

decorative methods, to give up rime for blank verse. His latest poem, *Samson Agonistes*, is a metrical study of the highest interest.

Milton was not quite alone among the poets of his time in espousing the popular cause. Andrew Marvell, who was his assistant in the Latin secretaryship and sat in Parliament for Hull, after the Restoration, was a good Republican, and wrote a fine *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*. There is also a rare imaginative quality in his *Song of the Exiles in Bermuda*, *Thoughts in a Garden*, and *The Girl Describes her Fawn*. George Wither, who was imprisoned for his satires, also took the side of the Parliament, but there is little that is distinctively Puritan in his poetry.

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CHAPTER V.

FROM THE RESTORATION TO THE DEATH OF POPE.

1660-1744.

THE Stuart Restoration was a period of descent from poetry to prose, from passion and imagination to wit and the understanding. The serious, exalted mood of the civil war and Commonwealth had spent itself and issued in disillusion. There followed a generation of wits, logical, skeptical, and prosaic, without earnestness, as without principle. The characteristic literature of such a time is criticism, satire, and burlesque, and such, indeed, continued to be the course of English literary history for a century after the return of the Stuarts. The age was not a stupid one, but one of active inquiry. The Royal Society, for the cultivation of the natural sciences, was founded in 1662. There were able divines in the pulpit and at the universities—Barrow, Tillotson, Stillingfleet, South, and others; scholars, like Bentley; historians, like Clarendon and Burnet; scientists, like Boyle and Newton; philosophers, like Hobbes and Locke. But of poetry, in any high sense of the word, there was little between the time of Milton and the time of Goldsmith and Gray.

The English writers of this period were strongly influenced by the contemporary literature of France, by the comedies of Molière, the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, and the satires, epistles, and versified essays of Boileau. Many of the Restoration writers—Waller, Cowley, Davenant, Wycherley, Villiers, and others—had been in France during the exile, and brought back with them French tastes. John

Dryden (1631-1700), who is the great literary figure of his generation, has been called the first of the moderns. From the reign of Charles II., indeed, we may date the beginnings of modern English life. What we call "society" was forming, the town, the London world. "Coffee, which makes the politician wise," had just been introduced, and the ordinaries of Ben Jonson's time gave way to coffee-houses, like Will's and Button's, which became the head-quarters of literary and political gossip. The two great English parties, as we know them to-day, were organized: the words Whig and Tory date from this reign. French etiquette and fashions came in, and French phrases of convenience—such as *coup de grace*, *bel esprit*, etc.—began to appear in English prose. Literature became intensely urban and partisan. It reflected city life, the disputes of faction, and the personal quarrels of authors. The politics of the great rebellion had been of heroic proportions, and found fitting expression in song. But in the Revolution of 1688 the issues were constitutional and to be settled by the arguments of lawyers. Measures were in question rather than principles, and there was little inspiration to the poet in Exclusion Bills and Acts of Settlement.

Court and society, in the reign of Charles II. and James II., were shockingly dissolute, and in literature, as in life, the reaction against Puritanism went to great extremes. The social life of the time is faithfully reflected in the diary of Samuel Pepys. He was a simple-minded man, the son of a London tailor, and became, himself, secretary to the admiralty. His diary was kept in cipher, and published only in 1825. Being written for his own eye, it is singularly outspoken; and its *naïve*, gossipy, confidential tone makes it a most diverting book, as it is, historically, a most valuable one.

Perhaps the most popular book of its time was Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663-1664), a burlesque romance in ridicule of the Puritans. The king carried a copy of it in his pocket,

and Pepys testifies that it was quoted and praised on all sides. Ridicule of the Puritans was nothing new. Zeal-of-the-land Busy, in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, is an early instance of the kind. There was nothing laughable about the earnestness of men like Cromwell, Milton, Algernon Sidney, and Sir Henry Vane. But even the French Revolution had its humors; and as the English Puritan Revolution gathered head and the extremest sectaries pressed to the front—Quakers, New Lights, Fifth Monarchy Men, Ranters, etc.,—its grotesque sides came uppermost. Butler's hero is a Presbyterian justice of the peace who sallies forth with his secretary, Ralpho—an Independent and Anabaptist—like Don Quixote with Sancho Panza, to suppress May games and bear-baitings. (Macaulay, it will be remembered, said that the Puritans disapproved of bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.) The humor of *Hudibras* is not of the finest. The knight and the squire are discomfited in broadly comic adventures, hardly removed from the rough physical drolleries of a pantomime or circus. The deep heart-laughter of Cervantes, the pathos on which his humor rests, is, of course, not to be looked for in Butler. But he had wit of a sharp, logical kind, and his style surprises with all manner of verbal antics. He is almost as great a phrase-master as Pope, though in a coarser kind. His verse is a smart doggerel, and his poem has furnished many stock sayings, as for example,

'Tis strange what difference there can be
'Twixt tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee.

