have been asked to act as understudy. We know that actors from both the London theatres were in Stratford in the year 1567. It is not beyond the bounds of probability that a fellow-townsman said a good word for him to one of these visitors, who “gave a lift” to the young man when he returned to London.

Shakespeare's earliest reputation was made as an actor, probably as a member of the Earl of Leicester's servants, who, after the accession of James I., were permitted to call themselves “The King's Players.” Burbage, the leading tragic actor of the day, Heming, Condell, and Phillips—Shakespeare's lifelong friends—were members of this company, and we know that under their auspices two of his plays first saw the light.

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On a dirty site, outside the walls of the city, and on the banks of the Thames, rose the Globe Theatre, which had been erected by Shakespeare and his partners. In form it was a sort of hexagonal tower, open to the sky. A red-lettered play-bill outside indicated the title of the play to be performed. A glance at the interior showed that, like our modern theatres, it had developed out of the inn yards in which the strolling players of the time were wont to perform. An Elizabethan tavern,

such as the Four Swans, was built round a square courtyard, and the enclosing walls carried tiers of galleries. Such was the model on which the Globe was erected.

Only the galleries and a portion of the stage were roofed in; the rest was open to the weather, and the people in the open space, the “yard” or pit, stood—for there were no seats—and frequently received the streaming rain on their heads. The “groundlings” paid from one penny to sixpence for admission, and a place in one of the galleries or on the stage cost from sixpence or a shilling to half a crown.

The stage projected into the pit, which, when the play was a popular one, was crowded with a disorderly mob of mechanics and 'prentices in greasy leather jerkins, servants in blue frieze with their masters' badges on their shoulders, boys and grooms, cracking nuts, eating apples, howling, fighting, and sometimes, when the actors did not please them, falling upon them with their fists. The whole place smelled of sawdust and fetid breath, like a modern travelling circus.

On the rush-strewn stage sat young gallants drinking and smoking, laying wagers, playing cards, or interrupting the play, especially in the tragic parts, by loud talking and laughter. A boy went up and down amongst them selling tobacco and furnishing lights for the smokers. If a lady ventured into the theatre, she sat in one of the galleries and discreetly hid her face behind a mask.

The performance usually began at three in the afternoon, and lasted from two to three hours. When a play was about to begin, a flag was hoisted above the building as a signal. In due time a flourish of trumpets was heard, and the Prologue, an actor in a black velvet mantle with a crown of bays upon his flowing wig, strutted forward, and after bowing to the audience, recited the introductory lines. Then the trumpets sounded again, the curtain was drawn back, and the play began. The costumes worn by the players were rich and fashionable, but no care was taken to make them appropriate to the period of the play. All the actors were men and boys; not until the return of Charles II. did women publicly appear on the stage.

There was some attempt at scenery, for the stage was hung with “painted cloths,” and overhead was a blue canopy representing “the heavens.” Sometimes, when the play was a tragedy, the stage was hung with black. In a play presented at Oxford in the year 1605 there were three changes of scene, but this was quite an exception. As a rule the scene was indicated by a scroll on which was inscribed in large letters the name of the place: “A Room in the Palace,” “A Wood near Athens,” “On a Ship at Sea,” and so forth. At the back of the stage was a balcony which served many purposes, and represented a window, battlements, a hillside, or an upper room, as the case might be.

The stage effects were very crude, as may be noticed from the following stage directions: “Exit Venus; or, if you can conveniently, let a chair come down from the top of the stage, and draw her up.” Shakespeare, in the days when his fame was secure, frequently chafed at the restrictions imposed upon his art by this poverty of stage illusion. In one of the choruses of *Henry V.* he asks,—

> “Can this cock-pit hold
> The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?”

While the play was going forward, a clown sometimes amused the “groundlings” by coarse and impromptu jokes—a practice detested by Shakespeare, who makes Hamlet say:—

> “Let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them; for there be of them, that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too; though, in the meantime, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered; that's villainous and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.”

Between the acts there was dancing and singing, and the performances usually concluded with a jig, performed to the music of pipe or tabor. Finally, the actors all came to the front of the stage, knelt down and offered up a prayer for the Queen's Majesty.

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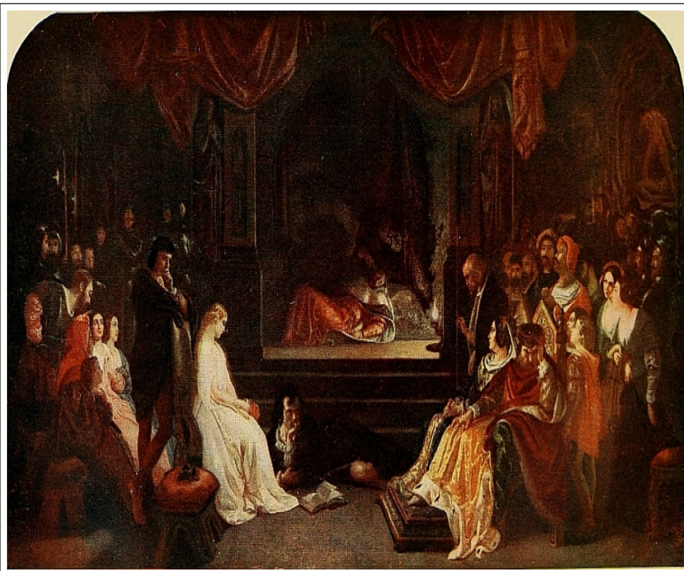
Such was the theatre in the days of good Queen Bess. As Coleridge finely says, “The stage in Shakespeare's time was a naked room with a blanket for a curtain, but he made it a field for monarchs!”

# Chapter XXV.

## SHAKESPEARE, THE MAN.

> *"His mind and his hand went together. And what he thought, he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers."*
>
> Heming and Condell (1623).

In the *Groatsworth of Wit* which poor Robert Greene sent forth as his *vale* to a thankless world, he speaks of "an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tyger's heart wrapt in a Player's hide" supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you, and being an absolute "Johannes factotum" (jack-of-all-work) "is, in his own conceit, the only Shake-scene in a countrie. . . . . . It is a pity men of such rare wit should be subject to the pleasures of such groomes." If, as is probable, the reference is to Shakespeare, we have good evidence that in his twenty-eighth year he had already turned his 'prentice hand to the work of play-writing.



**The Play Scene from "Hamlet."**

**(*From the picture by Daniel Maclise, R.A.*)** To List

Greene would seem to indicate that Shakespeare was a mere adapter, that, in accordance with the practice of the time, he revised and rewrote plays belonging to

his company, but originally the work of other hands. The writer of a play usually sold his production outright to a theatre or to a middleman, and when he had received his price, which varied from four to twenty pounds, had no further property in his work. Such plays, when they became staled by use, were frequently handed over to another writer, who recast and revivified them by means of fresh speeches or modernized scenes, and thus gave them an air of novelty. Probably Shakespeare, as a dramatic “Jack-of-all-work,” made many a silk purse out of a sow's ear in this manner. Thus, he exercised himself daily in the art of the playwright and nightly in the practice of the stage.

Greene's allusion was envious and spiteful, for as a “University wit” he had nothing but contempt for writers who lacked the academic inspiration. Chettle, who edited Greene's book, offered the *Johannes factotum* a liberal apology three months after the *Groatsworth of Wit* appeared. “I am as sory,” he writes, “as if the originall fault had beene my fault, because my selfe have seene his demeanor no lesse civill, than he exelent in the quality he professes; besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightnes of dealing which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approoves his art.” Chettle thus testifies to Shakespeare's high repute as an actor, a man, and a poet.

A year later there was no doubt about his position as a poet, for his *Venus and Adonis*, dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, was issued by Richard Field, a Stratford man who had set up in London as a printer. This poem, which Shakespeare calls “the first heire of my invention,” revealed him as not far short of Spenser in mastery of verse and rhyme, and in luscious description of beauty. The town received *Venus and Adonis* with a rapture which was intensified when *The Rape of Lucrece* appeared in the following year. Edition followed edition, and it is quite likely that Spenser became an ardent admirer, and addressed the author, whom he apostrophized as Aetion (Eagle), in the following lines, which appear in *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*:—

> “And there, though last not least is Aetion;
> A gentler Shepheard may no where be found,
> Whose muse, full of high thoughts' invention,
> Doth, like himself, heroically sound.”

The last line seems to refer to Shakespeare's name.

Meanwhile, “the upstart Crow” was busy with his historical plays and earlier comedies. In the year 1598 Francis Meres, Master of Arts, published his “Wit's Treasury,” in which he commemorated 125 English writers, from the time of Chaucer down to his own day. Here for the first time we have an authentic commendation of Shakespeare, whom Meres calls “mellifluous and honey-tongued,” and the following list of his plays: *Gentlemen of Verona*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Love's Labour Won* (probably the play known to us as *All's Well that Ends Well*), *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Richard II.*, *Richard III.*, *Henry IV.*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

What a magical blossoming of genius! Twelve years ago he had crossed London Bridge as a green country lad, unlettered save in the merest elements, with no book-lore except the beggarly hints that lurked in his dog-eared school-books, utterly ignorant of the world of kings, nobles, statesmen, and wits, too humbly bred for the society of the great and learned, too young for the wisdom of actual experience, untaught by travel, unpractised in the literary art, and ignorant of the craft and mystery of the stage. Yet, within this brief interval, we find him leaping to supreme eminence, taking the whole world as his province, inditing verse which bettered Marlowe, songs that outsang Spenser, possessing a vocabulary far in excess of Milton's, giving intuitive expression to the inmost thoughts of kings, sages, and high-born ladies, creating characters that "live and move and have their being" out of the "unbodied joy" of faery, and, though not yet out of "the workshop" and on to the "heights," master of every human passion and slave of none, as massive as the mountains, as wondrously changeful as an April sky, astonishing in the exuberance of his genius, amazing in the depth of his philosophic insight, and unrivalled in the scope and minuteness of his poetic imagination. Mystery of mysteries, yet actual fact that none may truly gainsay!

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When Meres wrote, Shakespeare was a prosperous man, a member of the company of The King's Players, daily growing in fame, and rich in the number of his friends. That practical wisdom which we saw allied with poetic instinct in Raleigh and Spenser, and notably absent in the "University Wits," belonged to Shakespeare in a special degree. Unlike the poetic tribe in general, he could make money and keep it. There is little doubt that he loathed the life of the stage, and felt himself bitterly humiliated by the degraded calling which branded his name.

> "Alas! 'tis true I have gone here and there
> And made myself a motley to the view,
> Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear."

With prosperity came a longing to be quit of the tawdry surroundings, the foul breath, the guttering candles, and the loose manners of the theatre. He began to cherish an ardent desire to restore the blemished repute of his family by assuming the part of a country gentleman in his native town. Four years after Meres wrote, we find him inciting his father, now gradually emerging from his tangle of monetary difficulties, to apply for a coat of arms, which was granted in the following year. This was an obvious preliminary to the founding of a family, but the ambition was rudely shattered by the death of his only son Hamnet.

In the next year he purchased New Place, the best house in Stratford; and in the following year, the fame of his substance having been noised abroad, we find him beginning to lend money to Stratford folks. Shortly afterwards he became a shareholder in the Globe Theatre, and, his income being considerably augmented, his savings were prudently invested in lands and in a lease of the tithes of Stratford and some of the neighbouring villages. The latter purchase made him a lay rector of

the parish, and gave him a right of interment within the chancel of the beautiful church that stands on the verge of the Avon, ringed about by majestic yews and approached by an avenue of immemorial elms.

Shakespeare's frugality and strict attention to business reveal a side of his character which may seem as incongruous as the housewifely care of Wordsworth, who habitually stuffed a pair of dry stockings into his pockets before setting forth to pay a visit on a rainy day. But he had family experience of the misery of debt, and was far too sane to let the morrow take care of itself. Further, a secure income was necessary for that position of dignified ease which he coveted.

Punctilious as he was in all his business dealings, he seems to have cared little or nothing for his literary fame. We know that he wrote in a white heat and that he never blotted a line. Publication of plays was not the practice in Shakespeare's time; the playwright's sole ambition was to see his play on the stage, and the actors believed that their profit would be diminished if a play appeared in print.

Only sixteen of Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays were published in his lifetime, and probably all of them were “stolne and surreptitious.” Seven years after his death his stage friends Heming and Condell published the First Folio, containing thirty-six of his plays, all printed “according to the true original copies.” In the evening of his days Shakespeare was either too weary to undertake the laborious work of revision, too indifferent to care for the applause of posterity, or too sure of his immortality to tamper with the text as the inspiration of the moment had bodied it forth.

In September 1611 “William Shakespeare of Stratford on Avon, gentleman,” having completed *The Tempest*, the last of his plays, like Prospero, broke his staff, drowned his magic book, dismissed the airy spirits that did his bidding, and retired to his dukedom in New Place, Stratford-on-Avon. He who was the most renowned dramatist of the day, before whom the incense of applause constantly arose, whose “flights upon the banks of Thames so did take Eliza and our James,” now quitted the scene of his triumphs, the roaring streets and the busy hum of men, for a peaceful home in a quiet country town that to the average man would have spelt “boredom” in capital letters. “Sir,” said Dr. Johnson many years later, “the man who is tired of London is tired of existence.” Not so Shakespeare; he quitted all, even the brilliant wit-combats at the Mermaid Tavern, where, amidst the brightest intellects of the day, he more than held his own, and entered upon a retirement that was never humdrum, only grateful.

Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton, in his “Christmas at the Mermaid,” which recaptures the fine early rapture of his Elizabethan models, pictures Ben Jonson, Raleigh, Drayton, Lodge, Dekker, Chapman, and many another of the goodly company that sang and fought for England in the “spacious days,” raising their glasses at the very outset of their revel to

> “Stratford Will—beloved man,
> So generous, honest, open, brave, and free.”

Then follows the fine tribute of “rare Ben Jonson” to him who,

“With life at golden summit, fled the town
And took from Thames that light to dwindle down
O'er Stratford farms.”

A friend of Shakespeare's takes up the strain, and describes the evening after Will's return to his native town:—

“As down the bank he strolled through evening dew,
Pictures (he told me) of remembered eves
Mixt with that dream the Avon ever weaves,
And all his happy childhood came to view; . . .
Then, in the shifting vision's sweet vagaries,
He saw two lovers walking by themselves—
Walking beneath the trees, where drops of rain
Wove crowns of sunlit opal to decoy
Young love from home; and one, the happy boy
Knew all the thoughts of birds in every strain. . . .
He heard her say, 'The birds attest our troth!
Hark to the mavis, Will, in yonder may
Fringing the sward, where many a hawthorn spray
Round summer's royal field of golden cloth
Shines o'er the buttercups like snowy froth,
And that sweet skylark on his azure way,
And that wise cuckoo, hark to what they say:
“We birds of Avon heard and bless you both.”
And, Will, the sunrise, flushing with its glory
River and church, grows rosier with our story!
This breeze of morn, sweetheart, which moves caressing,
Hath told the flowers; they wake to lovelier growth!
They breathe—o'er mead and streams they breathe—the blessing,
“We flowers of Avon heard and bless you both!”'”

# Chapter XXVI.

## THE VISIONS OF SHAKESPEARE.

*"The greatest genius that perhaps human nature has yet produced, our myriad-minded Shakespeare."*—COLERIDGE.

THE scene changes to the pleasant garden of New Place in the springtime of the year 1616. The budding trees are bursting into tender green, the blackbird and thrush are calling, and the sun is shining. In a sheltered nook you see Master William Shakespeare, still hale and handsome, though past his prime, enjoying the fresh air of the morning. As he looks around, a line from one of his own sonnets comes into his mind:—

"Proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Has put a spirit of youth in everything."

**Ophelia.**

**(*From the picture by Sir John Millais, P.R.A., in the Tate Gallery.*)** To List

A servant appears and hands him a letter, and at its perusal a gentle smile irradiates his countenance. His two old friends, Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson, are coming to visit him; they are even now on the road. How welcome they will be! Both are very dear to him, both are poets, and one of them has written plays in which he has delighted to appear. They will come big with news from the great city, brimful of the gossip of court, tavern, and theatre. He will hear accounts of all the good fellows who nightly assemble at the Mermaid, the authentic history of Somerset's fall and Buckingham's rise; how Raleigh was released, how he is still infected with the mad idea of making another dash for El Dorado; the latest jest, the latest poem, the fortunes of Jonson's new play; all the flotsam and jetsam that are tossed up by the waves of talk where men "most do congregate." 'Twill be a halcyon time!

This sudden reminder of the town sets him thinking; he falls into a reverie, and muses on the career which he has now closed. He abandons himself to day-dreaming, and before him appear the shapes of the myriad characters that he has created. Here they come in multitudinous throng—kings and nobles, clowns, rustics, men-at-arms, strolling players, courtiers, lovers, ambitious statesmen, women of every class and temper of mind; dreamers of dreams, plotters of revenge, dull burgesses, shrewd fools—every type of humanity to be met with on the broad highway of life, together with fairies, ghosts, and witches, all clothed with parts and passions so that they are not merely with us but of us.

Yonder is *Imogen*, the heroine of *Cymbeline*, and the most tender and artless of all his wondrous characters. She is adorned with every virtue and every grace, *Fidele* in very sooth, yet persecuted to the verge of frenzy by the boastful folly of her husband, and the infamy of a villain. You see her garbed as a boy, lured deceitfully from her home, and in the extremity of her terror and fatigue happening upon the cave in which her gallant brothers dwell. Then, again, you see her, after her assumed death, restored to the arms of her husband, his faithlessness forgiven and all her sorrows and misery forgotten in the bliss of a joyful reconciliation.

Then comes that terrible figure of evil passion, remorseless intellect, and inexorable determination, *Lady Macbeth*, and a step behind, her faltering husband, the Thane of Cawdor. Strong in physical courage, he is morally weak, and is swept into the vortex of crime by the fierce ambition of his wife, who reminds us in her unconquerable will of Milton's Satan. The guilty pair come in gloom and pass in horror, while in the background lurk the grisly shapes of the "weird sisters," personifying the powers of evil that preside over the scene.

Tragedy is still with us. *Othello*, the Moor of Venice, the gentle *Desdemona*, and that prince of villains, *Iago*, now appear. You see the subtle and heartless Iago daily and hourly inflaming the Oriental nature of Othello to a passion of jealousy which eats away all his innate nobility and generosity. You perceive the agony of his soul as he slays his wife, only to learn that she is innocent, and that he has foully murdered the creature he loves best in all the world. With her life his life ends too.

Then come *Hamlet*, Prince of Denmark, and poor *Ophelia* to continue the dread tale of those who are

> "fallen out of high degree
> Into misery, and endeth wretchedly."

In Hamlet you see a man on whom fate has laid a solemn and tragical burden, altogether too great for him to bear. Young, pure, and noble, he would seem to be destined for the happiness of kings, but the apparition of his murdered father charges him with the awful burden of revenge; and the whole current of his life is thereafter changed. He is to do justice on his father's murderer, who is none other than his own uncle and step-father, the reigning king.

Hamlet is by nature a brooding student, a speculative thinker, and not a man of action. Puzzled and undecided, he dallies with his purpose, advances and recoils, tortures himself with doubts and fears, neglects his opportunities, and heaps bitter reproaches on himself for his indecision. Distraught by the travail of his soul, he slights the poor maid to whom he is betrothed, kills her father in a gust of anger, and drives her to suicide. He and all the leading characters of the play are involved in the coils of an inexorable fate from which there is no escape but in death.

*Romeo* and *Juliet*, who succeed, tell the fadeless story of a deep and passionate love that in the very springtime of ecstasy ends in the grave. The noble houses of which they are the joy and pride lead rival factions, but the love of Romeo and Juliet overleaps the bars and barriers of hereditary enmity and they unite themselves by a secret marriage. Romeo, taunted beyond endurance, slays a near kinsman of his wife's and is doomed to banishment, whereupon Juliet, to rid herself of the importunities of a lover favoured by her parents, drinks of a potion which gives her the aspect of death.

She is consigned to the tomb, and the sad news reaches Romeo, who possesses himself of poison and enters the vault to die by the side of his bride. When the last kiss has been pressed upon her cold lips, he drinks the fatal drug, eager for reunion with his lost love in another and better world. Then Juliet awakens from her trance, and seeing Romeo dead, unsheathes a dagger, and plunging it into her heart passes with him to that "undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns."

Lovers innumerable have feasted their souls for three centuries on the flowing beauty and melting sorrow of this exquisite idyll. It comes to them laden with the odours of a southern spring and rapturous with the songs of nightingales; it has been their golden book for centuries, and so it will remain.

Now *Cordelia* comes upon the scene leading by the hand *King Lear*, a character evolved by Shakespeare in the very heyday of his supreme powers. Cordelia is the very paragon of daughters, her filial love is deep and constant as the northern star, but she does not wear her heart on her sleeve, and she loathes the mercenary blandishments of her inhuman sisters. Lear has been called "the greatest sufferer" in all Shakespeare. He is full of passionate wilfulness, and his blind folly and

stubborn pride bring upon him the “whips and scorns” of an ingratitude which is sharper than a serpent's tooth.

**ROSALIND AND CELIA—A SCENE FROM “AS YOU LIKE IT.”**
**(*From the picture by Sir John Millais, R.A. By permission of Messrs. Henry Graves and Co.*)** To List

He is goaded to madness by the callous cruelty of his unnatural daughters, and when his wits leave him, the very elements seem to conspire against him; the tempest of his soul is reflected in the roar of the wind, the flash of the lightning, the crash of the thunder, and the deluge of rain. You see the white-haired old man, bereft of affection, power, and home, wandering amidst the midnight tempest, calling upon the sea to overwhelm the earth and destroy mankind, while his fool continues to jest, now wildly, now bitterly, but always with a sad remembrance of the happier past. No dramatist ever conceived a more pitiable scene. And when the storm has worn itself out, you see his sweet daughter coming again into his life like an angel of mercy, winding up his “untun'd and jarring senses,” and succouring his wounded spirit with the sacred balm of her love.

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And now with a burst of happy music the characters of Shakespeare's comedy crowd upon the scene—a glorious throng of men and women, grave, gay, lively, and severe. You see them involved in all sorts of humorous or pathetic complications,

misunderstandings, and misfortunes, but you know from the first that their sorrows and perplexities are but the frowns of an April day; the sun is behind even the blackest cloud, and long before the day closes, its bright beams will suffuse the whole scene and gladden the hearts of all who deserve the meed of joy.

Enter the characters of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that "strange and beautiful web woven delicately by a youthful poet's fancy. . . . It is as if threads of silken splendour were run together in its texture with a yarn of hempen homespun, and both these with lines of dewy gossamer and filaments drawn from the moon-beams." Here come *Oberon* and *Titania*, the King and Queen of Fairyland, and all their train led by *Puck*, the spirit of innocent mischief. You see the king and queen disagree like ordinary mortals, Oberon planning his frolicsome revenge, and Puck touching the eyelids of the sleeping queen with the charm that will make her fall in love with the first thing she sees upon waking.

Then you perceive the same charm working havoc in the loves of Athenian men and maids, and impelling the fairy queen to dote upon an absurd clown, *Bottom the Weaver*, who has been adorned by Oberon with an ass's head. The crude humours of the Athenian tradesmen, turned players for the nonce in order to divert their *Duke Theseus* and his Amazonian bride, make huge merriment; and when all the lovers are happily reconciled, the world is again given up to the fairy throng who delight to bestow their benisons upon the happy mortals who have won their favour.

We are now in Venice. Here upon the Rialto you see *Antonio* the merchant signing his "merry bond" with *Shylock* the Jew, who hates all Christians and especially Antonio, and has agreed to lend him money on condition that he yields a pound of flesh "nearest the heart," as the penalty of failure to repay the loan upon the specified day. Antonio has borrowed the money that his young friend *Bassanio* may have the means of equipping himself to woo *Portia*, the sweet, gracious, resourceful, and clever heiress of Belmont.

Bassanio's suit is successful, but like a passing bell in the midst of a wedding peal, comes the news that Antonio is bankrupt and that the Jew insists on exacting the dread penalty. Into the Doge's Court, where the cause is being tried, comes Portia, prettily disguised as a young doctor of laws, and her eloquence and ingenious pleading confound the Jew and save the life of her husband's friend. Then, with a touch of the most delightful comedy, the beautiful play ends in the luminous gardens of Belmont, where Antonio learns that his ships have come to port and he is still the rich *Merchant of Venice*.

*Sir John Falstaff*, the crown of all Shakespeare's comic invention, and, indeed, the most humorous figure of all English literature, now appears. You need no introduction to this huge, fat man with the bloodshot eyes, the bloated face, and the shaking frame. He is a haunter of taverns, a gross, self-indulgent, coarse-mouthed old sinner, ever ready to curse, lie, brag, and steal. He has no moral sense, and no self-respect. His friends, *Prince Hal*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page, make him the butt of their practical jokes, but, however nonplussed

he may be for the moment, he devises a way out of his embarrassment, usually by means of plentiful lies which crop up in his brain like mushrooms on a hotbed.

Who does not remember his account of the fight with the Prince and Poins on Gadshill? He says he has fought alone against two men; the next moment it is four, then seven, then eleven, then fourteen, and only an interruption prevents him from making it a whole army. When his fictions are exposed, he is not in the least abashed, nor does he lose his temper; he is the first to laugh. We ought to find Falstaff utterly repulsive, yet, strange to say, everybody has a kindly thought for him, and when, at last, he babbles of green fields and passes away "an it had been a christom child," only the sourest of moralists can refuse him the tribute of a smiling regret.

Again the scene shifts and we are in a mossy glade of the Forest of Arden, fleeting "the time carelessly, as they did in the Golden World," in company with the banished *Duke* and his exiled nobles. We listen to the moralizing of the deposed Prince, the easy cynicisms of the melancholy *Jaques*, and the wise-foolish sallies of *Touchstone* as he mocks at the follies of mankind. Then we see two beautiful visions appear amidst the greenery, the one garbed as a shepherd, the other clad as a country maiden. Half a glance reveals them as princesses in disguise. At once we know them as *Rosalind* and *Celia*, and recall the exquisite story of their rustic adventures which end with wedding bells, wrongs righted, misdeeds forgiven, sins atoned for, and truth and loyalty rewarded.

Follows the shrew *Katharina*, wilful and violent of temper, and with her *Petruchio* bent on taming her by sheer masculine force. No need to relate the noisy, bustling, almost farcical story which ends in the shrew's meek submission. Henceforth she is ready to place her hand beneath her husband's foot, if it should "do him ease"—a temper of mind wholly out of consonance with the ideals of the modern woman.

**The Shakespeare Bust.**
**(*In the Parish Church, Stratford-on-Avon.*)** To List

A group of characters from *Twelfth Night* now appears to remind us of the abounding mirth and delicate charm of that poetical romance. We recognize as they pass by, *Viola*, a very violet drenched in dew; *Orsino*, the duke to whom “she never told her love;” *Olivia*, the countess whom, as Orsino's page, Viola woos in his stead; *Malvolio*, the pompous, conceited, “yellow-legged stork,” who is so cruelly deceived and disillusioned; and the topers and drolls who supply the rollicking humour.

Room for *Beatrice* and her *Benedick* with their *Much Ado About Nothing*—he, a woman-hater, open and avowed; she My Lady Disdain, most witty of maidens, satirical of temper, mocking of tongue, ever eager for the fence and sword-play of wordy combat; both clever, both worldly-wise, yet both tricked into matrimony by the very shallowest of devices, and, strange to say, happy ever afterwards. Room, too, for beautiful, wronged *Hero*, repudiated at the altar by her deceived lover, and only

restored to her *Claudio's* arms after her simulated death and his bitter repentance. Room, too, for the immortal *Dogberry* and *Verges*, types of the ignorant and blundering "jacks in office," who, like the poor, are always with us.

The gentle and long-suffering *Hermione*, victim of *Leontes'* unreasoning jealousy, recalls *The Winter's Tale*. When her imprisonment ends in reported death, you see her daughter, *Perdita*, "queen of curds and cream," most dainty and joyous of shepherdesses, winning the heart of the gallant young *Florizel*, the Prince of Bohemia, but scorned for her ignoble birth by the king, his father. Then when the hour of reconciliation draws nigh a curtain is drawn, and Hermione, as a statue, is revealed to the eyes of her remorseful husband. The statue comes to life, Hermione forgives and forgets, and in joyful reunion the happy vision fades away.

The stately duke *Prospero*, banished from his kingdom to a lonely isle where he is lord of spirits and master of enchantments, now appears with his sweet and innocent daughter *Miranda*. The satyr-like shape of *Caliban*, half-brute, half-demon, lurks by him, while above him circles the "delicate *Ariel*" who does his bidding out of grateful love. By his wizardry a ship containing his enemies and *Ferdinand*, son of the King of Naples, is wrecked on the isle. Ferdinand and Miranda "exchange eyes" at their first meeting, and the story ends as Prospero relinquishes his magical powers, dismisses his airy servitors, and sets sail for his dukedom, where the nuptials of Miranda and Ferdinand are to be celebrated.

Not yet has the long procession of Shakespeare's characters drawn to a close. The heroes and heroines of his historical and Roman plays, and hundreds of others, must pass by unnoticed, and when the last figure has departed, we are fain to say with a great modern critic, "To Shakespeare the intellect of the world, speaking in divers accents, applies with one accord his own words, 'How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in apprehension how like a god!'"

# Chapter XXVII.

## FRANCIS BACON.

"*If parts allure thee, think how Bacon shined,*
*The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind!*"—Pope.

It is an April day in the year of our Lord 1621. The Lords' Chamber of the High Court of Parliament is thronged with expectant peers, but the noble assembly sits silent and constrained awaiting a scene which is as humiliating as it is rare. The Lord Chancellor of England, the highest legal luminary of the kingdom, the keeper of the king's conscience, the guardian of a nation's justice, rises in his place to plead guilty to twenty-three charges of bribery and to throw himself upon the mercy of the House. He is racked with bodily and mental anguish; he has exerted all the subtlety of his great mind to avert the catastrophe, but he now recognizes that further defence is impossible. "My Lords," he cries, "I beseech you to be merciful to a broken reed!" He pleads in vain; the Lords are obdurate, and as he leaves the chamber with bowed head and agonized mind, he is fain to say with Wolsey,—

"Farewell! a long farewell to all my greatness!
This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope; to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
And,—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening,—nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do."

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With the story of Francis Bacon, his rise to the highest legal office in the State, his disgrace, his deprivation, his banishment from court, and his exclusion from Parliament, our pageant need not concern itself. It is not Bacon, the Lord Chancellor, with whom we have to deal, but Bacon, the great English writer and the philosophic genius who first brought into due prominence the principles on which our modern science is founded.

Even while he was struggling for promotion he frequently desired to quit the cock-pit of intrigue, chicane, manœuvre, and vain contention for the calm retreats of literary exercise and philosophic meditation. Fifteen years before the painful scene which we have just witnessed, he wrote to Sir T. Bodley: "I do confess, since I was of any understanding, my mind hath in effect been absent from that I have done; and in absence are many errors which I do willingly acknowledge, and amongst the

rest this great one that led the rest: that knowing myself by inward calling to be fitter to hold a book than to play a part, I have led my life in civil causes, for which I was not very fit by nature, and more unfit by the preoccupation of my mind."

At the moment of writing this letter the "inward calling" had not been heard in vain. He was even then stealing hours from the law courts and council chamber in which to write those *Essays* which are his best known contribution to our literature. In 1597 he published ten of them; in 1612 he reprinted them and increased them to thirty-eight; and finally, four years after his disgrace, he issued them again, "newly written" and now fifty-eight in number.

Bacon was the father of the English essay. He derived the title from the works of Montaigne, whom he mentions in the first essay, but he borrowed nothing else. The "Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall," are wholly and entirely his own, the most original of all his writings. In them he goes a-harvesting in his own fields, and fills for us a granary of practical wisdom garnered with his own hands. His *Essays* are the outcome of personal observation and experience; he takes nothing on trust, but reasons out for himself all his conclusions.

So brief, suggestive, pithy, and packed with thought are they, that they resemble the proverbs in which men have delighted since the days of Solomon. They are set down without any attempt at ornament—"No flowers, by request,"—and they go to the heart of the matter with a quick thrust like the stiletto of an accomplished assassin.

A work so original and so individual in character, so stamped with genius on every page, was bound to achieve speedy and enduring popularity. It has been well said that though the *Essays* "may be read from beginning to end in a few hours, yet, after the twentieth perusal, one seldom fails to remark something overlooked before." This, indeed, is a characteristic of all Bacon's writings; they feed our thoughts with inexhaustible food, and by the strength which they impart, stimulate us to a wider outlook on life and its problems.

Many sayings from the *Essays* have become "household words." He who comes to them for the first time appreciates the sentiment of the man who grumbled that *Hamlet* was so full of quotations. Take the following, chosen almost at random:—

> "What is truth, said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer."
>
> "It is heaven upon earth to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth."
>
> "Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark."
>
> "Revenge is a kind of wild justice."
>
> "He that hath a wife and children, hath given hostages to fortune."
>
> "He was reputed one of the wise men that made answer to the question, when a young man should marry, 'A young man, not yet; an elder man, not at all.'"
>
> "If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world."

> “Money is like muck, not good except it be spread.”
>
> “The remedy is worse than the disease.”
>
> “A crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures.”
>
> “A man that is young in years may be old in hours, if he have lost no time.”
>
> “God Almighty first planted a garden; and, indeed, it is the purest of all pleasures.”
>
> “Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability.”
>
> “Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider.”
>
> “Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.”
>
> “Knowledge is power.”

Truly, Bacon was justified in describing the *Essays* as “of a nature whereof much should be found in experience and little in books; so that they should be neither repetitions nor fancies.” Amply, too, has his hope been fulfilled that they should “come home to men's business and bosoms.”

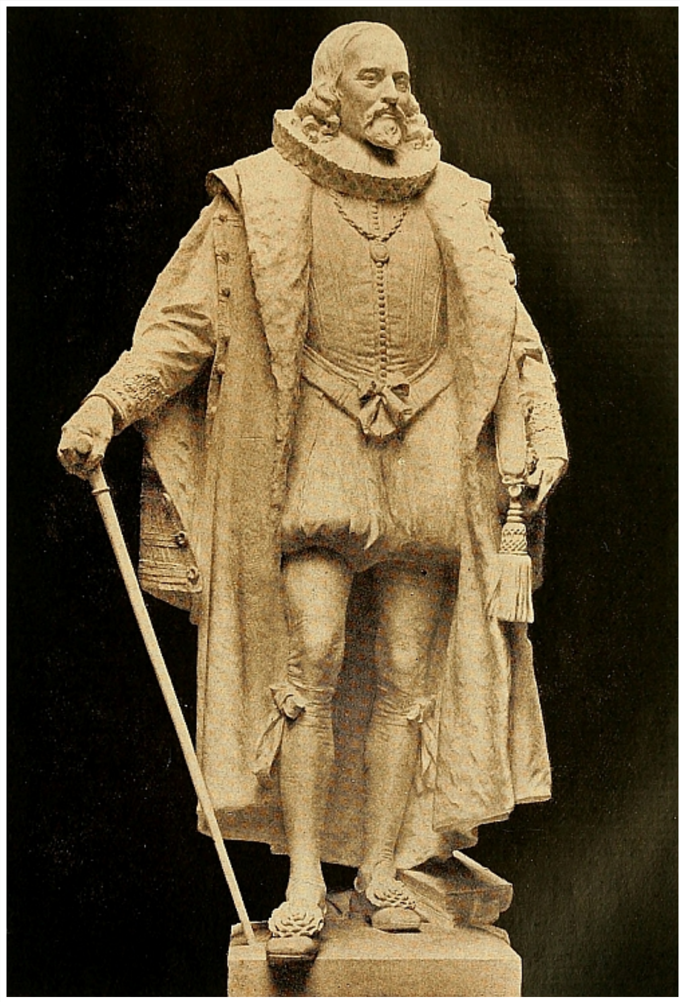
It is, however, upon his two great philosophic and scientific works that his fame chiefly rests. In 1605 his “Advancement of Learning” appeared, and in 1620 the “Novum Organum,” or New Instrument of Learning. Both these books are written with such eloquence and power that they are rightly ranked as pure literature.

As a lad of sixteen at Trinity College, Cambridge, he “fell into a dislike of the philosophy of Aristotle; not for the worthlessness of the author, to whom he would ever ascribe all high attributes, but for the unfruitfulness of the way.” The old schoolmen juggled with “words, words, words,” and strove vainly to make them yield new knowledge. With all their subtlety and ingenuity they produced nothing of practical utility; they were by reason of their method “incapable of producing works which might promote the well-being of men.” Nor did they think this their office; speculation was their business, not the discovery of profitable truth. All this Bacon sets forth in his “Advancement of Learning.”

The New Instrument which he proffers is the substitution of observation and experiment for the old barren method. For the discovery of truth, men must go directly to Nature and observe her processes, or question her by experiment. Thus, suppose a man sets himself to consider the effects of heat upon substances. Instead of laying down certain fundamental propositions about the nature and composition of bodies, and drawing deductions from them, Bacon would have a man take as many bodies of different materials as he could get, apply heat to them, and note the result. If he tried a sufficient number of them, and discovered that they all expanded when heat was applied to them, he would be entitled to lay down the general law that “heat expands bodies.”

By insisting on patient observation and experiment as the only rational method of discovering physical truth, Bacon taught men “the art of inventing arts.” He turned men from the profitless work of spinning cobwebs of the brain to examinations of

the world about them, and by so doing laid the foundations of our modern science. Thus he "gave to the human mind a direction which it shall retain for ages."



FRANCIS BACON, BARON VERULAM AND VISCOUNT ST. ALBANS. To List

Bacon's other philosophical works and his fragmentary "History of Henry the Seventh" must go unnoticed, but we cannot pass by thus cavalierly his "New Atlantis." It is a romance of a feigned commonwealth, after the manner of More's "Utopia," but painfully didactic, though not without considerable interest. Bacon's "New Atlantis," so called in contrast with the great Atlantis which is identified with the American continent, was discovered by a ship sailing from Peru to China, but driven out of its course by contrary winds.

When the food was consumed, and the sailors were in despair, they descried on the horizon the dim outline of an island which they afterwards learned was Bensalem. Sailing towards it with all speed, they found themselves in the port of a

fair city, and were there introduced to the refined Christian inhabitants, who received them courteously, and gave them shelter in the Strangers' House. They subsequently learned that the Bensalemites, in order to protect themselves from the evil communications of a corrupt world, forbade strangers to remain in the island unless they were prepared to become citizens, and to eschew all direct commerce with other nations.

The pride and glory of this island was a huge and completely equipped Temple of Learning, known as Solomon's House. The professors of this ideal college were enabled to visit other countries from time to time, for the purpose of keeping themselves abreast of modern developments in the arts and sciences. They travelled abroad in disguise, and secretly brought back with them the discoveries and inventions of other nations.

A visit to Solomon's House revealed great and beautiful buildings, occupied by students all engaged in scientific studies directed to the happiness and prosperity of the islanders. The study and culture of food-fishes was a particular branch of the work, and so was the discovery of mineral springs with curative waters. Cold storage was practised, and in what were called “chambers of health” the air was impregnated with odours which banished disease. Arboriculture, fruit-culture, and horticulture were scientifically practised in botanical gardens and on experimental farms, and zoology was studied in zoological gardens. Vivisection was by no means discouraged.

There were factories in which linen, paper, silks, velvets, dyes, and stuffs were produced, and there were laboratories for the study of light, heat, sound, and motion. Geological specimens were collected and diligently examined, and in the “house of motion” there were models of all kinds of boats, including submarines as well as flying machines which anticipated the aeroplane.

In another department, engines of war were invented, and explosives made. One house was specially set apart for the study of mathematics and geometry, and was furnished with instruments of great precision. On the mountains there were astronomical and meteorological observatories from which weather forecasts were issued. Elsewhere, the caves were investigated, and mines were sunk for the discovery of new metals.

In one great gallery there were carefully-arranged specimens of every art known to the world. This gallery was adorned with busts of all the great inventors of the arts, such as music, letters, printing, and so forth. There was even a memorial to the discoverer of sugar!

In this vision of Solomon's House we have a clear anticipation of the museums and technical schools of our own day. Bacon devised his “New Atlantis” to illustrate the use of his New Instrument of Learning, and to show the wonderful advances which would accrue from that observation and experiment by which alone Nature may be forced to yield her secrets. “For,” as Bacon truly observes,

> “man is but the servant and interpreter of nature; what he does and what he knows is only what he has observed of nature's order in fact or in thought; beyond this he knows nothing, and can do nothing. For the chain of causes cannot by any force be loosed or broken, nor can nature be commanded except by being obeyed. And so these twin objects, human Knowledge and human Power, do really meet in one; and it is from ignorance of causes that operation fails. And all depends on keeping the eye steadily fixed upon the facts of nature, and so receiving their images simply as they are.”

Bacon has been deservedly called “the brightest, richest, largest mind but one in the age which had seen Shakespeare and his fellows.” It has, indeed, been left for certain moderns to identify Shakespeare with Bacon, and to extinguish the light of the one in order to intensify the glory of the other. The fantastic theory that Bacon wrote the plays attributed to Shakespeare is accepted by no Elizabethan scholar of repute, and is hopelessly negatived by the character of the verse ascribed with authority to Bacon himself.

# Chapter XXVIII.

## THE CAVALIER POETS.

> “*A poet without love were a physical and metaphysical impossibility.*”
>
> CARLYLE.

THE death of Ben Jonson in the year 1637 marks an epoch in the story of our literature. A bookish man, a learned scholar, massive and painstaking, he wore Shakespeare's mantle, but could not wield his magic staff. He revivified Rome on the English stage with a wealth of exact and scrupulous detail, but nowhere do we find the warm, living, breathing, essential humanity of his great contemporary. He satirized the life of his own time with the utmost realism; but his characters are never much more than puppets: the strings that move them are plainly visible.

He appears in our pageant as the commanding figure of the Elizabethan drama in the period of its rapid decline. Five years after his death the theatres were closed, and the drama almost ceased until the Restoration in 1660. Jonson's plays are not seen upon the modern stage, and are now only read by students. He is, however, gratefully remembered for his charming and delicate lyrics, such as the *Hymn to Diana*, *Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes*, and *See the Chariot at hand here of Love*. No English anthology is complete without them. Lovers of Shakespeare delight to recall his intimate, though by no means adoring, friendship with the “Sweet Swan of Avon”—“I loved the man,” he said, “and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest and of an open and free nature.”

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The glory of the Elizabethan drama died with Jonson; the “carnival display” of the intense and impassioned life of that marvellous era departed with him never to return. The New Learning and the New Worship came to England hand in hand, but Shakespeare and his fellows were but little touched by the religious movements of their time; they reflected the gaiety, colour, light, music, youthful ardour, and spontaneity of the Renaissance spring tide. But year by year the temper of the nation was changing. The doctrines of the Reformation were gripping large

numbers of the people, and their thoughts and energies were becoming more and more enthralled by questions of religious reform and political theory. The new “Authorized Version of the Bible” became the daily literature of the people; the “great hereafter” was their most ardent concern, and that large enjoyment of life which was the first fruits of the New Learning became “sicklied o'er” with the pale cast of austere thought.

An arbitrary and obstinate king sat upon the throne, a man who stood upon the old ways, and strove to exert a personal sovereignty which had outlived its age. In a day when men were “searching the Scriptures,” when every institution in Church and State was being brought to the bar of Biblical trial, when independence of judgment and direct personal responsibility to God were openly asserted, such doctrines of the old state-craft as the “Divine right of kings to do wrong” was bound to provoke an opposition that could not fail to grow daily in bitterness and intensity.

Deep and irreconcilable differences began to divide the nation, and two great parties arose: the one, dominated by Old Testament ideals, doggedly and often fanatically insistent on a rigid severity of morals, drastic reform in Church and State, and the preservation of the ancient liberties of the realm; the other, favouring a more tolerant rule of life, staunchly supporting a strong monarchy, and firmly attached to the Church of England, which then, as now, occupied a middle position in matters of faith and practice between the old authority and the new freedom.

To the Puritan this world was a vale of sin and tears, a highway of thorns and briers, snares and pitfalls, along which no man might travel unscathed, yet by the grace of God might so order his going as to win an eternal reward. The Cavalier, on the other hand, held that this earth was no gloomy place of pilgrimage, but a potential garden of happiness; in his philosophy the pleasures of the senses were not to be condemned and despised, but enjoyed to the full.

Such was the broad distinction between the two parties now rapidly developing antipathies which could only be wiped out by effusion of blood. The diverse temperaments of the two schools of thought revealed themselves not merely in opinion, but in attire and demeanour. The Cavalier, with his long, curling locks, his gay dress, his graceful and elegant bearing, his frank enjoyment of the pleasures of life, looked upon the world through the rainbow-tinted glasses of his Elizabethan forbears. The Puritan, with his close-cropped head, his severely plain and sad-coloured garments, his square-toed shoes, his solemn visage, and his Biblical phraseology, regarded the pursuit of pleasure as the most dangerous and soul-destroying of all snares.

