

CHAPTER II

EARLY ELIZABETHAN PROSE

THE history of the earlier Elizabethan prose, if we except the name of Hooker, in whom it culminates, is to a great extent the history of curiosities of literature—of tentative and imperfect efforts, scarcely resulting in any real vernacular style at all. It is, however, emphatically the Period of Origins of modern English prose, and as such cannot but be interesting. We shall therefore rapidly survey its chief developments, noting first what had been done before Elizabeth came to the throne, then taking Ascham (who stands, though part of his work was written earlier, very much as the first Elizabethan prosaist), noticing the schools of historians, translators, controversialists, and especially critics who illustrated the middle period of the reign, and singling out the noteworthy personality of Sidney. We shall also say something of Lyly (as far as *Euphues* is concerned) and his singular attempts in prose style, and shall finish with Hooker, the one really great name of the period. Its voluminous pamphleteering, though much of it, especially the Martin Marprelate controversy, might come chronologically within the limit of this chapter, will be better reserved for a notice in Chapter VI. of the whole pamphlet literature of the reigns of Elizabeth and James—an interesting subject, the relation of which to the modern periodical has been somewhat overlooked, and which indeed was, until a comparatively recent period, not very easy to study. Gabriel Harvey alone, as

distinctly belonging to the earlier Elizabethans, may be here included with other critics.

It was an inevitable result of the discovery of printing that the cultivation of the vernacular for purposes of all work—that is to say, for prose—should be largely increased. Yet a different influence arising, or at least eked out, from the same source, rather checked this increase. The study of the classical writers had at first a tendency to render inveterate the habit of employing Latin for the journey-work of literature, and in the two countries which were to lead Western Europe for the future (the literary date of Italy was already drawing to a close, and Italy had long possessed vernacular prose masterpieces), it was not till the middle of the sixteenth century that the writing of vernacular prose was warmly advocated and systematically undertaken. The most interesting monuments of this crusade, as it may almost be called, in England are connected with a school of Cambridge scholars who flourished a little before our period, though not a few of them, such as Ascham, Wilson, and others, lived into it. A letter of Sir John Cheke's in the very year of the accession of Elizabeth is the most noteworthy document on the subject. It was written to another father of English prose, Sir Thomas Hoby, the translator of Castiglione's *Courtier*. But Ascham had already and some years earlier published his *Toxophilus*, and various not unimportant attempts, detailed notice of which would be an antedating of our proper period, had been made. More's chief work, *Utopia*, had been written in Latin, and was translated into English by another hand, but his *History of Edward V.* was not a mean contribution to English prose. Tyndale's *New Testament* had given a new and powerful impulse to the reading of English; Elyot's *Governor* had set the example of treating serious subjects in a style not unworthy of them, and Leland's quaint *Itinerary* the example of describing more or less faithfully if somewhat uncouthly. Hall had followed Fabyan as an English historian, and, above all, Latimer's *Sermons* had shown how to transform spoken English of the raciest kind into literature. Lord Berners's translations of

Froissart and of divers examples of late Continental romance had provided much prose of no mean quality for light reading, and also by their imitation of the florid and fanciful style of the French-Flemish *rhétoriciens* (with which Berners was familiar both as a student of French and as governor of Calais) had probably contributed not a little to supply and furnish forth the side of Elizabethan expression which found so memorable an exponent in the author of *Euphues*.

For our purpose, however, Roger Ascham may serve as a starting-point. His *Toxophilus* was written and printed as early as 1545; his *Schoolmaster* did not appear till after his death, and seems to have been chiefly written in the very last days of his life. There is thus nearly a quarter of a century between them, yet they are not very different in style. Ascham was a Yorkshire man born at Kirbywiske, near Northallerton, in 1515; he went to St. John's College at Cambridge, then a notable seat of learning, in 1530; was elected scholar, fellow, and lecturer, became public orator the year after the appearance of *Toxophilus*, acted as tutor to the Princess Elizabeth, went on diplomatic business to Germany, was Latin secretary to Queen Mary, and after her death to his old pupil, and died on the 30th December 1568. A treatise on Cock-fighting (of which sport he was very fond) appears to have been written by him, and was perhaps printed, but is unluckily lost. We have also Epistles from him, and his works, both English and Latin, have been in whole or part frequently edited. The great interest of Ascham is expressed as happily as possible by his own words in the dedication of *Toxophilus* to Henry VIII. "Although," he says, "to have written this book either in Latin or Greek . . . had been more easier and fit for my trade in study, yet . . . I have written this English matter in the English tongue for Englishmen"—a memorable sentence none the worse for its jingle and repetition, which are well in place. Until scholars like Ascham, who with the rarest exceptions were the only persons likely or able to write at all, cared to write "English matters in English tongue for

Englishmen," the formation of English prose style was impossible; and that it required some courage to do so, Cheke's letter, written twelve years later, shows.¹

