

CHAPTER VIII

THE SCHOOL OF SPENSER AND THE TRIBE OF BEN

THE reign of James I. is not, in mere poetry, quite such a brilliant period as it is in drama. The full influence of Donne and of Jonson, which combined to produce the exquisite if not extraordinarily strong school of Caroline poets, did not work in it. Of its own bards the best, such as Jonson himself and Drayton, were survivals of the Elizabethan school, and have accordingly been anticipated here. Nevertheless, there were not a few verse-writers of mark who may be most conveniently assigned to this time, though, as was the case with so many of their contemporaries, they had sometimes produced work of note before the accession of the British Solomon, and sometimes continued to produce it until far into the reign of his son. Especially there are some of much mark who fall to be noticed here, because their work is not, strictly speaking, of the schools that flourished under Elizabeth, or of the schools that flourished under Charles. We shall not find anything of the first interest in them; yet in one way or in another there were few of them who were unworthy to be contemporaries of Shakespere.

Joshua Sylvester is one of those men of letters whom accident rather than property seems to have made absurd. He has existed in English literature chiefly as an Englisher of the Frenchman Du Bartas, whom an even greater ignorance has chosen to regard as something grotesque. Du Bartas is one of the grandest, if also one

of the most unequal, poets of Europe, and Joshua Sylvester, his translator, succeeded in keeping some of his grandeur if he even added to his inequality. His original work is insignificant compared with his translation ; but it is penetrated with the same qualities. He seems to have been a little deficient in humour, and his portrait—crowned with a singularly stiff laurel, throated with a stiffer ruff, and clothed, as to the bust, with a doublet so stiff that it looks like textile armour—is not calculated to diminish the popular ridicule. Yet is Sylvester not at all ridiculous. He was certainly a Kentish man, and probably the son of a London clothier. His birth is guessed, on good grounds, at 1563 ; and he was educated at Southampton under the famous refugee, Saravia, to whom he owed that proficiency in French which made or helped his fame. He did not, despite his wishes, go to either university, and was put to trade. In this he does not seem to have been prosperous ; perhaps he gave too much time to translation. He was probably patronised by James, and by Prince Henry certainly. In the last years of his life he was resident secretary to the English company of Merchant Venturers at Middleburgh, where he died on the 28th September 1618. He was not a fortunate man, but his descendants seem to have flourished both in England, the West Indies and America. As for his literary work, it requires no doubt a certain amount of good will to read it. It is voluminous, even in the original part not very original, and constantly marred by that loquacity which, especially in times of great inspiration, comes upon the uninspired or not very strongly inspired. The point about Sylvester, as about so many others of his time, is that, unlike the minor poets of our day and of some others, he has constant flashes—constant hardly separable, but quite perceivable, scraps, which show how genially heated the brain of the nation was. Nor should it be forgotten that his *Du Baitas* had a great effect for generations. The man of pure science may regret that generations should have busied themselves about anything so thoroughly unscientific ; but with that point of view we are unconcerned. The important thing is that

the generations in question learnt from Sylvester to take a poetical interest in the natural world.

John Davies of Hereford, who must have been born at about the same time as Sylvester, and who certainly died in the same year, is another curiosity of literature. He was only a writing-master,—a professor of the curious, elaborate penmanship which is now quite dead,—and he seems at no time to have been a man of wealth. But he was, in his vocation or otherwise, familiar with very interesting people, both of the fashionable and the literary class. He succeeded, poor as he was, in getting thrice married to ladies born; and, though he seems to have been something of a coxcomb, he was apparently as little of a fool as coxcombrity will consist with. His work (of the most miscellaneous character and wholly in verse, though in subject as well as treatment often better suiting prose) is voluminous, and he might have been wholly treated (as he has already been referred to) with the verse pamphleteers, especially Rowlands, of an earlier chapter. But fluent and unequal as his verse is—obviously the production of a man who had little better to offer than journalism, but for whom the times did not provide the opening of a journalist—there is a certain salt of wit in it which puts him above the mere pamphleteers. His epigrams (most of which are contained in *The Scourge of Folly*, undated, like others of his books) are by no means despicable; the Welsh ancestors, whom he did not fail to commemorate, seem to have endowed him with some of that faculty for lampooning and “flyting” which distinguished the Celtic race. That they are frequently lacking in point ought hardly to be objected to him; for the age had construed the miscellaneous examples of Martial indulgently, and Jonson in his own generation, and Herrick after him (two men with whom Davies cannot compare for a moment in general power), are in their epigrams frequently as pointless and a good deal coarser. His variations on English proverbs are also remarkable. He had a respectable vein of religious moralising, as the following sonnet from *Wit's Pilgrimage* will show:—

“ When Will doth long to effect her own desires,
She makes the Wit, as vassal to the will,
To do what she, howe'er unright, requires,
Which wit doth, though repiningly, fulfil.
Yet, as well pleased (O languishing wit !)
He seems to effect her pleasure willingly,
And all his reasons to her reach doth fit ;
So like the world, gets love by flattery.
That this is true a thousand witnesses,
Impartial conscience, will direct'y prove ;
Then if we would not willingly transgress,
Our will should swayed be by rules of love,
Which holds the multitude of sins because
Her sin morally to him his servants draws.”

