

hand, and, as their writings show, were well acquainted with recent Italian literature. But the dramatic element in that literature extended far beyond the circle of regular plays, whether tragedies, comedies, or pastorals. It included the collections of short prose stories which appeared, or were published for the first time, in such numbers during the 16th century, the novels or novelettes of Ser Giovanni, Cinthio, Bandello, and their associates. These stories, consisting of the humorous and tragic incidents of actual life, told in a vivid and direct way, naturally attracted the attention of the dramatists. We know from the result that Shakespeare must have studied them with some care, as he derived from this source the plots and incidents of at least a dozen of his plays. Many of the stories, it is true, had already been translated, either directly from the Italian, or indirectly from French and Latin versions. Of Cinthio's hundred tales, however, only two or three are known to have been rendered into English; and Shakespeare derived the story of Othello from the untranslated part of this collection. Many of the Italian stories touched on darker crimes or more aggravated forms of violence than those naturally prompted by jealousy and revenge, and are indeed revolting from the atrocities of savage cruelty and lust related so calmly as to betray a kind of cynical insensibility to their true character. Shakespeare, however, with the sound judgment and strong ethical sense that guided the working of his dramatic genius, chose the better and healthier materials of this literature, leaving the morbid excesses of criminal passion to Webster and Ford. But the Italian influence on Shakespeare's work is not to be estimated merely by the outlines of plot and incident he borrowed from southern sources and used as a kind of canvas for his matchless portraiture of human character and action. It is apparent also in points of structure and diction, in types of character and shades of local colouring, which realize and express in a concentrated form the bright and lurid, the brilliant and passionate, features of southern life. The great majority of the *dramatis personæ* in his comedies, as well as in some of the tragedies, have Italian names, and many of them, such as Mercutio and Gratiano on the one hand, Iachimo and Iago on the other, are as Italian in nature as in name. The moonlight scene in the *Merchant of Venice* is Southern in every detail and incident. And, as M. Philarette Chasles justly points out, *Romeo and Juliet* is Italian throughout, alike in colouring, incident, and passion. The distinctive influence is further traceable in Shakespeare's use of Italian words, phrases, and proverbs, some of which, such as "tranect" (from *tranare*), or possibly, as Rowe suggested, "traject" (*traghetto*), are of special local significance. In the person of Hamlet Shakespeare even appears as a critic of Italian style. Referring to the murderer who in the players' tragedy poisons the sleeping duke, Hamlet exclaims, "He poisons him in the garden for his estate. His name's Gonzago: the story is extant and written in very choice Italian." In further illustration of this point Mr Grant White has noted some striking turns of thought and phrase which seem to show that Shakespeare must have read parts of Berni and Ariosto in the original. No doubt in the case of Italian poets, as in the case of Latin authors like Ovid, whose works he was familiar with in the original, Shakespeare would also diligently read the translations, especially the translations into English verse. For in reading such works as Golding's Ovid, Harrington's Ariosto, and Fairfax's Tasso, he would be increasing his command over the elements of expressive phrase and diction which were the verbal instruments, the material vehicle, of his art. But, besides studying the translations of the Italian poets and prose writers made available for English readers,

he would naturally desire to possess, and no doubt acquired for himself, the key that would unlock the whole treasure-house of Italian literature. The evidence of Shakespeare's knowledge of French is more abundant and decisive, so much so as hardly to need express illustration. There can be little doubt therefore that, during his early years in London, he acquired a fair knowledge both of French and Italian.

But, while pursuing these collateral aids to his higher work, there is abundant evidence that Shakespeare also devoted himself to that work itself. As early as 1592 he is publicly recognized, not only as an actor of distinction, but as a dramatist whose work had excited the envy and indignation of his contemporaries, and especially of one so accomplished and so eminent, so good a scholar and master of the playwright's craft, as Robert Greene. Greene had, it is true, a good deal of the irritability and excitable temper often found in the subordinate ranks of poetical genius, and he often talks of himself, his doings, and associates in a highly-coloured and extravagant way. But his reference to Shakespeare is specially deliberate, being in the form of a solemn and last appeal to his friends amongst the scholarly dramatists to relinquish their connexion with the presumptuous and ungrateful stage. In his *Groatsworth of Wit*, published by his friend Chettle a few weeks after his death, Greene urges three of his friends, apparently Marlowe, Lodge, and Peele, to give up writing for the players. "Base-minded men, all three of you, if by my misery ye be not warned; for unto none of you like me sought those burs to cleave; those puppets, I mean, who speak from our mouths, those anticks garnisht in our colours. Is it not strange that I, to whom they have all been beholding; is it not like that you, to whom they have all been beholding, shall (were ye in that case that I am now) be both of them at once forsaken? Yes, trust them not; for there is an upstart Crow, beautified in our feathers, that, with his tiger'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 fac totum*, is, in his own conceit, the only Shakescene in a country. Oh that I might intreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let these apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions." This curious passage tells us indirectly a good deal about Shakespeare. It bears decisive testimony to his assured position and rapid advance in his profession. The very term of reproach applied to him, "*Johannes Factotum*," is a tribute to Shakespeare's industry and practical ability. From the beginning of his career he must have been in the widest and best sense a utility man, ready to do any work connected with the theatre and stage, and eminently successful in anything he undertook. In the first instance he had evidently made his mark as an actor, as it is in that character he is referred to by Greene, and denounced for going beyond his province and usurping the functions of the dramatist. Greene's words imply that Shakespeare not only held a foremost place as an actor, but that he was already distinguished by his dramatic success in revising and rewriting existing plays. This is confirmed by the parodied line from the *Third Part of Henry VI.*, recently revised if not originally written by Shakespeare. This must have been produced before Greene's death, which took place in September 1592. Indeed, all the three parts of *Henry VI.* in the revised form appear to have been acted during the spring and summer of that year. It is not improbable that two or three of Shakespeare's early comedies may also have been produced before Greene's death. And if so, his resentment, as an academic scholar, against the country actor who had not

