

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST DRAMATIC PERIOD

IT does not belong to the plan of this division of the present book to trace the earliest beginnings of the English theatre, or those intermediate performances by which, in the reigns of the four first Tudors, the Mystery and Morality passed into the Interlude. Even the two famous comedies of *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle* stand as it were only at the threshold of our period in this chapter, and everything before them is shut out of it. On the other hand, we can take to be our province the whole rise, flourishing, and decadence of the extraordinary product, known somewhat loosely as the Elizabethan drama. We shall in the present chapter discuss the two comedies or rather farces just mentioned, and notice on the one hand the rather amorphous production which, during the first thirty years of Elizabeth, represented the influence of a growing taste for personal and lively dramatic story on the somewhat arid soil of the Morality and Interlude, and, on the other, the abortive attempt to introduce the regular Senecan tragedy—an attempt which almost immediately broke down and disappeared, whelmed in the abundance of chronicle-play and melodrama. And finally we shall show how the two rival schools of the university wits and the actor playwrights culminated, the first in Marlowe, the second in the earlier and but indistinctly and conjecturally known work of Shakespere. A second chapter

will show us the triumph of the untrammelled English play in tragedy and comedy, furnished by Marlowe with the mighty line, but freed to a great extent from the bombast and the unreal scheme which he did not shake off. Side by side with Shakespere himself we shall have to deal with the learned sock of Jonson, the proud full style of Chapman, the unchastened and ill-directed vigour of Marston, the fresh and charming, if unkempt grace of Dekker, the best known and most remarkable members of a crowd of unknown or half-known playwrights. A third division will show us a slight gain on the whole in acting qualities, a considerable perfecting of form and scheme, but at the same time a certain decline in the most purely poetical merits, redeemed and illustrated by the abundant genius of Beaumont and Fletcher, of Middleton, of Webster, of Massinger, and of Ford. And the two latest of these will conduct us into the fourth or period of decadence where, round the voluminous work and still respectable fame of James Shirley, are grouped names like Brome, Glapthorne, Suckling, and others, whose writing, sometimes remarkable and even brilliant, gradually loses not only dramatic but poetical merit, till it drops into the formless plots, the unscannable verse, the coarseness unredeemed by passion, the horrors unlit by any tragic force, which distinguish the last plays before the closing of the theatres, and reappear to some extent at a period beyond ours in the drama (soon to be radically changed in almost every possible characteristic) of the Restoration. The field of survey is vast, and despite the abundant labour which has been bestowed upon it during the nineteenth century, it is still in a somewhat chaotic condition. The remarkable collection of old plays which we owe to Mr. A. H. Bullen shows, by sample only and with no pretence of being exhaustive, the amount of absolutely unknown matter which still exists. The collection and editing of texts has proceeded on the most widely different principles, and with an almost complete absence of that intelligent partition of labour which alone can reduce chaos to order in such a case. To give but one instance, there is

actually no complete collection, though various attempts have been made at it, which gives, with or without sufficient editorial apparatus to supplement the canon, all the dramatic *adespota* which have been at one time or another attributed to Shakespere. These at present the painful scholar can only get together in publications abounding in duplicates, edited on the most opposite principles, and equally troublesome either for library arrangement or for literary reference. The editions of single authors have exhibited an equal absence of method; one editor admitting doubtful plays or plays of part-authorship which are easily accessible elsewhere, while another excludes those which are difficult to be got at anywhere. It is impossible for any one who reads literature as literature and not as a matter of idle crotchet, not to reflect that if either of the societies which, during the nineteenth century, have devoted themselves to the study of Shakespere and his contemporaries, had chosen to employ their funds on it, a complete Corpus of the drama between 1560 and 1660, edited with sufficient but not superfluous critical apparatus on a uniform plan, and in a decent if not a luxurious form, might now be obtainable. Some forty or fifty volumes at the outside on the scale of the "Globe" series, or of Messrs. Chatto's useful reprints of Jonson, Chapman, and other dramatists, would probably contain every play of the slightest interest, even to a voracious student—who would then have all his material under his hand. What time, expense, and trouble are required to obtain, and that very imperfectly, any such advantage now, only those who have tried to do it know. Even Mr. Hazlitt's welcome, if somewhat uncritical, reprint of Dodsley, long out of print, did not boldly carry out its principle—though there are plans for improving and supplementing it.

Nevertheless, if the difficulties are great so are the rewards. It has been the deliberate opinion of many competent judges (neither unduly prejudiced in favour of English literature nor touched with that ignorance of other literature which is as fatal to judgment

as actual prejudice) that in no time or country has the literary interest of a short and definite period of production in one well-defined kind approached in value the interest of the Elizabethan drama. Other periods and other countries may produce more remarkable work of different kinds, or more uniformly accomplished, and more technically excellent work in the same kind. But for originality, volume, generic resemblance of character, and individual independence of trait, exuberance of inventive thought, and splendour of execution in detached passages—the Elizabethan drama from Sackville to Shirley stands alone in the history of the world. The absurd overestimate which has sometimes been made of its individual practitioners, the hyperbole of the language which has been used to describe them, the puerile and almost inconceivable folly of some of their scholiasts and parasitic students, find a certain excuse in this truth—a truth which will only be contested by those who have not taken the very considerable trouble necessary to master the facts, or who are precluded by a natural inability from savouring the *goût du terroir* of this abundant and intoxicating wine. There are those who say that nobody but an enthusiast or a self-deceiver can read with real relish any Elizabethan dramatist but Shakespere, and there are those who would have it that the incommunicable and uncommunicated charm of Shakespere is to be found in Nabbes and Davenport, in Glapthorne and Chettle. They are equally wrong, but the second class are at any rate in a more saving way of wrongness. Where Shakespere stands alone is not so much in his actual faculty of poetry as in his command of that faculty. Of the others, some, like Jonson, Fletcher, Massinger, had the art without the power; others, like Chapman, Dekker, Webster, had flashes of the power without the art. But there is something in the whole crew, jovial or saturnine, which is found nowhere else, and which, whether in full splendour as in Shakespere, or in occasional glimmers as in Tourneur or Rowley, is found in all, save those mere imitators and hangers-on who are peculiar to no period.