We must not, however, suppose that all Cavaliers were gay and immoral, and that all Puritans were sad and ascetic. In the ranks of both parties there was room for every variety of opinion and every shade of thought. There were high-minded Royalists of genuine piety and of almost Puritanical strictness of life; and there were Puritans who had an Elizabethan sense of form and colour and music, and were by no means averse from sensuous delights. Society on the eve of the Civil War was

very complex and many-sided, and this was clearly reflected in the literature of the time.

Anon we shall see the high seriousness and moral sense of the Puritanism mingling with the Renaissance love of beauty in the majestic figure of John Milton. The Cavalier temperament is best illustrated in the works of ROBERT HERRICK, a Devonshire vicar, who in the days of his youth had heard the chimes at midnight with Ben Jonson at the Mermaid Tavern. No high seriousness touches him, no storms of passion overwhelm him, no gloomy sense of sin weighs him down. He loves ease, creature comforts, warm sunshine, the songs of birds, the scent of roses, the blushing cheeks, the flashing eyes, and the rosy lips of fair women. *Carpe diem* is his motto. The day of life is short; let us snatch every pleasure from it before the shadows fall. "Come," he sings to Corinna,

"Come, let us go while we are in our prime,
And take the harmless folly of the time!
We shall grow old apace, and die
Before we know our liberty.
Our life is short; and our days run
As fast away as does the sun;

"And as a vapour, or a drop of rain
Once lost, can ne'er be found again:
So when or you or I are made
A fable, song, or fleeting shade;
All love, all liking, all delight
Lies drowned with us in endless night.
Then while time serves, and we are but decaying,
Come, my Corinna! Come, let's go a-maying!"

Civil war will rage, the Puritans will gain the upper hand, the king will lose his head, country sports and Christmas revels will be denounced; it will almost be a sin to eat a mince pie; nevertheless this gay singing bird will not be frowned into silence:—

"I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers,
Of April, May, of June, and July flowers;
I sing of Maypoles, hock-carts, wassails, wakes,
Of bridegrooms, brides, and of their bridal cakes."

Glad, sweet, and spontaneous, prince of lyrists, Herrick goes piping through the gloom, and with him is a gallant company of gentlemen, who write "with ease" and sometimes triumphantly of love and war and honour, and the thousand trifles of gay court life. COLONEL LOVELACE is the best graced of them all, and with the first and last verse of his unrivalled *To Althea from Prison* we take our leave of the Cavalier poets.

"When Love with unconfinèd wings
Hovers within my gates,
And my divine Althea brings
To whisper at the grates;
While I lie tangled in her hair
And fettered to her eye,
The birds that wanton in the air
Know no such liberty. . . .

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

# Chapter XXIX

## JOHN MILTON.

"*God-gifted organ voice of England*
*Milton, a name to resound for ages.*"—Tennyson.

The scene opens in the library of John Milton, scrivener, at the sign of the "Spread Eagle," Bread Street, Cheapside, in the city of London. The apartment is plainly furnished, but everything in it bears the stamp of sober comfort and solid prosperity. Books crowd the shelves, and in a recess you see the gilded pipes of an organ. Clearly the master of this house is a man of substance, and equally clearly he is a man of refined tastes. The volume of music which stands open on the desk of the organ bears his name.

Seated at a lamp-lighted table, a boy of twelve years of age is working at his school exercises with a passionate intentness that at once attracts your attention. Hour after hour he labours with unflagging zeal, and only when the hour of midnight clangs out from the steeples of half a score city churches does he rise from his task.

As he closes his books and places them in his satchel ready for to-morrow's school, observe him well. You will search long and far before you find such another face in the whole realm. The forehead is broad and high, the hair long and soft, and of a light-brown colour, the nose finely modelled, the mouth like Cupid's bow. The beauty and delicacy of his features are almost feminine, yet there is no trace of weakness in the whole countenance. There is a sweet serenity in his every aspect; unmistakable genius shines in his eyes; one sees at a glance that he lives in a world of high thoughts and pure resolves. Truly a boy marked out by nature for a great future.

What will he become? Will he, as his parents and relatives desire, and as he himself proposes, consecrate his body, soul, and spirit to the Altar? Will he one day wear the mitre of an archbishop, and guide the counsels of his Church with the inspired wisdom and boundless sympathy of a great heart and a majestic mind? England is even now yearning for such a man, and if he should appear in due season, what crimes and miseries the nation will be spared! No, the boy you now see is not destined for the Church. Fate has willed it otherwise. He has been set apart as the High Priest of Sacred Song—

"He that rode sublime
Upon the seraph wings of ecstasy,
The secrets of the abyss to spy.
He passed the flaming bounds of Place and Time:

The living Throne, the sapphire-blaze,
Where Angels tremble, while they gaze."

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JOHN MILTON was born three years before Shakespeare betook himself to the retirement of New Place, Stratford-on-Avon. He was most fortunate in his parents. His father was a lover of poetry and music, and early taught his son to play the organ and to sing tunefully. In the days of his sore affliction these accomplishments afforded him the most exquisite comfort and delight.

Young Milton's education was zealously cared for. A Scottish minister, afterwards a well-known Presbyterian divine, was his private tutor, and the boy speedily demonstrated great capacity, remarkable industry, and high literary promise. It is said that he wrote verse at ten years of age, and that Spenser's *Faery Queene* was his favourite book. In his twelfth year he was sent to St. Paul's School, and so great was his zeal for study that he seldom left his studies until midnight. This long and late poring over books brought on severe headaches, and, no doubt, injured his eyesight. His description of John the Baptist's youth is a faithful picture of his own:—

"When I was a child, no childish play
To me was pleasing; all my mind was set
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
What might be public good; myself I thought
Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
And righteous things."

In his seventeenth year Milton was sent to Christ's College, Cambridge, where his rooms on the first floor of the western staircase on the north side of the great court are still pointed out. His beauty of face, his slender figure, and refined manners won him the nickname of "The Lady of Christ's." Nevertheless he was a good fencer, and thought himself a "match for any one." Though highly respected by his fellows for his lofty and austere character, he quarrelled with his tutor, and was "sent down" for a few weeks. Some writers tell us that he was actually flogged! He finally left Cambridge as a Master of Arts in his twenty-fourth year.

During his residence in college Milton traversed vast fields of Greek and Latin literature, and simultaneously read the best Hebrew, French, Spanish, Italian, and Old English authors. He wrote Latin and Italian verse of remarkable merit, and had a wide knowledge of music, mathematics, and theology. He was the most learned man in England for his years. Before he left college he had abandoned all idea of becoming a priest. "He who would take orders," he wrote, "must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal. . . . I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing."

His career as an English poet had already begun. He had already written several sonnets, including the glorious sonnet to Shakespeare, and his noble *Ode to the Nativity*. In the beautiful measure and splendid harmony of this inspired hymn he

first invoked “the heavenly Muse,” and struck these sonorous chords which swell “like the long roll of sounding seas” in the great poems of his maturer years:—

> “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 bass of heaven's deep organ blow;
> And with your ninefold harmony
> Make up full consort to the angelic symphony.”

Milton's father was a wealthy man, and there was no pecuniary reason why his son should hastily decide upon a profession. He, therefore, retired to his father's beautiful country house at Horton, a village of Buckinghamshire, not far from Windsor Castle. Here, amidst the fields and woods, he lived “in the still air of delightful studies,” and began to dream of a great theme on which to exercise his pen. No man ever prepared himself for the task so nobly and with such singleness of aim. He believed that great poetry could only flow from a great soul; he who would write a great poem must live a great poem; his thoughts must be lofty, his life pure, his aims unselfish; he must live for ever in his “great Taskmaster's eye.”

> “Mortals that would follow me,
> Love Virtue: she alone is free.
> She can teach ye how to climb
> Higher than the sphery chime.”

While undecided on the theme of the projected great poem, he exercised himself in writing two pieces which contrast the moods typical of the two temperaments which met and conjoined in him—the joy and beauty of the Renaissance, and the earnestness and melancholy of the Reformation.

In the first of these poems, *L'Allegro*, he depicts the cheerful man, and draws his idyllic pictures of rustic life from the surroundings of his Buckinghamshire home. He bids Melancholy flee, and leave him to enjoy the sweet May breezes, the blue violets, and the fresh roses washed in dew. Then he invokes Euphrosyne, by men called “heart-easing Mirth.” He is admitted of her “crew.” In the morning he is to be waked by the song of the lark and the crow of the cock, and he is to wander out on the hillside and see,

> “Right against the eastern gate,
> Where the great sun begins his state,
> Robed in flames and amber light,
> The clouds in thousand liveries dight.”

There he will hear the ploughman whistling in the furrow, the milkman singing blithe, the mower whetting his scythe, and the shepherd telling his tale, “under the hawthorn in the dale.” Then his eye will delight in the beauty of the landscape, in the lawns and fallows, the hills, the clouds, the meadows, brooks, and rivers. Above the trees he sees the towers and battlements of a lordly dwelling,

> “Where perhaps some beauty lies
> The cynosure of neighbouring eyes.”

He also sees the cottage homes, in which happy peasants sit at meat before going forth to the labour of the fields, and pictures their joy,

> “When the merry bells ring round,
> And the jocund rebecks sound
> To many a youth and many a maid,
> Dancing in the chequered shade,
> And young and old come forth to play
> On a sunshine holy-day.”

Evening falls, and the cheerful man and his rustic friends gather round the hearth, telling wondrous tales of Queen Mab and Robin Goodfellow.

> “Thus done the tales, to bed they creep,
> By whispering winds soon lulled asleep.”

Next the cheerful man betakes himself to the town, where he delights in the “high triumphs” of the tournament, and sees knights and barons engaged in mimic combat to win the smiles of those

> “whose bright eyes
> Rain influence, and judge the prize
> Of wit or arms, while both contend
> To win her grace whom all commend.”

Wedding feasts, with their attendant revelry, masque and antique pageantry, give him pleasure, and so does the “well-trod stage,” especially—

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

And then, the day of joy at an end, he laps himself “in soft Lydian airs married to immortal verse,” and to the strains of melting music sinks to slumber.

**L'Allegro.**
**(*From the painting by C. W. Cope, R.A.*)** To List

Such are the harmless and innocent delights which the world affords to the cheerful man. *L'Allegro*, we observe, gives a picture of Elizabeth's England purged of grossness, refined and idealized by the moral alchemy of Milton's Puritanism.

In *Il Penseroso* he banishes “vain deluding joys and idle follies,” and hails the goddess “sage and holy,” “divinest Melancholy.” The man disposed to gentle sadness will also wander into the country, but by night, when the world is still and solemn, and the stars are shining. His companion shall be a “pensive nun, devout and pure,” wearing “a robe of darkest grain,” whose rapt soul holds commerce with the skies. He will not feast but fast; he will withdraw himself from men to commune with the “cherub Contemplation,” and to hear the nightingale “most musical and most melancholy” singing her even-song.

“If the air will not permit,” he retires to his room in the gloaming, and listens to the crickets on the hearth, or ascends to some high, lonely tower, and by the light of his lamp reads the great books of the mighty dead, and feeds his mind on the deep, solemn thoughts of Plato, the “gorgeous tragedy” of Homer, the tales of Chaucer, the “enchantments drear” of Spenser.

In the daytime he walks in groves as dark as twilight, and wanders beside lonely brooks until the low murmur of the stream and the drowsy hum of the bees lull him to sleep.

> “But let my due feet never fail
> To walk the studious cloisters pale,
> And love the high-embowèd roof
> With antique pillars massy proof,
> And storied windows richly dight,
> Casting a dim religious light;
> There let the pealing organ blow,
> To the full-voicèd quire below,
> In service high and anthems clear,
> As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
> Dissolve me into ecstasies,
> And bring all heaven before mine eyes.”

At last, when he is old and weary, he bids farewell to the world, and retires to a peaceful hermitage, where he studies the stars on high, and the herbs that grow around him—

> “Till old experience do attain
> To something like prophetic strain.”

*Il Penseroso* thus reveals the high seriousness and earnestness of the Puritan, touched, however, with that love of art and letters which characterized the best minds of the Elizabethan age. As yet it was doubtful whether the Renaissance or the Reformation was the more strongly to colour Milton's life and writings.

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A year or two later he was requested by his friend Henry Lawes to write a masque, such as Ben Jonson had frequently composed for the court of King James. These spectacles, in which opportunities were afforded for the recitation of poetry, the singing of songs, dancing, and display of rich costumes, were borrowed from Italy, and were extremely popular in Renaissance England. Milton complied with the request, and wrote his *Comus*, which was performed on Michaelmas night in the year 1634 in the great hall of Ludlow Castle by the family of the Earl of Bridgewater. It is said that Milton himself played a part. Lawes wrote the music.

*Comus* was intended for the entertainment of men and women in their hours of relaxation, but it contained no mirth, no characterization, and no humour, qualities in which Milton was ever deficient. Though Cavalier in form, it was essentially a Puritan revel; its rich, varied, and gleaming texture was interwoven with the sober strands of a high moral purpose. Milton set out to show that purity and innocence

can thread the darkest thickets and most tangled ways of life unharmed and invincible.

> "So dear to heaven is saintly chastity,
> That when a soul is found sincerely so,
> A thousand liveried angels lackey her."

The story of the masque is soon told. Within an "ominous" wood lives Comus, an even greater magician than his mother Circe. The drugged wine of his cup does not wholly turn those who drink it into brutish beasts, but partially transforms them, so that they do not perceive their foul disfigurement, and are fain to boast themselves more comely than before. In the "sensual sty" of his court there lives a rout of monsters who do his bidding. When darkness falls they sally forth for—

> "Midnight shout and revelry,
> Tipsy dance and jollity."

While the customary riot is at its height, Comus bids them break off. By his magic he perceives "some chaste footing near about." He determines to make the stranger join his hideous band; he bids his followers hide themselves, and dons the dress of a simple villager. A lady now appears, and explains her predicament. She is being escorted through the perilous wood by her brothers, but they have left her to seek berries and cooling fruits for her refreshment, and have bidden her await their return.

Hearing the noise of revelry, she has hurried to this spot in the hope that one of the merry-makers will direct her to a place of safety. She knows no fear, for "pure-eyed Faith and white-handed Hope" are her guardian angels. She cannot shout to her brothers, but she can sing, and so indicate her whereabouts. Then follows a beautiful song which captivates Comus, who covets her as his queen. He comes forward, learns her story, offers his guidance, and leads her towards his foul abode.

**CIRCE, THE MOTHER OF COMUS.**
**(*From the picture by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. Photo by F. Hollyer.*)** To List

The guardian spirit who hovers over the scene now informs the brothers of their sister's danger, and they hasten to the palace of Comus, where they discover her seated in a magic chair from which she cannot rise. Comus is about to force her to drink the drugged wine, when the brothers with swords drawn burst into the hall. They wrest the bowl from the magician's hands, and dash it to the ground. The crowd of semi-wolves, boars, hogs, and goats in the train of Comus attack them, but are easily driven off. Then it is seen that the magician has escaped, taking with him his magic wand.

The lady sits fixed and motionless in the magic chair, and none can release her. Then the attendant spirit remembers that Sabrina, “that with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream,” possesses a charm which “can thaw the numbing spell.” So the goddess is invoked in an exquisite song.

“Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen and save!”

The goddess does listen. Attended by her nymphs she appears and sprinkles drops of Severn water on the lady's finger-tips, and lays her cool hand upon the

magic chair. Instantly the spell is broken, and the maiden is free.

Then the attendant spirit bids the young people fly from the enchanted palace, and informs them that they are in the neighbourhood of their father's castle. Their friends have already assembled, and are ready to greet their home-coming with song and dance.

The scene changes to Ludlow Castle. As the brothers and the lady enter, loud shouts of rejoicing are heard. The shepherds and milkmaids sing happy songs and dance merry country dances. Finally, as the children are clasped in their parents' arms, the attendant spirit, freed from servitude, like Prospero's Ariel, points the virtuous moral of the play.

Upon this theme Milton lavished all the resources of his youthful heart and mind. *Comus* abounds in beauties. The moral thoughts and descriptive passages are couched in blank verse of wondrous music, and the lyrics are almost unsurpassed. Hereafter the strain of his verse will be more august and sustained, but he will never write better poetry.

One more exercise of his youthful genius must detain us. Shortly before his stay at Horton came to an end he wrote *Lycidas*—his lament on the death of a close and dear college friend, Edward King, who was drowned when crossing over to Ireland. The friends are disguised as shepherds after the old familiar pastoral manner, and the elegy is full of those classical allusions which aroused the ready wrath of Dr. Samuel Johnson. Nevertheless, it contains outbursts of deep natural feeling, and lines of perfect and ever-haunting beauty. Tennyson held that *Lycidas* was the touchstone of poetic taste. One passage, an attack on the Church of England, alone mars its perfection, and only deserves mention because it indicates the growth of that controversial temper which was soon to dominate the poet's mind.

So closes the Horton period—years to be counted on the fingers of one hand, but each of them adorned with the jewelled splendour of an immortal song.

# Chapter XXX.

## PARADISE LOST.

> "*Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart:*
> *So did'st thou travel on life's common way*
> *In cheerful godliness.*"—WORDSWORTH.

ONE year after the publication of *Lycidas*, Milton went on his travels. Sir Henry Wotton, the Provost of Eton, a near neighbour at Horton, gave him the best of advice—to keep his thoughts shut up and his eyes open—and his father provided adequate funds. Thus equipped, he passed through Paris to Italy, the land of sunshine, science, and beauty, where his lofty character, prepossessing appearance, and high literary culture ensured him a most favourable reception. He made the acquaintance of Grotius and Galileo, sought the society of scholars, men of letters, and men of the world, heard the works of the best musicians, steeped himself in the artistic beauties of Florence and Rome, and all the while kept himself "unspotted from the world."

There was a purpose in every deliberate act of Milton's life, and the purpose of his travels was to plume his wings "for a flight." The mystic and heroic figure of Arthur was attracting him strongly, and had events proved propitious, Tennyson might have been anticipated by a Miltonic "Idylls of the King."

When the Revolution began to threaten, Milton returned to England, convinced, as he himself tells us, that it was a shame for him to spend his life in learned and intellectual culture abroad while his fellow-countrymen were fighting for liberty at home. From the day of his return to the Restoration in 1660 he deliberately set aside his cherished ambitions and pursuits. He flung himself fiercely into the fray, and wielded his pen in defence of Puritan principles with the ruthless vigour of an Ironside. Years that might have been given to the high and gracious service of poesy were devoted to "hoarse disputes" in which he was not a whit behind his fellows in ferocity and rancour, though occasionally he rose to such passages of noble and earnest eloquence as the following vision of England:—

> "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam."

His two most important prose works of this period were "The Tractate of Education," and " Areopagitica," a burning plea for the liberty of the press, which "will last as long as there are writers and readers of books."

**Milton at Chalfont.**
**(*From the picture by A. L. Vernon. By permission of Mr. Franz Hanfstaengl.*)** To List

In the year that John Hampden fell mortally wounded at Chalgrove Field, Milton went down into Oxfordshire, and to the amazement of his friends returned with a wife. She was the daughter of a jovial and free-living Cavalier, and had arrived at the mature age of seventeen years! The poor girl was most unsuitably yoked; the solemnity and rigid severity of Milton's character soon drove her to the utmost depths of despondency. Milton, unlike Wordsworth's “Phantom of Delight,” was altogether too bright and good for human nature's daily food. After enduring “a philosophic life “ for a month, the young wife fled to the gaiety and freedom of her Oxfordshire home. Milton sent a messenger to bring her back, but rumour says that his emissary was “evilly entreated.” Whereupon he determined that she should never return, and began to write his famous book on divorce—a quaint occupation for a honeymoon!

As the Civil War proceeded, Mary Milton's father lost his property, and fell into distress. Then it was thought advisable to seek a reconciliation with the despised Puritan husband, so one day Mary suddenly appeared in a house where Milton was paying a visit, fell upon her knees, and implored his forgiveness. It was at once granted, and thenceforward she lived with her husband to the day of her death. She not only returned herself, but brought her family with her, and Milton generously gave them house-room and protection.

Since his return from the Continent Milton had supported himself by keeping a school in which he educated the sons of his friends. The death of his father and the consequent inheritance of a small fortune now relieved him of this irksome occupation. By this time the king's head had fallen, and the Commonwealth was established. The new Council of State invited Milton to become its secretary, and to occupy himself in translating foreign dispatches into Latin, which was then the language of diplomacy. He was also directed to reply to a spurious work, “Eikon Basilike” (The Image of the King), in which “martyred Charles” purported to reveal the lofty beauty of his life and character. Milton's “Eikonoklastes” (The Image Breaker) served its purpose, but is as tiresome as the original. Other controversial works, which have now lost all interest except to the student, also engaged his pen.

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Mary Milton died in 1653, and this loss was followed by a terrible affliction. Milton's eyes had been failing for some years, and his doctor had repeatedly warned him that he would lose the use of them altogether unless he showed himself some mercy. Nevertheless he persisted, and now entirely lost his sight. Thus, at the age of forty-five, he found himself a blind and widowed man, with the charge of three little daughters. A few years before his death he wrote his *Samson Agonistes*, and in it he described, as only a sightless man could do, the “living death” of blindness.

> “Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.
> O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrevocably dark, total eclipse,
> Without all hope of day!
> O first-created beam, and thou great Word,
> 'Let there be light, and light was over all,'
> Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?”

To most men such an affliction would have meant the end of all things; but so abundantly had Milton stored his mind that there was no blindness within, but rather a new and more vivid radiancy. It was then that his soul became “a star and dwelt apart.” The loftiest and most majestic of his achievements were wrought in the days of his blindness.

Under the Commonwealth Milton was held in honour and esteem. A beautiful picture by Ford Madox Brown, unhappily without historic warrant, represents the blind poet with ecstatic rapture on his countenance translating into Latin Cromwell's stern remonstrances to the King of France against the Duke of Savoy's savage

persecutions of the Waldenses. Andrew Marvell, his scribe and fellow poet, and Cromwell himself, look on with awed wonder as the stern words of righteous wrath fall in measured cadence from the poet's lips. Far more applicable would the picture be to the hour when the formal dispatch having been written, Milton burst into that majestic sonnet which enshrined for ever his own passionate cry for divine vengeance—

> “Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
> Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
> Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
> When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones.
> Forget not: in thy book record their groans
> Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
> Slain by the bloody Piemontese, that rolled
> Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
> The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
> To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
> O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
> The triple Tyrant: that from these may grow
> A hundred-fold, who, having learnt thy way,
> Early may fly the Babylonian woe.”

Five years after this sonnet was penned, the son of “martyred Charles” recovered the throne of his fathers. The “rule of the saints” was over; the Puritan was overthrown, and the Cavalier was in the ascendant. The pendulum swung to the opposite extreme; a great reaction set in, and like a dammed-up stream now burst the barriers of restraint and flooded the country with licence and debauchery. The bones of the dead regicides were dragged from their graves and hung on gibbets; the living were in imminent peril. Milton, who had written a defence of the regicides, at once went into hiding, and remained concealed in a friend's house until the long parliamentary debates as to those who were to be excluded from pardon came to an end.

In June 1660 his “Defensio” was burnt by the common hangman, and, later on, he was arrested and fined. The Indemnity Act, however, did not exclude him, and henceforth he was free from molestation. It is probable that he owed his escape to “his insignificance and harmlessness,” and that he had played a much smaller part in Commonwealth politics than is generally supposed. Others say that powerful friends interceded for him. One anecdote tells us that Milton had begged the life of Sir William d'Avenant under the Commonwealth, and that d'Avenant repaid his benefactor in a similar way at the Restoration.

Milton was no longer the admired writer, the friend of scholars and statesmen, with a recognized position and a comfortable income. He lived in a humble dwelling in Artillery Walk, Bunhill Fields, London, and on sunny days might be seen at the door of his house, turning his sightless eyes to the sky, listening to the songs of the birds, and rejoicing in the scents of the flowers in his little garden. He had already made another essay in matrimony. Katherine Woodcock, whom he had married in 1656, died a little more than a year later, and was commemorated by her husband in a touching sonnet as “my late espoused saint.” He now married Elizabeth

Minshull, who ruled his distracted household well, and was assiduous in caring for his comfort.

Some five years later he settled down to the greatest work of his life—his *Paradise Lost*. The temper of his mind had completely changed since the days when the story of Arthur had attracted him; no longer did his soul respond to the call of high romance; his mind was now steeped in religious ideas. No mere human drama of life and love and knightly endeavour was sufficient for him. His stage was to be the vastest that the highest human imagination could conceive—not merely the physical world with the ten concentric spheres revolving about it, but the vast empyrean beyond.

His scheme was to soar above even that of Dante; he would picture not only Chaos and Heaven, with its opal towers and sapphire battlements, and the "pendant world in bigness as a star" hanging from its floor by golden chains, but Pandemonium, "high capital" of the Prince of Evil, where his "infernal peers" sit in council. And the characters of the drama were to be appropriate to their cosmic setting. With a daring unequalled amongst men he would portray God Himself, and search His ineffable mind for a clue to the awful and inscrutable mysteries of existence. Satan should be shown warring against God, and should reveal himself in all his majestic subtlety and terror. He should stand with undaunted heart and undazzled eyes before the Throne itself, and descend, still unawed, into the "pain of unextinguishable fire." Angels, spirits, devils, and human souls, tempted and fallen, risen and triumphant—all were to be revealed in the poem which was now taking shape in Milton's mind.

It was a superhuman task—to write of "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme," and it is no wonder that even Milton's titanic genius failed to accomplish it. He still leaves us with the baffling mystery of sin and suffering unexplained, and the "ways of God to man" unjustified, but he gives us the most superb failure that literature has ever known. His *Satan* is the supreme figure of the whole epic. He is a figure of invincible will; the embodiment of an ambition that prefers suffering to servility, full of harsh obstinacy and biting irony, proud and resourceful, but growing meaner as he approaches his second and final degradation.

*Paradise Lost* is not now read for its theology, but for its incomparable majesty and dignity of verse, for the most sonorous and mysterious music that was ever evoked by language.

When the Great Plague broke out in London, Milton removed to Chalfont St. Giles in Buckinghamshire, and inhabited a "pretty box" of a cottage, which in 1887 was bought for the public, and is the only house now existing in which Milton lived. Here he busied himself with his great epic, dictating it, twenty, thirty or more lines at a time, to one of his daughters.

One day he gave the completed manuscript to Thomas Ellwood, a Quaker friend, and bade him read it. Ellwood returned the poem with these words: "Thou hast said much here of Paradise Lost, but what of Paradise Found?" *Paradise Regained* is

said to be the outcome of this suggestion. *Paradise Lost* had told the story of Adam's fall, and the expulsion of our first parents from the Garden of Eden. *Paradise Regained*, which is usually held to be inferior to the former poem, because not admitting of being so great, shows Satan still warring with Goodness, but now shorn of most of his power, and forced to decline upon malice and cunning as his weapons. He fails to tempt our Lord to sin, and his defeat is the bitterest grief he has ever known since the day when he and his angels were

> “Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky
> With hideous ruin and combustion, down
> To bottomless perdition.”

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Milton returned to London in 1667, to find his father's house in Bread Street burnt down in the Great Fire. He now sold the copyright of *Paradise Lost* to Samuel Simmons the publisher for £5, with the promise of a similar sum for each of the three subsequent editions. Two editions were published in Milton's lifetime, and all that he received for this sublime epic was £10.

Writers in later ages have lavished their scorn upon the publisher who awarded him this pitiful recompense; but it is simple justice to Simmons to point out that only 1,300 copies were sold in eighteen months, and 4,500 in twenty-one years. The lofty seriousness of the poem and its wealth of classical allusion probably explain its tardy recognition by the public. It is an open question whether it would have secured a greater sale if published in our own day. Its fame, however, grew surely, if slowly, for we find Edward Phillips in the year 1675 giving currency to the popular opinion that Milton had reached the perfection of epic poetry. His eminence was probably established before his death.

The close of his life was calm and peaceful, though he was a martyr to gout, and had not altogether come to that “still time when there shall be no childing,” for his undutiful daughters caused him considerable domestic discomfort. It is said that they were required to read to their father in various languages, including Hebrew, and perhaps Syriac, Greek, and Latin, without knowing or wishing to know the meaning of what they read. We are also told that this trial of their patience became “almost beyond endurance.” We are not surprised.

**Milton dictating “Samson Agonistes.”**
(*From the picture by J. C. Horsley, R.A. By permission of Messrs. Henry Graves and Co.*) To List

Contemporary writers give us a picture of the man in his later years. He was stately and courteous, though he could be satirical. He sat at his house-door in a gray coarse cloth coat in fine weather to receive visitors; indoors, he was neatly dressed in black. He was pale, but not cadaverous; and his fingers were “gouty and with chalk stones.” His life was lived according to scrupulous rule. He retired to rest every night at nine, and awoke at four in summer and at five in winter. If he was not then disposed to rise, some one was called to his bedside to read to him. After he had dressed, he heard a chapter of the Hebrew Bible. From the breakfast hour until noon books were read to him, or he composed. He frequently dictated from ten to thirty lines to any one who happened to be at the house, leaning back in his easy chair with a leg thrown over the arm. During sleepless nights he also composed, and called up a daughter to take down the lines at his dictation.

When he had dined he took some exercise for an hour, either by walking or swinging himself in his chair, and afterwards played on the organ or the bass viol. Sometimes he sang, or made his wife sing; he used to say that she had a good voice but no ear. He then retired for a time, but again appeared at six, from which hour till eight he conversed with the friends who came to see him. After a supper of “olives or some light thing,” he smoked a pipe of tobacco, drank a glass of water, and retired to rest.

In this calm, regular manner the evening of his days was passed. At length, in his sixty-sixth year, gout “struck in,” and on the morning of Sunday, November 8, 1674, he passed away “by a quiet and silent expiration.” He was buried by the side of his father in the church of St. Giles, Cripplegate; but six years later his coffin was broken open and his bones were scattered, no man knoweth whither.

# Chapter XXXI.

## JOHN BUNYAN.

> "*Was there ever yet anything written by mere man that was wished longer by its readers, excepting 'Don Quixote,' 'Robinson Crusoe,' and the 'Pilgrim's Progress'?*"—DR. JOHNSON.

A MAN and a child are standing at the gate of the county jail of Bedford. The man is a tall, sturdy fellow, with a heavy, honest face, garnished by a moustache. It is a plebeian countenance, but the nose is strong, the chin firm, the forehead high, and the eyes clear and sparkling. One hand rests on the shoulder of a little blind girl—his daughter—and occasionally he looks down at her with a pity and tenderness that would move a heart of stone. The other hand holds some dozens of thread bootlaces with metal tags. By his side is a basket with a further supply.

As you stand watching this scene, several pedlars purchase his wares, and a few grave townsfolk, men and women, greet him with signs of respect. You perceive in a moment that he is no common malefactor, but a man held in high honour and esteem by his neighbours. Let us inquire his name and condition. He is JOHN BUNYAN, Nonconformist, field-preacher, and converted tinker.

Why does this man figure in our pageant? What title has he—a jail-dweller, an unlettered mender of pots and pans, and a tagger of laces—to mingle in the goodly company of those who have enriched our literature with pearls of wisdom and jewels of song? Never before have we admitted a man of such mean condition and base occupation to our Court of Letters. Let his presence be explained.

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John Bunyan was born in the village of Elstow, about a mile from Bedford, when Milton was in his twentieth year. The little cottage in which he first saw the light still stands, and is an object of pious pilgrimage for men and women of the English-speaking race all over the world. Bunyan's father described himself as a brazier, but John, who followed the parental calling, and had a healthy contempt for euphemisms, dubbed himself plain tinker. "My descent," he said, perhaps with the pride that apes humility, "was of a low and inconsiderable generation, my father's house being of that rank that is meanest and most despised of all the families in the land." Nevertheless, his ancestors had been freeholders from time immemorial, and the cottage was family property.

John likewise boasted of his miserable education. “I never went to school,” he writes, “to Aristotle or Plato.” He certainly learned to read and write, but when he was called from his primer and pot-hooks to help in the tinkering, he speedily forgot the little learning that he had painfully acquired. His mother came of humble but decent and worthy folks, and was the only refining influence in the little household. When she died in John's sixteenth year, and a stepmother appeared two months later, the lad left home and enlisted—probably in the Parliamentary army.

In after years he was wont to recall a providential escape from death. “When I was a soldier,” he says, “I with others was drawn out to go to such a place to besiege it. But when I was just ready to go, one of the company desired to go in my room; to which, when I consented, he took my place, and coming to the siege, as he stood sentinel he was shot in the head with a musket bullet and died.” The incident seems to have made no particular impression upon Bunyan at the time, though his knowledge of camps and fortresses, guns, drums, trumpets, and so forth, served him well when he took his pen in hand to write.

When the militia was disbanded John returned to his native village, and attained, according to his own story, an unenviable notoriety as a ringleader of the youth of Elstow in all manner of vice. He tells us that he was given to lying, that he was the “ungodliest fellow for swearing ever heard,” that his delight was in dancing, bell-ringing, playing at hockey and tipcat on Sundays, and reading the history of Sir Bevis of Southampton. No doubt he was a gay, daring young fellow who fell somewhat below the high puritanical standard of his day, but, after all, had very little real vice in him.

At nineteen he married a young woman as poor as himself. He tells us that they were without “so much household stuff as a dish or spoon between them.” The young wife, however, came of godly parents, and brought him as her dowry two pious books, which he read and pondered.

He was gifted with a powerful imagination; his mind was easily excited. As a lad of ten he had been haunted by religious terrors; now they returned. He tells us that in the middle of a game of tipcat he would suddenly see an awful countenance frowning at him from the sky, and hear a voice asking him whether he would leave his sins and go to heaven, or keep his sins and go to hell. In obedience to this voice, he gave up the terrible sin of bell-ringing, though he compromised with the Evil One for a time by watching others pulling the ropes. But the thought struck him that the tower might fall and overwhelm him in the midst of his wickedness, so he fled the place in terror, and never countenanced the accursed sport again.

To give up dancing was an even greater struggle, but even this darling sin was overcome. Swearing, of course, he had long broken with; and now, to outward seeming, he was fit to take his place with Colonel Fight-the-Good-Fight and Captain Smite-them-hip-and-thigh. But he knew that he was no better than a whited sepulchre, a “poor painted hypocrite.”

The real awakening came one day when he was mending a kettle at Bedford and overheard a few poor women “sitting at a door in the sun and talking about the things of religion.” By this time he was a “brisk talker on religion” himself, but here he heard spiritual experiences to which he was an utter stranger. Then began a terrible mental and spiritual conflict, which in later years he related, “as with a pen of fire,” in his “Grace Abounding,” a revelation of personal temptation, illusion, hope and fear, joy and misery, expectation and despair, never equalled save by St. Augustine in his “Confessions.”

At length peace came to his perturbed spirit; he joined a Baptist Society in Bedford, and in 1655 was chosen one of the deacons. Two years later he was formally recognized as a preacher, and his fame began to spread. Men and women flocked by hundreds to hear the blaspheming tinker who had turned saint. His exhortations were so simple, so plain, so earnest, and so powerful that many who came to mock remained to pray. “In woods, in barns, on village greens, or in town chapels” throughout the Midlands his was a name to conjure with. The incumbents of parishes began to complain, and five months after the Restoration, when the persecution of Dissenters began, he was flung into Bedford Jail.

The authorities had no wish to deal harshly with him; if he would promise to refrain from preaching, they were quite ready to let him go. He was brought before several tribunals, and threats, cajolery, and ridicule were tried on him in vain. One facetious gentleman told him that he ought not to hide his real gift, which was the repairing of old kettles; another drew a parallel between him and Alexander the Coppersmith. To all his judges he made the same reply, “If you let me out to-day, I will preach again to-morrow.” So he lay year after year in his “den,” supporting himself by tagging laces, while the new wife whom he had married just before his arrest pleaded with his judge, and even with the House of Lords, for his deliverance.

In the earlier part of his imprisonment considerable indulgence was shown to him. He was allowed to go out preaching, and on one occasion to “see Christians in London.” Later on, his confinement was more rigorous: he was forbidden “even to look out of the door.”

The enforced leisure of prison gave him time to study. He read and re-read the Bible and Foxe's Book of Martyrs till they were part and parcel of his brain. His knowledge of the Bible and the human heart formed the sum total of the lore with which he turned to literature. In the intervals of study and exhortation of his fellow-prisoners he began to write tracts, verse, the “Grace Abounding,” and numerous controversial pamphlets couched in the bitter spirit of the age. So the years passed away. He was released for a few weeks in 1666, but was rearrested and again confined in his old quarters.

**JOHN BUNYAN.**
(***After the portrait by Sadler.***) To List

In 1672, when Charles the Second suspended all penal laws against Nonconformists and Roman Catholics in the interest of the latter, Bunyan profited by this constitutional proceeding and received a pardon under the Great Seal. In the last year of his prison life he was appointed pastor of the Baptist Church at Bedford, and when he left his prison he found that his writings and sufferings had made him famous all over England. It is now generally supposed that three years later he returned to prison for a short period, and that during this time he wrote his “Pilgrim's Progress,” the greatest religious allegory in all English literature, and perhaps in any literature.

As everybody knows, the “Pilgrim's Progress” describes a journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, and personifies the trials and temptations of the way, the vices that lead men astray, and the virtues that give them strength to resist. It is quite unnecessary to describe the allegory further, for probably there is no better-known book in all the world. For wellnigh a hundred years its readers were confined to the poor and non-literary classes. At length its great merits became recognized, and the unpretentious work of the “inspired tinker” took rank with the indisputable classics. Probably the “Pilgrim's Progress” is the only book of which the unlettered first perceived the greatness.

No better description of Bunyan's style can be given than that of Macaulay in his famous essay.

> “The style of Bunyan is delightful to every reader, and invaluable as a study to every person who wishes to obtain a wide command over the English language. The vocabulary is the vocabulary of the common people. There is not an expression, if we except a few technical terms of theology, which would puzzle the rudest peasant. We have observed several pages which do not contain a single word of more than two syllables. Yet no writer has said more exactly what he meant to say. . . . There is no book in our literature on which we would so readily stake the fame of our old unpolluted English language, no book which shows so well how rich that language is in its own proper wealth, and how little it has been improved by all that it has borrowed.”

The others of the dozen works of Bunyan need not detain us. All are in the same allegorical vein. “The Life and Death of Mr. Badman,” though now almost forgotten, displays Bunyan's inventive genius as powerfully as the “Pilgrim's Progress,” though the subject is disagreeable, and the boldly drawn details do not make wholesome reading. Of “The Holy War” it has been said by Macaulay that if there had been no “Pilgrim's Progress” it would have been the first of religious allegories.

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This “truly Apostolic man” met his death on an errand of mercy. A son had given his father great offence, and there was enmity between them. Bunyan took up the work of reconciliation zealously, and with the object of bringing father and prodigal together rode many miles in the drenching rain. He had already been enfeebled by an attack of “sweating sickness,” and now he succumbed to fever. He died before he had completed his sixtieth year, and did not live to see the Revolution. His last words were: “Take me, for I come to Thee!”

He was buried in the *Campo Santo* of London Dissenters at Bunhill Fields, and for years after Puritans begged with their dying breath that their bodies might be buried as near as possible to the author of the “Pilgrim's Progress.”

In what does the greatness of the work consist? First and foremost, in the fact that Bunyan had a great message to deliver, and that he followed Sir Philip Sidney's golden rule—“Look in thine heart and write.” He had passed through purgatorial fires himself, and the experiences of Christian were his own. He had climbed the Hill of Difficulty, had sunk in the Slough of Despond, and had fought with Apollyon;

every temptation, every snare, every peril that the world, the flesh, and the devil could devise, he had met and overcome. These things he knew from bitter experience, and with his high imagination, his remarkable power of giving body, form, and spirit to abstract ideas, and his extraordinary inborn capacity for conceiving the invisible and the intangible in terms of the actual and real, he was able to compose an allegory which was also a romance, capable of being read with consuming interest even by those who never uttered Christian's despairing cry, “What shall I do to be saved?”

Then, again, all was so wonderfully simple, straightforward, and devoid of conscious art. In his dream, Bunyan did not transport his readers to cloudland, but remained fixed on solid earth, amongst substantial human beings. To use a cant phrase, he was “of the people and for the people,” and “the common people heard him gladly.”

# Chapter XXXII.

## JOHN DRYDEN.

> *"Considering what he started with, what he accomplished, and what advantages he left to his successors, he must be pronounced, without exception, the greatest craftsman in English letters, and as such he ought to be regarded with peculiar veneration by all who, in however humble a capacity, are connected with the craft."*—SAINTSBURY.

AGAIN a dramatist appears in our pageant. He is a short, florid man with a "sleepy eye" and a mole on his right cheek. His friends, especially the young literary men of the day, greatly esteem him and dub him "Glorious John"; his enemies—and he has many—profanely speak of him as "Poet Squab." He is JOHN DRYDEN, Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal, the most admired dramatist of his time, an accomplished poet, the first of our English satirists, "the greatest craftsman in English letters."

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John Dryden was a son of the parsonage; his father was a vicar and the third son of a baronet. The boy was born eleven years before King Charles raised his standard at Nottingham, and in the Civil War that followed, his relatives ranged themselves on the popular side. By means of a scholarship he entered Westminster School, then governed by Dr. Busby, the prince of all flogging pedagogues, who once boasted that he had birched no fewer than sixteen of the bishops who then adorned the Episcopal bench! Dryden remembered Busby's floggings to the day of his death.

We know little of his schooldays except that he wrote an elegy on the death of a school-fellow, Lord Hastings. From Westminster he proceeded to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he remained seven years, but did not obtain a fellowship. Like Bacon and Milton, he had no love for his university, though for a different reason: he preferred Royalist Oxford to Puritan Cambridge. He left the university in 1654, and obtained occupation of some kind in London, perhaps as a publishers' hack.

In 1658 we find him inditing certain *Heroic Stanzas* on the death of Oliver Cromwell, whom he beslavered with praise, likening him to Alexander the Great, and proceeding with a nice "derangement of epitaphs," as follows:—

> "He fought, secure of fortune as of fame,

> Till by new maps the island might be shown
> Of conquests, which he strewed where'er he came
> Thick as the galaxy with stars is sown."

When "The Merry Monarch" landed at Dover and with flags flying, drums beating, and church bells ringing, entered London to enjoy his own again, Dryden changed his coat with a remarkable facility, and brought butter in a lordly dish to the new king. Dryden, in politics as in literature, was cast in a chameleonic mould: he took his colour from his surroundings; during the greater part of his life he strove to be on the winning side.

On the death of his father he inherited a small competence, and a few years later married Lady Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Earl of Berkshire. His marriage can scarcely be called happy, for his wife and her relatives regarded him as a social inferior, and the lady's temper was by no means equable. Probably, however, his aristocratic connections were useful in helping him to those positions of profit under the crown which he afterwards enjoyed.

The great reaction which set in at the Restoration was now in full swing. The king and his friends had returned from France with a French polish of manners, modes, tastes, and vices, and had set the fashion of a debonair depravity which the upper classes were not slow to follow. High thought and noble endeavour were openly derided; personal honour and virtue were sneered out of existence; it was a shameful and shameless age, which the theatre reflected only too faithfully.

Two new theatres were opened in London in the year 1662, and in one of these Dryden's first acted play—*The Wild Gallant*—was performed. It failed, but his tragi-comedy—*Rival Ladies*—was produced later in the same year and proved fairly successful. Pepys notes in his Diary that it was "innocent, and most pretty witty." It was written partly in poor blank verse and partly in rhyming couplets which Dryden imitated from the French dramatists and transformed into a remarkable instrument of poetic expression. His *Indian Emperor* was staged with great splendour in 1665, and it established his fame as a playwright. For the next fourteen years he devoted himself to the stage, and produced some twenty-eight plays, most of which are now forgotten.

All this time Dryden was writing for bread; only one of his plays—*All for Love*—was written to please himself; "the rest were given to the people." In this tragedy he abandoned the rhyming couplet for blank verse. As a matter of fact, Dryden never felt himself very fit for tragedy, and he knew that many of his contemporaries surpassed him in comedy, but he had to be in the mode at all costs. "I confess," he writes, "my chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live. If the humour of this be for low comedy, small accidents and raillery, I will force my genius to obey it, though with more reputation I could write in verse."

Some idea of the literary taste of the time may be gathered from two incidents in Dryden's dramatic career. In 1672 he projected an opera founded on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and asked the poet's permission to turn his majestic epic into rhyme.

To this Milton replied, “Ah! you may tag my verses if you will.” And tag them he did after this manner:—

> “Seraph and cherub, careless of their charge,
> And wanton, in full ease, who live at large,
> Unguarded leave the passes of the sky,
> And all dissolved in hallelujahs lie.”

The spectacle of wanton seraphs “dissolved in hallelujahs” dissolved the town in laughter, but “Glorious John” was ready with what he conceived to be a classical parallel by way of justification. Though Dryden sank to the barbarity of rhyming *Paradise Lost*, it is only fair to say that in the preface he speaks of it as “one of the greatest, most noble, and sublime poems which either this age or nation hath produced.”

