

CHAPTER XI

THE FOURTH DRAMATIC PERIOD

Two great names remain to be noticed in the Elizabethan drama (though neither produced a play till after Elizabeth was dead), some interesting playwrights of third or fourth-rate importance have to be added to them, and in a postscript we shall have to gather up the minor or anonymous work, some of it of very high excellence, of the second division of our whole subject, including plays of the second, third, and fourth periods. But with this fourth period we enter into what may really be called by comparison (remembering always what has been said in the last chapter) a period of decadence, and at its latter end it becomes very decadent indeed. Only in Ford perhaps, of our named and individual authors in this chapter, and in him very rarely, occur the flashes of sheer poetry which, as we have seen in each of the three earlier chapters on the drama, lighten the work of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists proper with extraordinary and lavish brilliance. Not even in Ford are to be found the whole and perfect studies of creative character which, even leaving Shakespeare out of the question, are to be found earlier in plays and playwrights of all kinds and strengths, from *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Vittoria Corombona*, to *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* and *A Cure for a Cuckold*. The tragedies have Ben Jonson's labour without his force, the comedies his coarseness and lack of inspiring life without his keen observation and incisive touch. As the

taste indeed turned more and more from tragedy to comedy, we get attempts on the part of playwrights to win it back by a return to the bloody and monstrous conceptions of an earlier time, treated, however, without the redeeming features of that time, though with a little more coherence and art. Massinger's *Unnatural Combat*, and Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, among great plays, are examples of this: the numerous minor examples are hardly worth mentioning. But the most curious symptom of all was the gradual and, as it were, imperceptible loss of the secret of blank verse itself, which had been the instrument of the great triumphs of the stage from Marlowe to Dekker. Something of this loss of grasp may have been noticed in the looseness of Fletcher and the over-stiffness of Jonson: it is perceptible distinctly even in Ford and Massinger. But as the Restoration, or rather the silencing of the theatres by the Commonwealth approaches, it becomes more and more evident until we reach the chaotic and hideous jumble of downright prose and verse that is neither prose nor verse, noticeable even in the early plays of Dryden, and chargeable no doubt with the twenty years' return of the English drama to the comparative barbarism of the couplet. This apparent loss of ear and rhythm-sense has been commented on already in reference to Lovelace, Suckling (himself a dramatist), and others of the minor Caroline poets; but it is far more noticeable in drama, and resulted in the production, by some of the playwrights of the transition period under Charles I. and Charles II., of some of the most amorphous botches in the way of style that disfigure English literature.

With the earliest and best work of Philip Massinger, however, we are at any rate chronologically still at a distance from the lamentable close of a great period. He was born in 1583, being the son of Arthur Massinger, a "servant" (pretty certainly in the gentle sense of service) to the Pembroke family. In 1602 he was entered at St. Alban's Hall in Oxford: he is supposed to have left the university about 1609, and may have begun writing plays

soon. But the first definite notice of his occupation or indeed of his life that we have is his participation (about 1614) with Daborne and Field in a begging letter to the well-known manager Henslowe for an advance of five pounds on "the new play," nor was anything of his printed or positively known to be acted till 1622, the date of *The Virgin Martyr*. From that time onwards he appears frequently as an author, though many of his plays were not printed till after his death in 1640. But nothing is known of his life. He was buried on 18th March in St. Saviour's, Southwark, being designated as a "stranger,"—that is to say, not a parishioner.

Thirty-seven plays in all, or thirty-eight if we add Mr. Bullen's conjectural discovery, *Sir John Barneveldt*, are attributed to Massinger; but of these many have perished, Massinger having somehow been specially obnoxious to the ravages of Warburton's cook. Eighteen survive; twelve of which were printed during the author's life. Massinger was thus an industrious and voluminous author, one of many points which make Professor Minto's comparison of him to Gray a little surprising. He was, both at first and later, much given to collaboration,—indeed, there is a theory, not without colour from contemporary rumour, that he had nearly if not quite as much to do as Beaumont with Fletcher's great work. But oddly enough the plays which he is known to have written alone do not, as in other cases, supply a very sure test of what is his share in those which he wrote conjointly. *The Old Law*, a singular play founded on a similar conception to that in the late Mr. Anthony Trollope's *Fixed Period*, is attributed also to Rowley and Dekker, and has sometimes been thought to be so early that Massinger, except as a mere boy, could have had no hand in it. The contradictions of critics over *The Virgin Martyr* (by Massinger and Dekker) have been complete; some peremptorily handing over all the fine scenes to one, and some declaring that these very scenes could only be written by the other. It is pretty certain that the argumentative theological part is Massinger's; for he had a strong liking for such things, while the passages between

Dorothea and her servant Angelo are at once more delicate than most of his work, and more regular and even than Dekker's. No companion is, however, assigned to him in *The Unnatural Combat*, which is probably a pretty early and certainly a characteristic example of his style. His demerits appear in the exaggerated and crude devilry of the wicked hero, old Malefort (who cheats his friend, makes away with his wife, kills his son in single combat, and conceives an incestuous passion for his daughter), in the jerky alternation and improbable conduct of the plot, and in the merely extraneous connection of the farcical scenes. His merits appear in the stately versification and ethical interest of the debate which precedes the unnatural duel, and in the spirited and well-told apologue (for it is almost that) of the needy soldier, Belgarde, who is bidden not to appear at the governor's table in his shabby clothes, and makes his appearance in full armour. The debate between father and son may be given:—

Malef. sen. " Now we are alone, sir ;

And thou hast liberty to unload the burthen
Which thou groan'st under. Speak thy griefs.

Malef. jun. I shall, sir ;

But in a perplex'd form and method, which
You only can interpret : Would you had not
A guilty knowledge in your bosom, of
The language which you force me to deliver
So I were nothing ! As you are my father
I bend my knee, and, uncompell'd profess
My life, and all that's mine, to be your gift ;
And that in a son's duty I stand bound
To lay this head beneath your feet and run
All desperate hazards for your ease and safety :
But this confest on my part, I rise up,
And not as with a father (all respect,
Love, fear, and reverence cast off) but as
A wicked man I thus expostulate with you.
Why have you done that which I dare not speak,
And in the action changed the humble shape
Of my obedience, to rebellious rage
And insolent pride? and with shut eyes constrain'd me,

I must not see, nor, if I saw it, shun it.
 In my wrongs nature suffers, and looks backward,
 And mankind trembles to see me pursue
 What beasts would fly from. For when I advance
 This sword as I must do, against your head,
 Piety will weep, and filial duty mourn,
 To see their altars which you built up in me
 In a moment razed and ruined. That you could
 (From my grieved soul I wish it) but produce
 To qualify, not excuse your deed of horror,
 One seeming reason that I might fix here
 And move no farther !

Malef. sen. Have I so far lost
 A father's power, that I must give account
 Of my actions to my son ? or must I plead
 As a fearful prisoner at the bar, while he
 That owes his being to me sits a judge
 To censure that which only by myself
 Ought to be question'd ? mountains sooner fall
 Beneath their valleys and the lofty pine
 Pay homage to the bramble, or what else is
 Preposterous in nature, ere my tongue
 In one short syllable yield satisfaction
 To any doubt of thine ; nay, though it were
 A certainty disdaining argument !
 Since though my deeds wore hell's black lining,
 To thee they should appear triumphal robes,
 Set off with glorious honour, 'hou being bound,
 To see with my eyes, and to hold that reason
 That takes or birth or fashion from my will.