This remarkable quality, however, does not show itself in the dramatic work of our present period until quite the close of it. It is true that the period opens (according to the traditional estimate which has not been much altered by recent studies) with three plays of very considerable character, and of no inconsiderable merit—the two comedies already named and the tragedy of *Gorboduc*, otherwise *Ferrex and Porrex*. *Ralph Roister Doister* was licensed and is thought to have been printed in 1566, but it may have been acted at Eton by 1541, and the whole cast of the metre, language, and *scenariò*, is of a colour older than Elizabeth's reign. It may be at least attributed to the middle of the century, and is the work of Nicholas Udall, a schoolmaster who has left at two great schools a repute for indulgence in the older methods of instruction not inferior to Busoy's or Keate's. *Ralph Roister Doister*, though a fanciful estimate may see a little cruelty of another kind in it, is of no austere or pedagogic character. The author has borrowed not a little from the classical comedy—Plautine or even Aristophanic rather than Terentian—to strengthen and refine the domestic interlude or farce; and the result is certainly amusing enough. The plot turns on the courtship of Dame Christian Custance [Constance], a widow of repute and wealth as well as beauty, by the gull and coxcomb, *Ralph Roister Doister*, whose suit is at once egged on and privately crossed by the mischievous Matthew Merrygreek, who plays not only parasite but rook to the hero. Although Custance has not the slightest intention of accepting Ralph, and at last resorts to actual violence, assisted by her maids, to get rid of him and his followers, the affair nearly breeds a serious quarrel between herself and her plighted lover, Gawin Goodluck; but all ends merrily. The metre is the somewhat unformed doggerel couplet of twelve syllables or thereabouts, with a strong cæsura in the middle, and is varied and terminated by songs from Custance's maids and others. Indeed the chief charm of the piece is the genuine and unforced merriment which pervades it. Although Merrygreek's practices

on Ralph's silliness sometimes tend a little to tediousness, the action on the whole moves trippingly enough, and despite the strong flavour of the "stock part" in the characters they have considerable individuality. The play is, moreover, as a whole remarkably free from coarseness, and there is no difficulty in finding an illustrative extract.

*C. Custance loquitur.*

"O Lord! how necessary it is now o' days,  
 That each body live uprightly all manner ways;  
 For let never so little a gap be open,  
 And be sure of this, the worst shall be spoken.  
 How innocent stand I in this frame o' thought,  
 And yet see what mistrust towards me it hath wrought.  
 But thou, Lord, knowest all folks' thoughts and eke intents;  
 And thou art the deliverer of all innocents.  
 Thou didst keep the advoutress,<sup>1</sup> that she might be amended;  
 Much more then keep, Lord,<sup>2</sup> that never sin intended.  
 Thou didst keep Susanna, wrongfully accused,  
 And no less dost thou see, Lord, how I am now abused.  
 Thou didst keep Hester, wher she should have died,  
 Keep also, good Lord, that my truth may be tried.  
 Yet, if Gawin Goodluck with Tristram Trusty speak,  
 I trust of ill-report the force shall be but weak;  
 And lo! yond they come talking sadly together:  
 I will abide, and not shrink for their coming hither."

Freedom from coarseness is more than can be predicated of the still more famous *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, attributed to, and all but certainly known to be, by John Still, afterwards bishop. The authorship, indeed, is not quite certain; and the curious reference in Martin Marprelate's *Epistle* (ed. Arber, p. 11) to "this trifle" as "shewing the author to have had some wit and invention in him" only disputes the claim of Dr. Bridges to those qualities, and does not make any suggestion as to the identity of the more favoured author. Still was the son of a Lincolnshire gentleman, is supposed to have been born about 1543, was educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, and after a course of

<sup>1</sup> Adulteress.

<sup>2</sup> Understand "me."

preferment through the positions of parish priest in London and at Hadleigh, Dean of Bocking, Canon of Westminster, Master successively of St. John's and Trinity, and Vice-Chancellor of his own University, was at the beginning of 1593 made Bishop of Bath and Wells, an office which he held for fifteen years. His play (taking it as his) was his only work of the kind, and was the first English play acted at either university, though later he himself had to protest officially against the use of the vernacular in a piece performed before the Queen. *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, as has been said, is, despite the subsequent history of its author and the academic character of its appearance, of a much lower order of comedy than *Ralph Roister Doister*, though it is also more spontaneous, less imitative, and, in short, more original. The best thing about it is the magnificent drinking song, "Back and Side go Bare, go Bare," one of the most spirited and genuine of all bacchanalian lyrics; but the credit of this has sometimes been denied to Still. The metre of the play itself is very similar to that of *Ralph Roister Doister*, though the long swinging couplet has a tendency to lengthen itself still further, to the value of fourteen or even sixteen syllables, the central cæsure being always well marked, as may be seen in the following :—

*Diccon.* "Here will the sport begin, if these two once may meet,  
 Their cheer, [I] durst lay money, will prove scarcely sweet.  
 My gammer sure intends to be upon her bones,  
 With staves, or with clubs, or else with coble stones.  
 Dame Chat on the other side, if she be far behind,  
 I am right far deceived, she is given to it of kind.  
 He that may tarry by it a while, and that but short,  
 I warrant him trust to it, he shall see all the sport.  
 Into the town will I, my friends to visit there,  
 And hither straight again to see the end of this gear.  
 In the meantime, fellows, pipe up your fiddles; I say, take them,  
 And let your friends hear such mirth as ye can make them."

As for the story, it is of the simplest, turning merely on the losing of her needle by Gammer Gurton as she was mending her man Hodge's breeches, on the search for it by the house-

hold, on the tricks by which Diccon the Bedlam (the clown or "vice" of the piece) induces a quarrel between Gammer and her neighbours, and on the final finding of the needle in the exact place on which Gammer Gurton's industry had been employed. The action is even better sustained and livelier than in Udall's play, and the swinging couplets canter along very cheerfully with great freedom and fluency of language. Unfortunately this language, whether in order to raise a laugh or to be in strict character with the personages, is anything but choice. There is (barring a possible double meaning or two) nothing of the kind generally known as licentious; it is the merely foul and dirty language of common folk at all times, introduced, not with humorous extravagance in the Rabelaisian fashion, but with literal realism. If there had been a little less of this, the piece would have been much improved; but even as it is, it is a capital example of farce, just as *Ralph Roister Doister* is of a rather rudimentary kind of regular comedy.