"I am of this opinion that our own tongue should be written clean and pure, unmixed and unmingled with borrowing of other tongues, wherein, if we take not heed by time, ever borrowing and never paying, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt.¹ For then doth our tongue naturally and praisably utter her meaning, when she borroweth no counterfeitures of other tongues to attire herself withal, but useth plainly her own with such shift as nature, craft, experience, and following of other excellent doth lead her unto, and if she want at any time (as being imperfect she must) yet let her borrow with such bashfulness that it may appear, that if either the mould of our own tongue could serve us to fashion a word of our own, or if the old denized words could content and ease this need we would not boldly venture of unknown words."²

The *Toxophilus* and the *Schoolmaster* are both in their different ways very pleasant reading; and the English is far more correct than that of much greater men than Ascham in the next century. It is, however, merely as style, less interesting, because it is clear that the author is doing little more than translate in his head, instead of on the paper, good current Latin (such as it would have been "more easier" for him to write) into current English. He does not indulge in any undue classicism; he takes few of the liberties with English grammar which, a little later, it was the habit to take on the strength of classical examples. But, on the other hand, he does not attempt, and it would be rather unreasonable to expect that he should have attempted, experiments in the literary power of English itself. A slight sense of its not being so "easy" to write in English as in Latin, and of the consequent advisableness of keeping to a sober beaten path, to a kind of style which is not much

¹ The letter is given in full by Mr. Arber in his introduction to Ascham's *Schoolmaster*, p. 5.

² It will be seen that Cheke writes what he argues for, "clean and pure English." "Other excellent" is perhaps the only doubtful phrase in the extract or in the letter.

more English (except for being composed of good English words in straightforward order) than it is any literary language framed to a great extent on the classics, shows itself in him. One might translate passage after passage of Ascham, keeping almost the whole order of the words, into very good sound Latin prose; and, indeed, his great secret in the *Schoolmaster* (the perpetual translation and retranslation of English into the learned languages, and especially Latin) is exactly what would form such a style. It is, as the following examples from both works will show, clear, not inelegant, invaluable as a kind of go-cart to habituate the infant limbs of prose English to orderly movement; but it is not original, or striking, or characteristic, or calculated to show the native powers and capacities of the language.

“I can teach you to shoot fair, even as Socrates taught a man once to know God. For when he asked him what was God? ‘Nay,’ saith he, ‘I can tell you better what God is not, as God is not ill, God is unspeakable, unsearchable, and so forth. Even likewise can I say of fair shooting, it hath not this discommodity with it nor that di.commodity, and at last a man may so shift all the discommodities from shooting that there shall be left nothing behind but fair shooting. And to do this the better you must remember how that I told you when I described generally the whole nature of shooting, that fair shooting came of these things of standing, nocking, drawing, holding and loosing; the which I will go over as shortly as I can, describing the discommodities that men commonly use in all parts of their bodies, that you, if you fault in any such, may know it, and go about to amend it. Faults in archers do exceed the number of archers, which come with use of shooting without teaching. Use and custom separated from knowledge and learning, doth not only hurt shooting, but the most weighty things in the world beside. And, therefore, I marvel much at those people which be the maintainers of uses without knowledge, having no other word in their mouth but this use, use, custom, custom. Such men, more wilful than wise, beside other discommodities, take all place and occasion from all amendment. And this I speak generally of use and custom.”

“Time was when Italy and Rome have been, to the great good of us who now live, the best breeders and bringers up of the worthiest men, not only for wise speaking, but also for well-doing in all civil affairs that ever was in the world. But now that time is gone; and though the place remain, yet the old and present manners do differ as far as black and white, as virtue and vice. Virtue once made that country mistress over all the world; vice now maketh that

country slave to them that before were glad to serve it. All man [*i.e.* mankind] seeth it; they themselves confess it, namely such as be best and wisest amongst them. For sin, by lust and vanity, hath and doth breed up everywhere common contempt of God's word, private contention in many families, open factions in every city; and so making themselves bond to vanity and vice at home, they are content to bear the yoke of serving strangers abroad. Italy now is not that Italy it was wont to be; and therefore now not so fit a place as some do count it for young men to fetch either wisdom or honesty from thence. For surely they will make others but bad scholars that be so ill masters to themselves."

This same characteristic, or absence of characteristic, which reaches its climax—a climax endowing it with something like substantive life and merit—in Hooker, displays itself, with more and more admixture of raciness and native peculiarity, in almost all the prose of the early Elizabethan period up to the singular escapade of Lyly, who certainly tried to write not a classical style but a style of his own. The better men, with Thomas Wilson and Ascham himself at their head, made indeed earnest protests against Latinising the vocabulary (the great fault of the contemporary French *Pléiade*), but they were not quite aware how much they were under the influence of Latin in other matters. The translators, such as North, whose famous version of Plutarch after Amyot had the immortal honour of suggesting not a little of Shakespere's greatest work, had the chief excuse and temptation in doing this; but all writers did it more or less: the theologians (to whom it would no doubt have been "more easier" to write in Latin), the historians (though the little known Holinshed has broken off into a much more vernacular but also much more disorderly style), the rare geographers (of whom the chief is Richard Eden, the first English writer on America), and the rest. Of this rest the most interesting, perhaps, are the small but curious knot of critics who lead up in various ways to Sidney and Harvey, who seem to have excited considerable interest at the time, and who were not succeeded, after the early years of James, by any considerable body of critics of English till John Dryden began to write in the last third of

