

Bacon's reason was illuminated by a powerful imagination, and his noble English rises now and then, as in his essay *On Death*, into eloquence—the eloquence of pure thought, touched gravely and afar off by emotion. In general, the atmosphere of his intellect is that *lumen siccum* which he loved to commend, “not drenched or bloodied by the affections.” Dr. Johnson said that the wine of Bacon's writings was a dry wine.

A popular class of books in the 17th century were “characters” or “witty descriptions of the properties of sundry persons,” such as the Good Schoolmaster, the Clown, the Country Magistrate; much as in some modern *Heads of the People*, where Douglas Jerrold or Leigh Hunt sketches the Medical Student, the Monthly Nurse, etc. A still more modern instance of the kind is George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, which derives its title from the Greek philosopher, Theophrastus, whose character-sketches were the original models of this kind of literature. The most popular character-book in Europe in the 17th century was La Bruyère's *Caractères*. But this was not published till 1688. In England the fashion had been set in 1614, by the *Characters* of Sir Thomas Overbury, who died by poison the year before his book was printed. One of Overbury's sketches—the *Fair and Happy Milkmaid*—is justly celebrated for its old-world sweetness and quaintness. “Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new-made hay-cock. She makes her hand hard with labor, and her heart soft with pity; and when winter evenings fall early, sitting at her merry wheel, she sings defiance to the giddy wheel of fortune. She bestows her year's wages at next fair, and, in choosing her garments, counts no bravery in the world like decency. The garden and bee-hive are all her physic and surgery, and she lives the longer for it. She dares go alone and unfold sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none; yet to say

truth, she is never alone, but is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts and prayers, but short ones. Thus lives she, and all her care is she may die in the spring-time, to have store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet.”

England was still merry England in the times of good Queen Bess, and rang with old songs, such as kept this milk-maid company; songs, said Bishop Joseph Hall, which were “sung to the wheel and sung unto the pail.” Shakspeare loved their simple minstrelsy; he put some of them into the mouth of Ophelia, and scattered snatches of them through his plays, and wrote others like them himself:

Now, good Cesario, but that piece of song,
That old and antique song we heard last night.
Methinks it did relieve my passion much,
More than light airs and recollected terms
Of these most brisk and giddy-paced times.
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain.
The knitters and the spinners in the sun
And the free maids that weave their threads with bones
Do use to chant it; it is silly sooth¹
And dallies with the innocence of love
Like the old age.

Many of these songs, so natural, fresh, and spontaneous, together with sonnets and other more elaborate forms of lyrical verse, were printed in miscellanies, such as the *Pasionate Pilgrim*, *England's Helicon*, and Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody*. Some were anonymous, or were by poets of whom little more is known than their names. Others were by well-known writers, and others, again, were strewn through the plays of Lyly, Shakspeare, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, and other dramatists. Series of love sonnets, like Spenser's *Amoretti* and Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, were written by Shakspeare, Daniel, Drayton, Drummond, Constable, Watson, and others, all dedicated to some mistress real or imaginary. Pastorals, too, were written in great number, such as

¹ Simple truth.

William Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* and *Shepherd's Pipe* (1613-1616) and Marlowe's charmingly rococo little idyl, *The Passionate Shepherd to his Love*, which Shakspeare quoted in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and to which Sir Walter Raleigh wrote a reply. There were love stories in verse, like Arthur Brooke's *Romeo and Juliet* (the source of Shakspeare's tragedy), Marlowe's fragment, *Hero and Leander*, and Shakspeare's *Venus and Adonis*, and *Rape of Lucrece*, the first of these on an Italian and the other three on classical subjects, though handled in any thing but a classical manner. Wordsworth said finely of Shakspeare, that he "could not have written an epic: he would have died of a plethora of thought." Shakspeare's two narrative poems, indeed, are by no means models of their kind. The current of the story is choked at every turn, though it be with golden sand. It is significant of his dramatic habit of mind that dialogue and soliloquy usurp the place of narration, and that, in the *Rape of Lucrece* especially, the poet lingers over the analysis of motives and feelings, instead of hastening on with the action, as Chaucer, or any born story-teller, would have done.