Nor did Shakespeare escape the rhyming passion of the time. Along with Davenant, Dryden laid sacrilegious hands on *The Tempest*, and adapted it to suit the grovelling taste of the court. At a later period he took *Troilus and Cressida* in hand. In the preface he tells us unblushingly that he removed the heap of rubbish under which excellent thoughts lay wholly buried, remodelled the plot, and refined the language. Nevertheless, he reverenced Shakespeare, and in the prologue to his version of *The Tempest* appears the following famous couplet:

> “But Shakespeare's magic could not copied be;
> Within that magic circle none durst walk but he.”

Dryden knew—none better—that, as far as fame was concerned, his dramatic work, profitable though it might be, was mere waste of time. In one of the most beautiful of his poems he cries,—

> “O Gracious God! how far have we
> Profaned Thy heavenly gift of poesy!”

And towards the close of his life he bitterly regretted “the scandal I have given by my loose writings,” and expressed himself ready to “make what reparation I am able by this public acknowledgment.”

**JOHN DRYDEN.**
(***After the portrait by Sir Godfrey Kneller.***) To List

One poem, the *Annus Mirabilis*, was composed in the intervals of his dramatic work. The *Annus Mirabilis* was the wonderful year of 1666, the year of the Great Fire and the Dutch War. The poem, though not without conceits, is vigorous and interesting. The finest passages are those which describe the progress of the fire.

Eight years after the poem appeared, Dryden was made Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal, and was generally recognized as the first man of letters of his day. Tradition pictures him sitting in the arm-chair specially reserved for him in the sunny bow-window of Wills's Coffee-house, and discoursing on the writers of the day with amiability and generosity to a circle of young authors who considered a pinch of snuff from his box a mark of special honour.

In his fiftieth year Dryden bade farewell to the stage and, following Milton's example, turned to political writing. His first political satire, *Absalom and Achitophel*, was a counterblast to the Exclusion Bill, so called because it provided for the exclusion of the king's brother, James, Duke of York, from the succession to the throne, on the ground that he was a Roman Catholic. The Bill passed the Commons, but was thrown out by the Lords, to the great relief of those immediately concerned. Dryden produced a Biblical parallel to the political situation, and pictured Charles as David, Absalom as the Duke of Monmouth, whose claims to the throne were preferred by the Exclusion party, and Achitophel as the Earl of Shaftesbury, the leader of the Exclusionists. The satire did its work; the chiefs of the Exclusion party were roused to frenzy, and they brought the author to trial on a charge of treason. The jury, however, refused to convict him, and his friends, over-joyed at this triumph, struck a commemorative medal with the motto "*Laetamur*" (Let us rejoice).

Dryden was now immersed in the Donnybrook Fair of controversy, and in reply to an attack he wrote *The Medal*, which assailed Shaftesbury and the Whigs with the utmost bitterness. Nowadays, the disputes which occasioned these satires are as dead as the personages concerned, but we can still admire the tireless vigour and brilliancy of the verse, its sure and rapid movement, and the keen intellect which animated it.

There were several replies to *The Medal*. One of them by Thomas Shadwell, a wretched versifier supported by the Whigs, provoked Dryden's *Macflecknoe*, in which he lustily applied his satiric whip to the shoulders of his assailant. Shadwell was represented as monarch of the realms of dullness, and his immortality was assured by such lines as the following:—

> "Shadwell alone, of all my sons is he
> Who stands confirmed in full stupidity;
> The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
> But Shadwell never deviates into sense."

Having defended the Monarchy, Dryden now proceeded to perform a like office for the Church of England. His *Religio Laici* (a Layman's Faith) was a zealous defence of the Anglican Church, and was rewarded with a lucrative post in the Customs.

A month after the death of Charles, he produced his *Threnodia Augustalis* (Royal Lament), and shortly afterwards adopted the faith of the new king. His conversion to Roman Catholicism has been regarded as the last shift of a shameless time-server, but there is no reason to believe that he was insincere. Even in the preface to the defence of the Church of England he showed a marked desire for an infallible guide. Immediately on his conversion he exhibited the zeal of a convert, and took up the cudgels for Rome as he had formerly done for Canterbury. His *Hind and the Panther* was not a very appropriate allegory, the milk-white Hind being the Roman Catholic Church, the Panther, the Church of England. These ill-assorted beasts strive with each other in theological argument, but the poem is written in Dryden's

best manner, and contains many splendid passages of melody, charm, and intellectual power.

Replies were, of course, forthcoming. The most famous of them, which was based on the fable of the Town and the Country Mouse, was the work of Matthew Prior, and Charles Montagu, afterwards Prime Minister and Earl of Halifax. It is said that Dryden wept at this “cruel usage” from two young fellows to whom he had always been “very civil.” In his *Ode to the Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew*, which appeared in the same year, occurs the repentant lines already quoted on page 264.

The Revolution of 1688 was the ruin of Dryden. For once he was consistent; he refused to take the oath of allegiance to William of Orange, and suffered for his new faith. His public offices were taken from him, and the depth of humiliation was sounded when Shadwell was created Poet Laureate in his stead. He was now fifty-eight years of age, and was forced to make a new start in life. Once more he turned to the stage; he made translations from the classics; he was a diligent man of all work; he made a living, and “his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated.”

Soon after his translation of the *Æneid* appeared he wrote his *Alexander's Feast; or, the Power of Music*, an elaborate ode in which he makes “the sound appear an echo of the sense.” *Alexander's Feast* has its affectations, but its magnificent force and its harmonious charm are undeniable, and it has been ranked by good judges as the finest ode in the language. A volume of tales, ancient and modern, translated into verse from Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer, and commonly known as “The Fables,” closed his literary career.

Gout attacked a frame worn out with hard work and, it must be added, with intemperate living. On April 30, 1700, a newspaper announced that “John Dryden, Esq., the famous poet, lies a-dying.” The end came on May 1, within three months of the close of his sixty-ninth year, and Poets' Corner received him.

Before we take leave of Dryden, let us ask what contribution he made to the development of our literature. First of all, he practically created the heroic couplet as an instrument of verse. His poetry never sprang from the fullness of emotion; it was bred in the head and not in the heart; it was great literature rather than great poetry, but its “craftmanship” was superb, and reflected the spirit of an age which had lost the high creative faculty and was more concerned with form than with feeling.

As a prose writer he rose to a high level. He simplified book prose, and brought it into conformity with the daily needs of men; he gave it lucidity and precision, and, as Lowell remarked, “endowed it with something of the freedom of good talk.” He created English poetical satire; and, finally, he first taught his countrymen the science of literary criticism. He laid down in his *Apology for Heroic Poetry* and in his various prefaces the general principles of the art; he brought keen poetic appreciation, fearlessness, and sound common sense to bear on the work of appraisement; he compared writer with writer, and was the first to point out the literary foundations upon which rest the fame of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton.

# Chapter XXXIII.

## DANIEL DEFOE.

> "*He certainly wrote an excellent book—the first-part of 'Robinson Crusoe'—one of those feats which can only be performed by a union of luck with ability. That awful solitude of a quarter of a century—that strange union of comfort, plenty, and security with the misery of loneliness—was my delight before I was five years old, and has been the delight of hundreds of thousands of boys since.*"—Macaulay.

*Scene*, Temple Bar, London. *Temp.*, July 31, 1703.

A middle-aged, spare man, with a hooked nose, a sharp chin, gray eyes, and a dark complexion, is undergoing the public disgrace of the pillory. His hands and head are confined in the wooden framework of shame, but he looks down upon the roaring, surging mob with composure. There are many zealous Churchmen on the edge of the crowd eager to pelt him with rotten vegetables and miscellaneous filth, but they are overawed by a bodyguard of sturdy fellows who evidently regard him as a hero. They have garlanded the instrument of his degradation with flowers; from time to time they drink his health with "three times three" and lift their hoarse voices in his *Hymn to the Pillory*, which the ballad-mongers are even now selling in large numbers to the onlookers:—

> "Tell them the men that placed him here
> Are scandals to the times;
> Are at a loss to find his guilt,
> And can't commit his crimes."

To List

**DANIEL DEFOE.**

Such is our introduction to DANIEL DEFOE, destined to be the author of that immortal fiction, “The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe.”

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Defoe was the son of a Nonconformist butcher of St. Giles, Cripplegate. At the age of fourteen he was sent to an academy kept by an ejected divine at Newington Green, where he studied for the dissenting ministry. On arriving at years of discretion, however, he abandoned all idea of this calling as too dangerous and precarious, and went into business as a dealer in hosiery. He was, nevertheless, strong in his Nonconformist principles, and his mind was much more concerned with politics than with stockings. He was out with Monmouth in 1685, and may have fought at Sedgemoor. We know that in October 1689 he was a trooper in the

regiment that escorted William and Mary to a great banquet in the city, and it is probable that he had already written several political pamphlets. Some three years later he became bankrupt, and was forced to go into hiding.

While his creditors were vainly seeking him, he occupied himself with an "Essay on Projects," in which he made suggestions for the reform of the bankruptcy laws, advocated a national bank, a system of assurance, savings banks, idiot asylums, etc., and showed himself an intelligent and far-seeing exponent of social improvement. Later on, we hear of him as "accountant to the commissioners of the glass duty," and as secretary to a tile factory at Tilbury. A measure of prosperity attended the latter venture, and Defoe prudently and honourably utilized his profits in reducing his debts.

Meanwhile his polemical pen was busy, and towards the end of William's reign he was regarded as the best pamphleteer in the country. He displayed great controversial ability; he went straight to the point, had an instinct for the weak places in his opponent's argument, and was never afraid to say exactly what he thought. His English was clear, forcible, and not without grace, and he never failed to hold the attention of his readers. His *True-born Englishman*, a set of rough satiric verses in which he declared that his fellow-countrymen belonged to a race of mongrels bred from the off-scourings of Europe in all ages, had an amazing success. Eighty thousand copies were sold in the streets, and King William, that "true-born Englishman" from Holland, was so delighted with the compliment paid to his subjects that he showed the poet marked favour.

**Crusoe.**

(***From the picture by J. C. Dollman, A.R.W.S. By permission of the artist, owner of the copyright.***) To List

William had not been long in his grave before the High Church party came into power and passed a Bill which practically prevented a conscientious Dissenter from holding public office at all. Much controversy was aroused, and Defoe joined in the fray with a piece of ironical writing, which he called "The Shortest Way with Dissenters." In this unlucky essay he posed as a Tory of the old school, and advocated the extirpation of Dissenters altogether. At first the more vehement High Churchmen took the pamphlet in sober earnest and praised it without stint, but when they discovered that it was meant to be ironical, their approval was turned to wrath, and Defoe was prosecuted for libelling the Church. The House of Commons ordered his book to be burnt, and he was sentenced to a heavy fine, condemned to imprisonment during the queen's pleasure, and ordered to stand three times in the pillory. In this predicament we saw him in our opening scene.

While Defoe was in Newgate his business at Tilbury had to be abandoned, and he lost his all. He had a wife and six children dependent upon him, and was now forced to write for bread. During his imprisonment he started the *Review*, a periodical which began as a weekly, then appeared twice a week, and finally three times. This paper is a landmark in the history of English journalism, and was, no doubt, the parent of those remarkable periodicals of which we shall read in the next chapter. Of news, in our sense of the word, there was necessarily little; the pages were full of political discussion and essays on all sorts of social subjects. Most of these were written by Defoe himself.

There is little doubt that he left Newgate as a hireling of the Tory minister Harley, and his pen was thenceforth at the service of those who bitterly hated the Nonconformists. Defoe now wrote in defence of Tory principles, and was engaged on divers subterranean missions. As an agent of the Government he went to Scotland to persuade the Scots to agree to a union with England, and he was a hidden spectator of the tumultuous scene in Edinburgh when the Scottish Parliament, amidst the execrations of the mob, signed the hated treaty.

In the year after his return from Scotland his patron, Harley, was dismissed from office, whereupon he offered his services to Godolphin, his Whig successor. When, in turn, Godolphin was dismissed, he was "providentially cast back upon his original benefactor." Harley's fall in 1714 meant loss of place and salary to Defoe, who was bitterly attacked as a renegade by both sides. He defended his conduct in a pamphlet which closed his political career.

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He was now fifty years of age, and had made nothing of his life. As a last resort, he turned to literature pure and simple, and in April 1719 gave to the world the first and by far the best part of the immortal work which alone rescues his name from oblivion. The following is a transcription of the original title-page:—

> "The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner, who lived Eight-and-Twenty Years all alone in an uninhabited Island

> on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River Oroonoque; having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the men perished but himself. With an Account how he was at last strangely delivered by Pyrates. Written by himself. London: Printed for W. Taylor, at the Ship in Pater-Noster Row. MDCCXIX."

The story, as everybody knows, is based on Captain Rogers's narrative of the adventures of Alexander Selkirk, the Fifeshire mariner who was marooned on the island of Juan Fernandez. The extraordinary and enduring popularity of the story is due to Defoe's marvellous power of "giving verisimilitude to his fictions," or, in other words, to his amazing talent "for telling lies." "Robinson Crusoe" is one of the marvels of literature, and the wonder is increased when we remember that it is a romance of solitude and self-sustainment written by a man whose whole life had been spent in the pursuit of those arts which can only be practised in the turmoil of contending parties. Crusoe is a man forced to solve, almost unaided, the vital problems of life—how to provide himself with food, clothing, and shelter by the exercise of his wits and his native strength. There is many a worse primer of Economics than "Robinson Crusoe."

With the other productions of Defoe's literary period—"The Memoirs of a Cavalier," "The Life of Captain Singleton," "The Journal of the Plague," and so forth—we need not waste time, except to say that the same capacity for clothing fiction in the garb of truth distinguishes them all.

Towards the end of his life, fortune smiled upon him. He was connected with prosperous newspapers, his books and pamphlets sold readily, he built himself a mansion and kept a coach, but somehow his affairs again fell into confusion, and for the last two years of his life he was compelled to go into hiding. He died in a humble lodging in his seventieth year, and was buried in the cemetery where Bunyan lies.

# Chapter XXXIV.

## JOSEPH ADDISON.

> *"One whose fires*
> *True genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires;*
> *Blest with each talent and each art to please,*
> *And born to write, converse, and live with ease."*—POPE.

OUR pageant now illustrates the following scene from Thackeray's "Esmond":—

> "One sunny afternoon, when by chance Dick had a sober fit upon him, he and his friend were making their way down Germain Street, and Dick all of a sudden left his companion's arm, and ran after a gentleman who was poring over a folio volume at the book-shop near to St. James's Church. He was a fair, tall man, in a snuff-coloured suit, with a plain sword, very sober, and almost shabby in appearance—at least when compared to Captain Steele, who loved to adorn his jolly round person with the finest of clothes, and shone in scarlet and gold lace. The Captain rushed up, then, to the student of the book-stall, took him in his arms, hugged him, and would have kissed him—for Dick was always hugging and bussing his friends; but the other stepped back with a flush on his pale face, seeming to decline this public manifestation of Steele's regard.
>
> "'My dearest Joe, where hast thou hidden thyself this age?' cried the Captain, still holding both his friend's hands; 'I have been languishing for thee this fortnight.'
>
> "'A fortnight is not an age, Dick,' says the other, very good-humouredly. (He had light blue eyes, extraordinary bright, and a face perfectly regular and handsome, like a tinted statue.) 'And I have been hiding myself—where do you think?'
>
> "'What! not across the water, my dear Joe?' says Steele, with a look of great alarm. 'Thou knowest I have always——'
>
> "'No,' says his friend, interrupting him with a smile; 'we are not come to such straits as that, Dick. I have been hiding, sir, at a place where people never think of finding you—at my own lodgings, whither I am going to smoke a pipe now and drink a glass of sack. Will your honour come?'
>
> "'Harry Esmond, come hither,' cried out Dick. 'Thou hast heard me talk over and over again of my dearest Joe, my guardian angel?'
>
> "'Indeed,' says Mr. Esmond with a bow, 'it is not from you only that I have learnt to admire Mr. Addison. We loved good poetry at Cambridge as well as at Oxford; and I have some of yours by heart, though I have put on a red coat. . . .'"

---

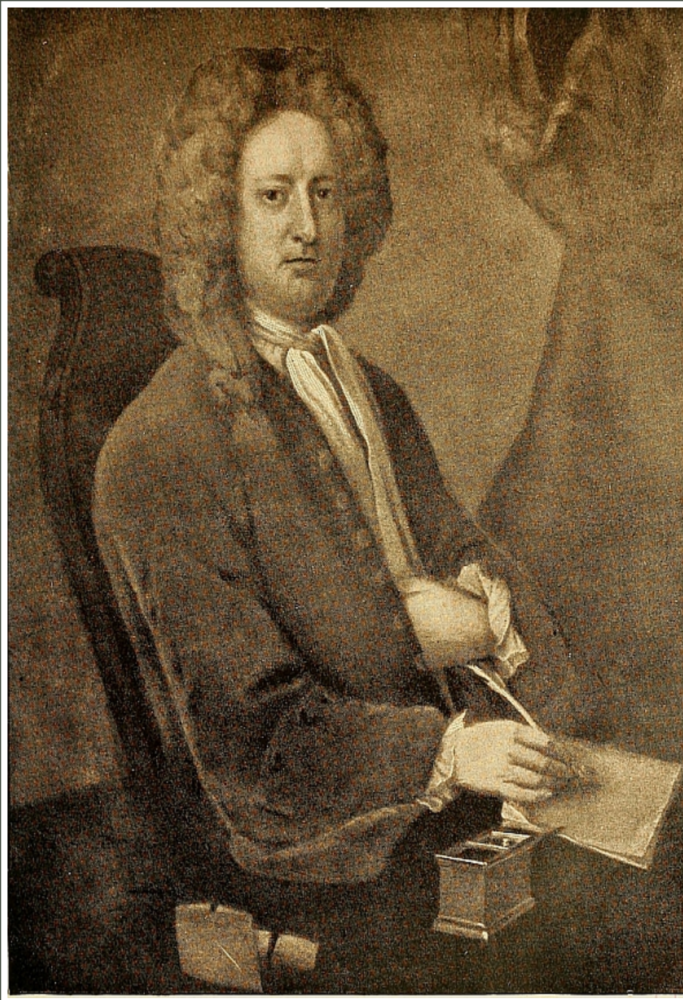
Defoe was eleven years of age when JOSEPH ADDISON, thus introduced, first saw the light in his father's rectory at Milston, Wiltshire. In this refined and cultured

home, amidst singularly accomplished people, he spent a happy boyhood. After attending several preparatory schools he was sent to the Charterhouse, which was afterwards to give to the world such distinguished men as Wesley, Grote, and Thackeray. Here he formed a friendship, destined to be almost lifelong, with the gay, affectionate, and irresponsible "Dicky" Steele described above. In his fifteenth year Addison proceeded to Queen's College, Oxford, where his excellent Latin verses gained him a scholarship at Magdalen. Oxford still commemorates the shy and studious scholar who brought her such renown by "Addison's Walk," a shady path in a pretty wood round which meander two branches of the Cherwell.

In his twenty-first year Addison addressed a highly complimentary poem to "Glorious John," who was greatly gratified by the young poet's admiration, and in the next year wrote his *Account of the Greatest English Poets*. In this work he declared that Spenser, whom he had not then read,

"Can charm an understanding age no more."

Three years later he succeeded to a fellowship at Magdalen, but reluctant to take the Holy Orders, without which his fellowship would lapse in the course of a few years, obtained an introduction to Somers and Montagu, the heads of the Whig Party, then on the lookout for a promising young writer to serve them with his pen. As a beginning, they suggested that he should write an *Address to King William*, which duly appeared, and a few years later was followed by a Latin poem on *The Peace of Ryswick*. In return he was awarded an allowance of £300 a year, and sent abroad to enlarge his experience.



**Joseph Addison.**
(***After the portrait by Michael Dahl.***) To List

For four years he went to and fro on the Continent, seeing many lands, and meeting many famous people. His pen was not wholly idle during the tour. He wrote a *Letter from Italy* which was couched in the graceful, easy style which he soon developed into his incomparable prose. He also wrote a dialogue, neither learned nor deep, on *Medals*, and four acts of his tragedy, *Cato*. When William died in 1702, Addison's friends were driven from office, his allowance was stopped, and his prospects were cheerless.

On his return to London he was forced to live in somewhat shabby obscurity up three pairs of stairs in the Haymarket. His political friends, however, kept an eye upon him, and recommended him to Godolphin as the best man to celebrate in verse Marlborough's great victory at Blenheim. Addison was delighted with the task, and produced *The Campaign*, which was immensely popular, though it was little

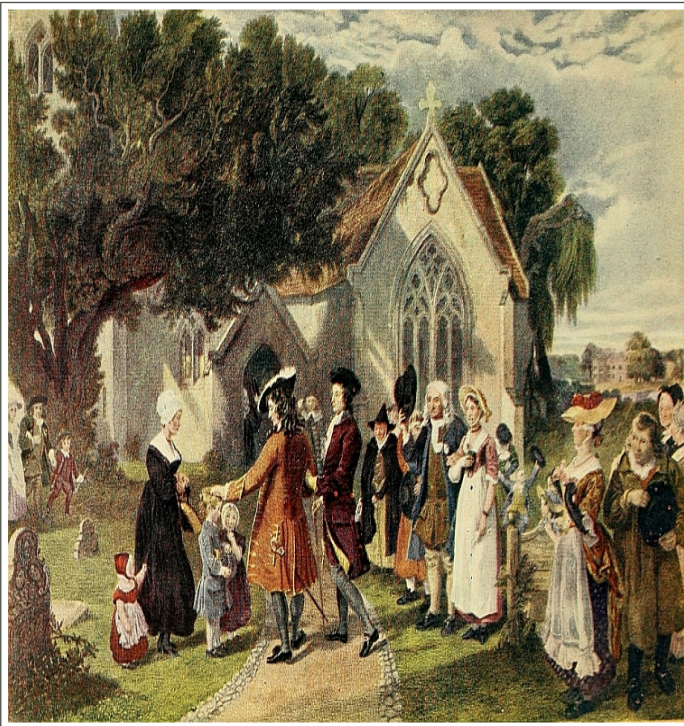
better than “a gazette in rhyme.” The finest passage in the poem, which, by the way, Dr. Johnson adversely criticized, is as follows:—

> “'Twas then great Marlborough's mighty soul was proved,
> That in the shock of charging hosts unmoved,
> Amidst confusion, horror, and despair,
> Examined all the dreadful scenes of war;
> In peaceful thought the field of death surveyed,
> To fainting squadrons sent the timely aid,
> Inspired repulsed battalions to engage,
> And taught the doubtful battle where to rage.
> So, when an angel, by divine command,
> With rising tempests shakes a guilty land,
> Such as late o'er pale Britannia past,
> Calm and serene he drives the furious blast;
> And, pleased th' Almighty's orders to perform,
> Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm.”

For this poem Addison was rewarded with an office of profit, and shortly afterwards was appointed an under-secretary of State. He entered Parliament, but he was a silent member. Only once did he essay a speech, and then broke down ignominiously in his first sentence. In his thirty-sixth year he went to Ireland as Secretary to the Viceroy, and here he formed an admiring friendship with Dean Swift, of whom we shall read in our next chapter. His stay in Ireland was brief; Godolphin fell in the following year, and Addison lost his secretaryship.

While Addison was in Ireland, his friend “Dicky” Steele was editing a London periodical called *The Tatler*. It consisted of one folio sheet with double columns, was published three times a week, and cost a penny. It was not a newspaper in our sense of the word, but a budget of gossip concerning the life of the town.

With great wit and vivacity Steele regaled his readers with the latest topics of gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment, criticized and condemned the eccentricities of fashion, the foppishness of “smart fellows,” the vice of gaming, the absurdity of duels, and so forth. “If a fine lady thinks fit to giggle at church,” he wrote, “or a great beau come in drunk to a play, either shall be sure to hear of it in my ensuing paper.” An honourable and chivalrous consideration for women was specially noticeable in all Steele's writings. “It was Steele,” says Thackeray, “who first began to pay a manly homage to their goodness and understanding as well as to their tenderness and beauty.”



**Sir Roger de Coverley on his Way to Church.**

***(From the picture by C. R. Leslie, R.A. By permission of Messrs. Henry Graves and Co.)*** To List

*The Tatler* exactly suited the fashionable taste of the time. It was essentially an age of gossip. The theatre had decayed; the novel was not yet. Men found their chief amusement in meeting together for social talk at the coffee-houses, the most famous of which were *Wills's* and *Button's*, where the conversation was literary, the *Grecian*, where the learned met, and *St. James's*, where the politicians foregathered. Men with any sort of a common interest formed a club, and met in coffee-houses at frequent intervals. “In these coffee-houses,” writes a foreign observer, “you have all manner of news; you have a good Fire which you may sit by as long as you please; you have a Dish of Coffee, you meet your friends for the Transaction of Business, and all for a penny, if you don't care to spend more.”

All sorts of curious clubs sprang up. For example, there was a club of Fat Men, another of Scarecrows and Skeletons, and a third which met at the mutton-pie house kept near Temple Bar by one Christopher Kat, and was known as the Kit-Cat Club. Addison and Steele were members of this club, but Addison was more frequently to be seen at *Button's*, where he dined and spent five or six hours every day.

Not only was it an age of talk, it was the age of the beaux and the belles, of extreme foppery in dress, of elaborate amusement, and triviality of thought and conversation. Learning was considered old-fashioned by these butterflies of the fashionable world; the fops and great ladies thought it *à la mode* to affect an utter

indifference to anything intellectual. Ladies of extreme fashion wore on the head a wire frame covered with silk and trimmed with rows of lace or ribbons, which sometimes cost as much as £40. Their skirts, which were of the richest materials, were worn over a whalebone framework which grew and grew "into a most enormous concave," and their silk hoods rivalled the rainbow in colour.

The fashionable gentleman gave his best thoughts and attention to his wig. The full-bottomed wig, consisting of a great mass of false hair which rolled down on the shoulders, was most commonly worn, though lighter wigs, such as the tye wig and the bob wig, were coming into fashion. Addison was once described by a friend as "a parson in a tye wig." Every morning the wig was newly powdered and curled, and its wearer carried an ivory or tortoise-shell comb with which he dressed his wig while sitting in the park or in the theatre. His long velvet coat of many colours, sometimes bordered with gold or silver lace, had the skirts stiffened out with whalebone. He wore knee-breeches, silk stockings, and buckled shoes; carried a cocked hat under his arm, a small sword by his side, and a snuff-box in his be-ruffled hand.

On summer evenings the beaux and the belles amused themselves by walking in the Mall, in St. James's Park, and in Spring Gardens, where Buckingham Palace now stands. The ladies wore masks, and some of them were attended by little black footboys. At Ranelagh Gardens there were cascades and fountains glittering in the sun, shady alleys and bowers, and at night fireworks and trees hung with coloured lamps.

Fashionables went to the theatre to be seen rather than to see and hear, and the ladies were usually masked. Gambling was the great vice of the time, and gaming-houses of all kinds were open day and night. Duels with the sword were common, and frequently ended fatally. Gangs of notorious young men, calling themselves Mohocks, roamed the streets after dark, assaulting decent citizens and wrenching off door-knockers. One gang, known as the Nickers, used to go about breaking, with handfuls of coppers, the windows of shopkeepers who pressed them to pay their bills. Such was the London upon which Steele launched his *Tatler*.

Steele now invited Addison to contribute to his paper, and Addison gladly agreed, for he felt that it would provide him with an excellent field for the display of his particular talents. *The Tatler* came to an end in January 1711, and was succeeded by *The Spectator*, which the friends raised to the level of a classic. It was a daily paper, and the leading feature was an elegantly written essay on some social, literary, or philosophical subject, treated with sparkling wit, quaint humour, and delicate criticism. At once *The Spectator* leaped into popularity. It was in huge demand in every coffee-house, and no fashionable tea-table was complete without a copy. In its witty and interesting pages men and women seemed to be listening to the best talk ever heard.

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*The Spectator* gave itself out as the mouthpiece of a fashionable club, the chief members of which were a rich merchant, a dashing soldier, a sporting idler, a learned lawyer, a thoughtful clergyman, and an old-fashioned country gentleman, the gem of them all. Mr. Spectator also belonged to the club, but he was simply the observant scribe of other members' sayings and doings, experiences, adventures, and opinions. In this character Addison and Steele emulated the players in Hamlet, and were the “abstract and brief chronicles of the time.” They faithfully mirrored the life of their day, and they did it as high-minded, cultured gentlemen who desired to lead men and women by silken strings away from the frivolous and idle talk of the hour to “whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report.”

Addison wrote in all some two hundred and seventy-four numbers of *The Spectator*, and Steele contributed two hundred and thirty-four. Each of Addison's papers is marked with one of the four letters, C. L. I. O.—the initials of the places where the papers were written: Chelsea, London, Islington, Office. *The Spectator* ran to 635 numbers, and continued, with a break of eighteen months, until the end of 1714. It was read all over England, and its circulation is said to have reached ten thousand daily.

No notice of *The Spectator* would be complete without a reference to Sir Roger de Coverley, the first of the two great gentlemen of English literature. In No. 2, which was published on March 2, 1711, Steele introduced as one of the club members, “a gentleman of Worcestershire of ancient descent, a baronet, his name *Sir Roger de Coverley*.” Addison afterwards took Sir Roger up, and made him immortal. He is full of whims and oddities, as simple and transparently honest as a child, and as gentle and tender-hearted as a woman. He is the landlord of his parish, his servants adore him, his tenants regard him as their best friend; he has a high sense of the duties of his position, and he goes about “doing good.”

> “What,” says Thackeray, “would Sir Roger de Coverley be without his follies and his charming little brain-cracks? If the good knight did not call out to the people sleeping in church, and say 'Amen' with such delightful pomposity; if he did not make a speech in the assize court merely to show his dignity to Mr. Spectator; if he were wiser than he is; if he had not his humour to salt his life, and were but a mere English gentleman and game-preserver—of what worth were he to us? We love him for his vanities as much as for his virtues. What is ridiculous is delightful in him: we are so fond of him because we laugh at him so.”

The profits of *The Spectator* enabled Addison to buy the estate of Bilton, near Rugby, for £10,000, and to live as a man of wealth. His play *Cato* was staged in 1713, and became so popular that he was, in his own day, far more celebrated as the author of *Cato* than as *Mr. Spectator*. For one who now knows and admires *Cato*, there are ten thousand who know and admire *Mr. Spectator*.

We need not detail the remainder of Addison's life, or the story of his literary squabbles with Pope. On the death of Queen Anne he once more went to Ireland as Secretary, but spent a good deal of his time in London, where he wrote another play, *The Drummer*. It was a failure, and so was *The Freeholder*, a paper which was

begun after *The Spectator* had run its course. In 1716 he married Charlotte, Countess of Warwick, and took up his abode at Holland House. The marriage was a “splendid but dismal union,” and Addison frequently stole away from the cold grandeur of his wife's lordly mansion to mingle with his old friends at *Buttons'*. Soon afterwards he became Secretary of State and was sworn of the Privy Council.

A year before his death, Addison and his old friend Steele fell out on a political question, and a duel of the pen followed. In the third of the series of pamphlets, in which they wounded each other to the quick, Steele dared his opponent to take the field again. Alas! Addison was now beyond the reach of all human controversy. Asthma, complicated with dropsy, cut him off, and poor Steele was almost frantic with remorse. He seized the first possible opportunity of expressing his love and reverence for his old friend.

What claims has Addison to a prominent place in our pageant? He won no immortality by his *Campaign*, his essay on *Medals*, and his ponderous tragedy *Cato*, but he goes down to the ages as the prince of English essayists. His aim was “to temper wit with morality, and to enliven morality with wit,” and in this he succeeded perfectly. He possessed exquisite taste and fine observation, and his prose is a model of high-bred grace, dignified ease, and unaffected charm. “Whoever,” says Dr. Samuel Johnson, “wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.”

**THE TOAST OF THE KIT-CAT CLUB.** (***From the celebrated picture by W. F. Yeames, R.A. By permission of the Artist, who has kindly supplied the following key.***) The following persons are represented:—1. Christopher Cat, keeper of the coffee-house at which the club met. 2. John Churchill, afterwards Duke of Marlborough. 3. John Dryden, the poet. 4. Sir Godfrey Kneller, the painter, who painted three-quarter length portraits (hence the term “Kit-Cat portraits” for paintings of this size) of forty-three members of the club. 5. William Congreve, the dramatist. 6. Sir Richard Steele, the author and dramatist. 7. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. 8. The Duke of Kingston, father of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. To List

# Chapter XXXV.

## JONATHAN SWIFT.

> "*By far the greatest man of that time, I think, was Jonathan Swift. . . . He saw himself in a world of confusion and falsehood; no eyes were clearer to see it than his.*"—CARLYLE.

AN uncouth young Irishman, with a look of suppressed wrath on his strongly marked features and a fierce gleam of hatred in his blue eyes, enters the library of Sir William Temple's country seat at Moor Park, near Farnham. He is something between a secretary and an upper servant; he is begrudged twenty pounds a year, and he takes his meals with the steward and the housekeeper. We see at a glance that he is morbid and sensitive, and as proud as Lucifer. In mental stature he is a giant, his ambitions are equal to his abilities, and he conceives his present situation to be a bitter and perpetual humiliation.

His patron is the only person in the household with whom he can consort on equal terms, but from this self-concentrated and self-complacent personage he receives, so he thinks, nothing but cold looks and lofty disdain. How the wolf of deadly rage gnaws at his vitals when he follows at his honour's heels in the garden, or stands by the great man's chair to receive his icy comments and querulous complaints! There is more than a hint of madness in the aspect of the young man as he broods on the daily indignities to which he thinks himself subjected, not only by his master, but by his master's menials.

He seats himself at the library table and busies himself with books and papers. The door opens, and a delicate little girl of eight years of age, as bright as a sunbeam and as pretty as an opening flower, enters the room. The young man's face relaxes something of its fierceness as his eye lights on this charming vision. He is as fond of the little girl as a heartless man can be, and she looks up into his eyes with adoring affection. She has come for her daily lesson, and now we see her seated in a big chair, tracing her pot-hooks and hangers under the young man's direction.

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JONATHAN SWIFT, who thus figures in our pageant, was born in Dublin of English parents, seven years before the death of Milton. He was a clever, delicate child, and it is said that he could read any chapter of the Bible before he was three years old.

He received a good education at Kilkenny School, but when he went up to Trinity College he idled his time and obtained the lowest degree awarded. It is probable that he was contemptuous of the pedantry and antiquated learning then purveyed, and it is certain that he was publicly censured for offences against discipline. The rebellion of 1688 drove him to England. Thanks to his mother's slight connection with Sir William Temple, he was offered a shelter at Moor Park, where we saw him in our opening scene. Here he assisted Sir William in his literary work, and acted as tutor to Esther Johnson, a beautiful little girl whom he called “Stella.”

**Swift and Stella.**

(*From the picture by Margaret J. Dicksee. By permission of the Berlin Photographic Co.*) To List

We already know that Swift chafed bitterly against what he fancied to be the slights and neglects of his patron. In a sudden fit of petulance he now threw up his post and returned to Ireland, where he was ordained a clergyman of the Protestant Church. His life as a country parson at Kilroot, near Belfast, proved most irksome. He performed the duties of his office faithfully enough, but he had no spiritual leanings. His mind was essentially worldly; he hungered for place and power, and at Kilroot his ambitions were as far from realization as ever.

In despair he humbled his soul, and again returned to Moor Park, somewhat less ready to take offence at a careless word, and found Sir William far more approachable than formerly. At Moor Park he met King William, who showed him how to cut asparagus after the Dutch fashion, and consorted with some of the

leading members of the government. He frequently visited London, and was introduced to many of the wits and men of letters of the time. He also found leisure to write two books, which did not see the light of publication until 1704.

The first of these books was “The Tale of a Tub,” an old expression for any rambling or fictitious story. Swift explains that as seamen sometimes toss overboard an empty tub to distract the attention of a whale about to attack their ship, so he tosses his tub of a tale into the sea of controversy to divert the attention of wits and sceptics from their attacks on the ship of state. His book was an allegory showing how the early Church had become corrupted and split into two great sections at war with each other. It was full of mad, coarse fun, and was certainly not the kind of book which a clergyman ought to have written. As events proved, it cost him a bishopric.

The second of the works which Swift wrote at Moor Park was “The Battle of the Books.” It arose out of an essay which Sir William Temple had published to prove the superiority of ancient authors over modern writers. Swift took the contrary view, and in a clever burlesque described a contest between the ancient and modern books in the King's Library. “The Battle of the Books” was a coarse but amusing tilt at the shams of pedantry. In these books he showed himself a master of strong, nervous, unadorned prose, and in the verses which he subsequently wrote we also observe much coarse and graphic vigour.

Sir William died in 1699, and Swift again returned to Ireland, this time as chaplain and secretary to the Viceroy; but on reaching Dublin he was dismissed from the latter post, and resigned the former. He was, however, presented with a small living in County Meath, and began his ministrations once more. His flock numbered fifteen persons all told, “most of them gentle, and all of them simple.” On one occasion, when he and the parish clerk formed the whole congregation, he began the service with these words: “Dearly beloved Roger, the Scripture moveth you and me. . .”

As might be expected of a man of genius and ambition, Swift soon found life in his little remote parish utterly unbearable. He frequently visited London, and in order to advance his fortunes began to write political pamphlets on the Whig side. Before long he was regarded as the ablest pamphleteer in the country, and his savage and almost brutal attacks on the Tories made him hated and feared. Nevertheless Addison found him “the most agreeable companion and the truest friend.”

He had served the Whigs well, and naturally he looked to them for promotion; but nothing was done for him, and in despair he changed sides, and began writing scathing attacks on his former friends. He soon became a power in the Tory party, and lorded it over great and small with boorish arrogance. To his credit be it said, that he sought and obtained favours for many deserving men, but he flung his benefactions in their faces. When his new friends came into power, they wanted to make him a bishop, but Queen Anne promptly and very properly refused lawn sleeves to the author of “The Tale of a Tub.” Eventually, however, she was persuaded to give him the vacant deanery of St. Patrick's, Dublin.

In the following year the Tory Government fell, and with it disappeared all Swift's hope of further promotion. He was fully conscious that his career was at an end, and in the bitterness and wrath of his disappointment he conceived a fierce and malignant hatred of his fellow-men which coloured all his subsequent writings. He wrote to the chief of the Tory party in London as follows: “It is time for me to have done with the world; and so I would if I could get into a better before I was called into the best, and not die here in a rage like a poisoned rat in a hole.”

During the three years from 1710 to 1713, when Swift was at the height of his political power, he began the daily practice of writing to Stella. He knew that she was the good angel of his life, that she was always thinking of him and longing for him, so he wrote just as though he were fondling a sweet and artless child. He told her everything that happened to him, all his hopes, fears, wishes, and expectations, and revealed to her and her alone the gentler and more playful side of his complex nature. Sometimes he talked to her in baby language; his whole desire was to give her pleasure.

Nothing was too precious to be withheld from her, nothing too trifling for her interest, and so he mingled in his letters domestic details with state secrets and court intrigues, and gave as much prominence to the healing of his broken shin as to the disgrace of the Duke of Marlborough. His letters were not intended for publication; they were for Stella's bright eyes alone. As we read them to-day in the “Journal to Stella,” they move us to tenderness, awe, and pity, and serve to remind us that the “terrible Dean” was not wholly a rabid and malignant hater of his kind.

When he took up his duties in Dublin, Stella and her companion came to live with him at the Deanery. The sad story of poor Stella and of Esther Vanhomrigh, who fell in love with him, would be out of place here. It is said that Stella was privately married to Swift about the year 1718, and that the news of this marriage led to the death of Miss Vanhomrigh.

During his residence at the Deanery his pen was never idle. He wrote bitter satires against the unjust and callous treatment of Ireland, and became the idol of the nation. “If,” said he to an archbishop who blamed him for stirring up the people, “if I had lifted up my finger, they would have torn you to pieces.”

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In 1726, when he was fifty-nine years of age, he produced the work by which he is best known—“Gulliver's Travels.” The book was published so secretly that even the publisher did not know who the author was. The manuscript, he said, was dropped at his house from a hackney coach in the dark. Its success was instantaneous, and has never waned.

Gulliver, as everybody knows, was a ship's surgeon who made four remarkable voyages, the first to Lilliput, the land of pigmies; the second to Brobdingnag, the land of giants; the third to Laputa, the land of charlatans and sorcerers; the fourth to

the land of the Houyhnhnms, a race of horses endowed with reason. As a book of adventures, “Gulliver's Travels” has been called “almost the most delightful children's book ever written.” Its air of veracity and its wonderful detail place it side by side with “Robinson Crusoe.” An Irish bishop who read the book thought it a veracious account of actual voyages undertaken by the author.

Swift, however, did not design his book for children; he meant it as a political and social satire, and as such it was read in his own day. His purpose was to pour contempt on the base public men and shameless place-seekers of his time. He showed his readers a kingdom of tiny creatures, barely six inches high, with politicians and courtiers fawning and cringing to their sovereign, and lying and intriguing for place and power; he showed them giants to whom they were miserably inferior; he showed them horses far superior in wisdom.

Not only did he pour scorn on the passing phases of English politics, but he satirized “that hated and detestable creature called man,” and showed that his boasted knowledge was mere foolishness, his god-like power of reason simply contemptible, and his instincts brutal and vile. All this, however, passes harmlessly over the heads of children, and the two first voyages are theirs by right of adoption. It has been well said of the last voyage that nobody but a savage could have imagined it, and that none but savage minds can fully enjoy its revolting pictures.

The remainder of Swift's story is soon told. Stella died in 1728, and his mind gradually gave way. Our last vision of him is that of a lonely gray-haired lunatic walking his room for ten hours a day like a caged tiger. After three years of almost total silence he died, bequeathing his fortune, with a last satiric touch, to build and endow a hospital for incurable madmen.

# Chapter XXXVI.

## ALEXANDER POPE.

> “*Where is that living language which could claim*
> *Poetic more, as philosophic, fame,*
> *If all our bards, more patient of delay,*
> *Would stop, like Pope, to polish by the way?*”—Byron.

“Glorious John,” portly and rubicund, sits in his accustomed chair at *Wills's*, his open snuff-box by his side, and his oft-filled glass near at hand. He is in his sixty-seventh year; his scanty locks are white as snow, and from time to time his face is contracted as he feels the sharp twinges of pain in his leg. Nevertheless he still loves good company, and the society of his brother wits is the best solace that he knows. They sit around him smoking their pipes, criticizing the latest poem or play, and seeking occasion to utter their diligently-prepared impromptus with an air of spontaneity. Dryden himself is not a ready talker; but when he opens his lips to speak, all voices are hushed, and men lean forward to catch his every word. He is still a celebrity, and country cousins often peep into *Wills's* for a sight of the great man.

To-day a very youthful visitor enters the room, and gazes reverently on the aged prince of letters. He is a boy of nine, “plump and pretty, and of a fresh complexion,” delicate in body, refined in mind, amiable and charming in disposition, and extraordinarily precocious. A friend introduces him to “Glorious John,” and the boy's cup of happiness is full. Could the old man and his friends peep into the future they would rise and acclaim him. When Dryden goes hence and is no more seen, this boy will succeed to his kingdom; he will be the greatest poet of his time, and will so dominate the literature of his period that men will speak of it as “The Age of Pope.”

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Alexander Pope was born in London in the year that King James the Second fled from his kingdom and William of Orange was invited to fill the vacant throne. He was an only child, and was petted and spoiled by his elderly parents. As they were Roman Catholics, he was debarred from attending a public school or a university. An old aunt taught him to read, and he taught himself to write by copying printed letters. This probably accounts for his small and cramped writing. In after years he could crowd such an immense number of words into so small a space that Dean Swift called him “paper-sparing Pope.”

**ALEXANDER POPE.**
(***After the portrait by William Hoare.***) To List

He began Latin and Greek under a priest, and then attended a Roman Catholic school at Twyford and another at Hyde Park, where he unlearned all that he had been taught by his first instructor. At twelve years of age he was placed under a fourth priest, "and this was all the learning I ever had," he said, "and God knows, it extended a very little way." He was now left to his own devices, and took to reading with great eagerness and enthusiasm. He loved poetry, and began to write verse when he was little more than a baby:—

> "As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
> I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came."

In a few years he had dipped into most of the English, French, Italian, Latin, and Greek poets. "This I did," he says, "without any design, except to amuse myself; and got the languages by hunting after the stories in the several poets I read, rather

than read the books to get the languages. I followed everywhere as my fancy led me, and was like a boy gathering flowers in the fields and woods, just as they fell in his way. These five or six years I looked upon as the happiest of my life."

In his twelfth year a severe illness, brought on by "perpetual application," attacked him, and left him with a weak and deformed body. Thereafter his life was "a long disease." To the day of his death he was a nervous invalid, small, fragile, and misshapen, with a drawn face and large, brilliant eyes. To his secluded upbringing and to his lifelong sufferings we must attribute those faults of character on which his biographers lay stress. In spite of his terrible handicaps he managed to win and keep the palm of British letters throughout his life, and all the greatest men of the time were his friends.