The strangeness of the contrast which these two plays offer when compared with the third is peculiar in English literature. Elsewhere it is common enough. That tragedy should be stately, decorous, and on the whole somewhat uneventful as far as visible action goes,—comedy bustling, crammed with incident, and quite regardless of decorum,—might seem a law of nature to the audience of Æschylus and Aristophanes, of Plautus and Pacuvius, even to the audience of Molière and Racine. But the vast and final change, the inception of which we have here to record, has made tragedy, tragicomedy, comedy, and farce pass into one another so gradually, and with so little of a break in the English mind, that *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and *Gorboduc*, though they were presented to the same audiences, and in all probability written within ten years of each other at furthest, seem to belong to different worlds of literature and society. The two comedies just noticed are framed upon no literary model at all as wholes, but simply upon the model of human nature. *Gorboduc* is framed, though not with absolute fidelity, on the model of the tragedies



of Seneca, which had, during the early years of the sixteenth century, mastered the attention of the literary playwrights of Italy, France, and even to some extent Germany, and which determined for three hundred years, at any rate, the form of the tragedy of France. This model—which may be briefly described as the model of Greek tragedy, still further pruned of action, with the choruses retained, but estranged from their old close connection with the dialogue, and reduced to the level of elaborate lyrical moralisings, and with the tendency to such moralising in dialogue as well as in chorus largely increased—was introduced in England with hardly less advantage than abroad. Sackville, one of the reputed authors of *Gorboduc*, was far superior to Jodelle, both as poet and as versifier, and the existence of the two universities in England gave a support, to which nothing in France corresponded, to the influence of learned writers. Indeed, till nearly the close of our present period, the universities had the practical control of literary production. But the genius of the English nation would have none of Seneca. It refused him when he was first introduced by Sackville and others; it refused him once more when Daniel and the set of the Countess of Pembroke again attempted to introduce him; it refused him again and again in the later seventeenth century, when imitation, first of his earlier French followers, and then of the greater tragedy of Corneille and Racine (which was only the Senecan model strengthened and improved) was repeatedly tried by fine gentlemen and by needy hacks, by devotees of the unities, and by devotees of court fashion. I hardly know any other instance in literary history of a similar resistance offered to a similar tide of literary influence in Europe. We have little room here for fanciful comparisons, yet might the dramatic events of 1560-1590 in England well seem a literary battle of Tours, in which an English Charles Martel stemmed and turned back for ever and ever the hitherto resistless march of a literary invader and spread of a literary heresy.

To the modern reader *Gorboduc* (part of which is attributed

to Thomas Norton, and which was acted on 18th January 1561, published piratically in 1565, and authoritatively under the title of *Ferrex and Porrex* in 1571?) is scarcely inviting, but that is not a criterion of its attractiveness to its own contemporaries. Perhaps the most curious thing about it is the violence done to the Horatian and Senecan theories; or rather the *naïf* outwitting of those theories, by an arrangement of dumb shows between the acts to satisfy the hunger for real action which the model refused to courtenace. All the rest is of the most painful regularity: and the scrupulosity with which each of the rival princes is provided with a counsellor and a parasite to himself, and the other parts are allotted with similar fairness, reaches such a point that it is rather surprising that Gorboduc was not provided with two queens—a good and a bad. Such action as there is lies wholly in the mouths of messengers, and the speeches are of excessive length. But even these faults are perhaps less trying to the modern reader than the inchoate and unpolished condition of the metre in the choruses, and indeed in the blank verse dialogue. Here and there, there are signs of the stateliness and poetical imagery of the "Induction"; but for the most part the decasyllables stop dead at their close and begin afresh at their beginning with a staccato movement and a dull monotony of cadence which is inexpressibly tedious, as will be seen in the following:—

(*Videna soliloquises.*)

" Why should I live and linger forth my time  
 In longer life to double my distress?  
 O me, most woeful wight, whom no mishap  
 Long ere this day could have bereaved hence.  
 Might not these hands, by fortune or by fate,  
 Have pierc'd this breast, and life with iron rest?  
 Or in this palace here where I so long  
 Have spent my days, could not that happy hour  
 Once, once have happ'd in which these huge frames  
 With death by fall might have oppressed me?  
 Or should not this most hard and cruel soil,

So oft where I have press'd my wretched steps,  
Some time had ruth of mine accursed life,  
To rend in twain and swallow me therin: ?  
So had my bones possessed now in peace  
Their happy grave within the closed ground,  
And greedy worms had gnawn th'is pined heart  
Without my feeling pain: so should not now  
This living breast remain the ruthful tomb  
Wherein my heart yielded to death is grav'd;  
Nor dreary thoughts, with pangs of pining grief,  
My doleful mind had not afflicted thus."

There is no blame due to Sackville in that he did not invent what no single man invented, and what even in England, where only it has been originally attained, took some thirty years of the genius of the nation working through innumerable individual tentatives and failures to bring about. But he did not invent it; he did not even make any attempt to invent it; and had this first English tragedy been generally followed, we should have been for an unknown period in the land of bondage, in the classical dungeon which so long retained the writers of a nation, certainly not, at the time of the appearance of *Gorboduc*, of less literary promise than our own.

In describing these tentatives and failures it will be impossible here to enter into any lengthened criticism of particular works. We shall have to content ourselves with a description of the general lines and groups, which may be said to be four in number: (1) The few unimportant and failing followers of Sackville; (2) The miscellaneous farce-and-interlude-writers, who, incult and formless as their work was, at least maintained the literary tradition; (3) The important and most interesting group of "university wits" who, with Marlowe at their head, made the blank verse line for dramatic purposes, dismissed, cultivated as they were, the cultivation of classical models, and gave English tragedy its Magna Charta of freedom and submission to the restrictions of actual life only, but who failed, from this cause or that, to achieve perfect life-likeness; and (4) The actor-play-

wrights who, rising from very humble beginnings, but possessing in their fellow Shakespere a champion unparalleled in ancient and modern times, borrowed the improvements of the University Wits, added their own stage knowledge, and with Shakespere's aid achieved the master drama of the world.

A very few lines will suffice for the first group, who are the merest literary curiosities. Indeed the actual number of Senecan dramas in English is very small indeed, though there may possibly be some undiscovered in MS. The *Tancred and Gismund* of Robert Wilmot (acted 1568, and of some merit), the *Cornelia* of Garnier, translated by Kyd and printed in 1594, the curious play called *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, acted before the Queen in the Armada year, with "triumphs" partly devised by Francis Bacon, the two plays of Samuel Daniel, and a very few others, complete the list; indeed *Cornelia*, *Cleopatra*, and *Philotas* are almost the only three that keep really close to the model. At a time of such unbounded respect for the classics and when Latin plays of the same stamp were constantly acted at the universities, such a paucity of examples in English can only testify to a strong national distaste—an instinctive feeling that this would never do.

