

CHAPTER V

THE SECOND DRAMATIC PERIOD—SHAKESPERE

THE difficulty of writing about Shakespere is twofold ; and though it is a difficulty which, in both its aspects, presents itself when other great writers are concerned, there is no other case in which it besets the critic to quite the same extent. Almost everything that is worth saying has been already said, more or less happily. A vast amount has been said which is not in the least worth saying, which is for the most part demonstrably foolish or wrong. As Shakespere is by far the greatest of all writers, ancient or modern, so he has been the subject of commentatorial folly to an extent which dwarfs the expense of that folly on any other single subject. It is impossible to notice the results of this folly except at great length ; it is doubtful whether they are worth noticing at all ; yet there is always the danger either that some mischievous notions may be left undisturbed by the neglect to notice them, or that the critic himself may be presumed to be ignorant of the foolishness of his predecessors. These inconveniences, however, must here be risked, and it may perhaps be thought that the necessity of risking them is a salutary one. In no other case is it so desirable that an author should be approached by students with the minimum of apparatus.

The scanty facts and the abundant fancies as to Shakespere's life are a commonplace of literature. He was baptized on the 26th of April 1564 at Stratford-on-Avon, and must have been

born either on the same day, or on one of those immediately preceding. His father was John Shakespere, his mother Mary Arden, both belonging to the lower middle class and connected, personally and by their relations, with yeomanry and small landed gentry on the one side, and with well-to-do tradesmen on the other. Nothing is known of his youth and little of his education; but it was a constant tradition of men of his own and the immediately succeeding generation that he had little school learning. Before he was nineteen he was married, at the end of November 1582, to Anne Hathaway, who was seven years his senior. Their first child, Susannah, was baptized six months later. He is said to have left Stratford for London in 1585, or thereabouts, and to have connected himself at once with the theatre, first in humble and then in more important positions. But all this is mist and myth. He is transparently referred to by Robert Greene in the summer or autumn of 1592, and the terms of the reference prove his prosperity. The same passage brought out a complimentary reference to Shakespere's intellectual and moral character from Chettle, Greene's editor. He published *Venus and Adonis* in 1593, and *Lucrece* next year. His plays now began to appear rapidly, and brought him money enough to buy, in 1597, the house of New Place at Stratford, and to establish himself there after, it is supposed, twelve years' almost complete absence from his birthplace and his family. Documentary references to his business matters now become not infrequent, but, except as showing that he was alive and prosperous, they are quite uninteresting. The same may be said of the marriages and deaths of his children. In 1609 appeared the *Sonnets*, some of which had previously been printed in unauthorised and piratical publications. He died on the 23d of April (supposed generally to be his birthday) 1616, and was buried at Stratford. His plays had been only surreptitiously printed, the retention of a play in manuscript being of great importance to the actors, and the famous first folio did not appear till seven years after his death.

The canon of Shakespere's plays, like everything else connected with him, has been the subject of endless discussion. There is no reasonable doubt that in his earlier days (the first printed play among those ordinarily assigned to him, *Romeo and Juliet*, dates from 1597) he had taken part in dramatic work which is now mostly anonymous or assigned to other men, and there is also no doubt that there may be passages in the accepted plays which he owed to others. But my own deliberate judgment is that no important and highly probable ascription of extant work to Shakespere can be made outside the canon as usually printed, with the doubtful exception of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; and I do not believe that in the plays usually accepted, any very important or characteristic portion is not Shakespere's. As for Shakespere-Bacon theories, and that kind of folly, they are scarcely worthy even of mention. Nor among the numerous other controversies and errors on the subject shall I meddle with more than one—the constantly repeated assertion that England long misunderstood or neglected Shakespere, and that foreign aid, chiefly German (though some include Voltaire!), was required to make her discover him. A very short way is possible with this absurdity. It would be difficult to name any men more representative of cultivated literary opinion and accomplishment in the six generations (taking a generation at the third of a century) which passed between Shakespere's death and the battle of Waterloo (since when English admiration of Shakespere will hardly be denied), than Ben Jonson, John Milton, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Their lives overlapped each other considerably, so that no period is left uncovered. They were all typical men of letters, each of his own time, and four at least of them were literary dictators. Now, Ben Jonson's estimate of Shakespere in prose and verse is on record in more places than one, and is as authentic as the silly stories of his envy are mythical. If Milton, to his eternal disgrace, flung, for party purposes, the study of Shakespere as a reproach in his dead king's face, he had himself long before put on

record his admiration for him, and his own study is patent to every critical reader of his works. Dryden, but a year or two after the death of Shakespere's daughter, drew up that famous and memorable eulogy which ought to be familiar to all, and which, long before any German had spoken of Shakespere, and thirty years before Voltaire had come into the world, exactly and precisely based the structure of Shakespere-worship. Pope edited Shakespere. Johnson edited him. Coleridge is acknowledged as, with his contemporaries Lamb and Hazlitt, the founder of modern appreciation. It must be a curious reckoning which, in face of such a catena as this, stretching its links over the whole period, maintains that England wanted Germans to teach her how to admire the writer whom Germans have done more to mystify and distort than even his own countrymen.

The work of Shakespere falls into three divisions very unequal in bulk. There is first (speaking both in the order of time and in that of thought, though not in that of literary importance and interest) the small division of poems, excluding the *Sonnets*, but including *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and the few and uncertain but exquisite scraps, the *Lover's Complaint*, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, and so forth. All these are likely to have been the work of early youth, and they are much more like the work of other men than any other part of Shakespere's work, differing chiefly in the superior sweetness of those wood-notes wild, which Milton justly, if not altogether adequately, attributed to the poet, and in the occasional appearance of the still more peculiar and unique touches of sympathy with and knowledge of universal nature which supply the main Shakesperian note. The *Venus* and the *Lucrece* form part of a large collection (see last chapter) of extremely luscious, not to say voluptuous, poetry which the imitation of Italian models introduced into England, which has its most perfect examples in the earlier of these two poems, in numerous passages of Spenser, and in the *Hero and Leander* of Marlowe, but which was written, as will have been seen from what has been already said, with extra-

ordinary sweetness and abundance, by a vast number of Elizabethan writers. There are extant mere *adspota*, and mere "minor poems" (such as the pretty "Britain's Ida," which used to be printed as Spenser's, and which some critics have rather rashly given to Phineas Fletcher), good enough to have made reputation, if not fortune, at other times. There is no reason to attribute to Shakespere on the one hand, any deliberate intention of executing a *tour de force* in the composition of these poems or, in his relinquishment of the style, any deliberate rejection of the kind as unworthy of his powers on the other. He appears to have been eminently one of those persons who care neither to be in nor out of the fashion, but follow it as far as suits and amuses them. Yet, beautiful as these poems are, they so manifestly do not present their author at the full of his powers, or even precluding in the kind wherein the best of those powers were to be shown, that they require comparatively little critical notice. As things delightful to read they can hardly be placed too high, especially the *Venus*; as evidences of the poet's many-sided nature, they are interesting. But they are in somewhat other than the usual sense quite "simple, sensuous, and passionate." The misplaced ingenuity which, neglecting the *unum necessarium*, will busy itself about all sorts of unnecessary things, has accordingly been rather hard put to it with them, and to find any pasture at all has had to browse on questions of dialect, and date, and personal allusion, even more jejune and even more unsubstantial than usual.

It is quite otherwise with the *Sonnets*. In the first place nowhere in Shakespere's work is it more necessary to brush away the cobwebs of the commentators. This side of madness, no vainer fancies have ever entered the mind of man than those which have been inspired by the immaterial part of the matter. The very initials of the dedicatee "W. H." have had volumes written about them; the *Sonnets* themselves have been twisted and classified in every conceivable shape; the persons to whom they are addressed, or to whom they refer, have been identified

with half the gentlemen and ladies of Elizabeth's court, and half the men of letters of the time; and every extremity and eccentricity of non-natural interpretation has been applied to them. When they are freed from this torture and studied rationally, there is nothing mysterious about them except the mystery of their poetical beauty. Some of them are evidently addressed in the rather hyperbolical language of affection, common at the time, and derived from the study of Greek and Italian writers, to a man; others, in language not hyperbolical at all, to a woman. Disdain, rivalry, suspense, short-lived joy, long sorrow, all the symptoms and concomitants of the passion of love—which are only commonplaces as death and life are commonplace—form their motives. For my part I am unable to find the slightest interest or the most rudimentary importance in the questions whether the Mr. W. H. of the dedication was the Earl of Pembroke, and if so, whether he was also the object of the majority of the *Sonnets*; whether the "dark lady," the "woman coloured ill," was Miss Mary Fitton; whether the rival poet was Chapman. Very likely all these things are true: very likely not one of them is true. They are impossible of settlement, and if they were settled they would not in the slightest degree affect the poetical beauty and the human interest of the *Sonnets*, which, in a strange *reductio ad absurdum* of eighteenth century common-sense criticism, Hallam thought it impossible not to wish that Shakespere had not written, and which some critics, not perhaps of the least qualified, have regarded as the high watermark of English, if not of all, poetry.

This latter estimate will only be dismissed as exaggerated by those who are debarred from appreciation by want of sympathy with the subject, or distracted by want of comprehension of it. A harmony of the two chief opposing theories of poetry will teach us that we must demand of the very highest poetry first—the order is not material—a certain quality of expression, and secondly, a certain quality of subject. What that quality of subject must be has been, as it seems to me, crudely and wrongly stated, but rightly indicated, in Mr. Matthew Arnold's formula of the "Criticism of

Life." That is to say, in less debatable words, the greatest poet must show most knowledge of human nature. Now both these conditions are fulfilled in the sonnets of Shakespere with a completeness and intensity impossible to parallel elsewhere. The merits of the formal and expressive part hardly any one will now question ; the sonnets may be opened almost at random with the certainty of finding everywhere the phrases, the verses, the passages which almost mechanically recur to our minds when we are asked to illustrate the full poetical capacity and beauty of the English tongue, such as :

"The painful warrior, famed for fight,
After a thousand victories once foiled,
Is from the book of honour razed quite
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled ;"

or

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past ;"

or

"Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,
Bound for the prize of all too precious you ?"

or

"Then hate me if thou wilt,"

with the whole sonnet which it opens ; or

"When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights ;"

or that most magnificent quatrain of all,

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove."

