Copies of some of these old ballads were hawked about in the 16th century, printed in black letter, "broadsides," or single sheets. Wynkyn de Worde printed in 1489 *A Lytell Geste of Robin Hood*, which is a sort of digest of earlier ballads on the subject. In the 17th century a few of the English popular ballads were collected in miscellanies called *Garlands*. Early in the 18th century the Scotch poet, Allan Ramsay, published a number of Scotch ballads in the *Evergreen* and *Tea-Table Miscellany*. But no large and important collection was put forth until Percy's *Reliques* (1765), a book which had a powerful influence upon Wordsworth and Walter Scott. In Scotland some excellent ballads in the ancient manner were written in the 18th century, such as Jane Elliott's *Lament for Flodden*, and the fine ballad of *Sir Patrick Spence*. Walter Scott's *Proud Maisie is in the Wood*, is a perfect reproduction of the pregnant, indirect method of the old ballad makers.

In 1453 Constantinople was taken by the Turks, and many Greek scholars, with their manuscripts, fled into Italy, where they began teaching their language and literature, and especially the philosophy of Plato. There had been little or no knowledge of Greek in western Europe during the Middle Ages, and only a very imperfect knowledge of the Latin classics. Ovid and Statius were widely read, and so was the late Latin poet, Boethius, whose *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* had been translated into English by King Alfred and by Chaucer. Little was known of Vergil at first hand, and he was popularly supposed to have been a mighty wizard, who made sundry works of enchantment at Rome, such as a magic mirror and statue. Caxton's so-called translation of the *Æneid* was in reality nothing but a version of a French romance based on Vergil's epic. Of the Roman historians, orators, and moralists, such as Livy, Tacitus, Cæsar, Cicero, and Seneca, there was almost entire ignorance, as also of poets like Horace, Lucretius, Juvenal, and

Catullus. The gradual rediscovery of the remains of ancient art and literature which took place in the 15th century, and largely in Italy, worked an immense revolution in the mind of Europe. Manuscripts were brought out of their hiding places, edited by scholars, and spread abroad by means of the printing-press. Statues were dug up and placed in museums, and men became acquainted with a civilization far more mature than that of the Middle Age, and with models of perfect workmanship in letters and the fine arts.

In the latter years of the 15th century a number of Englishmen learned Greek in Italy and brought it back with them to England. William Grocyn and Thomas Linacre, who had studied at Florence under the refugee, Demetrius Chalcondylas, began teaching Greek at Oxford, the former as early as 1491. A little later John Colet, Dean of St. Paul's and the founder of St. Paul's School, and his friend, William Lily, the grammarian, and first master of St. Paul's (1500), also studied Greek abroad; Colet in Italy, and Lily at Rhodes and in the city of Rome. Thomas More, afterward the famous chancellor of Henry VIII., was among the pupils of Grocyn and Linacre at Oxford. Thither also, in 1497, came, in search of the new knowledge, the Dutchman, Erasmus, who became the foremost scholar of his time. From Oxford the study spread to the sister university, where the first English Grecian of his day, Sir John Cheke, who "taught Cambridge and King Edward Greek," became the incumbent of the new professorship founded about 1540. Among his pupils was Roger Ascham, already mentioned, in whose time St. John's College, Cambridge, was the chief seat of the new learning, of which Thomas Nashe testifies that it "was an universitie within itself; having more candles light in it, every winter morning before four of the clock, than the four of clock bell gave strokes." Greek was not introduced at the universities without violent opposition from