Malef. jun. This sword divides that slavish knot.

Malef. sen. It cannot :
 It cannot, wretch, and if thou but remember
 From whom thou had'st this spirit, thou dar'st not hope it.
 Who trained thee up in arms but I ? Who taught thee
 Men were men only when they durst look down
 With scorn on death and danger, and contemn'd
 All opposition till plumed Victory
 Had made her constant stand upon their helmets ?
 Under my shield thou hast fought as securely
 As the young eaglet covered with the wings
 Of her fierce dam, learns how and where to prey.

All that is manly in thee I call mine ;
 But what is weak and womanish, thine own.
 And what I gave, since thou art proud, ungrateful,
 Presuming to contend with him to whom
 Submission is due, I will take from thee.
 Look therefore for extremities and expect not
 I will correct thee as a son, but kill thee
 As a serpent swollen with poison ; who surviving
 A little longer with infectious breath,
 Would render all things near him like itself
 Contagious. Nay, now thy anger's up,
 Ten thousand virgins kneeling at my feet,
 And with one general cry howling for mercy,
 Shall not redeem thee.

Malef. jun. Thou incensed Power
 Awhile forbear thy thunder ! let me have
 No aid in my revenge, if from the grave
 My mother——

Malef. sen. Thou shalt never name her more."

[*They fight.*]

The Duke of Milan is sometimes considered Massinger's masterpiece ; and here again there are numerous fine scenes and noble *tirades*. But the irrationality of the *donnée* (Sforza the duke charges his favourite not to let the duchess survive his own death, and the abuse of the authority thus given leads to horrible injustice and the death of both duchess and duke) mars the whole. The predilection of the author for sudden turns and twists of situation, his neglect to make his plots and characters acceptable and conceivable as wholes, appear indeed everywhere, even in what I have no doubt in calling his real masterpiece by far, the fine tragi-comedy of *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. The revengeful trick by which a satellite of the great extortioner, Sir Giles Overreach, brings about his employer's discomfiture, regardless of his own ruin, is very like the denouement of the Brass and Quilp part of the *Old Curiosity Shop*, may have suggested it (for *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* lasted as an acting play well into Dickens's time), and, like it, is a little improbable. But the play is an admirable one, and Overreach (who, as is well known, was

supposed to be a kind of study of his half namesake, Miompeçon, the notorious monopolist) is by far the best single character that Massinger ever drew. He again came close to true comedy in *The City Madam*, another of the best known of his plays, where the trick adopted at once to expose the villainy of the apparently reformed spendthrift Luke, and to abate the ruinous extravagance of Lady Frugal and her daughters, is perhaps not beyond the limits of at least dramatic verisimilitude, and gives occasion to some capital scenes. *The Bondman*, *The Renegado*, the curious *Parliament of Love*, which, like others of Massinger's plays, is in an almost Æschylean state of text-corruptness, *The Great Duke of Florence*, *The Maid of Honour* (one of the very doubtful evidences of Massinger's supposed conversion to Roman Catholicism), *The Picture* (containing excellent passages, but for improbability and topsy-turviness of incident ranking with *The Duke of Milan*), *The Emperor of the East*, *The Guardian*, *A Very Woman*, *The Bashful Lover*, are all plays on which, if there were space, it would be interesting to comment; and they all display their author's strangely mixed merits and defects. *The Roman Actor* and *The Fatal Dowry* must have a little more attention. The first is, I think, Massinger's best tragic effort; and the scene where Domitian murders Paris, with his tyrannical explanation of the deed, shows a greater conception of tragic poetry—a little cold and stately, a little Racinish or at least Cornelian rather than Shakesperian, but still passionate and worthy of the tragic stage—than anything that Massinger has done. *The Fatal Dowry*, written in concert with Field and unceremoniously pillaged by Rowe in his once famous *Fair Penitent*, is a purely romantic tragedy, injured by the unattractive character of the light-of-love Beaumelle before her repentance (Massinger never could draw a woman), and by not a few of the author's favourite improbabilities and glaring or rather startling non-sequiturs of action, but full also of fine passages, especially of the quasi-forensic kind in which Massinger so much delights.

To sum up, it may seem inconsistent that, after allowing

so many faults in Massinger, I should protest against the rather low estimate of him which critics from Lamb downwards have generally given. Yet I do so protest. It is true that he has not the highest flashes either of verbal poetry or of dramatic character-drawing; and though Hartley Coleridge's dictum that he had no humour has been exclaimed against, it is only verbally wrong. It is also true that in him perhaps for the first time we perceive, what is sure to appear towards the close of a period, a distinct touch of *literary* borrowing—evidence of knowledge and following of his forerunners. Yet he had a high, a varied, and a fertile imagination. He had, and was the last to have, an extensive and versatile command of blank verse, never perhaps reaching the most perfect mastery of Marlowe or of Shakespere, but singularly free from monotony, and often both harmonious and dignified. He could deal, and deal well, with a large range of subjects; and if he never ascends to the height of a De Flores or a Bellafront, he never descends to the depths in which both Middleton and Dekker too often complacently wallow. Unless we are to count by mere flashes, he must, I think, rank after Shakespere, Fletcher, and Jonson among his fellows; and this I say, honestly avowing that I have nothing like the enthusiasm for him that I have for Webster, or for Dekker, or for Middleton. We may no doubt allow too much for bulk of work, for sustained excellence at a certain level, and for general competence as against momentary excellence. But we may also allow far too little; and this has perhaps been the general tendency of later criticism in regard to Massinger. It is unfortunate that he never succeeded in making as perfect a single expression of his tragic ability as he did of his comic, for the former was, I incline to think, the higher of the two. But many of his plays are lost, and many of those which remain come near to such excellence. It is by no means impossible that Massinger may have lost incomparably by the misdeeds of the constantly execrated, but never to be execrated enough, minion of that careless herald.

As in the case of Clarendon, almost absolutely contradictory

opinions have been delivered, by critics of great authority, about John Ford. In one of the most famous outbursts of his generous and enthusiastic estimate of the Elizabethan period, Lamb has pronounced Ford to be of the first order of poets. Mr Swinburne, while bringing not a few limitations to this tremendous eulogy, has on the whole supported it in one of the most brilliant of his prose essays; and critics as a rule have bowed to Lamb's verdict. On the other hand, Hazlitt (who is "gey ill to differ with" when there are, as here, no extra-literary considerations to reckon) has traversed that verdict in one of the most damaging utterances of commonsense, yet not commonplace, criticism anywhere to be found, asking bluntly and pointedly whether the exceptionableness of the subject is not what constitutes the merit of Ford's greatest play, pronouncing the famous last scene of *The Broken Heart* extravagant, and fixing on "a certain perversity of spirit" in Ford generally. It is pretty clear that Hartley Coleridge (who might be paralleled in our own day as a critic, who seldom went wrong except through ignorance, though he had a sublime indifference as to the ignorance that sometimes led him wrong) was of no different opinion. It is not easy to settle such a quarrel. But I had the good fortune to read Ford before I had read anything except Hartley Coleridge's rather enigmatic verdict about him, and in the many years that have passed since I have read him often again. The resulting opinion may not be exceptionally valuable, but it has at least stood the test of frequent re-reading of the original, and of reading of the main authorities among the commentators.