Any competent judge of the formal part of poetry must admit that its force can no farther go. Verse and phrase cannot be better moulded to the melodious suggestion of beauty. Nor, as

even these scraps show, is the thought below the verse. Even if Hallam's postulate of misplaced and ill-regulated passion be granted (and I am myself very far from granting it), the extraordinary wealth of thought, of knowledge, of nature, of self-knowledge, of clear vision of others in the very midst of the circumstances which might make for unclear vision, is still unmistakable. And if the poet's object was to catch up the sum of love and utter it with or even without any special relation to his own actual feelings for any actual person (a hypothesis which human nature in general, and the nature of poets in particular, makes not improbable), then it can only be said that he has succeeded. From Sappho and Solomon to Shelley and Mr. Swinburne, many bards have spoken excellently of love: but what they have said could be cut out of Shakespere's sonnets better said than they have said it, and yet enough remain to furnish forth the greatest of poets.

With the third and in every sense chief division of the work, the necessities for explanation and allowance cease altogether. The thirty-seven plays of the ordinary Shakesperian canon comprise the greatest, the most varied, the most perfect work yet done by any man in literature; and what is more, the work of which they consist is on the whole the most homogeneous and the least unequal ever so done. The latter statement is likely to be more questioned than the former; but I have no fear of failing to make it out. In one sense, no doubt, Shakespere is unequal—as life is. He is not always at the tragic heights of Othello and Hamlet, at the comic raptures of Falstaff and Sir Toby, at the romantic ecstasies of Romeo and Titania. Neither is life. But he is always—and this is the extraordinary and almost inexplicable difference, not merely between him and all his contemporaries, but between him and all other writers—at the height of the particular situation. This unique quality is uniquely illustrated in his plays. The exact order of their composition is entirely unknown, and the attempts which have been made to arrange it into periods, much more to rank play after play in regular

sequence, are obvious failures, and are discredited not merely by the inadequate means—such as counting syllables and attempting to classify the cadence of lines—resorted to in order to effect them, but by the hopeless discrepancy between the results of different investigators and of the same investigator at different times. We know indeed pretty certainly that *Romeo and Juliet* was an early play, and *Cymbeline* a late one, with other general facts of the same kind. We know pretty certainly that the *Henry the Sixth* series was based on a previous series on the same subject in which Shakespere not improbably had a hand; that *King John* and *The Taming of the Shrew* had in the same way first draughts from the same or other hands, and so forth. But all attempts to arrange and elucidate a chronological development of Shakespere's mind and art have been futile. Practically the Shakesperian gifts are to be found *passim* in the Shakesperian canon—even in the dullest of all the plays, as a whole, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, even in work so alien from his general practice, and so probably mixed with other men's work, as *Titus Andronicus* and *Pericles*. There are rarely elsewhere—in *The Maid's Tragedy* of Fletcher, in *The Duchess of Malfy* of Webster, in *The Changeling* of Middleton—passages or even scenes which might conceivably have been Shakespere's. But there is, with the doubtful exception of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, no play in any other man's work which as a whole or in very great part is Shakesperian, and there is no play usually recognised as Shakespere's which would not seem out of place and startling in the work of any contemporary.

This intense, or rather (for intense is not the right word) this extraordinarily diffused character, is often supposed to be a mere fancy of Shakespere-worshippers. It is not so. There is something, not so much in the individual flashes of poetry, though it is there too, as in the entire scope and management of Shakespere's plays, histories, tragedies, and comedies alike, which distinguishes them, and it is exactly the characteristic noted

above, and well put by Dryden in his famous definition of Shakespere. Perhaps the first branch or phase of this distinction is that Shakespere is never, in the vulgar sense of the word, unnatural. He has not the slightest objection to horrors; the alarmed foreign critics who described his theatre as a "shambles" need not have gone farther than his greatest plays to justify themselves literally. But with barely even the exception which has so often to be made of *Titus Andronicus*, his horrors are never sought beyond a certain usual and probable round of circumstance, and are almost always tempered and humanised by touches of humour or pathos, or both. The cool sarcastic villainy of Aaron (a mood hit off nowhere out of Shakespere, except in Middleton's *De Flores*, and not fully there) is the point on which I should chiefly put the finger to justify at least a partial Shakesperian authorship. Contrast the character with the nightmare ghastlinesses and extravagances not merely of Tourneur and Webster, but even of Marlowe in *Barabas*, and the difference of Shakespere's handling will be felt at once. Another point which has been often, yet perhaps not quite fully, noticed is the distinct and peculiar attitude of Shakespere towards what is in the common sense called morality. Nobody can possibly call him squeamish: I do not know that even any French naturalist of the latest school has charged the author of *Pericles*, and *Love's Labour Lost*, and *Henry IV.*, with that *pruderie bête* of which they accuse Scott. But he never makes those forms of vice which most trouble and corrupt society triumphant; he never diverges into the morbid pathology of the amatory passion, and above all, and most remarkably of all, though I think least remarked, he never makes his personages show the singular toleration of the most despicable immorality which almost all his dramatic contemporaries exhibit. One is constantly astonished at the end of an Elizabethan play, when, after vice has been duly baffled or punished, and virtue rewarded (for they all more or less follow that rule), reconciliations and forgivenesses of injuries follow, to observe the complacency with which husbands who have sold their wives'

favours, wives who have been at the command of the first comer or the highest bidder, mix cheek by jowl, and apparently unrebuked, with the modest maidens, the virtuous matrons, the faithful lovers of the piece. Shakespere never does this. Mrs. Quickly is indeed at one time the confidante of Anne Fenton, and at another the complaisant hostess of Doll Tear-sheet, but not in the same play. We do not find Marina's master and mistress rewarded, as they would very likely have been by Fletcher or Middleton, with comfortable if not prominent posts at the court of Pericles, or the Government-house of Mytilene. The ugly and artistically unmanageable situation of the husband who trades in his wife's honour simply does not occur in all the wide license and variety of Shakespere's forty plays. He is in his own sense liberal as the most easy going can demand, but he never mixes vice and virtue. Yet again, while practising this singular moderation in the main element, in the most fertile motives, of tragedy and comedy respectively, he is equally alone in his use in both of the element of humour. And here we are on dangerous ground. To many excellent persons of all times since his own, as well as in it, Shakespere's humour and his use of it have been stumbling-blocks. Some of them have been less able to away with the use, some with the thing. Shakesperian clowns are believed to be red rags to some experienced playwrights and accomplished wits of our own days: the porter in *Macbeth*, the gravediggers in *Hamlet*, the fool in *Lear*, even the humours in *Love's Labour Lost* and *The Merchant of Venice* have offended. I avow myself an impenitent Shakesperian in this respect also. The constant or almost constant presence of that humour which ranges from the sarcastic quintessence of Iago, and the genial quintessence of Falstaff, through the fantasies of Feste and Edgar, down to the sheer nonsense which not unfrequently occurs, seems to me not only delightful in itself, but, as I have hinted already, one of the chief of those spells by which Shakespere has differentiated his work in the sense of universality from that of all other dramatists. I have used the word nonsense, and I may be thought to have partly given up my case by it. But

nonsense, as hardly any critic but Hazlitt has had the courage to avow openly, is no small part of life, and it is a part the relish of which Englishmen, as the same great but unequal critic justly maintains, are almost alone in enjoying and recognising. It is because Shakespeare dares, and dares very frequently, simply *desipere*, simply to be foolish, that he is so pre-eminently wise. The others try to be always wise, and, alas! it is not necessary to complete the antithesis.

These three things—restraint in the use of sympathy with suffering, restraint in the use of interest in voluptuous excess, and humour—are, as it seems to me, the three chief distinguishing points in Shakespeare's handling which are not found in any of his contemporaries, for though there is humour in not a few of these, none of them is a perfect humorist in the same sense. Here, as well as in that general range or width of subject and thought which attracted Dryden's eulogium, he stands alone. In other respects he shares the qualities which are perceptible almost throughout this wonderfully fertile department of literature; but he shares them as infinitely the largest shareholder. It is difficult to think of any other poet (for with Homer we are deprived of the opportunity of comparison) who was so completely able to meet any one of his contemporaries on that contemporary's own terms in natural gift. I say natural gift because, though it is quite evident that Shakespeare was a man of no small reading, his deficiencies in general education are too constantly recorded by tradition, and rendered too probable by internal evidence, to be ignored or denied by any impartial critic. Put it is difficult to mention a quality possessed by any of the school (as it is loosely called), from Marlowe to Shirley, which he had not in greater measure; while the infinite qualities which he had, and the others each in one way or another lacked, are evident. On only one subject—religion—is his mouth almost closed; certainly, as the few utterances that touch it show, from no incapacity of dealing with it, and apparently from no other dislike than a dislike to meddle with anything outside of the purely human province of

which he felt that he was universal master—in short from an infinite reverence

It will not be expected that in a book like the present—the whole space of which might very well be occupied, without any of the undue dilation which has been more than once rebuked, in dealing with Shakespere alone—any attempt should be made to criticise single plays, passages, and characters. It is the less of a loss that in reality, as the wisest commentators have always either begun or ended by acknowledging, Shakespere is your only commentator on Shakespere. Even the passages which corrupt printing, or the involved fashion of speaking peculiar to the time, make somewhat obscure at first, will in almost every case yield to the unassisted cogitation of any ordinarily intelligent person ; and the results so reached are far more likely to be the true results than the elaborate emendations which delight a certain class of editors. A certain amount of mere glossary is of course necessary, but otherwise the fewer corks and bladders the swimmer takes with him when he ventures into “the ocean which is Shakespere,” the better. There are, however, certain common errors, some of which have survived even the last century of Shakespere-study and Shakespere-worship, which must perhaps be discussed. For in the case of the greatest writers, the business of the critic is much more to shovel away the rubbish of his predecessors than to attempt any accumulation of his own. The chief of these errors—or rather that error which practically swallows up all the others and can produce them again at any time—is that Shakespere was, if not exactly an inspired idiot, at any rate a mainly tentative if not purely unconscious artist, much of whose work is only not bad as art, while most, if not all of it, was originally produced with a minimum of artistic consciousness and design. This enormous error, which is protean in form, has naturally induced the counter error of a too great insistence on the consciousness and elaboration of Shakespere’s art. The most elaborate theories of this art have been framed—theories involving the construction of perhaps as much baseless fabric as anything else connected with the subject,