The nondescript followings of morality and farce are infinitely more numerous, and perhaps intrinsically more interesting; but they can hardly be said to be, except in bulk, of much greater importance. Their real interest to the reader as he turns them over in the first seven or eight volumes of Dodsley, or in the rarer single editions where they occur, is again an interest of curiosity—a desire to trace the various shiftings and turnings of the mighty but unorganised genius which was soon to find its way. Next to the difficulty of inventing a conveniently plastic form seems to have been the difficulty of inventing a suitable verse. For some time the swinging or lumbering doggerel in which a tolerably good rhyme is reached by a kind of scramble through four or five feet, which are most like a very shuffling anapæst—the verse which appears in the comedies of Udall and Still—held its ground. We have it in the morality of the *New Custom*,

printed in 1573, but no doubt written earlier, in the Interlude of *The Trial of Treasure*, in the farcical comedy of *Like Will to Like*, a coarse but lively piece, by Ulpian Fulwell (1568). In the very curious tragicomedy of *Cambyses* this doggerel appears partly, but is alternated with the less lawless but scarcely more suitable "fourteener" (divided or not as usual, according to printer's exigencies) which, as was shown in the last chapter, for a time almost monopolised the attention of English poets. The same mixture appears to some extent, though the doggerel occupies the main text, in the *Damon and Pythias* of Richard Edwards, the editor of *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*. In *Appius and Virginia* (a decidedly interesting play) the fourteener on the contrary is the staple verse, the doggerel being only occasional. Something the same may be said of a very late morality, *The Conflict of Conscience*. Both doggerel and fourteeners appear in the quaint productions called *Three Ladies of London*, etc.; but by this time the decasyllable began to appear with them and to edge them out. They died hard, however, thoroughly ill-fitted as they were for dramatic use, and, as readers of *Love's Labour Lost* know, survived even in the early plays of Shakespeare. Nor were the characters and minor details generally of this group less disorderly and inadequate than the general schemes or the versification. Here we have the abstractions of the old Morality; there the farcical gossip of the *Gammer Gurton's Needle* class; elsewhere the pale and dignified personages of *Gorboduc*: all three being often jumbled together all in one play. In the lighter parts there are sometimes fair touches of low comedy; in the graver occasionally, though much more rarely, a touching or dignified phrase or two. But the plays as wholes are like Ovid's first-fruits of the deluge—nondescripts incapable of life, and good for no useful or ornamental purpose.

It is at this moment that the cleavage takes place. And when I say "this moment," I am perfectly conscious that the exact moment in dates and years cannot be defined. Not a little harm has been done to the history of English literature by the

confusion of times in which some of its historians have pleased themselves. But even greater harm might be done if one were to insist on an exact chronology for the efflorescence of the really poetical era of Elizabethan literature, if the blossoming of the aloe were to be tied down to hour and day. All that we can say is that in certain publications, in certain passages even of the same publication, we find the old respectable plodding, the old blind tentative experiment in poetry and drama: and then without warning—without, as it seems, any possible opportunity of distinguishing chronologically—we find the unmistakable marks of the new wine, of the unapproachable poetry proper, which all criticism, all rationalisation can only indicate and not account for. We have hardly left (if we take their counterparts later we have not left) the wooden verse of *Gorboduc*, the childish rusticity of *Like Will to Like*, when suddenly we stumble on the bower—

“Seated in hearing of a hundred streams”—

of George Peele, on the myriad graceful fancies of Lyly, on the exquisite snatches of Greene, on the verses, to this day the high-water mark of poetry, in which Marlowe speaks of the inexpressible beauty which is the object and the despair of the poet. This is wonderful enough. But what is more wonderful is, that these lightning flashes are as evanescent as lightning. Lyly, Peele, Greene, Marlowe himself, in probably the very next passages, certainly in passages not very remote, tell us that this is all matter of chance, that they are all capable of sinking below the level of Sackville at his even conceivably worst, close to the level of Edwards, and the various anonymous or half-anonymous writers of the dramatic miscellanies just noted. And then beyond these unequal wits arises the figure of Shakespere; and the greatest work of all literature swims slowly into our ken. There has been as yet no history of this unique phenomenon worthy of it; I have not the least pretension to supply one that shall be worthy. But at least the uniqueness of it shall here have due celebration. The

age of Pericles, the age of Augustus, the age of Dante, had no such curious ushering-in unless time has dealt exceptional injustice to the forerunners of all of them. We do not, in the period which comes nearest in time and nature to this, see anything of the same kind in the middle space between Villon and Ronsard, between Agrippa d'Aubigné and Corneille. Here if anywhere is the concentrated spirit of a nation, the thrice-decocted blood of a people, forcing itself into literary expression through mediums more and more worthy of it. If ever the historical method was justified (as it always is), now is its greatest justification as we watch the gradual improvements, the decade-by-decade, almost year-by-year acquisitions, which lead from Sackville to Shakespere.

The rising sap showed itself in two very different ways, in two branches of the national tree. In the first place, we have the group of University Wits, the strenuous if not always wise band of professed men of letters, at the head of whom are Lyly, Marlowe, Greene, Peele, Lodge, Nash, and probably (for his connection with the universities is not certainly known) Kyd. In the second, we have the irregular band of outsiders, players and others, who felt themselves forced into literary and principally dramatic composition, who boast Shakespere as their chief, and who can claim as seconds to him not merely the imperfect talents of Chettle, Munday, and others whom we may mention in this chapter, but many of the perfected ornaments of a later time.

It may be accident or it may not, but the beginning of this period is certainly due to the "university wits." Lyly stands a good deal apart from them personally, despite his close literary connection. We have no kind of evidence which even shows that he was personally acquainted with any one of the others. Of Kyd, till Mr. Boas's recent researches, we knew next to nothing, and we still know very little save that he was at Merchant Taylors' School and was busy with plays famous in their day. But the other five were closely connected in life, and in their deaths they were hardly divided. Lodge

only of the five seems to have freed himself, partly in virtue of a regular profession, and partly in consequence of his adherence to the Roman faith, from the Bohemianism which has tempted men of letters at all times, and which was especially dangerous in a time of such unlimited adventure, such loose public morals, and such unco-ordinated society as the Elizabethan era. Whatever details we have of their lives (and they are mostly very meagre and uncertain) convey the idea of times out of joint or not yet in joint. The atheism of Marlowe rests on no proof whatever, though it has got him friends in this later time. I am myself by no means sure that Greene's supposed debauchery is not, to a great extent, "copy." The majority of the too celebrated "jests" attributed to George Peele are directly traceable to Villon's *Repues Franches* and similar compilations, and have a suspiciously mythical and traditional air to the student of literary history. There is something a little more trustworthily autobiographical about Nash. But on the whole, though we need not doubt that these ancestors of all modern Englishmen who live by the gray goose quill tasted the inconveniences of the profession, especially at a time when it was barely constituted even as a vocation or employment (to quote the Income Tax Papers), we must carefully avoid taking too gloomy a view of their life. It was usually short, it was probably merry, but we know very little else about it. The chief direct documents, the remarkable pamphlets which some of them have left, will be dealt with hereafter. Here we are busied only with their dates and their dramatic work, which was in no case (except perhaps in that of Kyd) their sole known work, but which in every case except those of Nash and perhaps Greene was their most remarkable.