The defect of Davies, as of not a few of his contemporaries, is that, having the power of saying things rememberable enough, he set himself to wrap them up and merge them in vast heaps of things altogether unrememberable. His successors have too often resembled him only in the latter part of his gift. His longer works (*Mirum in Modum*, *Summa Totalis*, *Microcosmus*, *The Holy Rood*, *Humours Heaven on Earth*, are some of their eccentric titles) might move simple wonder if a century which has welcomed *The Course of Time*, and *Yesterday, To-day, and For Ever*, not to mention examples even more recent than these, had any great reason to throw stones at its fore-runners. But to deal with writers like Davies is a little difficult in a book which aims both at being nothing if not critical, and at doing justice to the minor as well as to the major luminaries of the time: while the difficulty is complicated by the necessity of *not* saying ditto to the invaluable labourers who have reintroduced him and others like him to readers. I am myself full of the most unfeigned gratitude to my friend Dr. Grosart, to Professor Arber, and to others, for sparing students, whose time is the least disposable thing they have, visits to public libraries or begging at rich men's doors for the sight of books. I should be very sorry both as a student and as a lover of literature not to possess

Davies, Breton, Sylvester, Quarles, and the rest, and not to read them from time to time. But I cannot help warning those who are not professed students of the subject that in such writers they have little good to seek; I cannot help noting the difference between them and other writers of a very different order, and above all I cannot help raising a mild protest against the encomiums which are sometimes passed on them. Southey, in that nearly best of modern books unclassified, *The Doctor*, has a story of a glover who kept no gloves that were not "Best." But when the facts came to be narrowly inquired into, it was found that the ingenious tradesman had no less than five qualities—"Best," "Better than Best," "Better than better than Best," "Best of All," and the "Real Best." Such language is a little delusive, and when I read the epithets of praise which are sometimes lavished, not by the same persons, on Breton and Watson, I ask myself what we are to say of Spenser and Shakespere.

Davies has no doubt also suffered from the fact that he had a contemporary of the same name and surname, who was not only of higher rank, but of considerably greater powers. Sir John Davies was a Wiltshire man of good family: his mother, Mary Bennet of Pyt-house, being still represented by the Benett-Stanfords of Dorsetshire and Brighton. Born about 1569, he was a member of the University of Oxford, and a Templar; but appears to have been anything but a docile youth, so that both at Oxford and the Temple he came to blows with the authorities. He seems, however, to have gone back to Oxford, and to have resided there till close of middle life; some if not most of his poems dating thence. He entered Parliament in 1601, and after figuring in the Opposition during Elizabeth's last years, was taken into favour, like others in similar circumstances, by James. Immediately after the latter's accession Davies became a law officer for Ireland, and did good and not unperilous service there. He was mainly resident in Ireland for some thirteen years, producing during the time a valuable "Discovery of the Causes of the Irish Discontent." For the last ten years of his life he seems to have

practised as serjeant-at-law in England, frequently serving as judge or commissioner of assize, and he died in 1626. His poetical work consists chiefly of three things, all written before 1600. These are *Nosce Teipsum*, or the immortality of the soul, in quatrains, and as light as the unsuitableness of the subject to verse will allow; a singularly clever collection of acrostics called *Astraea*, all making the name of Elizabetha Regina; and the *Orchestra*, or poem on dancing, which has made his fame. Founded as it is on a mere conceit—the reduction of all natural phenomena to a grave and regulated motion which the author calls dancing—it is one of the very best poems of the school of Spenser, and in harmony of metre (the seven-lined stanza) and grace of illustration is sometimes not too far behind Spenser himself. An extract from it may be fitly followed by one of the acrostics of *Astraea* :—

“As the victorious twins of Leda and Jove,
 (That taught the Spartans dancing on the sands
 Of swift Eurotas) dance in heaven above,
 Knit and united with eternal bands;
 Among the stars, their double image stands,
 Where both are carried with an equal pace,
 Together jumping in their turning race.

“This is the net, wherein the sun’s bright eye,
 Venus and Mars entangled did behold;
 For in this dance, their arms they so imply,
 As each doth seem the other to enfold.
 What if lewd wits another tale have told
 Of jealous Vulcan, and of iron chains!
 Yet this true sense that forged lie contains.

“These various forms of dancing Love did frame,
 And besides these, a hundred millions more;
 And as he did invent, he taught the same:
 With goodly gesture, and with comely show,
 Now keeping state, now humbly honouring low,
 And ever for the persons and the place
 He taught most fit, and best according grace.”

" Each day of thine, sweet month of May,
 Love makes a solemn Holy Day.
 I will perform like duty ;
 Since thou resemblest every way
 Astraea, Queen of Beauty.
 Both you, fresh beauties do partake,
 Either's aspect, doth summer make,
 Thoughts of young Love r'waking,
 Hearts you both do cause to ache ;
 And yet be p'leased with aching.
 Right dear art thou, and so is She,
 Even like attractive sympathy
 Gains unto both, like dearness.
 I ween this made antiquity
 None thee, sweet May of majesty,
 As being both like in clearness."

The chief direct followers of Spenser were, however, Giles and Phineas Fletcher, and William Browne. The two first were, as has been said, the cousins of John Fletcher the dramatist, and the sons of Dr. Giles Fletcher, the author of *Licia*. The exact dates and circumstances of their lives are little known. Both were probably born between 1580 and 1590. Giles, though the younger (?), died vicar of Alderton in Suffolk in 1623 : Phineas, the elder (?), who was educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge (Giles was a member of Trinity College in the same university), also took orders, and was for nearly thirty years incumbent of Hilgay-in-the-Fens, dying in 1650.