which is saying a great deal. It appears to me in the highest degree improbable that Shakespere had before him consciously more than three purposes; but these three I think that he constantly had, and that he was completely successful in achieving them. The first was to tell in every play a dramatically complete story; the second was to work that story out by the means of purely human and probable characters; and the third was to give such form and ornaments to the working out as might please the playgoers of his day. In pursuing the first two he was the poet or dramatist of all time. In pursuing the third he was the intelligent playwright. But (and here is the source of the common error) it by no means follows that his attention, and his successful attention, to his third purpose in any way interferes with, or degrades, his excellence as a pursuer of the first two. In the first place, it can escape no careful student that the merely playwright part of Shakespere's work is (as is the case with no other dramatic author whatever) singularly separable. No generation since his death has had the slightest difficulty in adapting by far the greater part of his plays to use and popularity in its own day, though the adaptation may have varied in liberty and in good taste with the standards of the time. At the present day, while almost all other old dramatists have ceased to be acted at all, or are acted merely as curiosities, the adaptation of Shakespere has become more and more a process of simple omission (without the addition or alteration of anything) of parts which are either unsuited to modern manners or too long for modern patience. With the two usual exceptions, *Pericles* and *Titus Andronicus* (which, despite the great beauty of parts, are evidently less Shakesperian as wholes than any others), there is not a single play of the whole number that could not be—there are not many that have not been—acted with success in our time. It would be difficult to find a stronger differentia from the work of the mere playwright, who invariably thinks first of the temporary conditions of success, and accordingly loses the success which is not temporary. But the second great difference of Shakespere is,

that even what may be in comparison called the ephemeral and perishable parts of him have an extraordinary vitality, if not theatrical yet literary, of their own. The coarser scenes of *Measure for Measure* and *The Comedy of Errors*, the satire on fleeting follies in *Love's Labour Lost*, the uncomelier parts of *All's Well that Ends Well*, the Doll Tear-sheet business of *Henry IV.*, the comic by-play of *Troilus and Cressida*, may seem mere wood, hay, and stubble in comparison with the nobler portions. Yet the fire of time has not consumed them : they are as delightful as ever in the library if not on the stage.

Little or nothing need be said in defence of Shakespere as an artist from the attacks of the older or Unity criticism. That maleficent giant can now hardly grin at the pilgrims whom he once harassed. But there are many persons who, not dreaming of the Unities, still object in language less extravagant than Voltaire's or George the Third's, but with hardly less decision, to the "sad stuff," the *fumier* of Shakespere's admixture of comedy with tragedy, of his digressions and episodes, of his multifarious underplots and minor groups, and ramifications of interest or intrigue. The reply to this is not (as it might be, if any reply were not superfluous, in the case of the Unity objection) a reply of demonstration. If any person experienced in literature, and with an interest in it, experienced in life and with an interest in that, asserts that Caliban and Trinculo interfere with his enjoyment of Ferdinand and Miranda ; that the almost tragedy of Hero is marred for him by the comedy of Beatrice and the farce of Dogberry ; that he would have preferred *A Midsummer Night's Dream* without the tedious brief effort of Quince and his companions ; that the solemnity and passion of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* cause in him a revulsion against the porter and the gravedigger ; that the Fool and Edgar are out of place in *Lear*,— it is impossible to prove to him by the methods of any Euclid or of any Aldrich that he is wrong. The thing is essentially, if not wholly, a matter of taste. It is possible, indeed, to point out, as in the case of the Unities, that the objectors, if they will

maintain their objection, must deny the position that the dramatic art holds up the mirror to Nature, and that if they deny it, the burden—a burden never yet successfully taken up by any one—of framing a new definition rests upon them. But this is only a partial and somewhat inconclusive argument, and the person who genuinely dislikes these peculiarities of Shakespere is like a man who genuinely dislikes wine or pictures or human faces, that seem delightful and beautiful to others. I am not aware of any method whereby I can prove that the most perfect claret is better than zoedone in flavour, or that the most exquisite creation of Botticelli or Lionardo is more beautiful than the cuts on the sides of railway novels. Again, it is matter of taste.

It will be seen that I am not for my part afraid to avow myself a thoroughgoing Shakesperian, who accepts the weak points of his master as well as the strong. It is often forgotten (indeed I do not know where I have seen it urged) that there is in Shakespere's case an excuse for the thousand lines that good Ben Jonson would have liked him to blot,—an excuse which avails for no one else. No one else has his excuse of universality; no one else has attempted to paint, much less has painted, the whole of life. It is because Shakespere has attempted this, and, in the judgment of at least some, has succeeded in it, that the spots in his sun are so different from the spots in all other suns. I do not know an unnatural character or an unnatural scene in Shakespere, even among those which have most evidently been written to the gallery. Everything in him passes, in some mysterious way, under and into that "species of eternity" which transforms all the great works of art, which at once prevents them from being mere copies of Nature, and excuses whatever there is of Nature in them that is not beautiful or noble. If this touch is wanting anywhere (and it is wanting very seldom), that, I take it, is the best, indeed the only, sign that that passage is not Shakespere's,—that he had either made use of some other man's work, or that some other man had made use of his. If such passages were of more frequent occurrence, this argument might be called a circular one.

But the proportion of such passages as I at least should exclude is so small, and the difference between them and the rest is so marked, that no improper begging of the question can be justly charged. The plays in the *Globe* edition contain just a thousand closely-printed pages. I do not think that there are fifty in all, perhaps not twenty—putting scraps and patches together—in which the Shakesperian touch is wanting, and I do not think that that touch appears outside the covers of the volume once in a thousand pages of all the rest of English literature. The finest things of other men,—of Marlowe, of Fletcher, of Webster (who no doubt comes nearest to the Shakesperian touch, infinitely as he falls short of the Shakesperian range),—might conceivably be the work of others. But the famous passages of Shakespere, too numerous and too well known to quote, could be no one else's. It is to this point that æsthetic criticism of Shakespere is constantly coming round with an almost monotonous repetition. As great as all others in their own points of greatness; holding points of greatness which no others even approach; such is Shakespere.

There is a certain difficulty—most easily to be appreciated by those who have most carefully studied the literature of the period in question, and have most fully perceived the mistakes which confusion of exact date has induced in the consideration of the very complex subject before us—in selecting dramatists to group with Shakespere. The obvious resource of taking him by himself would frustrate the main purpose of this volume, which is to show the general movement at the same time as the individual developments of the literature of 1560–1660. In one sense Shakespere might be included in any one of three out of the four chapters which we have here devoted to the Elizabethan dramatists. His earliest known, and probably much of his unknown work coincides with the period of tentative; and his latest work overlaps very much of that period of ripe and somewhat over-ripe performance, at the head of which it has here been thought good to set Beaumont and Fletcher. But there is a

group of four notable persons who appear to have especial rights to be classed with him, if not in greatness, yet in character of work, and in the influences which played on that work. They all, like him, took an independent part in the marvellous wit-combat of the last decade of Elizabeth, and they all like him survived, though for different lengths of time, to set an example to the third generation. They are all, even the meanest of them, distinctly great men, and free alike from the immaturity, visible even in Lyly and Marlowe, which marked some of their older contemporaries, and from the decadence, visible even in Fletcher and Massinger, which marred their younger followers. Furthermore, they were mixed up, as regards one another, in an inextricable but not uninteresting series of broils and friendships, to some part of which Shakespere himself may have been by no means a stranger. These reasons have seemed sufficient for separating them from the rest, and grouping them round the captain. They are Benjamin Jonson, George Chapman, John Marston, and Thomas Dekker.

The history of Ben Jonson (the literary history that is to say, for the known facts of his life are simple enough) is curious and perhaps unique. Nothing is really known of his family; but as, at a time when Scotchmen were not loved in England, he maintained his Annandale origin, there should be, especially after Mr. Symonds's investigations as to his career, no doubt that he at least believed himself to be of Border extraction, as was also, it may be remembered, his great disciple, panegyrist, slanderer, and (with the substitution of an easy for a rugged temper), analogue, John Dryden. The fact of these two typical Englishmen being of half or whole Scotch descent will not surprise any one who does not still ignore the proper limits of England. Nobody doubts that his father (or rather stepfather, for he was a posthumous child, born 1573, and his mother married again) was a bricklayer, or that he went to Westminster School; it seems much more dubious whether he had any claim to anything but an honorary degree from either university, though he received

that from both. Probably he worked at bricklaying, though the taunts of his rivals would, in face of the undoubted fact of his stepfather's profession, by no means suffice to prove it. Certainly he went through the chequered existence of so many Elizabethan men of letters; was a soldier in Flanders, an actor, a duellist (killing his man, and escaping consequences only by benefit of clergy), a convert to Romanism, a "revert" to the Anglican Church, a married man, a dramatist. The great play of *Every Man in his Humour*, afterwards very much altered, was perhaps acted first at the Rose Theatre in 1596, and it established Jonson's reputation, though there is no reasonable doubt that he had written other things. His complicated associations and quarrels with Dekker, Marston, Chapman, and others, have occupied the time of a considerable number of persons; they lie quite beyond our subject, and it may be observed without presumption that their direct connection, even with the literary work (*The Poetaster*, *Satiro-mastix*, and the rest) which is usually linked to them, will be better established when critics have left off being uncertain whether *A* was *B*, or *B*, *C*. Even the most famous story of all (the disgrace of Jonson with others for *Eastward Ho!* as a libel against the Scots, for which he was imprisoned, and, being threatened with mutilation, was by his Roman mother supplied with poison), though told by himself, does not rest on any external evidence. What is certain is that Jonson was in great and greater request, both as a writer of masks and other *divertissements* for the Court, and as a head and chief of literary conviviality at the "Mermaid," and other famous taverns. Here, as he grew older, there grew up round him that "Tribe of Ben," or admiring clique of young literary men, which included almost all the most remarkable poets, except Milton, of the late Jacobean and early Caroline period, and which helped to spread his fame for at least two generations, and (by Waller's influence on Saint-Evremond) to make him the first English man of letters who was introduced by a great critic of the Continent to continental attention as a worker in the English

vernacular. At last he was made Poet Laureate, and in 1618 he took a journey to Scotland, and stayed there for some time with Drummond of Hawthornden. The celebrated conversations noted by the host have been the very centre battle-ground of all fights about Ben Jonson's character. It is sufficient here to say that though Ben's chief defender, Gifford, may have been too hard on Drummond, it is difficult, if not impossible, to think that the "Notes of Conversations" were made in a friendly spirit. They contain for their bulk an extraordinary amount of interesting matter, and much sound criticism; but which of us in modern days would care to have such "notes" taken? A man thinks that there are faults in a friend's work, and in the usual exaggeration of conversation he says that it is "rubbish." The Drummonds of this world note it down and it passes as a deliberate judgment. He must be a fortunate man, or an exceptional recluse, who has not found some good-natured friend anticipate Drummond, and convey the crude expression (probably heightened in conveyance) direct to the person concerned. After this visit (which must have been at the end of 1618) Jonson suffered the calamity of having his study destroyed by fire, and lost much MS. work. He lived many years longer and retained his literary primacy, but was unfortunate in money matters, and even in reception of his work by the public, though the literary men of his day made no mistake about him. He died in 1637, and the last of the many stories clustering round his name is the famous one of the inscription, "O rare Ben Jonson!" A year later, a *tombeau*, or collection of funeral poems, entitled *Jonsonus Virbius*, showed the estimate entertained of him by the best and brightest wits of the time.