only become a dramatist but had excelled Greene himself in his chosen field of romantic comedy becomes intelligible enough. Even in his wrath, however, Greene bears eloquent witness to Shakespeare's diligence, ability, and marked success, both as actor and playwright. All this is fully confirmed by the more deliberate and detailed language of Chettle's apology, already quoted. Of Shakespeare's amazing industry and conspicuous success the next few years supply ample evidence. Within six or seven years he not only produced the brilliant reflective and descriptive poems of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, but at least fifteen of his dramas, including tragedies, comedies, and historical plays. Having found his true vocation, Shakespeare works during these years as a master, having full command over the materials and resources of his art. The dramas produced have a fulness of life and a richness of imagery, a sense of joyousness and power, that speak of the writer's exultant absorption and conscious triumph in his chosen work. The sparkling comedies and great historical plays belonging to this period evince the ease and delight of an exuberant mind realizing its matured creations.

Nor after all is this result so very surprising. Shakespeare entered on his London career at the very moment best fitted for the full development of his dramatic genius. From the accession of Elizabeth all the dominant impulses and leading events of her reign had prepared the way for the splendid triumph of policy and arms that closed its third decade, and for the yet more splendid literary triumph of the full-orbed drama that followed. After the gloom and terror of Mary's reign the coming of Elizabeth to the crown was hailed with exultation by the people, and seemed in itself to open a new and brighter page of the nation's history. Elizabeth's personal charms and mental gifts, her high spirit and dauntless courage, her unflinching political tact and judgment, her frank bearing and popular address, combined with her unaffected love for her people and devotion to their interests, awakened the strongest feelings of personal loyalty, and kindled into passionate ardour the spirit of national pride and patriotism that made the whole kingdom one. The most powerful movements of the time directly tended to reinforce and concentrate these awakened energies. While the Reformation and Renaissance impulses had liberalized men's minds and enlarged their moral horizon, the effect of both was at first of a political and practical rather than of a purely religious or literary kind. The strong and exhilarating sense of civil and religious freedom realized through the Reformation was inseparably associated with the exultant spirit of nationality it helped to stimulate and diffuse. The pope, and his emissaries the Jesuits, were looked upon far more as foreign enemies menacing the independence of the kingdom than as religious foes and firebrands seeking to destroy the newly established faith. The conspiracies, fomented from abroad, that gathered around the captive queen of Scots, the plots successively formed for the assassination of Elizabeth, were regarded as murderous assaults on the nation's life, and the Englishmen who organized them abroad or aided them at home were denounced and prosecuted with pitiless severity as traitors to their country. Protestantism thus came to be largely identified with patriotism, and all the active forces of the kingdom, its rising wealth, energy, and intelligence, were concentrated to defend the rights of the liberated empire against the assaults of despotic Europe represented by Rome and Spain. These forces gained volume and impetus as the nation was thrilled by the details of Alva's ruthless butcheries, and the awful massacre of St Bartholomew, until at length they were organized and hurled

with resistless effect against the grandest naval and military armament ever equipped by a Continental power,—an armament that had been sent forth with the assurance of victory by the wealthiest, most absolute, and most determined monarch of the time. There was a vigorous moral element in that national struggle and triumph. It was the spirit of freedom, of the energies liberated by the revolt from Rome, and illuminated by the fair humanities of Greece and Italy, that nerved the arm of that happy breed of men in the day of battle, and enabled them to strike with fatal effect against the abettors of despotic rule in church and state. The material results of the victory were at once apparent. England became mistress of the seas, and rose to an assured position in Europe as a political and maritime power of the first order. The literary results at home were equally striking. The whole conflict reacted powerfully on the genius of the race, quickening into life its latent seeds of reflective knowledge and wisdom, of poetical and dramatic art.

Of these effects the rapid growth and development of the national drama was the most brilliant and characteristic. There was indeed at the time a unique stimulus in this direction. The greater number of the eager excited listeners who crowded the rude theatres from floor to roof had shared in the adventurous exploits of the age, while all felt the keenest interest in life and action. And the stage represented with admirable breadth and fidelity the struggling forces, the mingled elements, humorous and tragic, the passionate hopes, deep-rooted animosities, and fitful misgivings of those eventful years. The spirit of the time had made personal daring a common heritage: with noble and commoner, gentle and simple, alike, love of queen and country was a romantic passion, and heroic self-devotion at the call of either a beaten way of ordinary life. To act with energy and decision in the face of danger, to strike at once against any odds in the cause of freedom and independence, was the desire and ambition of all. This complete unity of national sentiment and action became the great characteristic of the time. The dangers threatening the newly liberated kingdom were too real and pressing to admit of anything like seriously divided councils, or bitterly hostile parties within the realm. Everything thus conspired to give an extraordinary degree of concentration and brilliancy to the national life. For the twenty years that followed the destruction of the Armada London was the centre and focus of that life. Here gathered the soldiers and officers who had fought against Spain in the Low Countries, against France in Scotland, and against Rome in Ireland. Along the river side, and in noble houses about the Strand, were the hardy mariners and adventurous sea captains, such as Drake, Hawkins, and Frobisher, who had driven their dauntless keels into unknown seas, who had visited strange lands and alien races in order to enlarge the knowledge, increase the dominions, and augment the wealth of their fellow-countrymen. Here assembled the noble councillors, scholars, and cavaliers whose foresight and skill guided the helm of state, whose accomplishment in letters and arms gave refinement and distinction to court pageants and ceremonials, and whose patronage and support of the rising drama helped to make the metropolitan theatre the great centre of genius and art, the great school of historical teaching, the great mirror of human nature in all the breadth and emphasis of its interests, convictions, and activities. The theatre was indeed the living organ through which all the marvellous and mingled experiences of a time incomparably rich in vital elements found expression. There was no other, no organized or adequate means, of popular expression at all. Books were a solitary

