

of the word "tragedy." It meant for Chaucer's time the story of those who had fallen from high to low estate. It had nothing dramatic:—

"Tregedis is to sayn a certeyn storie,  
As olde bokes maken us memorie,  
Of hem that stood in greet prosperité  
And is y-fallen out of heigh degré  
Into miserie and endith wrecchedly."

A "comedy" was a narrative that did not end tragically: *cf.* Dante's great work.

With far wider sweep of history, modern poets have greatly increased the variety of romances and legendary poems. Think of *Evangeline* or *Hiawatha* on one hand, and on the other, of the Norse legends or the classic stories of William Morris. No classic themes have ever been revived with such power as in Marlowe's (and Chapman's) *Hero and Leander*, and in Keat's *Hyperion*. The field is practically boundless. There is great license of treatment. The poet can adhere closely to his original, or he can invent and change at will. Such cases may be cited as the romances of Scott and Byron.

Under this head belong the *Riming Chronicle* and the *Narrative Didactic* poem. The first is a history in rime. In the Thirteenth Century Robert of Gloucester wrote such a chronicle of England; later (end of Fifteenth Century) we have *Harding's Chronicle*. As poetry they are of no value whatever.—The second class we may illustrate best by describing its best example. In 1559 appeared a book called "*A Myrroure for Magistrates*," wherein may be seen by example of other, with how

grevous plages vices are punished, and howe frayle, unstable worldly prosperitie is founde, even of those whom fortune seemeth most highly to favour. *Felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum*, Londini, &c." This work, begun by Sackville on the model of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, resembles in plan the "Tregedis," described above, which make up the *Monk's Tale* in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, except that in the former the characters are all English.

(d) Lastly, we note *the revival of the supernatural* in modern tales. This sort assumes a belief on the part of its readers that the supernatural is possible. The greatest example is Coleridge's *Christabel*: *cf.* the same poet's *Ancient Mariner*, and Scott's less successful *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

## (2) ALLEGORY.

Here we still have narrative, but it is no longer based on history, on actual events. *Invention* begins to play a leading part. A certain series of events is *supposed* to have taken place, and these events generally point out some moral, or else tell one story in terms of another. Allegory was the favorite form of the sacred Latin poetry of the early church. The last poets of profane Latin literature had a strong leaning toward allegory; and it was taken up with ardor by the Christians as particularly suited to their purposes. *Prudentius* (born in Saragossa, 348 A.D.) was the first Christian poet who regularly used pure allegory, and he employed it first in his *Psychomachia*, which is therefore important as the herald of a long line of allegorical poems. Its example and its effect upon mediæval literature can



hardly be overestimated. It belonged, says Ebert, to the "standard works," was recommended for study, and was copied by many of the church poets. This, as we must remember, is *the first purely allegorical poem, but not the first use of allegory in poetry*. The latter is a point of *style*. In profane poetry, allegory soon became very popular, notably among the French poets, whom Chaucer copied. It was used quite apart from any moral purposes, and is often the vehicle of pure amusement. Such in part is the *Romaunt of the Rose*,—though there are many satirical touches in it,—a French poem of which we have a translation attributed to Chaucer. But we must regard first the

(a) **Didactic Allegory.**

The supreme allegory of the world is the *Divina Commedia* of Dante. It is at the same time a noble epic, of which, as has been said, Dante himself is the hero. Exactly what it is intended to teach is a question on which commentators still differ. In general, however, we may call it an allegory partly of political events, but chiefly of Dante's own life and religious belief. The poem is of the greatest importance aside from its splendid composition; it sums up the highest results of the middle ages and is filled with their loftiest and purest spirit. It is often imitated by Chaucer—as in his *House of Fame*. Further, the Scotch school of poets who followed Chaucer—Dunbar especially—showed great fondness for this sort of allegory, as well as for *Visions*. Visions belong with allegory, and were beloved by the middle ages. Gregory the Great, St. Boniface (Winfried), and many other famous writers,