His life was thus a life of struggle, for he was never rich, and lived for the most part on the most unsatisfactory of all sources of income—casual bounties from the king and others. It is not improbable that his favour with the Court and with Templar society (which was then very unpopular with the middle classes), had something to do with the ill-reception of his later plays. But his

literary influence was very great, and with Donne he determined much of the course of English poetry for many years, and retained a great name even in the comparative eclipse of the "Giant Race" after the Restoration. It was only when the study of Shakespere became a favourite subject with persons of more industry than intelligence in the early eighteenth century, that a singular fabric of myth grew up round Ben Jonson. He was pictured as an incarnation of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, directed in the first place towards Shakespere, and then towards all other literary craftsmen. William Gifford, his first competent editor, set himself to work to destroy this, and undoubtedly succeeded. But the acrimony with which Gifford tinctured all his literary polemic perhaps rather injured his treatment of the case; even yet it may be doubted whether Ben Jonson has attained anything like his proper place in English literary history.

Putting aside the abiding influence of a good long-continued course of misrepresentation, it is still not difficult to discover the source of this under-estimate, without admitting the worst view or even any very bad view of Ben Jonson's character, literary and personal. It may be granted that he was rough and arrogant, a scholar who pushed scholarship to the verge of pedantry, a critic who sometimes forgot that though a schoolmaster may be a critic, a critic should not be merely a schoolmaster. His work is saturated with that contempt of the *profanum vulgus* which the *profanum vulgus* (humanly enough) seldom fails to return. Moreover, it is extremely voluminous, and it is by no means equal. Of his eighteen plays, three only—*Every Man in his Humour*, *The Alchemist*, and the charming fragment of *The Sad Shepherd*—can be praised as wholes. His lovely *Masques* are probably unread by all but a few scores, if so many, in each generation. His noble sinewy prose is, for the most part, unattractive in subject. His minor poems, though not a few of them are known even to smatterers in literature, are as a whole (or at least it would seem so) unknown. Yet his merits are extraordinary.

“Never” in his plays (save *The Sad Shepherd*) “tender,” and still more rarely “sublime,” he yet, in words much better applied to him than to his pupil Dryden, “wrestles with and conquers time.” Even his enemies admit his learning, his vigour, his astonishing power of work. What is less generally admitted, despite in one case at least the celebrity of the facts that prove it, is his observation, his invention, and at times his anomalous and seemingly contradictory power of grace and sweetness. There is no more singular example of the proverb, “Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness,” which has been happily applied to Victor Hugo, than the composition, by the rugged author of *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, of *The Devil is an Ass* and *Bartholomew Fair*, of such things as

“Here lies to each her parents ruth;”

or the magnificent song,

“Drink to me only with thine eyes;”

or the crown and flower of all epitaphs,

“Underneath this sable herse.”¹

But these three universally-known poems only express in quaintness a quality of Jonson’s which is spread all about his minor pieces, which appears again perfectly in *The Sad Shepherd*, and which he seems to have kept out of his plays proper rather from bravado than for any other reason. His prose will be noticed separately in the next chapter, but it may be observed here that it is saturated with the same literary flavour which pervades all his work. None of his dramatic fellows wrote anything that can compare to it, just as none of them wrote anything that surpasses the songs and snatches in his plays, and the best things in his miscellaneous works. The one title which no competent criticism has ever grudged him is that of best epitaph-writer in the English language, and only those who have failed to consider the difficulties and the charm of that class of composition will

¹ Ben is sometimes deprived of this, *me judice*, most irreligiously.

consider this faint praise. Nevertheless, it was no doubt upon drama that Jonson concentrated his powers, and the unfavourable judgments which have been delivered on him chiefly refer to this.

A good deal of controversy has arisen out of the attribution to him, which is at least as old as *The Return from Parnassus*, of being minded to classicise the English drama. It is certain that he set a value on the Unities which no other English dramatist has set, and that in *The Alchemist* at least he has given something like a perfect example of them, which is at the same time an admirable play. Whether this attention is at all responsible for the defects which are certainly found in his work is a very large question. It cannot be denied that in that work, with perhaps the single exception just mentioned, the reader (it is, except in the case of *Every Man in his Humour*, generations since the playgoer had any opportunity of judging) finds a certain absence of sympathetic attraction, as well as, for all the formal unity of the pieces, a lack of that fusing poetic force which makes detail into a whole. The amazing strength of Jonson's genius, the power with which he has compelled all manner of unlikely elements into his service, is evident enough, but the result usually wants charm. The drawbacks are (always excepting *The Alchemist*) least perceptible in *Every Man in his Humour*, the first sprightly runnings (unless *The Case is Altered* is older) of Jonson's fancy, the freshest example of his sharp observation of "humours." Later he sometimes overdid this observation, or rather he failed to bring its results sufficiently into poetic or dramatic form, and, therefore, is too much for an age and too little for all time. But *Every Man in his Humour* is really charming. Bobadil, Master Stephen, and Kately attain to the first rank of dramatic characters, and others are not far behind them in this respect. The next play, *Every Man out of his Humour*, is a great contrast, being, as even the doughty Gifford admits, distinctly uninteresting as a whole, despite numerous fine passages. Perhaps a little of its want of attraction must be set down to a pestilent habit of Jonson's, which he had

at one time thought of applying to *Every Man in his Humour*, the habit of giving foreign, chiefly Italian, appellations to his characters, describing, and as it were labelling them—Deliro, Macilente, and the like. This gives an air of unreality, a figure-head and type character. *Cynthia's Revel* has the same defects, but is to some extent saved by its sharp raillery of euphuism. With *The Poetaster* Jonson began to rise again. I think myself that the personages and machinery of the Augustan Court would be much better away, and that the implied satire on contemporaries would be tedious if it could not, as it unfortunately can, be altogether neglected. But in spite of these drawbacks, the piece is good. Of *Sejanus* and Jonson's later Roman play *Catiline* I think, I confess, better than the majority of critics appear to think. That they have any very intense tragic interest will, indeed, hardly be pretended, and the unfortunate but inevitable comparison with *Coriolanus* and *Julius Cæsar* has done them great and very unjust harm. Less human than Shakespere's "godlike Romans" (who are as human as they are godlike), Jonson's are undoubtedly more Roman, and this, if it is not entirely an attraction, is in its way a merit. But it was not till after *Sejanus* that the full power of Jonson appeared. His three next plays, *Volpone*, *Epicene*, and *The Alchemist*, could not have been written by any one but himself, and, had they not been written, would have left a gap in English which nothing from any other literature could supply. If his attitude had been a little less virtuous and a little more sarcastic, Jonson would in these three plays have anticipated Swift. Of the three, I prefer the first and the last—the last being the best of all. *Epicene* or the *Silent Woman* was specially liked by the next generation because of its regularity, and of the skill with which the various humours are all wrought into the main plot. Both these things are undeniable, and many of the humours are in themselves amusing enough. But still there is something wanting, which is supplied in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. It has been asked whether that disregard of probability, which is one of Jonson's greatest faults,

does not appear in the recklessness with which "The Fox" exposes himself to utter ruin, not so much to gratify any sensual desire or obtain any material advantage, as simply to indulge his combined hypocrisy and cynicism to the very utmost. The answer to this question will very much depend on each reader's taste and experience. It is undeniable that there have been examples of perverse indulgence in wickedness for wickedness' sake, which, rare as they are, go far to justify the creation of Volpone. But the unredeemed villany of the hero, with whom it is impossible in any way to sympathise, and the sheer brutality of the fortune-hunting dupes who surround him, make it easier to admire than to like the play. I have little doubt that Jonson was to some extent sensible of this, for the comic episode or underplot of Sir Politick and Lady Would-be is very much more loosely connected with the centre interest (it is only by courtesy that it can be said to be connected at all), than is usual with him, and this is an argument in favour of its having been introduced as a makeweight.

From the drawbacks of both these pieces *The Alchemist* is wholly free. Jonson here escaped his usual pitfall of the unsympathetic, for the vices and follies he satirises are not loathsome, only contemptible at worst, and not always that. He found an opportunity of exercising his extraordinary faculty of concentration as he nowhere else did, and has given us in Sir Epicure Mammon a really magnificent picture of concupiscence, of sensual appetite generally, sublimed by heat of imagination into something really poetic. The triumvirate of adventurers, Subtle, Dol and Face (for Dol has virile qualities), are not respectable, but one does not hate them; and the gulls are perfection. If any character could be spared it is the "Angry Boy," a young person whose humours, as Jonson himself admits of another character elsewhere, are "more tedious than diverting." *The Alchemist* was followed by *Catiline*, and *Catiline* by *Bartholomew Fair*, a play in which singularly vivid and minute pictures of manners, very amusing sketches of character,

and some capital satire on the Puritans, do not entirely redeem a profusion of the coarsest possible language and accident. *The Devil is an Ass* comes next in time, and though no single character is the equal of Zeal-of-the-land Busy in *Bartholomew Fair*, the play is even more amusing. The four last plays, *The Staple of News*, *The Magnetic Lady*, *The New Inn*, and *The Tale of a Tub*, which Jonson produced after long absence from the stage, were not successful, and were both unkindly and unjustly called by Dryden "Ben's dotages." As for the charming *Sad Shepherd*, it was never acted, and is now unfinished, though it is believed that the poet completed it. It stands midway as a pastoral *Féerie* between his regular plays and the great collection of ingenious and graceful masques and entertainments, which are at the top of all such things in England (unless *Comus* be called a masque), and which are worth comparing with the ballets and spectacle pieces of Molière. Perhaps a complete survey of Jonson's work indicates, as his greatest defect, the want of passion. He could be vigorous, he could be dignified, he could be broadly humorous, and, as has been said, he could combine with these the apparently incompatible, or, at least, not closely-connected faculty of grace. Of passion, of rapture, there is no trace in him, except in the single instance—in fire mingled with earth—of Sir Epicure Mammon. But the two following passages—one from *Sejanus*, one from *The Sad Shepherd*—will show his dignity and his pathos. No extract in brief could show his humour :—

Arr. "I would begin to study 'em,¹ if I thought
They would secure me. May I pray to Jove
In secret and be safe? ay, or aloud,
With open wishes, so I do not mention
Tiberius or Sejanus? Yes I must,
If I speak out. 'Tis hard that. May I think
And not be racked? What danger is't to dream,
Talk in one's sleep or cough? Who knows the laws?
May I shake my head without a comment? Say

¹ To wit the "arts" of suffering and being silent, by which his interlocutor Lepidus has explained his own safety from delation.