the conservative element, who were nicknamed Trojans. The opposition came in part from the priests, who feared that that new study would sow seeds of heresy. Yet many of the most devout churchmen were friends of a more liberal culture, among them Thomas More, whose Catholicism was undoubted and who went to the block for his religion. Cardinal Wolsey, whom More succeeded as chancellor, was also a munificent patron of learning, and founded Christ Church College at Oxford. Popular education at once felt the impulse of the new studies, and over twenty endowed grammar schools were established in England in the first twenty years of the 16th century. Greek became a passion even with English ladies. Ascham in his *Schoolmaster*, a treatise on education, published in 1570, says that Queen Elizabeth "readeth here now at Windsor more Greek every day, than some prebendarie of this Church doth read Latin in a whole week." And in the same book he tells how, calling once on Lady Jane Grey, at Brodegate, in Leicestershire, he "found her in her chamber reading *Phædon Platonis* in Greek, and that with as much delite as some gentlemen would read a merry tale in *Bocase*," and when he asked her why she had not gone hunting with the rest, she answered, "I wisse,[1] all their sport in the park is but a shadow to that pleasure that I find in Plato." Ascham's *Schoolmaster*, as well as his earlier book, *Toxophilus*, a Platonic dialogue on archery, bristles with quotations from the Greek and Latin classics, and with that perpetual reference to the authority of antiquity on every topic that he touches, which remained the fashion in all serious prose down to the time of Dryden.

One speedy result of the new learning was fresh translations of the Scriptures into English out of the original tongues. In 1525 William Tyndal printed at Cologne and Worms his version of the New Testament from the Greek.

[1] Surely; a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon *gewis*.

Ten years later Miles Coverdale made, at Zurich, a translation of the whole Bible from the German and Latin. These were the basis of numerous later translations, and the strong beautiful English of Tyndal's Testament is preserved for the most part in our Authorized Version (1611). At first it was not safe to make or distribute these early translations in England. Numbers of copies were brought into the country, however, and did much to promote the cause of the Reformation. After Henry VIII. had broken with the pope the new English Bible circulated freely among the people. Tyndal and Sir Thomas More carried on a vigorous controversy in English upon some of the questions at issue between the Church and the Protestants. Other important contributions to the literature of the Reformation were the homely sermons preached at Westminster and at Paul's Cross by Bishop Hugh Latimer, who was burned at Oxford in the reign of Bloody Mary. The English Book of Common Prayer was compiled in 1549–1552. More was, perhaps, the best representative of a group of scholars who wished to enlighten and reform the Church from the inside, but who refused to follow Henry VIII. in his breach with Rome. Dean Colet and John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, belonged to the same company, and Fisher was beheaded in the same year (1535) with More, and for the same offense, namely, refusing to take the oath to maintain the act confirming the king's divorce from Catharine of Arragon and his marriage with Anne Boleyn. More's philosophy is best reflected in his *Utopia*, the description of an ideal commonwealth, modeled on Plato's *Republic*, and printed in 1516. The name signifies "no place" (*οὐ τόπος*), and has furnished an adjective to the language. The *Utopia* was in Latin, but More's *History of Edward V. and Richard III.* written 1513, though not printed till 1557, was in English. It is the first example in the tongue of a history as distinguished from a chronicle; that is, it is a reasoned and artistic

presentation of an historic period, and not a mere chronological narrative of events.

The first three quarters of the 16th century produced no great original work of literature in England. It was a season of preparation, of education. The storms of the Reformation interrupted and delayed the literary renascence through the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., and Queen Mary. When Elizabeth came to the throne, in 1558, a more settled order of things began, and a period of great national prosperity and glory. Meanwhile the English mind had been slowly assimilating the new classical culture, which was extended to all classes of readers by the numerous translations of Greek and Latin authors. A fresh poetic impulse came from Italy. In 1557 appeared *Tottel's Miscellany*, containing songs and sonnets by a "new company of courtly makers." Most of the pieces in the volume had been written years before by gentlemen of Henry VIII.'s court, and circulated in manuscript. The two chief contributors were Sir Thomas Wiat, at one time English embassador to Spain, and that brilliant noble, Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, who was beheaded in 1547 for quartering the king's arms with his own. Both of them were dead long before their work was printed. The verses in *Tottel's Miscellany* show very clearly the influence of Italian poetry. We have seen that Chaucer took subjects and something more from Boccaccio and Petrarch. But the sonnet, which Petrarch had brought to perfection, was first introduced into England by Wiat. There was a great revival of sonneteering in Italy in the 16th century, and a number of Wiat's poems were adaptations of the sonnets and *canzoni* of Petrarch and later poets. Others were imitations of Horace's satires and epistles. Surrey introduced the Italian blank verse into English in his translation of two books of the *Æneid*. The love poetry of *Tottel's Miscellany* is polished and artificial, like the models which it followed. Dante's Beatrice was a