have left "Visions" among their works,—wonderful dreams, full of help or warning from the other world. Among the prettiest specimens of this sort of literature is a poem called *The Pearl* (North of England, about 1370). A father has lost his dear and only daughter, but in a dream he sees her in heaven and is comforted. Probably by the same author is a poem founded on the Arthurian legend and called *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*. This teaches in allegorical wise the lesson that manhood must be purified by doubt, temptation, and sorrow successfully combated; the poem may be compared with the great German poem of Wolfram von Eschenbach,—the *Parzival*. The finest allegorical poem in our own literature is, of course, *The Faery Queene*. Other famous poems of the kind are, on one hand, the *social allegory*, mourning the wrongs of certain classes in society: example, *The Vision concerning Piers the Ploughman* (Fourteenth Century); or, on the other, the *political allegory*, aiming at abuses in government or factious opposition: example, Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, where English contemporary characters are introduced under the veil of a story from the Bible. Saul is Oliver Cromwell, David is King Charles II., Absalom is the Duke of Monmouth, &c. The same author wrote an allegory of religious faiths,—*The Hind and the Panther*. Dramatic in form (*cf.* Chap. III. § 5) but full of a fine allegory is Milton's noble *Comus*.

(b) When the didactic allegory is bounded by very narrow limits, there results the *Fable*. The Fable is "the feigned history of a particular case, in which we recognize a general truth." The events are mostly



taken from the life of beasts, birds, etc. One of the oldest English forms of this sort of allegory is a description of some animal and his habits, with a moral interpretation. A collection of such stories was called a *Bestiary* or *Physiologus*. But ordinarily, by fable we understand a short, pithy incident in animal life, intended to convey a moral. Jacob Grimm, it is true, thought there had once existed a regular *beast-epic*, like the human epic of early days, and he referred the later fables to such a source. There was, however, no Germanic beast-epic at all. The stories came from the East, from Byzantium, brought by word of mouth into Italy, and thence into the different nations of Europe. The "morals" were added by the monks. Such collections were very popular. Caxton printed in 1481 a prose history of *Reynard the Fox*. Gay's *Fables* in English — and Prior's also — are specimens of the light vein: in French, Marie de France among older writers, and the incomparable La Fontaine, are superior to the English, except that Chaucer's imitation of Marie de France (*The Nonne Prestes Tale*) far surpasses the original, and is one of the liveliest and most charming tales in our literature.

(c) **Miscellaneous.**

There are several kindred forms of allegory, such as *Poetic Parable*, which deals with human beings rather than with beasts. This sort of poetry came also from the East. In modern English we may cite a familiar example in Leigh Hunt's *Abou ben Adhem*. The *Gnomic Dialogue* is an old form of verse. Two persons tell in turn anecdotes intended to bring out some truth.

Such were the famous dialogues between the soul and the body, well known to our early literature: further, the dialogue between *Solomon and Saturn* (!) and others of the same type. This latter poem is related to the popular Riddle Ballads, in which difficult questions are put and answered. (See Child, *Eng. and Scot. Pop. Ball.*, Vol. 1, p. 13, 2d ed.)

(3) REFLECTIVE POETRY.

The desire *to draw a moral* from the story of events was, we saw, practically unknown to the primitive epic. The later forms, as they grew fond of allegory, allowed the moral element to get the upper hand. At last arose a kind of poetry that is *all moral*, and not in any way story, — just the opposite extreme from the old epic. What allows us to class such Reflective Poetry in this place, is the fact that the poet bases his moralizing upon experience of life. Now the middle ages had a boundless affection for moralizing; they would have taken the excellent Polonius and his maxims very seriously indeed. Add a touch of melancholy, inherent in the Anglo-Saxon race, and we can readily understand how popular was the *Poema Morale* (about 1170), a good example of the reflective poem. It is a sermon in verse; perhaps with as much lyric tone as epic, but still well freighted with good advice in addition to the pathos. Much longer, epic in breadth, style, and plan, is Wordsworth's *Excursion*; shorter, his *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*. Another example is Cowper's *Task*. More directly appealing to the *intellect* is Pope's *Essay on Criticism*; to the *reason*, the same author's *Essay on Man*. With this kind of reflective and philosophical



