

ia

*Ex Libris*

C. K. OGDEN



THE LIBRARY  
OF  
THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CALIFORNIA  
LOS ANGELES

CP  
146

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation





CONTEMPORARIES  
OF SHAKESPEARE

The Works of  
Algernon Charles Swinburne

COLLECTED POETICAL WORKS. In 6  
vols. 36s. net the set.

POSTHUMOUS POEMS. 6s. net.

THE GOLDEN PINE EDITION, at 3s. 6d.  
net in cloth, and 6s. net in leather (limp  
covers), of the following works—

1. POEMS AND BALLADS. First Series.
2. POEMS AND BALLADS. Second and  
Third Series.
3. SONGS BEFORE SUNRISE, including  
Songs of Italy.
4. ATALANTA IN CALYDON, and  
ERECTHEUS.
5. TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE.
6. A STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

# CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

By

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Edited by Edmund Gosse, C.B.  
and Thomas James Wise



---

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN

*London: William Heinemann, 1919*

PR  
421  
S 17

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION: by EDMUND Gosse	vii
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE IN RELATION TO GREENE, PEELE, AND LODGE	I
GEORGE CHAPMAN	13
THE EARLIER PLAYS OF BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER	143
PHILIP MASSINGER	167
JOHN DAY	211
ROBERT DAVENPORT	233
THOMAS NABBES	251
RICHARD BROME	259
JAMES SHIRLEY	275



## INTRODUCTION

THE shadow of irreparable loss lies across the essays which are here for the first time collected. During a period of sixty years, from his boyhood at Eton to his last weeks at Putney, Swinburne brooded over the history of the Elizabethan poets, chanted their music, compared them one with another and celebrated their beauties in a voice that shook with adoration. No one who ever lived, not Charles Lamb himself, approached our great poet-critic in worship of the Elizabethans and Jacobeans or in textual familiarity with their writings. He had read and reread them all, even the obscurest; not one "dim watchfire of some darkling hour" but he had measured what faint light and heat it had to give. All through his life he held before him the design of a work of broad extent which should cover with enthusiastic analysis the entire field, and render future critical excursions in that direction useless and indeed impossible. Day by day, standing before his bookshelves, a precious quarto quivering in his hands, he would start with ecstasy at some

new discovery, and resolve more firmly than ever to complete the great task of illumination. But he died, overburdened perhaps by his own erudition and his own enthusiasm, without having done more than finish certain portions of the structure. The palace of Elizabethan criticism which he dreamed of building remains a fragment.

The scheme of it, I believe, is to be traced in the cycle of twenty-one sonnets which he published in 1882. If this is correct, the completed work would have consisted of a series of volumes, various in size and scope, but identical in method. There would have been a predominance, but not an overpowering predominance, allotted to Shakespeare; this Swinburne gave in the *Study of Shakespeare* of 1880, and in the much less important and less valuable volume of 1909. Of the other parts of the work, the elaborate essay about Ford (1871) and the volume about Ben Jonson (1889) represent the ambitious scale on which Swinburne originally planned the work. He told me that a volume, larger than that devoted to Jonson, would enshrine what he had to say about Beaumont and Fletcher. Of this all that was ever achieved is presented in the following pages, the provisional essay included in *Studies in Prose and Poetry* (1894) being scarcely worthy of mention. Although Marlowe had occupied his thoughts almost to excess through his whole career, he never produced



the finished study of that great precursor's genius which he often proposed to himself and mentioned to his friends. These comments indicate the points at which the vast structure is most obviously incomplete.

It was not, indeed, until about the close of his life that Swinburne determined to unveil, as it were, the messages and minor chambers of his edifice. In 1908, a few months before his death, he published, without preface or comment of any kind, the volume entitled *The Age of Shakespeare*. It consisted of nine chapters, written and periodically printed long before, but now first collected. There was a short paper on Marlowe, an entirely perfunctory note on Chapman, and monographs of due fullness and in fair relation to the original scheme on Webster, Dekker, Marston, Middleton, William Rowley, Heywood, and Cyril Tourneur. It was apparent, of course, that several of the great names were still unrepresented, and if what the world possessed in collected form at the death of Swinburne had been all that he left behind him, the hope of even hazily indicating the scope of the main work which he projected would be denied to us.