Hudibras has had many imitators, not the least successful of whom was the American John Trumbull, in his revolutionary satire, *M'Fingal*, some couplets of which are generally quoted as Butler's, as, for example,

No man e'er felt the halter draw
With good opinion of the law.

The rebound against Puritanism is seen no less plainly in the drama of the Restoration, and the stage now took vengeance for its enforced silence under the Protectorate. Two theaters were opened under the patronage, respectively, of the king and of his brother, the Duke of York. The manager of the latter, Sir William Davenant—who had fought on the king's side, been knighted for his services, escaped to France, and was afterward captured and imprisoned in England for two years—had managed to evade the law against stage plays as early as 1656, by presenting his *Siege of Rhodes* as an "opera," with instrumental music and dialogue in recitative, after a fashion newly sprung up in Italy. This he brought out again in 1661, with the dialogue recast into riming couplets in the French fashion. Movable painted scenery was now introduced from France, and actresses took the female parts formerly played by boys. This last innovation was said to be at the request of the king, one of whose mistresses, the famous Nell Gwynne, was the favorite actress at the King's Theater.

Upon the stage, thus reconstructed, the so-called "classical" rules of the French theater were followed, at least in theory. The Louis XIV. writers were not purely creative, like Shakspeare or his contemporaries in England, but critical and self-conscious. The Academy had been formed in 1636 for the preservation of the purity of the French language, and discussion abounded on the principles and methods of literary art. Corneille not only wrote tragedies, but essays on tragedy, and one in particular on the *Three Unities*. Dryden followed his example in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* (1667), in which he treated of the unities, and argued for the use of rime in tragedy in preference to blank verse. His own practice varied. Most of his tragedies were written in rime, but in the best of them, *All for Love*, founded on Shakspeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, he returned to blank verse. One of the principles of the classical school was to

keep comedy and tragedy distinct. The tragic dramatists of the Restoration, Dryden, Howard, Settle, Crowne, Lee, and others, composed what they called "heroic plays," such as the *Indian Emperor*, the *Conquest of Granada*, the *Duke of Lerma*, the *Empress of Morocco*, the *Destruction of Jerusalem*, *Nero*, and the *Rival Queens*. The titles of these pieces indicate their character. Their heroes were great historic personages. Subject and treatment were alike remote from nature and real life. The diction was stilted and artificial, and pompous declamation took the place of action and genuine passion. The tragedies of Racine seem chill to an Englishman brought up on Shakspeare, but to see how great an artist Racine was, in his own somewhat narrow way, one has but to compare his *Phedre*, or *Iphigenie*, with Dryden's ranting tragedy of *Tyrannic Love*. These bombastic heroic plays were made the subject of a capital burlesque, the *Rehearsal*, by George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, acted in 1671 at the King's Theater. The indebtedness of the English stage to the French did not stop with a general adoption of its dramatic methods, but extended to direct imitation and translation. Dryden's comedy, *An Evening's Love*, was adapted from Thomas Corneille's *Le Feint Astrologue*, and his *Sir Martin Mar-all*, from Molière's *L'Etourdi*. Shadwell borrowed his *Miser* from Molière, and Otway made versions of Racine's *Bèrènice* and Molière's *Fourberies de Scapin*. Wycherley's *Country Wife* and *Plain Dealer* although not translations, were based, in a sense, upon Molière's *Ecole des Femmes* and *Le Misanthrope*. The only one of the tragic dramatists of the Restoration who prolonged the traditions of the Elizabethan stage was Otway, whose *Venice Preserved*, written in blank verse, still keeps the boards. There are fine passages in Dryden's heroic plays, passages weighty in thought and nobly sonorous in language. There is one great scene (between Antony and Ventidius) in his *All for Love*. And one, at least, of his comedies, the *Spanish*

Friar, is skillfully constructed. But his nature was not pliable enough for the drama, and he acknowledged that, in writing for the stage, he "forced his genius."