entertainment in the hands of few; newspapers did not exist; and the modern relief of incessant public meetings was, fortunately perhaps, an unknown luxury. And yet, amidst the plenitude of national life centred in London, the need for some common organ of expression was never more urgent or imperious. New and almost inexhaustible springs from the well-heads of intellectual life had for years been gradually fertilizing the productive English mind. The heroic life of the past, in clear outline and stately movement, had been revealed in the recovered masterpieces of Greece and Rome. The stores of more recent wisdom and knowledge, discovery and invention, science and art, were poured continually into the literary exchequer of the nation, and widely diffused amongst eager and open-minded recipients. Under this combined stimulus the national intellect and imagination had already reacted fruitfully in ways that were full of higher promise. The material results of these newly awakened energies were, as we have seen, not less signal or momentous. The number, variety, and power of the new forces thus acting on society effected in a short period a complete moral revolution. The barriers against the spread of knowledge and the spirit of free inquiry erected and long maintained by mediæval ignorance and prejudice were now thrown down. The bonds of feudal authority and Romish domination that had hitherto forcibly repressed the expanding national life were effectually broken. Men opened their eyes upon a new world which it was an absorbing interest and endless delight to explore,—a new world physically, where the old geographical limits had melted into the blue haze of distant horizons—a new world morally, where the abolition of alien dogma and priestly rule gave free play to fresh and vigorous social energies; and, above all, more surprising and mysterious than all, they opened their eyes with a strange sense of wonder and exultation on the new world of the emancipated human spirit. At no previous period had the popular curiosity about human life and human affairs been so vivid and intense. In an age of deeds so memorable, man naturally became the centre of interest, and the whole world of human action and passion, character and conduct, was invested with irresistible attraction. All ranks and classes had the keenest desire to penetrate the mysterious depths, explore the unknown regions, and realize as fully as might be the actual achievements and ideal possibilities of the nature throbbing with so full a pulse within themselves and reflected so powerfully in the world around them. Human nature, released from the oppression and darkness of the ages, and emerging with all its infinite faculties and latent powers into the radiant light of a secular day, was the new world that excited an admiration more profound and hopes far more ardent than any recently discovered lands beyond the sinking sun. At the critical moment Shakespeare appeared as the Columbus of that new world. Pioneers had indeed gone before and in a measure prepared the way, but Shakespeare still remains the great discoverer, occupying a position of almost lonely grandeur in the isolation and completeness of his work.

Never before, except perhaps in the Athens of Pericles, had all the elements and conditions of a great national drama met in such perfect union. As we have seen, the popular conditions supplied by the stir of great public events and the stimulus of an appreciative audience were present in exceptional force. With regard to the stage conditions,—the means of adequate dramatic representation,—public theatres had for the first time been recently established in London on a permanent basis. In 1574 a royal licence had been granted by the queen to the earl of Leicester's company "to use, exercise, and occupy the art and faculty

of playing Comedies, Tragedies, Interludes, and Stage Plays, and such other like as they have been already used and studied, as well for the recreation of our loving subjects as for our solace and pleasure when we shall think good to see them"; and, although the civil authorities resisted the attempt to establish a public theatre within the city, two or three were speedily erected just outside its boundaries, in the most convenient and accessible suburbs,—the Curtain and the Theatre in Shoreditch, beyond the northern boundary, and the Blackfriars theatre within the precincts of the dissolved monastery, just beyond the civic jurisdiction on the western side. A few years later other houses were built on the southern side of the river,—the Rose near the foot of London Bridge, and the Hope and Swan further afield. There was also at Newington Butts a place of recreation and entertainment for the archers and holiday people, with a central building which, like the circus at Paris Garden, was used during the summer months for dramatic purposes. These theatres were occupied by different companies in turn, and Shakespeare during his early years in London appears to have acted at several of them. But from his first coming up it seems clear that he was more identified with the earl of Leicester's players, of whom his energetic fellow townsman, James Burbage, was the head, than with any other group of actors. To Burbage indeed belongs the distinction of having first established public theatres as a characteristic feature of metropolitan life. His spirit and enterprise first relieved the leading companies from the stigma of being strolling players, and transferred their dramatic exhibitions, hitherto restricted to temporary scaffolds in the court-yards of inns and hostleries, to the more reputable stage and convenient appliances of a permanent theatre. In 1575 Burbage, having secured the lease of a piece of land at Shoreditch, erected there the house which proved so successful, and was known for twenty years as *the Theatre*, from the fact that it was the first ever erected in the metropolis. He seems also to have been concerned in the erection of a second theatre in the same locality called the Curtain; and later on, in spite of many difficulties, and a great deal of local opposition, he provided the more celebrated home of the rising drama known as the Blackfriars theatre. When Shakespeare went to London there were thus theatres on both sides of the water—the outlying houses being chiefly used during the summer and autumn months, while the Blackfriars, being roofed in and protected from the weather, was specially used for performances during the winter season. In spite of the persistent opposition of the lord mayor and city aldermen, the denunciations of Puritan preachers and their allies in the press, and difficulties arising from intermittent attacks of the plague and the occasional intervention of the court authorities, the theatres had now taken firm root in the metropolis; and, strong in royal favour, in noble patronage, and above all in popular support, the stage had already begun to assume its higher functions as the living organ of the national voice, the many-coloured mirror and reflexion of the national life. A few years later the companies of players and the theatres they occupied were consolidated and placed on a still firmer public basis. For some years past, in addition to the actors really or nominally attached to noble houses, there had existed a body of twelve performers, selected by royal authority (in 1583) from different companies and known as the Queen's players. The earl of Leicester's, being the leading company, had naturally furnished a number of recruits to the Queen's players, whose duty it was to act at special seasons before Her Majesty and the court. But within a few years after Shakespeare arrived in London the chief