child, and so was Petrarch's Laura. Following their example, Surrey addressed his love complaints, by way of compliment, to a little girl of the noble Irish family of Geraldine. The Amourists, or love sonneteers, dwelt on the metaphysics of the passion with a tedious minuteness, and the conventional nature of their sighs and complaints may often be guessed by an experienced reader from the titles of their poems: "Description of the restless state of a lover, with suit to his lady to rue on his dying heart;" Hell tormenteth not the damned ghosts so sore as unkindness the lover;" "The lover prayeth not to be disdained, refused, mistrusted nor forsaken," etc. The most genuine utterance of Surrey was his poem written while imprisoned in Windsor—a cage where so many a song-bird has grown vocal. And Wiat's little piece of eight lines, "Of his Return from Spain," is worth reams of his amatory affectations. Nevertheless the writers in *Tottel's Miscellany* were real reformers of English poetry. They introduced new models of style and new metrical forms, and they broke away from the mediæval traditions which had hitherto obtained. The language had undergone some changes since Chaucer's time, which made his scansion obsolete. The accent of many words of French origin, like *natúre*, *courage*, *virtúe*, *matére*, had shifted to the first syllable, and the *e* of the final syllables *ës*, *ën*, *ëd*, and *ë*, had largely disappeared. But the language of poetry tends to keep up archaisms of this kind, and in Stephen Hawes, who wrote a century after Chaucer, we still find such lines as these:

> But he my strokës might right well endure,
> He was so great and huge of puissánce.[1]

Hawes's practice is variable in this respect, and so is his contemporary, Skelton's. But in Wiat and Surrey, who wrote only a few years later, the reader first feels sure

[1] Trisyllable—like crëatúre neighëboúr, etc., in Chaucer.

that he is reading verse pronounced quite in the modern fashion.

But Chaucer's example still continued potent. Spenser revived many of his obsolete words, both in his pastorals and in his *Faerie Queene*, thereby imparting an antique remoteness to his diction, but incurring Ben Jonson's censure, that he "writ no language." A poem that stands midway between Spenser and the late mediæval work of Chaucer's school—such as Hawes's *Passetyme of Pleasure* —was the induction contributed by Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, in 1563 to a collection of narrative poems called the *Mirrour for Magistrates*. The whole series was the work of many hands, modeled upon Lydgate's *Falls of Princes* (taken from Boccaccio), and was designed as a warning to great men of the fickleness of fortune, The *Induction* is the only noteworthy part of it. It was an allegory, written in Chaucer's seven-lined stanza, and described, with a somber imaginative power, the figure of Sorrow, her abode in the "griesly lake" of Avernus, and her attendants, Remorse, Dread, Old Age, etc. Sackville was the author of the first regular English tragedy *Gorboduc;* and it was at his request that Ascham wrote the *Schoolmaster*.