His father now took a house at Binfield, a village near Windsor Forest, and it was in this beautiful retreat that Pope dipped into the classics, as described above. A regular course of riding in the forest improved his bodily health, and his mind was stimulated by the congenial society of Sir William Trembell, a former Secretary of State, who was a neighbour.

In his sixteenth year he wrote his *Pastorals*, a series of poems treating of shepherd life and the four seasons, after the manner of Theocritus and Virgil. The poems were shown by Sir William Trembell to certain well-known writers, who were amazed at the boy's skill in writing smooth and flowing verse. There was no particular originality in them, nor was there any real knowledge or understanding of country life; his poem was an essay in artificiality, faithful to the classical models and the classical rules, and quite in accordance with the spirit of the age. Lofty imagination and deep-moving thoughts were discounted in his day, and the greatest stress was laid on correct form and strict adherence to rules. This was the main characteristic of Pope's verse throughout life. As Dr. Johnson so well says, "Pope's page is a velvet lawn, shaven by the scythe, and levelled by the roller." In the age of "reason," the tangled wood, the wayward path, the sudden glimpses of unexpected glory, "the light that never was on land or sea," were just as "horrid" to the poets of the time as the savage grandeur of Highland scenery was to Dr. Johnson.

Other poems followed, and in each of them Pope, though still in his teens, proved himself a master of versification. In his twenty-fifth year he took the town by storm with his *Essay on Criticism*, in which he set forth the established rules of poetic composition. "Follow nature," he cried; but nature was not to be sought in wood and field, cloud and shower and the heart of man, but in the masterpieces of Greek art. The *Essay on Criticism* is an essence of current literary wisdom, and its couplets are so terse and so neatly turned that many of them have become "household words." For example, how many persons quote the following without knowing their source?—

> "Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,
> Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream."
>
> "A little learning is a dangerous thing;
> Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."

> “True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed.”
>
> “Words are like leaves; and where they most abound
> Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.”
>
> “To err is human, to forgive divine.”
>
> “For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”

Addison praised the *Essay* in the *Spectator*, and its publication brought Pope a host of other literary friends. The *Rape of the Lock*, which appeared in the following year, revealed the genuine Pope. A trifling incident of the fashionable world—the theft of a lady's ringlet by her lover—gave him the opportunity of writing a mock-heroic poem dealing with the pleasures, the gaieties, the flirting, card-playing, and dressing of London society, which to the wits comprehended the whole life of England. In this delicate and graceful epic of the frivolous, Pope appeared with his true singing robes about him, as the poet of the town.

Addison praised the poem, but not warmly, and when Pope proposed to extend it and introduce the “machinery” of sylphs and gnomes, advised him to let it alone. Pope rejected his friend's advice, and in its altered form the piece attained a huge success. Nevertheless he was nettled at Addison's lack of enthusiasm, and his suspicious mind detected jealousy where there was none. Though a coolness sprang up between them, Pope wrote a delightful prologue to Addison's *Cato*, and when John Dennis attacked it, sprang into the arena to defend both the tragedy and its author. So savage and vulgar was his onslaught that Addison repudiated it, and the breach between the friends grew wider and deeper.

For ten or twelve years after the publication of *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope devoted himself to editing and translation. He began with Homer's *Iliad*, a tremendous task for which he was apparently not fitted either by physical strength or classical learning. When he announced his intention of translating Homer, Thomas Tickell, a friend of Addison's, set to work on a rival translation. Pope believed that Addison had spitefully urged the young Oxford scholar to this task in order to belittle his work. When his first volume containing the first four books of the *Iliad* appeared almost simultaneously with Tickell's translation of Book I., and Addison eagerly praised his protégé's work, Pope was furious, and wrote bitterly and contemptuously of Mr. Spectator. He might easily have been magnanimous, for his translation was hailed with a chorus of approbation, and still remains a monument of English verse, though “you must not call it Homer.”

After his Homeric translations were completed, he made Addison the subject of his first essay in personal satire, and addressed him in lines which blended admiration for his genius, fame, and talent, with scorn for his jealous desire “to rule alone,” and to suffer, “like the Turk, no brother near the throne.” “I sent the verses to Mr. Addison,” said Pope, “and he used me very civilly ever after.”

Pope made a small fortune by his translations, and spent the money in buying a villa and grounds at Twickenham, where he gave way to his passion for improving

on nature. He excavated a tunnel under the public road, and adorned this “grotto” with fragments of looking-glass, spar, and various ores. He also built a temple of shells, and delighted in these childish toys far more than in the beautiful vistas of the noble river and its overhanging woods. At Twickenham Pope held a kind of court, and amongst his visitors were Dean Swift, and John Gay the author of *The Beggar's Opera*.

Pope was now a man of fortune and reputation, and his success naturally excited the malicious envy of the crowd of little poets who hailed from Grub Street. They put him in their pillory, hooted him with foul abuse, and made his poor deformed body the butt of their heavy wit. Pope was not built on heroic lines; he could not, like Dryden, regard these pitiful detractors with amused unconcern; his vanity was deeply wounded, his high-strung temperament was outraged. He replied with *The Dunciad*, the Epic of Dunces, and in it he shrieked back unsavoury abuse, like a virago of Billingsgate.

As Thackeray says, “Pope was more savage to Grub Street than Grub Street was to Pope. The thong with which he lashed them was dreadful; he fired upon that howling crew such shafts of flame and poison; he slew and wounded so fiercely, that in reading *The Dunciad* and the prose lampoons of Pope, one feels disposed to side against the ruthless little tyrant—at least to pity those wretched folks upon whom he was so unmerciful.” By his descriptions of the miserable poverty in which these poor men lived, he so depreciated the literary calling in the eyes of the public that for generations it was regarded as unfit for a gentleman.

It is a relief to turn from the coarse abuse of *The Dunciad* to the finished and brilliant work with which Pope closed his career. The *Essay on Man*, partly published in 1732, and completed two years later, is supposed to be a system of ethics, but it is poor philosophy couched in masterly verse, and is now only remembered for its many quotable extracts, such as,—

> “Hope springs eternal in the human breast:
> Man never is, but always to be blest.”
>
> “Know thou thyself, presume not God to scan;
> The proper study of mankind is man.”
>
> “Vice is a monster of such frightful mien,
> As, to be hated, needs but to be seen.”
>
> “He can't be wrong, whose life is in the right,”—

and the purple passage beginning, “Lo, the poor Indian.”

Early in the year 1744 it was plain that Pope's feeble frame was breaking down. His spirits sank so low that he could not bear to see any but his most intimate friends. After a life of extraordinary literary activity he died on May 30, 1744, in the fifty-sixth year of his age, and was buried in Twickenham Church, near to the monument which he had erected to his parents. Never was there a better son; for his simple old mother he had the most profound affection; his loving regard for her was a finer epic than he ever wrote.

Pope was the very mirror of his age, the authentic spokesman of his time. The gay world of fashion, the jealous and starveling world of writers, and the intriguing world of politics comprised his whole world; but, narrow and ignoble as it was, he interpreted it with all the minuteness and truth of a great artist. His poetic instrument was the rhyming couplet, in which he attained a remarkable perfection and ease, but which moderns find cramping and artificial, and almost inevitably tending to one line for sense and the other for sound. Pope himself showed in a parody how stereotyped the couplet could become in the hands of the unskilful:—

> “Where'er you find 'the western cooling breeze,'
> In the next line, it 'whispers through the trees:'
> If crystal streams 'with pleasing murmurs creep,'
> The reader's threatened (not in vain) with 'sleep.'”

Ever since Pope's day men have asked the question, “Was Pope a poet?” His poetry was the only kind that his age desired and esteemed—the poetry that dealt with man as a literary, political, and fashionable animal. It is as idle to compare Pope with Chaucer, Spenser, or Shakespeare as to compare the lion roaming his native wilds with the same noble beast ceaselessly pacing to and fro in a ten-foot cage.

**SAMUEL RICHARDSON.**

(*After the portrait by Joseph Highmore.*) To List

# Chapter XXXVII.

## THE FATHERS OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL.

> "*We know to tell many fictions like to truths, and we know, when we will, to speak what is true.*"—HESIOD.

OUR pageant now brings together two men who would have scorned to meet in actual life. They are the most oddly-assorted pair imaginable; poles asunder in appearance, manner, mental equipment, tastes, pursuits, and moral outlook. The first of them is SAMUEL RICHARDSON, a short, plump, ruddy, and prosperous bookseller of London. He is a douce, careful man, eminently respectable, self-made, self-taught, a water-drinker, and a vegetarian, highly moral, very vain, and very sentimental. He dislikes men's company, and loves the ladies. To see him in his element, he ought to be surrounded by the very large hoops of his many admirers. His gray eyes are downcast but keen, and no man of his time has so intimate a knowledge of the feminine heart and mind as he.

Following this idol of the ladies, we see HENRY FIELDING, a man cast in a very different mould. He is tall and handsome, a scholar and a gentleman, a wit and a sportsman, big and virile, a lover of good living, recklessly improvident, and absurdly generous. He is essentially a man's man, and he has a healthy hatred of all sentimentality and affectation. His predecessor spends much of his time in traducing him, but he cares nothing for the little bookseller's attacks. Give him a venison pasty and a bumper of champagne, and the world may go hang!

Why is the respectable Richardson yoked with the rakish Fielding in our pageant? The sequel will explain.

You already know that from the earliest times down to the days of Edmund Spenser, all our great writers told stories, chiefly in verse. In the Elizabethan age they turned with huge zest from story-telling to the drama, to the construction of living pictures for the stage. For wellnigh a hundred years they expended their best energies on play-writing. Then came the decline of the drama, and as it grew corrupt, vapid, and trivial, men were ready to turn to stories once more.

In happy time Bunyan, Defoe, and Swift produced novels which were eagerly read; but they were distinctly novels of adventure; their interest lay not in the delineation of character, not in the revelation of human beings at work or at play, in love or in hate, in the family circle or in public life, but in extraordinary and exceptional circumstances.

Four years before Pope sank into his grave an entirely new kind of novel appeared. For the first time a story was produced in which men and women were seen not in fairyland, enchanted forest, desert isle, or realm of nightmare, but in the familiar surroundings of everyday life. The eighteenth century discovered that men and women were so profoundly interested in themselves and their neighbours that stories of ordinary people, invested with an air of reality and showing a genuine knowledge of the human heart, were capable of capturing their interest and affording intense pleasure. Between 1740 and 1750 certain English writers appeared who first gave this kind of fiction an important place in the history of literature.

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SAMUEL RICHARDSON as a shy, demure boy of thirteen had made many a shilling by writing love-letters for the young girls of his native town in Derbyshire. There was something in him that invited their confidences, and many lovelorn maidens, “unknown to others,” poured out their hearts to him, quite certain that he could never reveal their secrets. In this way he obtained a great and intimate knowledge of the feminine heart. When a middle-aged man, he turned this knowledge to account, and began writing domestic novels in the form of letters. He was not a correct writer; he had no distinction and no wit; he was wearisomely long and full of sickly sentimentality; but he had the magic gift of setting forth a tale in such a manner that people were compelled to listen to him.

He wrote three novels, “Pamela,” “Clarissa,” and “Sir Charles Grandison,” dealing respectively with lower-class, middle-class, and upper-class life. All were intended to “cultivate the principles of virtue and religion,” and all were highly recommended from the pulpit. They met with surprising success, and tens of thousands who had never read a book of any other kind were enthralled by them.

Sir John Herschell tells us that a blacksmith of Windsor procured a copy of “Pamela,” and used to read it aloud in the long summer evenings, seated on his anvil, and never failed to have a large and attentive audience. “It is,” he says, “a pretty long-winded book; but their patience was fully a match for the writer's prolixity, and they fairly listened to it all. At length, when the happy turn of fortune arrived which brings the hero and heroine together and sets them living long and happily according to the most approved rules, the congregation were so delighted as to raise a great shout, and, procuring the church keys, actually set the parish bells ringing!”

It was the success of “Pamela “which turned the genius of HENRY FIELDING to novel-writing. For Richardson's work he had the most hearty contempt. “He couldn't do otherwise,” says Thackeray, “than laugh at the puny cockney bookseller, pouring out endless volumes of sentimental twaddle, and hold him up to scorn as a mollcoddle and a milksop. *His* genius had been nursed on sack-posset and not on dishes of tea. *His* muse had sung the loudest in tavern choruses, had seen the

daylight streaming in over thousands of emptied bowls, and reeled home to chambers on the shoulders of the watchman. Richardson's goddess was attended by old maids and dowagers, and fed on muffins and bohea. 'Milksop!' roars Harry Fielding, clattering at the timid shop-shutters. 'Wretch! Monster! Mohock!' shrieks the sentimental author of 'Pamela,' and all the ladies of his court cackle out an affrighted chorus.”

Fielding's first novel began as a parody or burlesque of “Pamela,” but it soon ceased to be a parody, and became a vivid and forcible picture of the men and women of his world. It was not a nice world, and Fielding did not attempt to make it nice; he set down on paper much that was coarse and vicious, but he never mocked at genuine goodness, only at cant, hypocrisy, and maudlin sentiment. His aim was to portray the real world as he saw it, and he scorned to picture a rubbish heap as a rose garden. He probed the hearts of his characters, and never glozed over their follies and sins; he drew real men and women from actual observation, and invested his writing with great wit and humour. Later on we shall see that he was Thackeray's master and model.

Richardson and Fielding were the fathers of the English novel, and they were closely followed by LAURENCE STERNE and TOBIAS SMOLLETT, who proved themselves notable workers in the same field. Nevertheless, more than seventy years were to pass away before the novel appealed to people of taste and culture, and fiction began to take the predominant place which it holds in the life of to-day.

# Chapter XXXVIII.

## THE GREAT CHAM OF LITERATURE.

"*The great and dingy Reality of the eighteenth century, the Immortal!*"

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL.

THE ever-famous Literary Club is holding one of its weekly suppers at the Turk's Head, Gerrard Street, Soho, in the winter of the year 1773. At the head of the table sits a rugged, massive man, whom we recognize at once as DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON, the great lexicographer. His features are scarred and disfigured by disease; by the constant blinking of his eyes we guess that he is short-sighted, and our guess is verified by the condition of his wig, which has been burnt away in the front by the candles at which he reads. He wears a shabby brown coat with metal buttons, and our glimpse of his shirt collar assures us that he "has no passion for clean linen."

Not for a moment is he at rest; he constantly puffs and blows, rolls his head, drums his fingers, and jerks his body with queer, convulsive starts. He is regaling himself with a "satisfying" dish of veal pie stuffed with plums and sugar, and he eats with savage, silent fury, like a hungry wolf. His laugh is harsh and strident, and his voice is loud and domineering. Such is the uncouth and eccentric old giant who is gladly hailed by the members of the club as their unchallenged king, and is generally acknowledged by all the writers of the time as the "Great Cham of Literature."

It is a very distinguished company over which he presides, and we cannot but be interested in the many notabilities present. The bland, smiling, middle-aged man holding his hand to his ear the better to catch his neighbour's conversation is SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, President of the Royal Academy, the first portrait painter of his time, great artist and great gentleman. There sits EDMUND BURKE, the renowned parliamentarian, whose pamphlet, "Thoughts on the Present Discontents," has already marked him out as the wisest and soundest political writer of his age. His great triumphs are yet to come, but even now you could not take shelter with him under a tree during a shower without remarking, as you proceeded on your way, "What a remarkable man!"

Yonder bright-eyed little gentleman who is talking with such gaiety and vivacity is David Garrick, the Doctor's old pupil, and the most famous actor in all the country. The brilliant young aristocrat who laughingly responds to his remarks is Topham Beauclerk, and surely you recognize the ugly, amiable man on the other side of him

as GOLDSMITH, "for shortness called Noll, who wrote like an angel and talked like poor Poll."

This gentleman with the cocked nose, the baggy cheeks, and the sycophantic manner, who watches the Doctor with eyes almost starting out of his head, and scribbles violently on a paper held beneath the table whenever the great man opens his mouth, is JAMES BOSWELL, Esq., of Auchinleck, in the kingdom of Scotland. He is a poor, mean, vain creature, and Johnson treats him with brutal candour; but the world will come to recognize in him the first of all biographers, the maker of "one of the small number of books fit to live for ever." Sneered at, slighted, and spurned, this indefatigable toady has, nevertheless, something of the true Shakespeare secret—he lets the characters who crowd the pages of his "Life of Samuel Johnson" tell their own tale, and reveal themselves by their words and acts, and not by any commentary of his own.

And now the servitors clear the board, and the learned Doctor "folds his legs and has his talk out." Listen to him as he begins the intellectual sword-play of the evening. Notice his apt illustrations, his keen arguments, his rapid flashes of wit and humour, his dexterity of fence. But be careful not to contradict him, unless you wish to bring down upon your devoted head the thunder of his ungovernable wrath, and the scorn of his unbridled tongue. "If his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt-end of it." Nevertheless his conversation is worth travelling far to hear, and it will be strange if you do not carry away some pithy saying, shrewd reflection, or sagacious remark, that you will be glad to store up in your memory.

**Dr. Johnson in Lord Chesterfield's Anteroom, waiting for an Audience, 1748.**
**(*From the picture by E. M. Ward, R.A., in the Tate Gallery.*)** To List

Samuel Johnson was the son of a bookseller in the quiet cathedral town of Lichfield. The house in which he was born is now preserved as a national monument. From infancy he was afflicted with “king's evil,” and was “touched” by Queen Anne, but without result. Boswell tells us that from his earliest years his superiority was perceived and acknowledged by his teachers; he was from the beginning a king of men. His master never corrected him except for talking and diverting other boys from their business. Such was the submission and deference of his school-fellows that three of the boys used to come in the morning as his humble attendants to carry him to school. At the Grammar School of Stourbridge he was well grounded in Latin, and during the two years spent at home before he went to college, he read widely in the classics, and stored up in his retentive memory much of the learning for which he was afterwards famous.

In his nineteenth year he went up to Pembroke College, Oxford, and was acclaimed by the Master as “the best qualified for the university that he had ever known come there.” It must be confessed, however, that he was idle, and that he “cut” lectures in order to lounge and talk at the college gate above which his sculptured features may now be seen. His life at college was a constant struggle with poverty; but he would accept no charity, and once threw away in violent anger

a new pair of shoes, kindly left at his door. Already he was subject to those moods of bitter melancholy that grew in intensity with advancing years.

Poverty forced him to leave college at the end of a year. He attempted to maintain himself by keeping a school at Lichfield; but the school failed, and, along with his pupil David Garrick, he set out for London. Tradition says that he had 2½d. in his pocket, and Garrick 1½d. He had already married the “fat, flaring, and fantastic Mrs. Porter,” who was twenty years his senior, but to whom he was devotedly attached.

Arrived in London, Johnson became an obscure writer for various papers, and made a little money and more fame by his poem *London*, which attracted the favourable attention of Pope. In 1750 he founded *The Rambler*, a periodical somewhat resembling *The Spectator*, and for two years filled it with ponderous, many-syllabled essays of a strongly moral character.

In 1747 he issued his Plan of a Dictionary, which he forwarded to Chesterfield, who gave him but scant encouragement, though afterwards, when the work was nearly ready for publication, clearly intimated that he was ready to accept the dedication. Johnson replied in a letter of noble rebuke which is a monument to his fine, fearless, independent character. A syndicate of booksellers financed the Dictionary, which was completed in eight years of enormous and incessant drudgery. Johnson received £1,575 for the work; but, as he had to remunerate his assistants out of this sum, he was not overpaid.

The Dictionary was remarkably clear in all its definitions, but very weak on the side of derivation. It is still interesting because of the many quotations from various English authors intended to illustrate the appropriate uses of words. The public received it with enthusiasm, and Oxford gave him a degree; but he had been “working the dead horse,” and twice in the next two years was arrested and carried off to sponging-houses, from which he was only released by the good offices of his friend Samuel Richardson. In 1759, when his mother died, he wrote his one novel, “Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia,” in order to pay the expenses of her funeral. “Rasselas” has plenty of wisdom and humour of a heavy kind, but it does not find many readers nowadays.

Johnson now began to edit Shakespeare, but was very dilatory with the work, and was only provoked into diligence by some lines addressed to him in a play:—

> “He for subscribers baits his hook,
> And takes their cash—but where's the book?”

In 1762 George the Third, to his eternal credit, conferred a pension of £300 a year on the great lexicographer, and thus ensured his comfort for the rest of his days. Johnson's edition of Shakespeare saw the light three years later, and then he abandoned the pen “to do what good I can by my conversation.” A few political pamphlets and his “Lives of the Poets” were the only other works which he produced. He died in 1784, full of years and honours, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Undoubtedly Dr. Samuel Johnson looms larger in our pageant than the merits of his writings warrant. His essays, couched in that heavy and learned style known as *Johnsonese*, are more remarkable for their moral teachings than for their literary charm. His “Lives of the Poets,” however, is written in a simpler style, and contains the critical opinions of his later years. He was often blinded by prejudice in his estimates, and he had no sympathy with high flights of imagination and lyrical outbursts of emotion, both of which were abhorrent in an age of “reason.” The last of the school of Pope, he stood at the parting of the ways, not foreseeing the new paths along which poetry was to travel. Time has reversed nearly all the standards which he so dogmatically asserted, but still he remains, thanks to Boswell, the best-known literary figure of our history. As Lord Brougham so well said, “He was a good man, as he was a great man; and he had so firm a regard for virtue that he wisely set much greater store by his worth than by his fame.”

**DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON.**
(***From a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds.***) To List

# Chapter XXXIX.

## OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

"*Innocently to amuse the imagination in this dream of life is wisdom.*"

GOLDSMITH.

IT is late evening in an ill-lighted street of "dear, dirty Dublin." A little group of men and women are gathered round a ballad-monger, who is howling a ditty which he displays for sale on a roughly-printed broadsheet. Half hidden in the shadow of a neighbouring wall is a shabby, undersized, ugly young man, wearing the coarse stuff gown and the red cap of a sizar of Trinity College. As the raucous voice of the ballad-monger rises and falls, he listens intently and with a beating heart. A flush of pleasure irradiates his grotesque countenance as several of the bystanders produce their coppers and buy the ballad. The verses which have just been sung are his own; for a blissful moment he tastes the joy of successful authorship.

So far his life has been one continuous failure: he makes no mark in college; he is as poor as a church mouse; and every day he is subjected to bitter indignity. But here is compensation; his ballad has its admirers! True, they are ragged, poverty-stricken, and ignorant, but they appreciate his work, and that is a joy no man taketh from him. As he moves away you can almost hear him muttering, "The great world will be listening some day." He is right; it certainly will.

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OLIVER GOLDSMITH, the poor student with whom we have already made acquaintance as one of Dr. Johnson's circle, was born in the parsonage of Lissoy, a pretty Irish village of County Westmeath, sixteen years before the death of Pope. His father was the village parson, a man whose education far exceeded his fortune, and whose generosity and warmth of heart were boundless. He was always oppressed by poverty, yet no wayfarer ever asked food or lodging of him and went empty away. "His pity gave ere charity began."

Forty-two years later Goldsmith idealized his native village in his beautiful poem, *The Deserted Village*:—

"Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheered the labouring swain,
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed:
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,

Seats of my youth, when every sport could please.
How often have I loitered o'er thy green,
Where humble happiness endeared each scene!
How often have I paused on every charm,
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topt the neighbouring hill,
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made!”

His father is thus described:—

“A man he was to all the country dear,
And passing rich with forty pounds a year;
Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
Nor e'er had changed, nor wished to change his place;
Unpractised he to fawn, or seek for power,
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour;
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise.
His house was known to all the vagrant train,
He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain. . . .

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

The village schoolmaster is pictured with the slyest of humour as follows:—

“A man severe he was, and stern to view;
I knew him well, and every truant knew.
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face;
Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;
Full well the busy whisper circling round
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned;
Yet he was kind, or, if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault.
The village all declared how much he knew;
'Twas certain he could write and cypher too;
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And even the story ran—that he could gauge;
In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill,
For even though vanquished, he could argue still;
While words of learned length and thundering sound
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around,
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all he knew.”

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Could we have looked into the little parsonage of Lissoy about the year 1731, we should have seen Goldsmith as a boy of three making his first acquaintance with the mysteries of the alphabet under the tuition of an old dame, who sighed and groaned at the “impenetrable stupidity” of her little scholar. Other more competent tutors told the same tale; Goldsmith was a flower that blossomed late. When a young boy he was attacked by smallpox, the scourge of the age, and his poor plain

face was ever afterwards scored and seamed with its unlovely traces. A thoughtless member of the family, seeing him soon after his recovery, remarked, “Why, Noll, you are a fright. When are you going to get handsome again?” To which the boy replied, “I shall get better, sir, when you do.”

Like Pope, “he lisped in numbers,” but his ready rhyming and his readiness of retort were the only youthful signs of a literary bent. He loved the Latin poets, but hated Cicero, and was far more renowned for his prowess in boyish games and his robbing of orchards than for scholastic attainment.

**TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.**

**The University of Swift, Burke, and Goldsmith.** To List

In his seventeenth year, when returning to school at Elfin on a borrowed hack with a guinea in his pocket, an adventure befell him which he afterwards introduced into his successful comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer*. Belated at Ardagh, he inquired for the “best house,” meaning the best inn, but was directed by the joker of the place to the mansion of Squire Featherstone, where he ordered a supper, and invited the supposed landlord and his family to “join him at the table.” The Squire, perceiving a joke, played the part assigned to him, and only next day did Noll learn to his confusion that he had been entertained at a private house.

Schooldays over, Goldsmith went up to Trinity College as a sizar—that is, a poor scholar who paid very small fees, and, in return, was required to perform certain menial duties. He felt the humiliation of his position keenly, for he was endowed by nature with “an exquisite sensibility of contempt,” but did little or nothing to improve his position. His tutor was unsympathetic, and he had a hearty dislike for the “dreary subtleties” of academic learning.

Like Johnson, he lounged about the college gate in daily idleness. In the social circle, however, he was *persona grata*; he could sing a song well, and play in a somewhat mechanical way on the German flute. His resources were terribly straitened, and it was a happy day for him when he discovered that a printer at the sign of the Reindeer in Montrath Court would give him five shillings for a ballad.

Rarely indeed did the five shillings which he received for his verses go home with him. Goldsmith inherited all his father's inability to resist a tale of woe, and there was always some wretched creature into whose hands he was impelled to thrust his little earnings. One morning his cousin, Edward Mills, called on him, and found him lying not *on* his bed, but *inside* it. He had ripped up the ticking, and had thrust himself in amongst the feathers. It appeared that a poor woman with six children had begged him to help her, and having no money, he had given her his bedclothes!

The death of his father in 1747 robbed him of the scanty funds irregularly forwarded for his maintenance, and thenceforth he had to practise all the arts of “squalid poverty.” At the age of twenty-one, when the law asserts that a man has arrived at years of discretion, Goldsmith quitted college for ever, and went to live with his brother Henry at Kilkenny West. Here he was a great social acquisition, and was quite content to teach in his brother's school in the daytime and be king of the company at Conway's inn in the evening.

He was urged to enter the Church; but when he came up for ordination, totally unprepared, and attired in a pair of flaming scarlet breeches, his rejection was only a matter of moments. He then set off for America with £30 in his pocket, but returned in six weeks, pale and travel-stained, and with empty pockets. The law was next suggested as a career, and once more he was furnished with the necessary funds; but he fell into the hands of a card-sharper in Dublin, and was mercilessly fleeced. Then, with the assistance of a long-suffering uncle, he journeyed to Edinburgh, and entered himself at the university as a medical student.

After spending two winters in the Scottish capital he set out for Leyden in Holland, where he maintained himself by teaching English—with a strong Irish brogue. Soon, however, the *wander-lust* possessed him, and with his flute and a single guinea he began the “grand tour.” In his exquisite novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*, he thus described his wanderings:—

> “I had some knowledge of music, with a tolerable voice, and now turned what was once my amusement into a present means of subsistence. I passed among the harmless peasants of Flanders, and among such of the French as are poor enough to be very merry, for I ever found them sprightly in proportion to their wants. Whenever I approached a peasant's house towards nightfall I played one of my most merry tunes, and that procured me not only a lodging but subsistence for the next day. I once or twice attempted to play for people of fashion, but they thought my performance odious, and never rewarded me with even a trifle.”

The experiences and reflections of this journey subsequently inspired his poem *The Traveller*.

We next find him in London trying to pick up a living, first as a chemist's assistant and then as a doctor in Southwark. His love of finery still possessed him. He wore an old suit of green and gold with a large patch on the left breast, and a shirt and neckcloth that had long forgotten their acquaintance with the wash-tub. When he visited a patient he used to cover up the patch with his cocked hat. Patients, however, were few and far between, and the pangs of hunger often gnawed beneath the patch. He tried proof-reading for Mr. Samuel Richardson, was an usher in a school, and at last found occupation as a “tame author” at the sign of the Dunciad in Paternoster Row. He soon lost this employment, and for the next few years scraped a living, Heaven knows how! It was a miserable, despairing struggle, but Goldsmith never lost heart; he had ever a “knack of hoping.”

At length his prospects brightened a little. He began to write for *The Critical Review*, and was enabled to move into a miserable, dirty room, furnished with a wretched bed and one chair, in Green Arbour Court. Here he wrote his *Enquiry into Polite Learning in Europe*, and revealed in it the dawning graces of his charming prose style. A new magazine, *The Bee*, which ceased to hum after the eighth number, included some of his pieces. One of them, *The Fame Machine*, contained delicate compliments to the leading authors of the day, including, of course, Dr. Samuel Johnson. It was probably *The Fame Machine* which made him known to the “Great Cham.”

By this time Goldsmith's pen was in demand; the booksellers sought him out; his circumstances considerably improved, though his money still burnt a hole in his pocket, for whenever he was in funds, he indulged in fine dinners and gay clothes, and flung his guineas right and left in indiscriminate charity.

**JOHNSON READING "THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD."**
**(From the picture by E. M. Ward, R.A.)** To List

Johnson himself tells us how Goldsmith's masterpiece, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, first saw the light.

> "I received one morning, somewhere about the end of 1764, a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress, and as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was drest, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea, and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork into the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced to me. I looked into it and saw its merit, told the landlady I should soon return, and having gone to a bookseller, sold it for sixty guineas. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a high tone for having used him so ill."

The novel which thus relieved Goldsmith from his embarrassments is a classic, renowned for its humanity, its simplicity, and its happy mingling of character and common sense. It is full of the soft sunshine and tender beauty of home life, and only a good man could have written it. Structurally, it follows the lines of the Book of Job. A good man is overwhelmed with successive misfortunes, yet the pure flame of his soul continues to burn in the midst of his darkness, and as the reward of his patience and fortitude he is restored to happiness with even larger flocks and herds than before. "There are a hundred faults in this thing," wrote Goldsmith in his

preface, “and a hundred things might be said to prove them beauties.” Posterity has not discovered a tithe of the faults thus confessed, but has perceived in it twice a thousand beauties.

This precious little book has been translated into, at least, twenty languages, and it came as a light in the darkness to Goethe, Germany's greatest thinker. “It is not to be described,” he wrote, “the effect Goldsmith's *Vicar* had upon me at the critical moment of my mental development.” Andrew Lang used to declare that “it ought to be read once a year.”

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At the time of his arrest, *The Traveller*, Goldsmith's first important essay in poetry, lay completed in his desk. It was the fruit of much secret and anxious labour, and was his “first strike for honest fame.” He wrote his limpid and graceful prose with the pen of a ready writer, but his verse was the outcome of deep meditation and constant revision, and he considered ten lines a good morning's work. *The Traveller* was published in 1764, and at once placed its author in the front rank of poets. Johnson said that it was the finest poem since Pope's time; and Sir Joshua Reynolds declared that he could never again think of Goldsmith as ugly, because the poem showed that under his coarse, blunt features and rugged skin there was a lovely and lovable nature.

Four years later his comedy, *The Good-Natured Man*, was produced. Goldsmith attended the first performance “in a suit of Tyrian bloom, satin grain, and garter-blue silk breeches,” which, let us hope, were paid for. The comedy was partially successful and brought him £500, which he spent on new clothes and in buying Wilton carpets, tea and card equipages, “morine festoon window curtains,” and so forth, for the furnishing of a set of chambers in Brick Court, Middle Temple.

A series of hack works for the booksellers followed, and in 1770 *The Deserted Village* was published. It was rapturously received; four editions were called for in a month, and a fifth soon afterwards. Johnson thought it inferior to *The Traveller* because it was less didactic, but this was the very reason why the great majority of readers applauded it.

There is little more to chronicle in Goldsmith's life. With the proceeds of *The Deserted Village* he visited Paris in the company of Mrs. Horneck and her lovely daughter, “the Jessamy Bride.” Three years later his comedy *She Stoops to Conquer* was produced, and in book form was dedicated to Johnson, who attended the performance—“sat in a front row in a side box; and when he laughed everybody thought himself warranted to roar.” The piece, in spite of many obstacles, proved a great success and brought much grist to Goldsmith's thriftless mill.

His last poem, *Retaliation*, was a delightful satire on the leading members of the Literary Club. Garrick was hit off as “an abridgment of all that was pleasant in man;” Burke, as one “who, born for the universe, narrowed his mind, and to party gave up

what was meant for mankind; “Reynolds, as “born to improve us in every part, his pencil our faces, his manners our heart,” and so on. *The Retaliation* was not finished when the pen fell from poor Goldsmith's fingers. A local disorder, badly treated, laid him low, and he died on April 4, 1774, having lived but forty-five years and five months. He died, as he lived, in debt, and his last hours were clouded by the memory of his reckless life, and his foolish, unthrifty ways.

The news of his death deeply affected his friends; a crowd of humble pensioners filled his little staircase, and a lock of his hair was cut from his head for “the Jessamy Bride” and her sister. “Let not his frailties be remembered,” said Johnson, “he was a very great man.” Seventy-seven years later Thackeray cried, “Who of the millions whom he has amused doesn't love him? To be the most beloved of English writers, what a title that is for a man!”

Goldsmith, the poet, marks the passing of the Pope influence. No longer are we confined to the narrow little world of London streets and to the equally narrow world of writers and wits, fops and politicians, but we go forth to the great world of nature, to the wide realms of earth and sea and sky, and view mankind touched and moved by contact with the great elemental things. It was Goldsmith's glory to renew the spirit of humanity in poetry, and to show the priest, the husbandman, the father of a family, the poor, the oppressed, and the outcast as themes fit for the exercise of the highest art and the loftiest forms of human expression.

**The First Audience**

Oliver Goldsmith reading the manuscript of “She Stoops to Conquer” to his friends the Misses Horneck.

**(From the painting by Margaret I. Dicksee.)** To List

# Chapter XL.

## COWPER AND CRABBE.

> "*Cowper, thy lovely spirit was there, by death disenchanted*
> *From that heavy spell which had bound it in sorrow and darkness.*
> *Thou wert there, in the kingdom of peace and of light everlasting.*"
>
> SOUTHEY.

Two poets, both of the second rank, appear in our pageant as illustrative of the transition period through which poetry is now passing. It is a period of revolt against convention in art and society. Men are beginning to find a joy in natural objects; they are beginning to prefer the woodland to the formal garden, and to believe that "God made the country and man made the town." True beauty and true pleasure, they perceive, can only be found in fields and woods and in the simple duties of home and country life. "Return to Nature," is the cry; cultivate the simple, human affections; love all created things, animate and inanimate; rejoice in natural beauty, be tender to animals, be kind to the poor, and strive to make the world a larger reflex of the happy home. The world as God made it is good, very good; "every prospect pleases, and only man is vile." Let but man cultivate sympathy with Nature and he will be weaned from worldliness to God.

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WILLIAM COWPER, whose teachings may thus be roughly summed up, was, like Goldsmith, a child of the parsonage. His father was a royal chaplain, the son of a judge, the nephew of a Lord Chancellor, and the rector of Great Berkhampstead in Hertfordshire. His boy, who was born in the year that Samuel Johnson left Oxford, was very delicate, and was tenderly cared for by his mother, a lady of noble birth. When he was old enough to go to school, it was her hands that wrapped his little scarlet cloak around him and filled his little bag with biscuits before he set out in the morning. The happiest years of his life were spent by her knee, where he often amused himself by marking out the flowered pattern of her dress on paper with a pin. His mother's death when he was only six years old overwhelmed the poor boy with grief.

Soon afterwards he was sent to a school where a bullying school-fellow terrorized him almost to distraction. Later on he went to Westminster School, where he played cricket and football and became a competent scholar. After leaving Westminster he was entered at Middle Temple and articled to a solicitor. He

constantly visited the house of his uncle, Ashley Cowper, and he and his girl cousins made the old house ring with laughter from morning till night.

This happy intimacy, however, came to an end; he began to reside alone in the Temple, grew morbid, and was attacked by a deep religious melancholy. His uncle's refusal to permit a marriage between him and his cousin Theodora increased his despondency, and the clouds grew darker and darker about his brain. In 1763, just as he had been appointed Clerk of the Journals of the House of Lords, he became insane and was removed to an asylum.

Two years later he was sufficiently cured to be removed to lodgings in Huntingdon, where he made the acquaintance of a clergyman named Unwin, and was, later in the year, taken into his household as a paying guest. When Mr. Unwin died, and the home was broken up, Cowper removed with the widow and her daughter to Olney in Buckinghamshire, where he was devotedly cared for. In the orderly quiet of this home and in the company of his three tame hares and other animals, Cowper found peace for his perturbed spirit.

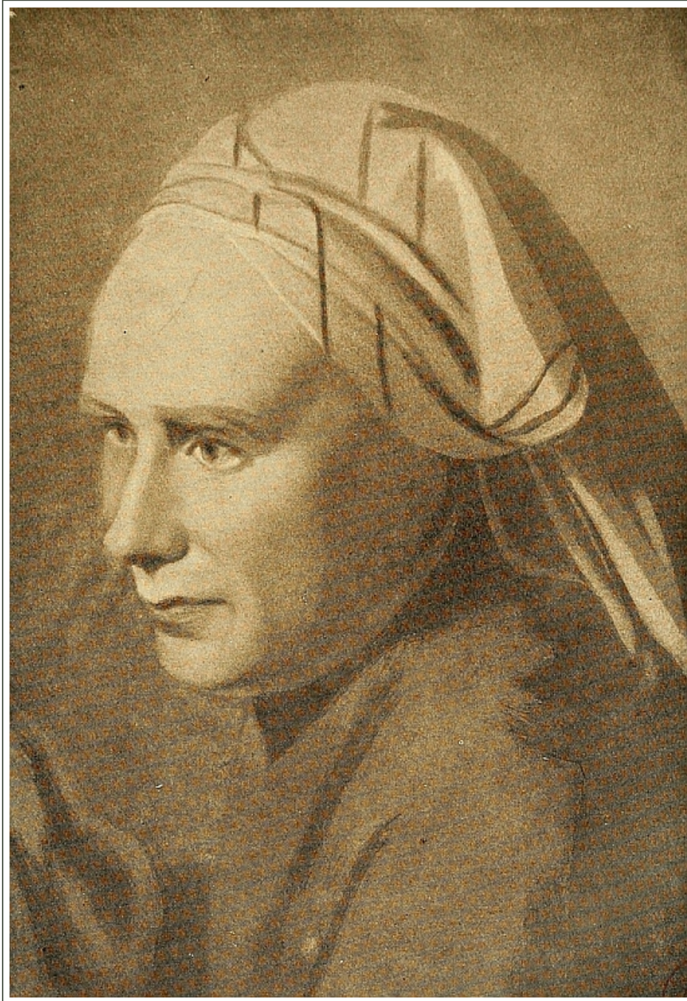
In 1772 he again relapsed into madness, and remained in this condition for sixteen months. Upon his recovery he found himself able to write for the first time with ease and fluency, and now, on the verge of his fiftieth year, blossomed forth as a poet. “The necessity of amusement,” he said, “made me write verses; it made me a carpenter, a bird-cage maker, a gardener, and has lately taught me to draw.” His first volume of *Poems* was published in 1782, and attracted little attention. A bright and clever widow named Lady Austen now came to live at Olney, and interested herself much in his welfare. To cheer him in an hour of depression she told him the story of John Gilpin's ride, which he immediately made the subject of a well-known set of playful verses.

One day Lady Austen asked Cowper to write her a poem. “On what subject?” he asked. “On a sofa,” she replied. Cowper immediately began to write, and his poem, which he called *The Task*, gradually grew into six books. Its publication established him as the poet of the simple life, and gave him high rank amongst the writers of the day. The whole work is full of human kindness and love for children and animals, of homely thoughts which the sights and sounds of the pretty neighbourhood inspired, together with faithful descriptions of the landscapes amidst which he took his walks. Running through it all is a strain of deep religious fervour, an enthusiastic love of humanity, and a passion for freedom.

In the beautiful lines which close one of the pieces in his first volume he distinctly claims to be a teacher of mankind:—

> “Me poetry (or rather notes that aim
> Feebly and faintly at poetic fame)
> Employs, shut out from more important views,
> Fast by the banks of the slow-winding Ouse;
> Content if thus sequestered I may raise
> A monitor's, though not a poet's, praise,
> And while I teach an art too little known,
> To close life wearily, may not waste my own.”

The success of *The Task* encouraged him to begin a verse translation of Homer; but the work was interrupted by another fit of madness, and was not completed and published until 1791. Once more his mind gave way, and during this attack Mrs. Unwin, his guardian angel for thirty years, passed away. For the rest of his life Cowper was practically insane. He died on April 26, 1800.



**WILLIAM COWPER.**
**(From the portrait by George Romney.)** To List

Cowper's work is always interesting, and his popularity never waned for the twenty years following the publication of *The Task*. In advanced literary circles he was dubbed “a coddled Pope,” but in middle-class homes his work was deemed worthy of a place side by side with Bunyan and the Bible. He was not only a pleasant and gracious poet, but one of the best letter-writers who ever lived. His letters make excellent reading; they are written in simple and graceful English, and are full of wit and humour.

Cowper's companion in our pageant is George Crabbe, who tasted the bitterness of extreme poverty in youth, studied medicine, found the profession distasteful, threw it up, and with a capital of £3 proposed to storm the literary citadels of London. Reduced to the extremity of distress, he was befriended by Edmund Burke, and in 1781 wrote anonymously *The Library*, which he followed up two years later with his better-known work *The Village*. Subsequently Crabbe took holy orders, and became a pluralist in easy circumstances. His *Parish Register*, published when he was fifty-three, made him famous and introduced him to Sir Walter Scott, who often in his later years said to Lockhart, his biographer, “Read me some amusing thing—read me a bit of Crabbe.”

Crabbe, like Cowper, was a poet of the country, but there the resemblance ends. He recognized that the taste of the day was in revolt against the old Arcadian ideal of country life—that men were tired of courtiers posing as shepherds, and fine ladies as milkmaids and nymphs. The insipidity and artificiality of it all was absurd in a day when social questions were beginning to agitate men's minds. Crabbe had been born and bred amongst the very poor, and he knew that the town poets were utterly ignorant of the real conditions of rural life, so he deliberately set himself to destroy the fiction of the Golden Age and paint—

> “the cot
> As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.”

With stern fidelity, and a passion for realism, he pictured the village, the wretched homes, the half-starved inhabitants, the sufferings of peasants, the hopelessness of their outlook, and the workhouse that awaited them in old age. He was a Rembrandt of the poor; he painted faces that bore the impress of hard and bitter experience, and flung the dark shadows of sorrow and suffering athwart his canvas. This he did in order to invoke pity for the lowly and downtrodden, and to extend the bounds of human sympathy to the obscure and the inarticulate.

His verse has been well described as “beads of clay strung at intervals upon a chain of pearls.” It was little better than prose cut into lengths, and its faults were legion, but it embodied that new interest in humanity which was soon to dominate the poetry of a more inspired age.

# Chapter XLI.

## THE AYRSHIRE PLOUGHMAN.

“*The boast of Scotland, Robert Burns.*”—Sir Walter Scott.

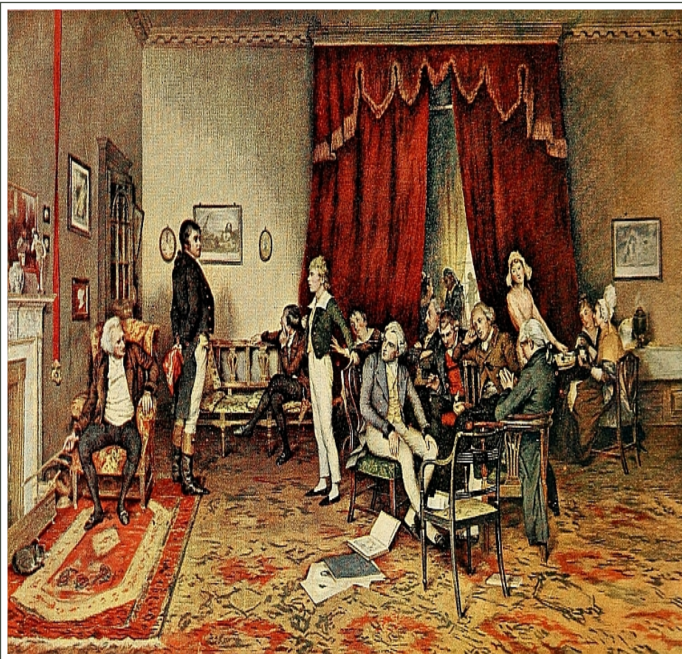
The scene shifts to Edinburgh, the gray old capital of the North. It is the year 1786, and an evening party is in progress at the house of Professor Ferguson in the Sciennes. Several of the university and literary lights of the city are present; amongst them the celebrated Dugald Stewart, and a boy of fifteen, who is destined to rise to the highest pinnacle of literary fame. But the party has not assembled to do honour to the renowned Professor of Moral Philosophy or to the boy-genius, but to the man who now stands gazing at a picture on the wall.