Giles's extant work is a poem in four cantos or parts, generally entitled *Christ's Victory and Triumph*. He chose a curious and rather infelicitous variation on the Spenserian stanza *ababbcc*, keeping the Alexandrine but missing the seventh line, with a lyrical interlude here and there. The whole treatment is highly allegorical, and the lusciousness of Spenser is imitated and overdone. Nevertheless the versification and imagery are often very beautiful, as samples of the two kinds will show :—

" The garden like a lady fair was cut
 That lay as if she slumber'd in delight,

And to the open skies her eyes did shut ;
 The azure fields of Heav'n were 'sembled right
 In a large round, set with the flow'rs of light :
 The flow'rs-de-luce, and the round sparks of dew,
 That hung upon their azure leaves did shew
 Like twinkling stars, that sparkle in the evening blue.

“ Upon a hilly bank her head she cast,
 On which the bower of Vain-delight was built,
 White and red roses for her face were placed,
 And for her tresses marigolds were spilt :
 Them broadly she displayed like flaming gilt,
 Till in the ocean the glad day were drowned :
 Then up again her yellow locks she wound,
 And with green fillets in their pretty cauls them bound.

“ What should I here depaint her lily hand,
 Her veins of violets, her ermine breast,
 Which there in orient colours living stand :
 Or how her gown with living leaves is drest,
 Or how her watchman, armed with boughy crest,
 A wall of prim hid in his bushes bears
 Shaking at every wind their leafy spears
 While she supinely sleeps, nor to be waked fears.”

“ See, see the flowers that below,
 Now as fresh as morning blow,
 And of all the virgin rose,
 That as bright Aurora shows :
 How they all unleavèd die,
 Losing their virginity ;
 Like unto a summer shade,
 But now born and now they fade.
 Everything doth pass away,
 There is danger in delay.
 Come, come gather then the rose,
 Gather it, or it you lose.
 All the sand of Tagus' shore
 Into my bosom casts his ore :
 All the valleys' swimming corn
 To my house is yearly borne :
 Every grape of every vine
 Is gladly bruis'd to make me wine,

While ten thousand kings, as proud,
 To carry up my train have bow'd,
 And a world of ladies send me
 In my chambers to attend me.
 All the stars in Heaven that shine,
 And ten thousand more, are mine :
 Only bend thy knee to me,
 Thy wooing shall thy winning be."

The Purple Island, Phineas Fletcher's chief work, is an allegorical poem of the human body, written in a stanza different only from that of *Christ's Victory* in being of seven lines only, the quintett of Giles being cut down to a regular elegiac quatrain. This is still far below the Spenserian stanza, and the colour is inferior to that of Giles. Phineas follows Spenser's manner, or rather his mannerisms, very closely indeed, and in detached passages not unsuccessfully, as here, where the transition from Spenser to Milton is marked :—

"The early morn lets out the peeping day,
 And strew'd his path with golden marigolds :
 The Moon grows wan, and stars fly all away.
 Whom Lucifer locks up in wonted folds
 Till light is quench'd, and Heaven in seas hath flung
 The headlong day : to th' hill the shepherds throng
 And Thirsil now began to end his task and song :

"Who now, alas ! shall teach my humble vein,
 That never yet durst peep from covert glade,
 But softly learnt for fear to sigh and plain
 And vent her griefs to silent myrtle's shade ?
 Who now shall teach to change my oaten quill
 For trumpet 'larms, or humble verses fill
 With graceful majesty, and lofty rising skill ?

"Ah, thou dread Spirit ! shed thy holy fire,
 Thy holy flame, into my frozen heart ;
 Teach thou my creeping measures to aspire
 And swell in bigger notes, and higher art :
 Teach my low Muse thy fierce alarms to ring,
 And raise my soft strain to high thundering,
 Tune thou my lofty song ; thy battles must I sing.

“Such as thou wert within the sacred breast
Of that thrice famous poet, shepherd, king ;
And taught'st his heart to frame his cantos best
Of all that e'er thy glorious works did sing ;
Or as, those holy fishers once among,
Thou flamedst bright with sparkling parted tongues ;
And brought'st down Heaven to Earth in those all-conquering songs.”

But where both fail is first in the adjustment of the harmony of the individual stanza as a verse paragraph, and secondly in the management of their fable. Spenser has everywhere a certain romance-interest both of story and character which carries off in its steady current, where carrying off is needed, both his allegorising and his long descriptions. The Fletchers, unable to impart this interest, or unconscious of the necessity of imparting it, lose themselves in shallow overflowings like a stream that overruns its bank. But Giles was a master of gorgeous colouring in phrase and rhythm, while in *The Purple Island* there are detached passages not quite unworthy of Spenser, when he is not at his very best—that is to say, worthy of almost any English poet. Phineas, moreover, has, to leave *Britain's Ida* alone, a not inconsiderable amount of other work. His Piscatory Eclogue shows the influence of *The Shepherd's Calendar* as closely as, perhaps more happily than, *The Purple Island* shows the influence of *The Faërie Queene*, and in his miscellanies there is much musical verse. It is, however, very noticeable that even in these occasional poems his vehicle is usually either the actual stanza of the *Island*, or something equally elaborate, unsuited though such stanzas often are to the purpose. These two poets indeed, though in poetical capacity they surpassed all but one or two veterans of their own generation, seem to have been wholly subdued and carried away by the mighty flood of their master's poetical production. It is probable that, had he not written, they would not have written at all ; yet it is possible that, had he not written, they would have produced something much more original and valuable. It ought to be mentioned that the influence of both upon Milton, directly and

as handing on the tradition of Spenser, was evidently very great. The strong Cambridge flavour (not very perceptible in Spenser himself, but of which Milton is, at any rate in his early poems, full) comes out in them, and from *Christ's Victory* at any rate the poet of *Lycidas*, the *Ode on the Nativity*, and *Paradise Regained*, apparently "took up," as the phrase of his own day went, not a few commodities.