In Marlowe's poem there is the same spendthrift fancy, although not the same subtlety. In the first two divisions of the poem the story does, in some sort, get forward; but in the continuation, by George Chapman (who wrote the last four "sestiads"),¹ the path is utterly lost, "with woodbine and the gadding vine o'ergrown." One is reminded that modern poetry, if it has lost in richness, has gained in directness, when one compares any passage in Marlowe and Chapman's *Hero and Leander* with Byron's ringing lines:

The wind is high on Helle's wave,
As on that night of stormy water,
When love, who sent, forgot to save
The young, the beautiful, the brave,
The lonely hope of Sestos' daughter.

¹ From Sestos on the Hellespont, where Hero dwelt.

Marlowe's continuator, Chapman, wrote a number of plays, but he is best remembered by his royal translation of Homer, issued in parts from 1598-1615. This was not so much a literal translation of the Greek, as a great Elizabethan poem, inspired by Homer. It has Homer's fire, but not his simplicity; the energy of Chapman's fancy kindling him to run beyond his text into all manner of figures and conceits. It was written, as has been said, as Homer would have written if he had been an Englishman of Chapman's time. Keats's fine ode, *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, is well known. In his translation of the *Odyssey*, Chapman employed the ten-syllabled heroic line chosen by most of the standard translators; but for the *Iliad* he used the long "fourteener." Certainly all later versions—Pope's and Cowper's and Lord Derby's and Bryant's—seem pale against the glowing exuberance of Chapman's English, which degenerates easily into sing-song in the hands of a feeble metrist. In Chapman it is often harsh, but seldom tame, and in many passages it reproduces wonderfully the ocean-like roll of Homer's hexameters.

From his bright helm and shield did burn a most unwearied fire,
Like rich Autumnus' golden lamp, whose brightness men admire
Past all the other host of stars when, with his cheerful face
Fresh washed in lofty ocean waves, he doth the sky enchase.

The national pride in the achievements of Englishmen, by land and sea, found expression, not only in prose chronicles and in books, like Stow's *Survey of London*, and Harrison's *Description of England* (prefixed to Holinshed's *Chronicle*), but in long historical and descriptive poems, like William Warner's *Albion's England*, 1586; Samuel Daniel's *History of the Civil Wars*, 1595-1602; Michael Drayton's *Barons' Wars*, 1596, *England's Heroical Epistles*, 1598, and *Polyolbion*, 1613. The very plan of these works was fatal to their success. It is not easy to digest history and geography into

poetry. Drayton was the most considerable poet of the three, but his *Polyolbion* was nothing more than a "gazeteer in rime," a topographical survey of England and Wales, with tedious personifications of rivers, mountains, and valleys, in thirty books and nearly one hundred thousand lines. It was Drayton who said of Marlowe, that he "had in him those brave translunary things that the first poets had;" and there are brave things in Drayton, but they are only occasional passages, oases among dreary wastes of sand. His *Agincourt* is a spirited war-song, and his *Nymphidia; or, Court of Faery*, is not unworthy of comparison with Drake's *Culprit Fay*, and is interesting as bringing in Oberon and Robin Goodfellow, and the popular fairy lore of Shakspeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The "well-lingued Daniel," of whom Ben Jonson said that he was "a good honest man, but no poet," wrote, however, one fine meditative piece, his *Epistle to the Countess of Cumberland*, a sermon apparently on the text of the Roman poet Lucretius's famous passage in praise of philosophy,

Suave, mari magno, turbantibus æquora ventis,
E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem.