You judge him at first sight to be a tenant farmer, a man who is accustomed to guide his own plough. He is strong and robust, clad in top boots, buckskin breeches, and a cut-away coat with brass buttons. His face is heavy and wears an expression of shrewdness and good sense; his manners are rustic, but not clownish. There is a dignified plainness and simplicity about him, and you guess from his self-possessed bearing that he is a man of some distinction. In sooth he is; all the capital is talking of him. A few days ago a Scottish poetess wrote to a friend: “The town is at present agog with the ploughman poet, who receives adulation with native dignity.”

You would not have judged him a poet at a casual glance, but when he takes a spirited part in the conversation, you cannot mistake the poetic gleam in his large dark eyes. The boy who now listens eagerly to him afterwards declared that his eye literally *glowed* when he spoke with feeling or interest. “I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men in my time.”

The boy and the man come into close touch before the evening is over. The poet is moved by a picture representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on the one side, and on the other his widow, with a child in her arms. There are some lines of verse beneath the picture, and he asks who wrote them; no one knows but the boy, who whispers the information to a friend. It is passed on to the poet, who rewards him with a kind look and a word of thanks, which he receives with a flush of pleasure.

This scene introduces us to the two greatest men of letters ever produced by Scotland, Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott—the one, the national poet of his land and the inspired interpreter of his race; the other, worthy to rank with Homer and Shakespeare.



**The Meeting of Burns and Scott.**
(***From the painting by C. Martin Hardie, R.S.A. By permission of Messrs. Thomas Forman and Sons, Nottingham, owners of the colour copyright.***) To List

ROBERT BURNS was born in an “auld clay biggin” of the Ayrshire village of Alloway, in the “hindmost year but ane” of George the Second. The cottage in which he was born is now national property, and hard by is a Burns museum. Every summer hordes of tourists set out from

> “Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses
> For honest men and bonny lasses,”

to visit the ruins of the old kirk in which “Tam o' Shanter” saw the horrible revel of the witches, to see the cottage in which Burns was born, and to wander on “the banks and braes o' bonnie Doon,” the scene of his earliest love adventures. Scarce one of the native pilgrims, though they may wear “hodden gray” and be strangers to the culture of the schools, but can quote some of his lines or sing some of his songs. No poet in any land remains so much a national possession. He himself was intensely national, thoroughly woven into the web of his nation, and wholly untainted by the admixture of alien sentiment. And Scots so fully recognize him as the inspired interpreter of their race that wherever they may wander, from the icefields of the Yukon to the boundless pastures of Australia, they carry his lyrics in their hearts. Year by year, as the twenty-fifth day of January comes round, Burns's fellow-countrymen on every continent and on every shore make festival in honour of his birth.

The life of Burns is the story of thirty-seven years of sorrow and struggle, chequered by a few faint and transient gleams of prosperity. His youth was hard, his

formal education was scanty; at thirteen he threshed corn, and at fifteen he was the chief labourer on his father's farm. But he was brought up in a home where learning was revered, and book-reading was the favourite pastime. It was common parish gossip that if you visited the “auld clay biggin” at meal-times you would be sure to find the whole family with a book in one hand and a horn spoon in the other.

Burns had few books, but they were worthy books, and they introduced him to much that was best in literature. He, himself, seized every opportunity to learn, and in his seventeenth year he first burst into song. His inspiration owed nothing to books. “Gie me,” he said,

> “ae spark o' Nature's fire,
> That's a' the learning I desire,
> Then tho' I drudge thro' dub and mire
> At pleugh or cart,
> My muse, tho' hamely in attire,
> May touch the heart.”

It touches the heart, not in spite of, but actually because of the drudgery, dub and mire, the pleugh, the cart, and the hamely attire. “He sings,” as he says, “the sentiments and manners he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him.” Nothing was too lowly for his song; the lowlier the better. He was most inspired when his theme was apparently trivial—a field-mouse's nest torn to pieces by his ploughshare, a crimson-tipped daisy crushed in the furrow, the sorrows of a ewe, a dog, or an old mare, or the love transports of a plough-boy and a milkmaid. But he was not by any means an unlettered genius. Burns diligently studied the best models, and was no believer in “intuitive propriety and unlaboured elegance.” He sang like the birds, because he must, but his lyric powers were sedulously fostered.

While the poet was reaping the “harvest of the quiet eye” and was pouring out his inmost thoughts in homely and impassioned verse, the farm on which he wrought like a galley slave gave him little or no recompense. The outlook was so hopeless that he resolved to desert his native land for Jamaica, in the hope of obtaining a stewardship on some sugar plantation. In order to raise a little money for the voyage he collected his songs into a slender book and published them. Six hundred copies were printed at Kilmarnock, and they sold so well that he made a profit of twenty guineas. With this sum in his pocket, he sent his chest to Greenock, breathed a fond farewell to the banks of Ayr in his touching song, *The gloomy night is gathering fast*, and was about to emigrate when an incident occurred which changed the whole current of his life.

A copy of his little book had fallen into the hands of Dr. Blacklock, a local Edinburgh poet, who greatly admired it and wrote to a friend warm words of praise and encouragement. He suggested that Burns should come to Edinburgh, and the poet, nothing loath, arrived in the capital in November 1787 without a single friend or a letter of introduction. We have already seen how he was received; he was lionized and feasted, university professors, judges, and advocates, ladies of rank and fashion, ministers, brethren of the masonic craft, all united to do him honour, and, incidentally, to spoil him. Happily his native good sense and genuine modesty

were sufficient ballast to prevent him from capsizing in the gale of adulation which now filled his sails.

While waiting for Creech to publish the Edinburgh edition of his poems, he filled up the time by making a tour through the Borders and the Highlands. In the preface to the edition published by Creech he explained the source of his inspiration exactly: “The Poetic Genius of my Country found me, as the prophetic bard Elijah did Elisha—at the plough; and threw her inspiring mantle over me. She bade me sing the loves, the joys, the rural scenes, and rural pleasures of my native soil in my native tongue: I tuned my wild, artless notes as she inspired.”

The final settlement with Creech put £500 into his pocket. By this time Edinburgh had tired of its novelty, and Burns found himself neglected in the circles which had recently competed for his company. He decided to shake the dust of the capital from his feet and take the farm of Ellisland, six miles from Dumfries. Having married Jean Armour, he endeavoured to settle down to the work of agriculture, but by this time society had become necessary to him. After the days of bright and varied conversation and the nights of unstinted conviviality in Edinburgh, the isolation of the country was very irksome to him. His acres, too, were uniformly ungrateful, for he had made a poet's and not a farmer's choice of a farm.

**IN BURNS' LAND.**
1. Birthplace of Robert Burns.
2. Alloway Church, showing William Burns' tomb.
3. Statue of Robert Burns at Ayr.
4. The banks of “bonnie Doon.” To List

“Place,” as we have seen in former pages, was the conventional reward of literary merit, and his friends now obtained for him a post in the Excise. For a time he combined gauging with ploughing, but in November 1791 left his farm and settled down as excise officer in Dumfries with a salary of £70 a year.

In the meantime he had not deserted the Muse, nor was she unfriendly to him. He set himself to give Scotland and the world a store of songs, original and amended, such as no other country possesses. Many old songs were purged of their grossness, and many new lyrics of incomparable beauty were written. Over a hundred of these songs appeared in Thomson's collection, and for them he received a shawl for his wife, a picture by David Allan, and a five pound note! When

the money came to him he wrote an indignant letter to the publisher, and never afterwards handled a stiver. He knew that his songs were the choicest flower of his achievement; they were not for sale, but were a free-will offering to Scots for all time.

> ". . . A wish (I mind its power)
> A wish that to my latest hour
> Will strongly heave my breast,
> That I for poor auld Scotland's sake,
> Some useful plan or book could make,
> Or sing a song at least."

To this period also belongs *Tam o' Shanter*, which he considered his "standard performance in the poetical line."

Burns early learned to "lift his glass," and his duties as exciseman surrounded him with temptations to which he more and more succumbed. He joined heartily in the convivial meetings of his fellow-townsmen, and his occasional excesses, together with the laborious toil and privations of his youth and the exposure and fatigue inseparable from his occupation, broke down his health. In the autumn of 1795 he was attacked with rheumatic fever, and from a second attack in the next year he never rallied. He died on July 21, 1796, at the age of thirty-seven.

His last days were passed in a torment of anxiety. "There is nothing," says Lord Rosebery, "more melancholy in all biography. The brilliant poet, the delight of all society, from the highest to the lowest, sits brooding in silence over the drama of his spent life; the early innocent home, the plough and the savour of fresh-turned earth, the silent communion with nature and his own heart, the brief hour of splendour, the dark hour of neglect, the mad struggle for forgetfulness, the bitterness of vanished homage, the gnawing doubt of fame, the distressful future of his wife and children—an endless witch-dance of thought without clue or remedy, all perplexing, all soon to end while he is yet young, as men reckon youth; though none know so well as he that his youth is gone, his race is run, his message is delivered."

It is Burns's songs which give him his lofty place in our pageant. His fellow-countryman, Carlyle, hailed him as the first of all our song-writers. "With what tenderness he sings, yet with what vehemence and entireness! There is piercing wail in his sorrow, the purest rapture in his joy; he burns with the sternest ire, or laughs with the loudest of slyest mirth; and yet he is sweet and soft, 'sweet as the smiles when fond lovers meet, and soft as their parting tear.'" Yet he was something more than a love-lyrist. He was the embodiment of peasant Scotland of his day. We see it depicted with ruthless faithfulness in all its coarseness and narrowness, in its carousals and light loves, in the tyranny of the kirk, and the hypocrisy of the "unco guid;" but we see it, too, in its proud consciousness of independence, its strong democratic feeling, its fervid patriotism, its warmth of family affection, and its strong, stern faith in God.

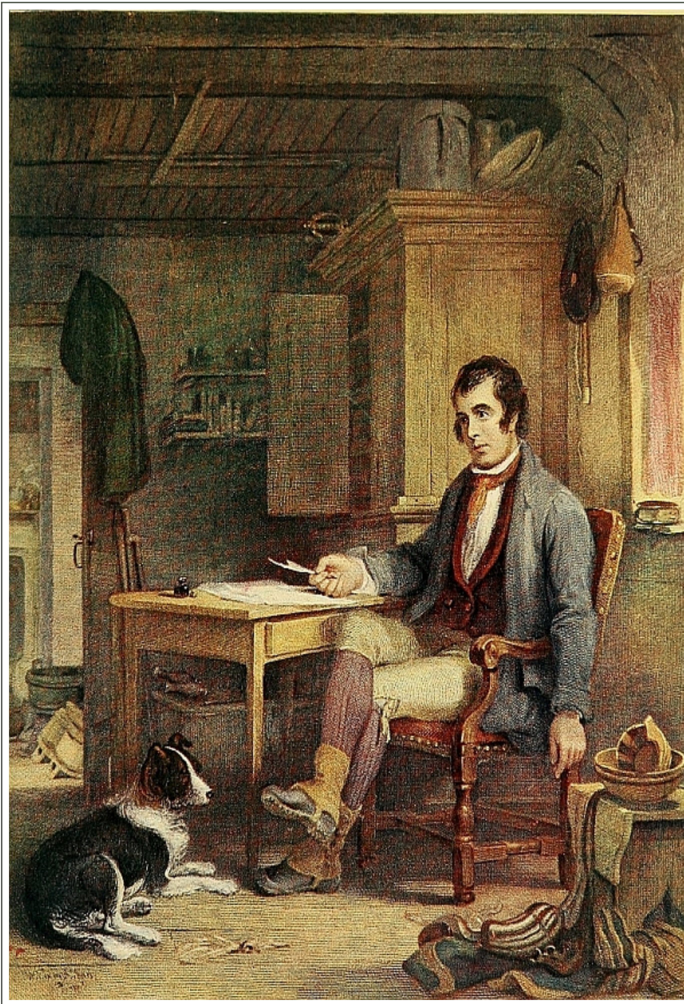
In his *Jolly Beggars* he shows us the mad revelry of degraded outcasts; in *Tam o' Shanter*, the Walpurgis night of a drunken imagination; in *The Cottar's Saturday Night*, a noble and pathetic picture of a humble home irradiated by simple

contentment, dutiful affection, and the brooding spirit of divine faith and worship. Goldsmith tells us that the three greatest characters upon earth are, the priest, the husbandman, and the father of a family. The humble cottar combines them all in his own patriarchal person.

Burns's passionate assertion of human equality and the glory of simple manhood still remains a characteristic of his countrymen:

> “What though on hamely fare we dine,
> Wear hodden gray, and a' that;
> Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
> A man's a man for a' that!
> For a' that, and a' that,
> Their tinsel show and a' that,
> The honest man, though e'er sae poor,
> Is king o' men for a' that.”

His inspiring patriotism not only shines forth in the two concluding stanzas of *The Cottar's Saturday Night*, which he once repeated kneeling on Coldstream Bridge, but in the “fire-eyed fury” of *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*. In Scotland Burns is still the people's poet, and so he will remain, for in his songs Scotsmen cannot fail to find the impassioned expression of their every mood.



**Burns composing “The Cottar's Saturday Night.”**
(***From the picture by Sir William Allen, R.A. By permission of Messrs. Henry Graves and Co.***) To List

# Chapter XLII.

## THE WIZARD OF THE NORTH.

> "*Brother of Homer, and of him*
> *On Avon's banks by twilight dim,*
> *Who dreamt immortal dreams and took*
> *From Nature's hand her storied book;*
> *Earth hath not seen, Time may not see*
> *Till ends his march, such other three.*"—"DELTA" MOIR.

WHAT Robert Burns was to the minstrelsy of Scotland, WALTER SCOTT was to its romance. The Ayrshire ploughman gave immortality to the songs of the people; the Edinburgh lawyer, like the prophet of old, betook himself to the valley of dry bones which men call history, and there wrought a miracle—"the breath came into them and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army." With a magician's wand he revivified the past and flashed upon a mechanical and prosaic age all that was heroic, chivalrous, and romantic in the traditions of bygone years. He created the historical novel, and displayed in the process such wide and deep knowledge of human nature, such sympathy and humour, and such abounding genius, that he rightly claims to sit with Homer and Shakespeare on the triple throne of universal literature.

---

Walter Scott was born on August 15, 1771, in a house at the head of the College Wynd in Edinburgh. The Wynd exists no longer, and the only indication of his birthplace is a tablet on the side wall of a building which fronts Chambers Street. Scott's father was a Writer to the Signet, a plodding, kindly man with a weakness for attending funerals. His mother was the daughter of a professor in the university; she was a bright, happy lady with a great love of poetry. The family was well-to-do, and all the educational resources of the Scottish capital were open to him.

He was a healthy infant, but when eighteen months old, a fever left him weak and without the use of his right leg. All sorts of remedies were tried without success, and at last he was sent to his grandfather's farm at Smailholme in Roxburghshire to see what country air could do for him. The use of his leg came back by degrees, but he always walked with a limp.

At Smailholme, Scott found himself in the "Borders," famous for centuries as the scene of guerilla warfare between the neighbouring Scots and English. His forefathers had been Border chieftains who lived by raiding the cattle and sheep of

the Northumbrian valleys. When the larder was empty they would buckle on their swords, bestride their Galloway nags, and with a bag of oatmeal at the saddlebows, dash across the Border, and return driving before them herds of cattle and droves of sheep. One of Scott's ancestors, known as Auld Wat, used to boast that he never left anything behind him unless it was too heavy or too hot to carry away. Once, when this worthy was returning from a foray, he passed a large haystack. “Had ye but four legs,” he said, “ye should na stand there lang!”

As Scott grew older and stronger he loved nothing better than climbing the “peel” at Sandyknowe, and dreaming amidst its ancient stones of the warlike doings of his warrior sires. From the summit of the tower he could look over a wide expanse of country, where every field had its battle, and every rivulet its story. He listened with eager ears to all the tales and ballads of the countryside, talked with the old folks whose memories went back to stirring days, devoured every chap-book within reach, and peopled anew each crag and ruined wall with its long since dead and gone heroes.

Amidst such scenes Scott spent his youthful years, filling his memory with a wealth of antiquarian lore. The clang of sword on buckler and the twang of the bowstring were ever in his ears; visions of mail-clad knights, ever ready to rescue fair damsels in distress, crowded upon his boyish mind, and stirred him like a trumpet call. In after years all this was translated into the glowing pages of his poems and novels.

In his eighth year Scott was sent to the High School of Edinburgh. He was not a model pupil, but his readiness and retentive memory enabled him to take a “decent place” in his class. On the whole, he was more distinguished in the playground than in the classroom. Out of school hours he delighted in “bickers” with the boys of the neighbourhood, and in climbing the cliff paths of the Castle rock.

Some writers have labelled Scott “dunce” in his boyhood. Dunce he never was, though a learned doctor made the pronouncement. Though he did not make much mark at school, his mind was chock-full of omnivorous reading; it was stored from cellar to garret with what his tutors would have called lumber, but it was this lumber which enabled him to furnish and adorn many literary mansions. He was impatient of set tasks; he was one of the great undistinguished of school who become the great distinguished of life.

Even in boyhood he acquired a reputation as a teller of tales. One of his school-fellows afterwards said, “He was the best story teller I ever heard.” One can easily guess the subjects of his stories; they were certain to deal with knightly doings in the brave days of old.

Schooldays came to an end, and Scott began to attend the university. He was not much interested in his classes, and much preferred to wander to Salisbury Crags, Arthur's Seat, or Blackford Hill discussing knight-errantry with a friend. He could not walk many yards in his “own romantic town” without recalling a host of stirring memories. The very stones of Edinburgh to this day whisper a nation's

history. The city of his birth and pride was a perpetual inspiration, and it played a large part in the making of the “Wizard of the North.”

When Scott left the university he entered his father's office as an apprentice, and in the course of business was frequently sent to the Highlands. As we may well imagine, that “enchanted land” made a deep and lasting impression upon him. He talked with veterans who remembered the '45; he visited the caves in which Prince Charlie had hidden, and he stored up in his marvellous memory a thousand scenes and incidents which he afterwards reproduced in prose and verse.

At the close of his apprenticeship he became an advocate (*Anglice*, barrister), and one memorable day in the year 1792 he donned gown and wig and was called to the Bar. A friendly solicitor gave him a small case before the court rose, and Scott thus earned his first guinea. As he walked home with a friend he said, “This is a sort of wedding day with me. I think I must go in here and buy myself a new nightcap.” So he did, but with his first real fee he bought a silver taperstand for his mother.

Scott received some employment from his father and from other solicitors, but he had plenty of leisure. With a friend he frequently made what he called “raids” into the Border counties, where he explored every corner of the country, collecting ballads and picking up stories from all sorts and conditions of people. Other raids took him into Perthshire, Stirlingshire, and Forfarshire, and introduced him to the originals of Tully-Veolan of “Waverley” and the real “Old Mortality.”

In 1797 he married a beautiful girl named Charlotte Mary Carpenter, and settled down to the real work of his life. He had already produced some verse translations from the German and a few ballads of his own. Now he began to prepare a collection of the Border Ballads which he had been collecting almost from boyhood. “The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border” was published in 1802, and was very well received. Scott made some eighty pounds out of it and hosts of literary friends.

Meanwhile he had been appointed Sheriff-Substitute of Selkirkshire, and was required to reside within his jurisdiction. He therefore removed to a pleasant country house called Ashestiel on the banks of the Tweed. Never was river better loved by any man. His passion was to live so close to it that its song might ever be in his ears.

His first “real strike for honest fame” was *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which was published at the beginning of 1805. Its success was instantaneous; all the reading world was talking of the new poet, and everybody was charmed with it. *The Lay* was a story in verse, and such a thing had not been so well done since the days of Chaucer. It was calculated to please all tastes. All the characters in it play their parts right gallantly, there is plenty of stir and movement, many tender and graceful songs are scattered through it, and, above all, it contains descriptions of scenery which were then as novel as they were refreshing. Take, as an example, the opening of the second canto:—

> “If thou wouldst view fair Melrose aright,
> Go visit it by the pale moonlight,

For the gay beams of lightsome day
Gild, but to flout, the ruins gray.
When the broken arches are black in night,
And each shafted oriel glimmers white;
When the cold light's uncertain shower
Streams on the ruined central tower;
When buttress and buttress alternately
Seem framed of ebon and ivory;
When silver edges the imagery,
And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die;
When distant Tweed is heard to rave,
And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave,
Then go—but go alone the while—
Then view St. David's ruined pile;
And, home returning, soothly swear,
Was never scene so sad and fair."

*The Lay of the Last Minstrel* was a brilliant success, and its author received more than £750 for it. In the next year Scott was appointed one of the principal clerks in the Court of Session; his duties were fairly light, and left him plenty of leisure for writing. An old school-fellow named James Ballantyne, who had printed the "Minstrelsy" at Kelso, had by this time removed to Edinburgh, and had set up his press in the Canongate, near the palace of Holyrood. Scott became Ballantyne's secret partner in a printing business, and thus began a connection which in later days was to prove his financial downfall.

About this time Scott began his first novel, "Waverley." When he had written some chapters of it he showed it to a valued friend, who disapproved of it and advised him not to waste his time on it. Scott took his advice and turned again to poetry.

What a worker he was! When residing at Ashestiel he used to rise at five in the morning, and an hour later sat down to write, his books of reference piled round him on the floor, and a favourite dog by his knee. By breakfast time he had "broken the back" of his day's work, and by noon he was a "free man," ready to join in all the sports of the countryside. He was especially fond of coursing with his greyhounds and of spearing salmon.

In February 1808 *Marmion*, the greatest of all Scott's poetical works, saw the light. He had given much time and pains to the poem, and it was eagerly anticipated by the public. Constable, "the Czar of publishers," offered a thousand guineas for it before he had even seen it! *Marmion* proved an even greater success than *The Lay*; it was a better poem, though it did not escape sharp criticism from Jeffrey, the Edinburgh reviewer.

In the same year Scott quarrelled with Constable, and determined to establish a publishing business himself. The new firm consisted of James Ballantyne, his brother John, and Walter Scott, who found the bulk of the capital. The first of Scott's books which the Ballantyne firm published was *The Lady of the Lake*, probably the best known and best loved of all Scott's long poetical pieces. The poem was wonderfully popular from the first, and twenty thousand copies were sold within the

year. It literally created the Trossachs, and, almost immediately, the district was invaded by tourists all carrying *The Lady of the Lake* as a guide-book.

**SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.**
(***From the portrait by Sir Henry Raeburn.***) To List

Though *The Lady* brought much golden grist to the mill, the publishing business of which Scott was the chief partner was far from being a success. Scott was the tenderest-hearted man alive; he could not bear to refuse an author publication, and the consequence was that he issued a large number of expensive and utterly unsaleable works. Though the business was in a bad way, he now gratified his ambition to become a landed proprietor. He bought the estate of Abbotsford, and began to lay out the grounds and set about the building of a baronial hall. On the decorations of this place, on the armour with which he crowded the walls, on the woodlands, the gardens, the furniture, and the paintings, he spent many thousands of pounds. Abbotsford became his hobby and his chiefest pride; he developed a

passion for buying up the neighbouring land at extravagant prices, and he begrudged no money upon the development and the improvement of his estate.

The two first poetical pieces which he wrote in his new home showed a great falling off, both in composition and in popular favour. His first freshness had gone, and he saw in Lord Byron, who was then beginning to take the world by storm, a rival who was to eclipse him. He, therefore, began to think of other literary occupations.

Looking out some fishing tackle in a desk one day, he came across the manuscript of "Waverley," which he had begun some years before, but had thrown aside. He read the manuscript, thought it had been underrated, and decided to finish it and publish it. As he was uncertain how this new venture would succeed, and was unwilling to tarnish his poetic fame by a possible prose failure, he determined to publish the book anonymously.

In three weeks it was finished; but before it was ready for publication, the affairs of Ballantyne and Co. were in such a critical state that Scott had to appeal to Constable for financial assistance. Thus began that business connection with Constable that ended so disastrously. Though Scott was terribly worried about money matters at this time, he managed to find £50 for a fellow-author in distress. "His hand was open as the day to melting charity."

"Waverley" was published in July 1814, and was splendidly received. Everybody wanted to know the name of the author—the "Great Unknown," as he was called. There had been historical novels before "Waverley," but none in which the dry bones were made to live, and the days of old revived as in a kinematograph. Story, anecdote, description of scenery, deep knowledge of men and women, were to be found in the pages of the new novel, and the vividness and charm of it entranced all readers. His second novel—"Guy Mannering"—which was written in six weeks, was also well received. Money came "tumbling in on him very fast:" all his anxieties disappeared; but instead of laying by for a rainy day, he at once began to buy more land.

"Waverley" and "Guy Mannering" were the first fruits of the new literary field from which Scott was to reap a most bountiful harvest. During the next ten years he poured out a series of splendid novels with such remarkable rapidity that we still wonder how any one man could do it. The secret of their authorship was well kept, but it leaked out at last, though Scott did not make a public confession until the year 1827.

He was now at the very top of his fame. He visited London and the Continent, and was everywhere greeted with acclamation. Returning to Abbotsford, he laboured furiously, and one by one the great novels on which his fame rests flowed from his pen. His works were read by cultivated people all over Europe, his society was courted by the greatest in the land, and his annual income was not less than £10,000. A baronetcy had already been conferred upon him.

We now come to the closing years of his career. The story is very sad, yet it shows the great man at his best. So far we have seen him as a writer of genius, a noble soul, and a lover of his country, dwelling amongst his fellows in prosperity and honour. We are now to see how he bore himself in misfortune, the real touchstone of character. “Sweet are the uses of adversity,” and out of adversity Scott rose, a hero.

About the middle of January 1826, the thunder-cloud, which had been so long gathering, burst upon his devoted head. A firm with which Constable had very large dealings failed, and this brought down both Constable and Ballantyne. The result was that, at the age of fifty-five, Scott was not only penniless, but owed £117,000. He bore the news, which came to him after months of anxiety, like a man. “Naked we entered the world,” said he, “and naked we leave it. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” He was strongly advised to declare himself a bankrupt, and thus to free himself from his embarrassments; but he refused. “No,” said he, “this right hand shall work it off.”

Already his strong frame had been shaken by illness, and the hair that fringed his towering forehead had become as white as snow. He had looked forward to an old age of ease and honour, but the future was now black indeed. Nevertheless, his valiant soul did not quail; he took upon himself the whole of the debts of the Ballantyne firm, and then devoted the rest of his life to paying them off. In two years he cleared for his creditors nearly £40,000, and paid a dividend of six shillings in the pound.

Day after day he drudged on, delving ceaselessly in the mine of his imagination; but the end was drawing near. He was attacked by apoplexy and paralysis. Nature was revenging herself for his cruel wear and tear of mind and body. In vain he sought the restorative airs of a southern climate. He visited Italy, but gradually grew worse instead of better, and a great longing for Abbotsford possessed him. He was hurried home, and on the journey lay in a state of torpor until his eye fell on his own towers, when he sprang up with a cry of delight. Abbotsford gave him some respite; he rallied a little, and, propped up in his chair with pillows, tried to write. Alas! the pen dropped from his nerveless fingers, and the helpless old man sank back into his chair and wept in silence. His life's work was done.

> “About half-past one on the twenty-first of September 1832, Sir Walter breathed his last in the presence of all his children. It was a beautiful day, so warm that every window was wide open, and so perfectly still that the sound of all others most delicious to his ear—the gentle ripple of the Tweed over its pebbles—was distinctly audible as we knelt around the bed, and his eldest son kissed and closed his eyes.”

“Good-night, Sir Walter!” With him passed not merely one of the glories of our literature, but a great and good man. We know all, or nearly all, about him, yet we know nothing unworthy, mean, or base. George the Fourth made him a baronet, but

God Almighty made him a gentleman. In his life he was the “Great Unknown”; as long as the English tongue remains he will be the “Great Unforgotten.”

Scott's place in literature has already been sufficiently indicated. He appears as one of those granite rock pillars that stand amidst the waves on the rugged coast of his native land. He represents, in his best and most characteristic work, the vanished world of a bygone age—a world which he suffuses with an atmosphere of romance, and peoples with men and women who have the spark of life in them. As a creator of character he stands nearest to Shakespeare.

In his poetical work he is nearest to Homer; he sings of the camp and battlefield, of warriors and combat, with all the gusto and fire of the born minstrel. It was not his purpose to solve the intellectual doubts of men and to probe deeply the problems of life. He had no “message” to deliver, save that of his own life and character. Action, not brooding thought, ever dominated him; he told his story for the story's sake, and never made it a vehicle for philosophizing and propaganda. Honour and courtesy, courage, fidelity, and patriotism, were the virtues in which his soul delighted, and he lived and worked in the spirit of his admonition to Lockhart, his son-in-law: “Be a good man, my dear—be virtuous, be religious, be a good man.”

There are, of course, blots on his work: he is sometimes heavy and tedious, his style can be careless and involved, and any pedant can point out his inaccuracies and anachronisms; but when we consider his unparalleled fertility, his extraordinary speed of production, the magnitude of his antiquarian knowledge, the multitude of characters which he created, and the high average excellence of all that he wrote, we are bound to recognize him as one of the greatest geniuses who ever held a pen.

# Chapter XLIII.

## LORD BYRON.

> “*When Byron's eyes were shut in death,*
> *We bowed our head and held our breath.*
> *He taught us little; but our soul*
> *Had felt him like the thunder's roll.*”
>
> Matthew Arnold.

Two remarkable Englishmen are walking arm in arm on the Belle Rive by the shore of Lake Geneva on a June day in the year 1816. Both are young, both are of gentle birth, both are renowned poets, and both are notorious in their private lives. Wandering tourists peep at them through telescopes and point them out to each other, not so much for their high poetic gifts as for the scandals associated with their names. The younger man, Percy Bysshe Shelley, is the loftier and purer spirit and the greater poet. He is tall and sinewy, with an abundance of wavy brown hair, a sensitive, almost girlish face, and dark blue eyes that look out on the world with an habitual expression of rapt wonder.

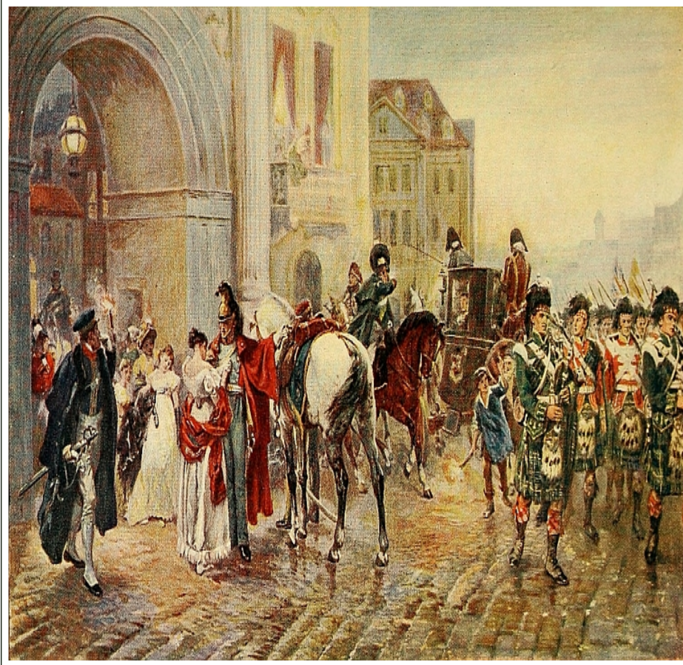
The older man, Lord Byron, has already attained a European reputation; he would seem to be blessed beyond his fellows in all the things that men hold dear. He has great intellectual power, humour, common sense, and inventive faculty; he is a peer with all the social distinctions attaching to his rank; he is the idol of fashionable fame, his purse is sufficiently full, and in graces of person he is richly endowed; yet there is a canker at his heart that makes his life one long bitterness.

As he passes by, you see that he is a strikingly handsome man, an Apollo Belvedere in form and feature. His face is pale and colourless as though chiselled out of Parian marble. His small head is covered with auburn curls, his forehead is high and narrow, his light gray eyes are clear and shining, and his mouth and chin are of classic beauty. It is a face “like a spirit's, good or bad.” One blemish alone mars his physical splendour: he is slightly lame, and the consciousness of this defect is a poignant misery to him.

Both these men are rebellious spirits; they have been “cradled into poesy” by the wrong which they perceive in the world, and they are in revolt against what they conceive to be the tyranny of social and moral laws. Both passionately hate all the shackles that cripple and confine thought, word, and action; both cry aloud for freedom and for the essential rights of all men; but there the resemblance ends. Byron is constitutionally unhappy; a proud, sullen, rebellious spirit, born, like the hero of a Greek tragedy, to a heritage of guilt and suffering. He would enjoy, but he

suffers “the stinging of a heart the world hath stung,” and out of his personal sense of wrong defiantly declaims against the whole scheme of existence.

> “Meanwhile I seek no sympathies, nor need;
> The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
> I planted—they have torn me—and I bleed.”



**Summoned to Waterloo—Brussels 16th June 1815—Dawn.**
(See page 363.)
(*From the painting by Robert Hillingford.*) To List

He is “the very slave of circumstance and impulse—borne away with every breath,” and the freedom for which he craves is undistinguishable from licence to do what seems best in his own eyes. Shelley, too, is unhappy. He, too, “falls upon the thorns of life,” but his cry for liberty is not personal. He sees “the selfish and the strong still tyrannize,” and mankind thereby falling short of the happiness to which it might attain. Byron out of his selfish egotism would uproot the whole social fabric; Shelley would interpenetrate it with the spirit of freedom, that men might work together for happiness—

> “For when the power of imparting joy
> Is equal to the will, the human soul
> Requires no other heaven.”

---

George Gordon Byron was the son of a reckless, improvident, dissolute father, known to his regiment as “Mad Jack.” His mother was a capricious,

passionate woman, capable one moment of reviling her boy as "a lame brat," and the next of smothering him with demonstrations of affection. The boy was naturally acute and vigorous of mind, and warm and sincere in emotion, but the circumstances of his upbringing were most unfavourable to his development. His unhappy home life spoiled his temper, and his succession to a peerage at the age of eleven surrounded him with temptations which fostered his egotism and prematurely warped his judgment of the world.

In the summer of 1801, at his own request, he was sent to Harrow, where he read voraciously, but made no mark in class. His lameness only intensified his desire to shine in athletics, and, in spite of his handicap, he became a powerful swimmer and a member of the cricket team which played against Eton at Lord's. School discipline was hateful to him, and he led a childish revolt against the authorities.

In 1805 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and, in the larger freedom of the university, posed as a man of fashion and gallantry. His gyp described him as "a young gentleman of tumultuous passions," and he himself boasted that he was held up as "the votary of licentiousness and the disciple of infidelity." This was, no doubt, a mere pose, for Byron was given to swaggering as a bold, bad man all his life. At the university most of his time was spent in healthy outdoor sports and in boyish mischief. He boxed, rode, shot, swam, kept bulldogs in his room, and brought a bear-cub into college to train, as he said, for a fellowship! Nevertheless, he made some friendships amongst the more intellectual men about him, and began to write.

In his nineteenth year he published his first volume of verse, *Hours of Idleness*, and in the following January his vanity was stung to the quick by an unfavourable criticism in the *Edinburgh Review*. The juvenile poems of the young lord did not deserve praise; but there was no need to tomahawk them in the merciless fashion of his critic. Byron says that after reading the review he drank three bottles of claret and began a reply. It was published in 1809 as *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, and was a hard-hitting piece of indignant invective without a trace of critical insight. Even Sir Walter Scott was not spared; but he contented himself with the remark that the satirist was "a young whelp."

This satire gained Byron much applause in certain circles; but London society did not pay him the homage which he coveted, and he determined to go abroad. Two years later he returned home with two cantos of his *Childe Harold* ready for publication. Never was there a more sudden or more memorable success in English literature. Byron literally awoke to find himself famous.

In this poem he pictures himself as Childe Harold, a proud, reckless, joyless, solitary wanderer, scorned and hated by the world, and giving back double measure for what he receives. When the hero disappears from the scene, the verse improves, and rises from sonorous rhetoric to genuine poetry. There are few better-known poems than *Childe Harold* in the English language; generations of school boys and girls have learned its stanzas, and they are incorporated into every guide

book. Probably the best passages are those which describe Brussels on the evening before Waterloo, and the grim aftermath of the battle:—

> "Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,
> Last eve in Beauty's circle proudly gay;
> The midnight brought the signal-sound of strife,
> The morn the marshalling in arms,—the day
> Battle's magnificently stern array!
> The thunder-clouds close o'er it, which when rent
> The earth is covered thick with other clay,
> Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent,
> Rider and horse,—friend, foe,—in one red burial blent!"

The *Giaour*, published in 1813, was the first of a succession of Oriental tales, which still further increased popular enthusiasm. It was written in Scott's own metre, but, though full of splendid passages, lacked Scott's art of telling a story in verse. The *Prisoner of Chillon* and *Mazeppa* are the best of all these earlier tales, because in them Byron is carried away by a flood of sympathy for the sufferings of his characters, and forgets himself.

In 1815 he made the mistake of his life. Miss Milbanke, the lady whom he married, was his very antithesis. The union was most uncongenial, and it ended in the following year for reasons not fully known. The public then turned upon the author of *Childe Harold* with bitter condemnation; its idol had shown feet of clay, and was ruthlessly overthrown. Smarting under a bitter sense of injustice, Byron left England never to return. His pride was outraged, his vanity was wounded, the thorns which he had planted lacerated his soul, and what he learned in suffering he thereafter taught in song. He was thrown back on Nature for consolation and repose, and she gave him the inspiration for some of the best and purest of his poetry.

After spending some time at Geneva with Shelley, he settled down at Venice, near the "waves of the Adriatic, like the stag at bay who betakes himself to the waters." He now wrote with extraordinary power and rapidity. The remaining and much ennobled cantos of *Childe Harold* were completed, and *Cain* and *Manfred* were written. In the latter work we see the Byronic hero at his worst, guilty but defiant, scornfully self-reliant, and only preserved from despair by disdainful pride. The most important of his remaining works were *Don Juan* and the *Vision of Judgment*, esteemed by some as the poems on which his fame really rests.

We are now to see Byron in his last and best phase. The Greek War of Independence, which broke out in 1823, appealed to all that was best in him. He had always loved and revered

> "Fair Greece! Sad relic of departed worth!
> Immortal, though no more; though fallen, great;"

and the sight of her subjection to the devastating Turk roused the Crusader spirit in him. He flung himself ardently into her cause, and in burning words called her degenerate sons to arms:—

> "Hereditary bondsmen! Know ye not

Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow."

Nor did he confine himself to poetic outbursts. He chartered a vessel, and sailed from Genoa to Missolonghi, where he laboured with unquenchable ardour, reconciling opposing factions, drilling troops, organizing supplies, and preparing for an expedition against Lepanto. While so engaged, he was struck down by an epileptic fit, and knew that his life was drawing to its close. On his thirty-sixth birthday he wrote a set of verses which seem to foreshadow the end that awaited him:—

"If thou regret'st thy youth, *why live*?
The land of honourable death
Is here. . . .
Then look around and choose thy ground
And take thy rest."

On the 11th of April, attended by his Suliote guards, he rode out through the olive groves for the last time; a few hours later he lay on the bed from which he never rose again. In his delirium he led the "hereditary bondsmen" to their freedom. "Forward, forward, courage!" he cried; "follow my example; don't be afraid!" He died at six o'clock on the evening of April 19, 1824, aged thirty-six years and three months. The Greeks were heart-broken; they mourned him for twenty-one days, and buried him at Missolonghi, but sent his heart back to England, where it was refused interment in Westminster Abbey.

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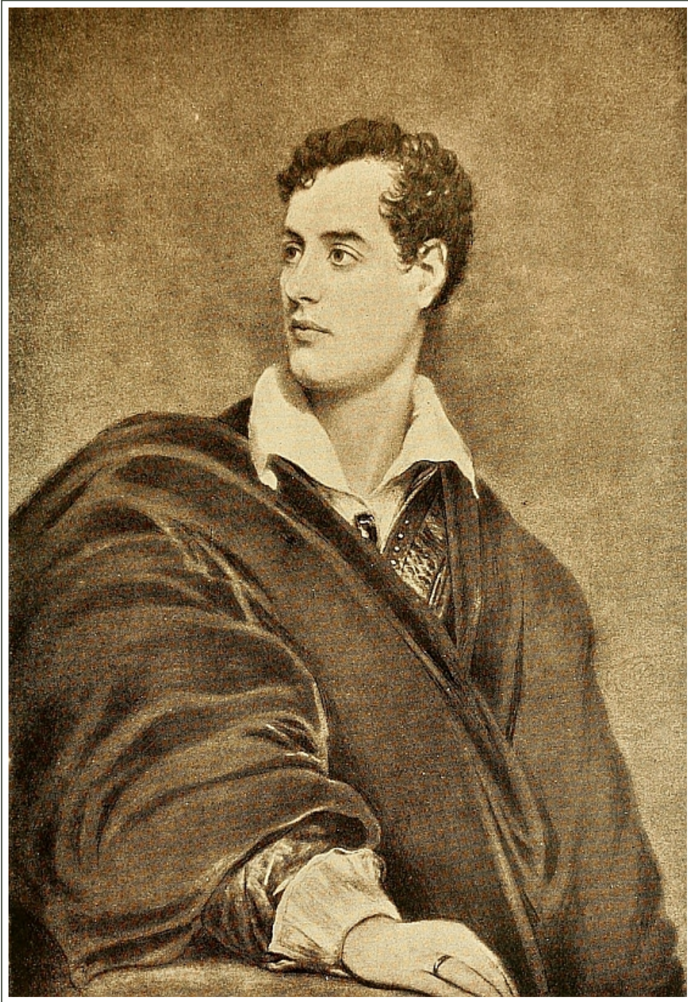
Such was the end of this strange, lawless spirit. The young and generous of his generation felt that he was the trumpet-voice of their aspirations, despairs, and unbeliefs; his influence on all his fellows who had within them a spark of the revolting spirit was immense. On the Continent he was acclaimed as the inspired apostle of democracy and the greatest poet that England had ever produced. His great merit was that he opened to all Europe the treasures of English literature. "It is since Byron," says Mazzini, "that we Continentalists have learned to study Shakespeare and other English writers. From him dates the sympathy of all the true-hearted amongst us for his land of liberty, whose true vocation he so worthily represented among the oppressed. He led the genius of Britain on a pilgrimage throughout all Europe."



**LORD BYRON.**
(***After the portrait by T. Phillips, R.A.***) To List

As a poet Byron's intellect was far superior to his imagination. As a craftsman he was careless of finish and detail, his ear was faulty, and the music of his verse was coarse. He gives us poetic eloquence rather than inspired poetry; but its Titanic force, and the superb brilliancy of many of his passages, must always assure him a high place amidst English poets.

# Chapter XLIV.

## SHELLEY.

> "*And in his gusts of song he brings*
> *Wild odours shaken from strange wings;*
> *And unfamiliar whisperings*
> *From far lips blown,*
> *With all the rapturous heart of things*
> *Throbs through his own.*"—William Watson.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, whom we saw strolling with Byron by the lake of Geneva, now claims our attention. He was the eldest son of a Sussex baronet, and was bred in the easy, comfortable, and conservative surroundings of a country gentleman's home. His mother was a woman of great beauty, which she transmitted to her children, and of considerable facility in composition, which her boy inherited. He was shy and sensitive, loving and loyal, highly romantic and imaginative, and possessed of an extremely independent character that would brook no assertion of authority.

At the preparatory school to which he was sent in his tenth year, he was much persecuted by his school-fellows. This early acquaintance with "man's inhumanity to man" inspired in his fiery nature that horror of oppression and that unquenchable spirit of defiance which marked his whole life. At this school he was taught some science, and displayed an eager desire to penetrate for himself the secrets of nature.

In 1805, when he proceeded to Eton, he was derided by his school-fellows because of his almost feminine beauty, and the persecution of the preparatory school was continued on a larger scale. His revolting spirit developed itself every day. Though he might have been "tamed by affection," he was "unconquered by blows," and he defied the "tyranny" of masters and boys alike.