It rains, or it holds up, and not be thrown
 Upon the Gemonies? These now are things,
 Whereon men's fortune, yea, their fate depends.
 Nothing hath privilege 'gainst the viclent ear.
 No place, no day, no hour, we see, is free,
 Not our religious and most sacred times
 From some one kind of cruelty: all matter,
 Nay, all occasion pleaseth. Madmen's rage,
 The idleness of drunkards, women's nothing,
 Jester's simplicity, all, all is good
 That can be catcht at. Nor is now the event
 O' any person, or for any crime
 To be expected; for 'tis always one:
 Death, with some little difference of place
 Or time. What's this? Prince Nero, guarded!"

Æg. "A spring, now she is dead! of what? of thorns,
 Briars and brambles? histles, burs and docks?
 Cold hemlock, yews? the mandrake, or the box?
 These may grow still; but what can spring beside?
 Did not the whole earth sicken when she died
 As if there since did fall one drop of dew,
 But what was wept for her! or ahy stalk
 Did bear a flower, or any branch a bloom,
 After her wreath was made! In faith, in faith,
 You do not fair to put these things upon me,
 Which can in no sort be: Earine
 Who had her very being and her name
 With the first knots or buddings of the spring,
 Born with the primrose and the violet
 Or earliest roses blown: when Cupid smiled
 And Venus led the Graces out to dance,
 And all the flowers and sweets in nature's lap
 Leaped out and made their solemn conjuration
 To last but while she lived! Do not I know
 How the vale withered the same day? how Dove,
 Dean, Eye, and Erwash, Idel, Snite and Soare
 Each broke his urn, and twenty waters more
 That swelled proud Trent, shrunk themselves dry, that since
 No sun or moon, or other cheerful star,
 Looked out of heaven, but all the cope was dark
 As it were hung so for her exequies!
 And not a voice or sound to ring her knell

But of that dismal pair, the screeching owl
 And buzzing hornet ! Hark ! hark ! hark ! the foul
 Bird ! how she flutters with her wicker wings !
 Peace ! you shall hear her screech.

Cla. Good Karolin, sing,
 Help to divert this phant'sy.

Kar. All I can :

Sings while Æg. reads the song.

' Though I am young and cannot tell
 Either what Death or Love is well,
 Yet I have heard they both bear darts
 And both do aim at human hearts :
 And then again, I have been told,
 Love wounds with heat, as Death with cold ;
 So that I fear they do but bring
 Extremes to touch and mean one thing.

' As in a ruin we it call
 One thing to be blown up, or fall ;
 Or to our end, like way may have,
 By a flash of lightning or a wave :
 So Love's inflamed shaft or brand
 May kill as soon as Death's cold hand,
 Except Love's fires the virtue have
 To fright the frost out of the grave.' "

Of no two contemporary men of letters in England can it be said that they were, intellectually speaking, so near akin as Ben Jonson and George Chapman. The translator of Homer was a good deal older than Jonson, and exceedingly little is known of his life. He was pretty certainly born near Hitchin in Hertfordshire, the striking situation of which points his reference to it even in these railroad days. The date is uncertain—it may have been 1557, and was certainly not later than 1559—so that he was the oldest of the later Elizabethan school who survived into the Caroline period. He perhaps entered the University of Oxford in 1574. His first known work, *The Shadow of Night*, dates from 1594 ; and a reference of Meres's shows that he was known for tragedy four years later. In 1613 he, Jonson (a constant friend of his

whose mutual fidelity refutes of itself the silly calumnies as to Jonson's enviousness, for of Chapman only, among his colleagues, was he likely to be jealous), and Marston were partners in the venture of *Eastward Ho!* which, for some real or fancied slight on Scotland, exposed the authors to danger of the law. He was certainly a *protégé* of Prince Henry, the English Marcellus, and he seems to have received patronage from a much less blameless patron, Carr, Earl of Somerset. His literary activity was continuous and equal, but it was in his later days that he attempted and won the crown of the greatest of English translators. "Georgius Chapmanus, Homeri metaphrastes" the posy of his portrait runs, and he himself seems to have quite sunk any expectation of fame from his original work in the expectation of remembrance as a translator of the Prince of Poets. Many other interesting traits suggest, rather than ascertain, themselves in reference to him, such as his possible connection with the early despatch of English troupes of players to Germany, and his adoption of contemporary French subjects for English tragedy. But of certain knowledge of him we have very little. What is certain is that, like Drayton (also a friend of his), he seems to have lived remote and afar from the miserable quarrels and jealousies of his time; that, as has been already shown by dates, he was a kind of English Fontenelle in his overlapping of both ends of the great school of English poets; and that absolutely no base personal gossip tarnishes his poetical fame. The splendid sonnet of Keats testifies to the influence which his work long had on those Englishmen who were unable to read Homer in the original. A fine essay of Mr. Swinburne's has done, for the first time, justice to his general literary powers, and a very ingenious and, among such hazardous things, unusually probable conjecture of Mr. Minto's identifies him with the "rival poet" of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. But these are adventitious claims to fame. What is not subject to such deduction is the assertion that Chapman was a great Englishman who, while exemplifying the traditional claim of great Englishmen to originality, independence, and

verratility of work, escaped at once the English tendency to lack of scholarship, and to ignorance of contemporary continental achievements, was entirely free from the fatal Philistinism in taste and in politics, and in other matters, which has been the curse of our race, was a Royalist, a lover, a scholar, and has left us at once one of the most voluminous and peculiar collections of work that stand to the credit of any literary man of his country. It may be that his memory has gained by escaping the danger of such revelations or scandals as the Jonson confessions to Drummond, and that the lack of attraction to the ordinary reader in his work has saved him from that comparison which (it has perhaps been urged *ad nauseam*) is the bane of just literary judgment. To those who always strive to waive all such considerations, these things will make but little difference.

The only complete edition of Chapman's works dates from our own days, and its three volumes correspond to a real division of subject. Although, in common with all these writers, Chapman has had much uncertain and some improbable work fathered on him, his certain dramas supply one of the most interesting studies in our period. As usual with every one except Shakespere and (it is a fair reason for the relatively disproportionate estimate of these so long held) Beaumont and Fletcher, they are extremely unequal. Not a certain work of Chapman is void of interest. The famous *Eastward Ho!* (one of the liveliest comedies of the period dealing with London life) was the work of three great writers, and it is not easy to distribute its collaboration. That it is not swamped with "humours" may prove that Jonson's learned sock was put on by others. That it is neither grossly indecent nor extravagantly sanguinary, shows that Marston had not the chief hand in it, and so we are left to Chapman. What he could do is not shown in the list of his own certain plays till *All Fools*. *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596?) and *An Humorous Day's Mirth* show that singular promiscuousness—that heaping together of scenes without order or connection—which we have noticed in the first dramatic period, not to mention that the way in which

the characters speak of themselves, not as "I" but by their names in the third person, is also unmistakable. But *All Fools* is a much more noteworthy piece, and though Mr. Swinburne may have praised it rather highly, it would certainly take place in a collection of the score best comedies of the time not written by Shakespere. *The Gentleman Usher* and *Monsieur d'Olive* belong to the same school of humorous, not too pedantic comedy, and then we come to the strange series of Chapman's French tragedies, *Bussy d'Ambois*, *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, *Byron's Conspiracy*, *The Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron*, and *The Tragedy of Philip Chabot, Admiral of France*. These singular plays stand by themselves. Whether the strong influence which Marlowe exercised on Chapman led the later poet (who it must be remembered was not the younger) to continue *The Massacre of Paris*, or what other cause begat them, cannot now be asserted or even guessed without lost labour. A famous criticism of Dryden's attests his attention to them, but does not, perhaps, to those who have studied Dryden deeply, quite express the influence which Chapman had on the leader of post-Restoration tragedy. As plays, the whole five are models of what plays should not be; in parts, they are models of what plays should be. Then Chapman returned to the humour-comedy and produced two capital specimens of it in *May-Day* and *The Widow's Tears*. *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, which contains long passages of German, and *Revenge for Honour*, two tragedies which were not published till long after Chapman's death, are to my mind very dubiously his. Mr. Swinburne, in dealing with them, availed himself of the hypothesis of a mellowing, but at the same time weakening of power by age. It may be so, and I have not the slightest intention of pronouncing decidedly on the subject. They bear to my mind much more mark of the decadent period of Charles I., when the secret of blank verse was for a time lost, and when even men who had lived in personal friendship with their great predecessors lapsed into the slipshod stuff that we find in Davenant, in his followers, and among them even in the earlier plays of Dryden. It is, of

course, true that this loosening and slackening of the standard betrays itself even before the death of Chapman, which happened in 1634. But I cannot believe that the author of *Bussy d'Ambois* (where the verse is rude enough but never lax) and the contemporary or elder of Shakespere, Marlowe, and all the great race, could ever have been guilty of the slovenliness which, throughout, marks *Revenge for Honour*.