groups of actors were divided into two great companies, specially licensed and belonging respectively to the Lord Chamberlain and the Lord Admiral. Under the new arrangement the earl of Leicester's actors (who, as already stated, after the earl's death in 1588 found for a time a new patron in Lord Strange<sup>1</sup>) became the servants of the Lord Chamberlain. James Burbage had already retired from the company, his place being taken by his more celebrated son Richard Burbage, the Garrick of the Elizabethan stage, who acted with so much distinction and success all the great parts in Shakespeare's leading plays. In order that the Lord Chamberlain's company might have houses of their own both for summer and winter use, Richard Burbage, his brother Cuthbert, and their associates, including Shakespeare, undertook in 1599 to build a new theatre on the bank side, not far from the old Paris Garden circus. We know from a subsequent document, which refers incidentally to the building of this theatre, that the Burbages had originally introduced Shakespeare to the Blackfriars company. He had indeed proved himself so useful, both as actor and poet, that they were evidently glad to secure his future services by giving him a share as part proprietor in the Blackfriars property. The new theatre now built by the company was that known as the Globe, and it was for fifteen years, during the summer and autumn months, the popular and highly successful home of the Shakespearian drama. Three years earlier Richard Burbage and his associates had rebuilt the Blackfriars theatre on a more extended scale; and this well-known house divided with the Globe the honour of producing Shakespeare's later and more important plays. Shakespeare's position indeed of actor and dramatist is identified with these houses and with the Lord Chamberlain's company to which they belonged. On the accession of James I, this company, being specially favoured by the new monarch, received a fresh royal charter, and the members of it were henceforth known as the King's servants. In the early years of Shakespeare's career the national drama had thus a permanent home in theatres conveniently central on either side of the river, and crowded during the summer and winter months by eager and excited audiences. Even before the building of the Globe, the house at Newington where three of Marlowe's most important plays and some of Shakespeare's early tragedies were produced was often crowded to the doors. In the summer of 1592, when the *First Part of Henry VI.*, as revised by Shakespeare, was acted, the performance was so popular that, we are told by Nash, ten thousand spectators witnessed it in the course of a few weeks. It is true that even in the best theatres the appliances in the way of scenes and stage machinery were of the simplest description, change of scene being often indicated by the primitive device of a board with the name painted upon it. But players and playwrights, both arts being often combined in the same person, knew their business thoroughly well, and justly relied for success on the more vital attractions of powerful acting, vigorous writing, and practised skill in the construction of their pieces. In the presence of strong passions expressed in kindling words and powerfully realized in living action, gesture, and incident, the absence of canvas sunlight and painted gloom was hardly felt. Or, as the stirring choruses in *Henry V.* show, the want of more elaborate and realistic scenery was abundantly supplied by the excited fancy, active imagination, and concentrated interest of the spectators.

<sup>1</sup> This is maintained by Mr Fleay in his recent *Life and Work of Shakespeare*. But the history of the early dramatic companies is so obscure that it is difficult to trace their changing fortunes with absolute certainty.

The dramatic conditions of a national theatre were indeed, at the outset of Shakespeare's career, more complete, or rather in a more advanced state of development, than the playhouses themselves or their stage accessories. If Shakespeare was fortunate in entering on his London work amidst the full tide of awakened patriotism and public spirit, he was equally fortunate in finding ready to his hand the forms of art in which the rich and complex life of the time could be adequately expressed. During the decade in which Shakespeare left Stratford the playwright's art had undergone changes so important as to constitute a revolution in the form and spirit of the national drama. For twenty years after the accession of Elizabeth the two roots whence the English drama sprang—the academic or classical, and the popular, developed spontaneously in the line of mysteries, moralities, and interludes—continued to exist apart, and to produce their accustomed fruit independently of each other. The popular drama, it is true, becoming more secular and realistic, enlarged its area by collecting its materials from all sources,—from novels, tales, ballads, and histories, as well as from fairy mythology, local superstitions, and folklore. But the incongruous materials were, for the most part, handled in a crude and semi-barbarous way, with just sufficient art to satisfy the cravings and clamours of unlettered audiences. The academic plays, on the other hand, were written by scholars for courtly and cultivated circles, were acted at the universities, the inns of court, and at special public ceremonials, and followed for the most part the recognized and restricted rules of the classic drama. But in the third decade of Elizabeth's reign another dramatic school arose intermediate between the two elder ones, which sought to combine in a newer and higher form the best elements of both. The main impulse guiding the efforts of the new school may be traced indirectly to a classical source. It was due, not immediately to the masterpieces of Greece and Rome, but to the form which classical art had assumed in the contemporary drama of Italy, France, and Spain, especially of Italy, which was that earliest developed and best known to the new school of poets and dramatists. This southern drama, while academic in its leading features, had nevertheless modern elements blended with the ancient form. As the Italian epics, following in the main the older examples, were still charged with romantic and realistic elements unknown to the classical epic, so the Italian drama, constructed on the lines of Seneca and Plautus, blended with the severer form essentially romantic features. With the choice of heroic subjects, the orderly development of the plot, the free use of the chorus, the observance of the unities, and constant substitution of narrative for action were united the vivid colouring of poetic fancy and diction, and the use of materials and incidents derived from recent history and contemporary life. The influence of the Italian drama on the new school of English playwrights was, however, very much restricted to points of style and diction of rhetorical and poetical effect. It helped to produce among them the sense of artistic treatment, the conscious effort after higher and more elaborate forms and vehicles of imaginative and passionate expression. For the rest, the rising English drama, in spite of the efforts made by academic critics to narrow its range and limit its interests, retained and thoroughly vindicated its freedom and independence. The central characteristics of the new school are sufficiently explained by the fact that its leading representatives were all of them scholars and poets, living by their wits and gaining a somewhat precarious livelihood amidst the stir and bustle, the temptations and excitement, of concentrated London life. The distinctive note of their work is the reflex of

their position as academic scholars working under poetic and popular impulses for the public theatres. The new and striking combination in their dramas of elements hitherto wholly separated is but the natural result of their attainments and literary activities. From their university training and knowledge of the ancients they would be familiar with the technical requirements of dramatic art, the deliberate handling of plot, incident, and character, and the due subordination of parts essential for producing the effect of an artistic whole. Their imaginative and emotional sensibility, stimulated by their studies in Southern literature, would naturally prompt them to combine features of poetic beauty and rhetorical finish with the evolution of character and action; while from the popular native drama they derived the breadth of sympathy, sense of humour, and vivid contact with actual life which gave reality and power to their representations.