John Ford, like Fletcher and Beaumont, but unlike almost all others of his class, was a person not compelled by need to write tragedies,—comedies of any comic merit he could never have written, were they his neck verse at Hairibee. His father was a man of good family and position at Ilsington in Devon. His mother was of the well-known west-country house of the Pophams. He was born (?) two years before the Armada, and three years after Massinger. He has no university record, but was a member of the

Middle Temple, and takes at least some pains to assure us that he never wrote for money. Nevertheless, for the best part of thirty years he was a playwright, and he is frequently found collaborating with Dekker, the neediest if nearly the most gifted gutter-playwright of the time. Once he worked with Webster in a play (*The Murder of the Son upon the Mother*) which must have given the fullest possible opportunity to the appetite of both for horrors. Once he, Rowley, and Dekker combined to produce the strange masterpiece (for a masterpiece it is in its own undisciplined way) of the *Witch of Edmonton*, where the obvious signs of a play hastily cobbled up to meet a popular demand do not obscure the talents of the cobblers. It must be confessed that there is much less of Ford than of Rowley and Dekker in the piece, except perhaps its comparative regularity and the quite unreasonable and unintelligible bloodiness of the murder of Susan. In *The Sun's Darling*, due to Ford and Dekker, the numerous and charming lyrics are pretty certainly Dekker's; though we could pronounce on this point with more confidence if we had the two lost plays, *The Fairy Knight* and *The Bristowe Merchant*, in which the same collaborators are known to have been engaged. *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble*, and *The Lady's Trial* which we have, and which are known to be Ford's only, are but third-rate work by common consent, and *Love's Sacrifice* has excited still stronger opinions of condemnation from persons favourable to Ford. This leaves us practically four plays upon which to base our estimate — 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, *The Lover's Melancholy*, *The Broken Heart*, and *Perkin Warbeck*. The last-named I shall take the liberty of dismissing summarily with the same borrowed description as Webster's *Appius and Virginia*. Hartley Coleridge, perhaps willing to make up if he could for a general distaste for Ford, volunteered the strange judgment that it is the best specimen of the historic drama to be found out of Shakespère; and Hazlitt says nothing savage about it. I shall say nothing more, savage or otherwise. *The Lover's Melancholy* has been to almost all its critics a kind of lute-case for the very pretty version

of Strada's fancy about the nightingale, which Crashaw did better ; otherwise it is naught. We are, therefore, left with *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Broken Heart*. For myself, in respect to the first, after repeated readings and very careful weighings of what has been said, I come back to my first opinion—to wit, that the Annabella and Giovanni scenes, with all their perversity, all their availing themselves of what Hazlitt, with his unerring instinct, called “unfair attractions,” are among the very best things of their kind. Of what may be thought unfair in them I shall speak a little later ; but allowing for this, the sheer effects of passion—the “All for love and the world well lost,” the shutting out, not instinctively or stupidly, but deliberately, and with full knowledge, of all other considerations except the dictates of desire—have never been so rendered in English except in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The comparison of course brings out Ford's weakness, not merely in execution, but in design ; not merely in accomplishment, but in the choice of means for accomplishment. Shakespere had no need of the *haut goût* of incest, of the unnatural horrors of the heart on the dagger. But Ford had ; and he in a way (I do not say fully) justified his use of these means.

The Broken Heart stands far lower. I own that I am with Hazlitt, not Lamb, on the question of the admired death scene of Calantha. In the first place, it is certainly borrowed from Marston's *Malcontent* ; in the second, it is wholly unnatural ; in the third, the great and crowning point of it is not, as Lamb seemed to think, Calantha's sentimental inconsistency, but the consistent and noble death of Orgilus. There Ford was at home, and long as it is it must be given :—

Cal. “ Bloody relator of thy stains in blood,
 For that thou hast reported him, whose fortunes
 And life by thee are both at once snatch'd from him,
 With honourable mention, make thy choice
 Of what death likes thee best, there's all our bounty.
 But to excuse delays, let me, dear cousin,

Intreat you and these lords see execution
Instant before you part.

Near. Your v:ill commands us.

Org. One suit, just queen, my last : vouchsafe your clemency
That by no common hand I be divided
From thi. my humble frailty.

Cal. To their wisdoms
Who are to be spectators of thine end
I make the reference : those that are dead
Are dead ; had they not now died, of necessity
They must have paid the deb: they owed to nature,
One time or other. Use dispatch, my lords ;
We'll suddenly prepare our coronation.

[*Exeunt CAL., PHIL., and CHRIS.*

Arm. 'Tis strange, these tragedies should never touch on
Her female pity.

Bass. She has a masculine spirit,
And wherefore should I pule, and, like a girl,
Put finger in the eye? Let's be all toughness
Without distinction betwixt sex and sex.

Near. Now, Orgilus, thy choice?

Org. To bleed to death.

Arm. The executioner?

Org. Myself, no surgeon ;
I am well skilled in letting blood. Bind fast
This arm, that se the pipes may from their conduits
Convey a full stream ; here's a skilful instrument :

[*Shows his dagger.*

Only I am a beggar to some charity
To speed me in this execution
By lending the other prick to the other arm
When this is bubbling life out.

Bass. I am for you,
It most concerns my art, my care, my credit,
Quick, fillet both his arms.

Org. Gramercy, friendship !
Such courtesies are real which flow cheerfully
Without an expectation of requital.
Reach me a staff in this hand. If a proneness

[*They give him a staff.*

Or custom in my nature, from my cradle
Had been inclined to fierce and eager bloodshed,

A coward guilt hid in a coward quaking,
 Would have betray'd me to ignoble flight
 And vagabond pursuit of dreadful safety :
 But look upon my steadiness and scorn not
 The sickness of my fortune ; which since Bassanes
 Was husband to Penthea, had lain bed-rid.
 We trifle time in words : thus I show cunning
 In opening of a vein too full, too lively.

[*Pierces the vein with his dagger.*]

Arm. Desperate courage !

Near. Honourable infamy !

Hem. I tremble at the sight.

Gron. Would I were loose !

Bass. It sparkles like a lusty wine new broach'd ;
 The vessel must be sound from which it issues,
 Grasp hard this other stick—I'll be as nimble—
 But prithee look not pale—I have at ye ! stretch out
 Thine arm with vigour and unshaken virtue.

[*Opens the vein.*]

Good ! oh I envy not a rival, fitted
 To conquer in extremities : this pastime
 Appears majestic ; some high-tuned poem
 Hereafter shall deliver to posterity
 The writer's glory, and his subjects triumph.
 How is't man ?—droop not yet.

Org. I feel no palsies,

On a pair-royal do I wait in death :
 My sovereign as his liegeman ; o.. my mistress
 As a devoted servant ; and on Ithocles
 As if no brave, yet no unworthy enemy :
 Nor did I use an engine to entrap
 His life out of a slavish fear to combat
 Youth, strength, or cunning ; but for that I durst not
 Engage the goodness of a cause on fortune
 By which his name might have outfaced my vengeance.
 Oh, Tecnicus, inspired with Phœbus' fire !
 I call to mind thy augury, 'twas perfect ;
Revenge proves its own executioner.

When feeble man is lending to his mother
 The dust he was first framed in, thus he totters.

Bass. Life's fountain is dried up.

Org. So falls the standard

Of my prerogative in being a creature,
 A mist hangs o'er mine eyes, the sun's bright splendour
 Is clou'd in an everlasting shadow.
 Welcome, thou ice that sit'st about my heart,
 No heat can ever thaw' thee.

[Dies.