The second part of Chapman's work, his original verse, is much inferior in bulk and in interest of matter to the first and third. Yet, is it not perhaps inferior to either in giving evidence of the author's peculiarities; while the very best thing he ever wrote (a magnificent passage in *The Tears of Peace*) is contained in it. Its component parts are, however, sufficiently odd. It opens with a strange poem called *The Shadow of Night*, which Mr. Swinburne is not wrong in classing among the obscurest works in English. The mischievous fashion of enigmatic writing, already glanced at in the section on satire, was perhaps an offshoot of euphuism; and certainly Chapman, who never exhibits much taint of euphuism proper, here out-Herods Herod and out-Tourneurs Tourneur. It was followed by an equally singular attempt at the luscious school of which *Venus and Adonis* is the most famous. *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* has received high praise from critics whom I esteem. For my own part I should say that it is the most curious instance of a radically unpassionate nature, trying to lash itself into passion, that our language contains. Then Chapman tried an even bolder flight in the same dialect—the continuation of Marlowe's unfinished *Hero and Leander*. In this attempt, either by sheer force of his sinewy athletics, or by some inspiration derived from the "Dead Shepherd," his predecessor, he did not fail, curious as is the contrast of the two parts. *The Tears of Peace*, which contains his finest work, is in honour of Prince Henry—a worthy work on a worthy subject, which was followed up later by an epicedium on the prince's lamented death. Besides some epigrams and sonnets, the chief other piece of this division is the disastrous *Andromeda Liberata*,

which unluckily celebrates the nuptials—stained with murder, adultery, and crime of all sorts—of Frances Howard and Robert Carr. It is in Chapman's most allusive and thorniest style, but is less interesting intrinsically than as having given occasion to an indignant prose vindication by the poet, which, considering his self-evident honesty, is the most valuable document in existence for explaining the apparently grovelling panegyric of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It makes clear (what indeed an intelligent reader might gather for himself) that the traditional respect for rank and station, uniting with the tendency to look for patterns and precedents in the classics for almost everything, made of these panegyrics a kind of school exercise, in which the excellence of the subject was taken for granted, and the utmost hyperbole of praise was only a "common form" of composition, to which the poet imparted or added what grace of style or fancy he could, with hardly a notion of his ascriptions being taken literally.

But if Chapman's dramas have been greatly undervalued, and if his original poems are an invaluable help to the study of the time, there is no doubt that it is as a translator that he made and kept the strongest hold on the English mind. He himself spoke of his Homeric translations (which he began as early as 1598, doing also Hesiod, some Juvenal, and some minor fragments, Pseudo-Virgilian, Petrarchian and others) as "the work that he was born to do." His version, with all its faults, outlived the popularity even of Pope, was for more than two centuries the resort of all who, unable to read Greek, wished to know what the Greek was, and, despite the finical scholarship of the present day, is likely to survive all the attempts made with us. I speak with all humility, but as having learnt Homer from Homer himself, and not from any translation, prose or verse. I am perfectly aware of Chapman's outrageous liberties, of his occasional unfaithfulness (for a libertine need not necessarily be unfaithful in translation), and of the condescension to his own fancies and the fancies of his age, which obscures not more perhaps than some condescen-

sions which nearness and contemporary influences prevent some of us from seeing the character of the original. But at the same time, either I have no skill in criticism, and have been reading Greek for fifty years to none effect, or Chapman is far nearer Homer than any modern translator in any modern language. He is nearer in the Iliad than in the Odyssey—an advantage resulting from his choice of vehicle. In the Odyssey he chose the heroic couplet, which never can give the rise and fall of the hexameter. In the Iliad, after some hesitation between the two (he began as early as 1598), he preferred the fourteeners, which, at its best, is the hexameter's nearest substitute. With Chapman it is not always at its best—very far from it. If he never quite relapses into the sheer doggerel of the First Period, he sometimes comes perilously near to it. But he constantly lifts his wings and soars in a quite different measure which, when he keeps it up for a little, gives a narrative vehicle unsurpassed, and hardly equalled, in English poetry for variation of movement and steady forward flow combined. The one point in which the Homeric hexameter is unmatched among metres is its combination of steady advance with innumerable ripples and eddies in its course, and it is here that Chapman (though of course not fully) can partly match it. It is, however, one of the testimonies to the supreme merit of the Homeric poems that every age seems to try to imitate them in its own special mannerisms, and that, consequently, no age is satisfied with the attempts of another. It is a second, that those who know the original demur at all.

The characteristics of Chapman, then, are very much those of Jonson with a difference. Both had the same incapacity of unlaboured and forceless art, the same insensibility to passion, the same inability to rise above mere humours and contemporary oddities into the region of universal poetry. Both had the same extensive learning, the same immense energy, the same (if it must be said) arrogance and contempt of the vulgar. In casual strokes, though not in sustained grasp, Chapman was Jonson's superior ;

but unlike Jonson he had no lyric gift, and unlike Jonson he let his learning and his ambitious thought clog and obscure the flow of his English. Nor does he show in any of his original work the creative force of his younger friend. With the highest opinion reasonably possible of Chapman's dramas, we cannot imagine him for a moment composing a *Volpone*, or an *Alchemist*—even a *Bartholomew Fair*; while he was equally, or still more, incapable of Jonson's triumphs in epigram and epitaph, in song and ode. A certain shapelessness is characteristic of everything that Chapman did—an inability, as Mr. Swinburne (to whom every one who now writes on Chapman must acknowledge indebtedness), has said, "to clear his mouth of pebbles, and his brow of fog." His long literary life, which must have exceeded half a century, and his great learning, forbid our setting this down as it may be set in the case of many of his contemporaries, and especially in the case of those two to whom we are now coming, as due to youth, to the imperfect state of surrounding culture, to want of time for perfecting his work, and so forth. He is the "Bègue de Villars," the heroic Stammerer of English literature—a man who evidently had some congenital defect which all his fire and force, all his care and curiosity, could not overcome. Yet are his doings great, and it is at least probable that if he had felt less difficulty in original work, he would not have been prompted to set about and finish the noble work of translation which is among the best products of an unsatisfactory kind, and which will outlive the cavils of generations of etymologists and aorist-grinders. He has been so little read that four specimens of his different manners—the early "tenebrous" style of *The Shadow of Night*, the famous passage from *Bussy d'Ambois* which excited Lamb's enthusiasm, and a sample from both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—may be given :

“ In this vast thicket (whose description's task
The pens of fairies and of fiends would ask :
So more than human-thoughted horrible)
The souls of such as lived implausible,

In happy empire of this goddess' glories,
 And scorned to crown her fanes with sacrifice,¹
 Did ceaseless walk ; expiring fearful groans,
 Curses and threats for their confusions.
 Her darts, and arrows, some of them had slain :
 Others her dogs eat, painting her disdain,
 After she had transformed them into beasts :
 Others her monsters carried to their nests,
 Rent them in pieces, and their spirits sent
 To this blind shade, to wail their banishment.
 The huntsmen hearing (since they could not hear)
 Their hounds at fault, in eager chase drew near,
 Mounted on lions, unicorns, and boars,
 And saw their hounds lie licking of their sores
 Some yearning at the shroud, as if they chid
 Her stinging tongues, that did their chase forbid :
 By which they knew the game was that way gone.
 Then each man forced the beast he rode upon,
 T' assault the thicket ; whose repulsive thorns
 So gall'd the lions, boars, and unicorns,
 Dragons and wolves, that half their courages
 Were spent in roars, and sounds of heaviness :
 Yet being the princeliest, and hardiest beasts,
 That gave chief fame to those Ortygian forests,
 And all their riders furious of their sport,
 A fresh assault they gave, in desperate sort :
 And with their falchions made their way in wounds,
 The thicket open'd, and let in the hounds."

Bu. "What dismal change is here ; the good old Friar
 Is murder'd, being made known to serve my love ;
 And now his restless spirit would forewarn me
 Of some plot dangerous and imminent.
 Note what he wants ? He wants his upper weed,
 He wants his life and body ; which of these
 Should be the want he means, and may supply me
 With any fit forewarning ? This strange vision
 (Together with the dark prediction
 Used by the Prince of Darkness that was raised
 By this embodied shadow) stir my thoughts
 With reminiscion of the spirit's promise,

¹ The rhyme, bad as it is, is not unprecedented.

Who told me, that by any invocation
 I should have power to raise him, though it wanted
 The powerful words and decent rites of art ;
 Never had my set brain such need of spirit
 T' instruct and cheer it ; now, then, I will claim
 Performance of his free and gentle vow
 T' appear in greater sight and make more plain
 His rugged oracle. I long to know
 How my dear mistress fares, and be inform'd
 What hand she now holds on the troubled blood
 Of her incensèd lord. Methought the spirit
 (When he had utter'd his perplex'd presage)
 Threw his changed countenance headlong into clouds,
 His forehead bent, as it would hide his face,
 He knock'd his chin against his darken'd breast,
 And struck a churlish silence through his powers.
 Terror of darkness ! O, thou king of flames !
 That with thy music-footed horse dost strike
 The clear light out of crystal on dark earth,
 And hurl'st instructive fire about the world,
 Wake, wake, the drowsy and enchanted night
 That sleeps with dead eyes in this heavy riddle ;
 Or thou great prince of shades where never sun
 Sticks his far darted beams, whose eyes are made
 To shine in darkness, and see ever best
 Where sense is blindest : open now the heart
 Of thy abashed oracle, that for fear
 Of some ill it includes, would fain lie hid,
 And rise thou with it in thy greater light."

"For Hector's glory still he stood, and ever went about
 To make him cast the fleet such fire, as never should go out ;
 Heard Thetis' foul petition, and wished in any wise
 The splendour of the burning ships might satiate his eyes.¹
 From him yet the repulse was then to be on Troy conferred,
 The honour of it given the Greeks ; which thinking on, he stirr'd
 With such addition of his spirit, the spirit Hector bore
 To burn the fleet, that of itself was hot enough before.
 But now he fared like Mars himself, so brandishing his lance
 As, through the deep shades of a wood, a raging fire should glance,

¹ This line alone would suffice to exhibit Chapman's own splendour at his best.

Held up to all eyes by a hill ; about his lips a foam
 Stood as when th' ocean is enraged ; his eyes were overcome
 With fervour and resembled flames, set off by his dark brows,
 And from his temples his bright helm abhorred lightnings throws ;
 For Jove, from forth the sphere of stars, to his state put his own
 And all the blaze of both the hosts confined in him alone.
 And all this was, since after this he had not long to live,
 This lightning flew before his death, which Pallas was to give
 (A small time thence, and now prepared) beneath the violence
 Of great Pelides. In meantime, his present eminence
 Thought all things under it ; and he, still where he saw the stands
 Of greatest strength and bravest arm'd, there he would prove his hands,
 Or no where ; offering to break through, but that passed all his power
 Although his will were past all theirs, they stood him like a tower
 Conjoined so firm, that as a rock, exceeding high and great,
 And standing near the hoary sea, bears many a boisterous threat
 Of high-voiced winds and billows huge, belched on it by the storms ;
 So stood the Greeks great Hector's charge, nor stirred their battellous forms."