The same rich borrower owed something to William Browne, who, in his turn, like the Fletchers, but with a much less extensive indebtedness, levied on Spenser. Browne, however, was free from the *genius loci*, being a Devonshire man born and of Exeter College, Oxford, by education. He was born, they say, in 1591, published the first part of *Britannia's Pastorals* in 1613, made many literary and some noble acquaintances, is thought to have lived for some time at Oxford as a tutor, and either in Surrey or in his native county for the rest of his life, which is (not certainly) said to have ended about 1643. Browne was evidently a man of very wide literary sympathy, which saved him from falling into the mere groove of the Fletchers. He was a personal friend and an enthusiastic devotee of Jonson, Drayton, Chapman. He was a student of Chaucer and Occleve. He was the dear friend and associate of a poet more gifted but more unequal than himself, George Wither. All this various literary cultivation had the advantage of keeping him from being a mere mocking-bird, though it did not quite provide him with any prevailing or wholly original pipe of his own. *Britannia's Pastorals* (the third book of which remained in MS. for more than two centuries) is a narrative but extremely desultory poem, in fluent and somewhat loose couplets, diversified with lyrics full of local colour, and extremely pleasant to read, though hopelessly difficult to analyse in any short space, or indeed in any space at all. Browne seems to have meandered on exactly as the fancy took him; and his ardent love for the country, his really artistic though somewhat unchastened gift of poetical description and presentment enabled him to go on just as he

pleased, after a fashion, of which here are two specimens in different measures :—

“ ‘ May first
 (Quoth Marin) swains give lambs to thee ;
 And may thy flood have seignory
 Of all floods else ; and to thy fame
 Meet greater springs, yet keep thy name.
 May never newt, nor the toad
 Within thy banks make their abode !
 Taking thy journey from the sea
 May'st thou ne'er happen in thy way
 On nitre or on brimstone mine,
 To spoil thy taste ! This spring of thine,
 Let it of nothing taste but earth,
 And salt conceived in their birth.
 Be ever fresh ! Let no man dare
 To spoil thy fish, make lock c wear,
 But on thy margent still let dwell
 Those flowers which have the sweetest smell.
 And let the dust upon thy strand
 Become like Tagus' golden sand.
 Let as much good be side to thee
 As thou hast favour shew'd to me. ’ ”

“ Here left the bird the cherry, and anon
 Forsook her bosom, and for more is gone,
 Making such speedy flights into the thick
 That she admir'd he went and came so quick.
 Then, lest his many cherries should distaste,
 Some other fruit he brings than he brought last.
 Sometime of strawberries a little stem
 Oft changing colours as he gather'd them,
 Some green, some white, some red, on them infus'd,
 These lov'd, these fear'd, they blush'd to be so us'd.
 The peascod green, oft with no little toil
 He'd seek for in the fattest, fertil'st soil
 And rend it from the stalk to bring it to her,
 And in her bosom for acceptance woo her.
 No berry in the grove or forest grew
 That fit for nourishment the kind bird knew,
 Nor any powerful herb in open field
 To serve her brood the teeming earth did yield,

But with his utmost industry he sought it,
And to the cave for chaste Marina brought it."

The Shepherd's Pipe, besides reproducing Occleve, is in parts reminiscent of Chaucer, in parts of Spenser, but always characterised by the free and unshackled movement which is Browne's great charm; and the same characteristics appear in the few minor poems attributed to him. Browne has been compared to Keats, who read and loved him, and there are certainly not a few points of resemblance. Of Keats's higher or more restrained excellences, such as appear in the finest passages of *St. Agnes' Eve*, and *Hyperion*, in the *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, and such minor pieces as *In a Drear-Nighted December*, Browne had nothing. But he, like Keats, had that kind of love of Nature which is really the love of a lover; and he had, like Keats, a wonderful gift of expression of his love.¹ Nor is he ever prosaic, a praise which certainly cannot be accorded to some men of far greater repute, and perhaps of occasionally higher gifts both in his own time and others. The rarest notes of Apollo he has not, but he is never driven, as the poet and friend of his, to whom we next come, was often driven, to the words of Mercury. This special gift was not very common at the time; and though that time produced better poets than Browne, it is worth noting in

¹ Something of the same love, but unluckily much less of the same gift, occurs in the poems of a friend of Browne's once hardly known except by some fair verses on Shakespere ("Renowned Spenser," etc.), but made fully accessible by Mr. R. Warwick Bond in 1893. This was William Basse, a retainer of the Wennan family near Thame, the author, probably or certainly, of a quaint defence of retainership, *Sword and Buckler* (1602), and of other poems—*Pastoral Elegies*, *Urania*, *Polyhymnia*, etc.—together with an exceedingly odd piece, *The Metamorphosis of the Walnut-Tree of Boarstall*, which is not quite like anything else of the time. Basse, who seems also to have spelt his name "Bas," and perhaps lived and wrote through the first forty or fifty years of the seventeenth century, is but a moderate poet. Still he is not contemptible, and deserves to rank as a member of the Spenserian family on the pastoral side; while the *Walnut-Tree*, though it may owe something to *The Oak and the Brere*, has a quaintness which is not in Spenser, and not perhaps exactly anywhere else.

him. He may never reach the highest poetry, but he is always a poet.