His love of scientific investigation continued: he destroyed an old willow with a burning-glass, and endeavoured to raise the devil, but only succeeded in rousing his tutor. His pronounced peculiarities of temperament gained him the nickname of "Mad Shelley" and "Shelley the Atheist." While at Eton he began to imitate the popular romances of the day and write verse of no special distinction.

Oxford proved no happier a dwelling-place than Eton. Before the end of his first year's residence he put forth a printed syllabus of arguments which he foolishly imagined would demonstrate "The Necessity of Atheism," and addressed it to the

bishops and heads of the college. He was summoned to appear before the authorities, but refused to answer the questions put to him, and was expelled.

He had already formed a slight acquaintance with Harriet Westbrook, the daughter of a retired hotel-keeper, and a school-fellow of his sister. She was now sixteen years of age, and believed herself to be harshly treated by her relatives. Shelley sympathized with her, and when the girl threatened suicide, carried her off to Scotland, where he married her. This was the great mistake of his life, for though his young wife was a pleasing, good-tempered girl, she was utterly unable to appreciate the complex nature of the genius to whom she was wedded. Shelley's father, justly incensed at his son's expulsion from the university and at this foolish marriage, cut him adrift with a small allowance. Thus at nineteen Shelley began married life with a wife three years his junior.

The next few years were not marked by any special incident, but all the time Shelley's mind was developing, and he propounded a hundred different theories, most of them wildly impossible, for reclaiming the world. In 1812 he wrote *Queen Mab*, a philosophical poem full of rationalistic and socialistic doctrines. As yet he had given but little indication of the marvellous poetic powers which he was soon to reveal.

As every one had foreseen, Shelley's married life was doomed to failure. At first he and his wife lived in “close-woven happiness,” but rifts within the lute rapidly developed. Shelley lived a high-strung mental and emotional life, and was lost to the world amidst his theorizings and dreams; Harriet was a healthy, buxom creature, without the shadow of an interest in intellectual things. When she and her husband went out together, “the walk commonly conducted us to a fashionable bonnet shop.” The tastes and habits of the pair were utterly incompatible, and the wife gradually grew indifferent to the husband, and soon disliked his society.

By this time Shelley had formed a close friendship with Mary Godwin, the daughter of William Godwin, who preached pure reason as man's only guide, and desired to see it triumph over law, government, and religion. Shelley was an enthusiastic disciple of these doctrines, and was attracted to the prophet's daughter because she had imbibed her father's principles. Shortly afterwards Harriet left her husband and retired to her father's house, whereupon Shelley eloped with Mary Godwin.

There was no peace for the errant husband, and when, less than two years later, Harriet committed suicide, he was naturally “a prey to the reproaches of memory.” During this period of constant mental agitation, Shelley's genius awakened, and he wrote *Alastor*, or *The Spirit of Solitude*. In this poem the true Shelley for the first time appeared. He describes himself as a lonely and dreamy poet, wandering vainly in search of unattainable and ideal beauty, and ending his quest in death. He shows himself possessed of Marlowe's “desire for the impossible,” and his verse soars rapturously aloft into imaginative realms far from the ken of common men.

Two years later *The Revolt of Islam* appeared. It embodied in a fantastic tale his implacable hatred of the cruelties and oppressions of the world, but there was no Byronic scorn and hate of his kind in the poem. In the midst of the gloom which he pictures, the star of hope shines bright, and he sees in love the sole law which ought to govern the moral world and the sole instrument of its regeneration.

This poem, which was received with mingled indifference, bitter attack, and enthusiastic praise, was partly written in Bisham Wood and in a boat on the Thames. When not actually engaged on the poem, Shelley busied himself in relieving the distresses of his cottage neighbours, and in publishing political tracts.

His health now began to fail, and he decided to seek a warmer climate. He and his wife went abroad, visited Byron at Geneva and in Venice, and wandered about Italy in search of a suitable home. This wandering period was the great flowering time of Shelley's genius. Year by year his heart and mind and skill had been maturing. He had learnt in suffering; thought and study had fixed his views; diligent endeavour had made him a consummate master of his craft.

In his *Prometheus Unbound*, written in 1820, the two strains which were apparent in *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam* mingled in their highest intensity; and in his tragedy, *The Cenci*, written in the same year, he drew very near to the classical masterpieces in sombre strength and dramatic intensity. In *Hellas*, a Greek drama inspired by the Greek War of Independence, he saw with prophetic eye the return of the Golden Age when “Saturn and Love” should be the twin deities of the world. It is in this poem that the professed atheist expresses that intensely Christian spirit which he had all along revealed in his infinite sympathy for the wronged and oppressed, in his practical work of charity, and in his ministrations of love and pity to the poor and the suffering.

At this time, too, he wrote the lyrics which are the summit and crown of his genius. It has been said of him that “he was alone the perfect singing-god,” and in his *Ode to a Skylark*, *Ode to the West Wind*, *The Cloud*, and the *Indian Serenade*, we hear strains of such lyric rapture as have never before or since swelled from the heart of mortal man.

“Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest,
Like a cloud of fire;
The deep blue thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.”

Leigh Hunt once spoke of Shelley as “unearthly,” “seraphical,” and a “thing of the elements.” No better description could be given of the dreams and visions which he transmuted into song.

“Whom the gods love die young.” On 8th July, 1822, Shelley sailed from Leghorn for Spezia in a little boat with his friend Williams. Scarcely had they embarked when a squall descended and blotted out the vessel from the view of the watchers on the shore. A week elapsed, and then Shelley's body was flung up by the waves near

the town of Viareggio. It was recognized by the dress and the stature, and by the volumes of Keats and Sophocles found in the jacket pocket.

In the presence of Byron, Hunt, and Trelawny, the body was burnt on the sands "after the good ancient fashion," and the ashes were gathered into a coffer which was subsequently interred in the Protestant cemetery at Rome. The heart was snatched from the flames by Trelawny, and given to Mary Shelley, in the keeping of whose family it still remains. Above his grave is a simple stone, on which is engraved the following inscription:—

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

COR CORDIUM<br>
NATUS IV AUG. MDCCXCII<br>
OBIIT VIII JUL. MDCCCXXII

"*Nothing of him that doth fade*<br>
*But doth suffer a sea-change*<br>
*Into something rich and strange.*"

**BURNING OF SHELLEY'S BODY.**
(***From the picture by Louis E. Fournier. By permission of the Corporation of Liverpool.***) To List

# Chapter XLV.

## JOHN KEATS.

"*A bud bit by an envious worm,*
*Ere he could spread his sweet leaves to the air,*
*Or dedicate his beauty to the sun.*"

Quoted by Hazlitt in his "Table Talk."

In his twenty-ninth year, twelve months before the waves closed over him, Shelley wrote *Adonais*, the noblest of all poetic laments for dead friendship. The third stanza runs as follows:—

"He is made one with Nature. There is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder to the song of night's sweet bird.
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone;
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own,
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath and kindles it above."

Of whom did he thus sing? Of the third of those three "inheritors of unfulfilled renown" who glorified the English tongue in the first quarter of the nineteenth century—John Keats. Though we link him in our pageant with Byron and Shelley, he has no spiritual kinship with either of them. He knew nothing of Byron's ungoverned passions and defiant despair; he knew nothing of the visionary altruism of Shelley; democratic aspirations and revolutionary movements passed him by like the idle wind; he had no mission to reform the world; he loved and worshipped beauty, and to perceive and create beauty was the alpha and omega of his passionate endeavour. Until the *Adonais* was given to the world, he was almost unknown. He died in the bitterness of supposed failure; he lives with the greatest poets that any age or country has produced.

---

John Keats was the son of an ostler who married his employer's daughter, "a woman of uncommon talents," and attained to a position of respectable prosperity. Their boy, who was born three years after the birth of Shelley, was remarkable for his beauty, and was the favourite of all, "like a pet prize-fighter, for his terrier courage." Only towards the close of his schooldays did he turn to study, but he then read with as much pertinacity as he had formerly fought.

During this period of activity he formed a fortunate friendship with Charles Cowden Clarke, an usher in the school, and under his guidance devoured every book of literature, criticism, and mythology upon which he could lay hands. He left school with a fair knowledge of Latin, some acquaintance with French, and a multifarious load of general information on things literary. He never learned Greek, but no Englishman was ever so richly endowed with the Greek spirit; it came to him by intuition, and not from books.

Keats loved his mother dearly, and when she fell into a decline tended her with touching devotion. Upon her death in his fifteenth year he “gave way to impassioned and prolonged grief.” The trustees of his mother's will removed him from school and apprenticed him to a surgeon at Edmonton. Clarke still continued to direct his reading in English literature, and now introduced him to the Elizabethan dramatists. He discovered Spenser for himself, and his young spirit leaped to meet that old lover of loveliness. Under the influence of Spenser he began to write.

For some reason he quarrelled with his master; his indentures were cancelled, and he went to London, where he “walked the hospitals.” But poetry was his absorbing passion; “all other pursuits were to his mind mean and tame.”

The famous sonnet, *On First Reading Chapman's Homer*, revealed him as a true poet, and shortly afterwards Clarke introduced him to Leigh Hunt, whose name has already appeared in these pages as the friend of Byron and Shelley. Hunt was a jaunty and not unpleasing versifier, and a writer of graceful literary essays. His politics aroused the bitter hostility of the Tory reviewers, and his two years' imprisonment for libelling the Prince Regent gave him a martyr's crown amongst Liberals.

Keats now became Hunt's disciple, and before long the tomahawks directed at his master were flying about his head also. Some of Keats's sonnets had already been published in various journals, and he now abandoned surgery for poetry. He made the acquaintance of Shelley, and asked his advice as to bringing out a volume of *Poems*. Shelley advised him not to publish “his first blights;” but the *Poems* appeared with all their crudities, but also with much buoyancy and promise. The real Elizabethan note was struck, but the little book fell flat.

His *Endymion*, his first long poem, soon followed. As a story it was almost unreadable, but there were frequent passages of beauty which ought to have revealed the advent of a genuine poet to any critics who were not blinded by incurable prejudice. The most “savage and slaughterly” criticism was his portion; he was hailed as an adherent of the “Cockney School” of Hunt; brutally jeered at as an apothecary's boy, and told to stick to his plasters, pills, and ointment boxes.

While the sting of this disgraceful criticism was rankling, he thought of giving up literature, and “trying what good he could do to the world in some other way.” But he soon recovered himself, and presented a manly and dignified front to his assailants. He knew that *Endymion* was a failure; “it was,” he said, “a feverish attempt rather than a deed accomplished.” Nevertheless he felt that he had the root of the matter

in him. “I think,” he wrote in one of his letters, “I shall be among the English poets after my death.”

He was but twenty-three when the *Endymion* was published, and he had less than three years more to live. Yet in that time he developed marvellously. His odes, *To the Nightingale*, *To Autumn*, *On a Grecian Urn*, were highly-wrought pieces instinct with the classic beauty of Greek art at its best. In his later work we look with him through—

> “magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn.”

It is in his smaller pieces that he rises to his highest perfection of form, and it is in this respect that he comes near to Shakespeare. Matthew Arnold says, “Shakespearean work it is; not imitative, indeed, of Shakespeare, but Shakespearean because its expression has that rounded perfection and felicity of loveliness of which Shakespeare is the great master.”

Poetry had been his passion so far, but now the muse was to have a rival. He fell in love with a Miss Fanny Brawne, a lively, fair-haired girl of seventeen, a flirt, very fond of admiration, and quite incapable of realizing the engrossing and jealous passion which she had aroused in the young poet's heart. His love was a fever, a torment and a tumult to him; he fell into despondency, and the fatal seeds of consumption in him began to spring up.

Keats knew that he must soon die. He collected and published his later poems, his *Hyperion*, *Lamia*, *Eve of St. Agnes*, *Pot of Basil*, and the rest, and in 1820 sailed for Naples in the hope that balmy skies might give him respite. He lingered for a few months, but on February 23, 1821, the end came. He died in Rome, and was buried in the Protestant cemetery, near to the Pyramid of Caius Cestius, in a place “so beautiful that it makes one in love with death.”

At his own request devoted friends inscribed upon his tombstone his sad consciousness of failure: “Here lies one whose name was writ in water.” He was wrong; his name is graven in marble; he is amongst the English poets; his life was too short for full achievement, but not for enduring fame. One thinks of him as a lovely rose that had but half opened its exquisite petals, and had but half exhaled its delicious perfume when the chilling frost nipped its heart, and it fell from its stem.

We have already said that in his life and in his work Keats loved and worshipped beauty. He enshrined his creed in two lines:—

> “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.”
>
> “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.”

To perceive and to create beauty was almost the sole aim of his life. For the perception of beauty he was endowed with senses so finely attuned that they responded like an Eolian harp to every zephyr. We are told that “the glitter of the sea seemed to make his nature tremble.” This delicate susceptibility to the beauty of

outward impressions is seen in all that he wrote; it is also seen in the wondrous felicity of phrase in which his soul delighted.

To him ideas were secondary; beauty of form both in the outer world and in the linked sweetness of words was everything, and he found this beauty mainly in the triumphs of classical Greece and in the fairylands of mediæval romance. This insistence on beauty as the be-all and end-all of poetry carries with it something of effeminacy, something of soft, enervating indolence. We are led into a lotus-land, and not on to the breezy heights where the soul is uplifted and the heart is stimulated to high endeavour.

If the highest function of the poet is to give us sensuous pleasure, Keats almost attains the ideal; but something more is necessary for the sublimest of poetry—spiritual insight, thoughts that burn, aspirations that uplift, moral enthusiasm that moves mountains, and in these respects Keats, perhaps by virtue of his immaturity, is lacking. “To enjoy delight with liberty” is not the sole end and aim of man. There are victories to be won, there are dragons to be slain, there is justice to be done, and the reward of such manly and unselfish labours is altogether beyond the ken of mere seekers after sensuous pleasure.

# Chapter XLVI.

## THE GENTLE ELIA.

> “*Beloved beyond all names of English birth,*
> *More dear than mightier memories! gentlest name*
> *That ever clothed itself with flower-sweet fame,*
> *Or linked itself with loftiest names of old*
> *By right and might of loving. . . .*”—SWINBURNE.

WE are privileged to look in at a quiet party given by MR. CHARLES LAMB on a Wednesday evening in the early summer of the year 1823. Mr. Lamb lives in modest lodgings in Great Russell Street, Covent Garden, London. The very site is sacred to good talk, for here formerly stood *Wills's*, where the wits and poets of Queen Anne's day were wont to gather in daily conclave.

At the head of the table sits the host, a little man with a long, melancholy face, and a bland, sweet smile that has a touch of sadness in it. His nose is large and hooked, and his figure tapers from his large head to the tiny gaitered ankles of his “almost immaterial legs.” You see at a glance that the great attraction of the evening is the host himself. He is the light and joy of the company; his whimsical fancies and his sparkling wit furnish forth a perpetual feast. It is true that he stutters, but he artfully contrives to make his defect accentuate his humour.

Look at the man at his elbow. He is somewhat fat and pursy, but his forehead is broad and white and high; his eyebrows are large and projecting, and the eyes beneath them are “like a sea with darkened lustre.”

“Lamb,” he says, “did you ever hear me preach?”

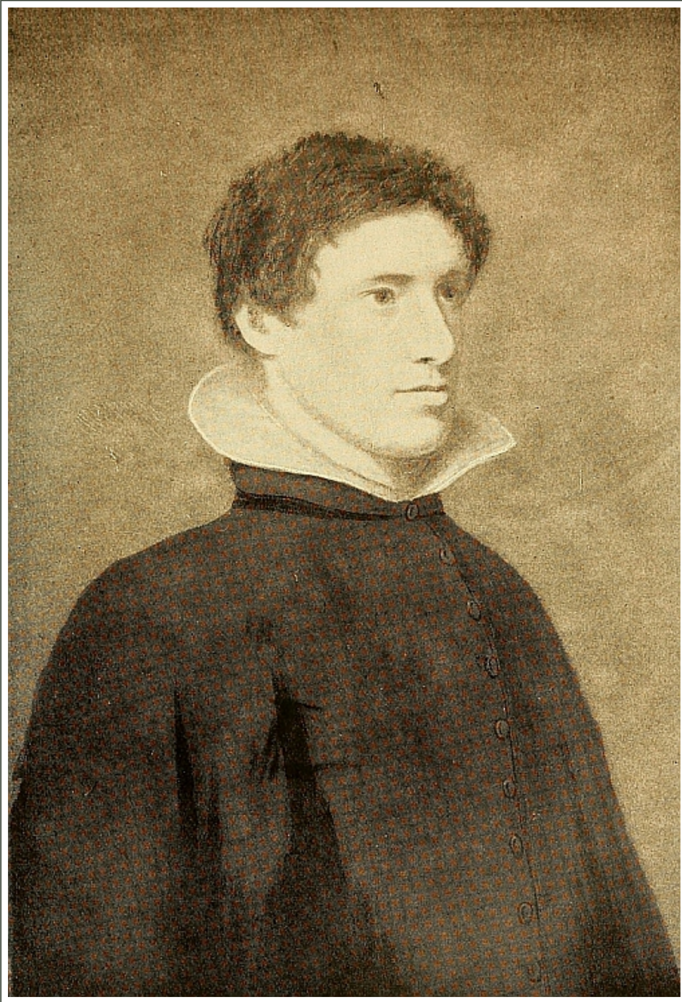
“I ne-ne-never heard you do anything else,” replies Lamb.

The man who provokes this sally is SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, one of the most remarkable of all Englishmen, and the most copious talker who ever lived. Throughout a long-drawn summer's day he will talk to you “in low, equable, and musical tones, concerning all things human and divine.” He is the widest-read man in the whole country, and he stands in the first rank of English writers as poet, critic, and philosopher. His friend and school-fellow, Lamb, has long ago described him as “an archangel—a little damaged.” You now see him more than a little damaged by his ineffectual struggles to keep the wolf from the door, by the downfall of a gifted son, and by his own indulgence in a body-and soul-destroying drug.

By his side is William Hazlitt, slovenly dressed, but with a handsome face, dark, curling hair, and bright eyes. As a youth of twenty he was bewitched by Coleridge, who first encouraged him to write; nevertheless he has since penned some inexcusably bitter things about his old friend. He is by no means an amiable character; his temper is wayward, he likes to be in a minority of one, and he cannot understand “why everybody has such a dislike to me.” With all his faults he is a literary critic of the first water, and an essay-writer of rare penetration and power.

A guest to whom your eye has often wandered is Robert Southey, the poet laureate of the day. He is strikingly handsome, and his character accords with the nobility of his countenance. You see him cheerful and happy; and a man of finer rectitude, of more generosity, constancy, and unselfishness, you will scarcely find in the whole land. There is no trace of littleness or jealousy in him; nothing delights him more than the success of his friends.

For thirty years he has been writing with a wonderful steadiness of application, and he has modestly described himself as “a quiet, patient, easy-going hack of the mule breed, regular as clockwork in my pace.” His poetical period is over; he will make “no more great attempts, only a few autumnal flowers, like second primroses,” but will devote himself to the prose which he writes with such ease and perfection. Long after he is gathered to his fathers men will rejoice in his masterpiece, the immortal “Life of Nelson.”



**CHARLES LAMB.** (***After the portrait by William Hazlitt.***) To List

The last and most important member of the group is William Wordsworth. Six years ago Hazlitt described him thus: “There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense, high, narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face.” He is a sturdy, large-boned, heavily-built man nearly six feet in height, and in his rough country clothes he looks like one of the respectable dalesmen of his native Cumberland. He talks naturally and freely, with a deep guttural intonation, and a strong touch of the northern *burr*.

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Three of the literary personages to whom we have been introduced must now claim our special attention.

CHARLES LAMB, called by Coleridge “the gentle-hearted Charles,” was born in the Inner Temple, in the year succeeding the death of Goldsmith, whose tombstone he must have seen almost daily on the north side of Temple Church. His father was clerk to a barrister named Salt, in whose library the boy's earliest years were spent. Here he and his sister Mary browsed at will on the “fair and wholesome pasturage of good old English reading.” In his eighth year Lamb was sent to Christ's Hospital, where he met Coleridge, who was his senior by two years. His schooldays were happy, and he attained the position of deputy Grecian, the second highest post of honour in the school. A clerkship was obtained for him in the India Office, and he remained a member of its staff for thirty years.

On the death of Mr. Salt, Lamb's father was obliged to leave the Temple and remove to humble lodgings. The family was poor; the father was sinking into dotage; the mother was an invalid. The work and worry of the household fell upon Mary Lamb, whose mind gave way under the strain. One day in September 1796, when a little servant-girl was more than usually irritating, she snatched a knife from the table and tried to stab her. The mother interposed, the knife entered her heart, and she instantly fell dead. Mary was taken to an asylum, where she gradually recovered, and was given over to the custody of her brother, who devoted his life to her care. From time to time her madness returned, and she went back to the asylum; but “between the acts” the pair lived together in the most affectionate companionship.

Lamb was occupied with the routine duties of his office all day, and the evenings alone were available for study and literary work. He began by writing sonnets, a romance, and a drama in verse; but poverty forced him to turn to more remunerative work, and he became a contributor of puns and squibs to the *Morning Post*. His farce, *Mr. H.*, was produced at Drury Lane in 1806, but it was hissed off the stage, and Lamb joined in the hissing!

In the previous year he had been introduced to Hazlitt, by whose good offices a publisher was persuaded to commission him to write “Tales from Shakespeare.” Lamb did the tragedies and Mary the comedies, and the work when issued achieved an instant and enduring success. In the next year Lamb published his “Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare,” and revealed himself as one of the most delicate and acute of all literary critics.

A variety of miscellaneous work followed, and in 1820 he began those “Essays of Elia” which are amongst the most cherished things in all our literature. Elia was the name of an obscure clerk at the South Sea Office, in which Lamb had spent some time at the beginning of his official career. He appended the name as a joke to his first essay, and continued it until it became inseparably connected with the series.

Lamb's Essays are after the manner of Goldsmith, but they are far more delicate and intimate, and far more suffused with pathos and humour. Nothing so delightfully

personal had ever before appeared in literature. A whimsical, gracious, ripe, and manly nature is revealed in them; they are the comments of a man of the world who lays himself out to be a delightful companion, who never preaches or bores, but writes exquisitely and with the slyest touches of humour on books, plays, the gossip of the tea-table, the coffee-house, old china, chimney-sweepers, beggars, his own tastes, likes and dislikes, and so forth.

Sometimes, as in his exquisite *Dream Children*, he bares his inmost heart, and the man must be granite indeed who is not strangely moved by its sweet and compelling pathos. Every one who has read Lamb sympathetically is proud to call him friend. Mr. Augustine Birrell asserts that “of all English authors Charles Lamb is the one loved most warmly and emotionally by his admirers.”

Lamb retired from the India Office on a pension in 1825, and was ecstatically happy at the thought of freedom from “the desk's dry wood.” “I came home for *ever* on Tuesday in last week,” he wrote, “and it was like passing from life into eternity.” Leisure, however, gave him no new inspiration. By the year 1829 his literary career was over, and five years later he died, murmuring with his last breath the names of the friends whom he had loved for many long and not unhappy years.

# Chapter XLVII.

## SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

"*Coleridge, that rich-freighted argosie tilting in sunshine over Imagination's Seas.*"—JOHN WILSON.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, Lamb's lifelong friend, was the youngest of the ten children of the vicar of Ottery St. Mary, in Devonshire. He was a remarkably precocious child; indeed, he never was a child. "I never thought as a child," he writes, "never had the language of a child." Before his fifth birthday he had read the "Arabian Nights," and soon after was found wandering in the fields, slashing off the heads of paynim weeds and nettles as one of the "Seven Champions of Christendom."

In his ninth year his father died, and a friend of the family obtained for him a presentation to Christ's Hospital, where he passed most of his play hours lying on the school roof, day-dreaming, and watching the drifting clouds. Some one made him free of a library, and he read "right through the catalogue." At fifteen he plunged into metaphysics, and displayed such argumentative powers that his uncle used to take him from coffee-house to coffee-house, and from tavern to tavern, where he drank and talked and disputed as if he had been a man.

Lamb describes him in his Elia Essay on "Christ's Hospital Thirty-five Years Ago" in an oft-quoted passage:—

> "How have I seen the casual passer through the cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration. . . to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Jamblichus or Plotinus. . . or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar, while the walls of the old Greyfriars re-echoed to the accents of the inspired charity-boy!"

In February 1791 Coleridge went up to Jesus College, Cambridge, as a sizar, but for some reason or other ran away to London and enlisted in the King's Light Dragoons, under the appropriate name of Comberback, for he never could ride. After four months in the army he was brought back to Cambridge; but he left the university in 1794 without taking a degree.

During a visit to Oxford he met Southey, who was full of a wildly impossible scheme for setting up an ideal community on the banks of the Susquehanna in the wilds of America. The Susquehanna was chosen as the site of the experiment because of the music of its name, and the denizens of the new republic were to combine farming with the writing of books.

The scheme never materialized, and in the meanwhile Coleridge married, and began in a feeble way to earn his living. A volume of poems and the conduct of a dull magazine barely sufficed to keep body and soul together, and in his nervous depression he began to take laudanum, a habit to which he was addicted until towards the close of his life. He fixed his home at Nether Stowey, a little remote town on the eastern slopes of the Quantocks, not far from Alfoxden, where Wordsworth was then living, and here the best of his poems were composed.

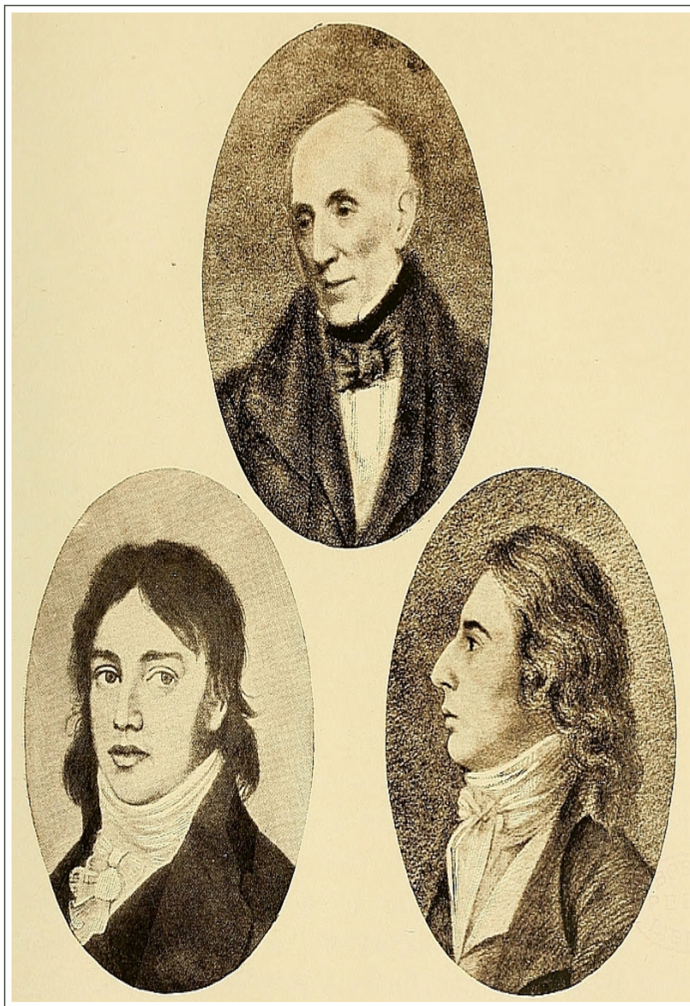
To the “Lyrical Ballads,” in which he combined forces with Wordsworth, he contributed *The Ancient Mariner*, his one perfect poem. The subject was suggested by a friend's dream, and Coleridge worked it up into a ballad which Swinburne thought “perhaps the most wonderful of all poems.” It combines the supernatural with a deep love of nature, and amidst quite possible incidents realistically told, we descry the ghostly shapes and mysterious influences which surround the figure of the Ancient Mariner. His fate is interwoven with that of the albatross which he has cruelly killed, and the curse laid upon him only passes away when he blesses the water-snakes, and thus confesses his sympathy with the great brotherhood of animated things.

> “He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.”

In 1798 Coleridge went to Germany, where he resided for two years, learned the language, and steeped himself in the German metaphysics which he afterwards introduced into England. On his return he began writing political articles for the *Morning Post*, and was offered a lucrative interest in the paper if he would wholly devote himself to it; but he declared that he would not “give up the country and the lazy reading of old folios for two thousand times £2,000.”

By 1806 he was “ill, penniless, and worse than homeless;” but Southey's hospitable roof at Greta Hall, Keswick, sheltered him for a time. Subsequently he returned to London, leaving his family in Cumberland, and in 1812 delivered the first series of his famous “Lectures on Shakespeare.” In the next year he produced a tragedy, which put £400 into his pocket. He now sank more and more under the influence of the fatal drug, and desired to be placed in a private madhouse. Meanwhile Southey was keeping the wife and family at Greta Hall.

A kindly physician, Mr. Gilman of Highgate, took him into his house, where Carlyle saw him, “a heavy-laden, high-aspiring, much-suffering man.” Under Mr. Gilman's care he conquered the opium habit; but, though he subsequently did a good deal of work, his creative genius had vanished, and he was fain to confess himself beaten in the struggle with the world and himself.



**1. WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.**
(*After the portrait by Henry W. Pickersgill.*)
**2. S. T. COLERIDGE. 3. ROBERT SOUTHEY.**

(*After a pastel.*) (*After the portrait by Robert Hancock.*) To List

While at Highgate he published a slender volume of exquisite poetry written many years before, and containing his *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan*. The former poem is full of the terror and mystery of magical evil, expressed in poetry of exquisite charm and sweetness; while the latter is a fragment of verbal splendour which came to him in a vision during sleep, and could never be finished, waking. Sad, empty years followed; he gradually grew weaker and weaker, and in the winter of 1833 wrote his own epitaph:—

> “Stop, Christian passer-by; stop, child of God,
> And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod
> A poet lies, or that which once seemed he—
> O, lift a prayer in thought for S. T. C.!

> That he who many a year with toil of breath,
> Found death in life, may here find life in death!
> Mercy for praise—to be forgiven, for fame
> He asked, and hoped through Christ. Do thou the same.”

He died in his sleep on the morning of July 25, 1834.

Coleridge wrote but little poetry, but he introduced a wondrous new music into English verse, and an element of mystical beauty which has never been surpassed. His close observations of nature enabled him to paint a vivid picture with a few quick strokes, and his peculiar quality of imagination endowed the smallest of inanimate things with a strange romantic weirdness.

All that he did perfectly might be bound up in twenty pages; but it is all pure gold. His influence upon the minds of his friends, wielded rather by talk than by the printed word, was magical. Wordsworth said he was the only *wonderful* man he ever knew, and Lamb declared that it was he who “first kindled in him, if not the power, the love of poetry, and beauty, and kindness.” We part from this man of wasted life but lofty ideals marvelling what his work would have been had his rare and almost universal genius been wedded to industry and self-control.

# Chapter XLVIII.

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

*“From Shelley's dazzling glow or thunderous haze,*
*From Byron's tempest-anger, tempest-mirth,*
*Men turned to thee and found—not blast and blaze,*
*Tumult of tottering heavens, but peace on earth.*
*Nor peace that grows by Lethe, scentless flower,*
*There in white languors to decline and cease;*
*But peace whose names are also rapture, power,*
*Clear sight, and love: for these are parts of peace.”*
William Watson.

No locality in all the world, not even Stratford-on-Avon, has ever been so completely identified with the name and genius of a poet as the Lake District of England. It is, indeed, “Wordsworthshire.” Wordsworth's placid and thoughtful days were spent amidst its green fells, murmuring streams, leaping torrents, sleeping tarns, and hoary mountains, and every guide-book is studded with his descriptive passages which seem instinct with the spirit of its appealing beauty.

The tourist who makes the village of Ambleside his starting-point has only to walk a few miles along the Keswick road to find the intimate haunts of Wordsworth's daily life, and the homes in which he dwelt almost continuously for fifty years. In a single hour the pedestrian will reach the lovely village of Grasmere, where his remains lie. Nowhere in all the world is there so exquisite a commingling of lake, village, church, valley, and mountain into one perfect picture of natural beauty and domestic peace. The first view of Grasmere is an emotional epoch in the life of every man and woman susceptible to scenic charm. In the quiet churchyard by the side of the murmuring Rothay is a simple, upright slate slab with this inscription:—

William Wordsworth, 1850.
Mary Wordsworth, 1859.

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The little town of Cockermouth, in which Wordsworth was born, lies outside the Lake District proper; but the quaint village of Hawkshead, in which his schooldays were spent, is in the very heart of that enchanted land. The Grammar School still stands, and the desk on which Wordsworth, like other boys, carved his name is still shown.

The school was conducted on easy-going principles, and much liberty was allowed to the scholars. There was no attempt to cram the boys or to train them for the triumphs of the examination room. Wordsworth browsed, like Lamb, though with far less opportunity, on the fair and wholesome pasturage of good old English reading, and rejoiced especially in the "Arabian Nights," of which he had but an abridgment. He and his school-fellows tried to save enough money to buy the complete work, but the tuck-shop held out too many allurements.

Out of school hours young Wordsworth rambled over the fields, fished, boated, and bird-nested, and in winter skated on Coniston Water. He was already fond of solitary rambles, during which his characteristic mood began to appear. The outward world, he says, seemed to him a dream. The distant mountains appeared to be endowed with spectral life, and he gazed upon them with superstitious awe. While Scott, on the other side of the Border, was filling his mind with the heroisms of legend and ballad, Wordsworth was developing an almost mystical love of nature.

> "There was a boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs
> And islands of Winander!—many a time,
> At evening, when the earliest stars began
> To move along the edges of the hills,
> Rising or setting, would he stand alone,
> Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;
> And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
> Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth
> Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
> Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
> That they might answer him.—And they would shout
> Across the watery vale, and shout again,
> Responsive to his call,—with quivering peals,
> And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
> Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
> Of jocund din! And, when there came a pause
> Of silence such as baffled his best skill;
> Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
> Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
> Would enter unawares into his mind
> With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
> Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
> Into the bosom of the steady lake."

Nevertheless, he was no recluse, but a strong, sturdy, unaffected lad, who took a keen interest in the lives of the independent "dalesmen" and shepherds about him.

In his seventeenth year he went up to St. John's College, Cambridge, where "he enjoyed even more thoroughly than at Hawkshead whatever advantages might be derived from the neglect of his teachers." He appeared rough and uncouth to the "chattering popinjays" of the university, but he was sociable enough, though he frequently stole away from college for solitary walks on the "level fields" of Cambridgeshire. Academic honours did not appeal to him. The vision of a splendid sunrise in the year 1788 so deeply moved him that he then and there solemnly dedicated his life to the service of God and mankind.

Two years later he and a friend started on a continental tour. They had £20 apiece; they travelled on foot, and carried all that they needed in pocket-handkerchiefs. Wordsworth thoroughly enjoyed this expedition, which led him through France and Switzerland. On his return he took his degree, without honours, and began to look about him for a career. Desiring to learn French, that he might qualify as a travelling tutor, he crossed over to France, which was then seething with revolution. Wordsworth flung himself into the cause of republicanism with extraordinary ardour. Like all the generous spirits of the time, he felt that the world was being made anew, and that the Golden Age was about to dawn:—

> "Bliss was it at that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven."

He felt inclined to offer his services as a revolutionary leader, but his relatives, alarmed for his safety, stopped his supplies, and he was forced to return to England.

As a boy at school he had dabbled in verse, and now he wrote and published *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, the latter being a reflective poem on his continental wanderings somewhat after the manner of Goldsmith's *Traveller*. In it he described the sufferings of the French peasantry, and expressed his eager sympathy with revolutionary principles. Coleridge read the poem, and hailed its author as an "original poetical genius;" but otherwise it passed almost unnoticed.

While Wordsworth was still uncertain as to his future destiny, a friend left him a legacy of £900, which freed him from the immediate necessity of adopting a profession. He now took a cottage at Racedown, in Dorsetshire, and his sister Dorothy, the best, most loving, and most sympathetic of women, kept house for him. Here he led a life of "plain living and high thinking," and in his devotion to noble thoughts and high purposes came nearest of all our poets to Milton. Removing to the northern part of the Quantocks in 1797, he was within a walk of Coleridge's cottage at Nether Stowey. The two poets, as we already know, joined forces, and in the following year produced that remarkable collection of poems known as the "Lyrical Ballads."

This volume, which marks an era in the history of English poetry, embodied the novel theories of the two friends. Both believed that high themes were not alone the subject-matter of poetry, but that the humblest and commonest things, the joys and sorrows of the poor, the quiet life of the village and the farm, the "huts where poor men lie," the hedgerow flowers or the piping birds, could be invested with the truest poetry. "Verse," wrote Wordsworth, "may build a princely throne on humble truth."

Both poets revolted against the falsehood and unreality of the "artificial" language which was then the conventional vehicle of poetry, and Wordsworth went a step further, and declared that the language of poetry should be identical with that of "real life." Wordsworth was quite right in holding that poetry may be written in the language of the peasant—Burns and his predecessors had already proved this—but he was wrong when he said that *all* words, however vulgarized by common association, are fit for poetry. One of the great charms of verse is the fastidious

choice of words, sweet and musical in themselves, and importing rare and noble ideas. In his own *Tintern Abbey*, and in his finer verses, he refuted his own theory, for it is impossible that they could have been written in the speech of ordinary men.

Then, again, in asserting that humble themes are capable of being infused with the highest poetry, he often chose a subject merely because it was humble and lowly, and therefore in his eyes necessarily poetic. There was, of course, an element of truth in both of his contentions, and to this extent modern poetry has been greatly influenced by him.

Wordsworth chose his words with great art, but he used the common mintage of everyday life, and this appeared to his critics to give a bald, prosaic, and utterly unpoetical air to his verse. They received his work with shouts of ridicule, and parodied him mercilessly; but, conscious that there was at least an element of truth in his theories, he wrote on, undaunted. He and Coleridge and Southey were dubbed "The Lake Poets."

> "They lived in the Lakes—an appropriate quarter
> For poems diluted with plenty of water."

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At the age of thirty Wordsworth returned to the scenes of his childhood, and settled down in Dove Cottage, Grasmere. The fortunate repayment of a debt due to his father set him free to work without anxiety on the great poem which was to sum up his whole theory of life—*The Excursion*. Two years later he married Mary Hutchinson, a gentle, sympathetic woman, who made his home a bower of perfect domestic happiness.

> "She was a Phantom of delight
> When first she gleamed upon my sight;
> A lovely Apparition, sent
> To be a moment's ornament;
> Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair,
> Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair;
> But all things else about her drawn
> From May-time and the cheerful Dawn;
> A dancing Shape, an Image gay,
> To haunt, to startle, and way-lay.

**Lake Windermere and Ambleside.**

(***From the painting by F. W. Hayes. By permission of Messrs. Hildesheimer and Co.***) To List

“I saw her upon nearer view,
A Spirit, yet a Woman too!
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin-liberty;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet;
A Creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

“And now I see with eye serene
The very pulse of the machine;
A Being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller between life and death;
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;
A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light.”

Husband, wife, and sister lived together in an ideal companionship seldom vouchsafed to a man of genius. At Dove Cottage, and later at Rydal Mount, the calm, ordered days flowed on with the gentle music of the valley stream. This “even tenor of his way” was broken by occasional visits to Scotland and the Continent; but in the long intervals, Wordsworth lived in his own world of solemn thought and high imaginings, pursuing the one aim of his life:—

> “To console the afflicted: to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy, happier; to teach the young and gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous.”

Slowly but surely his work grew in popular favour, but poetry never afforded him the means of subsistence. A friend obtained for him the post of Distributor of Stamps for the county of Westmoreland, and this brought him in £500 a year without unduly encroaching upon his time. In 1843 he succeeded Southey as Poet Laureate, and seven years later, when he was within a few days of his eightieth birthday, he sank peacefully into his grave.

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It was the *Prelude*, finished in 1806, which first revealed Wordsworth as the poet of Nature and of Man. In this poem he tells us the history of his poetical growth. Even as a boy Nature drew him to herself, and her manifestations so appealed to his senses that he was filled with a strange rapture at their beholding.

> “The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.”

This boyish mood passed, and the man began to perceive behind the outward shows of things a living presence—the omnipresence of God. He conceived the “Wisdom and Spirit of the universe,” the soul that is the “eternity of thought,” giving to every form and image a soul of its own, not to man alone, but to cataract, mountain, and tree, and even to “the meanest flower that blows.” He speaks of

> “The Being that is in the clouds and air,
> That is in the green leaves among the groves.”

Between this spirit in Nature and in the mind of man he saw a preordained harmony that enabled her to

> “so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our cheerful faith that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings.”

Thus regarding Nature, not as inanimate, but infused with a soul akin to his own, he saw her as living and personal, possessed of character, parts, and passions, and therefore capable of being studied and loved as one would study and love a wife or a sister. Out of this love arose his minute observation and description of the world

around him. “Nature herself,” says Matthew Arnold, “seems to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power.” To be one with Nature was in Wordsworth's philosophy to be made partaker of the highest bliss, and to be preserved from the deadening and contaminating influences of the world. Wordsworth's creed thus rose to the level of a poetic religion.

Everywhere he calls our attention to the beauty, the harmony, and the sublimity of Nature, and he is strengthened by its calm and unbroken order. But there is another and a terrible side to Nature. She is “red in tooth and claw;” she brings in her train pain, cruelty, death, and a sublime indifference to human suffering, and to all this Wordsworth seems oblivious. But though his philosophy is partial and incomplete, his insistence on the omnipresence of the Almighty, his image of the whole world as the temple of the living God, is full of tranquillizing and “healing” power.

His own life and character were severely and serenely simple, and in many of his shorter poems his simplicity and serenity is reflected with a charm that defies analysis. His longer poems, such as *The Excursion*, are infused with wisdom and beauty, but, it must be confessed, contain many passages which do not rise above the level of dull prose. He had no humour, no dramatic force, and no narrative skill.

It is in his *Sonnets* and in his odes *To Duty* and *On the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* that we hear the majestic organ-notes of Milton, and are thrilled with the consciousness of genuine inspiration. If Wordsworth had done no more than teach men to draw uncommon delights from very common things, he would have merited the eternal gratitude of posterity.

# Chapter XLIX.

## A GROUP OF WOMEN WRITERS.

> *"It would hardly be safe to name Miss Austen, Miss Brontë, and George Eliot as the three greatest women novelists the United Kingdom can boast, and were one to go on and say that the alphabetical order of their names is also their order of merit, it would be necessary to seek police protection, and yet surely it is so."*—AUGUSTINE BIRRELL.

ELEVEN long centuries lie between the humble cowherd who sang "the beginning of things created" and the poet who saw all creation interpenetrated with the divine spirit of the Creator. Down the ages we have seen the makers of our literature rising and setting like the stars of heaven, but, so far, all of them have been men; not one woman has graced the goodly company. The distaff, the still-room, the family, and society have so far comprehended the whole sphere of woman, and the age of wide education and a larger freedom is not yet.

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MRS. APHRA BENN, the first English female writer to make a profession of letters, appeared with the Restoration; but save for a few imperishable songs, and a novelette or two, she wrote nothing that the world would not willingly let die. LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU, who was born in the year that saw the last of this sprightly widow, wrote entertaining letters and sparkling, malicious verses, but achieved a more enduring fame as the implacable satirist of Pope.

FRANCES BURNEY, who succeeded, deserves more respectful attention. Dr. Johnson called her a "little character-monger," and he and all his circle applauded her to the echo. She must be recognized as the mother of all our women novelists, for she founded the modern school of fiction which aims at a realistic picture of society. Quiet observation, wonderful skill in character-drawing, lively garrulity, plentiful effusion of sentiment, and frequent flashes of humour distinguish her best work.

MRS. RADCLIFFE, who was a contemporary, provided a very different kind of fare; she revelled in mysteries, haunted castles, Byronic heroes, and supernatural effects, which in deference to the spirit of her age she explained on rational grounds. MARIA EDGEWORTH also occupies a high place in this roll of pioneers. She

wrote Irish tales of plentiful humour and wholesome sentiment, and gave a lead in the delineation of peasant life to Scott himself.

The ladies just mentioned appear in our pageant rather by courtesy than of right. We are now to make the acquaintance of four women writers who ask for no such consideration, but take their places with all the assurance of genius and skill as the greatest women novelists that Britain has produced.

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Room for JANE AUSTEN! She is a tall, slender, and remarkably graceful woman with fine features, hazel eyes, rich colouring, and curling brown hair. “That young lady,” wrote Sir Walter Scott, after he had read her “Pride and Prejudice” for the third time,

> “has a talent for describing the involvement of feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The big 'bow-wow' strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary, commonplace things and characters interesting from the trick of the description and the sentiment is denied to me. What a pity such a gifted creature died early!”

Scott's lament has been echoed by scores of the best judges of literature in more recent times. If Shelley is the poets' poet, Jane Austen is assuredly the novelists' novelist.