" This the Goddess told,
 And then the morning in her throne of gold
 Surveyed the vast world ; by whose orient light
 The nymph adorn'd me with attires as bright,
 Her own hands putting on both shirt and weed
 Robes fire, and curious, and upon my head
 An ornament that glittered like a flare ;
 Girt me in gold ; and forth betimes I came
 Amongst my soldiers, roused them all from sleep,
 And bade them now no more observance keep
 Of ease, and feast, but straight a shipboard fall,
 For now the Goddess had inform'd me all.
 Their noble spirits agreed ; nor yet so clear
 Could I bring all off, but Elpenor there
 His heedless life left. He was youngest man
 Of all my company, and one that wan
 Least fame for arms, as little for his brain ;
 Who (too much steep'd in wine and so made fain
 To get refreshing by the cool of sleep,
 Apart his fellows plung'd in vapours deep,
 And they as high in tumult of their way)
 Suddenly waked and (quite out of the stay
 A sober mind had given him) would descend
 A huge long ladder, forward, and an end

Fell from the very roof, full pitching on
The dearest joint his head was placed upon,
Which quite dissolved, let loose his soul to hell."

With regard to Marston (of whose little-known personality something has been said in connection with his satires) I find myself somewhat unable to agree with the generality of critics, who seem to me to have been rather taken in by his blood-and-thunder work, his transpontine declamation against tyrants, and his affectation of a gloomy or furious scorn against mankind. The uncouthness, as well as the suspicion of insincerity, which we noted in his satirical work, extend, as it seems to me, also to his dramas; and if we class him as a worker in horrors with Marlowe earlier, and with Webster and Ford later, the chief result will be to show his extreme inferiority to them. He is even below Tourneur in this respect, while, like Tourneur, he is exposed to the charge of utterly neglecting congruity and proportion. With him we relapse not merely from the luminous perfection of Shakespere, from the sane order of work which was continued through Fletcher, and the best of Fletcher's followers, but from the more artificial unity of Jonson, back into the chaotic extravagances of the First Period. Marston, like the rest, is fond of laughing at *Jeronimo*, but his own tragic construction and some of his own tragic scenes are hardly less bombastic, and scarcely at all less promiscuous than the tangled horrors of that famous melodrama. Marston, it is true, has lucid intervals—even many of them. Hazlitt has succeeded in quoting many beautiful passages, one of which was curiously echoed in the next age by Nat. Lee, in whom, indeed, there was a strong vein of Elizabethan melodrama. The sarcasm on philosophical study in *What You Will* is one of the very best things of its own kind in the range of English drama,—light, sustained, not too long nor too short, in fact, thoroughly "hit off."

"*Delight* my spaniel slept, whilst I baised¹ leaves,
Tossed o'er the dunces, pored on the old print

¹ Kissed.

Of titled words, and still my spaniel slept.
 Whilst I wasted lamp oil, bated my flesh,
 Shrunk up my veins, and still my spaniel slept,
 And still I held converse with Zabarell,
 Aquinas, Scotus, and the musty saws
 Of antique Donate : still my spaniel slept.
 Still on went I : first *an sit anima*,
 Then, an' 'twere mortal. O hold, hold !
 At that they are at brain buffets, fell by the ears,
 Amain [pell-mell] together—still my spaniel slept.
 Then whether 'twere corporeal, local, fixed,
Ex traduce ; but whether 't had free will
 Or no, hot philosophers
 Stood banding factions all so strongly propperd,
 I staggered, knew not which was firmer part ;
 But thought, quoted, read, observed and pried,
 Stuffed noting-books, and still my spaniel slept.
 At length he waked and yawned, and by yon sky
 For aught I know, he knew as much as I."

There is real pathos in *Antonio and Mellida*, and real satire in *Parasitaster* and *The Malcontent*. Hazlitt (who had a very high opinion of Marston) admits that the remarkable inequalities of this last piece "seem to show want of interest in the subject." This is an odd explanation, but I suspect it is really only an anticipation in more favourable words of my own theory, that Marston's tragic and satiric moods were not really sincere ; that he was a clever man who found a fashion of satire and a fashion of blood-and-thunder tragedy prevailing, and threw himself into both without much or any heart in the matter. This is supported by the curious fact that almost all his plays (at least those extant) were produced within a very few years, 1602-1607, though he lived some thirty years after the latter date, and quite twenty after his last dated appearances in literature, *The Insatiate Countess*, and *Eastward Ho!* That he was an ill-tempered person with considerable talents, who succeeded, at any rate for a time, in mistaking his ill-temper for *sæva indignatio*, and his talents for genius, is not, I think, too harsh a description of Marston. In the hotbed of the literary influences of the time, these conditions of his produced

some remarkable fruit. But when the late Professor Minto attributes to him "amazing and almost Titanic energy," mentions "life" several times over as one of the chief characteristics of his personages (I should say that they had as much life as violently-moved marionettes), and discovers "an able and admirable characters" among them, I am compelled not, of course, to be positive that my own very different estimate is right, but to wonder at the singularly different way in which the same things strike different persons, who are not as a rule likely to look at them from very different points of view.

Marston's plays, however, are both powerful enough and famous enough to call for a somewhat more detailed notice. *Antonio and Mellida*, the earliest and if not the best as a whole, that which contains the finest scenes and fragments, is in two parts—the second being more properly called *The Revenge of Antonio*. The revenge itself is of the exaggerated character which was so popular with the Elizabethan dramatists, but in which (except in the famous Cornwall and Gloucester scene in *Lear*) Shakespere never indulged after his earliest days. The wicked tyrant's tongue is torn out, his murdered son's body is thrown down before him, and then the conspirators, standing round, gibe, curse, and rant at him for a couple of pages before they plunge their swords into his body. This goodly conclusion is led up to by a sufficient quantity of antecedent and casual crimes, together with much not very excellent fooling by a court gull, Balurdo, who might be compared with Shakespere's fools of the same kind, to the very great advantage of those who do not appreciate the latter. The beautiful descriptive and reflective passages which, in Lamb's *Extracts*, gave the play its reputation, chiefly occur towards the beginning, and this is the best of them:—

And. "Why man, I never was a Prince till now.
 'Tis not the bared pate, the bended knees,
 Gilt tipstaves, Tyrian purple, chairs of state,
 Troops of pied butterflies, that flutter still
 In greatness summer, that confirm a prince :

'Tis not the unsavoury breath of multitudes,
 Shouting and clapping, with confusèd din ;
 That makes a prince. No, Lucio, he's a king,
 A true right king, that dares do aught save wrong,
 Fears nothing mortal, but to be unjust,
 Who is not blown up with the flattering puff.
 Of spongy sycophants : who stands unmov'd
 Despite the jostling of opinion :
 Who can enjoy himself, maugre the throng
 That strive to press his quiet out of him :
 Who sits upon Jove's footstool as I do
 Adoring, not affecting majesty :
 Whose brow is wreathèd with the silver crown
 Of clear content : this, Lucio, is a king,
 And of this empire, every man's possessed
 That's worth his soul."

Sophonisba, which followed, is much less rambling, but as bloody and extravagant. The scene where the witch Erichtho plays Succubus to Syphax, instead of the heroine, and in her form, has touches which partly, but not wholly, redeem its extravagance, and the end is dignified and good. *What You Will*, a comedy of intrigue, is necessarily free from Marston's worst faults, and here the admirable passage quoted above occurs. But the main plot—which turns not only on the courtship, by a mere fribble, of a lady whose husband is supposed to be dead, and who has very complacently forgotten all about him, but on a ridiculous plot to foist a pretender off as the dead husband itself—is simply absurd. The lack of probability, which is the curse of the minor Elizabethan drama, hardly anywhere appears more glaringly. *Parasitaster*, or *The Fawn*, a satirical comedy, is much better, but the jealous hatred of *The Dutch Courtesan* is again not made probable. Then came Marston's completest work in drama, *The Malcontent*, an anticipation, after Elizabethan fashion, of *Le Misanthrope* and *The Plain Dealer*. Though not free from Marston's two chief vices of coarseness and exaggerated cynicism, it is a play of great merit, and much the best thing he has done, though the reconciliation,

at the end, of such a husband and such a wife as Piero and Aurelia, between whom there is a chasm of adultery and murder, again lacks verisimilitude. It is to be observed that both in *The Fawn* and *The Malcontent* there are disguised dukes—a fact not testifying any very great originality, even in' borrowing. Of *Eastward Ho!* we have already spoken, and it is by no means certain that *The Insatiate Countess* is Marston's. His reputation would not lose much were it not. A *fabliau*-like underplot of the machinations of two light-o'-love citizens' wives against their husbands is not unamusing, but the main story of the Countess Isabella, a modern Messalina (except that she adds cruelty to the vices of Messalina) who alternately courts lovers and induces their successors to assassinate them, is in the worst style of the whole time—the tragedy of lust that is not dignified by the slightest passion, and of murder that is not excused by the slightest poetry of motive or treatment. Though the writing is not of the lowest order, it might have been composed by any one of some thirty or forty writers. It was actually attributed at the time to William BarksteJ, a minor poet of some power, and I am inclined to think it not Marston's, though my own estimate of him is, as will have been seen, not so high as some other estimates. It is because those estimates appear to me unduly high that I have rather accentuated the expression of my own lower one. For the last century, and perhaps longer, the language of hyperbole has been but too common about our dramatists, and I have known more than one case in which the extravagant praise bestowed upon them has, when students have come to the works themselves, had a very disastrous effect of disappointment. It is, therefore, all the more necessary to be candid in criticism where criticism seems to be required.