The comparative impotence of even the best criticism to force writers on public attention has never been better illustrated than in the case of George Wither himself. The greater part of a century has passed since Charles Lamb's glowing eulogy of him was written, and the terms of that eulogy have never been contested by competent authority. Yet there is no complete collection of his work in existence, and there is no complete collection even of the poems, saving a privately printed one which is inaccessible except in large libraries, and to a few subscribers. His sacred poems, which are not his best, were indeed reprinted in the Library of Old Authors; and one song of his, the famous "Shall I Wasting in Despair," is universally known. But the long and exquisite poem of *Philarete* was not generally known (if it is generally known now, which may be doubted) till Mr. Arber reprinted it in the fourth volume of his *English Garner*. Nor can *Fidelia* and *The Shepherd's Hunting*, things scarcely inferior, be said to be familiar to the general reader. For this neglect there is but one excuse, and that an insufficient one, considering the immense quantity of very indifferent contemporary work which has had the honour of modern publication. What the excuse is we shall say presently. Wither was born at Brentworth, in the Alresford district of Hampshire (a district afterwards delightfully described by him), on 11th June 1588. His family was respectable; and though not the eldest son, he had at one time some landed property. He was for two years at Magdalen College, Oxford, of which he speaks with much affection, but was removed before taking his degree. After a distasteful experience of farm work, owing to reverses of fortune in his family he came to London, entered at Lincoln's Inn, and for some years haunted the town and the court. In 1613 he published his *Abuses Stript and Whipt*, one of the general and rather artificial satires not unfashionable at the time. For this, although the book has no direct personal reference that can be discovered, he was im-

prisoned in the Marshalsea ; and there wrote the charming poem of *The Shepherd's Hunting*, 1615, and probably also *Fidelia*, an address from a faithful nymph to an inconstant swain, which, though inferior to *The Shepherd's Hunting* and to *Philarete* in the highest poetical worth, is a signal example of Wither's copious and brightly-coloured style. Three years later came the curious personal poem of the *Motto*, and in 1622 *Philarete* itself, which was followed in the very next year by the *Hymns and Songs of the Church*. Although Wither lived until 2d May 1667, and was constantly active with his pen, his *Hallelujah*, 1641, another book of sacred verse, is the only production of his that has received or that deserves much praise. The last thirty years of his long life were eventful and unfortunate. After being a somewhat fervent Royalist, he suddenly changed his creed at the outbreak of the great rebellion, sold his estate to raise men for the Parliament, and was active in its cause with pen as well as with sword. Naturally he got into trouble at the Restoration (as he had previously done with Cromwell), and was imprisoned again, though after a time he was released. At an earlier period he had been in difficulties with the Stationers' Company on the subject of a royal patent which he had received from James, and which was afterwards (though still fruitlessly) confirmed by Charles, for his *Hymns*. Indeed, Wither, though a man of very high character, seems to have had all his life what men of high character not unfrequently have, a certain facility for getting into what is vulgarly called hot-water.

The defect in his work, which has been referred to above, and which is somewhat passed over in the criticisms of Lamb and others, is its amazing inequality. This is the more remarkable in that evidence exists of not infrequent retouching on his part with the rather unusual result of improvement—a fact which would seem to show that he possessed some critical faculty. Such possession, however, seems on the other hand to be quite incompatible with the production of the hopeless doggerel which he not infrequently signs. The felicity of language and the command

of rhythmical effect which he constantly displays, are extraordinary, as for instance in the grand opening of his first Canticle :—

“ Come kiss me with those lips of thine,
For better are thy loves than wine ;
And as the poured ointments be
Such is the savour of thy name,
And for the sweetness of the same
The virgins are in love with thee.”

Compare the following almost unbelievable rubbish—

“ As we with water wash away
Uncleanness from our flesh,
And sometimes often in a day
Ourselves are fain to wash.”

Even in his earlier and purely secular work there is something, though less of this inequality, and its cause is not at all dubious. No poet, certainly no poet of merit, seems to have written with such absolute spontaneity and want of premeditation as Wither. The metre which was his favourite, and which he used with most success—the trochaic dimeter catalectic of seven syllables—lends itself almost as readily as the octosyllable to this frequently fatal fluency ; but in Wither's hands, at least in his youth and early manhood, it is wonderfully successful, as here :—

“ And sometimes, I do admire
All men burn not with desire.
Nay, I muse her servants are not
Pleading love : but O they dare not :
And I, therefore, wonder why
They do not grow sick and die.
Sure they would do so, but that,
By the ordinance of Fate,
There is some concealed thing
So each gazer limiting,
He can see no more of merit
Than beseems his worth and spirit.
For, in her, a grace there shines
That o'erdaring thoughts confines,

Making worthless men despair
 To be loved of one so fair.
 Yea the Destinies agree
 Some good judgments blind should be :
 And not gain the power of knowing
 Those rare beauties, in her growing.
 Reason dot'd as much imply,
 For, if every judging eye
 Which beholdeth her should there
 Find what excellences are ;
 All, o'ercome by those perfections
 Would be captive to affections.
 So (in happiness unblest)
 She for lovers should not rest."