The leading members of this group or school were Kyd, Greene, Lodge, Nash, Peele, and Marlowe, of whom, in relation to the future development of the drama, Greene, Peele, and Marlowe are the most important and influential. They were almost the first poets and men of genius who devoted themselves to the production of dramatic pieces for the public theatres. But they all helped to redeem the common stages from the reproach their rude and boisterous pieces had brought upon them, and make the plays represented poetical and artistic as well as lively, bustling, and popular. Some did this rather from a necessity of nature and stress of circumstance than from any higher aim or deliberately formed resolve. But Marlowe, the greatest of them, avowed the redemption of the common stage as the settled purpose of his labours at the outset of his dramatic career. And during his brief and stormy life he nobly discharged the self-imposed task. His first play, *Tamburline the Great*, struck the authentic note of artistic and romantic tragedy. With all its extravagance, and over-straining after vocal and rhetorical effects, the play throbs with true passion and true poetry, and has throughout the stamp of emotional intensity and intellectual power. His later tragedies, while marked by the same features, bring into fuller relief the higher characteristics of his passionate and poetical genius. Alike in the choice of subject and method of treatment Marlowe is thoroughly independent, deriving little, except in the way of general stimulus, either from the classical or popular drama of his day. The signal and far-reaching reform he effected in dramatic metre by the introduction of modulated blank verse illustrates the striking originality of his genius. Gifted with a fine ear for the music of English numbers, and impatient of "the giggling veins of rhyming mother wits," he introduced the noble metre which was at once adopted by his contemporaries and became the vehicle of the great Elizabethan drama. The new metre quickly abolished the rhyming couplets and stanzas that had hitherto prevailed on the popular stage. The rapidity and completeness of this metrical revolution is in itself a powerful tribute to Marlowe's rare insight and feeling as a master of musical expression. The originality and importance of Marlowe's innovation are not materially affected by the fact that one or two classical plays, such as *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta*, had been already written in unrhymed verse. In any case these were private plays, and the monotony of cadence and structure in the verse excludes them from anything like serious comparison with the richness and variety of vocal effect produced by the skilful pauses and musical interlinking of Marlowe's heroic metre. Greene and Peele did almost as much for romantic comedy as Marlowe had done for romantic tragedy. Greene's ease and lightness of touch, his freshness of feeling and play of fancy, his vivid sense

of the pathos and beauty of homely scenes and thorough enjoyment of English rural life, give to his dramatic sketches the blended charm of romance and reality hardly to be found elsewhere except in Shakespeare's early comedies. In special points of lyrical beauty and dramatic portraiture, such as his sketches of pure and devoted women and of witty and amusing clowns, Greene anticipated some of the more delightful and characteristic features of Shakespearian comedy. Peele's lighter pieces and Lyly's prose comedies helped in the same direction. Although not written for the public stage, Lyly's court comedies were very popular, and Shakespeare evidently gained from their light and easy if somewhat artificial tone, their constant play of witty banter and sparkling repartee, valuable hints for the prose of his own comedies. Marlowe again prepared the way for another characteristic development of Shakespeare's dramatic art. His *Edward II.* marks the rise of the historical drama, as distinguished from the older chronicle play, in which the annals of a reign or period were thrown into a series of loose and irregular metrical scenes. Peele's *Edward I.*, Marlowe's *Edward II.*, and the fine anonymous play of *Edward III.*, in which many critics think Shakespeare's hand may be traced, show how thoroughly the new school had felt the rising national pulse, and how promptly it responded to the popular demand for the dramatic treatment of history. The greatness of contemporary events had created a new sense of the grandeur and continuity of the nation's life, and excited amongst all classes a vivid interest in the leading personalities and critical struggles that had marked its progress. There was a strong and general feeling in favour of historical subjects, and especially historical subjects having in them elements of tragical depth and intensity. Shakespeare's own early plays—dealing with the distracted reign of King John, the Wars of the Roses, and the tragical lives of Richard II. and Richard III.—illustrate this bent of popular feeling. The demand being met by men of poetical and dramatic genius reacted powerfully on the spirit of the age, helping in turn to illuminate and strengthen its loyal and patriotic sympathies.

This is in fact the key-note of the English stage in the great period of its development. It was its breadth of national interest and intensity of tragic power that made the English drama so immeasurably superior to every other contemporary drama in Europe. The Italian drama languished because, though carefully elaborated in point of form, it had no fulness of national life, no common elements of ethical conviction or aspiration, to vitalize and ennoble it. Even tragedy, in the hands of Italian dramatists, had no depth of human passion, no energy of heroic purpose, to give higher meaning and power to its evolution. In Spain the dominant courtly and ecclesiastical influences limited the development of the national drama, while in France it remained from the outset under the artificial restrictions of classical and pseudo-classical traditions. Shakespeare's predecessors and contemporaries, in elevating the common stages, and filling them with poetry, music, and passion, had attracted to the theatre all classes, including the more cultivated and refined; and the intelligent interest, energetic patriotism, and robust life of so representative an English audience supplied the strongest stimulus to the more perfect development of the great organ of national expression. The forms of dramatic art, in the three main departments of comedy, tragedy, and historical drama, had been, as we have seen, clearly discriminated and evolved in their earlier stages. It was a moment of supreme promise and expectation, and in the accidents of earth, or, as we may more appropriately and gratefully say, in the ordinances of heaven the supreme

Superiority of the English stage.