As to the last of our good company, there is fortunately very little risk of difference of opinion. A hundred years ago Thomas Dekker was probably little more than a name to all but professed students of Elizabethan literature, and he waited longer than any of his fellows for due recognition by presentation of his work in

a complete form. It was not until the year 1873 that his plays were collected ; it was not till eleven years later that his prose works had the same honour. Yet, since attention was directed to Dekker in any way, the best authorities have been unanimous in his praise. Lamb's famous outburst of enthusiasm, that he had "poetry enough for anything," has been soberly endorsed by two full generations of the best judges, and whatever differences of detail there may be as to his work, it is becoming more and more the received, and correctly-received opinion, that, as his collaborator Webster came nearest to Shakespere in universalising certain types in the severer tragedy, so Dekker has the same honour on the gently pathetic side. Yet this great honour is done to one of the most shadowy personalities in literature. We have four goodly volumes of his plays and five of his other works ; yet of Thomas Dekker, the man, we know absolutely less than of any one of his shadowy fellows. We do not know when he was born, when he died, what he did other than writing in the certainly long space between the two unknown dates. In 1637 he was by his own words a man of threescore, which, as it has been justly remarked, may mean anything between fifty-five and seventy. He was in circumstances a complete contrast to his fellow-victim in Jonson's satire, Marston. Marston was apparently a gentleman born and bred, well connected, well educated, possessed of some property, able to make testamentary dispositions, and probably in the latter part of his life, when Dekker was still toiling at journalism of various kinds, a beneficed clergyman in country retirement. Dekker was, it is to be feared, what the arrogance of certain members of the literary profession has called, and calls, a gutter-journalist—a man who had no regular preparation for the literary career, and who never produced anything but hand-to-mouth work. Jonson went so far as to say that he was a "rogue ;" but Ben, though certainly not a rōgue, was himself not to be trusted when he spoke of people that he did not like ; and if there was any but innocent roguery in Dekker he has contrived to leave exactly the opposite im-

pression stamped on every piece of his work. And it is particularly interesting to note, that constantly as he wrote in collaboration, one invariable tone, and that the same as is to be found in his undoubtedly independent work, appears alike in plays signed with him by persons so different as Middleton and Webster, as Chettle and Ford. When this is the case, the inference is certain, according to the strictest rules of logic. We can define Dekker's idiosyncrasy almost more certainly than if he had never written a line except under his own name. That idiosyncrasy consists, first, of an exquisite lyrical faculty, which, in the songs given in all collections of extracts, equals, or almost equals, that of Shakespere; secondly, of a faculty for poetical comedy, for the comedy which transcends and plays with, rather than grasps and exposes, the vices and follies of men; thirdly, for a touch of pathos again to be evened only to Shakespere's; and lastly, for a knack of representing women's nature, for which, except in the master of all, we may look in vain throughout the plentiful dramatic literature of the period, though touches of it appear in Greene's *Margaret of Fressingfield*, in Heywood, in Middleton, and in some of the anonymous plays which have been fathered indifferently, and with indifferent hopelessness of identification, on some of the greatest of names of the period, on some of the meanest, and on an equal number of those that are neither great nor mean.

Dekker's very interesting prose works we shall treat in the next chapter, together with the other tracts into whose class they fall, and some of his plays may either go unnoticed, or, with those of the dramatists who collaborated with him, and whose (notably in the case of *The Roaring Girl*) they pretty evidently were more than his. His own characteristic pieces, or those in which his touch shows most clearly, though they may not be his entirely, are *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, *Old Fortunatus*, *Satiromastix*, *Patient Grissil*, *The Honest Whore*, *The Whore of Babylon*, *If it be not Good the Devil is in it*, *The Virgin Martyr*, *Match me in London*, *The Son's Darling*, and *The Witch of Edmonton*. In every one of these the same characteristics appear, but the strangely

composite fashion of writing of the time makes them appear in differing measures. *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is one of those innumerable and yet singular pieces in which the taste of the time seems to have so much delighted, and which seem so odd to modern taste,—pieces in which a plot or underplot, as the case may be, of the purest comedy of manners, a mere picture of the life, generally the lower middle-class life of the time, is united with hardly a thought of real dramatic conjunction to another plot of a romantic kind, in which noble and royal personages, with, it may be, a dash of history, play their parts. The crowning instance of this is Middleton's *Mayor of Queenborough*; but there are scores and hundreds of others, and Dekker specially affects it. *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is principally distinguished by the directness and raciness of its citizen sketches. *Satiromastix* (the second title of which is "The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet") is Dekker's reply to *The Poetaster*, in which he endeavours to retort Jonson's own machinery upon him. With his customary disregard of congruity, however, he has mixed up the personages of Horace, Crispinus, Demetrius, and Tucca, not with a Roman setting, but with a purely romantic story of William Rufus and Sir Walter Tyrrel, and the king's attempt upon the fidelity of Tyrrel's bride. This incongruous mixture gives one of the most charming scenes of his pen, the apparent poisoning of Celestina by her father to save her honour. But as Lamb himself candidly confessed, the effect of this in the original is marred, if not ruined, by the farcical surroundings, and the more farcical upshot of the scene itself,—the poisoning being, like Juliet's, a mere trick, though very differently fortunèd. In *Patient Grissil* the two exquisite songs, "Art thou poor" and "Golden slumbers kiss thine eyes," and the sympathetic handling of Griselda's character (the one of all others to appeal to Dekker) mark his work. In all the other plays the same notes appear, and there is no doubt that Mr. Swinburne is wholly right in singling out from *The Witch of Edmonton* the feminine characters of Susan, Winifred, and the witch herself, as showing Dekker's unmatched command of the

colours in which to paint womanhood. In the great debate as to the authorship of *The Virgin Martyr*, everything is so much conjecture that it is hard to pronounce authoritatively. Gifford's cool assumption that everything bad in the play is Dekker's, and everything good Massinger's, will not hold for a moment; but, on the other side, it must be remembered that since Lamb there has been a distinct tendency to depreciate Massinger. All that can be said is, that the grace and tenderness of the Virgin's part are much more in accordance with what is certainly Dekker's than with what is certainly Massinger's, and that either was quite capable of the Hircius and Spungius passages which have excited so much disgust and indignation—disgust and indignation which perhaps overlook the fact that they were no doubt inserted with the express purpose of heightening, by however clumsily designed a contrast, the virgin purity of Dorothea the saint.

It will be seen that I have reserved *Old Fortunatus* and *The Honest Whore* for separate notice. They illustrate, respectively, the power which Dekker has in romantic poetry, and his command of vivid, tender, and subtle portraiture in the characters, especially, of women. Both, and especially the earlier play, exhibit also his rapid careless writing, and his ignorance of, or indifference to, the construction of a clear and distinctly outlined plot. *Old Fortunatus* tells the well-known story of the wishing cap and purse, with a kind of addition showing how these fare in the hands of *Fortunatus's* sons, and with a wild intermixture (according to the luckless habit above noted) of kings and lords, and pseudo-historical incidents. No example of the kind is more chaotic in movement and action. But the interlude of Fortune with which it is ushered in is conceived in the highest romantic spirit, and told in verse of wonderful effectiveness, not to mention two beautiful songs; and throughout the play the allegorical or supernatural passages show the same character. Nor are the more prosaic parts inferior, as, for instance, the pretty dialogue of Orleans and Galloway, cited by Lamb, and the fine passage where Andelocia says what he will do "to-morrow."

Fort. "No more : curse on : your cries to me are music,
 And fill the sacred roundure of mine ears
 With tunes more sweet than moving of the spheres.
 Curse on : on our celestial brows do sit
 Unnumbered smiles, which then leap from their throne
 When they see peasants dance and monarchs groan.
 Behold you not this Globe, this golden bowl,
 This toy call'd world at our Imperial feet ?
 This world is Fortune's ball wherewith she sports.
 Sometimes I strike it up into the air,
 And then create I Emperors and Kings.
 Sometimes I spurn it : at which spurn crawls out
 That wild beast multitude : curse on, you fools.
 'Tis I that tumble Princes from their thrones,
 And gild false brows with glittering diadems.
 'Tis I that tread on necks of conquerors,
 And when like semi-gods they have been drawn,
 In ivory chariots to the capitol,
 Circled about with wonder of all eyes
 The shouts of every tongue, love of all hearts
 Being swoll'n with their own greatness, I have prick'd
 The bladder of their pride, and made them die,
 As water bubbles, without memory.
 I thrust base cowards into honour's chair,
 Whilst the true spirited soldier stands by
 Bare headed, and all bare, whilst at his scars
 They scoff, that ne'er durst view the face of wars.
 I set an Idiot's cap on virtue's head,
 Turn learning out of doors, clothe wit in rags
 And paint ten thousand images of loam
 In gaudy silken colours : on the backs
 Of mules and asses I make asses ride
 Only for sport, to see the apish world
 Worship such beasts with sound idolatry.
 This Fortune does, and when this is done,
 She sits and smiles to hear some curse her name,
 And some with adoration crown her fame.

And. "To-morrow ? ay to-morrow thou shalt buy them.
 To-morrow tell the Princess I will love her,
 To-morrow tell the King I'll banquet him,
 To-morrow, Shadow, will I give thee gold,
 To-morrow pride goes bare, and lust a-cold.

To-morrow will the rich man feed the poor,
And vice to-morrow virtue will adore.
To-morrow beggars shall be crownèd kings.
This no-time, morrow's time, no sweetness sings.
I pray thee hence : bear that to Agripync."

The whole is, as a whole, to the last degree crude and undigested, but the ill-matured power of the writer is almost the more apparent.

The Honest Whore, in two parts, is, as far as general character goes, a mixed comedy of intrigue and manners combining, or rather uniting (for there is little combination of them), four themes—first, the love of Hippolito for the Princess Infelice, and his virtuous motions followed by relapse; secondly, the conversion by him of the courtesan Bellafront, a damsel of good family, from her evil ways, and her marriage to her first gallant, a hairbrained courtier named Matheo; thirdly, Matheo's ill-treatment of Bellafront, her constancy and her rejection of the temptations of Hippolito, who from apostle has turned seducer, with the humours of Orlando Friscobaldo, Bellafront's father, who, feigning never to forgive her, watches over her in disguise, and acts as guardian angel to her reckless and sometimes brutal husband; and lastly, the other humours of a certain marvellously patient citizen who allows his wife to hector him, his customers to bully and cheat him, and who pushes his eccentric and unmanly patience to the point of enduring both madhouse and jail. Lamb, while ranking a single speech of Bellafront's very high, speaks with rather oblique approval of the play, and Hazlitt, though enthusiastic for it, admires chiefly old Friscobaldo and the ne'er-do-weel Matheo. My own reason for preferring it to almost all the non-tragical work of the time out of Shakespere, is the wonderful character of Bellafront, both in her unreclaimed and her reclaimed condition. In both she is a very woman—not as conventional satirists and conventional encomiasts praise or rail at women, but as women are. If her language in her unregenerate days is sometimes coarser than is altogether pleasant, it does not disguise her nature,—the very

nature of such a woman misled by giddiness, by curiosity, by love of pleasure, by love of admiration, but in no thorough sense depraved. Her selection of Matheo not as the instrument of her being "made an honest woman," not apparently because she had any love for him, left, or had ever had much, but because he was her first seducer, is exactly what, after a sudden convincing of sin, such a woman would have done; and if her patience under the long trial of her husband's thoughtlessness and occasional brutality seem excessive, it will only seem so to one who has been unlucky in his experience. Matheo indeed is a thorough good-for-nothing, and the natural man longs that Bellafront might have been better parted; but Dekker was a very moral person in his own way, and apparently he would not entirely let her—Imogen gone astray as she is—off her penance.