In noticing *Euphues* an account has already been given of Lyly's life, or rather of the very scanty particulars which are known of it. His plays date considerably later than *Euphues*. But they all bear the character of the courtier about them; and both in this characteristic and in the absence of any details in



the gossiping literature of the time to connect him with the Bohemian society of the playhouse, the distinction which separates Lyly from the group of "university wits" is noteworthy. He lost as well as gained by the separation. All his plays were acted "by the chudren of Paul's before her Majesty," and not by the usual companies before Dick, Tom, and Harry. The exact date and order of their writing is very uncertain, and in one case at least, that of *The Woman in the Moon*, we know that the order was exactly reversed in publication: this being the last printed in Lyly's lifetime, and expressly described as the first written. His other dramatic works are *Campaspe*, *Sappho and Phaon*, *Endymion*, *Galathea*, *Midas*, *Mother Bombie*, and *Love's Metamorphosis*; another, *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, which has been attributed to him, is in all probability not his.

The peculiar circumstances of the production of Lyly's plays, and the strong or at any rate decided individuality of the author, keep them in a division almost to themselves. The mythological or pastoral character of their subject in most cases might not of itself have prevented their marking an advance in the dramatic composition of English playwrights. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and much other work of Shakespere's show how far from necessary it is that theme, or class of subject, should affect merit of presentment. But Lyly's work generally has more of the masque than the play. It sometimes includes charming lyrics, such as the famous *Campaspe* song and others. But most of it is in prose, and it gave beyond doubt—though Gascoigne had, as we have seen, set the example in drama—no small impetus to the use and perfecting of that medium. For Lyly's dramatic prose, though sometimes showing the same faults, is often better than *Euphues*, as here:—

"*End.* O fair Cynthia, why do others term thee unconstant, whom I have ever found immovable? Injurious time, corrupt manners, unkind men, who finding a constancy not to be matched in my sweet mistress, have christened her with the name of wavering, waxing, and waning. Is she inconstant that keepeth a settled course, which since her first creation altereth not one minute

in her moving? There is nothing thought more admirable, or commendable in the sea, than the ebbing and flowing; and shall the moon, from whom the sun taketh this virtue, be accounted fickle, for increasing and decreasing? Flowers in their buds are nothing worth till they be blown; nor blossoms accounted till they be ripe fruit; and shall we then say they be changeable, for that they grow from seeds to leaves, from leaves to buds, from buds to their perfection? then, why be not twigs that become trees, children that become men, and mornings that grow to evenings, termed wavering, for that they continue not at one stay? Ay, but Cynthia being in her fulness decayeth, as not delighting in her greatest beauty, or withering when she should be most honoured. When malice cannot object anything, folly will; making that a vice which is the greatest virtue. What thing (my mistress excepted) being in the pride of her beauty, and latter minute of her age, that waxeth young again? Tell me, Eumenides, what is he that having a mistress of ripe years, and infinite virtues, great honours, and unspeakable beauty, but would wish that she might grow tender again? getting youth by years, and never-decaying beauty by time; whose fair face, neither the summer's blaze can scorch, nor winter's blast chap, nor the numbering of years breed altering of colours. Such is my sweet Cynthia, whom time cannot touch, because she is divine, nor will offend because she is delicate. O Cynthia, if thou shouldst always continue at thy fulness, both gods and men would conspire to ravish thee. But thou, to abate the pride of our affections, dost detract from thy perfections; thinking it sufficient if once in a month we enjoy a glimpse of thy majesty; and then, to increase our griefs, thou dost decrease thy gleams; coming out of thy royal robes, wherewith thou dazzlest our eyes, down into thy swath clouts, beguiling our eyes; and then —"

In these plays there are excellent phrases and even striking scenes. But they are not in the true sense dramatic, and are constantly spoilt by Lyly's strange weakness for conceited style. Everybody speaks in antitheses, and the intolerable fancy similes, drawn from a kind of imaginary natural history, are sometimes as prominent as in *Euphues* itself. Lyly's theatre represents, in short, a mere backwater in the general stream of dramatic progress, though not a few allusions in other men's work show us that it attracted no small attention. With Nash alone, of the University Wits proper, was Lyly connected, and this only problematically. He was an Oxford man, and most of them were of Cambridge; he was a courtier, if a badly-paid one, and they all lived by their wits; and, if we may judge

by the very few documents remaining, he was not inclined to be hail-fellow-well-met with anybody, while they were all born Bohemians. Yet none of them had a greater influence on Shakespere than Lyly, though it was anything but a beneficial influence, and for this as well as for the originality of his production he deserves notice, even had the intrinsic merit of his work been less than it is. But, in fact, it is very great, being almost a typical production of talent helped by knowledge, but not mastered by positive genius, or directed in its way by the precedent work of others.

In the work of the University Wits proper—Marlowe, Greene, Peele, Lodge, Nash, and Kyd, the last of whom, it must again be said, is not certainly known to have belonged to either university, though the probabilities are all in favour of that hypothesis—a very different kind of work is found. It is always faulty, as a whole, for even *Dr. Faustus* and *Edward II.*, despite their magnificent poetry and the vast capabilities of their form, could only be called good plays or good compositions as any kind of whole by a critic who had entirely lost the sense of proportion. But in the whole group, and especially in the dramatic work of Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and Kyd (for that of Lodge and Nash is small in amount and comparatively unimportant in manner), the presence, the throes of a new dramatic style are evident. Faults and beauties are more or less common to the whole quartet. In all we find the many-sided activity of the Shakesperian drama as it was to be, sprawling and struggling in a kind of swaddling clothes of which it cannot get rid, and which hamper and cripple its movements. In all there is present a most extraordinary and unique rant and bombast of expression which reminds one of the shrieks and yells of a band of healthy boys just let out to play. The passages which (thanks chiefly to Pistol's incomparable quotations and parodies of them) are known to every one, the "Pampered jades of Asia," the "Have we not Hiren here," the "Feed and grow fat, my fair Callipolis," the other quips and cranks of mine ancient are

scattered broadcast in their originals, and are evidently meant quite seriously throughout the work of these poets. Side by side with this mania for bombast is another mania, much more clearly traceable to education and associations, but specially odd in connection with what has just been noticed. This is the foible of classical allusion. The heathen gods and goddesses, the localities of Greek and Roman poetry, even the more out-of-the-way commonplaces of classical literature, are put in the mouths of all the characters without the remotest attempt to consider propriety or relevance. Even in still lesser peculiarities the blemishes are uniform and constant—such as the curious and childish habit of making speakers speak of themselves in the third person, and by their names, instead of using “I” and “me.” And on the other hand, the merits, though less evenly distributed in degree, are equally constant in kind. In Kyd, in Greene still more, in Peele more still, in Marlowe most of all, phrases and passages of blinding and dazzling poetry flash out of the midst of the bombast and the tedium. Many of these are known, by the hundred books of extract which have followed Lamb’s *Specimens*, to all readers. Such, for instance, is the

“See where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament”

of Marlowe, and his even more magnificent passage beginning

“If all the pens that ever poets held;”

such Peele’s exquisite bower,

“Seated in hearing of an hundred streams,

which is, with all respect to Charles Lamb, to be paralleled by a score of other jewels from the reckless work of “George Peeboard”: such Greene’s

“Why thinks King Henry’s son that Margaret’s love  
Hangs in the uncertain balance of proud time?”

such even Kyd’s

“There is a path upon your left hand side  
That leadeth from a guilty conscience  
Unto a forest of distrust and fear.”