verse we touch the borders of poetry itself. Poetry purely didactic is not poetry; for poetry must, to a certain extent, exist for its own sake, as a work of art. There is brilliant verse in Pope's *Essays* above-mentioned; but when we come to the lower forms of so-called didactic poetry, we must deny the substantive. Thus rimed histories, catechisms, mnemonic verses, instructive literature generally, are not poetry. Cf. Furnivall's ed. of the *Book of Nurture* (E. E. T. Soc. 1868); Tusser's *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*; Armstrong's *Art of Preserving Health*, and a host of the same kind: all of these could be much more simply and effectively written in prose. In fact, such verse is a survival from the days before prose was established, when poetry was maid-of-all-work to priesthood and the law. Yet we cannot say that all so-called didactic poetry is not poetry; even if we give up Vergil's *Georgics*, we have the great poem of Lucretius. In the latter case, a system of philosophy is taught in verse; but there is a vast remove from Armstrong's prattle about "The choice of aliment, the choice of air" to the "glittering shafts" of Lucretius' cosmic forces. We may say that the *De Rerum Natura* is poetical in spite of its subject.

#### (4) DESCRIPTIVE POETRY.

This may be called a *Nature-epic*. It carries us not from one *event* to another, but from one *object* to another. It is generally combined with reflective poetry: cf. Goldsmith's *Traveller* and *Deserted Village*, or Thomson's *Seasons*. There is much descriptive verse in the *Excursion*, the *Task*, and like poems; also in the epic

itself. A fine bit of description is the conclusion of M. Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*. In shorter compass, it appears in the famous epic *Similes* (cf. p. 109), and is familiar to lyric and dramatic verse. The one condition of descriptive poetry is that it shall have distinctively *human connections and human interest*; else it becomes a catalogue. As a setting for the gem of human interest, it is omnipresent in poetry: the ballads open with a brief descriptive touch of the merry greenwood; the lyric has its moonlight and rustling leaves; the drama is set in actual scenery. It is this human interest combined with vivid description that gives success to Wordsworth's best work; it is the lack of human interest that condemns from the start the effort of the verse-maker, who says (according to Carlyle), "Come, let us make a description!"

It is worth noting that the gorgeous pomp of description so common in the Elizabethan drama, and to modern taste often so superfluous, is due to the miserable scenery of the early stage. To beguile the imagination away from a bare space with a pasteboard tree and a label "Forest of Arden," the playwright had recourse to elaborate and highly colored description. Famous for this characteristic is the description of Dover Cliff in *Lear*.

#### (5) PASTORAL POETRY.

An odd mixture of narrative and descriptive, with a dramatic element added, is the so-called Pastoral Poetry. It was once believed that poetry originated among shepherds; and in a corrupt or artificial age there is a reaction towards this primitive verse. Dwellers in crowded cities imagine themselves "silly" shepherds piping by



the brookside among their sheep. But simplicity is, as a rule, the very last quality of this kind of poetry. Under such circumstances it is almost impossible to write naturally; there is too wide a gap between the singer and his song. The incongruity becomes evident when modern and ancient expressions are brought together, as in Pope's lines:—

“Inspire me, Phœbus, in my Delia's praise,  
With Waller's strains or Granville's moving lays;  
A milk-white bull shall at your altars stand  
That threatens a fight and spurns the rising sand.”

But there is some very successful pastoral poetry; such is that of Theocritus and Vergil for the Greek and Latin, and of Spenser and William Browne for the English. This kind of poetry also had its origin in *worship of the gods*, and began in Greece with the worship of Pan and the Dorian Artemis. The Spanish pastoral poem *Diana*, by George de Monte Mayor, had considerable influence on Sidney in his *Arcadia*. Our earliest pastoral is the *Robyne and Makyne* of Robert Henrysoun, a Scotch poet of the Fifteenth Century.

Not so limited in range, though of the same character as the pastoral, is the *Idyll*. The *Idyll* must be simple, calm, more concerned with *situation* than with *action*. As a good example of this sort of poetry we should not instance the obvious *Idylls of the King* by Tennyson, which are more full of *action* than the title warrants, and belong to the legendary epic; but we should instance *The Cotter's Saturday Night* of Burns as an excellent short idyll. In German, *Hermann and Dorothea* (Goethe) is called an idyll; the quietness and simplicity of the poem, its exquisite grace, are more

prominent than the action, which is very simple. It was the only one of his poems, Goethe told Eckermann, which pleased the author in his old age.—For the *dramatic Idyll*, see Chap. III. § II.