But the Elizabethan genius found its fullest and truest expression in the drama. It is a common phenomenon in the history of literature that some old literary form or mold will run along for centuries without having any thing poured into it worth keeping, until the moment comes when the genius of the time seizes it and makes it the vehicle of immortal thought and passion. Such was in England the fortune of the stage play. At a time when Chaucer was writing character-sketches that were really dramatic, the formal drama consisted of rude miracle plays that had no literary quality whatever. These were taken from the Bible, and acted at first by the priests as illustrations of Scripture history and additions to the church service on feasts and saints'

days. Afterward the town guilds, or incorporated trades, took hold of them, and produced them annually on scaffolds in the open air. In some English cities, as Coventry and Chester, they continued to be performed almost to the close of the 16th century. And in the celebrated Passion Play at Oberammergau, in Bavaria, we have an instance of a miracle play that has survived to our own day. These were followed by the moral plays, in which allegorical characters, such as Clergy, Lusty Juventus, Riches, Folly, and Good Demeanaunce were the persons of the drama. The comic character in the miracle plays had been the Devil, and he was retained in some of the moralities side by side with the abstract vice, who became the clown or fool of Shaksperian comedy. The "formal Vice, Iniquity," as Shakspeare calls him, had it for his business to belabor the roaring Devil with his wooden sword:

. . . with his dagger of lath
In his rage and his wrath
Cries 'Aha!' to the Devil,
'Pare your nails, Goodman Evil!'

He survives also in the harlequin of the pantomimes, and in Mr. Punch, of the puppet shows, who kills the Devil and carries him off on his back, when the latter is sent to fetch him to hell for his crimes.

Masques and interludes—the latter a species of short farce—were popular at the court of Henry VIII. Elizabeth was often entertained at the universities or at the inns of court with Latin plays, or with translations from Seneca, Euripides, and Ariosto. Original comedies and tragedies began to be written, modeled upon Terence and Seneca, and chronicle histories founded on the annals of English kings. There was a master of the revels at court, whose duty it was to select plays to be performed before the queen, and these were acted by the children of the Royal Chapel, or by the choir boys of St. Paul's Cathedral. These early plays are of inter-

est to students of the history of the drama, and throw much light upon the construction of later plays, like Shakspeare's; but they are rude and inartistic, and without any literary value.

There were also private companies of actors maintained by wealthy noblemen, like the Earl of Leicester, and bands of strolling players, who acted in inn-yards and bear-gardens. It was not until stationary theaters were built and stock companies of actors regularly licensed and established, that any plays were produced which deserve the name of literature. In 1576 the first London play-houses, known as the Theater and the Curtain, were erected in the suburb of Shoreditch, outside the city walls. Later the Rose, the Hope, the Globe, and the Swan were built on the Bankside, across the Thames, and play-goers resorting to them were accustomed to "take boat." These locations were chosen in order to get outside the jurisdiction of the mayor and corporation, who were Puritans, and determined in their opposition to the stage. For the same reason the Blackfriars, belonging to the company that owned the Globe—the company in which Shakspeare was a stockholder—was built, about 1596, within the "liberties" of the dissolved monastery of the Blackfriars.

These early theaters were of the rudest construction. The six-penny spectators, or "groundlings," stood in the yard or pit, which had neither floor nor roof. The shilling spectators sat on the stage, where they were accommodated with stools and tobacco pipes, and whence they chaffed the actors or the "opposed rascality" in the yard. There was no scenery, and the female parts were taken by boys. Plays were acted in the afternoon. A placard, with the letters "Venice," or "Rome," or whatever, indicated the place of the action. With such rude appliances must Shakspeare bring before his audience the midnight battlements of Elsinore and the moonlit garden of the Capulets. The dramatists had to throw themselves upon the imagination of their public, and it says

much for the imaginative temper of the public of that day, that it responded to the appeal. It suffered the poet to transport it over wide intervals of space and time, and "with aid of some few foot and half-foot words, fight over York and Lancaster's long jars." Pedantry undertook, even at the very beginnings of the Elizabethan drama, to shackle it with the so-called rules of Aristotle, or classical unities of time and place, to make it keep violent action off the stage and comedy distinct from tragedy. But the playwrights appealed from the critics to the truer sympathies of the audience, and they decided for freedom and action, rather than restraint and recitation. Hence our national drama is of Shakspeare and not of Racine. By 1603 there were twelve play-houses in London in full blast, although the city then numbered only one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants.