This gentle, consumptive girl who wrote “Northanger Abbey” when she was twenty-one, and completed “Sense and Sensibility,” “Pride and Prejudice,” “Mansfield Park,” and “Emma” in the course of a brief life of forty-two years, ending in 1817, never strayed outside the placid experiences of home life, and never drew a character or described a scene with which she was not perfectly familiar at first hand. One does not go to her for frame-shaking sobs, for harrowing pathos, for thrills and mysteries, for elemental passions and tragical intensity, but for a perfect picture of the men and women whom she knew and daily observed. We are no sooner introduced to her characters than we find ourselves among friends and acquaintances, wearing old-fashioned dresses and using old-world phrases, it is true, but, nevertheless, as familiar to us as the members of our own household.

Jane Austen reveals for us the whole country life of squires, parsons, doctors, lawyers, sportsmen, and old maids, with a wit like the summer lightning that illuminates and harms not. She has ridicule for foibles, contempt for vanity, and scorn for the witless, but it is all touched with the kindness of her own gentle heart. Only meanness moves her to deep indignation. In her own day and generation her work was neglected, but by slow degrees she has won her way to lasting and ever-growing renown.

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Another singularly gifted and singularly beautiful woman now appears. She is Mrs. Gaskell, of whom George Sand wrote: “She has done what neither I nor other female writers in France can accomplish; she has written novels which excite the deepest interest in men of the world, and yet which every girl will be the better for reading.” The wife of a Unitarian minister, she wrote “Mary Barton” to turn her thoughts from the depression occasioned by the death of her only boy. The book was published anonymously in 1848, but its success was not a moment in doubt. All the leading lights of the literary world were enthusiastic in its praise, and her reputation was made at a single bound. “Mary Barton” was a novel of working-class people, showing a profound insight into the life of the poor, and revealing sincere pathos and a delightful strain of typical Lancashire humour.

Amongst her early contributions to Dickens's *Household Words* were the papers subsequently republished as “Cranford.” At once the quaint Cheshire town of Knutsford became known to readers all the world over, and its inhabitants vied with each other in testifying to the fidelity of the portraiture. Lord Houghton described the book as “the purest piece of humoristic description that had been added to British literature since Charles Lamb.”

A succeeding work—“North and South”—also appeared in *Household Words*, and marked a distinct advance in constructive power and humour. Perhaps Mrs. Gaskell's most unfortunate experience was the publication of her “Life of Charlotte Brontë,” which overwhelmed her in a flood of controversy and for a time gave her a distaste for writing. Subsequently, however, she returned to her old love, and after the stress of the Cotton Famine, during which she devoted herself to organizing schemes of relief, she wrote “Sylvia's Lovers,” and finally “Wives and Daughters,” the most admired of her fictions. It is an “everyday story,” brimful of humanity, and ranging in tone and feeling from the most charming playfulness to the most subduing pathos. As this book drew to its close, Mrs. Gaskell's health began to fail, and in November 1865 she was suddenly stricken down by heart disease. She lies in the little graveyard of the Unitarian Chapel at Knutsford.

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A woman on whose face lifelong sorrow has set its seal now passes us by. She is Charlotte Brontë, the eldest of the four children of the Vicar of Haworth, a village near the Yorkshire town of Keighley. No literary family has ever excited so much personal interest or exercised so many gossipy pens as hers. Literary pilgrims still visit the village of scattered gray houses high on the bleak moor, and gaze on the “low, oblong stone parsonage,” with wonder that such unpropitious surroundings could have been the cradle of abounding genius.

Probably there never was a house so crammed with precocity and literary facility as Haworth Parsonage. The three girls and the boy were talented to the finger tips, and all turned to the pen as a duck to water. The boy grew up to be the shame and burden of his family, but the three girls—Charlotte, Emily, and Anne—lived to

compose romances which sprang from the very heartbeats of their deep emotional natures. Narrow and straitened circumstances, blighted health, embittered experiences, insistent struggle, and constant disappointment were their portion, yet their gloomy but fiery genius rose superior to every obstacle.

In the autumn of 1845 each of the sisters discovered that the others had dabbled in verse, and a little book of poems by "Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell" was the result. It was totally neglected. Charlotte wrote to De Quincey: "In the space of a year our publisher has disposed of but two copies, and by what painful efforts he succeeded in getting rid of those two himself only knows."

**GEORGE ELIOT.**

***(From an etching by Rajon after the portrait by Sir Frederick Burton.*** To List

Out of this failure emerged another revelation. Each of the sisters confessed that she had written a novel—Charlotte, "The Professor"; Emily, "Wuthering Heights";

and Anne, “Agnes Grey.” The manuscripts were sent to the publishers: the two latter stories were accepted, but “The Professor” suffered rejection. Charlotte, however, immediately began “Jane Eyre,” which Messrs. Smith and Elder published, and Currer Bell awoke to find herself famous. Her novel was the theme of a thousand tongues, and was alternately reviled and lauded as something entirely new and startling in fiction. Its instinctive realism, its bitter experiences tempered with high romance, and its novel frankness were qualities entirely foreign to the literature of the day.

Anne lived to write another novel; but before “Shirley,” Charlotte's second book, appeared, both the younger sisters were dead. “Shirley,” with its unmistakable local colour, swept aside the veil of anonymity, and Charlotte became a “shy, tameless lioness” of London drawing-rooms. Then came “Villette” to lay the coping-stone on a great literary reputation. Some months of congenial marriage wove a few golden threads of happiness into the gray warp of her life, but before she had touched her fortieth year she too was dead—the last of the strangely gifted brood that was reared in the chilly solitude of the Yorkshire hills.

> “Charlotte Brontë,” says Frederic Harrison, “painted not the world, hardly a corner of the world, but the very soul of one proud and loving girl. That is enough: we need ask no more. It was done with consummate power. We feel that we know her life, from ill-used childhood to her proud matronhood; we know her home, her school, her professional duties, her loves and hates, her agonies and her joys, with that intense familiarity and certainty of vision with which our own personal memories are graven on our brain.”

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George Eliot, whose great massive face, like the mask of the martyr-priest, Savonarola, is as distinctive as her own personality, stands in the same rank with Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë. She was thirty-seven years of age, and already known to fame as an essayist, translator, and philosopher, before she took up the novelist's pen and in “Amos Barton”—the first of her *Scenes of Clerical Life*—produced a story which almost ranks with “The Vicar of Wakefield.”

Then came the greatest of all her books—“Adam Bede”—a novel of which she wrote: “I love it very much, and I am deeply thankful to have written it.” “Adam Bede” was a transcript from life. Adam was her father; Mrs. Poyser, one of the undying characters of British fiction, was her mother; and Dinah Morris, the aunt who told her the story which forms the central incident of the plot. “Adam Bede,” with its exquisite charm, its fine simplicity, its fidelity to nature, and its flashes of rustic humour, still stands as the crowning achievement of George Eliot.

“The Mill on the Floss,” which is second only in merit and popularity to “Adam Bede,” was a self-revelation embodying many of the scenes of her own girlhood. She wrote it, as she confessed, “out of all the painful discipline, all the most hardly-learnt lessons of my past life.” For genuine pathos and passion, and for poetic beauty of description, “The Mill on the Floss“ stands alone amongst her works, and

Maggie Tulliver is, without exception, the most lovable and delightful of all her heroines.

“Silas Marner,” which was published in 1861, is an exquisite prose poem. The conversion to humanity of Silas, the cynical, miserly weaver, is one of the most beautiful developments in all fiction. Then came two grandiose works in quite another vein. “Romola” and “Felix Holt” were “studies” remarkable for keen analysis of human motives, and for political and philosophic theorizing, but quite lacking in that first-hand observation which made George Eliot's three former novels things of beauty and joy.

“Middlemarch” was a return to the earlier manner, but “Daniel Deronda” was designed to express George Eliot's romantic ideals of the future of Judaism. Over all her later novels there is a sense of heaviness; we resent the intrusion of profound learning, the over-elaboration, and obvious purpose of the writing. George Eliot's greatness did not reside in her philosophy, her scholarship, or her poetry, but in her brilliant delineation of Middle England during the earlier nineteenth century. Amidst the folk of these parts she moved with extraordinary sureness and ease, and was never greater than when she dropped the descriptive for the dramatic and reproduced with rare fidelity and humour their characteristic conversations.

# Chapter L.

## LORD MACAULAY.

> "*Macaulay has conferred most memorable services on the readers of English throughout the world. He stands between philosophic historians and the public very much as journals and periodicals stand between the masses and great libraries. . . . He brings the matured results of scholars to the man in the street in a form that he can remember and enjoy, when he could not make use of a merely learned book.*"—FREDERIC HARRISON.

A FAIR, bright boy of seven or eight years of age, dressed in a green coat with red collar and cuffs, and white trousers, is paying a visit with his father to Lady Waldegrave at Strawberry Hill. He has examined the famous Orford Collection with extraordinary interest, and ever afterwards he will carry a catalogue of its wonders in his head. He is now sitting in the great gallery, partaking of refreshment. A clumsy servant spills some hot coffee over the child's legs, and he is in great pain. The hostess is all kindness and compassion, and, after a while, asks him how he is feeling. The little fellow looks up in her face and replies: "Thank you, madam, the agony is abated!"

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Such is our introduction to THOMAS BABINGTON, afterwards LORD MACAULAY. He was probably the most precocious boy who ever lived. Sir George Trevelyan, in his delightful biography, tells us that he read incessantly at three years of age, and that—as we gather from the above incident—he talked "quite printed words," which produced an effect that appeared formal, and often, no doubt, exceedingly droll. His memory was prodigious; he once read through *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and was then able to repeat the whole of the poem. Before his eighth year he began a compendium of Universal History, had written a paper to persuade the people of Travancore to embrace the Christian religion, and six cantos of a heroic poem. He was indeed a born man of letters.

His father, Zachary Macaulay, was one of the earnest band of men who brought about the abolition of slavery in the British dominions. He was fairly well-to-do, and young Macaulay was reared in a household where solid comfort was combined with thrift and simplicity. From his earliest youth he lived amongst men of high purpose and serious endeavour, and his education was his father's jealous care.

Nevertheless, he was a boy of great cheerfulness and good humour, quite unspoiled, though the idol of the family, and possessed of a buoyant self-confidence that made light of every obstacle.

His university career at Trinity College, Cambridge, was distinguished, though his vivid enjoyment of the stirring life about him handicapped him in his race for university honours. He detested mathematics, but he twice gained the Chancellor's medal for English verse, won a Craven university scholarship, and subsequently a fellowship. His readiness in conversation and his capacity for debate were remarkable. After leaving Cambridge he was called to the Bar, and the failure of his father's business threw upon him the burden not only of supporting himself, but of maintaining his family and paying off his father's debts. To eke out his scanty means he turned to his pen.

While at college he had contributed *The Battle of Ivry* and several other poems to a magazine which was attempting to bring literature within the reach of the people; now he ventured on higher and more remunerative flights. As an undergraduate his style was formed, and the short, sharp, vivid sentences of his prize essays represent his most matured method.

At this time Jeffrey, the editor of the famous *Edinburgh Review*, was looking about him for clever young men, and Macaulay was recommended to him. His first contribution—the famous essay on Milton—appeared in 1825, and attained an instantaneous success. The clearness and vigour of the style, the sparkling antitheses, the extraordinary range and "cocksureness" of the knowledge displayed, captivated most readers, and Macaulay entered into his kingdom at once. By 1833 he had contributed twenty-two essays to the *Review*, and these still remain the most widely read of all his productions. In his historical detail he was frequently inaccurate and lacking in research, but he wrote for men of the world and not for scholars, and his work was genuine literature.

Macaulay resembled Spenser, Raleigh, and Shakespeare, in being a man of affairs as well as a writer. He had a vivid interest in the politics of his time, and an enthusiasm for material progress. In 1830 he entered Parliament, and proved himself an extremely effective speaker, though lacking in the highest qualities of oratory. Three years later he was sent out to India as a member of the Supreme Council, and he signalized his appointment by preparing a criminal code and establishing Indian education on that English basis which has not proved an unmixed blessing to the native population.

In 1838 Macaulay returned to England, and entered Parliament as member for Edinburgh, but lost his seat nine years later, and then devoted the remainder of his life to literature. He began to work on his great "History of England from the Accession of James II.," and death overtook him before its completion. "I shall not be satisfied," he wrote, "unless I produce something which shall for a few days supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables of young ladies." This he did, for he certainly made history more picturesque than any romance. He went to the

chap-book, the ballad, the memoirs of the time for his detail, and thus was able to apply kinematograph methods to dry-as-dust records. The consequence was a series of pictures both brilliant and fascinating.

As a historian Macaulay has been accused of partisanship, of lack of philosophic insight, and of inaccuracy; but nothing of this detracts from the high standard of literary excellence which his writing attains, and the enormous popular interest which it aroused in historical study. The success of the “History” was amazing. Within a generation over a hundred and forty thousand copies were sold in the United Kingdom alone, while “in the United States its wide diffusion has only been exceeded by the Bible and one or two school books of universal use.” As we have already indicated, Macaulay did not live to complete his work. When he died in 1859, surrounded by his books, he was engaged on the fifth volume. The narrative was brought down only to the death of William the Third, and that with many gaps which can never be filled up.

Macaulay's highest praise is that he was the popular educator of the time. He has been well called the Pope of English prose, for no man could “load his reef with ore” more skilfully and felicitously. His mind was wondrously stored; his memory retained everything—good, bad, or indifferent—that was likely to be of use to him; and he set his varied learning forth with fancy and understanding, and without the slightest sense of effort.

As a poet Macaulay cannot claim to rank with the immortals, but as a writer of ballads and as a story-teller in verse he has never been excelled. His “Lays of Ancient Rome”—which he set forth as the folk-songs sung by the early Romans at their feasts and national festivals—have a ring, a “go,” a vividness of form, and a heroic vigour that stamp them as ideal for recitation and reading aloud. Every schoolboy knows his *Horatius* by heart.

# Chapter LI.

## THE SAGE OF CHELSEA.

> "*Carlylism is the male of Byronism. It is Byronism with thew and sinew, bass-pipe, and shaggy bosom.*"—
> LORD MORLEY.

NO greater contrast can be imagined than that between Macaulay and THOMAS CARLYLE, who now appears upon our scene. The very aspect of Macaulay marks him as one on whom the world has smiled, and who smiles on the world; he is cheerful, unwrinkled, smooth-shaven, complacent, and prosperous. Carlyle, on the other hand, suggests a Hebrew prophet of old, dwelling apart in the desert, and weighed down with the burden of a wayward nation's frailties and sins. His beard is shaggy, his iron-gray hair tumbles about his brow, his gaunt face is deeply lined with care, and his wonderful eyes look out as from a harrowed soul to a perverse and faithless generation.

Nor is the contrast in appearance only. Macaulay sees the world, and, behold! it is very good: Carlyle has no belief in comfortable doctrines; he cannot prophesy smooth things; he sees dangers and miseries, falsities, cant, and shams about him; ease and happiness and complacence are deadly snares. "Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion!" he cries. We are not here for happiness, but for the working out of our own salvation. "Work is the grand cure of all the maladies and miseries that ever beset mankind." "Love not pleasure; love God. This is the *Everlasting Yea*,—wherein whoso walks and *works*, it is well with him."

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Carlyle, like Burns, was a product of South Scotland. The village of Ecclefechan, in which he was born, stands some five miles from the pleasant town of Annan overlooking the Solway Firth. His father was a mason and builder, a strong, stern, silent man of good intellect and deep religious feeling. Amidst simple, austere surroundings, and in an atmosphere of inflexible authority, young Carlyle spent "not a joyful life, but a safe and quiet one."

His progress at the village school, and afterwards at the Annan Academy, was so satisfactory that his father looked forward to seeing him "wag his pow" in a pulpit. He was not, however, happy at Annan; his fellow-pupils were "coarse, unguided, tyrannous cubs" who dubbed him "Tom the Tearful."

At fourteen years of age he set out, like many another poor Scottish student, and walked the ninety miles between Ecclefechan and Edinburgh, where he entered the university. His career was not distinguished, but he showed considerable aptitude for mathematics, and afterwards declared that "the man who had mastered the forty-seven propositions of Euclid stood nearer to God than he had done before." He left Edinburgh without a degree in his eighteenth year, and carried away with him the unflattering impression that "out of England and Spain ours was the worst of all hitherto discovered Universities."

His religious views by this time had changed, and the ministry was now out of the question. A few barren years of teaching followed, during which he began to study German. He then returned to Edinburgh with the idea of reading law, and supported himself in the meantime by contributing various minor articles to the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*. His health was bad; he could not sleep, and he suffered from dyspepsia, to which he was a lifelong martyr. His daily bread was uncertain, and his soul was tormented with doubt.

The story of these sad, critical years was afterwards told in his "Sartor Resartus" (the Patcher Repatched). In form this work was a review of a German book on dress, but in reality it was a philosophical essay. In the guise of a German professor, Carlyle pours out the vials of his wrath against the old clothes of falsehood and fashion, convention and sham, in which men wrap themselves, and by so doing conceal the divine idea lying at the centre of human life. He tells us that he cried out for Truth though the heavens should crush him for following her, and that, at last, in June 1821, when he was on his way to bathe in the sea at Leith, he experienced a "spiritual new birth," and "found himself." Henceforward he would not surrender to his misery, but would substitute a grim defiance for "whining sorrow."

In the same month Carlyle made the acquaintance of Jane Baillie Welsh, whom he married two years later, and accepted a tutorial post which relieved him from monetary anxieties. By this time German Literature had gripped him; it seemed to him to reveal "a new heaven and a new earth," and he set himself the task of interpreting German poetry and German philosophy to English readers. He was fortunate in his hour, for an interest in things German was rapidly growing in England.

Three years later, during a visit to London, he resigned his tutorship, and remained in town superintending the publication in book form of his first important work—his "Life of Schiller." In the following year Miss Welsh, after much hesitation, agreed to marry him, and the newly wedded pair settled down in Edinburgh, where Carlyle busied himself with German translations and began to write articles for the *Edinburgh Review*.

Mrs. Carlyle was an heiress in a small way, and had inherited a small property at Craigenputtock, to which the pair retired in 1829. Carlyle himself described it as "the dreariest spot in all the British dominions," and certainly only a philosopher could find solace in the midst of its lonely, bleak moors. He, himself, was quite content to

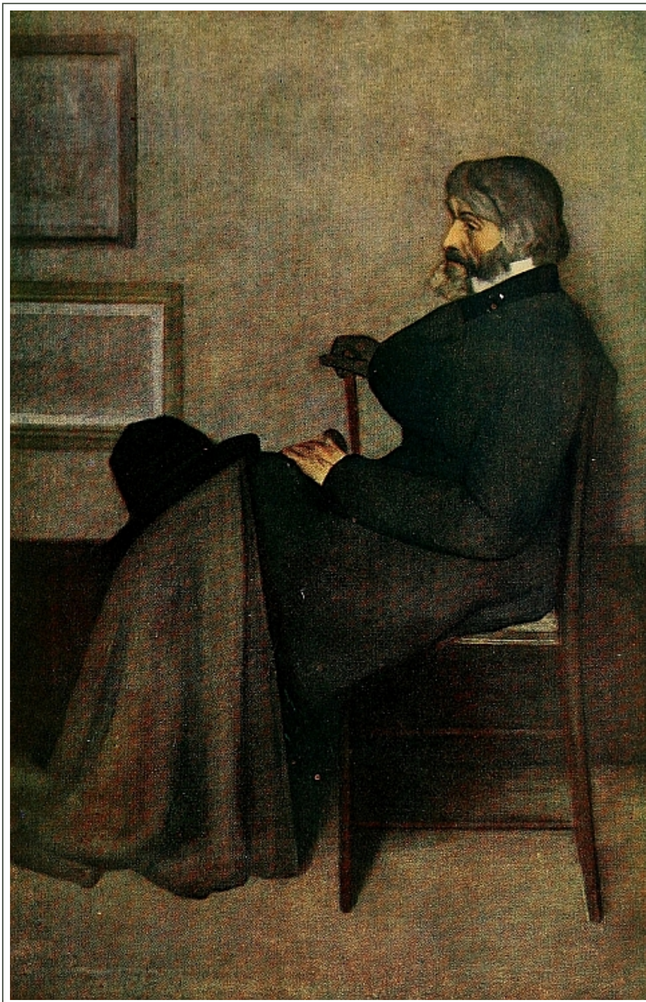
dwell in the wilderness, and here he did some of his best work, including his incomparable Essay on Burns. Jane Carlyle was a witty, highly cultured, society-loving woman, and to her the monotony and the drudgery of the Craigenputtock exile were almost intolerable. She did not complain, but the misery of those years at Craigenputtock permanently injured her health and soured her temper.

The richest fruit of the Craigenputtock period was “Sartor Resartus,” to which we have already referred. The ideas which it embodied were so strange, and the style was so grotesque, that no publisher could be induced to issue it, and the work only found its way to the public through the medium of *Fraser's Magazine*. Carlyle had by this time abandoned the simple, straightforward diction of his earlier work and had adopted an extraordinary, abrupt, uncouth, ejaculatory method of writing which set every literary canon at defiance. Readers were utterly bewildered when they were confronted with such apparent jargon as the following:—

> “Day after day I must thatch myself anew; day after day this despicable thatch must lose some film of its thickness; some film of it, frayed away by wear and tear, must be brushed off into the Ash-pit, into the Lay-stall; till by degrees the whole of it has been brushed thither, and I, the dust-making, patent Rag-grinder, get new material to grind down. O subter-brutish! vile! most vile! For have not I too a compact all-enclosing skin, whiter or dingier? Am I a botched mass of tailors' and cobblers' shreds, then, or a tightly articulated, homogeneous little Figure, automatic, nay alive?”

This *Carlylese* would be the most affected of affectations were any other man to write it, but Carlyle deliberately adopted it, as best fitted for the voice of a prophet crying in the wilderness. He wished to startle and arouse his readers, to set them tingling, to ruffle and revolt them, but, at the same time, to make them listen and think. The style was the man, and it was the only vehicle which could fitly express his message. This, and this alone, is its justification—and it is a complete justification.

In the year following the publication of the “Sartor,” Carlyle left Craigenputtock and set up house in Cheyne Row, Chelsea, London, which continued to be his abode for the forty-seven years of life that remained to him. Here he “toiled terribly” at his great work the *French Revolution*. It was the most unconventional piece of history ever written; its pages were filled with abrupt outcries and startling appeals, and the whole resembled a series of word photographs rather than an ordered narrative. He presented his wonderful tale of blood and tears with startling vividness, and the result was a work which stands absolutely alone in English literature. Despite the picturesque method adopted, the actual history is substantially accurate, as later and wider researches have amply proved.



**Thomas Carlyle.**
(***From the portrait by J. A. M'Neill Whistler. By permission of the Corporation of Glasgow.***) To List

When the work was well advanced Carlyle handed the first volume to John Stuart Mill, his close friend, for perusal and suggestions. One day Mill came to Cheyne Row with the terrible news that a servant girl had destroyed the manuscript—all but a few pages. Carlyle was in despair, but he did not reproach his friend. After an interval of agony he began to work again, and within six months the lost volume was rewritten. The work was published in 1837, but was not immediately successful. Before long, however, its great merits were recognized, and Carlyle received a full meed of public recognition. The old days of grinding poverty were over; fame had come at last, and the Sage of Chelsea became the greatest literary figure of London. His house was the resort of literary men, and was regarded by many of them “as the home of the real king of British letters.”

Several courses of lectures on “German Literature,” “The History of Literature,” “The Revolutions of Modern Europe,” “Heroes and Hero Worship” made his strange, rugged figure and prophetic intensity of utterance familiar to London audiences. Eight years later came his “Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell,” a most laborious piece of work, in which he was almost submerged beneath the confused mass of his materials, “fished up from foul Lethean quagmires, and washed clean of foreign stupidities—such a job of buck-washing as I do not long to repeat.” Carlyle was himself a Puritan, and his picture of the great Protector was limned by a sympathetic hand. The military part of the work was done with conscientious pains, and the story of Dunbar Drove remains a masterpiece.

The next work, “Latter-Day Pamphlets,” was a frenzied attack on the institutions of the country and the leading politicians of the time, but it produced little effect, owing to the wild, undiscriminating castigation which it inflicted on all and sundry. His last great book was “The History of Frederick the Second, commonly called the Great,” a mighty task, which occupied fourteen years and took him over the battlefields of the Seven Years' War. His greatest praise of Frederick is that “he managed *not* to be a liar and charlatan as his century was.” Of necessity the book is inferior in interest to the “French Revolution,” but it is a classic, both here and in Germany.

The university on which he had poured such scorn in the days of his youth now honoured him with the coveted office of Lord Rector, and in the year 1866, while he was in Edinburgh delivering the customary address, his wife died suddenly from heart disease. Carlyle was overwhelmed with grief, which developed into bitter remorse when he discovered from his wife's journal the carefully-concealed misery which his absorption in his work, his irritability, and his lack of consideration had caused her. He probably never recovered from this blow. For fifteen years he lingered on, a gloomy, silent, sad old man, with his life's work done. He died on February 4, 1881, and though a grave in Westminster Abbey might have held him, he was buried according to his wish in the little churchyard at Ecclefechan beside his own kith and kin.

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Carlyle's striking originality, his fiery earnestness, and his fierce, primitive power are his most impressive characteristics, and it was these qualities which made him so great a moral force and enabled him to wield so mighty and, in the main, so wholesome an influence upon his disciples. He was the prophet of the spiritual and unseen. It was his mission to denounce falsehoods and shams; to tear away the superficial and misleading in thought, belief, and action, and so lay bare the reality beneath.

To him the world was “out of joint;” he had no faith in the progress which Macaulay perceived; he cared little for art and science, despised poets and poetry, and scorned economists as the “dreary professors of a dismal science.” All these

things were mechanical, formal, and artificial. “The essential” thing was to perceive the underlying spirit of God in everything. “What is man himself,” he cries, “but a symbol of God.” He believed that progress was not the work of institutions but of super-men, who by dint of sheer force impressed their ideas on their fellows. He had no faith in democracy, but believed that “heroes” ought to guide and govern; and many of his other political theories were similarly unpractical.

Nevertheless he wrote and spoke as an inspired prophet, absolutely fearless, and intensely believing in the truth of all that he set forth, so that men of the calibre of Ruskin, Tennyson, and Browning felt his influence, and delighted to call him friend. In a material age, when men were eagerly hastening to be rich, he held up an arresting hand and bade them seek the greatest of all riches. The core of his teaching is the Psalmist's cry: “Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.”

# Chapter LII.

## JOHN RUSKIN.

> "*No true disciple of mine will ever be a Ruskinian; he will follow, not me, but the instincts of his own soul, and the guidance of its Creator.*"—RUSKIN.

HE who visits Derwentwater will, almost instinctively, direct his steps to a low promontory rising but a few feet above the level of the lake. From this favourite coign of vantage he will view the lovely mere in all its unsurpassed beauty—its oval form, its shining waters, its wooded islands, the rich blending of crag, green fell, and feathery wood on its margins. Beyond the lake his eye will be enraptured by the "enchanted land" of dark and lofty peaks which rise one above the other to close in the scene. No prospect in all the British Isles is fairer. A few steps from the edge of the water the visitor will see a plain slab of Skiddaw slate with a bronze medallion portrait, and this inscription:—

"JOHN RUSKIN, MDCCCXIX-MDCCCC.

"*The first thing which I remember as an event in life,*
*was being taken by my nurse to the brow of Friar's Crag*
*on Derwentwater.*"

So wrote the great man who combined in his own gifted and complex nature Keats's worship of beauty, Wordsworth's reverence for nature, and Carlyle's passion for truth. In him love and beauty and zeal for righteousness were inseparably blended. He saw in everything beautiful, whether from the hand of God or the hand of man, a deep moral and spiritual significance. He "loved the principle of beauty in all things," and while directing men's eyes towards all that was truly beautiful and beautifully true, he battled against everything that was sordid, mean, vulgar, and soul-destroying in our social and national life. His wonderful eloquence, his contagious enthusiasm, and his fervid imagination led thousands of men and women to find joy in nature and art; and out of the richness of his pity he passionately pleaded the cause of the poor, and practised what he preached with a large and generous charity.

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Ruskin was of Scottish origin though born in London. He derived his upright character and simple piety from his parents, but his youthful training, he confessed,

was “too formal and too luxurious.” His mother was a strong, stern Calvinist, who ardently desired that her only child should enter the Church. Under her guidance he read the Bible from cover to cover, “hard names and all.” To this rigid course of reading he afterwards ascribed his command of language, the best part of his taste in literature, and “his general power of taking pains.”

His father was a wealthy “entirely honest merchant” with a taste for letters, which he carefully fostered in his son. He made long tours on business, and his wife and child accompanied him. Thus, Ruskin at a very early age saw all the most beautiful scenery of our islands and most of the picturesque countries and cities of Europe.

The boy was dreamy, and as he had but little companionship with children of his own age, he spent the time not devoted to travel in watching the clouds, flowers, and ants in his father's garden at Herne Hill. In his seventh year he began to write stories and verses, and early developed a taste for drawing, in which he attained such skill that he was afterwards able to adorn some of his books with excellent and beautiful illustrations.

His father was one of the most devoted admirers of the painter Turner, and on his twelfth birthday presented him with a copy of Rogers' “Italy,” which contained many illustrations by that great artist. “This incident,” he tells us in his “Præterita,” “determined the main tenor of my life”—that is, it made him a firm believer in the principles of Turner's art, and induced him to spend a large part of his life in explaining and enforcing them.

Ruskin passed from a private school, where his girlish manners exposed him to a good deal of schoolboy contempt, to Christ Church, Oxford. Here, as at school, he was frequently an object of ridicule; but, as he tells us, he was fortified by “the fountain of pure conceit in his heart.” The main incident of his university life was the winning of the Newdigate prize with his poem *Salsette and Elephanta*.

After finally leaving Oxford he gave himself up to writing, and produced his “Modern Painters.” The book, which was expanded into five volumes, was intended to vindicate Turner, but it wandered over the whole field of art in its relation to life and nature. The first volume, which was published in 1842, was fiercely attacked by the critics for its theories, but, nevertheless, made a strong appeal by its deep thought, its earnest advocacy, and its striking eloquence.

Thenceforward, for about twenty years, Ruskin devoted himself to the study and criticism of art. “The Seven Lamps of Architecture,” which was his next work of importance, still remains the most popular of all his earlier books, but “The Stones of Venice,” which began to appear in 1851, is the greatest of all his ostensible works on art. Carlyle called it “a *sermon* in stones,” and hailed it as a new Renaissance. The sixth chapter of the second volume—*On the Nature of Gothic*—contains the gist of all his art teaching. The final volume of “Modern Painters” was issued in 1860.

About this time Ruskin's mind began to be concerned with questions of ethics and social reform. “I am tormented,” he wrote, “between the longing for rest and lovely life, and the sense of the terrific call of human crime for resistance and of human misery for help.” He began to perceive that all his exhortations were idle and vain so long as the nation had low standards of living and vulgar ideals of success. Before art could really uplift men and women, the whole social system must be regenerated, and truer and nobler principles of living must be established. In this spirit he wrote the first of a series of tracts addressed to working men, and entitled “Fors Clavigera.” The tracts were continued for seven years, and in them Ruskin revealed his ideals of life, manners, and society.

He now founded the Guild of St. George, which was to devote itself to the practical work of solving the problems of poverty and crime. The movement met with much opposition and ridicule, and received very little encouragement; but Ruskin was not deterred. He drew largely on his own fortune, bought land, laid out farms, set up mills in which hand-work was to take the place of machinery, and established schools of agriculture and art. He also opened a tea-shop in Marylebone, and helped to reclaim slum property in London.

In 1869 Ruskin was elected Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford. The ordinary lecture room would not contain the crowds that flocked to hear him, and the Sheldonian Theatre became his auditorium. Around him he gathered a circle of young and devoted disciples who were deeply influenced by his teaching, and under his direction engaged in the practical work of road-making. In the meantime he was writing many small books with charming titles, full of noble thoughts, expressed in language of great beauty and purity.

**JOHN RUSKIN IN OLD AGE.**

(***From photo by F. Hollyer.***) To List

The closing years of Ruskin's life were spent at Brantwood, on the shores of Lake Coniston. Here he continued his work, but in 1882 was stricken down by inflammation of the brain. He recovered sufficiently to travel, and to write “Præterita,” which is his autobiography. Two years later he discovered that he had spent or given away the whole of the fortune inherited from his father, but the ever-increasing sale of his books ensured him a comfortable income.

Brain excitement, and intense indignation at the establishment of a vivisection laboratory at Oxford, led him to resign his professorship, and thenceforward he lived in complete retirement. The bitter attacks of his critics had by this time ceased, and to thousands of earnest men and women he was the beloved “Master.” His eightieth birthday was the occasion of an outburst of public congratulation from all quarters of the globe. On the 20th January in the year 1900 he died suddenly, and was buried in Coniston churchyard.

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In this book we are not concerned with his theories of art or with his social economy, but with his work as a writer. As a master of English prose he stands in the very highest rank. In his earlier works his over-florid imagination, his love of gorgeous imagery, and his diffuseness often marred his page; but in his later books he rose to an unexampled serenity, purity, and lucidity of style. His “Præterita” contains such passages of tenderness and charm and subtlety of thought as have

never been surpassed. The word-pictures on which he lavished all the artistry of his pen are the outcome of a landscape-painter's eye and a poet's love of language. Take, for example, the magical word-painting in the following description of the Bay of Uri (Lake Lucerne):—

> “Steepest there on the western side, the walls of its rocks ascend to heaven. Far in the blue evening, like a great cathedral pavement, lies the lake in its darkness; and you may hear the whisper of innumerable falling waters return from the hollows of the cliff, like the voices of a multitude praying under their breath. From time to time the beat of a wave, slow-lifted, where the rocks lean over the black depth, dies heavily as the last note of a requiem. Opposite, green with steep grass, and set with chalet villages, the Fron-Alp rises in one solemn glow of pastoral light and peace; and above, against the clouds of twilight, ghostly on the gray precipice, stand, myriad by myriad, the shadowy armies of the Unterwalden pine.”

Ruskin and Carlyle come together in our pageant as the great prophetic teachers of the Victorian age. It was the influence of Carlyle which drew Ruskin from the realm of pure art and the contemplation of sheer beauty to an examination of the social and economic conditions of the everyday life around him. This abode of man as God made it was to him an unfailing vision of loveliness inspiring the soul to gratitude and the heart to virtue; every prospect pleased, and only the world as men of low and grovelling aims had made it, was vile. In his earlier teaching he pleaded for truth to nature, for purity and earnestness, and exhibited the foundations of great art in high morality. In the social and economical teaching of his later years he bade men bring the same moral virtues to the relief of human misery, the elevation of national ideals, and the general uplifting of mankind.

# Chapter LIII.

## CHARLES DICKENS.

> "*The philosophy of Dickens certainly is the professed philosophy of kindliness, of a genial interest in all things great and small, of a light English joyousness, and a sunny universal benevolence.*"—DAVID MASSON.

"A VERY queer small boy" of some eight or nine years of age is climbing Gads Hill, midway between Chatham and Gravesend. He is a pale, weak child, with a refined and sensitive face, on which there is an expression of unusual eagerness and animation. There is a flash of genius in his fine large eyes, and the smile that lurks about his lips betrays the cheerful and humorous thoughts that are for ever flitting through his mind. At the summit of the hill he pauses, and you hear him declaiming a well-known passage from *King Henry IV.*, Part I.

> "But, my lads, my lads, to-morrow morning by four o'clock, early at Gadshill. There are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings, and traders riding to London with fat purses. I have visors for you all; you have horses for yourselves."

He is a wonderfully imaginative boy, and as he speaks the merry escapade is enacted all over again before his eyes. It is moonlight on the lonely road and yonder is that mountain of fat, Falstaff, puffing and blowing, and calling down maledictions on his followers because his horse is missing. Presently the travellers appear, a boy leading their horses, and they on foot to ease their legs. Falstaff and his followers spring out of yonder coppice, and bid the wayfarers "Stand!" The big fat man loads the travellers with abuse, snatches their purses, and drives them away.

Now he and Bardolph and Peto sit by the roadside in the shadow sharing the booty and gloating over the supper and carousal that await them at Eastcheap. Suddenly Prince Hal and Poins, masked in visors, spring upon them. Falstaff waddles off as fast as his legs will carry him, roaring to his companions, who are rushing down the hill at top speed. As soon as he is out of sight the robbers of thieves shake their sides with laughter, and mounting their horses hasten to the rendezvous, where they hear Falstaff recounting the story of his valorous encounter with "eleven men in buckram." O glorious! glorious!—and to think that it all happened here!

The boy's eyes are glowing as he turns to look at the red-brick house on the summit of the hill. He knows it well; again and again he has visited it. His father, seeing him so fond of it, has often said to him, "*If you were to be very persevering,*

*and were to work hard, you might some day come to live in it.*” How he longs for that day!

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Such is our first view of CHARLES DICKENS, whose name is a household word wherever the English language is spoken. No novelist, save perhaps Sir Walter Scott, has been so widely read, and no novelist, not even Sir Walter Scott, has been so beloved by his readers. With no great artistic or intellectual gifts, and with no advantages of early education, Dickens, nevertheless, rose to the highest rank amongst our native novelists by dint of his extraordinary gifts of observation and unalloyed humour.

Happily we know much about his boyhood and early years, for his greatest novel, “David Copperfield,” is only a slightly idealized autobiography. He had a marvellous memory for the things of his boyhood, even as a grown man. He tells us, for instance, that he could actually remember learning to walk, and to the last day of his life he could vividly remember the small front garden of the house at 357 Commercial Road, Mile End, Landport, in Portsea, where he was born on February 7, 1812. In his fourth year, his father, who was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, was removed to Chatham, and here the “very queer small boy” went to school, read all sorts of books, visited Gads Hill again and again, and determined to be very persevering and to work hard, so that one day he might come to live in the house on its summit.

Debarred by his weak health from participating in outdoor sports, he early developed a passion for reading, and devoured the small collection of miscellaneous books which his father possessed. As a singer and a reciter he delighted his family and amazed visitors, and his early love of the drama never deserted him.

Chatham and the ancient city of Rochester were a constant delight. He loved to hear the call of the bugles and the roar of the guns, to watch the soldiers marching by, to see the warships departing for distant lands and returning after long and adventurous voyages. The six years spent at Chatham were the happiest of all his boyhood. He roamed the Kentish lanes and woods, the marshes and chalk hills, and learned to love the sounds and scenes of the country. At school he was an apt scholar, and like Sir Walter Scott he entranced his school-fellows with stories of his own invention. Before long he began to put down his little tales on paper. In after years he said of himself, “I was a writer when a mere baby.”

But this happiness was not to last. In his tenth year his father was transferred to a post in Somerset House, London, and the Dickens family moved to a tenement in a mean London street. Never was child so lonely, and never did child feel his loneliness more. The father was so deeply in debt that he could not pay for the boy's education, so he became a neglected household drudge.

In his secret heart he longed to be “a learned and distinguished man,” yet every day he felt himself sinking deeper and deeper into ignorance. His cup of misery was full when his father was imprisoned for debt in King's Bench prison. A time of great privation then set in; almost everything that the family possessed was sold or pawned, and little Charles was chiefly employed in these sordid transactions. “At the pawn-broker's shop,” he writes, “I began to be very well known. The principal gentleman who officiated behind the counter took a good deal of notice of me, and often got me, I recollect, to decline a Latin noun or adjective, or to conjugate a Latin verb in his ear, while he transacted my business.”

The poor boy had now to turn out and earn his own living. A distant relative, who was the proprietor of a blacking warehouse, offered him employment at a salary of six shillings a week. The offer was accepted, and the proud, sensitive child felt all his early hopes crushed in his breast. His experiences are vividly told in “David Copperfield,” and though they were hard to bear, they need not be regretted, for this early privation made him acquainted with the homes and haunts of the very poor—their speech, modes of life, joys, sorrows, hopes, and fears. His bitter servitude in the school of poverty was of inestimable value to him when he began to write the great stories on which his fame rests.

In his twelfth year the family fortunes improved. To his great joy, the boy was removed from the society of Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes and sent to a “classical and commercial academy,” and subsequently to another school in Henrietta Street, Brunswick Square. When his schooldays were over, he became a clerk in a lawyer's office; but his old ambition remained, and he studied diligently, especially shorthand, which was then “about equal in difficulty to the mastery of six languages.” Baffling as the art and mystery of shorthand was, he mastered it, and became an excellent reporter. He now quitted Gray's Inn for Doctors' Commons, where he reported law cases, and at the age of nineteen joined his father in the House of Commons gallery as a member of the staff of a daily paper.

When Parliament was “up” Dickens was frequently sent to the country to report speeches, and in this way he enjoyed a wide and varied experience of men and things which furnished him with many of the characters and incidents of his novels. He saw the last of the old coaching days, and of the old inns which he was so fond of describing. No man has ever pictured coaching days and coaching ways more vividly and attractively.

Dickens was now a journalist, and the step from journalism to literature is comparatively easy. The first piece of original writing which he ever published appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* for December 1833. He has described how one evening at twilight he stealthily and with fear and trembling dropped his manuscript into the dark letter-box of a dark office up a dark court, and with what agitation he bought and opened the next number of the magazine, and saw himself in print. “On which occasion,” he says, “I walked down to Westminster Hall and turned into it for half an hour; because my eyes were so dimmed with joy and pride that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there.”

**CHARLES DICKENS.**
(*From the portrait by W. P. Frith.*) To List

One of his contributions, in August 1834, bore the signature “Boz,” which was the nickname of a pet younger brother. About this time the *Monthly Magazine* was in difficulties, and Dickens offered to continue his sketches in the *Evening Chronicle*, on which he was then engaged as a reporter. His offer was accepted, and his salary was raised from five to seven guineas a week. In the spring of 1836 his sketches were collected into book form, and appeared as “Sketches by Boz,” illustrated by George Cruikshank. The keen observation, the good humour, and the plentiful fun of the book soon attracted attention. No one as yet knew who the author was.

> “Who the dickens 'Boz' could be
> Puzzled many a curious elf,
> Till time unveiled the mystery,
> And 'Boz' appeared as Dickens' self.”

Shortly afterwards Messrs. Chapman and Hall proposed that Dickens should write the letterpress for a new monthly publication, containing a number of pictures by a well-known comic artist named Seymour. The pictures were to represent the adventures of a party of Cockney sportsmen who were to figure in all sorts of amusing misadventures. Dickens agreed to the proposal, and began the famous "Pickwick Papers." Between the first and the second numbers the artist died by his own hand. There was some difficulty in finding a successor, and the first four parts had but a moderate sale. In the fifth number Dickens introduced Sam Weller, and immediately "Pickwick Papers" became the talk of the town. Four hundred copies of the first part were bound up for sale, but forty thousand of the fifth number were eagerly demanded.

The book, as every one knows, is a collection of miscellaneous sketches loosely strung together, and having no aim but to amuse. This they did in an amazing degree, and it would be hard to mention any book in the language which has evoked such harmless and hearty laughter. "Pickwick Papers" embodied all that Dickens had seen and heard and experienced in his short but varied career. His memory was like a sensitive photographic plate; everything that passed before him seemed to be printed clearly and indelibly in his recollection.

Dickens was now the most popular writer in the country. No longer need he go up dark passages and post his manuscripts by stealth, and wait anxiously the judgment of editors. He was a prize to be captured, and publishers waited on him cap in hand. Before the "Pickwick Papers" were finished he was hard at work on his first real novel, "Oliver Twist," which was followed in quick succession by "Nicholas Nickleby," "The Old Curiosity Shop," and "Barnaby Rudge." "Oliver Twist" does not seem to have been so popular at first as its fellow-stories, but "Nicholas Nickleby" surpassed even "Pickwick."

"Barnaby Rudge," inspired by the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott, for whom Dickens had always a reverential admiration, has never made a very wide appeal to Dickens lovers; but "The Old Curiosity Shop" was extraordinarily successful. It contained much of his incomparable drollery, and though modern critics find Little Nell "a monster of piety and long suffering," and indict her death scene as an "assault on the emotions," she entwined herself about the affections of myriads of readers. Macready, the actor, begged Dickens to spare the life of the child, and in distant Californian camps rough miners dropped their cards to hear the moving story.

> "And then while round them shadows gathered faster,
> And as the twilight fell,
> He read aloud the book whereon the Master
> Had writ of 'Little Nell.'"

The novels mentioned above were issued in weekly parts, and the strain of the constant and exhausting work thus entailed now began to tell on the writer. A serious illness in the autumn of 1841 suspended his pen, and on his recovery he set sail for the United States, where his reception was most flattering. He, however, was not enamoured of the country, and on his return wrote his "American Notes,"

which gave much offence to his entertainers. In the course of his journey he collected much of the material for “Martin Chuzzlewit,” which began to appear in January 1843, but had only a small sale. Dickens was much disappointed, and began to work a new vein.