#### (6) SATIRIC AND AMUSING POETRY.

The Latin word *Satura* (*lanx satura*, a plate heaped with various viands) meant a hodge-podge, or mixture of all things. A song was sung, made up of shifting subjects and metres,—a medley. At last it came to be a song ridiculing persons or events, and gradually gained dignity, till it ceased to *mock* its object, and began to *reprove*. The Romans were the greatest masters of this style of poetry, and Juvenal was its chief poet. Such satiric poetry as his, different from the milder satire of Horace, lashes public and private folly with a whip of indignant scorn. It does not aim to amuse; it is really didactic. Epic poetry was, we saw, objective; it mirrored the world, good or bad, without moral comment. Satiric poetry, on the other hand, judges events, and above all loves to belittle their importance, to show the reverse side of things. The epic loved to magnify its hero, to make him the special care of the gods; the satire delights to show him subject to petty ills and conquered by some ignominious fate. Thus Juvenal cries to Hannibal, “Go now, thou madman, scour the rugged Alps—that thou mayest please children (hearing his story) and be a good subject for compositions!” In order to make the satire keener, although the mixed and shifting treatment is retained, the poet adopts the form and manner of the epic: in Latin, the hexameter; in English, the heroic couplet. In the latter language



we have vigorous satire from Marston, Donne, Bishop Hall, and many others. Butler's *Hudibras* is another kind of satire, in mock epic style. Dr. Johnson's two imitations of Juvenal are well known. — Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* is a strong *personal* satire. There is much light and incidental satire in Chaucer; and in the old English poem called *The Owl and the Nightingale* (middle of the Thirteenth Century) the satire is softened to a delightful humor. This poem is in dialogue form, and may be compared with *The Twa Dogs* of Burns.

#### Amusing Epic Poetry.

*Parody*. — Here we look through a reversed spy-glass. The grand epic style is applied to petty subjects, and exact epic order and grouping are retained. One of the best mock-epics or parodies ever written is Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. Note especially the machinery of the sylphs, their punishment for neglect of duty (*cf.* the punishments in the *Odyssey*, — of Tantalus, Sisyphus, etc.); and the game of cards, described as the epic describes a battle.

A *Travesty*, on the other hand, is a noble subject treated in a ridiculous, ignoble way, — the opposite of the parody. Such are the Comic Histories. — But there is another sort of mock-poem which goes under the name *parody*, though really a travesty. It consists in copying a serious poem with comic effect, using, however, as far as may be, the same words, phrases, metre, and general plan. The best of this class is M. Prior's *English Ballad on the Taking of Namur by the King of Great Britain*, in which he parodies admirably Boileau's pompous ode, *Sur le Prise de Namur par les Armes du Roi, L'Annee*

1692. Prior wrote on its recapture by the English in 1695.

*Humorous Epic*. Not a parody or even a satire, but an easy poem, dealing with light events so as to form a connected story, and presenting generally some "philosophy of life," is the *Humorous Epic*. Byron's *Don Juan* is an example. With a far more serious undercurrent, but still outwardly humorous, is Clough's delightful *Bothie of Tober na Vuolich*. Byron and Clough had very different points of view, but the manner of the poems is in some respects the same.

Thence we descend to merry tales in rime, light poems written purely for entertainment. Such in France were La Fontaine's *Contes et Nouvelles*, many of which were based on Boccaccio's (prose) *Decameron*; England has Chaucer's lighter tales; and we may add for later literature (amid a host of 'comic' or 'humorous' poems) Burns' *Tam o' Shanter*.

Lastly, the *Riddle*. The Riddle is a short epic with the hero's name suppressed. Often the *form* of the poetry has great merit; *e.g.*, for older English, *Cynewulf's* Riddles; for later, *Praed's* so-called Charades.