The perverse absurdity of a man like Orgilus letting Penthia die by the most horrible of deaths must be set aside: his vengeance (the primary absurdity granted), is exactly and wholly in character. But if anything could be decisive against Ford being "of the first order of poets," even of dramatic poets, it would be the total lack of interest in the characters of Calantha and Ithocies. Fate-disappointed love seems (no doubt from something in his own history) to have had a singular attraction for Lamb; and the glorification, or, as it were, apotheosis of it in Calantha must have appealed to him in one of those curious and illegitimate ways which every critic knows. But the mere introduction of Bassanes would show that Ford is not of the first order of poets. He is a purely contemptible character, neither sublimed by passion of jealousy, nor kept whole by salt of comic exposition; a mischievous poisonous idiot who ought to have had his brains knocked out, and whose brains would assuredly have been knocked out, by any Orgilus of real life. He is absolutely unequal to the place of central personage, and causer of the harms, of a romantic tragedy such as *The Broken Heart*.

I have said "by any Orgilus of real life," but Ford has little to do with real life; and it is in this fact that the insufficiency of his claim to rank among the first order of poets lies. He was, it is evident, a man of the greatest talent, even of great genius, who, coming at the end of a long literary movement, exemplified the defects of its decadence. I could compare him, if there was here any space for such a comparison, to Baudelaire or Flaubert with some profit; except that he never had Baudelaire's perfect sense of art, and that he does not seem, like Flaubert, to have laid in, before melancholy marked him for her own, a sufficient stock of living types to save him from the charge of being a mere

study-student. There is no Frédéric, no M. Homais, in his repertory. Even Giovanni—even Orgilus, his two masterpieces, are, if not exactly things of shreds and patches, at any rate artificial persons, young men who have known more of books than of life, and who persevere in their eccentric courses with almost more than a half knowledge that they are eccentric. Annabella is incomplete, though there is nothing, except her love, unnatural in her. The strokes which draw her are separate imaginations of a learned draughtsman, not fresh transcripts from the living model. Penthea and Calantha are wholly artificial; a live Penthea would never have thought of such a fantastic martyrdom, unless she had been insane or suffering from green-sickness, and a live Calantha would have behaved in a perfectly different fashion, or if she had behaved in the same, would have been quit for her temporary aberration. We see (or at least I think I see) in Ford exactly the signs which are so familiar to us in our own day, and which repeat themselves regularly at the end of all periods of distinct literary creativeness—the signs of *eccentricité voulue*. The author imagines that “all is said” in the ordinary way, and that he must go to the ends of the earth to fetch something extraordinary. If he is strong enough, as Ford was, he fetches it, and it *is* something extraordinary, and we owe him, with all his extravagance, respect and honour for his labour. But we can never put him on the level of the men who, keeping within ordinary limits, achieve masterpieces there.

Ford—an Elizabethan in the strict sense for nearly twenty years—did not suffer from the decay which, as noted above, set in in regard to versification and language among the men of his own later day. He has not the natural trick of verse and phrase which stamps his greatest contemporaries unmistakably, and even such lesser ones as his collaborator, Dekker, with a hardly mistakable mark; but his verse is nervous, well proportioned, well delivered, and at its best a noble medium. He was by general consent utterly incapable of humour, and his low-comedy scenes are among the most loathsome in the English theatre. His

lyrics are not equal to Shakespere's or Fletcher's, Dekker's or Shirley's, but they are better than Massinger's. Although he frequently condescended to the Fletcherian license of the redundant syllable, he never seems to have dropped (as Fletcher did sometimes, or at least allowed his collaborators to drop) floundering into the Serbonian bog of stuff that is neither verse nor prose. He showed indeed (and Mr. Swinburne, with his usual insight, has noticed it, though perhaps he has laid rather too much stress on it) a tendency towards a severe rule-and-line form both of tragic scheme and of tragic versification, which may be taken to correspond in a certain fashion (though Mr. Swinburne does not notice this) to the "correctness" in ordinary poetry of Waller and his followers. Yet he shows no sign of wishing to discard either the admixture of comedy with tragedy (save in *The Broken Heart*, which is perhaps a crucial instance), or blank verse, or the freedom of the English stage in regard to the unities. In short, Ford was a person distinctly deficient in initiative and planning genius, but endowed with a great executive faculty. He wanted guidance in all the greater lines of his art, and he had it not; the result being that he produced unwholesome and undecided work, only saved by the unmistakable presence of poetical faculty. I do not think that Webster could ever have done anything better than he did: I think that if Ford had been born twenty years earlier he might have been second to Shakespere, and at any rate the equal of Ben Jonson and of Fletcher. But the flagging genius of the time made its imprint on his own genius, which was of the second order, not the first.

The honour of being last in the great succession of Elizabethan dramatists is usually assigned to James Shirley.¹ Though last, Shirley is only in part least, and his plays deserve more reading than has usually fallen to their lot. Not only in the general character of his plays—a character

¹ There was a contemporary, Henry Shirley, who was also a playwright. His only extant play, *The Martyred Soldier*, a piece of little merit, has been reprinted by Mr. Bullen.

hardly definable, but recognisable at once by the reader—but by the occurrence of such things as the famous song, “The glories of our blood and state,” and not a few speeches and tirades, Shirley has a right to his place; as he most unquestionably has also by date. He was born in London in 1596, was educated at Merchant Tailors’ School, and was a member of both universities, belonging to St. John’s College at Oxford, and to Catherine Hall at Cambridge. Like other dramatists he vacillated in religion, with such sincerity as to give up a living to which, having been ordained, he had been presented. He was a schoolmaster for a time, began to write plays about the date of the accession of Charles I., continued to do so till the closing of the theatres, then returned to schoolmastering, and survived the Restoration nearly seven years, being buried at St. Giles’s in 1666. He appears to have visited Ireland, and at least one monument of his visit remains in the eccentric play of *St. Patrick for Ireland*. He is usually credited with thirty-nine plays, to which it is understood that others, now in MS., have to be added, while he may also have had a hand in some that are printed but not attributed to him. Shirley was neither a very great nor a very strong man; and without originals to follow, it is probable that he would have done nothing. But with Fletcher and Jonson before him he was able to strike out a certain line of half-humorous, half-romantic drama, and to follow it with curious equality through his long list of plays, hardly one of which is very much better than any other, hardly one of which falls below a very respectable standard. He has few or no single scenes or passages of such high and sustained excellence as to be specially quotable; and there is throughout him an indefinable flavour as of study of his elders and betters, an appearance as of a highly competent and gifted pupil in a school, not as of a master and leader in a movement. The palm is perhaps generally and rightly assigned to *The Lady of Pleasure*, 1635, a play bearing some faint resemblances to Massinger’s *City Madam*, and Fletcher’s *Noble Gentleman* (Shirley is known to have finished one or two plays of

Fletcher's), and in its turn the original, or at least the forerunner of a long line of late seventeenth and eighteenth century plays on the extravagance and haughtiness and caprice of fine ladies. Shirley indeed was much acted after the Restoration, and exhibits, though on the better side, the transition of the older into the newer school very well. Of his tragedies *The Traitor* has the general suffrage, and perhaps justly: One of Shirley's most characteristic habits was that not of exactly adapting an old play, but of writing a new one on similar lines accommodated to the taste of his own day. He constantly did this with Fletcher, and once in *The Cardinal* he was rash enough to endeavour to improve upon Webster. His excuse may have been that he was evidently in close contact with the last survivors of the great school, for besides his work with or on Fletcher, he collaborated with Chapman in the tragedy of *Chabot* and the comedy of *The Ball*—the latter said to be one of the earliest *loci* for the use of the word in the sense of an entertainment. His versification profited by this personal or literary familiarity. It is occasionally lax, and sins especially by the redundant syllable or syllables, and by the ugly break between auxiliary verbs and their complements, prepositions and their nouns, and so forth. But it never falls into the mere shapelessness which was so common with his immediate and younger contemporaries. Although, as has been said, long passages of high sustained poetry are not easily producible from him, two short extracts from *The Traitor* will show his style favourably, but not too favourably. Amidea, the heroine, declares her intention—

“ To have my name
Stand in the ivory register of virgins,
When I am dead. Before one factious thought
Should lurk within me to betray my fame
To such a blot, my hands shall mutiny
And boldly with a poniard teach my heart
To weep out a repentance.”