the following century. Of these (putting out of sight Stephen Gosson, the immediate begetter of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, Campion, the chief champion of classical metres in English, and by a quaint contrast the author of some of the most charming of English songs in purely romantic style, with his adversary the poet Daniel, Meres, etc.), the chief is the author of the anonymous *Art of English Poesie*, published the year after the Armada, and just before the appearance of *The Faërie Queene*. This *Art* has chiefly to be compared with the *Discourse of English Poetrie*, published three years earlier by William Webbe. Webbe, of whom nothing is known save that he was a private tutor at one or two gentlemen's houses in Essex, exhibits that dislike and disdain of rhyme which was an offshoot of the passion for humanist studies, which was importantly represented all through the sixteenth and early seventeenth century in England, and which had Milton for its last and greatest exponent. The *Art of English Poesie*, which is attributed on no grounds of contemporary evidence to George Puttenham, though the book was generally reputed his in the next generation, is a much more considerable treatise, some four times the length of Webbe's, dealing with a large number of questions subsidiary to *Ars Poetica*, and containing no few selections of illustrative verse, many of the author's own. As far as style goes both Webbe and Puttenham fall into the rather colourless but not incorrect class already described, and are of the tribe of Ascham. Here is a sample of each:—

(Webbe's *Preface to the Noble Poets of England*.)

“Among the innumerable sorts of English books, and infinite fardels of printed pamphlets, wherewith this country is pestered, all shops stuffed, and every study furnished; the greater part, I think, in any one kind, are such as are either mere poetical, or which tend in some respects (as either in matter or form) to poetry. Of such books, therefore, sith I have been one that have had a desire to read not the fewest, and because it is an argument which men of great learning have no leisure to handle, or at least having to do with more serious matters do least regard. If I write something, concerning what I think of our English poets, or adventure to set down my simple judgment of English poetry, I trust the learned poets will give me leave, and vouchsafe my book

passage, as being for the rudeness thereof no prejudice to their noble studies, but even (as my intent is) an *instar cotis* to stir up some other of meet ability to bestow travail in 'his matter; whereby, I think, we may not only get the means which we yet want, to discern between good writers and bad, but perhaps also challenge from the rude multitude of rustical rhymers, who will be called poets, the right practice and orderly course of true poetry."

(Puttenham on *Style*.)

"Style is a constant and continual phrase or tenour of speaking and writing, extending to the whole tale or process of the poem or history, and not properly to any piece or member of a tale; but is of words, speeches, and sentences together; a certain contrived form and quality, many times natural to the writer, many times his peculiar bye-election and art, and such as either he keepeth by skill or holdeth on by ignorance, and will not or peradventure cannot easily alter into any other. So we say that Cicero's style and Sallust's were not one, nor Cæsar's and Livy's, nor Homer's and Hesiodus',¹ nor Herodotus' and Thucydides', nor Euripides' and Aristophanes', nor Erasmus' and Budeus' styles. And because this continual course and manner of writing or speech sheweth the matter and disposition of the writer's mind more than one or two instances can show, therefore there be that have called style the image of man (*mentis character*). For man is but his mind, and as his mind is tempered and qualified, so are his speeches and language at large; and his inward conceits be the metal of his mind, and his manner of utterance the very warp and woof of his conceits, more plain or busy and intricate or otherwise affected after the rate."²

Contemporary with these, however, there was growing up a quite different school of English prose which showed itself on one side in the *estilo culto* of Lyly and the university wits of his time; on the other, in the extremely vernacular and sometimes extremely vulgar manner of the pamphleteers, who were very often the same persons. Lyly himself exhibits both styles in *Euphues*; and if *Pap with a Hatchet* and *An Almond for a Parrot* are rightly attributed to him, still more in these. So also does Gabriel Harvey, Spenser's friend, a curious coxcomb who endeavoured to dissuade Spenser from continuing *The Faërie Queene*, devoted much time himself and strove to devote other people to the thankless task of composing English hexameters and

¹ The final *s* of such names often at the time appears unaltered.

² *I.e.* "in proportion."

trimeters, engaged (very much to his discomfiture) in a furious pamphlet war with Thomas Nash, and altogether presents one of the most characteristic though least favourable specimens of the Elizabethan man of letters. We may speak of him further when we come to the pamphleteers generally.