Shakespeare's dramatic career—first period.

poet and dramatist appeared to more than fulfil the utmost promise of the time. By right of imperial command over all the resources of imaginative insight and expression Shakespeare combined the rich dramatic materials already prepared into more perfect forms, and carried them to the highest point of ideal development. He quickly surpassed Marlowe in passion, music, and intellectual power; Greene in lyrical beauty, elegiac grace, and narrative interest; Peele in picturesque touch and pastoral sweetness; and Lyly in bright and sparkling dialogue. And having distanced the utmost efforts of his predecessors and contemporaries he took his own higher way, and reigned to the end without a rival in the new world of supreme dramatic art he had created. It is a new world, because Shakespeare's work alone can be said to possess the organic strength and infinite variety, the throbbing fulness, vital complexity, and breathing truth, of nature herself. In points of artistic resource and technical ability—such as copious and expressive diction, freshness and pregnancy of verbal combination, richly modulated verse, and structural skill in the handling of incident and action—Shakespeare's supremacy is indeed sufficiently assured. But, after all, it is of course in the spirit and substance of his work, his power of piercing to the hidden centres of character, of touching the deepest springs of impulse and passion, out of which are the issues of life, and of evolving those issues dramatically with a flawless strength, subtlety, and truth, which raises him so immensely above and beyond not only the best of the playwrights who went before him, but the whole line of illustrious dramatists that came after him. It is Shakespeare's unique distinction that he has an absolute command over all the complexities of thought and feeling that prompt to action and bring out the dividing lines of character. He sweeps with the hand of a master the whole gamut of human experience, from the lowest note to the very top of its compass, from the sportive childish treble of Mamilus and the pleading boyish tones of Prince Arthur, up to the spectre-haunted terrors of Macbeth, the tropical passion of Othello, the agonized sense and tortured spirit of Hamlet, the sustained elemental grandeur, the Titanic force and utterly tragical pathos, of Lear.

Shakespeare's active dramatic career in London lasted about twenty years, and may be divided into three tolerably symmetrical periods. The first extends from the year 1587 to about 1593-94; the second from this date to the end of the century; and the third from 1600 to about 1608, soon after which time Shakespeare ceased to write regularly for the stage, was less in London and more and more at Stratford. Some modern critics add to these a fourth period, including the few plays which from internal as well as external evidence must have been among the poet's latest productions. As the exact dates of these plays are unknown, this period may be taken to extend from 1608 to about 1612. The three dramas produced during these years are, however, hardly entitled to be ranked as a separate period. They may rather be regarded as supplementary to the grand series of dramas belonging to the third and greatest epoch of Shakespeare's productive power. To the first period belong Shakespeare's early tentative efforts in revising and partially rewriting plays produced by others that already had possession of the stage. These efforts are illustrated in the three parts of *Henry VI.*, especially the second and third parts, which bear decisive marks of Shakespeare's hand, and were to a great extent recast and rewritten by him. It is clear from the internal evidence thus supplied that Shakespeare was at first powerfully affected by "Marlowe's mighty line." This influence is so marked in the revised second

and third parts of *Henry VI.*, as to induce some critics to believe Marlowe must have had a hand in the revision. These passages are, however, sufficiently explained by the fact of Marlowe's influence during the first period of Shakespeare's career. To the same period also belong the earliest tragedy, that of *Titus Andronicus*, and the three comedies—*Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. These dramas are all marked by the dominant literary influences of the time. They present features obviously due to the revived and widespread knowledge of classical literature, as well as to the active interest in the literature of Italy and the South. *Titus Andronicus*, in many of its characteristic features, reflects the form of Roman tragedy almost universally accepted and followed in the earlier period of the drama. This form was supplied by the Latin plays of Seneca, their darker colours being deepened by the moral effect of the judicial tragedies and military conflicts of the time. The execution of the Scottish queen and the Catholic conspirators who had acted in her name, and the destruction of the Spanish Armada, had given an impulse to tragic representations of an extreme type. This was undoubtedly rather fostered than otherwise by the favourite exemplars of Roman tragedy. The *Medea* and *Thyestes* of Seneca are crowded with pagan horrors of the most revolting kind. It is true these horrors are usually related, not represented, although in the *Medea* the maddened heroine kills her children on the stage. But from these tragedies the conception of the physically horrible as an element of tragedy was imported into the early English drama, and intensified by the realistic tendency which the events of the time and the taste of their ruder audiences had impressed upon the common stages. This tendency is exemplified in *Titus Andronicus*, obviously a very early work, the signs of youthful effort being apparent not only in the acceptance of so coarse a type of tragedy but in the crude handling of character and motive, and the want of harmony in working out the details of the dramatic conception. Kyd was the most popular contemporary representative of the bloody school, and in the leading motives of treachery, concealment, and revenge there are points of likeness between *Titus Andronicus* and the *Spanish Tragedy*. But how promptly and completely Shakespeare's nobler nature turned from this lower type is apparent from the fact that he not only never reverted to it but indirectly ridicules the piled-up horrors and extravagant language of Kyd's plays.

The early comedies in the same way are marked by the dominant literary influences of the time, partly classic partly Italian. In the *Comedy of Errors*, for example, Shakespeare attempted a humorous play of the old classical type, the general plan and many details being derived directly from Plautus. In *Love's Labour's Lost* many characteristic features of Italian comedy are freely introduced: the pedant Holofernes, the curate Sir Nathaniel, the fantastic braggadocio soldier Armado, are all well-known characters of the contemporary Italian drama. Of this comedy, indeed, Gervinus says, "the tone of the Italian school prevails here more than in any other play. The redundancy of wit is only to be compared with a similar redundancy of conceit in Shakespeare's narrative poems, and with the Italian style which he had early adopted." These comedies display another sign of early work in the mechanical exactness of the plan and a studied symmetry in the grouping of the chief personages of the drama. In the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, as Prof. Dowden points out, "Proteus the fickle is set against Valentine the faithful, Silvia the light and intellectual against Julia the ardent and tender, Lance the humourist against Speed the wit." So in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the king and his three fellow-

students balance the princess and her three ladies, and there is a symmetrical play of incident between the two groups. The arrangement is obviously more artificial than spontaneous, more mechanical than vital and organic. But towards the close of the first period Shakespeare had fully realized his own power and was able to dispense with these artificial supports. Indeed, having rapidly gained knowledge and experience, he had before the close written plays of a far higher character than any which even the ablest of his contemporaries had produced. He had firmly laid the foundation of his future fame in the direction both of comedy and tragedy, for, besides the comedies already referred to, the first sketches of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and the tragedy of *Richard III.*, may probably be referred to this period.