And this of her brother Florio's is better still—

“ Let me look upon my sister now :
Still she retains her beauty,

Death has been kind to leave her all this sweetness.
Thus in a morning have I oft saluted
My sister in her chamber : sat upon
Her bed and talked of many harmless passages.
But now 'tis night, and a long night with her :
I shal ne'er see these curtains drawn again
Until we meet in heaven."

Here the touch, a little weakened it may be, but still the touch of the great age, is perceptible, especially in the last lines, where the metaphor of the "curtains," common enough in itself for eyelids, derives freshness and appositeness from the previous mention of the bed. But Shirley is not often at this high tragic level. His supposed first play, *Love Tricks*, though it appeared nearly forty years before the Restoration, has a curious touch of post-Restoration comedy in its lively, extravagant, easy farce. Sometimes, as in *The Witty Fair One*, he fell in with the growing habit of writing a play mainly in prose, but dropping into verse here and there, though he was quite as ready to write, as in *The Wedding*, a play in verse with a little prose. Once he dramatised the *Arcadia* bodily and by name. At another time he would match a downright interlude like the *Contention for Honour and Riches* with a thinly-veiled morality like *Honorio and Mammon*. He was a proficient at masques. *The Grateful Servant*, *The Royal Master*, *The Duke's Mistress*, *The Doubtful Heir*, *The Constant Maid*, *The Humorous Courtier*, are plays whose very titles speak them, though the first is much the best. *The Changes* or *Love in a Maze* was slightly borrowed from by Dryden in *The Maiden Queen*, and *Hyde Park*, a very lively piece, set a fashion of direct comedy of manners which was largely followed, while *The Brothers* and *The Gamester* are other good examples of different styles. Generally Shirley seems to have been a man of amiable character, and the worst thing on record about him is his very ungenerous gibing dedication of *The Bird in a Cage* to Prynne, then in prison, for his well-known attack on the stage, a piece of retaliation which, if the enemy had not been "down," would have been fair enough.

Perhaps Shirley's comedy deserves as a whole to be better spoken of than his tragedy. It is a later variety of the same kind of comedy which we noted as written so largely by Middleton,—a comedy of mingled manners, intrigue, and humours, improved a good deal in coherence and in stage management, but destitute of the greater and more romantic touches which emerge from the chaos of the earlier style. Nearly all the writers whom I shall now proceed to mention practised this comedy, some better, some worse; but no one with quite such success as Shirley at his best, and no one with anything like his industry, versatility, and generally high level of accomplishment. It should perhaps be said that the above-mentioned song, the one piece of Shirley's generally known, is not from one of his more characteristic pieces, but from *The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses*, a work of quite the author's latest days.

Thomas Randolph, the most gifted (according to general estimate rather than to specific performance) of the Tribe of Ben, was a much younger man than Shirley, though he died more than thirty years earlier. Randolph was born near Daventry in 1605, his father being a gentleman, and Lord Zouch's steward. He was educated at Westminster, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, of which he became a fellow, and he was also incorporated at Oxford. His life is supposed to have been merry, and was certainly short, for he died, of what disease is not known, in his thirtieth year. He left, however, no inconsiderable literary results; and if his dramas are not quite so relatively good as his poems (there is certainly none of them which is in its own kind the equal of the fine answer to Ben Jonson's threat to leave the stage and the Ode to Anthony Stafford), still they are interesting and show a strong intellect and great literary facility. The two earliest, *Aristippus* and *The Conceited Pedlar*, the first a slight dramatic sketch, the second a monologue, are eminent examples of the class of university, not to say of undergraduate, wit; but far stronger and fuller of promise than most specimens of that class. *The Jealous Lovers*, a play with classical nomenclature, and at first seeming

to aim at the Terentian model, drifts off into something like the Jonsonian humour-comedy, of which it gives some good studies, but hardly a complete example. Much better are *The Muses' Looking-Glass* and *Amyntas*, in which Randolph's academic schemes and names do not hide his vivid and fertile imagination. *The Muses' Looking-Glass*, a play vindicating the claim of the drama in general to the titic, is a kind of morality, but a morality carried off with infinite spirit, which excuses the frigid nature of the abstractions presented in it, and not seldom rises to the height of real comedy. The scene between Colax and Dyscolus, the professional flatterer and the professional snarler, is really excellent: and others equally good might be picked out. Of the two I am inclined to think that this play shows more natural genius in the writer for its style, than the pretty pastoral of *Amyntas*, which has sometimes been preferred to it. The same penchant for comedy appears in *Down with Knavery*, a very free and lively adaptation of the *Plutus* of Aristophanes. There is no doubt that Randolph's work gives the impression of considerable power. At the same time it is fair to remember that the author's life was one very conducive to precocity, inasmuch as he underwent at once the three stimulating influences of an elaborate literary education, of endowed leisure to devote himself to what literary occupations he pleased, and of the emulation caused by literary society. Jonson's friendship seems to have acted as a forcing-house on the literary faculties of his friends, and it is quite as possible that, if Randolph had lived, he would have become a steady-going soaker or a diligent but not originally productive scholar, as that he would have produced anything of high substantive and permanent value. It is true that many great writers had not at his age done such good work; but then it must be remembered that they had also produced little or nothing in point of bulk. It may be plausibly argued that, good as what Randolph's first thirty years gave is, it ought to have been better still if it was ever going to be of the best. But these excursions into possibilities are not very profitable, and the chief excuse for indulging in them is that Randolph's

critics and editors have generally done the same, and have as a rule perhaps pursued the indulgence in a rather too enthusiastic and sanguine spirit. What is not disputable at all is the example given by Randolph of the powerful influence of Ben on his "tribe."