In sharp contrast with these heroic plays was the comic drama of the Restoration, the plays of Wycherley, Killigrew, Etherege, Farquhar, Van Brugh, Congreve, and others; plays like the *Country Wife*, the *Parson's Wedding*, *She Would if She Could*, the *Beaux' Stratagem*, the *Relapse*, and the *Way of the World*. These were in prose, and represented the gay world and the surface of fashionable life. Amorous intrigue was their constantly recurring theme. Some of them were written expressly in ridicule of the Puritans. Such was the *Committee* of Dryden's brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard, the hero of which is a distressed gentleman, and the villain a London cit, and president of the committee appointed by Parliament to sit upon the sequestration of the estates of royalists. Such were also the *Roundheads* and the *Banished Cavaliers* of Mrs. Aphra Behn, who was a female spy in the service of Charles II., at Antwerp, and one of the coarsest of the Restoration comedians. The profession of piety had become so disagreeable that a shameless cynicism was now considered the mark of a gentleman. The ideal hero of Wycherley or Etherege was the witty young profligate, who had seen life, and learned to disbelieve in virtue. His highest qualities were a contempt for cant, physical courage, a sort of spendthrift generosity, and a good-natured readiness to back up a friend in a quarrel, or an amour. Virtue was *bourgeois*—reserved for London trades-people. A man must be either a rake or a hypocrite. The gentlemen were rakes, the city people were hypocrites. Their wives, however, were all in love with the gentlemen, and it was the proper thing to seduce them, and to borrow their husbands' money. For the first and last time, perhaps, in the history of the English drama, the sympathy of the audience was deliberately sought

for the seducer and the rogue, and the laugh turned against the dishonored husband and the honest man. (Contrast this with Shakspeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*.) The women were represented as worse than the men—scheming, ignorant, and corrupt. The dialogue in the best of these plays was easy, lively, and witty the situations in some of them audacious almost beyond belief. Under a thin varnish of good breeding, the sentiments and manners were really brutal. The loosest gallants of Beaumont and Fletcher's theater retain a fineness of feeling and that *politesse de cœur* which marks the gentleman. They are poetic creatures, and own a capacity for romantic passion. But the Manlys and Horners of the Restoration comedy have a prosaic, cold-blooded profligacy that disgusts.

Charles Lamb, in his ingenious essay on "The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," apologized for the Restoration stage, on the ground that it represented a world of whim and unreality in which the ordinary laws of morality had no application. But Macaulay answered truly, that at no time has the stage been closer in its imitation of real life. The theater of Wycherley and Etherege was but the counterpart of that social condition which we read of in Pepys's *Diary*, and in the *Memoirs* of the Chevalier de Grammont. This prose comedy of manners was not, indeed, "artificial" at all, in the sense in which the contemporary tragedy—the "heroic play"—was artificial. It was, on the contrary, far more natural, and, intellectually, of much higher value. In 1698 Jeremy Collier, a non-juring Jacobite clergyman, published his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, which did much toward reforming the practice of the dramatists. The formal characteristics, without the immorality, of the Restoration comedy re-appeared briefly in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, 1772, and Sheridan's *Rivals*, *School for Scandal*, and *Critic*, 1775-9; our last strictly "classical" comedies. None of this school of

English comedians approached their model, Molière. He excelled his imitators not only in his French urbanity—the polished wit and delicate grace of his style—but in the dexterous unfolding of his plot, and in the wisdom and truth of his criticism of life, and his insight into character. It is a symptom of the false taste of the age that Shakspeare's plays were rewritten for the Restoration stage. Davenant made new versions of *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, substituting rime for blank verse. In conjunction with Dryden, he altered the *Tempest*, complicating the intrigue by the introduction of a male counterpart to Miranda—a youth who had never seen a woman. Shadwell “improved” *Timon of Athens*, and Nahum Tate furnished a new fifth act to *King Lear*, which turned the play into a comedy! In the prologue to his doctored version of *Troilus and Cressida*, Dryden made the ghost of Shakspeare speak of himself as

Untaught, unpracticed in a barbarous age.

Thomas Rymer, whom Pope pronounced a good critic, was very severe upon Shakspeare in his *Remarks on the Tragedies of the Last Age*; and in his *Short View of Tragedy*, 1693, he said, “In the neighing of a horse or in the growling of a mastiff, there is more humanity than, many times, in the tragical flights of Shakspeare.” “To Deptford by water,” writes Pepys, in his diary for August 20, 1666, “reading *Othello*, *Moor of Venice*; which I ever heretofore esteemed a mighty good play; but, having so lately read the *Adventures of Five Hours*, it seems a mean thing.”