But the whole point of the thing is that these flashes, which are not to be found at all before the date of this university school, are to be found constantly in its productions, and that, amorphous, inartistic, incomplete as those productions are, they still show *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in embryo. Whereas the greatest expert in literary embryology may read *Gorboduc* and *The Misfortunes of Arthur* through without discerning the slightest signs of what was coming.

Nash and Lodge are so little dramatists (the chief, if not only play of the former being the shapeless and rather dull comedy, *Will Summer's Testament*, relieved only by some lyrics of merit which are probably not Nash's, while Lodge's *Marius and Sylla*, while it wants the extravagance, wants also the beauty of its author's companions' work), that what has to be said about them will be better said later in dealing with their other books. Greene's prose pieces and his occasional poems are, no doubt, better than his drama, but the latter is considerable, and was probably his earliest work. Kyd has left nothing, and Peele little, but drama; while beautiful as Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* is, I do not quite understand how any one can prefer it to the faultier but far more original dramas of its author. We shall therefore deal with these four individually here.

The eldest of the four was George Peele, variously described as a Londoner and a Devonshire man, who was probably born about 1558. He was educated at Christ's Hospital (of which his father was "clerk") and at Broadgates Hall, now Pembroke College, Oxford, and had some credit in the university as an arranger of pageants, etc. He is supposed to have left Oxford for London about 1581, and had the credit of living a Bohemian, not to say disreputable, life for about seventeen years; his death in 1597 (?) being not more creditable than his life. But even the scandals about Peele are much more shadowy than those about Marlowe and Greene. His dramatic work consists of some half-dozen plays, the earliest of which is *The Arraignment of Paris*, 1581 (?), one of the most elaborate and barefaced of the many con-

temporary flatteries of Elizabeth, but containing some exquisite verse. In the same way Peele has been accused of having in *Edward I.* adopted or perhaps even invented the basest and most groundless scandals against the noble and stainless memory of Eleanor of Castile; while in his *Battle of Alcazar* he certainly gratifies to the utmost the popular ante-Spanish and ante-Popish feeling. So angry have critics been with Peele's outrage on Eleanor, that some of them have declared that none but he could have been guilty of the not dissimilar slur cast on Joan of Arc's character in *Henry VI.*, the three parts of which it has been the good pleasure of Shakesperian commentators to cut and carve between the University Wits *ad libitum*. I cannot myself help thinking that all this has arisen very much from the idea of Peele's vagabondism given by the untrustworthy "jests." The slander on Queen Eleanor was pretty certainly supplied to him by an older ballad. There is little or nothing else in Peele's undoubted writings which is at all discreditable. His miscellaneous poems show a man by no means given to low company or low thoughts, and one gifted with the truest poetic vein; while his dramas, besides exhibiting a greater command over blank verse than any of his predecessors and than any except Marlowe of his contemporaries can claim, are full of charming passages. *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, which has been denied to him—an interesting play on the rare basis of the old romance—is written not in blank verse but in the fourteener. *The Old Wives' Tale* pretty certainly furnished Milton with the subject of *Comus*, and this is its chief merit. *Edward I.* and *The Battle of Alcazar*, but especially the latter, contain abundance of the hectoring rant which has been marked as one of the characteristics of the school, and which is half-excused by the sparks of valour that often break from its smoke and clatter. But Peele would undoubtedly stand higher, though he might not be so interesting a literary figure, if we had nothing of his save *The Arraignment of Paris* and *David and Bethsabe*. *The*

*Arraignment* (written in various metres, but mainly in a musical and varied heroic couplet), is partly a pastoral, partly a masque, and wholly a Court play. It thus comes nearest to Lyly, but is altogether a more dramatic, livelier, and less conceited performance than anything by the author of *Euphues*. As for *David and Bethsabe*, it is crammed with beauties, and Lamb's curiously faint praise of it has always been a puzzle to me. As Marlowe's are the mightiest, so are Peele's the softest, lines in the drama before Shakespere; while the spirit and humour, which the author also had in plenty, save his work from the merely cloying sweetness of some contemporary writers. Two of his interposed or occasional lyrics will be given later: a blank verse passage may find room here:—

*Bethsabe*. "Come, gentle Zephyr, trick'd with .hose perfumes  
 That erst in Eden sweeten'd Adam's love,  
 And stroke my bosom with thy silken fan:  
 This shade, sun-proof,<sup>1</sup> is yet no proof for thee;  
 Thy body, smoother than this waveless spring,  
 And purer than the substance of the same,  
 Can creep through that his lances cannot pierce:  
 Thou, and thy sister, soft and sacred Air,  
 Goddess of life, and governess of health,  
 Keep every fountain fresh and arb'ar sweet;  
 No brazen gate her passage can repulse,  
 Nor bushy thicket bar thy subtle breath:  
 Then deck thee with thy loose delightsome robes,  
 And on thy wings bring delicate perfumes,  
 To play the' wanton with us through the leaves."

Robert Greene, probably, if not certainly, the next in age of the group to Peele, was born in 1560, the son of apparently well-to-do parents at Norwich, and was educated at Clare Hall, Cambridge, where he took his Master's degree in 1583. He was subsequently incorporated at Oxford, and being by no means ill-inclined to make the most of himself, sometimes took the style of a member

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Milton's "elms star-proof" in the *Arcades*. Milton evidently knew Peele well.