Very little is known of another of that tribe, Richard Brome. He was once servant to Ben Jonson, who, though in his own old age he was himself an unsuccessful, and Brome a very successful, dramatist, seems always to have regarded him with favour, and not to have been influenced by the rather illiberal attempts of Randolph and others to stir up bad blood between them. Brome deserved this favour, and spoke nobly of his old master even after Ben's death. He himself was certainly dead in 1653, when some of his plays were first collected by his namesake (but it would seem not relation), Alexander Brome. The modern reprint of his dramas takes the liberty, singular in the collection to which it belongs, of not attempting any kind of critical or biographical introduction, and no book of reference that I know is much more fertile, the latest authority—the *Dictionary of National Biography*, in which Brome is dealt with by the very competent hand of the Master of Peterhouse—having little enough to tell. Brome's work, however, speaks for itself and pretty distinctly to all who care to read it. It consists, as printed (for there were others now lost or uncollected), of fifteen plays, all comedies, all bearing a strong family likeness, and all belonging to the class of comedy just referred to—that is to say, a cross between the style of Jonson and that of Fletcher. Of the greater number of these, even if there were space here, there would be very little to say beyond this general description. Not one of them is rubbish; not one of them is very good; but all are readable, or would be if they had received the trouble spent on much far inferior work, of a little editing to put the mechanical part of their presentation, such as the division of scenes, stage directions, etc., in a uniform and intelligible condition. Their names (*A Mad Couple well Matched*, *The Sparagus Garden*, *The City Wit*, and so forth) tell a good deal

about their most common form; while in *The Lovesick Court*, and one or two others, the half-courtly, half-romantic comedy of Fletcher takes the place of urban humours. One or two, such as *The Queen and Concubine*, attempt a statelier and tragi-comic style, but this was not Brome's forte. Sometimes, as in *The Antipodes*, there is an attempt at satire and comedy with a purpose. There are, however, two plays which stand out distinctly above the rest, and which are the only plays of Brome's known to any but diligent students of this class of literature. These are *The Northern Lass* and *A Jovial Crew*. The first differs from its fellows only as being of the same class, but better; and the dialect of the *ingénue* Constance seems to have been thought interesting and pathetic. *The Jovial Crew*, with its lively pictures of gipsy life, is, though it may have been partly suggested by Fletcher's *Beggar's Bush*, a very pleasant and fresh comedy. It seems to have been one of its author's last works, and he speaks of himself in it as "old."

Our two next figures are of somewhat minor importance. Sir Aston Cokain or Cockaine, of a good Derbyshire family, was born in 1608, and after a long life died just before the accession of James II. He seems (and indeed positively asserts himself) to have been intimate with most of the men of letters of Charles I.'s reign; and it has been unkindly suggested that posterity would have been much more indebted to him if he had given us the biographical particulars, which in most cases are so much wanted concerning them, instead of wasting his time on translated and original verse of very little value, and on dramatic composition of still less. As it is, we owe to him the knowledge of the not unimportant fact that Massinger was a collaborator of Fletcher. His own plays are distinctly of the lower class, though not quite valueless. *The Obstinate Lady* is an echo of Fletcher and Massinger; *Trappolin Creduto Principe*, an adaptation of an Italian farce, is a good deal better, and is said, with various stage alterations, to have held the boards till within the present century under the title of *A Duke and no Duke*, or *The Duke and the*

Devil. It is in fact a not unskilful working up of some well-trying theatrical motives, but has no great literary merit. The tragedy of *Ovid*, a regular literary tragedy in careful if not very powerful blank verse, is Cokain's most ambitious effort. Like his other work it is clearly an "echo" in character.

A more interesting and characteristic example of the "decadence" is Henry Glapthorne. When the enthusiasm excited by Lamb's specimens, Hazlitt's, and Coleridge's lectures for the Elizabethan drama, was fresh, and everybody was hunting for new examples of the style, Glapthorne had the doubtful luck to be made the subject of a very laudatory article in the *Retrospective Review*, and two of his plays were reprinted. He was not left in this honourable but comparatively safe seclusion, and many years later, in 1874, all his plays and poems as known were issued by themselves in Mr. Pearson's valuable series of reprints. Since then Glapthorne has become something of a butt; and Mr. Bullen, in conjecturally attributing to him a new play, *The Lady Mother*, takes occasion to speak rather unkindly of him. As usual it is a case of *ni cet excès d'honneur ni cette indignité*. Personally, Glapthorne has some of the interest that attaches to the unknown. Between 1639 and 1643, or for the brief space of four years, it is clear that he was a busy man of letters. He published five plays (six if we admit *The Lady Mother*), which had some vogue, and survived as an acted poet into the Restoration period; he produced a small but not despicable collection of poems of his own; he edited those of his friend Thomas Beedome; he was himself a friend of Cotton and of Lovelace. But of his antecedents and of the life that followed this short period of literary activity we know absolutely nothing. The guess that he was at St. Paul's School is a mere guess; and in the utter and total absence of the least scrap of biographical information about him, his editor has thought it worth while to print in full some not unamusing but perfectly irrelevant documents concerning the peccadillos of a certain *George* Glapthorne of Whittlesea, who was certainly a contemporary and perhaps a relation. Henry Glapthorne as a writer is

certainly not great, but he is as certainly not contemptible. His tragedy of *Albertus Wallenstein* is not merely interesting as showing a reversion to the practice, almost dropped in his time (perhaps owing to censorship difficulties), of handling contemporary historical subjects, but contains passages of considerable poetical merit. His *Argalus and Parthenia*, a dramatisation of part of the *Arcadia*, caught the taste of his day, and, like the *Wallenstein*, is poetical if not dramatic. The two comedies, *The Hollander* and *Wit in a Constable*, are of the school which has been so frequently described, and not of its strongest, but at the same time not of its weakest specimens. *Love's Privilege*, sometimes held his best play, is a rather flabby tragi-comedy of the Fletcher-Shirley school. In short, Glapthorne, without being positively good, is good enough to have made it surprising that he is not better, if the explanation did not present itself pretty clearly. Though evidently not an old man at the time of writing (he has been guessed, probably enough, to have been a contemporary of Milton, and perhaps a little older or a little younger), his work has the clear defects of age. It is garrulous and given to self-repetition (so much so that one of Mr. Bullen's reasons for attributing *The Lady Mother* to Glapthorne is the occurrence in it of passages almost literally repeated in his known work); it testifies to a relish of, and a habituation to, the great school, coupled with powers insufficient to emulate the work of the great school itself; it is exactly in flavour and character the last *not* sprightly runnings of a generous liquor. There is nowhere in it the same absolute flatness that occurs in the lesser men of the Restoration school, like the Howards and Boyle; the ancient gust is still too strong for that. It does not show the vulgarity which even Davenant (who as a dramatist was ten years Glapthorne's senior) too often displays. But we feel in reading it that the good wine has gone, that we have come to that which is worse.

I have mentioned Davenant; and though he is often classed with, and to some extent belongs to the post-Reformation school, he is ours for other purposes than that of mere mention. His

Shakespeare travesties (in one of which he was assisted by a greater than he), and even the operas and "entertainments" with which he not only evaded the prohibition of stage plays under the Commonwealth, but helped to produce a remarkable change in the English drama, do not concern us. But it must be remembered that Davenant's earlier, most dramatic, and most original playmaking was done at a time far within our limits. When the tragedy of *Albovine* (Alboin) was produced, the Restoration was more than thirty years distant, and Jonson, Chapman, Dekker, and Marston—men in the strictest sense of the Elizabethan school—were still living, and, in the case of all but Marston, writing. *The Gruel Brother*, which, though printed after, was licensed before, dates three years earlier; and between this time and the closing of the theatres Davenant had ten plays acted and printed coincidently with the best work of Massinger, Shirley, and Ford. Nor, though his fame is far below theirs, is the actual merit of these pieces (the two above mentioned, *The Wits*, *News from Plymouth*, *The Fair Favourite*, *The Unfortunate Lovers*, etc.), so much inferior as the fame. The chief point in which Davenant fails is in the failing grasp of verse above noted. This is curious and so characteristic that it is worth while to give an example of it, which shall be a fair average specimen and not of the worst:—

“ O noble maid, what expiation can
 Make fit this young and cruel soldier for
 Society of man that hath defiled
 The genius of triumphant glorious war
 With such a rape upon thy liberty !
 Or what less hard than marble of
 The Parian rock can'st thou believe my heart,
 That nurst and bred him my disciple in
 The camp, and yet could teach his valour no
 More tenderness than injured Scythians' use
 When they are wroth to a revenge? But he
 Hath mourned for it : and now Evandra thou
 Art strongly pitiful, that dost so long
 Conceal an anger that would kill us both.”