Nor had he at times a less original and happy command of the rhymed decasyllabic couplet, which he sometimes handles after a fashion which makes one almost think of Dryden, and sometimes after a fashion (as in the lovely description of Alresford Pool at the opening of *Philarete*) which makes one think of more modern poets still. Besides this metrical proficiency and gift, Wither at this time (he thought fit to apologise for it later) had a very happy knack of blending the warm amatory enthusiasm of his time with sentiments of virtue and decency. There is in him absolutely nothing loose or obscene, and yet he is entirely free from the milk-and-water propriety which sometimes irritates the reader in such books as Habington's *Castara*. Wither is never mawkish, though he is never loose, and the swing of his verse at its best is only equalled by the rush of thought and feeling which animates it. As it is perhaps necessary to justify this high opinion, we may as well give the "Alresford Pool" above noted. It is like Browne, but it is better than anything Browne ever did; being like Browne, it is not unlike Keats; it is also singularly like Mr. William Morris.

"For pleasant was that Pool; and near it, then,
 Was neither rotten marsh nor boggy fen.
 It was not overgrown with boisterous sedge,
 Nor grew there rudely, then, along the edge

A bending willow, nor a prickly bush,
 Nor broad-leafed flag, nor reed, nor knotty rush :
 But here, well ordered, was a grove with bowers ;
 There, grassy plots, set round about with flowers.
 Here, you might, through the water, see the land
 Appar, strewed o'er with white or yellow sand.
 Yon, deeper was it ; and the wind, by whiffs,
 Would make it rise, and wash the little cliffs ;
 On which, oft pluming, sate, unfrighted then
 The gagling wild goose, and the snow-white swan,
 With all those flocks of fowl, which, to this day
 Upon those quiet waters breed and play."

When to this gift of description is added a frequent inspiration of pure fancy, it is scarcely surprising that—

"Such a strain as might befit
 Some brave Tuscan poet's wit,"

to borrow a couplet of his own, often adorns Wither's verse.

Two other poets of considerable interest and merit belong to this period, who are rather Scotch than English, but who have usually been included in histories of English literature—Drummond of Hawthornden, and Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling. Both, but especially Drummond, exhibit equally with their English contemporaries the influences which produced the Elizabethan Jacobean poetry ; and though I am not myself disposed to go quite so far, the sonnets of Drummond have sometimes been ranked before all others of the time except Shakespeare's.

William Drummond was probably born at the beautiful seat whence he derived his designation, on 13th December 1585. His father was Sir John Drummond, and he was educated in Edinburgh and in France, betaking himself, like almost all young Scotchmen of family, to the study of the law. He came back to Scotland from France in 1610, and resided there for the greater part of his life, though he left it on at least two occasions for long periods, once travelling on the continent for eight years to recover from the grief of losing a lady to whom he was betrothed, and

once retiring to avoid the inconveniences of the Civil War. Though a Royalist, Drummond submitted to be requisitioned against the Crown, but as an atonement he is said to have died of grief at Charles I.'s execution in 1649. The most famous incidents of his life are the visit that Ben Jonson paid to him, and the much discussed notes of that visit which Drummond left in manuscript. It would appear, on the whole, that Drummond was an example of a well-known type of cultivated dilettante, rather effeminate, equally unable to appreciate Jonson's boisterous ways and to show open offence at them, and in the same way equally disinclined to take the popular side and to endure risk and loss in defending his principles. He shows better in his verse. His sonnets are of the true Elizabethan mould, exhibiting the Petrarchian grace and romance, informed with a fire and aspiring towards a romantic ideal beyond the Italian. Like the older writers of the sonnet collections generally, Drummond intersperses his quatorzains with madrigals, lyrical pieces of various lengths, and even with what he calls "songs,"—that is to say, long poems in the heroic couplet. He was also a skilled writer of elegies, and two of his on Gustavus Adolphus and on Prince Henry have much merit. Besides the madrigals included in his sonnets he has left another collection entitled "Madrigals and Epigrams," including pieces both sentimental and satirical. As might be expected the former are much better than the latter, which have the coarseness and the lack of point noticeable in most of the similar work of this time from Jonson to Herrick. We have also of his a sacred collection (again very much in accordance with the practice of his models of the preceding generation), entitled *Flowers of Zion*, and consisting, like the sonnets, of poems of various metres. One of these is noticeable as suggesting the metre of Milton's "Nativity," but with an alteration of line number and rhyme order which spoils it. Yet a fourth collection of miscellanies differs not much in constitution from the others, and Drummond's poetical work is completed by some local pieces, such as *Forth Feasting*, some hymns and divine poems, and an attempt

in Macaronic called *Polemo-Middenia*, which is perhaps not his. He was also a prose writer, and a tract, entitled *The Cypress Grove*, has been not unjustly ranked as a kind of anticipation of Sir Thomas Browne, both in style and substance. Of his verse a sonnet and a madrigal may suffice, the first of which can be compared with the Sleep sonnet given earlier:—

“ Sleep, Silence’ child, sweet father of soft rest,
 Prince whose approach peace to all mortals brings,
 Indifferent host to shepherds and to kings,
 Sole comforter of minds which are oppressed ;
 Lo, by thy charming rod, all breathing things
 Lie slumb’ring, with forgetfulness possess’d,
 And yet o’er me to spread thy drowsy wings
 Thou spar’st, alas ! who cannot be thy guest.
 Since I am thine, O come, but with that face
 To inward light, which thou art wont to show,
 With feignèd solace ease a true felt woe ;
 Or if, deaf god, thou do deny that grace,
 Come as thou wilt, and what thou wilt bequeath :
 I long to kiss the image of my death.”