John Lyly is a person of much more consequence in English literature than the conceited and pragmatical pedant who wrote *Pierce's Supererogation*. He is familiar, almost literally to every schoolboy, as the author of the charming piece, "Cupid with my Campaspe Played," and his dramatic work will come in for notice in a future chapter; but he is chiefly thought of by posterity, whether favourably or the reverse, as the author of *Euphuus*. Exceedingly little is known about his life, and it is necessary to say that the usually accepted dates of his death, his children's birth, and so forth, depend wholly on the identification of a John Lilly, who is the subject of such entries in the registers of a London church, with the euphuist and dramatist—an identification which requires confirmation. A still more wanton attempt to supplement ignorance with knowledge has been made in the further identification with Lyly of a certain "witty and bold atheist," who annoyed Bishop Hall in his first cure at Hawstead, in Suffolk, and who is called "Mr. Lilly." All supposed facts about him (or some other John Lyly), his membership of Parliament and so forth, have been diligently set forth by Mr. Bond in his Oxford edition of the *Works*, with the documents which are supposed to prove them. He is supposed, on uncertain but tolerable inferences, to have been born about 1554, and he certainly entered Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1569, though he was not matriculated till two years later. He is described as *plebeii filius*, was not on the foundation, and took his degree in 1573. He must have had some connection with the Cecils, for a letter of 1574 is extant from him to Burleigh. He cannot have been five and twenty when he wrote *Euphuus*, which was licensed at the end of 1578, and was published (the first part) early next year, while the second part followed with a very short

interval. In 1582 he wrote an unmistakable letter commendatory to Watson's *Hecatompattia*, and between 1580 and 1590 he must have written his plays. He appears to have continued to reside at Magdalen for a considerable time, and then to have haunted the Court. A melancholy petition is extant to Queen Elizabeth from him, the second of its kind, in which he writes: "Thirteen years your highness' servant, but yet nothing." This was in 1598: he is supposed to have died in 1606. *Euphues* is a very singular book, which was constantly reprinted and eagerly read for fifty years, then forgotten for nearly two hundred, then frequently discussed, but very seldom read, even it may be suspected in Mr. Arber's excellent reprint of it, or in that of Mr. Bond. It gave a word to English, and even yet there is no very distinct idea attaching to the word. It induced one of the most gifted restorers of old times to make a blunder, amusing in itself, but not in the least what its author intended it to be, and of late years especially it has prompted constant discussions as to the origin of the peculiarities which mark it. As usual, we shall try to discuss it with less reference to what has been said about it than to itself.

Euphues (properly divided into two parts, "Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit," and "Euphues and his England," the scene of the first lying in Naples) is a kind of love story; the action, however, being next to nothing, and subordinated to an infinite amount of moral and courtly discourse. Oddly enough, the unfavourable sentence of Hallam, that it is "a very dull story," and the favourable sentence of Kingsley, that it is "a brave, righteous, and pious book," are both quite true, and, indeed, any one can see that there is nothing incompatible in them. At the present day, however, its substance, which chiefly consists of the moral discourses aforesaid, is infinitely inferior in interest to its manner. Of that manner, any one who imagines it to be reproduced by Sir Piercie Shafton's extravagances in *The Monastery* has an entirely false idea. It is much odder than Shaftonese, but also quite different from it. Lyly's two secrets

are in the first place an antithesis, more laboured, more monotonous, and infinitely more pointless than Macaulay's—which antithesis seems to have met with not a little favour, and was indeed an obvious expedient for lightening up and giving character to the correct but featureless prose of Ascham and other "Latiners." The second was a fancy, which amounts to a mania, for similes, strung together in endless lists, and derived as a rule from animals, vegetables, or minerals, especially from the Fauna and Flora of fancy. It is impossible to open a page of *Euphues* without finding an example of this eccentric and tasteless trick, and in it, as far as in any single thing, must be found the recipe for euphuism, pure and simple. As used in modern language for conceited and precious language in general, the term has only a very partial application to its original, or to that original's author. Indeed Lyly's vocabulary, except occasionally in his similes, is decidedly vernacular, and he very commonly mingles extremely homely words with his highest flights. No better specimen of him can be given than from the aforesaid letter commendatory to the *Hecatompithia*.

"My good friend, I have read your new passions, and they have renewed mine old pleasures, the which brought to me no less delight than they have done to your self-commendations. And certes had not one of mine eyes about serious affairs been watchful, both by being too too busy, had been wanton: such is the nature of persuading pleasure, that it melteth the marrow before it scorch the skin and burneth before it warmth. Not unlike unto the oil of jet, which rotteth the bone and never rankleth the flesh, or the scarab flies which enter into the root and never touch the fruit.

"And whereas you desire to have my opinion, you may imagine that my stomach is rather cloyed than queasy, and therefore mine appetite of less force than my affection, fearing rather a surfeit of sweetness than desiring a satisfying. The repeating of love wrought in me a semblance of liking; but searching the very veins of my heart I could find nothing but a broad scar where I left a deep wound: and loose strings where I tied hard knots: and a table of steel where I framed a plot of wax.

"Whereby I noted that young swans are grey, and the old white, young trees tender and the old tough, young men amorous, and, growing in years, either wiser or warier. The coral plant in the water is a soft weed, on the land a hard stone: a sword frieth in the fire like a black eel; but laid in earth

like white snow : the heart in love is altogether passionate ; but free from desire altogether careless.