“Utriusque Academiae.” After leaving the university he seems to have made a long tour on the Continent, not (according to his own account) at all to the advantage of his morals or means. He is said to have actually taken orders, and held a living for some short time, while he perhaps also studied if he did not practise medicine. He married a lady of virtue and some fortune, but soon despoiled and deserted her, and for the last six years of his life never saw her. At last in 1592, aged only two and thirty,—but after about ten years it would seem of reckless living and hasty literary production,—he died (of a disease caused or aggravated by a debauch on pickled herrings and Rhenish) so miserably poor that he had to trust to his injured wife’s forgiveness for payment of the money to the extent of which a charitable landlord and landlady had trusted him. The facts of this lamentable end may have been spitefully distorted by Gabriel Harvey in his quarrel with Nash; but there is little reason to doubt that the received story is in the main correct. Of the remarkable prose pamphlets which form the bulk of Greene’s work we speak elsewhere, as also of the pretty songs (considerably exceeding in poetical merit anything to be found in the body of his plays) with which both pamphlets and plays are diversified. His actual dramatic production is not inconsiderable: a working-up of the *Orlando Furioso*; *A Looking Glass for London and England* (Nineveh) with Lodge; *James IV.* (of Scotland), a wildly unhistorical romance; *Alphonsus, King of Arragon*; and perhaps *The Pinner of Wakefield*, which deals with his own part namesake George-a-Greene; not impossibly also the pseudo-Shakesperian *Fair Em.* His best play without doubt is *The History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, in which, after a favourite fashion of the time, he mingles a certain amount of history, or, at least, a certain number of historical personages, with a plentiful dose of the supernatural and of horse-play, and with a very graceful and prettily-handled love story. With a few touches from the master’s hand, Margaret, the fair maid of Fressingfield, might serve as handmaid to Shakespere’s women, and is certainly by far the most human



heroine produced by any of Greene's own group. There is less rant in Greene (though there is still plenty of it) than in any of his friends, and his fancy for soft female characters, loving, and yet virtuous, appears frequently. But his power is ill-sustained, as the following extract will show :—

*Margaret.* “ Ah, father, when the harmony of heaven  
 Soundeth the measures of a lively faith,  
 The vain illusions of this flattering world  
 Seem odious to the thoughts of Margaret.  
 I lovèd once,—Lord Lacy was my love ;  
 And now I hate myself for that I loved,  
 And doted more on him than on my God,—  
 For this I scourge myself with sharp repents.  
 But now the touch of such aspiring sins  
 Tells me all love is lust but love of heaven ;  
 That beauty used for love is vanity :  
 The world contains naught but alluring baits,  
 Pride, flattery [            ], and inconstant thoughts.  
 To shun the pricks o' death I leave the world,  
 And vow to meditate on heavenly bliss,  
 To live in Framlingham a holy nun,  
 Holy and pure in conscience and in deed ;  
 And for to wish all maids to learn of me  
 To seek heaven's joy before earth's vanity.”

We do not know anything of Thomas Kyd's, except *The Spanish Tragedy*, which is a second part of an extremely popular play (sometimes attributed to Kyd himself, but probably earlier) called *Jeronimo*, and the translation of *Cornelia*, though others are doubtfully attributed. The well-known epithet of Jonson, “sporting” Kyd, seems to have been either a mere play on the poet's name, or else a *lucus a non lucendo* ; for both *Jeronimo* and its sequel are in the ghastliest and bloodiest vein of tragedy, and *Cornelia* is a model of stately dullness. The two “*Jeronimo*” or “*Hieronimo*” plays were, as has been said, extremely popular, and it is positively known that Jonson himself, and probably others, were employed from time to time to freshen them up ; with the consequence that the exact authorship of particular passages

is somewhat problematical. Both plays, however, display, nearly in perfection, the rant, not always quite ridiculous, but always extravagant, from which Shakespere rescued the stage; though, as the following extract will show, this rant is by no means always, or indeed often, smoke without fire:—

“ O ! forbear,  
 For other talk for us far fitter were.  
 But if you be importunate to know  
 The way to him, and where to find him out,  
 Then list to me, and I'll resolve your doubt.  
 There is a path upon your left hand side,  
 That leadeth from a guilty conscience  
 Unto a forest of distrust and fear—  
 A darksome place and dangerous to pass.  
 There shall you meet with melancholy thoughts  
 Whose baleful humours if you but uphold,  
 It will conduct you to despair and death.  
 Whose rocky cliffs when you have once beheld  
 Within a huge dale of lasting night—  
 That, kindled with the world's iniquities,  
 Doth cast up filthy and detested fumes—  
 Not far from thence, where murderers have built  
 An habitation for their cursed souls,  
 There is a brazen cauldron fixed by Jove  
 In his fell wrath upon a sulphur flame.  
 Yourselves shall find Lorenzo bathing him  
 In boiling lead and blood of innocents.”

But nothing, except citation of whole scenes and acts, could show the extraordinary jumble of ghosts, blood, thunder, treachery, and horrors of all sorts which these plays contain.

Now for a very different citation:—

“ If all the pens that ever poets held  
 Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,  
 And every sweetness that inspir'd their hearts,  
 Their minds, and muses, on admirèd themes;  
 If all the heavenly quintessence they 'still  
 From their immortal flowers of poesy,  
 Wherein as in a mirror we perceive

The highest reaches of a human wit ;  
If these had made one poem's period,  
And all combined in beauty's worthiness  
Yet should there hover in their restless heads  
One thought, one grace, one wonder at the least  
Which into words no virtue can digest."

It is no wonder that the whole school has been dwarfed in the general estimation, since its work was critically considered and isolated from other work, by the towering excellence of this author. Little as is known of all the band, that little becomes almost least in regard to their chief and leader. Born (1564) at Canterbury, the son of a shoemaker, he was educated at the Grammar School of that city, and at Benet (afterwards Corpus) College, Cambridge; he plunged into literary work and dissipation in London; and he outlived Greene only to fall a victim to debauchery in a still more tragical way. His death (1593) was the subject of much gossip, but the most probable account is that he was poniarded in self-defence by a certain Francis Archer, a serving-man (not by any means necessarily, as Charles Kingsley has it, a footman), while drinking at Deptford, and that the cause of the quarrel was a woman of light character. He has also been accused of gross vices not to be particularised, and of atheism. The accusation is certain; and Mr. Boas's researches as to Kyd, who was also concerned in the matter, have thrown some light on it; but much is still obscure. The most offensive charges were due to one Bame or Baines, who was afterwards hanged at Tyburn. That Marlowe was a Bohemian in the fullest sense is certain; that he was anything worse there is no evidence whatever. He certainly was acquainted with Raleigh and other distinguished persons, and was highly spoken of by Chapman and others.