“ To the delightful green
 Of you, fair radiant een,
 Let each black yield, beneath the starry arch.
 Eyes, burnish’d Heavens of love,
 Sinople¹ lamps of Jove,
 Save all those hearts which with your flames you parch
 Two burning suns you prove ;
 All other eyes, compared with you, dear lights
 Are Hells, or if not Hells, yet dumpish nights.
 The heavens (if we their glass
 The sea believe) are green, not perfect blue ;
 They all make fair, whatever fair yet was,
 And they are fair because they look like you.”

Sir William Alexander, a friend and countryman of Drummond (who bewailed him in more than one mournful rhyme of great beauty), was born in 1580 of a family which, though it had for some generations borne the quasi-surname Alexander, is said

¹ In heraldry (but not English heraldry) = “green.”

to have been a branch of the Clan Macdonald. Alexander early took to a court life, was much concerned in the proposed planting of Nova Scotia, now chiefly remembered from its connection with the Order of Baronets, was Secretary of State for Scotland, and was raised to the peerage. He died in 1640. Professor Masson has called him "the second-rate Scottish sycophant of an inglorious despotism." He might as well be called "the faithful servant of monarchy in its struggle with the encroachments of Republicanism," and one description would be as much question-begging as the other. But we are here concerned only with his literary work, which was considerable in bulk and quality. It consists chiefly of a collection of sonnets (varied as usual with madrigals, etc.), entitled *Aurora*; of a long poem on *Doomsday* in an eight-lined stanza; of a *Paraenesis* to Prince Henry; and of four "monarchic tragedies" on *Darius*, *Cræsus*, *Alexander*, and *Cæsar*, equipped with choruses and other appliances of the literary rather than the theatrical tragedy. It is perhaps in these choruses that Alexander appears at his best; for his special forte was grave and stately declamation, as the second of the following extracts will prove. The first is a sonnet from *Aurora*:—

" Let some bewitched with a deceitful show,
 Love earthly things unworthily esteem'd,
 And losing that which cannot be redeemed
 Pay back with pain according as they owe :
 But I disdain to cast my eyes so low,
 That for my thoughts o'er base a subject seem'd,
 Which still the vulgar course too beaten deem'd ;
 And loftier things delighted for to know.
 Though presently this plague me but with pain,
 And vex the world with wondering at my woes :
 Yet having gained that long desired repose
 My mirth may more miraculous remain.
 That for the which long languishing I pine,
 It is a show, but yet a show divine."

" Those who command above,
 High presidents of Heaven,

By whom all things do move,
As they have order given,
What worldling can arise
Against them to repine?
Whilst castled in the skies
With providence divine ;
They force this peopled round,
Their judgments to confess,
And in their wrath confound
Proud mortals who transgress
The bounds to them assigned
By Nature in their mind.

“ Base brood of th' Earth, vain man,
Why brag'st thou of thy might ?
The Heavens thy courses scan,
Thou walk'st still in th'ir sight ;
Ere thou wast born, thy deeds
Their registers dilate,
And think that none exceeds
The bounds ordain'd by fate ;
What heavens' would have thee to,
Though they thy ways abhor,
That thou of force must do,
And thou canst do no more
This reason would fulfil,
Their work should serve their will.

“ Are we not heirs of death,
In whom there is no trust ?
Who, toss'd with restless breath,
Are but a drachm of dust ;
Yet fools whenas we err,
And heavens do wrath contract,
If they a space defer
Just vengeance to exact,
Pride in our bosom creeps,
And misinforms us thus
That love in pleasure sleeps
Or takes no care of us :
'The eye of Heaven beholds
What every heart enfolds.' ”

Not a few of his other sonnets are also worth reading, and the unpromising subject of *Doomsday* (which connects itself in style partly with Spenser, but perhaps still more with *The Mirror for Magistrates*), does not prevent it from containing fine passages. Alexander had indeed more power of sustained versification than his friend Drummond, though he hardly touches the latter in point of the poetical merit of short isolated passages and poems. Both bear perhaps a little too distinctly the complexion of "*Gentlemen of the Press*"—men who are composing poems because it is the fashion, and because their education, leisure, and elegant tastes lead them to prefer that form of occupation. But perhaps what is most interesting about them is the way in which they reproduce on a smaller scale the phenomenon presented by the Scotch poetical school of the fifteenth century. That school, as is well known, was a direct offshoot from, or following of the school of Chaucer, though in Dunbar at least it succeeded in producing work almost, if not quite, original in form. In the same way, Drummond and Alexander, while able to the full to experience directly the foreign, and especially Italian influences which had been so strong on the Elizabethans, were still in the main followers of the Elizabethans themselves, and formed, as it were, a Scottish moon to the English sun of poetry. There is little or nothing that is distinctively national about them, though in their following of the English model they show talent at least equal to all but the best of the school they followed. But this fact, joined to those above noted, helps, no doubt, to give an air of want of spontaneity to their verse—an air as of the literary exercise.