Italian poetry also fed the genius of Edmund Spenser (1552–1599). While a student at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, he had translated some of the *Visions of Petrarch*, and the *Visions of Bellay*, a French poet, but it was only in 1579 that the publication of his *Shepheard's Calendar* announced the coming of a great original poet, the first since Chaucer. The *Shepheard's Calendar* was a pastoral in twelve eclogues —one for each month in the year. There had been a revival of pastoral poetry in Italy and France, but, with one or two insignificant exceptions, Spenser's were the first bucolics in English. Two of his eclogues were paraphrases from Clement Marot, a French Protestant poet, whose psalms were greatly in fashion at the court of Francis I. The pastoral machinery had been used by Vergil and by his modern imitators, not merely to portray the loves of Strephon and Chloe, or the idyllic charms of rustic life; but also as a vehicle of compliment, elegy, satire, and personal allusion of many kinds. Spenser, accordingly, alluded to his friends, Sidney and Harvey, as the shepherds Astrophel and Hobbinol; paid court to Queen Elizabeth as Cynthia; and introduced, in the form of anagrams, names of the High-Church Bishop of London, Aylmer, and the Low-Church Archbishop Grindal. The conventional pastoral is a somewhat delicate exotic in English poetry, and represents a very unreal Arcadia. Before the end of the 17th century the squeak of the oaten pipe had become a burden, and the only poem of the kind which it is easy to read without some impatience is Milton's wonderful *Lycidas*. The *Shepheard's Calendar*, however, though it belonged to an artificial order of literature, had the unmistakable stamp of genius in its style. There was a broad, easy mastery of the resources of language, a grace, fluency, and music which were new to English poetry. It was written while Spenser was in service with the Earl of Leicester, and enjoying the friendship of his nephew, the all-accomplished Sidney and it was, perhaps, composed at the latter's country seat of Penshurst. In the following year Spenser went to Ireland as private secretary to Arthur, Lord Grey of Wilton, who had just been appointed Lord Deputy of that kingdom. After filling several clerkships in the Irish government, Spenser received a grant of the castle and estate of Kilcolman, a part of the forfeited lands of the rebel Earl of Desmond. Here, among landscapes richly wooded, like the scenery of his own fairy land, "under the cooly shades of the green alders by the Mulla's shore," Sir Walter Raleigh found him, in 1589, busy upon his *Faerie Queene*. In his poem, *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*, Spenser tells, in pastoral language, how "the shepherd of the ocean" persuaded him to go to London, where

he presented him to the queen, under whose patronage the first three books of his great poem were printed, in 1590. A volume of minor poems, entitled *Complaints*, followed in 1591, and the three remaining books of the *Faerie Queene* in 1596. In 1595–1596 he published also his *Daphnaida*, *Prothalamion*, and the four hymns on *Love* and *Beauty*, and on *Heavenly Love* and *Heavenly Beauty*. In 1598, in Tyrone's rebellion, Kilcolman Castle was sacked and burned, and Spenser, with his family, fled to London, where he died in January, 1599.

The *Faerie Queene* reflects, perhaps, more fully than any other English work, the many-sided literary influences of the Renascence. It was the blossom of a richly composite culture. Its immediate models were Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, the first forty cantos of which were published in 1515, and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, printed in 1581. Both of these were, in subject, romances of chivalry, the first based upon the old Charlemagne epos—Orlando being identical with the hero of the French *Chanson de Roland:* the second upon the history of the first crusade, and the recovery of the Holy City from the Saracen. But in both of them there was a splendor of diction and a wealth of coloring quite unknown to the rude mediæval romances. Ariosto and Tasso wrote with the great epics of Homer and Vergil constantly in mind, and all about them was the brilliant light of Italian art, in its early freshness and power. The *Faerie Queene*, too, was a tale of knight-errantry. Its hero was King Arthur, and its pages swarm with the familiar adventures and figures of Gothic romance: distressed ladies and their champions, combats with dragons and giants, enchanted castles, magic rings, charmed wells, forest hermitages, etc. But side by side with these appear the fictions of Greek mythology and the personified abstractions of fashionable allegory. Knights, squires, wizards, hamadryads, satyrs, and river gods, Idleness, Gluttony, and Superstition

jostle each other in Spenser's fairy land. Descents to the infernal shades, in the manner of Homer and Vergil, alternate with descriptions of the Palace of Pride in the manner of the *Romaunt of the Rose*. But Spenser's imagination was a powerful spirit, and held all these diverse elements in solution. He removed them to an ideal sphere "apart from place, withholding time," where they seem all alike equally real, the dateless conceptions of the poet's dream.