In undramatic poetry the new school, both in England and in France, took its point of departure in a reform against the extravagances of the Marinists, or conceited poets, specially represented in England by Donne and Cowley. The new poets, both in their theory and practice, insisted upon correctness, clearness, polish, moderation, and good

sense. Boileau's *L' Art Poétique*, 1673, inspired by Horace's *Ars Poetica*, was a treatise in verse upon the rules of correct composition, and it gave the law in criticism for over a century, not only in France, but in Germany and England. It gave English poetry a didactic turn and started the fashion of writing critical essays in riming couplets. The Earl of Mulgrave published two “poems” of this kind, an *Essay on Satire*, and an *Essay on Poetry*. The Earl of Roscommon—who, said Addison, “makes even rules a noble poetry”—made a metrical version of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and wrote an original *Essay on Translated Verse*. Of the same kind were Addison's epistle to Sacheverel, entitled *An Account of the Greatest English Poets*, and Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, 1711, which was nothing more than versified maxims of rhetoric, put with Pope's usual point and brilliancy. The classicism of the 18th century, it has been said, was a classicism in red heels and a periwig. It was Latin rather than Greek; it turned to the least imaginative side of Latin literature and found its models, not in Vergil, Catullus, and Lucretius, but in the satires, epistles, and didactic pieces of Juvenal, Horace, and Persius.

The chosen medium of the new poetry was the heroic couplet. This had, of course, been used before by English poets as far back as Chaucer. The greater part of the *Canterbury Tales* was written in heroic couplets. But now a new strength and precision were given to the familiar measure by imprisoning the sense within the limit of the couplet, and by treating each line as also a unit in itself. Edmund Waller had written verse of this kind as early as the reign of Charles I. He, said Dryden, “first showed us to conclude the sense most commonly in distichs, which, in the verse of those before him, runs on for so many lines together that the reader is out of breath to overtake it.” Sir John Denham, also, in his *Cooper's Hill*, 1643, had written such verse as this:

O, could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
My great example as it is my theme!
Though deep yet clear, though gentle yet not dull,
Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.

Here we have the regular flow, and the nice balance between the first and second member of each couplet, and the first and second part of each line, which characterized the verse of Dryden and Pope.

Waller was smooth, but Dryden taught to join
The varying verse, the full resounding line,
The long resounding march and energy divine.

Thus wrote Pope, using for the nonce the triplet and alexandrine by which Dryden frequently varied the couplet. Pope himself added a greater neatness and polish to Dryden's verse and brought the system to such monotonous perfection that he "made poetry a mere mechanic art."

The lyrical poetry of this generation was almost entirely worthless. The dissolute wits of Charles the Second's court, Sedley, Rochester, Sackville, and the "mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease," threw off a few amatory trifles; but the age was not spontaneous or sincere enough for genuine song. Cowley introduced the Pindaric ode, a highly artificial form of the lyric, in which the language was tortured into a kind of spurious grandeur, and the meter teased into a sound and fury, signifying nothing. Cowley's Pindarics were filled with something which passed for fire, but has now utterly gone out. Nevertheless, the fashion spread, and "he who could do nothing else," said Dr. Johnson, "could write like Pindar." The best of these odes was Dryden's famous *Alexander's Feast*, written for a celebration of St. Cecilia's day by a musical club. To this same fashion, also, we owe Gray's two fine odes, the *Progress of Poesy* and the *Bard*, written a half-century later.

Dryden was not so much a great poet as a solid thinker, with a splendid mastery of expression, who used his ener-

getic verse as a vehicle for political argument and satire. His first noteworthy poem, *Annus Mirabilis*, 1667, was a narrative of the public events of the year 1666; namely, the Dutch war and the great fire of London. The subject of *Absalom and Ahitophel*—the first part of which appeared in 1681—was the alleged plot of the Whig leader, the Earl of Shaftesbury, to defeat the succession of the Duke of York, afterward James II., by securing the throne to Monmouth, a natural son of Charles II. The parallel afforded by the story of Absalom's revolt against David was wrought out by Dryden with admirable ingenuity and keeping. He was at his best in satirical character-sketches, such as the brilliant portraits in this poem of Shaftesbury, as the false counselor Ahitophel, and of the Duke of Buckingham as Zimri. The latter was Dryden's reply to the *Rehearsal*. *Absalom and Ahitophel* was followed by the *Medal*, a continuation of the same subject, and *Mac Flecknoe*, a personal onslaught on the "true blue Protestant poet" Thomas Shadwell, a political and literary foe of Dryden. Flecknoe, an obscure Irish poetaster, being about to retire from the throne of duncedom, resolved to settle the succession upon his son, Shadwell, whose claims to the inheritance are vigorously asserted.