Love and Honour, 1649.

Here we have the very poetical counterpart of the last of Jaques' ages, the big manly voice of the great dramatists sinking into a childish treble that stutters and drivels over the very alphabet of the poetical tongue.

In such a language as this poetry became impossible, and it is still a matter for wonder by what trick of elocution actors can have made it tolerable on the stage. Yet it was certainly tolerated. And not only so, but, when the theatre came to be open again, the discontent with blank verse, which partly at least drove Dryden and others into rhyme, never seems to have noticed the fact that the blank verse to which it objected was execrably bad. When Dryden returned to the more natural medium, he wrote it not indeed with the old many-voiced charm of the best Elizabethans, but with admirable eloquence and finish. Yet he himself in his earliest plays staggered and slipped about with the rest, and I do not remember in his voluminous critical remarks anything going to show that he was consciously aware of the slovenliness into which his master Davenant and others had allowed themselves and their followers to drop.

One more example and we shall have finished at once with those dramatists of our time whose work has been collected, and with the chief names of the decadence. Sir John Suckling, who, in Mr. Swinburne's happy phrase—

“ Stumbled from above
And reeled in slippery roads of alien art,”

is represented in the English theatre by four plays, *Aglaura*, *Brennoralt*, *The Sad One*, and the comedy of *The Goblins*. Of the tragedies some one, I forget who, has said truly that their names are the best thing about them. Suckling had a fancy for romantic names, rather suggesting sometimes the Minerva press of a later time, but still pretty. His serious plays, however, have all the faults, metrical and other, which have been noticed in Davenant, and in speaking of his own non-dramatic verse; and they possess as well serious faults as dramas—a combination of

extravagance and dulness, a lack of playwright's grasp, an absence in short of the root of the matter. How far in other directions besides mere versification he and his fellows had slipped from the right way, may be perhaps most pleasantly and quite fully discovered from the perusal, which is not very difficult, of his tragi-comedy or extravaganza, *The Goblins*. There are several good points about this play—an abundance of not altogether stagey noble sentiment, an agreeable presentment of fresh and gallant youths, still smacking rather of Fletcher's madcap but heart-sound gallants, and not anticipating the heartless crudity of the cubs of the Restoration, a loveable feminine character, and so forth. But hardly a clever boy at school ever devised anything so extravagantly puerile as the plot, which turns on a set of banished men playing at hell and devils in caverns close to a populous city, and brings into the action a series of the most absurd escapes, duels, chance-meetings, hidings, findings, and all manner of other devices for spinning out an unnatural story. Many who know nothing more of Suckling's plays know that *Aglaura* enjoys the eccentric possession of two fifth acts, so that it can be made a tragedy or a tragi-comedy at pleasure. *The Sad One*, which is unfinished, is much better. The tragedy of *Brennoralt* has some pathos, some pretty scenes, and some charming songs; but here again we meet with the most inconceivably bad verse, as here—a passage all the more striking because of its attempt, wilful or unconscious, to echo Shakespere:—

“ Sleep is as nice as woman ;
 The more I court it, the more it flies me.
 Thy elder brother will be kinder yet,
 Unsent-for death will come. To-morrow !
 Well, what can to-morrow do ?
 ’Twill cure the sense of honour lost ;
 I and my discontents shall rest together,
 What hurt is there in this ? But death against
 The will is but a slovenly kind of potion ;
 And though prescribed by Heaven, it goes against men's stomachs.
 So does it at fourscore too, when the soul's

Mewed up in narrow darkness : neither sees nor hears.
 Pish ! 'tis mere fondness in our nature.
 A certain clownish cowardice that still
 Would stay at home and dares not venture
 Into foreign countries, though better than
 Its own. Ha ! what countries ? for we receive
 Descriptions of th' other world from our divines
 As blind men take relations of this from us :
 My thoughts lead me into the dark, and there
 They'll leave me. I'll no more on it. Within !"

Such were the last notes of the concert which opened with the music, if not at once of *Hamlet* and *Othello*, at any rate of *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus*.

To complete this sketch of the more famous and fortunate dramatists who have attained to separate presentation, we must give some account of lesser men and of those wholly anonymous works which are still to be found only in collections such as Dodsley's, or in single publications. As the years pass, the list of independently published authors increases. Mr. Bullen, who issued the works of Thomas Nabbes and of Davenport, has promised those of W. Rowley. Nabbes, a member of the Tribe of Ben, and a man of easy talent, was successful in comedy only, though he also attempted tragedy. *Microcosmus* (1637), his best-known work, is half-masque, half-morality, and has considerable merit in a difficult kind. *The Bride*, *Covent Garden*, *Tottenham Court*, range with the already characterised work of Brome, but somewhat lower. Davenport's range was wider, and the interesting history of *King John and Matilda*, as well as the lively comedy of *The City Nightcap*, together with other work, deserved, and have now received, collection. William Rowley was of a higher stamp. His best work is probably to be found in the plays wherein, as mentioned more than once, he collaborated with Middleton, with Massinger, with Webster, with Fletcher, with Dekker, and in short with most of the best men of his time. It would appear that he was chiefly resorted to for comic underplots, in which he brought in a good deal of horse-play, and

a power of reporting the low-life humours of the London of his day more accurate than refined, together with not a little stock-stage wit, such as raillery of Welsh and Irish dialect. But in the plays which are attributed to him alone, such as *A New Wonder, a Woman Never Vexed*, and *A Match at Midnight*, he shows not merely this same *vis comica* and rough and ready faculty of hitting off dramatic situations, but an occasional touch of true pathos, and a faculty of knitting the whole action well together. He has often been confused with a half namesake, Samuel Rowley, of whom very little is known, but who in his chronicle play *When you see Me you know Me*, and his romantic drama of *The Noble Spanish Soldier*, has distinctly outstripped the ordinary dramatists of the time. Yet another collected dramatist, who has long had a home in Dodsley, and who figures rather curiously in a later collection of "Dramatists of the Restoration," though his dramatic fame was obtained many years before, was Shakerley Marmion, author of the pretty poem of *Cupid and Psyche*, and a "son" of Ben Jonson. Marmion's three plays, of which the best known is *The Antiquary*, are fair but not excessively favourable samples of the favourite play of the time, a rather broad humour-comedy, which sometimes conjoined itself with, and sometimes stood aloof from, either a romantic and tragicomical story or a downright tragedy.