The poem was to have been "a continued allegory or dark conceit," in twelve books, the hero of each book representing one of the twelve moral virtues. Only six books and the fragment of a seventh were written. By way of complimenting his patrons and securing contemporary interest, Spenser undertook to make his allegory a double one, personal and historical, as well as moral or abstract. Thus Gloriana, the Queen of Faery, stands not only for Glory but for Elizabeth, to whom the poem was dedicated. Prince Arthur is Leicester, as well as Magnificence. Duessa is Falsehood, but also Mary Queen of Scots. Grantorto is Philip II. of Spain. Sir Artegal is Justice, but likewise he is Arthur Grey de Wilton. Other characters shadow forth Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Philip Sidney, Henry IV. of France, etc.; and such public events as the revolt of the Spanish Netherlands, the Irish rebellion, the execution of Mary Stuart, and the rising of the northern Catholic houses against Elizabeth are told in parable. In this way the poem reflects the spiritual struggle of the time, the warfare of young England against popery and Spain.

The allegory is not always easy to follow. It is kept up most carefully in the first two books, but it sat rather lightly on Spenser's conscience, and is not of the essence of the poem. It is an ornament put on from the outside and detachable at pleasure. The "Spenserian stanza," in which the *Faerie Queene* was written, was adapted from the *ottava rima* of Ariosto. Spenser changed somewhat the order of

the rimes in the first eight lines and added a ninth line of twelve syllables, thus affording more space to the copious luxuriance of his style and the long-drawn sweetness of his verse. It was his instinct to dilate and elaborate every image to the utmost, and his similies, especially—each of which usually fills a whole stanza—have the pictorial amplitude of Homer's. Spenser was, in fact, a great painter. His poetry is almost purely sensuous. The personages in the *Faerie Queene* are not characters, but richly colored figures, moving to the accompaniment of delicious music, in an atmosphere of serene remoteness from the earth. Charles Lamb said that he was the poet's poet, that is, he appealed wholly to the artistic sense and to the love of beauty. Not until Keats did another English poet appear so filled with the passion for outward shapes of beauty, so exquisitively alive to all impressions of the senses. Spenser was, in some respects, more an Italian than an English poet. It is said that the Venetian gondoliers still sing the stanzas of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata.* It is not easy to imagine the Thames bargees chanting passages from the *Faerie Queene.* Those English poets who have taken strongest hold upon their public have done so by their profound interpretation of our common life. But Spenser escaped altogether from reality into a region of pure imagination. His aerial creations resemble the blossoms of the epiphytic orchids, which have no root in the soil, but draw their nourishment from the moisture of the air.

> *Their* birth was of the womb of morning dew,
> And *their* conception of the glorious prime.

Among the minor poems of Spenser the most delightful were his *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion.* The first was a "spousal verse," made for the double wedding of the Ladies Catherine and Elizabeth Somerset, whom the poet figures as two white swans that come swimming down the Thames,

the surface of which the nymphs strew with lilies, till it appears "like a bride's chamber-floor."

> Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,

is the burden of each stanza. The *Epithalamion* was Spenser's own marriage song, written to crown his series of *Amoretti* or love sonnets, and is the most splendid hymn of triumphant love in the language. Hardly less beautiful than these was *Muiopotmos; or, the Fate of the Butterfly,* an addition to the classical myth of Arachne, the spider. The four hymns in praise of *Love* and *Beauty, Heavenly Love* and *Heavenly Beauty,* are also stately and noble poems, but by reason of their abstractness and the Platonic mysticism which they express, are less generally pleasing than the others mentioned. Allegory and mysticism had no natural affiliation with Spenser's genius. He was a seer of visions, of *images* full, brilliant, and distinct; and not, like Bunyan, Dante, or Hawthorne, a projector into bodily shapes of *ideas,* typical and emblematic; the shadows which haunt the conscience and the mind.

---

1. English Writers. Henry Morley. Cassell & Co., 1887. 4 vols.

2. Skeat's Specimens of English Literature, 1394–1579 (Clarendon Press Series.) Oxford.

3. Morte Darthur. London: Macmillan & Co., 1868. (Globe Edition.)

4. English and Scottish Ballads. Edited by Francis J. Child. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1859. 8 vols.

5. Spenser's Poetical Works. Edited by Richard Morris. London: Macmillan & Co., 1877. (Globe Edition.)

6. "A Royal Poet." In Washington Irving's Sketch Book. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1864.