#### (7) THE GRAND EPIC OF MODERN TIMES.

By "modern" is meant the period since poetical *composition* has taken the place of poetical *growth*, — since the epoch of the *Odyssey* or of *Beowulf*. The time is relative, and differs with different races. The splendid possibilities of the pure epic have not been disregarded by great poets, and in many lands there has arisen a later or imitated epic modelled on the early national epic. Vergil's *Aeneid* is a not unworthy successor



(inferior in many respects, it is true, and necessarily lacking the freshness and spontaneity of the original) of the *Iliad*. Ariosto and Tasso applied the manner and form of the grand epic to medieval subjects. For English, *Paradise Lost*, with its intense energy and lofty tone, ranks among the few great epic poems of the world. A bold venture on classic ground was the unfinished *Hyperion* of Keats, — an epic not far behind Milton's in that "high seriousness" which has been advanced of late as prime quality in a great poem. Further, there are countless English *translations of the great epics*, Pope's and Chapman's Homers being the most conspicuous. One great test of the old epic was its absolute belief in itself; there was no feigning. This sincerity is impossible in imitated epic; and what makes Dante's great poem almost worthy to rank with the old epic, is the intense belief of Dante in his own work. It so catches the spirit of the middle ages, is so intense in its sincerity, that in this respect it may well be called Homeric.

#### § 4. THE BALLAD OR FOLK-SONG.

We see that from the original epic sprang many kinds of poetry that all had the common trait of telling something known, or supposed, or feigned to have happened. Other characteristics were simplicity, absence of personal property (authorship), truthful mirroring of nature, lack of a moral or reflective element. These qualities vanished in later epic poetry. But as in the natural world, when we have ploughed under some old wheat-field and planted a new crop of other grain, there will be crevices and corners where odd patches of wheat will

spring up and flourish by the side of the regular crop, so it is in the world of literature. The old wheat-field of epic poetry, long after it was ploughed under, kept sending up scattered blades, which we call *ballads* or *folk-songs*. Except in authority, national importance, and kindred qualities, we may use the same definition for the (narrative) folk-song that we use for the early epic. Both names, ballad and folk-song, are suggestive: *ballad* means a song to which one may dance; *folk-song* is something made by the whole people, not by individual poets. Wright, in speaking of certain songs of the Fifteenth Century (Percy Soc., vol. xxiii.), says: "The great variation in the different copies of the same song shews that they were taken down from oral recitation, and had been often preserved by memory among minstrels who were not unskilful at composing, and who were . . . in the habit . . . of making up new songs by stringing together phrases and lines, and even whole stanzas, from the different compositions that were imprinted on their memories." The importance and influence and, we may add, the worth, of the folk-song are in inverse ratio to the spread of printed books. As the minstrel's welcome vanished from the baron's hall, and his audience degenerated to peasants and serving-people, we note a corresponding degeneration from the highest poetical merit to the level of modern street-songs.<sup>1</sup> It easily follows that much of the best folk-poetry must be lost, — not because, like the heroes before Agamemnon, it lacked the pious poet to sing it, but rather the 'chiel' to take notes and 'print it.'

<sup>1</sup> . . . "the usual marks of degeneracy [of ballads], a dropping or obscuring of marvellous and romantic incidents, and a declension in the rank and style of the characters." Child, *Ballads*, 2d Ed., vol. I., p. 48.



The folk-song is a complete satisfaction of the demand for "more matter and less art." It is very artless and full of matter. The passions jostle each other terribly, as they escape from the singer's lips:—

" I hackéd him in pieces sma',  
For her sake that died for me."

The historical or narrative ballad is what we now consider. Like the early epic, it refers often to subjects made up partly of legend and partly of myth,—such as the Robin Hood ballads. But unlike the epic, the folk-song is often made immediately after a great battle or similar event. In the *Battle of Maldon, or Byrhtnoth's Death*, a stirring ballad of the later Anglo-Saxon period, the song follows the event so closely that the singer has not had time even to find out the name of the enemy's leaders. It is full of epic phrases and figures, and is thoroughly in the objective manner. The event seems to sing itself.

Professor Child has grouped our national ballads as follows: I. Romances of Chivalry and legends of the popular history of England. II. Ballads involving various superstitions; as of Fairies, Elves, Magic, and Ghosts. III. Tragic love-ballads. IV. Other tragic ballads. V. Love-ballads not tragic. In all these, and in the miscellaneous ballads, the tests we mentioned above will hold good for the genuine folk-song. It must be objective, filled with its story, adding no sentiment or moral, and breathing a healthy, popular spirit. Antique spelling and archaic phrases do not make a ballad. Many ballads, too, are not of native origin, but, blown from the East over Europe, dropped seed in