The rest to some faint meaning make pretense,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense. . . .
The midwife laid her hand on his thick skull
With this prophetic blessing—*Be thou dull.*

Dryden is our first great satirist. The formal satire had been written in the reign of Elizabeth by Donne, and by Joseph Hall, Bishop of Exeter, and subsequently by Marston, the dramatist, by Wither, Marvell, and others; but all of these failed through an over violence of language, and a purpose too pronouncedly moral. They had no lightness of touch, no irony and mischief. They bore down too hard, imitated Juvenal, and lashed English society in terms befitting the corruption of imperial Rome. They denounced,

instructed, preached, did every thing but satirize. The satirist must raise a laugh. Donne and Hall abused men in classes; priests were worldly, lawyers greedy, courtiers obsequious, etc. But the easy scorn of Dryden and the delightful malice of Pope gave a pungent personal interest to their sarcasm, infinitely more effective than these commonplace of satire. Dryden was as happy in controversy as in satire, and is unexcelled in the power to reason in verse. His *Religio Laici*, 1682, was a poem in defense of the English Church. But when James II. came to the throne Dryden turned Catholic and wrote the *Hind and Panther*, 1687, to vindicate his new belief. Dryden had the misfortune to be dependent upon royal patronage and upon a corrupt stage. He sold his pen to the court, and in his comedies he was heavily and deliberately lewd, a sin which he afterward acknowledged and regretted. Milton's "soul was like a star and dwelt apart," but Dryden wrote for the trampling multitude. He had a coarseness of moral fiber, but was not malignant in his satire, being of a large, careless, and forgetting nature. He had that masculine, enduring cast of mind which gathers heat and clearness from motion, and grows better with age. His *Fables*—modernizations from Chaucer and translations from Boccaccio, written the year before he died—are among his best works.

Dryden is also our first critic of any importance. His critical essays were mostly written as prefaces or dedications to his poems and plays. But his *Essay of Dramatic Poesie*, which Dr. Johnson called our "first regular and valuable treatise on the art of writing," was in the shape of a Platonic dialogue. When not misled by the French classicism of his day, Dryden was an admirable critic, full of penetration and sound sense. He was the earliest writer, too, of modern literary prose. If the imitation of French models was an injury to poetry it was a benefit to prose. The best modern prose is French, and it was the essayists of the

gallicised Restoration age—Cowley, Sir William Temple, and above all, Dryden—who gave modern English prose that simplicity, directness, and colloquial air which marks it off from the more artificial diction of Milton, Taylor and Browne.

A few books whose shaping influences lay in the past belong by their date to this period. John Bunyan, a poor tinker, whose reading was almost wholly in the Bible and Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, imprisoned for twelve years in Bedford jail for preaching at conventicles, wrote and, in 1678, published his *Pilgrim's Progress*, the greatest of religious allegories. Bunyan's spiritual experiences were so real to him that they took visible concrete shape in his imagination as men, women, cities, landscapes. It is the simplest, the most transparent of allegories. Unlike the *Faerie Queene*, the story of *Pilgrim's Progress* has no reason for existing apart from its inner meaning, and yet its reality is so vivid that children read of Vanity Fair and the Slough of Despond and Doubting Castle and the Valley of the Shadow of Death with the same belief with which they read of Crusoe's cave or Aladdin's palace.

It is a long step from the Bedford tinker to the cultivated poet of *Paradise Lost*. They represent the poles of the Puritan party. Yet it may admit of a doubt whether the Puritan epic is, in essentials, as vital and original a work as the Puritan allegory. They both came out quietly and made little noise at first. But the *Pilgrim's Progress* got at once into circulation, and hardly a single copy of the first edition remains. Milton, too—who received ten pounds for the copyright of *Paradise Lost*—seemingly found that "fit audience though few" for which he prayed, as his poem reached its second impression in five years (1672). Dryden visited him in his retirement and asked leave to turn it into rime and put it on the stage as an opera. "Ay," said Milton, good humoredly, "you may tag my verses." And accordingly they appeared, duly tagged, in Dryden's operatic masque, the *State of Innocence*. In this