“ But it is not my intent to inveigh against love, which women account but a bare word and men reverence as the best God. Only this I would add without offence to gentlewomen, that were not men more superstitious in their praises than women are constant in their passions love would either be worn out of use, or men out of love, or women out of lightness. I can condemn none but by conjecture, nor commend any but by lying, yet suspicion is as free as thought, and as far as I can see as necessary as credulity.

“ Touching your mistress I must needs think well, seeing you have written so well, but as false glasses shew the fairest faces so fine gloses amend the baddest fancies. Appelles painted the phoenix by hearsay not by sight, and Lysippus engraved Vulcan with a straight leg whom nature framed with a poulty foot, which proveth men to be of greater affection their [then? = than] judgment. But in that so aptly you have varied upon women I will not vary from you, so confess I must, and if I should not, yet mought I be compelled, that to love would be the sweetest thing in the earth if women were the faithfulest, and that women would be more constant if men were more wise.

“ And seeing you have used me so friendly as to make me acquainted with your passions, I will shortly make you privy to mine which. I would be loth the printer should see, for that my fancies being never so crooked he would put them into straight lines unfit for my humour, necessary for his art, who setteth down blind in as many letters as seeing.¹—Farewell.”

Many efforts have been made to discover some model for Lyly's oddities. Spanish and Italian influences have been alleged, and there is a special theory that Lord Berners's translations have the credit or discredit of the paternity. The curious similes are certainly found very early in Spanish, and may be due to an Eastern origin. The habit of overloading the sentence with elaborate and far-fetched language, especially with similes may also have come from the French *rhétoriciens* already mentioned—a school of pedantic writers (Chastelain, Robertet, Crétin, and some others being the chief) who flourished during the last half of the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth, while the latest examples of them were hardly dead when Lyly was born. The desire, very laudably

¹ “ Blinde ” with the *e* according to the old spelling having six letters, the same number as seeing. This curious epistle is both in style and matter an epitome of *Euphues*, which had appeared some three years before.

felt all over Europe, to adorn and exalt the vernacular tongues, so as to make them vehicles of literature worthy of taking rank with Latin and Greek, naturally led to these follies, of which euphuism in its proper sense was only one.

Michael Drayton, in some verse complimentary to Sidney, stigmatises not much too strongly Lyly's prevailing faults, and attributes to the hero of Zutphen the purification of England from euphuism. This is hardly critical. That Sidney—a young man, and a man of fashion at the time when Lyly's oddities were fashionable—should have to a great extent (for his resistance is by no means absolute) resisted the temptation to imitate them, is very creditable. But the influence of *Euphuus* was at least as strong for many years as the influence of the *Arcadia* and the *Apology*; and the chief thing that can be said for Sidney is that he did not wholly follow Lyly to do evil. Nor is his positive excellence in prose to be compared for a moment with his positive excellence in poetry. His life is so universally known that nothing need be said about it beyond reminding the reader that he was born, as Lyly is supposed to have been, in 1554; that he was the son of Sir Henry Sidney, afterwards Viceroy of Ireland, and of Lady Mary, eldest daughter of the luckless Dudley, Duke of Northumberland; that he was educated at Shrewsbury and Christ Church, travelled much, acquiring the repute of one of the most accomplished cavaliers of Europe, loved without success Penelope Devereux ("Stella"), married Frances Walsingham, and died of his wounds at the battle of Zutphen, when he was not yet thirty-two years old. His prose works are the famous pastoral romance of the *Arcadia*, written to please his sister, the Courtes of Pembroke, and the short *Apology for Poetry*, a very spirited piece of work, immediately provoked by a rather silly diatribe against the theatre by one Stephen Gosson, once a playwright himself, but turned Puritan clergyman. Both appear to have been written about the same time—that is to say, between 1579 and 1581; Sidney being then in London and in the society of Spenser and other men of letters.

The amiability of Sidney's character, his romantic history, the exquisite charm of his verse at its best, and last, not least, the fact of his enthusiastic appreciation and patronage of literature at a time when literary men never failed to give aristocratic patrons somewhat more than *quid pro quo*, have perhaps caused his prose work to be traditionally a little overvalued. The *Apology for Poetry* is full of generous ardour, contains many striking and poetical expressions, and explains more than any other single book the secret of the wonderful literary production of the half-century which followed. The *Arcadia*, especially when contrasted with *Euphues*, has the great merit of abundant and stirring incident and interest, of freedom from any single affectation so pestering and continuous as Lyly's similes, and of constant purple patches of poetical description and expression, which are indeed not a little out of place in prose, but which are undeniably beautiful in themselves. But when this is said all is said. Enthusiastic as Sidney's love for poetry and for literature was, it was enthusiasm not at all according to knowledge. In the *Apology*, by his vindication of the Unities, and his denunciation of the mixture of tragedy and comedy, he was (of course without knowing it) laying down exactly the two principles, a fortunate abjuration and scouting whereof gave us the greatest possession in mass and variety of merit that any literature possesses—the Elizabethan drama from Shakespeare and Marlowe to Ford and Shirley. Follow Sidney, and good-bye to *Faustus*, to *Hamlet*, to *Philaster*, to *The Duchess of Malfi*, to *The Changeling*, to *The Virgin Martyr*, to *The Broken Heart*. We must content ourselves with *Gorboduc* and *Cornelia*, with *Cleopatra* and *Philotas*, at the very best with *Sejanus* and *The Silent Woman*. Again Sidney commits himself in this same piece to the pestilent heresy of prose-poetry, saying that verse is "only an ornament of poetry;" nor is there any doubt that Milton, whether he meant it or not, fixed a deserved stigma on the *Arcadia* by calling it a "vain and amatorious poem." It is a poem in prose, which is as much as to say, in other words, that it unites the faults of both