Fresh plays were produced every year. The theater was more to the Englishmen of that time than it has ever been before or since. It was his club, his novel, his newspaper, all in one. No great drama has ever flourished apart from a living stage, and it was fortunate that the Elizabethan dramatists were, almost all of them, actors, and familiar with stage effect. Even the few exceptions, like Beaumont and Fletcher, who were young men of good birth and fortune, and not dependent on their pens, were probably intimate with the actors, lived in a theatrical atmosphere, and knew practically how plays should be put on.

It had now become possible to earn a livelihood as an actor and playwright. Richard Burbage and Edward Alleyn, the leading actors of their generation, made large fortunes. Shakspeare himself made enough from his share in the profits of the Globe to retire with a competence, some seven years before his death, and purchase a handsome property in his native Stratford. Accordingly, shortly after 1580, a number of men of real talent began to write for the stage as a career. These were young graduates of the universities,

Marlowe, Greene, Peele, Kyd, Lyly, Lodge, and others, who came up to town and led a bohemian life as actors and playwrights. Most of them were wild and dissipated and ended in wretchedness. Peele died of a disease brought on by his evil courses; Greene, in extreme destitution, from a surfeit of Rhenish wine and pickled herring, and Marlowe was stabbed in a tavern brawl.

The Euphuist Lyly produced eight plays between 1584 and 1601. They were written for court entertainments, mostly in prose and on mythological subjects. They have little dramatic power, but the dialogue is brisk and vivacious, and there are several pretty songs in them. All the characters talk Ephuism. The best of these was *Alexander and Campaspe*, the plot of which is briefly as follows. Alexander has fallen in love with his beautiful captive, Campaspe, and employs the artist Apelles to paint her portrait. During the sittings Apelles becomes enamored of his subject and declares his passion, which is returned. Alexander discovers their secret, but magnanimously forgives the treason and joins the lovers' hands. The situation is a good one, and capable of strong treatment in the hands of a real dramatist. But Lyly slips smoothly over the crisis of the action and, in place of passionate scenes, gives us clever discourses and soliloquies, or, at best, a light interchange of question and answer, full of conceits, repartees, and double meanings. For example:

"*Apel.* Whom do you love best in the world?"

"*Camp.* He that made me last in the world.

"*Apel.* That was God.

"*Camp.* I had thought it had been a man," etc.

Lyly's service to the drama consisted in his introduction of an easy and sparkling prose as the language of high comedy, and Shakspeare's indebtedness to the fashion thus set is seen in such passages as the wit combats between Benedict and Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*, greatly superior as they are to any thing of the kind in Lyly.

The most important of the dramatists who were Shakspeare's forerunners, or early contemporaries, was Christopher or—as he was familiarly called—Kit Marlowe. Born in the same year with Shakspeare (1564), he died in 1593, at which date his great successor is thought to have written no original plays, except the *Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labour's Lost*. Marlowe first popularized blank verse as the language of tragedy in his *Tamburlaine*, written before 1587, and in subsequent plays he brought it to a degree of strength and flexibility which left little for Shakspeare to do but to take it as he found it. *Tamburlaine* was a crude, violent piece, full of exaggeration and bombast, but with passages here and there of splendid declamation, justifying Ben Jonson's phrase, "Marlowe's mighty line." Jonson, however, ridiculed, in his *Discoveries*, the "scenical strutting and furious vociferation" of Marlowe's hero; and Shakspeare put a quotation from *Tamburlaine* into the mouth of his ranting Pistol. Marlowe's *Edward II.* was the most regularly constructed and evenly written of his plays. It was the best historical drama on the stage before Shakspeare, and not undeserving of the comparison which it has provoked with the latter's *Richard II.* But the most interesting of Marlowe's plays, to a modern reader, is the *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. The subject is the same as in Goethe's *Faust*, and Goethe, who knew the English play, spoke of it as greatly planned. The opening of Marlowe's *Faustus* is very similar to Goethe's. His hero, wearied with unprofitable studies, and filled with a mighty lust for knowledge and the enjoyment of life, sells his soul to the Devil in return for a few years of supernatural power. The tragic irony of the story might seem to lie in the frivolous use which Faustus makes of his dearly bought power, wasting it in practical jokes and feats of legerdemain; but of this Marlowe was probably unconscious. The love story of Margaret, which is the central point of Goethe's drama, is entirely wanting in Marlowe's, and so is