Happily, however, it appeared on careful examination that uncollected material for a second series of *The Age of Shakespeare* was in existence.

Various essays were unearthed from old periodicals, and among the manuscripts purchased by Mr. T. J. Wise from Watts-Dunton the missing chapters were included. The only section of the present volume which has appeared in separate book-form before is the essay on George Chapman. This was originally published, a thin octavo, in 1875, and has been out of print for more than a quarter of a century. Swinburne neglected to order its republication, doubtless because he wished it eventually to take its place as a part of the great Elizabethan structure. In restoring it, therefore, we believe that we are carrying out his wishes to the utmost of our power. In a further rearrangement, the short summary of Chapman's life written for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, like the trifling pages on Webster published in 1894, will disappear from the system of *The Age of Shakespeare*.

An examination of the ensuing pages will show that the main outline of Swinburne's enterprise is clearly indicated at last. Until now, we have known practically nothing of his attitude to Massinger and Shirley, not to mention various minor figures of no extreme positive value, but each necessary to fill up the general plan of criticism. It will be found that the present instalment of the work completes the design. The huge canvas is still, and must remain, unequally finished, but every

portion of its surface is now covered and there are no blank spaces left. Possibly, if he had chosen to do so, Swinburne might have devoted one more chapter to the small playwrights of the opening age : he has sketched them in a few rapid lines :

KYD, whose grim sport still gambolled over graves :  
 And CHETTLE, in whose fresh funereal verse  
 Weeps Marian yet on Robin's wildwood hearse :  
 COOKE, whose light boat of song one soft breath  
 saves,  
 Sighed from a maiden's amorous mouth averse.

He might even have spared a second to the Tribe  
 of Benjamin, the disciples of Jonson :

Prince RANDOLPH, nighest his throne of all his  
 men, . . .  
 CARTWRIGHT, a soul pent in with narrower  
 pale, . . .  
 MARMION, whose verse keeps always keen and fine  
 The perfume of their Apollonian wine  
 Who shared with that stout sire . . .  
 The exuberant chalice of his echoing shrine.

It is still more likely that he would have been glad to expatiate further than in frequent notes and passages he has elsewhere done on the Anonymous Plays, "more yet, and more, and yet we mark not all," among which he placed far higher than the rest the mysterious and almost miraculous *Arden of Feversham*. But these would be ornamental addi-

tions, extraneous appendages to the main building, of which, as we may be proud to assert, the essential scheme is now for the first time exhibited in its fullness.

EDMUND GOSSE

*October 1918*

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE



# CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

IN RELATION TO

GREENE, PEELE, AND LODGE

THE list which comprises the names of the very greatest among great poets or among men otherwise great can naturally never be a long one: briefer yet is the list of theirs who are only less great than these, and who first began the work or gave the example which none but they could follow, could complete, or could excel. Above all others enrolled in this latter list the name of Marlowe stands high, and will stand for ever. The father of English tragedy and the creator of English blank verse was therefore also the teacher and the guide of Shakespeare.

There is no such test of critical faculty and genuine instinct for true appreciation of poetry as the estimate given or accepted of Marlowe's place among poets. For his countrymen, at all events, there is none as yet, and probably there never will be. Most writers and most readers above the level of such as would do well to abstain and should in pity be prohibited from reading or from writing are much of one mind about Chaucer and Spenser, about Shakespeare and Milton, about Coleridge and

#### 4 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

Shelley. Those only who know and understand, as Pindar and as Dante would have expressed it, can hope or can be expected to appreciate the greatness of the man who began his career by a double and incomparable achievement: the invention of English blank verse and the creation of English tragedy.