Another mark of early work belonging to these dramas is the lyrical and elegiac tone and treatment associated with the use of rhyme, of rhyming couplets and stanzas. Spenser's musical verse had for the time elevated the character of rhyming metres by identifying them with the highest kinds of poetry, and Shakespeare was evidently at first affected by this powerful impulse. He rhymed with great facility, and delighted in the gratification of his lyrical fancy and feeling which the more musical rhyming metres afforded. Rhyme accordingly has a considerable and not inappropriate place in the earlier romantic comedies. The *Comedy of Errors* has indeed been described as a kind of lyrical farce in which the opposite qualities of elegiac beauty and comic effect are happily blended. Rhyme, however, at this period of the poet's work is not restricted to the comedies. It is largely used in the tragedies and histories as well, and plays even an important part in historical drama so late as *Richard II.* Shakespeare appears, however, to have worked out this favourite vein, and very much taken leave of it, by the publication of his descriptive and narrative poems, the *Venus and Adonis* and the *Lucrece*, although the enormous popularity of these poems might almost have tempted him to return again to the abandoned metrical form. The only considerable exception to the disuse of rhyming metres and lyrical treatment is supplied by the *Sonnets*, which, though not published till 1609, were probably begun early, soon after the poems, and written at intervals during eight or ten of the intervening years. Into the many vexed questions connected with the history and meaning of these poems it is impossible to enter. The attempts recently made by the Rev. W. A. Harrison and Mr T. Tyler to identify the "dark lady" of the later sonnets, while of some historical interest, cannot be regarded as successful. And the identification, even if rendered more probable by the discovery of fresh evidence, would not clear up the difficulties, biographical, literary, and historical, connected with these exquisite poems. It is perhaps enough to say with Prof. Dowden that in Shakespeare's case the most natural interpretation is the best, and that, so far as they throw light on his personal character, the sonnets show that "he was capable of measureless personal devotion; that he was tenderly sensitive, sensitive above all to every limitation or alteration of that love his heart so eagerly craved; and that, when wronged, although he suffered anguish, he transcended his private injury and learned to forgive."

Whatever question may be raised with regard to the superiority of some of the plays belonging to the first period of Shakespeare's dramatic career, there can be no question at all as to any of the pieces belonging to the second period, which extends to the end of the century. During these years Shakespeare works as a master, having complete command over the materials and resources of the most mature and flexible dramatic art. "To this stage,"

says Mr Swinburne, "belongs the special faculty of faultless, joyous, facile command upon each faculty required of the presiding genius for service or for sport. It is in the middle period of his work that the language of Shakespeare is most limpid in its fulness, the style most pure, the thought most transparent through the close and luminous raiment of perfect expression." This period includes the magnificent series of historical plays—*Richard II.*, the two parts of *Henry IV.*, and *Henry V.*—and a double series of brilliant comedies. The *Midsommer Night's Dream*, *All's Well that ends Well*, and the *Merchant of Venice* were produced before 1598, and during the next three years there appeared a still more complete and characteristic group including *Much ado about Nothing*, *As you Like it*, and *Twelfth Night*. These comedies and historical plays are all marked by a rare harmony of reflective and imaginative insight, perfection of creative art, and completeness of dramatic effect. Before the close of this period, in 1598, Francis Meres paid his celebrated tribute to Shakespeare's superiority in lyrical, descriptive, and dramatic poetry, emphasizing his unrivalled distinction in the three main departments of the drama,—comedy, tragedy, and historical play. And from this time onwards the contemporary recognitions of Shakespeare's eminence as a poet and dramatist rapidly multiply, the critics and eulogists being in most cases well entitled to speak with authority on the subject.

In the third period of Shakespeare's dramatic career years had evidently brought enlarged vision, wider thoughts, and deeper experiences. While the old mastery of art remains, the works belonging to this period seem to bear traces of more intense moral struggles, larger and less joyous views of human life, more troubled, complex, and profound conceptions and emotions. Comparatively few marks of the lightness and animation of the earlier works remain, but at the same time the dramas of this period display an unrivalled power of piercing the deepest mysteries and sounding the most tremendous and perplexing problems of human life and human destiny. To this period belong the four great tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Lear*; the three Roman plays—*Coriolanus*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*; the two singular plays whose scene and personages are Greek but whose action and meaning are wider and deeper than either Greek or Roman life—*Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*; and one comedy—*Measure for Measure*, which is almost tragic in the depth and intensity of its characters and incidents. The four great tragedies represent the highest reach of Shakespeare's dramatic power, and they sufficiently illustrate the range and complexity of the deeper problems that now occupied his mind. *Timon* and *Measure for Measure*, however, exemplify the same tendency to brood with meditative intensity over the wrongs and miseries that afflict humanity. These works sufficiently prove that during this period Shakespeare gained a disturbing insight into the deeper evils of the world, arising from the darker passions, such as treachery and revenge. But it is also clear that, with the larger vision of a noble, well-poised nature, he at the same time gained a fuller perception of the deeper springs of goodness in human nature, of the great virtues of invincible fidelity and unweary love, and he evidently received not only consolation and calm but new stimulus and power from the fuller realization of these virtues. The typical plays of this period thus embody Shakespeare's ripest experience of the great issues of life. In the four grand tragedies the central problem is a profoundly moral one. It is the supreme internal conflict of good and evil amongst the central forces and higher elements of human nature, as appealed to and developed by sudden and powerful temptation, smitten by accumu-