There are other writers who might indifferently come in this chapter or in that on Caroline poetry, for the reign of James was as much overlapped in this respect by his son's as by Elizabeth's, and there are others who need but slight notice, besides yet others—a great multitude—who can receive no notice at all. The doggerel of Taylor, the water-poet (not a bad prose writer), received both patronage and attention, which seem to have annoyed

his betters, and he has been resuscitated even in our own times. Francis Beaumont, the coadjutor of Fletcher, has left independent poetical work which, on the whole, confirms the general theory that the chief execution of the joint plays must have been his partner's, but which (as in the *Letter to Ben Jonson* and the fine stoicism of *The Honest Man's Fortune*) contains some very good things. His brother, Sir John Beaumont, who died not so young as Francis, but at the comparatively early age of forty-four, was the author of a historical poem on *Bosworth Field*, as well as of minor pieces of higher merit, including some remarkable critical observations on English verse. Two famous poems, which every one knows by heart, the "You Meaner Beauties of the Night" of Sir Henry Wotton and the "Tell Me no more how fair She is" of Bishop Henry King, are merely perfect examples of a style of verse which was largely if not often quite so perfectly practised by lesser or less known men, as well as by greater ones.¹

There is, moreover, a class of verse which has been referred to incidentally before, and which may very likely be referred to incidentally again, but which is too abundant, too characteristic, and too charming not to merit a place, if not very large one, to itself. I refer to the delightful songs which are scattered all over the plays of the period, from Greene to Shirley. As far as Shakespeare is concerned, these songs are well enough known, and Mr. Palgrave's *Treasury*, with Mr. Bullen's and Bell's *Songs from the Dramatists*, have given an inferior currency, but still a currency, to the best of the remainder. The earlier we have spoken of. But the songs of Greene and his fellows, though charming, cannot compare with those of the more properly Jacobean poets. To name only the

¹ The most interesting collection and selection of verse of this class and time is undoubtedly Dr. Hannah's well-known and charming but rather oddly entitled *Poems of Raleigh, Wotton, and other Courtly Poets* in the Aldine Series. I say oddly entitled, because though Raleigh and Wotton were certainly courtiers, it would be hard to make the name good of some of the minor contributors.

best of each, Ben Jonson gives us the exquisite "Queen and Huntress," which is perhaps the best-known piece of his whole work; the pleasant "If I freely may discover," and best of all — unsurpassed indeed in any language for rolling majesty of rhythm and romantic charm of tone—"Drink to me only with thine eyes." Again the songs in Beaumont and Fletcher stand very high, perhaps highest of all next to Shakespere's in respect of the "woodnote wild." If the snatch of only half articulate poetry of the "Lay a garland on my hearse," of *The Maid's Tragedy*, is really Fletcher's, he has here equalled Shakespere himself. We may add to it the fantastic and charming "Beauty clear and fair," of *The Elder Brother*, the comic swing of "Let the bells ring," and "The fit's upon me now;" all the songs without exception in *The Faithful Shepherdess*, which is much less a drama than a miscellany of the most delightful poetry; the lively war-song in *The Mad Lover*, to which Dryden owed not a little; the catch, "Drink to-day and drown all sorrow;" the strange song of the dead host in *The Lover's Progress*; the exquisite "Weep no more," of *The Queen of Corinth*; the spirited "Let the mill go round," of *The Maid in the Mill*; the "Lovers rejoice," of *Cupid's Revenge*; the "Roses, their sharp spines being gone," which is one of the most Shakesperean things of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; the famous "Hence, all you vain-delights," of *The Nice Valour*, which Milton expanded into *Il Penseroso*, and the laughing song of the same play. This long catalogue only contains a part of the singularly beautiful song work of the great pair of dramatists, and as an example we may give one of the least known from *The Captain* :—

"Tell me, dearest, what is love?
 'Tis a lightning from above;
 'Tis an arrow, 'tis a fire,
 'Tis a boy they call Desire.
 'Tis a grave,
 Gapes to have
 Those poor fools that long to prove.

“ Tell me more, are women true?
 Yes, some are, and some as you.
 Some are willing, some are strange
 Since you men first taught to change.
 And till troth
 Be in both,
 All shall love to love anew.

“ Tell me more yet, can they grieve?
 Yes, and sicken sore, but live,
 And be wise, and delay
 When you men are as wise as they.
 Then I see,
 Faith will be
 Never till they both believe.”

The dirge of *Vittoria Corombona* and the preparation for death of *The Duchess of Malfi* are Webster's sole but sufficient contributions to the list. The witch songs of Middleton's *Witch*, and the gipsy, or rather tramp, songs of *More Dissemblers besides Women* and *The Spanish Gipsy*, have very high merit. The songs of *Patient Grissell*, which are pretty certainly Dekker's, have been noticed already. The otherwise worthless play of *The Thracian Wonder*, attributed to Webster and Rowley, contains an unusual number of good songs. Heywood and Massinger were not great at songs, and the superiority of those in *The Sun's Darling* over the songs in Ford's other plays, seems to point to the authorship of Dekker. Finally, James Shirley has the song gift of his greater predecessors. Every one knows "The glories of our blood and state," but this is by no means his only good song; it worthily closes the list of the kind—a kind which, when brought together and perused separately, exhibits, perhaps, as well as anything else of equal compass, the extraordinary abundance of poetical spirit in the age. For songs like these are not to be hammered out by the most diligent ingenuity, not to be spun by the light of the most assiduously fed lamp. The wind of such inspiration blows where, and only where, it listeth.