Among the single plays comparatively few are of the latter kind. *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, a domestic tragicomedy, connects itself with the wholly tragical *Yorkshire Tragedy*, and is a kind of introduction to it. These domestic tragedies (of which another is *A Warning to Fair Women*) were very popular at the time, and large numbers now lost seem to have been produced by the dramatisation of notable crimes, past and present. Their class is very curiously mixed up with the remarkable and, in one sense or another, very interesting class of the dramas attributed, and in general estimation falsely attributed, to Shakespere. According to the fullest list these pseudo-Shakesperian plays number seventeen. They are *Fair Em*, *The Merry Devil of*

Edmonton, Edward III., The Birth of Merlin, The Troublesome Reign of King John, A Warning to Fair Women, The Arraignment of Paris, Arden of Feversham, Mucedorus, George à Green the Pinner of Wakefield, The Two Noble Kinsmen, The London Prodigal, Thomas Lord Cromwell, Sir John Oldcastle, The Puritan or the Widow of Watling Street, The Yorkshire Tragedy, and Locrine. Four of these, *Edward III., The Merry Devil of Edmonton, Arden of Feversham,* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* are in whole or parts very far superior to the rest. Of that rest *The Yorkshire Tragedy,* a violent and bloodthirsty little piece showing the frantic cruelty of the ruined gambler, Calverley, to his wife and children, is perhaps the most powerful, though it is not in the least Shakesperian. But the four have claims, not indeed of a strong, but of a puzzling kind. In *Edward III.* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* there are no signs of Shakespere either in plot, character-drawing, or general tone. But, on the contrary, there are in both certain scenes where the versification and dialogue are so astonishingly Shakesperian that it is almost impossible to account for the writing of them by any one else than Shakespere. By far the larger majority of critics declare for the part authorship of Shakespere in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; I avow myself simply puzzled. On the other hand, I am nearly sure that he did not write any part of *Edward III.,* and I should take it to be a case of a kind not unknown in literature, where some writer of great but not very original faculty was strongly affected by the Shakesperian influence, and wrote this play while under it, but afterwards, either by death or diversion to non-literary employments, left no other monument of himself that can be traced or compared with it. The difficulty with *Arden of Feversham* and *The Merry Devil* is different. We shall presently speak of the latter, which, good as it is, has nothing specially Shakesperian about it, except a great superiority in sanity, compactness, pleasant human sentiment, and graceful verse, to the ordinary anonymous or named work of the time. But *Arden of Feversham* is a very different piece of work. It is a domestic tragedy of a peculiarly

atrocious kind, Alice Arden, the wife, being led by her passion for a base paramour, Mosbie, to plot, and at last carry out, the murder of her husband. Here it is not that the versification has much resemblance to Shakespere's, or that single speeches smack of him, but that the dramatic grasp of character both in principals and in secondary characters has a distinct touch of his almost unmistakable hand. Yet both in the selection and in the treatment of the subject the play definitely transgresses those principles which have been said to exhibit themselves so uniformly and so strongly in the whole great body of his undoubted plays. There is a perversity and a dash of sordidness which are both wholly un-Shakesperian. The only possible hypothesis on which it could be admitted as Shakespere's would be that of an early experiment thrown off while he was seeking his way in a direction where he found no thoroughfare. But the play is a remarkable one, and deserves the handsome and exact reproduction which Mr. Bullen has given it. *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, licensed 1611, but earlier in type, is one of the gloomy pity-and-terror pieces which were so much affected in the earlier part of the period, but which seem to have given way later in the public taste to comedy. It is black enough to have been attributed to Tourneur. *The Queen of Aragon*, by Habington, though in a different key, has something of the starchness rather than strength which characterises *Castara*. A much higher level is reached in the fine anonymous tragedy of *Nero*, where at least one character, that of Petronius, is of great excellence, and where the verse, if a little declamatory, is of a very high order of declamation. The strange piece, first published by Mr. Bullen, and called by him *The Distracted Emperor*, a tragedy based partly on the legend of Charlemagne and Fastrada, again gives us a specimen of horror-mongering. *The Return from Parnassus* (see note, p. 81), famous for its personal touches and its contribution to Shakespere literature, is interesting first for the judgments of contemporary writers, of which the Shakespere passages are only the chief; secondly, for its evidence of the jealousy between the universities

and the players, who after, in earlier times, coming chiefly on the university wits for their supplies, had latterly taken to provide for themselves; and thirdly, for its flashes of light on university and especially undergraduate life. The comedy of *Wily Beguiled* has also a strong university touch, the scholar being made triumphant in it; and *Lingua*, sometimes attributed to Anthony Brewer, is a return, though a lively one, to the system of personification and allegory. *The Dumb Knight*, of or partly by Lewis Machin, belongs to the half-romantic, half-farcical class; but in *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, the authorship of which is quite unknown, though Shakespere, Drayton, and other great names have been put forward, a really delightful example of romantic comedy, strictly English in subject, and combining pathos with wit, appears. *The Merry Devil* probably stands highest among all the anonymous plays of the period on the lighter side, as *Arden of Feversham* does on the darker. Second to it as a comedy comes Porter's *Two Angry Women of Abingdon* (1599), with less grace and fancy but almost equal lightness, and a singularly exact picture of manners. With *Ram Alley*, attributed to the Irishman Lodowick Barry, we come back to a much lower level, that of the bustling comedy, of which something has been said generally in connection with Middleton. To the same class belong Haughton's pleasant *Englishmen for my Money*, a good patriot play, where certain foreigners, despite the father's favour, are ousted from the courtship of three fair sisters; *Woman is a Weathercock*, and *Amends for Ladies* (invective and palinode), by Nathaniel Field (first one of the little eyasses who competed with regular actors, and then himself an actor and playwright); "Green's *Tu Quoque*" or *The City Gallant*, attributed to the actor Cook, and deriving its odd first title from a well-known comedian of the time, and the catchword which he had to utter in the play itself; *The Hog hath Lost his Pearl*, a play on the name of a usurer whose daughter is married against his will, by Taylor; *The Heir* and *The Old Couple*, by Thomas May, more famous still for his Latin versification; the rather over-praised *Ordinary* of Cartwright, Ben

Jonson's most praised son ; *The City Match* by Dr. Jasper Mayne. All these figure in the last, and most of them have figured in the earlier editions of Dodsley, with a few others hardly worth separate notice. Mr. Bullen's delightful volumes of *Old Plays* add the capital play of *Dick of Devonshire* (see *ante*), the strange *Two Tragedies in One* of Robert Yarrington, three lively comedies deriving their names from originals of one kind or another, *Captain Underwit*, *Sir Giles Goosecap*, and *Dr. Dodipoll*, with one or two more. One single play remains to be mentioned, both because of its intrinsic merit, and because of the controversy which has arisen respecting the question of priority between it and Ben Jonson's *Alchemist*. This is *Albumazar*, attributed to one Thomas Tomkis, and in all probability a university play of about the middle of James's reign. There is nothing in it equal to the splendid bursts of Sir Epicure Mammon, or the all but first-rate comedy of Face, Dol, and Subtle, and of Abel Druggier ; but Gifford, in particular, does injustice to it, and it is on the whole a very fair specimen of the work of the time. Nothing indeed is more astonishing than the average goodness of that work, even when all allowances are made ; and unjust as such a mere enumeration as these last paragraphs have given must be, it would be still more unjust to pass over in silence work so varied and so full of talent.¹

¹ A note may best serve for the plays of Thomas Goff (1591-1629), acted at his own college, Christ Church, but not published till after his death. The three most noteworthy, *The Raging Turk*, *The Courageous Turk*, and the *Tragedy of Orestes*, were republished together in 1656, and a comedy, *The Careless Shepherdess*, appeared in the same year. The tragedies, and especially *The Raging Turk*, have been a byword for extravagant frugidity, though, as they have never been printed in modern times, and as the originals are rare, they have not been widely known at first hand. A perusal justifies the worst that has been said of them: though Goff wrote early enough to escape the Caroline dry-rot in dramatic versification. His lines are stiff, but they usually scan.