kinds. Nor is Sidney less an enemy (though a "sweet enemy" in his own or Bruno's words) of the minor and more formal graces of style. If his actual vocabulary is not Latinised, or Italianised, or Lylyfied, he was one of the greatest of sinners in the special Elizabethan sin of convoluting and entangling his phrases (after the fashion best known in the mouths of Shakespere's fine gentlemen), so as to say the simplest thing in the least simple manner. Not Osric nor Iachimo detests the *not propre* more than Sidney. Yet again, he is one of the arch offenders in the matter of spoiling the syntax of the sentence and the paragraph. As has been observed already, the unpretending writers noticed above, if they have little harmony or balance of phrase, are seldom confused or breathless. Sidney was one of the first writers of great popularity and influence (for the *Arcadia* was very widely read) to introduce what may be called the sentence-and-paragraph-heap, in which clause is linked on to clause till not merely the grammatical but the philosophical integer is hopelessly lost sight of in a tangle of jointings and appendices. It is not that he could not do better; but that he seems to have taken no trouble not to do worse. His youth, his numerous avocations, and the certainty that he never formally prepared any of his work for the press, would of course be ample excuses, even if the singular and seductive beauty of many scraps throughout this work did not redeem it. But neither of the radical difference in nature and purpose between prose and verse, nor of the due discipline and management of prose itself, does Sidney seem to have had the slightest idea. Although he seldom or never reaches the beauties of the *flamboyant* period of prose, which began soon after his death and filled the middle of the seventeenth century, he contains examples of almost all its defects; and considering that he is nearly the first writer to do this, and that his writings were (and were deservedly) the favourite study of generous literary youth for more than a generation, it is scarcely uncharitable to hold him directly responsible for much mischief. The faults of *Euphues* were faults which were certain to work their own cure; those of the *Arcadia* were so engaging in

themselves, and linked with so many merits and beauties, that they were sure to set a dangerous example. I believe, indeed, that if Sidney had lived he might have pruned his style not a little without weakening it, and then the richness of his imagination would probably have made him the equal of Bacon and the superior of Raleigh. But as it is, his light in English prose (we shall speak and speak very differently of his verse hereafter) was only too often a will-o'-the-wisp. I am aware that critics whom I respect have thought and spoken in an opposite sense, but the difference comes from a more important and radical difference of opinion as to the nature, functions, and limitations of English prose. Sidney's style may be perhaps best illustrated by part of his Dedication; the narrative parts of the *Arcadia* not lending themselves well to brief excerpt, while the *Apology* is less remarkable for style than for matter.

To my dear Lady and Sister, the Countess of Pembroke.

"Here have you now, most dear, and most worthy to be most dear, lady, this idle work of mine; which, I fear, like the spider's web, will be thought fitter to be swept away than wove to any other purpose. For my part, in very truth, as the cruel fathers among the Greeks were wont to do to the babes they would not foster, I could well find in my heart to cast out in some desert of forgetfulness this child which I am loth to father. But you desired me to do it, and your desire to my heart is an absolute commandment. Now it is done only for you, only to you; if you keep it to yourself, or commend it to such friends who will weigh errors in the balance of good will, I hope, for the father's sake, it will be pardoned, perchance made much of, though in itself it have deformities. For indeed for severer eyes it is not, being but a trifle, and that triflingly handled. Your dear self can best witness the manner, being done in loose sheets of paper, most of it in your presence, the rest by sheets sent unto you as fast as they were done. In sum, a young head, not so well stayed as I would it were, and shall be when God will, having many fancies begotten in it, if it had not been in some way delivered, would have grown a monster, and more sorry might I be that they came in than that they gat out. But his¹ chief safety shall be the walking abroad; and his chief protection the bearing the livery of your name, which, if much good will do not deceive me, is worthy to be a sanctuary for a greater offender. This say I because I know thy virtue so; and this say I because it may be for ever so, or, to say better, because it will be for ever so."

¹ Apparently = the book's.