The “Christmas Carol,” which was the first of his charming series of Christmas stories, appeared a few days before Christmas Day, 1843, and achieved a great success. It preached the gospel of human brotherhood, and pleaded for a general observance of Christmas as “a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.” “It seems to me,” wrote Thackeray, “a national benefit, and to every man and woman who reads it, a personal kindness.”

Several of the Christmas books were written on foreign soil. “The Chimes,” for example, was written in Genoa, and was read to a circle of admiring friends on his return home. In 1846 Dickens became the first editor of the *Daily News*; but he only held the post for a few weeks, and in May left London for Lausanne, where he settled down in a lakeside cottage, and began “Dombey and Son,” but made little headway with it because of his “craving for the streets of London.”

On his return the book was completed, and attained a brilliant success, though it has been the most severely criticized of all Dickens's stories. The death of Little Paul has been called a masterpiece of sentimentality; but its pathos is undeniable. Dickens walked about the streets, desolate and sad, putting off to the last moment the writing of the chapter in which he and the little boy were to part company for ever.

During the years between 1847 and 1851 the finest fruits of Dickens's genius were produced. He was now accepted by most readers as the leader of English novelists; wherever he went he was received with the utmost enthusiasm, for no other man was ever so much the people's favourite. In 1848 he published the last of his Christmas books, and began “David Copperfield,” by far the greatest of all his novels. It began to appear in May 1849 in monthly parts, and while it was issuing Dickens started his weekly magazine, *Household Words*. For the rest of his life he gave much of his energy and thought to this journal and to its successor, *All the Year Round*.

By this time the incessant wear and tear of his work had broken down his health; but though family bereavements had added grief to physical exhaustion, he laboured on and completed “Bleak House,” which was followed by “Hard Times” and “Little Dorrit.” During this period he showed much restlessness, and sought relief from his labours in Switzerland and Italy.

At the beginning of 1853 he received a testimonial at Birmingham, and undertook in return to give a public reading on behalf of the new Midland Institute. He kept his promise to his Birmingham friends, and in the Town Hall, which was crowded with people, he read his “Christmas Carol.” So great was the enthusiasm that he gave a second reading in the same place, the seats being reserved for working men at

prices which they could afford. Some six thousand persons heard him in all, and the Institute benefited by about £500.

So great was the success of these readings that applications for others poured in upon him. He accepted some, but refused many. This was the beginning of those public readings which were afterwards to play such a large part in his life, and to tax his energies so greatly that they may be said to have killed him.

In March 1856, Dickens realized the great ambition which he had cherished since he was “a very queer small boy;” he became the possessor of Gads Hill Place. He had longed for it in boyhood, and now that he was its proprietor he cherished it greatly. In 1860 it became his regular abode. He enlarged it and improved it, and set up in the grounds a Swiss chalet which his friend Fechter, the actor, had given him. A great deal of his writing was done in this chalet.

During his first course of readings, a “Tale of Two Cities” had been written; and in 1861 “Great Expectations,” considered by many to contain his best plot, was finished. Dickens then gave further readings, and was invited to America, but was prevented from accepting the invitation by the outbreak of the Civil War. For a time he returned to his writing, and produced “Our Mutual Friend,” a book which showed his energies to be flagging. In February 1865 he had a serious illness, and ever afterwards suffered from lameness in the foot. This, however, did not deter him from giving a third series of readings, at the end of which he ran over to France for a brief summer holiday.

In February 1866 Dickens accepted the offer of Messrs. Chappell to give another series of readings, which proved more popular than ever. Then came a fresh invitation from America, and, in spite of the entreaties of his friends, he decided to accept it. A great farewell banquet was given in his honour, and on November 9, 1867, he set sail from Liverpool.

He found that the Americans had quite forgiven him, and were eager to do him honour. He read in all the principal towns, but was frequently “so dead beat” at the close of the evening that he could scarcely stand. The last reading was given in New York on April 20, 1868; a farewell banquet followed, and he returned to England, £20,000 to the good, but almost bankrupt in health.

Unfortunately, on his return he was persuaded to give another course of readings, and the overwork, worry, and excitement consequent on them finally broke him down, and he was forced to give up this class of work altogether. In the autumn of 1869 he began “The Mystery of Edwin Drood,” which, in his own opinion, “very, very far outstripped every one of its predecessors.” He worked hard at this book, but he never lived to finish it, and the mystery will never be solved. On June 8, 1870, he left the chalet about six o'clock and came into the house, where he said a few words to his sister-in-law, and suddenly fell to the ground. He never spoke again, and died the next evening. He had lived about four months beyond his fifty-eighth year.

The news of his death shot a pang of sorrow into thousands of homes. All felt that a cheery, hopeful, helpful spirit—a friend in the best sense of the word—had been laid low. In Great Britain it was as if his countrymen had suffered a personal bereavement. Queen Victoria telegraphed her deepest regret, and there was no English journal that did not pay a feeling tribute to his memory. Dickens himself had wished to be buried somewhere near Gads Hill, but the nation felt that there was only one fit resting-place for so great a writer, and that was Westminster Abbey. There he was buried privately on June 14, at an early hour, unattended save by a small band of mourners. But for days the spot was visited by thousands; "flowers were strewn upon the grave by unknown hands; many tears were shed by unknown eyes."

Dickens was essentially the novelist of the people. He knew little and cared less for those on whom the favours of fortune were showered. The joys, the sorrows, the strength, and the weakness of the poor and the middle class he knew thoroughly; for he himself was born to a lowly estate, and had suffered bitterly from hunger, neglect, and unsatisfied longings during a hard and joyless boyhood. Against cruelty and oppression he was ever ready to wage war, and the weak, the poor, and the needy never wanted a champion while he lived. In several of his books he attacked a number of crying abuses, and by his merciless exposure caused them to be wellnigh stamped out of existence.

No novelist has ever created so many characters; and some of them, such as Pecksniff and Mark Tapley, have become proverbial. Though we may criticize many of them as bundles of oddities, painted from the outside, and revealed only by some specialized virtue or vice, some trick of speech or manner, some physical peculiarity, there is no doubt that they live and move and have their being along with the creations of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Bunyan, and Scott. Dickens's extraordinary range of creative genius has never been equalled by any English novelist. His descriptive power, as illustrated in "The Tale of Two Cities," and in passages from his other books, frequently rises to a great height of tragic intensity.

Few writers have drawn so much laughter and tears from their readers as he. His buoyant, whimsical humour is irresistible, and there has been no such shaking of sides since the grave closed over him. Unlike the earlier humourists, he is delightfully free from grossness and irreverence. Thackeray, ever the most generous of critics, wrote as follows:—

> "I think of those past writers, and of one who lives amongst us now, and am grateful for the innocent laughter and sweet unsullied page which the author of 'David Copperfield' gives to my children."

His powers of pathos have already been mentioned. Though he sometimes trembles on the undefined border-line that divides the sublime from the ridiculous, he never fails to reach the hearts of the simple and unworldly. His hold upon the public is still great, and the *Dickens Fellowship* which has been recently founded serves to keep his memory green. Secure in the affections of millions of readers, we

may leave him with the noble estimate of Carlyle,—“the good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever-friendly, noble Dickens, every inch of him an Honest Man.”

# Chapter LIV.

## WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY.

> “*Thackeray, with a fine and sympathetic soul, had a creative imagination that was far stronger on the darker and fouler sides of life than it was on the brighter and pure side of life. He saw the bright and pure side; he loved it, he felt with it, he made us love it. But his artistic genius worked with more free and consummate zest, when he painted the dark and the foul.*”
>
> Frederic Harrison.

Half a dozen undergraduates are gathered in a little knot in the great court of Trinity College, Cambridge, listening to one of their number reading a set of verses from the first number of an ephemeral little paper entitled *The Snob*. Tennyson of Trinity has just won the Chancellor's Prize with an English poem on the apparently unpoetical subject of *Timbuctoo*, and Thackeray, his college friend, has burlesqued the prize poem in the pages of *The Snob*. There is some good fun in the parody, and the undergraduates punctuate its reading with much laughter.

“In Africa (a quarter of the world)
Men's skins are black; their hair is crisp and curl'd,
And somewhere there, unknown to public view,
A mighty city lies, called Timbuctoo. . . .
The day shall come when Albion's self shall feel
Stern Afric's wrath, and writhe 'neath Afric's steel.
I see her tribes the hill of glory mount,
And sell their sugars on their own account;
While round her throne the prostrate nations come,
Sue for her rice, and barter for her rum!”

As the author—a man six feet three inches in height, with a mild, spectacled face and a broken nose—passes by, you hear the admiring undergraduates greet him with noisy applause.

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William Makepeace Thackeray, the author of this amusing skit, was the son of an Indian civil servant who was also a renowned elephant hunter. He was born in Calcutta, in the year preceding the birth of Dickens, and spent the first few years of his life in India. In 1816 his mother was left a widow, and soon afterwards the boy was sent to England, where he was placed under the care of his aunt, Mrs. Ritchie. On the homeward voyage his ship touched at St. Helena, where my black servant

took me a walk over rocks and hills till we passed a garden where we saw a man walking. “This is Bonaparte,” said the black; “he eats three sheep every day, and all the children he can lay his hands on!” We can imagine the terror of the gentle and rather timid boy at this horrifying announcement. He never forgot the incident, and afterwards utilized it in his lectures on “The Four Georges.”

Mrs. Ritchie, who was a second mother to him, was alarmed to discover that he could wear his uncle's hat. Her doctor, however, assured her that the boy's big head had a good deal in it.

After attending a couple of preparatory schools, the Charterhouse, which he was fond of calling the Slaughter House, received him, but failed to lay hold of his young affections. He tells us that he was “licked into indolence” as a child, and when older was “abused into sulkiness” and “bullied into despair.” He abhorred games, but he seems to have been popular with his school-fellows, mainly because of his skill in scribbling verses and in drawing caricatures. “Draw us some pictures,” the boys would say, and straightway he would pop down a caricature of a master on his slate or exercise paper. The margins of his school-books were adorned with whimsical illustrations, many of which have been reproduced in a volume called *Thackerayana*. In one of his school fights he had the misfortune to come off with a broken nose; and this accident led him later in life to adopt the pen name of “Michael Angelo,” to which he affixed “Titmarsh.”

At Trinity College, Cambridge, Thackeray “wasted his time” for a year, but made lifelong friendships with Fitzgerald, Tennyson, Monckton Milnes, Brookfield, and other men destined for fame. To *The Snob* and *The Gownsman* he contributed various jocular effusions, such as the comic verses on Timbuctoo, enjoyed much literary talk with his friends, sang a good song, and helped to found an Essay Club, but was otherwise undistinguished. Shortly after leaving Cambridge he went to Weimar, where he met Goethe, and afterwards to Paris, where he studied art in the intervals of long idleness. He never really learned to draw; but his natural cleverness enabled him to become an admirable, if faulty, illustrator.

In 1832 he came of age, and inherited a small fortune, which soon vanished in unprofitable newspaper investments. This was a blessing in disguise, for it forced him to concentrate his powers on the task of earning a livelihood. In 1836 he sought out Dickens, and offered to succeed Seymour in illustrating “Pickwick,” but the offer seems to have been declined. In the same year he married; but after four years of perfect happiness his wife's mind gave way, and for the rest of her life she was under the care of an attendant. “Though my marriage was a wreck,” Thackeray wrote to a friend, “I would do it over again, for behold love is the crown and completion of all earthly good.”

By 1837 we find him a regular member of the staff of *Fraser's Magazine*, and shortly afterwards he began to enliven the pages of *Punch* with innumerable parodies and burlesques. To *Punch* he contributed his “Snob Papers,” which poured withering ridicule on the hollowness, hypocrisy, and absurdities of “Society,” and

made him famous; and to *Fraser's* his “Memoirs of Mr. Charles Jeames Yellowplush,” an illiterate but extremely satirical West End footman, whose comments on men and things set the whole town laughing.

His first notable success, however, was achieved with “Vanity Fair,” which began to appear in monthly parts in 1847. In this book, which gradually became popular, and is rightly accounted a classic, Thackeray rose to the summit of his art at a single bound. “My kind reader,” he says, “will please to remember that this history has 'Vanity Fair' for a title, and that 'Vanity Fair' is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of all sorts of humbugs and falsenesses and pretensions.” To hold the mirror up to this world of wealth and fashion, to “show virtue her own features, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of time, his form and pressure,” “to extenuate nothing, and yet not to set down aught in malice,” was Thackeray's aim. “Such people there are,” he wrote,

> “living and flourishing in the world—Faithless, Hopeless, Charity-less; let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. Some there are, and very successful, too, mere quacks and fools; and it was to combat and expose such as these, no doubt, that laughter was made.”

We need not tell the story of “Vanity Fair,” for no one can claim even a nodding acquaintance with modern literature who is ignorant of it. From the first scene in which Becky Sharp throws the “dixonary” out of the carriage window to the final chapter in which Amelia rewards the devotion of her old admirer Dobbin, there is not a page without its fascination and its keen and penetrating criticism of life. Never did any man create in a single novel so many, so varied, and so justly-conceived characters.

Thackeray was a disciple of Fielding, but the disciple was far greater than his master. Fielding had nothing like Thackeray's wide vision of life and penetrating knowledge of human character. It used to be common cant to speak of Thackeray as a cynic, “and if it be cynical to paint the world as it is, to show selfish, clever schemers like Becky Sharp flourishing, while simple goodness and virtue, in the persons of Dobbin and Amelia Sedley, are sorely smitten by fortune, Thackeray's comedy is cynical indeed.” But in personal character Thackeray was the very antithesis of a cynic. His generosity was unbounded; his children were his dearest friends; he loved to tip schoolboys; and when he became an editor he could not bear to refuse the contributions of poor authors. His heart was as great as his intellect, and his humour was the child of love.

No cynic could have drawn Colonel Newcome; no cynic could have written the nobly pathetic scene in which that grand old gentleman takes leave of life:—

> “At the usual evening hour the chapel bell began to toll, and Thomas Newcome's hands outside the bed feebly beat time. And just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted up his head a little, and quickly said, 'Adsum!' and fell back. It was the word we used at school when names were called; and so he, whose heart was as that of a little child, had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of the Master.”

Thackeray drew the portraits of many mean, selfish, untrustworthy, vicious, and dissolute persons in his books, but he never tricked out vice as virtue, and never made evil masquerade as good. Every detail of evil was so painted as to produce disgust—never to allure. His characters are men and women with human faults and failings, not plaster saints; but he never failed to applaud chivalry, unselfishness, truthfulness, nobility of thought and deed, and hold them up for our emulation.

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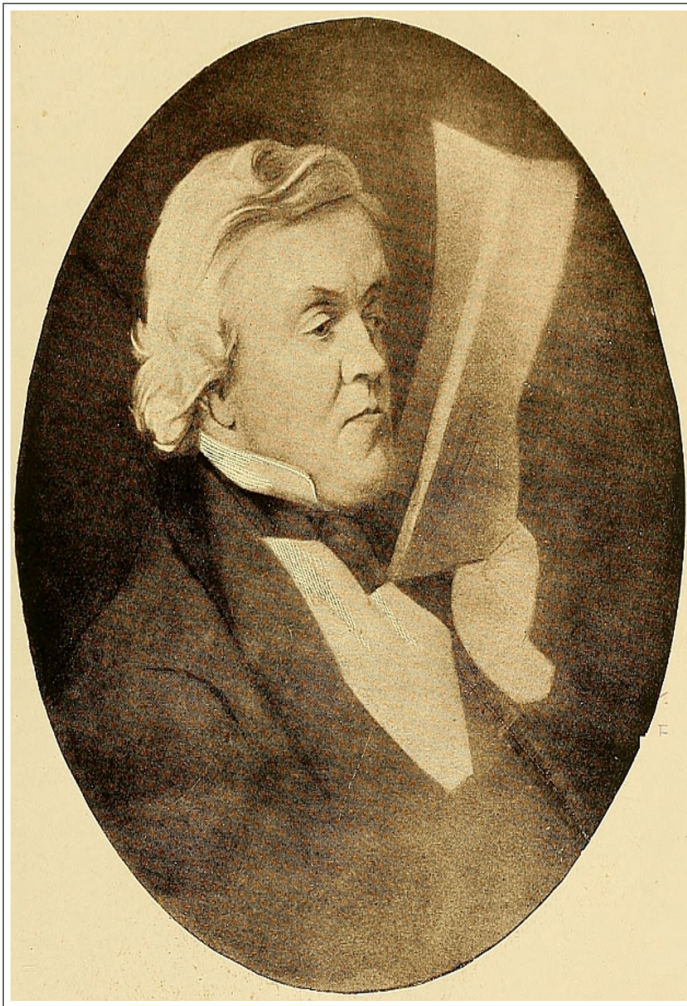
Thackeray was now hailed as the rival of Dickens; but rivalry there never was and never could be, for the two novelists worked on totally different planes, and achieved their masterpieces by totally different methods. “Vanity Fair” was speedily followed by “Pendennis,” a story of school, university, literary, and social life, largely autobiographical. The book has always been popular, and it contains a wealth of characters, including his best study of drollery, Mr. Henry Foker.

His next venture, “Esmond,” was a historical novel of the days of Queen Anne, in which not only the stately diction of the period but even the thought of the time was finely imitated. Thackeray actually dictated it while he smoked his cigar. “Esmond,” great as it is, was not appraised by the public at its proper value; but “The Newcomes” secured popular favour at once. The *Quarterly Review* promptly pronounced it Thackeray's masterpiece, and so it remains to most discerning readers to-day, though there are some who find it too long and not without languors. “The Virginians,” the last of his great novels, was a wonderful study of the later eighteenth century; but it was the work of a man confessedly weary.


**WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY.**
***(After the portrait by Samuel Laurence.)*** To List

When his fame as a novelist was fully established, Thackeray, following the example of Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Carlyle, took to the platform, and delivered brilliant and witty lectures on *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* and *The Four Georges*, which were afterwards issued in book form. He also attempted, without success, to enter Parliament, and acted as editor of *Cornhill*. The two novels contributed to this magazine showed a great falling off in power, but his “Round-about Papers” had all his old sparkle and vivacity. He was found dead in his bed on the morning of Christmas Eve in the year 1863. His novel “Denis Duval,” which seemed to promise a return of his old genius, was left unfinished. The news of his sudden, lonely death drew forth general expressions of sorrow.

Thackeray was by no means an industrious or methodical man. He had, in Carlyle's phrase, “a beautiful vein of genius,” but he had also a great faculty of

enjoyment, and he never wrote “under compulsion.” Consequently there is a wonderful spontaneity in most of his writings, which was, at its best, fresh, direct, light, graceful, and incisive. Assuredly he must be ranked with the greatest masters of English prose.

*Punch* thus bade him farewell:—

> “O gentle censor of our age!
> Prime master of our ampler tongue!
> Whose word of wit and generous page
> Were never wrath, except with wrong.”

# Chapter LV.

## ROBERT BROWNING.

> "*Most thinkers write and speak of man; Mr. Browning of men. With man as a species, with man as a society, he does not concern himself, but with individual man and men. Every man is for him an Epitome of the universe, a centre of creation.*"—Arthur Symons.

We are now permitted to visit the Casa Guidi, Florence, in the winter of 1857. We enter a large room hung with tapestry and old pictures of saints who look out sadly from carved frames of black wood; we note large cases brimming over with books, a bust of Dante, a cast of Keats's face, a pen-and-ink sketch of Tennyson, and several paintings of the little boy who is the idol of the home. The dark shadows and subdued light give the room a dreamy air, and seem to make it the fitting abode of poets. Opening out of the room is a balcony filled with plants, and, opposite, is the iron-gray church of happy omen—San Felice—whence come the muffled voices of chanting friars.

Seated in a low arm-chair by the door, a table strewn with writing materials by her side, is the elvish figure of a small, pale woman in a black silk dress. "It is wonderful to see," says Nathaniel Hawthorne, who has but recently visited her, "how small she is, how pale her cheek, how bright and dark her eyes. There is not such another figure in the world, and her black ringlets cluster down into her neck and make her face look whiter." Another American has described her as "a soul of fire enclosed in a shell of pearl." In sooth, she seems to be a spirit lent to earth; and her view of life, its sorrows and its shames, its beauty and its eternal hope, is what we might imagine a delicate ethereal spirit's to be.

There is a quick step in the corridor; the door opens and the master of the house enters. He is a handsome man of forty-five, somewhat below middle height, but muscular in frame, and with a mass of lustrous brown hair flecked with silver. As he greets the little lady in the arm-chair there is a look of positive adoration on his face, which she returns in full measure. You see at a glance that this husband and wife are passionate lovers; their courtship and married life have been, and will remain to the end, an exquisite love-poem.

Such is our introduction to Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning—the wife already recognized as the foremost English poetess of her time and accounted worthy to succeed Wordsworth as laureate; the husband slowly winning his way to recognition as the most stimulating and original of all our modern poets.

Robert Browning was the son of a clerk in the Bank of England, a man of scholarly and artistic tastes, who had abandoned the management of the parental sugar estate in the West Indies out of disgust with slavery. His boy was vigorous, restless, fearless, and fiery-tempered, and was definitely educated for the literary life. At eight years of age he delighted in Homer, and began to translate the “Odes” of Horace, but subsequently showed a great love of music, and desired to be a composer.

His mother was a gentle, sensitive lady, and his love for her was a passion. As a little boy he used to say, “When I am a man I will marry my mamma!” All through his life at home, however late he might be, he never went to bed without kissing her good-night. “She was a divine woman,” he said, and he could never mention her name to the close of his life without a break in his voice. His home was in Camberwell, then a country suburb where the nightingale sang, and the little fellow could wander in the fields within sight of the towers of Westminster Abbey and the cross of gold on the dome of St. Paul's. Except for a short period at the University of London, he was educated in private schools and at home.

Of *Pauline*, his first published poem, he sold very few copies, and he and his sister tore up the rest. *Paracelsus*, which was published in his twenty-fourth year, was praised by a few discerning spirits; but the public neglected it altogether. Macready, the actor, met the poet at dinner, and wrote in his diary, “The writer can scarcely fail to be a leading spirit of his time.” He asked Browning to write him a tragedy, and *Strafford* was produced. It ran five nights, and then the actor who played Pym threw up his part, and the play was taken off. During the next few years Browning lived very quietly in a house at Hatcham with a large rose garden, steeping himself in all literature, ancient and modern, English and foreign.

In 1838 he visited Italy, which was afterwards to be the land of his adoption. On the outward voyage he wrote the stirring poem, *How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*, and in the next year *Sordello*, the most cryptic and involved of all his writings. A critic said of this poem, “I have read *Sordello*, and there are only two lines in the volume that are intelligible, the first and the last—

> “'Who wills, may hear Sordello's story told;'
>
> 'Who wills, has heard Sordello's story told;'—

and these are not true.” *Sordello* was received with mockery, and friends who had warmly praised *Paracelsus* were baffled and mystified by it.

In 1841 a friend suggested that Browning should publish a number of his plays and poems in pamphlets at sixpence each, and to this the poet consented. The first number contained *Pippa Passes*, a story of a factory girl who *passes* the chief persons in the drama at critical moments and exercises an influence upon their fates, of which she is wholly unaware. Then came a tragedy, *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon*, of which Charles Dickens, who read it in manuscript, wrote, “It has

thrown me into a perfect passion of sorrow, and I swear it is a tragedy which *must* be played, and must be played, moreover, by Macready." It was played by Macready and the famous Helen Faucit, but only enjoyed a short run.

In 1845 the romance of his life began. He made the acquaintance of a cousin of Elizabeth Barrett, whose poems he greatly admired, and ardently desired an introduction to her. The author of *Paracelsus* was known to Miss Barrett by his works, and she had already declared in print that he resembled a "pomegranate, which, if cut deep down the middle, shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a veined humanity." She was the eldest daughter of a wealthy, despotic man, and had been brought up in a beautiful Herefordshire home surrounded by luxury and loving care. "Elizabeth's room" was a lofty chamber with a stained-glass window, and her garden was overgrown with white roses.

As a little child her gift of learning was extraordinary; at eight years of age she read Homer, holding the book in one hand and nursing her doll on the other arm. "She dreamed more of Agamemnon than of Moses her black pony." Like Pope, she lisped in numbers; and at thirteen her epic on the *Battle of Marathon* was printed by her father, who, she says, "was bent on spoiling me."

In her fifteenth year she tried to saddle her pony alone in a field, but fell in some way and injured her spine so severely that she had to lie on her back for years. In 1835 her *Prometheus Bound* appeared, and three years later "The Seraphim and Other Poems," which included some of her finest lyrics. So critical was the state of her health at this time that for months she never left her room, and had to be helped from her bed to a sofa. The drowning of her brother Edward was a terrible shock to her, and for a time she hovered between life and death.

At length she was removed to London, and in the seclusion of darkened rooms many of her poems were written. Her *Cry of the Children*, which was suggested by a report on mines and factories, attracted much attention; but her great success came in the autumn of 1844, when her two volumes of "Poems" appeared. The reviews rang with her praises, and she was everywhere recognized as the greatest woman poet of her time. Such was her story up to the momentous year 1845.

On the 10th of January in that year she received her first letter from Robert Browning. In it he declared his passion: "I love your books, and I love you too." She replied in terms of warm friendship, and a few days later Browning saw her for the first time, lying on her sofa in a partly darkened room, and she "instantly inspired him with a passionate admiration." Innumerable letters passed between them, letters full of tenderness and passion and literature, and Elizabeth, wholly inspired with love of him, wrote her "Sonnets from the Portuguese," which owe their title to the fact that Robert had once called her "his Portuguese."

At length she agreed to marry him. Her father, she knew, would never give his consent—he hated the thought of his children leaving him, and had already solemnly cursed one daughter who was inclined to obey the dictates of her heart—so a secret marriage was arranged. From the church door Mrs. Browning went back

to her father's house, but a week later she stole away at dinner-time with her maid, and Flush, her dog, met Browning at Vauxhall Station, and with him journeyed to Italy, which he devotedly loved, and of which he had written:—

> “Open my heart and you will see
> Graved inside of it, 'Italy!'”

When Wordsworth heard of the marriage he said, “So, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett have gone off together! Well, I hope they may understand each other—nobody else could!” Husband and wife did understand each other perfectly, and never was there a marriage of truer minds and more kindred souls.

The great happiness which had come to Elizabeth Browning, and the sunshine of Italy, gave her new life, and in her home at the Casa Guidi she and her husband lived and loved and worked in a perfect harmony of wedded bliss. Here their little son was born, and here the happy days fleeted by with no incident to mark their flight, except the publication of a new poem from one or the other of them, and the visits of literary friends.

Mrs. Browning's fame and popularity grew year by year, and the new beauty and realism apparent in her work was entirely due to her love-lit life. In 1851 she wrote her “Casa Guidi Windows and Other Poems,” which displayed her enthusiasm for a free and united Italy, and a few years later her *Aurora Leigh*, a novel in verse, which she herself called “the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions of work and art have entered.”

Her popularity has waned with the passing years; we now perceive over-eagerness and something of carelessness in her work; but despite all her blemishes she will ever hold a high place amongst the women poets for her loving pity, her tender passion, her wide sympathy, and her deep emotion. After sixteen years of unclouded married life she died in her husband's arms on June 29, 1861.

> “So God took her to Himself as you would lift a sleeping child from a dark uneasy bed into your arms and the light. Her last word when asked 'How do you feel?' was 'Beautiful!'”

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By this time Browning had published his “Men and Women,” which contained some fifty of his best known and most admired poems, and had slowly won the favour of a small but enthusiastic band of lovers of poetry. The death of his wife was a terrible blow to him, but his big, sane, wholesome spirit was not broken. “You know,” he wrote, “I have her dearest wishes and interests to attend to *at once*; her child to care for, educate, establish properly, and my own life to fulfil as properly, all just as she would require were she here.”

He left Florence with his motherless boy and settled in London, and in 1864 produced *Dramatis Personæ*, and four years later his greatest work, *The Ring and the Book*, a long, dramatic poem of wrong and cruelty and murder, full of tragic

beauty and emotion, and revealing his wonderful insight into the minds and motives of men. The poem is 21,000 lines long, and includes ten different versions of the tale beside the poet's prelude, in which he gives a general outline of it. *The Ring and the Book* is rightly considered one of the greatest poetic achievements of the nineteenth century.

In the closing years of his life Italy called him again and again. He made his last journey to that beloved land in August 1889, and took up his abode in his son's house at Venice. At the end of November he caught cold, and on the night of the 12th of December he died. His own wish was to be buried by her he loved in Florence; but a tomb in the Abbey was offered, and as he was borne to his last resting-place in Poets' Corner, the choir sang the words of his wife's beautiful poem, “He giveth His beloved sleep.”

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Browning remains the poet of deeply thoughtful, cultured, and earnest men and women; he will never be popular with the rank and file, but he will always exercise a wonderful influence on those who influence the world. His intellect was commanding, his insight into the hearts and minds of men was profound, his store of learning was rich and varied. He had the dramatic faculty of throwing himself by sheer force of sympathy into the personality of his characters, and of interpreting their inmost thoughts and their most secret motives. He tells us in the dedication of *Sordello* that little else is worth study but “the incidents in the development of a soul.”

Though his work is essentially dramatic, he has no narrative force, and he cares nothing for a plot, but in his descriptions of character he has no rival. In all his poems we feel ourselves in communion with one who regards this world as a school of discipline, in which our highest privilege is to chasten and refine and develop our souls for eternity. Art, knowledge, pain, pleasure, all the mingled tragedy and comedy of life, are given to us as means to this end:

> “Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure.”

Life must be lived to the full, and all experiences must be welcomed and utilized to foster the growth of the individual soul. Love and hope must shine through all things:—

> “God's in His heaven;
> All's right with the world.”

Unlike the poets who have so far appeared in our pageant, Browning pays little heed to mere singing; too frequently his music is that of the marrow-bones and cleavers. His verse is uncouth, crabbed, and grotesque, resembling in this respect Carlyle's prose. Form is not the first consideration with him; he is careless of metre and rhyme; it is the thought which chiefly concerns him, and the expression of his exact shade of meaning. If this exact meaning clothes itself in melody, so much the

better; but “linked sweetness long drawn out” is quite secondary in his poetic scheme. At the same time, he can be melodious, as many of his lyrics clearly prove.

Ordinary readers often complain that Browning is obscure and difficult of understanding. “I can have little doubt,” he once wrote,

> “that my writing has been in the main too hard for many I should have been pleased to communicate with; but I never designedly tried to puzzle people, as some of my critics have supposed. On the other hand, I never pretended to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar or a game at dominoes to an idle man. So, perhaps, on the whole, I get my deserts, and something over—not a crowd, but a few I value more.”

The obscurity and difficulty complained of arise from Browning's passion for presenting to our minds every possible aspect of the subject under consideration. He does not give us the mere summing up of his thoughts, but asks us to follow his gropings through all the tortuous processes by which he reaches his conclusions. “He will carry us with him along the stony track, flashing sidelights upon us at every turning, until we think with him at every step.” But while he is strong meat for babes, he has many pieces which are so transparently simple that any child can understand and enjoy them. *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* and *Hervé Riel*, for example, are to be found in every anthology for the young.

# Chapter LVI.

## LORD TENNYSON.

"*Then cried the King, and smote the oak,*
*'Love, Truth, and Beauty, one, but three,*
*This is the Artist's Trinity!'*
*And lo, lives Tennyson who spoke.*
*For this shall be through endless time*
*The burden of the golden rhyme*
*Of Tennyson, our Laureate.*"

W. C. Monkhouse.

It is an April day in the year 1824. A tall, handsome boy of fifteen, with hazel eyes, fine, strong features, a brown complexion, and dark, unkempt hair, is making his way through the wood of larch and sycamore which borders the lawn of the rectory at Somersby, in Lincolnshire. He appears to be greatly agitated; you figure him as overwhelmed with the passionate grief of youth, suffering, it may be, the first sharp bereavement of his life. Now he halts before a sandstone rock and, producing his knife, carves these words:—

BYRON IS DEAD!

You are puzzled. What is Byron to him or he to Byron? How comes it that this Lincolnshire boy is stricken with grief by the news that a poet whom he has never seen, and who is in no way related to him, has gone to his rest? The explanation is that the boy is himself a poet, that he has read and re-read Byron, and has grappled him to his soul with hooks of steel. He has long known and loved the verses of that wild, wayward genius, and has been thrilled by the story of his heroic devotion to the "hereditary bondsmen" of Greece, rightly struggling to be free. Now that his hero has perished in that "clime of the unforgotten brave," his sensitive heart is racked with anguish. "No common boy this," you remark, and you are right. He is destined to stand high in the glorious roll of our English poets.

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Alfred Tennyson, the boy to whom you have thus been introduced, was the third of the eleven children who filled the old rectory of Somersby, and made it one of the most joyous of habitations in all the land. There were four girls and seven boys—happy, handsome, clever, and imaginative children, who played at knights and giants, built forts, attacked castles, and drove back invading Danes.

The father of this quiverful of children was the rector of the parish, a disinherited son, a man of scholarly accomplishments, who devoted himself to the education of his boys. He possessed an excellent library, and in it the young Tennyson browsed at large. All the children had the literary gift; they could tell stories and write verses at the tenderest age, and in these diversions Alfred easily excelled.

At seven years of age he was given the choice of going to sea or going to school. He chose the latter alternative, and became a pupil of the Grammar School at Louth, where he spent five miserable years, relieved only by long solitary rambles on the Wolds, where he watched the birds, the insects, the flowers, and the flying clouds with an intentness far beyond his years. At the end of this time he returned home and was educated by his father. In the intervals of study he roamed over that "land of quiet villages, large fields, gray hillsides, and tall-towered churches," storing up in his mind the details of many a scene, afterwards to be reproduced with great fidelity in his poems. During summer holidays by the sea, he learned to say with Byron:—

> "And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy
> Of youthful sports was in thy breast to be
> Borne, like thy bubbles, onward."

He was already writing copiously. At twelve he wrote an epic of six thousand lines; at fourteen, a drama in blank verse. When he came to read those youthful exercises towards the close of his life, he said, "It seems to me I wrote them all in perfect metre." In his eighteenth year he and his two brothers, Frederick and Charles, united in publishing an anonymous collection of "Poems" which show an ear for the music of verse and a love of poetry, but reveal no particular originality. The volume made the surprising profit of £20.

In the following year Tennyson went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he outgrew his early shyness, and formed many friends, who looked up to him "as to a great poet and an elder brother." The greatest of all his friends was Arthur Henry Hallam, a young man of rare promise and singularly beautiful disposition.

We already know that Tennyson won the Chancellor's medal with his poem *Timbuctoo*. It was written in Miltonic blank verse, and was, as rarely happens in the case of prize poems, a work of genius. He also wrote numerous lyrics and other short poems, and in 1830, at the age of twenty-one, made his real entrance into the world of English letters with his "Poems, chiefly Lyrical." The slender volume revealed a new poet of great sweetness, magnificent fancy, and a wealth of imagery; with, of course, the faults of immaturity. There was something of Keats's delight in colour and melody; but even in this early work Tennyson dissented from Keats's theory that "Beauty is truth; truth beauty." His ideal poet was "dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love," and "bravely furnished all abroad to fling the winged shafts," not of beauty but of "truth."

In 1831 Tennyson left Cambridge for the parental roof, but a few days later his father died. The family lived on at the rectory, and Hallam became engaged to Emily Tennyson. The two friends saw much of each other, and engaged in all sorts of

athletic exercises. Two years later Hallam broke a blood-vessel in his brain and died suddenly in Vienna. He who had mourned a poet whom he never knew in the flesh, was plunged into the bitterest grief at the loss of his beloved friend.

**The Road to Camelot.**
**(*From the picture by George H. Boughton, R.A. By permission of the Corporation of Liverpool.*)** To List

Seventeen years later his sense of bereavement found expression in that noble lament *In Memoriam*. It is a record of the poet's sorrow and suffering, of his doubts and fears, of his deep musings on the problems of life, the soul and immortality, and, finally, of his grave and quiet faith in the wisdom and goodness of the All-Father. He thus concludes:—

" . . . the man, that with me trod
    This planet, was a noble type
    Appearing ere the times were ripe,
That friend of mine who lives in God,

That God, which ever lives and loves,
    One God, one law, one element,
    And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

After the death of Hallam, Tennyson lived chiefly in London, writing much but publishing very little. He joined a coterie of kindred spirits, the "Sterling Club," and formed friendships, for which he had a genius, with Carlyle, Thackeray, Browning, and other distinguished men. After nearly ten years of silence, he published in 1842 a two-volume edition of his "Poems," containing such pieces as *The Lady of Shalott*, *Morte d'Arthur*, *Ulysses*, *The Two Voices*, *Locksley Hall*, and *Sir Galahad*, and it was this work which made him the leading poet of his time.

From 1842 to the day of his death his fame increased with the years, and, thenceforward, he lived chiefly in seclusion, working with steady industry and living

an uneventful life, marked only by the successive publication of his poems. Carlyle gives us an excellent picture of him at this period:

> “One of the finest looking men in the world. A great shock of rough, dusky, dark hair; bright, laughing, hazel eyes; massive aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate; of sallow complexion, almost Indian looking; clothes cynically loose, free, and easy. Smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail. I do not meet in these late decades such company over a pipe.”

In 1847 he wrote his *Princess*, which was but a rude sketch of the poem as we now have it. He almost entirely rewrote it in later years, and added the five exquisite songs—*As thro' the Land*, *Sweet and Low*, *The Splendour Falls*, *Home they brought her Warrior Dead*, and *Ask Me No More*—which are among the finest flowers of his literary genius.

Princess Ida founds a university of which she is the head,

> “With prudes for proctors, dowagers for deans,
> And sweet girl-graduates in their golden hair.”

But her academic dreams vanish when love comes into her life, and she discovers a bliss in the simple homely duties which “electric, chemic laws, and all the rest” can never supply. Tennyson's ridicule was powerless to stay the movement for the higher education and the higher usefulness of women. He wrote as a doubter, but he remains as a prophet. The poem was a playful satire on the claims of women to enjoy the same kind of education and follow the same professions as men.

Three years later, in the year of *In Memoriam*, he married, and succeeded Wordsworth as Poet Laureate. The first poem which he wrote as laureate was his nobly patriotic *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*. In the following year he rented and afterwards bought a little house and farm called Farringford, near Freshwater, in the Isle of Wight. It was a beautiful place, ringed round with ilexes and cedars, and in it Tennyson and his wife lived a happy, simple life. The laureate might often have been seen sweeping up the leaves, or laying fresh gravel on the garden walks. He devoted himself to his farm and garden, and to a minute observation of the nature around him. Tourists often lay in wait for him as he strode along the cliffs in his broad-brimmed hat and flowing cloak.

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Tennyson had long known and loved Malory's “Morte d'Arthur,” and he had already written a few poems on subjects taken from that immortal book. He now began to do what Milton had dreamed of doing—that is, to turn the glorious old stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Table Round into verse. The first four stories of *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere* were published in the summer of 1859, and were received by the public with rapture. All were entranced by the sweetness and purity of his treatment and by the perfection of the workmanship.

Within a month of publication 10,000 copies were sold, and Thackeray wrote to his "dear old Alfred" that the "Idylls" had given him

> "a splendour of happiness. . . gold and purple and diamonds, I say, gentlemen, and glory and love and honour, and if you haven't given me all these why should I be in such an ardour of gratitude? But I have had out of that dear book the greatest delight that has come to me since I was a young man."

At intervals for the next thirty years Tennyson added new "Idylls" to his collection, and as we now possess them we perceive that they are intended to picture the struggle between the lower and the higher elements in men—between the body and the senses on the one hand, and the soul and the spirit on the other. Tennyson held strongly that the race is slowly moving upward out of the darkness of low and brutal desires to the light of high and spiritual joy; but he held, too, that this progress is slow and painful, and not uninterrupted—that the higher elements are often defeated and set back, though they must win in the end.

His Arthur tries to set up an ideal kingdom, and, in the short space of one brief lifetime, to achieve the impossible and reform the world. He seems to fail, and is greatly disheartened; but this is because he is a mere episode in the story of the world's progress, and cannot see the far-off but certain end for which man is designed. As Arthur, wounded to death by treachery, sails with three queens in the dusky barge, his sole remaining knight cries:—

> "He passes to be King among the dead,
> And after healing of his grievous wound
>     He comes again."

Arthur, the flower of kings, the figure of chivalry, courage, purity, and faith, ever battling with Evil, *will* come again, and the fight will be renewed, and so it will continue until the ideal brotherhood of the Table Round extends to the whole wide world.

The "Idylls" were dedicated to the memory of the Prince Consort, and this led to Tennyson's introduction to Queen Victoria, who "stood pale and statue-like before him, and in a kind of stately innocence." Ever afterwards she held him in high regard.

In 1867, weary of being besieged by sightseers, Tennyson left Farringford for Aldworth, in Surrey, and in his new home, which stood on the high ridge of hills not far from Haslemere and commanded a wide and beautiful view, he lived to the day of his death. In his sixty-fifth year he wrote *Queen Mary*, the first of the seven plays with which he vainly attempted to add the laurel of dramatic success to his lyric crown. All his plays failed save the seventh, *Becket*, and when its success was achieved he was dead.

In September 1883 he accompanied his friend Gladstone on a voyage round the north of Scotland to Orkney, thence to Norway and Denmark. During the voyage Gladstone offered him a peerage, and after some demur he agreed to accept it, and entered the House of Lords as Baron Tennyson of Aldworth and Farringford. Three

years later his eldest son Lionel died, and “grief tore him to pieces,” but he found solace in his work and in sharing the sorrows of others. He was over eighty when he published his “Demeter and Other Poems.” His perfect lyric, *Crossing the Bar*, was written in his eighty-first year:

> “Sunset and evening star,
>       And one clear call for me!
> And may there be no moaning of the bar
>       When I put out to sea.
>
> *    *    *    *    *
>
> “For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
>       The flood may bear me far,
> I hope to see my Pilot face to face
>       When I have crossed the bar.”

Soon after entering his eighty-fourth year he began to fail, though up to a few hours before his death he was able to read *Cymbeline* with appreciation and enjoyment. On the night of October 6, 1892, he “crossed the bar.” His last moments were beautifully serene; he lay tranquilly awaiting the end with his finger still marking the dirge that he had so lately read; his face, always noble, seemed to have caught something of celestial beauty as the moon in full splendour flung her white radiance upon him and his spirit returned to Him who gave it.

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No poet ever held England so long in the thrall of his genius as Tennyson, and no poet so completely gave poetic utterance to the sentiments of his day and generation. Though he had not the sublime philosophy of Wordsworth, the romantic witchery of Coleridge, the sweeping passion of Byron, the spiritual rapture of Shelley, or the rich loveliness of Keats, no other man ever combined so much of the best qualities of these poets in his own person. He was not only an artist in words and a craftsman of perfect skill, not only a master of melody and picturesque description, but he possessed the great gift of lucidity. His thought, even when it deals with abstruse and difficult subjects, is expressed with all the clearness of crystal.

**TENNYSON AT FARRINGFORD.**
(*From the painting by Norman Little.*) To List

His range was extraordinarily wide; he essayed the whole field of poetic art. He gives us classic and mediæval themes, finished studies of modern and home life, patriotic poems that rang through the country like Sir Philip Sidney's trumpet, dialect pieces of rough humour and wonderful insight into the peasant mind, lofty and spiritual meditations, and, above all, songs of such tender loveliness, that were all else of his to perish, they alone would preserve his enduring fame.

Another aspect of Tennyson must detain us for a moment. He was not content to shut himself up in the selfish seclusion of a Palace of Art, but deemed it his duty to step down among his fellow-men and interpret for them the deep significance of the social and scientific movements of his time. In his *Locksley Hall*, written in his thirty-third year, Tennyson sees the world as it might be if regenerated by science and the new spirit of brotherhood. In *Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After*, he is disillusioned; the

world is not redeemed. Nevertheless, he still perceives mankind slowly rising “on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things.” He still sees

> “One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves.”

And this is his great message. Through all the wondrous harmonies of his verse we cannot fail to hear the deep diapason note of invincible faith in God, and of undiminished hope in Eternity.

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*As the noble figure of Tennyson recedes, the long procession which we have witnessed—may it be hoped without weariness, and not without profit?—comes to an end. But the pageant of our literature can never end while our glorious tongue remains. Co-eval with, and subsequent to, Tennyson were men of great power and genius, who exercised the wizardry of the pen in the spirit of the immortals, and, by virtue of their achievements, were entirely worthy of an honourable place on the bead-roll of fame. Their names are on all men's tongues, and they will be missed from this record, but they are excluded, not by any deficiency of merit, but because they more fitly lead the march of a new era. The mantle of the prophets has assuredly fallen upon them, but, for the most part, they wear it in the newer fashion of a newer age. Tennyson closes an epoch, and with him this pageant of long centuries may appropriately conclude.*

## THE END.

**Transcriber's Note:**

Obvious printer's errors, including punctuation have been silently corrected. Hyphenated and accented words have been standardized. All other inconsistencies have been left as in the original. Obscure and archiac spellings have been left as in the original.

Fairy corrected to Faery

[The end of *The Pageant of English Literature* by Sir (James) Edward Parrott]