many countries. Hence a number of similar ballads (*cf.* the extraordinary spread of a ballad known in English as *Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight*) in the different literatures of Europe. Again, like fairy and nursery tales, like superstitions and folk-lore of every sort, many strikingly similar European ballads point to a common mythical source. But amid the diversity of subject and origin, the general spirit of the ballad or folk-song remains one and the same. The genuine ballad is one thing, and the imitated ballad—even such an imitation as Chatterton could make—is quite another. To understand this clearly, read a good specimen of each kind; compare, say, *Thomas of Ercildoune* with Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci, a Ballad*. The latter is wrought by the fancy of a poet under certain influences of the past; the other, written in the Fifteenth Century, but older in composition than that, is the work of a single poet or minstrel only in the sense that this minstrel combined materials which had been handed down from remotest times. The study of these materials leads in all directions,—to the prophecies of Merlin, the story of the Tannhäuser, and so forth; the floating waifs of myth and superstition had gathered about the legendary (or historical) form of Thomas the Rhymer, and under one minstrel's hands take this definite shape as ballad. It is the old epic process in miniature. Even in the *style* we may distinguish the two. "I am glad as grasse wold be of raine" is the ballad style (*Marriage of Sir Gawayne*); "With kisses glad as birds are that get sweet rain at noon" is the imitated ballad style (Swinburne, *A Match*).

The ballad, with the spread of letters, degenerates



into the street-song or broadside. It bewails abuses in government, the wrongs of the poor, satirizes the follies of the day, and the like. For a collection of such, see (among others) the *Roxburghe Ballads*.

#### § 5. LATER BALLADS.

As with the epic, so with the folk-song; poets soon saw how much could be done with the form and manner of the ballad. Prudentius wrote a sort of ballad on the death of the martyr Laurentius; it was in the metre of the Latin folk-song, and is called by Ebert the first example of a modern ballad. He compares the style, and even the metre, to the English popular ballads of later time. Of course, Prudentius purposely adopts this ballad style: "Hear," he cries to the martyr, "*a rustic poet*." The nearer such *conscious* ballads approach the tone of genuine folk-song, the better they are. The old Anglo-Saxon ballad, e.g., *Byrhtnoth's Death*, may be compared with Drayton's stirring *Battle of Agincourt*. The list of these imitated or conscious ballads, works of individual poets, would be endless. Any great occasion or situation can inspire such songs. Of martial ballads, we instance Campbell's *Battle of the Baltic*; of love-ballads (narrative, of course), *Maud Müller* or *Lord Ullin's Daughter*; gay ballads, like Burns' *Duncan Grey* or *John Barleycorn*; longer historical ballads, like Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, in which there is more tinsel than true metal; the "dramatic," spirited ballad, such as Robert Browning delights in; and a host of others. Often a story is told in a story; e.g., Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. *Comic* ballads are of two

kinds. In one, the fun springs from the situation or event; e.g., *John Gilpin's* famous ride. In the other, the mind must work out the humor of the poem; there is nothing laughable in the event itself. Of this kind is Goldsmith's *Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog*. To classify the great number of occasional ballads would be useless. They cover every conceivable situation. But we must note the gradual shading away of narrative ballads into ballads that are either *lyric* or *dramatic*. The tragic ballad is in its purity objective, — as *The Children in the Wood*, or *Sir Patrick Spens*: when it begins to let emotion outweigh narrative, then we have a lyric ballad. When the persons of the story speak for themselves, we have a dramatic ballad. Naturally, the lyric and epic are often closely blended. Thus a deep emotion — as of grief — finds expression by dwelling on certain events. *The Burial of Sir John Moore* is strongly objective; mingled with outbursts of feeling is the narrative in David's beautiful lament over Jonathan (2 *Sam.* 1. 17 ff.). This is closely allied to the lyric *Threnody*; but there is a tendency to dwell on events. There is much narrative in Milton's *Lycidas*, and at first we might call it chiefly epic in its lament; — what with the pastoral allegory, and the appeal to the nymphs, one is almost ready to add "artificial": but a deeper study shows us that the whole poem is a splendid burst of grief and indignation, — Milton's first strong cry against the evil of the times, against a degenerate priesthood. King's death is only the occasion for uttering those feelings. *Lycidas* is in every sense of the word a *lyric*.