The difference referred to above is again well exemplified by the difference of opinions on the style of Hooker as compared with that of Sidney. Hooker wrote considerably later than the other authors here criticised, but his work is so distinctly the climax of the style started by Ascham, Cheke, and their fellows (the style in which English was carefully adapted to literary purposes for which Latin had been previously employed, under the general idea that Latin syntax should, on the whole, rule the new literary medium), that this chapter would be incomplete without a notice of him. For the distinguished writers who were contemporary with his later years represent, with rare and only partly distinguished exceptions, not a development of Hooker, but either a development of Sidney or a fresh style, resulting from the blending in different proportions of the academic and classical manner with the romantic and discursive.

The events of Hooker's neither long nor eventful life are well-known from one of the earliest of standard biographies in English—that of Izaak Walton. He was born at Heavitree, a suburb of Exeter, in 1554 (?). Though he was fairly connected, his parents were poor, and he was educated as a Bible clerk at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He entered here in 1567, and for some fifteen years Oxford was his home, latterly as Fellow and Lecturer of Corpus. The story of his marriage is slightly pathetic, but more than slightly ludicrous, and he appears to have been greatly henpecked as well as obliged to lead an uncongenial life at a country living. In 1585 he was made Master of the Temple, and held that post for seven years, distinguishing himself both as a preacher and a controversialist. But neither was this his vocation; and the last nine years of his life were spent, it would seem more congenially, in two other country livings, first in Wiltshire, then in Kent. He died in 1600. The first four books of the *Ecclesiastical Polity* were published in 1594, the fifth in 1597. The last three books, published after his death, lie under grave suspicion of having been tampered with. This, however, as the unquestionably genuine portion is

considerable in bulk, is a matter rather of historical and theological than of purely literary interest. Hooker himself appears to have been something like the popular ideal of a student: never so happy as when pen in hand, and by no means fitted for the rougher kind of converse with his fellow-men, still less for the life of what is commonly called a man of the world.

But in the world of literature he is a very great man indeed. Very few theological books have made themselves a place in the first rank of the literature of their country, and if the *Ecclesiastical Polity* has done so, it has certainly not done so without cause. If there has been a certain tendency on the part of strong partisans of the Anglican Church to overestimate the literary and philosophical merit of this book, which may be called the first vernacular defence of the position of the English Church, that has been at least compensated by partisan criticism on the other side. Nor is there the least fear that the judgment of impartial critics will ever deprive Hooker of the high rank generally accorded to him. He is, of course, far from being faultless. In his longer sentences (though long sentences are by no means the rule with him) he often falls into that abuse of the classical style which the comparatively jejune writers who had preceded him avoided, but which constantly manifested itself in the richer manner of his own contemporaries—the abuse of treating the uninflected English language as if it were an inflected language, in which variations and distinctions of case and gender and number help to connect adjective with substantive, and relative with antecedent. Sometimes, though less often, he distorts the natural order of the English in order to secure the Latin desideratum of finishing with the most emphatic and important words of the clause. His subject leads and almost forces him to an occasional pedantry of vocabulary, and in the region which is not quite that of form nor quite that of matter, he sometimes fails in co-ordinating his arguments, his facts, and his citations, and in directing the whole with crushing force at his enemy. His argu-

ment occasionally degenerates into mere illustration ; his logic into mere rhetoric.

But when all these things are admitted, the *Ecclesiastical Polity* remains a book in which matter and manner are wedded as in few other books of the same kind. The one characteristic which has been admitted by Hooker's faintest praisers as well as by his warmest—the golden moderation and judiciousness of his argument—is perhaps rather calculated to extort esteem than to arouse admiration. Moderation, like other kinds of probity, *laudatur et alget*: the adversary is not extremely grateful for not being pushed to extremity, and those on the same side would at least excuse a little more vehemence in driving advantages home. But Hooker has other qualities which are equally estimable and more shining. What especially distinguishes him from the literary point of view is his almost unique faculty of diversifying dry and technical argument with outbursts of rhetoric. These last are not mere purple patches ; they do not come in with the somewhat ostentatious usherment and harbingerly which, for instance, laid the even more splendid bursts of Jeremy Taylor open to the sharp sarcasm of South. There is nothing theatrical about them ; they rise quite naturally out of the level of discussion and sink into it again, with no sudden stumble or drop. Nor are they ever (like some of Sidney's poetical excrescences) tags and hemistichs of unwritten sonnets or songs stuck in anyhow upon the prose. For instance, Sidney writes : "About the time when the candles had begun to inherit the sun's office." Now this in a somewhat quaint and conceited fashion of verse would be excellent. It would also be excellent in burlesque, and in such prose as Browne's it might conquer its place victoriously. But except in such a context (which Sidney cannot weave) it is a *rococo* ornament, a tawdry beautification. Compare with it any of the celebrated passages of Hooker, which may be found in the extract books—the encomium on law, the admirable passage, not so admirable indeed in the context as it might be, but still admirable, about angels, the vindication of music in the church