the subtle conception of Goethe's Mephistophiles. Marlowe's handling of the supernatural is materialistic and downright, as befitted an age which believed in witchcraft. The greatest part of the English *Faustus* is the last scene, in which the agony and terror of suspense with which the magician awaits the stroke of the clock that signals his doom are powerfully drawn.

O, lente, lente currite, noctis equi!
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike. . . .
O soul, be changed into little water-drops,
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found!

Marlowe's genius was passionate and irregular. He had no humor, and the comic portions of *Faustus* are scenes of low buffoonery.

George Peele's masterpiece, *David and Bethsabe*, was also, in many respects, a fine play, though its beauties were poetic rather than dramatic, consisting not in the characterization—which is feeble—but in the Eastern luxuriance of the imagery. There is one noble chorus—

O proud revolt of a presumptuous man,

which reminds one of passages in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, and occasionally Peele rises to such high Æschylean audacities as this:

At him the thunder shall discharge his bolt,
And his fair spouse, with bright and fiery wings,
Sit ever burning on his hateful bones.

Robert Greene was a very unequal writer. His plays are slovenly and careless in construction, and he puts classical allusions into the mouths of milkmaids and serving boys, with the grotesque pedantry and want of keeping common among the playwrights of the early stage. He has, notwithstanding, in his comedy parts, more natural lightness and grace than either Marlowe or Peele. In his *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, there is a fresh breath, as of the green

English country, in such passages as the description of Oxford, the scene at Harleston Fair, and the picture of the dairy in the keeper's lodge at merry Fressingfield.

In all these ante-Shaksperian dramatists there was a defect of art proper to the first comers in a new literary departure. As compared not only with Shakspeare, but with later writers, who had the inestimable advantage of his example, their work was full of imperfection, hesitation, experiment. Marlowe was probably, in native genius, the equal at least of Fletcher or Webster, but his plays, as a whole, are certainly not equal to theirs. They wrote in a more developed state of the art. But the work of this early school settled the shape which the English drama was to take. It fixed the practice and traditions of the national theater. It decided that the drama was to deal with the whole of life, the real and the ideal, tragedy and comedy, prose and verse, in the same play, without limitations of time, place, and action. It decided that the English play was to be an action, and not a dialogue, bringing boldly upon the mimic scene feasts, dances, processions, hangings, riots, plays within plays, drunken revels, beatings, battle, murder, and sudden death. It established blank verse, with occasional riming couplets at the close of a scene or of a long speech, as the language of the tragedy and high comedy parts, and prose as the language of the low comedy and "business" parts. And it introduced songs, a feature of which Shakspeare made exquisite use. Shakspeare, indeed, like all great poets, invented no new form of literature, but touched old forms to finer purposes, refining every thing, discarding nothing. Even the old chorus and dumb show he employed, though sparingly, as also the old jig, or comic song, which the clown used to give between the acts.

Of the life of William Shakspeare, the greatest dramatic poet of the world, so little is known that it has been possible for ingenious persons to construct a theory—and support it