lated wrongs, or plunged in overwhelming calamities. As the result, we learn that there is something infinitely more precious in life than social ease or worldly success—nobleness of soul, fidelity to truth and honour, human love and loyalty, strength and tenderness, and trust to the very end. In the most tragic experiences this fidelity to all that is best in life is only possible through the loss of life itself. But when Desdemona expires with a sigh and Cordelia's loving eyes are closed, when Hamlet no more draws his breath in pain and the tempest-tossed Lear is at last liberated from the rack of this tough world, we feel that, death having set his sacred seal on their great sorrows and greater love, they remain with us as possessions for ever. In the three dramas belonging to Shakespeare's last period, or rather which may be said to close his dramatic career, the same feeling of severe but consolatory calm is still more apparent. If the deeper discords of life are not finally resolved, the virtues which soothe their perplexities and give us courage and endurance to wait, as well as confidence to trust the final issues,—the virtues of forgiveness and generosity, of forbearance and self-control,—are largely illustrated. This is a characteristic feature in each of these closing dramas, in the *Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and the *Tempest*. The *Tempest* is supposed, on tolerably good grounds, to be Shakespeare's last work, and in it we see the great magician, having gained by the wonderful experience of life, and the no less wonderful practice of his art, serene wisdom, clear and enlarged vision, and beneficent self-control, break his magical wand and retire from the scene of his triumphs to the home he had chosen amidst the woods and meadows of the Avon, and surrounded by the family and friends he loved.

We must now briefly summarize the few remaining facts of the poet's personal history. The year 1596 was marked by considerable family losses. In August Shakespeare's only son Hamnet died in the twelfth year of his age. With his strong domestic affections and cherished hopes of founding a family, the early death of his only boy must have been for his father a severe blow. It was followed in December by the death of Shakespeare's uncle Henry, the friend of his childhood and youth, the protector and encourager of his boyish sports and enterprises at Bearley, Snitterfield, and Fulbroke. A few months later the Shakespeare household at Snitterfield, so intimately associated for more than half a century with the family in Henley Street, was finally broken up by the death of the poet's aunt Margaret, his uncle Henry's widow. Although the death of his son and heir had diminished the poet's hope of founding a family, he did not in any way relax his efforts to secure a permanent and comfortable home for his wife and daughters at Stratford. As early as 1597, when he had pursued his London career for little more than ten years, he had saved enough to purchase the considerable dwelling-house in New Place, Stratford, to which he afterwards retired. This house, originally built by Sir Hugh Clopton and called the "Great House," was one of the largest mansions in the town, and the fact of Shakespeare having acquired such a place as his family residence would at once increase his local importance. From time to time he made additional purchases of land about the house and in the neighbourhood. In 1602 he largely increased the property by acquiring 107 acres of arable land, and later on he added to this 20 acres of pasture land, with a convenient cottage and garden in Chapel Lane, opposite the lower grounds of the house. Within a few years his property thus comprised a substantial dwelling-house with large garden and extensive outbuildings, a cottage fronting the lower road, and about 137 acres of arable and pasture land. During these years Shakespeare made another important purchase that added considerably to his

income. From the letter of a Stratford burgess to a friend in London, it appears that as early as 1597 Shakespeare had been making inquiry about the purchase of tithes in the town and neighbourhood. And in 1605 he bought the unexpired lease of tithes, great and small, in Stratford and two adjoining hamlets, the lease having still thirty years to run. This purchase yielded him an annual income of £38 a year, equal to upwards of £350 a year of our present money. The last purchase of property made by Shakespeare of which we have any definite record is at once so interesting and so perplexing as to have stimulated various conjectures on the part of his biographers. This purchase carries us away from Stratford back to London, to the immediate neighbourhood of Shakespeare's dramatic labours and triumphs. It seems that in March 1613 he bought a house with a piece of ground attached to it a little to the south-west of St Paul's cathedral, and not far from the Blackfriars theatre. The purchase of this house in London after he had been for some years settled at Stratford has led some critics to suppose that Shakespeare had not given up all thought of returning to the metropolis, or at least of spending part of the year there with his family in the neighbourhood he best knew and where he was best known. The ground of this supposition is, however, a good deal destroyed by the fact that soon after acquiring this town house Shakespeare let it for a lease of ten years. He may possibly have bought the property as a convenience to some of his old friends who were associated with him in the purchase. In view of future contingencies it would obviously be an advantage to have a substantial dwelling so near the theatre in the hands of a friend. It was indeed by means of a similar purchase that James Burbage had originally started and established the Blackfriars theatre.

The year 1607-8 would be noted in Shakespeare's family calendar as one of vivid and chequered domestic experiences. On the 5th of June his eldest daughter Susanna, who seems to have inherited something of her father's genius, was married to Dr John Hall, a medical man of more than average knowledge and ability, who had a considerable practice in the neighbourhood of Stratford, and who was deservedly held in high repute. The newly married couple settled in one of the picturesque houses of the wooded suburb between the town and the church known as Old Stratford. But before the end of the year the midsummer marriage bells had changed to sadder music. In December Shakespeare lost his youngest brother, Edmund, at the early age of twenty-seven. He had become an actor, most probably through his brother's help and influence, and was, at the time of his death, living in London. He was buried at Southwark on the last day of the year. Two months later there was family rejoicing in Dr Hall's house at the birth of a daughter, christened Elizabeth, the only offspring of the union, and the only grandchild Shakespeare lived to see. The rejoicing at this event would be fully shared by the household in New Place, and especially by Shakespeare himself, whose cherished family hopes would thus be strengthened and renewed. Six months later in this eventful year, fortune again turned her wheel. Early in September Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden of the Asbies, died, having lived long enough to see and welcome her great-grandchild as a fresh bond of family life. She was buried at Stratford on the 9th of September, having survived her husband, who was buried on the 8th of September 1601, exactly seven years. Mary Shakespeare died full of years and honour and coveted rewards. For more than a decade she had witnessed and shared the growing prosperity of her eldest son, and felt the mother's thrill of joy and pride in the success that had crowned his brilliant