But the interest of Marlowe's name has nothing to do with these obscure scandals of three hundred years ago, though it may be difficult to pass them over entirely. He is the undoubted author of some of the masterpieces of English verse;

the hardly to be doubted author of others not much inferior. Except the very greatest names—Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Dryden, Shelley—no author can be named who has produced, when the proper historical estimate is applied to him, such work as is to be found in *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward the Second*, in one department; *Hero and Leander* and the *Passionate Shepherd* in another. I have but very little doubt that the powerful, if formless, play of *Lust's Dominion* is Marlowe's, though it may have been rewritten, and the translations of Lucan and Ovid and the minor work which is more or less probably attributed to him, swell his tale. Prose he did not write, perhaps could not have written. For the one characteristic lacking to his genius was measure, and prose without measure, as numerous examples have shown, is usually rubbish. Even his dramas show a singular defect in the architectural quality of literary genius. The vast and formless creations of the writer's boundless fancy completely master him; his aspirations after the immense too frequently leave him content with the simply unmeasured. In his best play as a play, *Edward the Second*, the limitations of a historical story impose something like a restraining form on his glowing imagination. But fine as this play is, it is noteworthy that no one of his greatest things occurs in it. *The Massacre at Paris*, where he also has the confinement of reality after a fashion, is a chaotic thing as a whole, without any great beauty in parts. *The Tragedy of Dido* (to be divided between him and Nash) is the worst thing he ever did. But in the purely romantic subjects of *Tamburlaine*, *Faustus*, and *The Jew of Malta*, his genius, untrammelled by any limits of story, showed itself equally unable to contrive such limits for itself, and able to develop the most marvellous beauties of detail. Shakespeare himself has not surpassed, which is equivalent to saying that no other writer has equalled, the famous and wonderful passages in *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus*, which are familiar to every student of English literature as examples of the *ne plus ultra* of the poetic powers, not of the language but of language. The tragic imagina-

tion in its wildest flights has never summoned up images of pity and terror more imposing, more moving, than those excited by *The Jew of Malta*. The riot of passion and of delight in the beauty of colour and form which characterises his version of *Hero and Leander* has never been approached by any writer. But Marlowe, with the fullest command of the *apeiron*, had not, and, as far as I can judge, never would have had, any power of introducing into it the law of the *peras*. It is usual to say that had he lived, and had his lot been happily cast, we should have had two Shakespeares. This is not wise. In the first place, Marlowe was totally destitute of humour—the characteristic which, united with his tragic and imaginative powers, makes Shakespeare as, in a less degree, it makes Homer, and even, though the humour is grim and intermittent, Dante. In other words, he was absolutely destitute of the first requisite of self-criticism. In the natural course of things, as the sap of his youthful imagination ceased to mount, and as his craving for immensity hardened itself, he would probably have degenerated from bombast shot through with genius to bombast pure and simple, from *Faustus* to *Lust's Dominion*, and from *Lust's Dominion* to *Jeremio* or *The Distracted Emperor*. Apart from the magnificent passages which he can show, and which are simply intoxicating to any lover of poetry, his great title to fame is the discovery of the secret of that "mighty line" which a seldom-erring critic of his own day, not too generously given, vouchsafed to him. Up to his time the blank verse line always, and the semi-couplet in heroics, or member of the more complicated stanza usually, were either stiff or nerveless. Compared with his own work and with the work of his contemporaries and followers who learnt from him, they are like a dried preparation, like something waiting for the infusion of blood, for the inflation of living breath. Marlowe came, and the old wooden versification, the old lay-figure structure of poetic rhythm, was cast once for all into the lumber-room, where only poetasters of the lowest rank went to seek it. It is impossible to call Marlowe a great dramatist, and the attempts that

have been made to make him out to be such remind one of the attempts that have been made to call Molière a great poet. Marlowe was one of the greatest poets of the world whose work was cast by accident and caprice into an imperfect mould of drama; Molière was one of the greatest dramatists of the world who was obliged by fashion to use a previously perfected form of verse. The state of Molière was undoubtedly the more gracious; but the splendour of Marlowe's uncut diamonds of poetry is the more wonderful.

The characteristics of this strange and interesting school may be summed up briefly, but are of the highest importance in literary history. Unlike their nearest analogues, the French romantics of the 1830 type, they were all of academic education, and had even a decided contempt (despite their Bohemian way of life) for un-scholarly innovators. They manifested (except in Marlowe's fortuitous and purely genial discovery of the secret of blank verse) a certain contempt for form, and never, at least in drama, succeeded in mastering it. But being all, more or less, men of genius, and having the keenest sense of poetry, they supplied the dry bones of the precedent dramatic model with blood and breath, with vigour and variety, which not merely informed but transformed it. *Davia and Bethsabe, Doctor Faustus, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, are chaotic enough, but they are of the chaos that precedes cosmic development. The almost insane bombast that marks the whole school has (as has been noticed) the character of the shrieks and gesticulations of healthy childhood, and the insensibility to the really comic which also marks them is of a similar kind. Every one knows how natural it is to childhood to appreciate bad jokes, how seldom a child sees a good one. Marlowe and his crew, too (the comparison has no doubt often been used before), were of the brood of Otus and Ephialtes, who grew so rapidly and in so disorderly a fashion that it was necessary for the gods to make an end of them. The universe probably lost little, and it certainly gained something.

Side by side with this learned, extravagant, gifted, ill-regulated

school, there was slowly growing up a very different one, which was to inherit all the gifts of the University Wits, and to add to them the gifts of measure and proportion. The early work of the actor school of English dramatists is a difficult subject to treat in any fashion, and a particularly difficult subject to treat shortly. Chronology, an important aid, helps us not very much, though such help as she does give has been as a rule neglected by historians, so that plays before 1590 (which may be taken roughly as the dividing date), and plays after it have been muddled up ruthlessly. We do not know the exact dates of many of those which are (many of the plays of the earlier time are not) extant; and of those which are extant, and of which the dates are more or less known, the authors are in not a few most important cases absolutely undiscoverable. Yet in the plays which belong to this period, and which there is no reason to attribute wholly to any of the Marlowe group, or much reason to attribute to them under the guidance, or perhaps with the collaboration of practical actors (some at least of whom were like Shakespeare himself, men of no known regular education), there are characteristics which promise at least as well for the future as the wonderful poetic outbursts of the Marlowe school itself. Of these outbursts we find few in this other division. But we find a growing knowledge of what a play is, as distinguished from a series of tableaux acted by not too lifelike characters. We find a glimmering (which is hardly anywhere to be seen in the more literary work of the other school) of the truth that the characters must be made to work out the play, and not the play be written in a series of disjointed scenes to display, in anything but a successful fashion, the characters. With fewer flights we have fewer absurdities; with less genius we have more talent. It must be remembered, of course, that the plays of the university school itself were always written for players, and that some of the authors had more or less to do with acting as well as with writing. But the flame of discord which burns so fiercely on the one side in the famous real or supposed dying utterances of Greene, and

which years afterwards breaks out on the other in the equally famous satire of *The Return from Parnassus*,<sup>1</sup> illuminates a real difference—a difference which study of the remains of the literature of the period can only make plainer. The same difference has manifested itself again, and more than once in other departments of literature, but hardly in so interesting a manner, and certainly not with such striking results.

<sup>1</sup> The outburst of Greene about “the only Shakescene,” the “upstart crow beattified with our feathers,” and so forth, is too well known to need extracting here. *The Return from Parnassus*, a very curious tripartite play, performed 1597-1601 but retrospective in tone, is devoted to the troubles of poor scholars in getting a livelihood, and incidentally gives much matter on the authors of the time from Shakespere downward, and on the jealousy of professional actors felt by scholars, and *vice versa*.