service. Here the expression, even at its warmest, is in no sense poetical, and the flight, as it is called, connects itself with and continues and drops into the ordinary march of argument in the most natural and imperceptible manner. The elevated passages of Hooker's style resemble more than anything else those convenient exploits common, probably, in most persons' dreams, in which the dreamer, without any trouble to himself or any apparent surprise in those about him, lifts himself from the ground and skims or soars as he pleases, sure that he can return to earth also when he pleases, and without any shock. The speculators on the causes of beauty, admiration, and the like have sometimes sought them in contrast first of all, and it has been frequently noticed that the poets who charm us most are those who know how to alternate pity and terror. There is something of the same sort in these variations of the equable procession of Hooker's syllogisms, these flower-gardens scattered, if not in the wilderness, yet in the humdrum arable ground of his collections from fathers and philosophers, his marshallings of facts and theories against the counter-theories of Cartwright and Travers. Neither before him nor in his time, nor for generations after him—scarcely, indeed, till Berkeley—did any one arise who had this profound and unpretentious art of mixing the useful with the agreeable. Taylor—already mentioned as inferior to Hooker in one respect, however superior he may be in the splendour of his rhetoric—is again and still more inferior to him in the parts that are not ornamental, in the pedestrian body of his controversy and exposition. As a mere controversialist, Hooker, if not exactly a Hobbes or a Bentley, if not even a Chillingworth, is not likely to be spoken of without respect by those who understand what evidence means. If he sometimes seems to modern readers to assume his premisses, the conclusions follow much more rigidly than is customary with a good many of our later philosophers, who protest against the assumption of premisses; but having so protested neglect the ambiguity of terms, and leave their middles undistributed, and perpetrate illicit process with a gaiety of heart which is extremely

edifying, or who fancy that they are building systems of philosophy when they are in reality constructing dictionaries of terms. But his argument is of less concern to us here than the style in which he clothes it, and the merit of that is indisputable, as a brief extract will show.

“As therefore man doth consist of different and distinct parts, every part endued with manifold abilities which all have their several ends and actions thereunto referred; so there is in this great variety of duties which belong to men that dependency and order by means whereof, the lower sustaining always the more excellent and the higher perfecting the more base, they are in their times and seasons continued with most exquisite correspondence. Labours of bodily and daily toil purchase freedom for actions of religious joy, which benefit these actions requite with the gift of desired rest—a thing most natural and fit to accompany the solemn festival duties of honour which are done to God. For if those principal works of God, the memory whereof we use to celebrate at such times, be but certain sabbes and days,¹ as it were, of that final benefit wherein our perfect felicity and bliss lieth folded up, seeing that the presence of the one doth direct our cogitations, thoughts, and desires towards the other, it giveth surely a kind of life and addeth inwardly no small delight to those so comfortable anticipations, especially when the very outward countenance of that we presently do representeth, after a sort that also whereunto we tend. As festival rest doth that celestial estate whereof the very heathens themselves, which had not the means whereby to apprehend much, did notwithstanding imagine that it must needs consist in rest, and have therefore taught that above the highest movable sphere there is no thing which feeleth alteration, motion, or change; but all things immutable, unsubject to passion, blest with eternal continuance in a life of the highest perfection, and of that complete abundant sufficiency within itself which no possibility of want, maim, or defect, can touch.”

Hooker's defects have been already admitted, and it has to be added to them that he was necessarily destitute of much useful vocabulary which his successors inherited or added, and that he had absolutely no model of style. What he lacked was the audacity to be, not like Sidney more flowery, not like the contemporary pamphleteers more slangy, but more intelligently vernacular; to follow in the mould of his sentences the natural order of English speech rather than the conventional syntax of Latin, and to elaborate for himself a clause-architecture or order, so to speak,

¹ “Assays.”

of word-building, which should depend upon the inherent qualities of euphony and rhythm possessed by English. It is, however, quite certain that nothing was further from Hooker's thoughts than the composition of English literature merely as English literature. He wanted to bring a certain subject under the notice of readers of the vulgar tongue, and being before all things a scholar he could not help making a scholarly use of that tongue. The wonder is that, in his circumstances and with his purposes, with hardly any teachers, with not a great stock of verbal material, and with little or no tradition of workmanship in the art, he should have turned out such admirable work.

It would be interesting to dwell on the prose of Fulke Greville, Sidney's friend, who long outlived him, and who anticipated not a little of that magnificence of the prose of his later contemporaries, beside which I have ventured to suggest that Sidney's own is sometimes but *rococo*. A place ought to be given to Richard Knolles, who deserves, if not the name of the first historian of England, certainly the credit of making, in his *History of the Turks* (1604), a step from the loose miscellany of the chronicle to the ordered structure of the true historic style. Some would plead for Richard Mulcaster, whose work on education and especially on the teaching of the English tongue in his *Positions and First Part of the Elementary* (1582) is most intimately connected with our general subject. But there is no room for more than a mention of these, or for further dwelling on the translators already glanced at and others, the most important and influential of whom was John Florio, the Englisher (1603) of Montaigne.