It has not always been duly remarked, it is not now always duly remembered, by students of the age of Shakespeare that Marlowe is the one and only precursor of that veritable king of kings and lord of lords among all writers and all thinkers of all time. The names usually associated with his by painstaking and well-meaning historians of dramatic poetry are hardly memorable or mentionable at all, except from a chronological point of view, among the names of dramatic poets. Lily, Greene, Peele, Nash, and Lodge were true though not great poets, who blundered into playwriting—*invitissima Minerva*—in search of popularity or of bread. Lily, Nash, and Greene were writers of prose which it would be difficult to overpraise if we had here to consider the finest work of Greene in romantic fiction, of Nash and Lily in controversial satire. Thackeray has given to the sweetest and loftiest verses of Peele the immortality which they could hardly have expected or attained, beautiful and noble and pathetic as they are, but for the more than royal dignity conferred on them by association with the deathless name and memory of Colonel Newcome. But their plays, though something in advance of the unreadable *Gorboduc* and the unspeakable *Lochrine*, have no particular claim to record among



the trophies of our incomparable drama: they belong rather to the historic province of antiquarian curiosity than to the æsthetic or spiritual kingdom of English poetry. No man can be more grateful than I for the research of the learned and laborious historians whose industry has been devoted to the noble task of lighting up the dark ways of study for all future students of the highest, the wealthiest, the most precious and golden branch of a matchless literature. For all these illustrious scholars it was a matter of obvious and obtrusive necessity to register all surviving literary documents which belong to the subject of their study. For a writer whose aim is confined to the indication and illustration of poetic and dramatic quality, of imaginative or spiritual excellence the attempt would be worse than a superfluous impertinence: it would be an injurious aberration or excursion from the straight line of his intended labour.

Nash is always readable, even when religious: and something of the "lightness and brightness" of his sunny and fiery spirit gives life to his fantastic little interlude of *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. The graceful author of *Rosalynde* is unrecognizable in Lodge's lamentable Roman tragedy *The Wounds of Civil War*. The *Selimus* and *Alphonsus* of Greene are feeble and futile essays in hopeless and heartless imitation of *Tamburlaine the Great*; very bloody, very wordy, very vehement, but essentially spiritless and passionless. Had Shakespeare never retouched his *Titus Andronicus*, and earned by his surely slight and transient additions in Greene's own semi-lyrical style the shamefully famous expression of the

## 6 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

dying man's undying rancour, that strangely fated play could hardly have been remembered except as the third in this trinity or triunity of rhetorical and rhapsodical horrors. The composition of *Orlando Furioso* is as pitifully scandalous as the story of its author's roguery in the disposal or venditation of his rubbish. *James the Fourth* is a comparatively creditable piece of work ; but its few, poor, meagre merits are noticeable mainly because of its date. There is something more of liveliness and coherence in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* : enough to exasperate the reader who can see what a far better and what a really charming work of realistic and fantastic invention might have been made of it—by the nameless author, for instance, of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*. *George a Greene* is an honest and homely expansion of a good old ballad into a passable if rather formless little play. It might savour of paradox to avow a preference for so tardy and so singular a survival of the old moralities as *A Looking-Glass for London and England* ; but, if that preference is not perverse and capricious, no more final proof of the fact that Dr. Lodge and Master Greene (M.A.) ought never to have strayed or staggered on to the boards could possibly be exacted. For there is not only much to amuse the reader of this quaint and belated sermon in scenes, there is something for him to admire and enjoy. And it is a pity, if not a shame, that even the smallest and least precious jewel of poetry should have been misframed in so barbaric a setting.

Something of the same regret may probably or must surely be felt by readers of *The Arraignment*

*of Paris.* That George Peele might and should have left a more honoured name among English poets than he chose or than he could manage to leave is painfully or pleasurably obvious when we compare the lovely lyrical and pastoral opening of this little courtly interlude with the weary and wordy commonplace of the rhyming and rhymeless verses that follow and fill out its five acts—"tedious and brief." Quaint and pretty casualties or felicities of expression may be found here and there to relieve the general platitude of style and matter. The "oration" of Paris in the fourth act is noticeable, if not memorable, as a decent exercise in blank verse when few could achieve anything better in that line than "untimely breathings, sick and short assays." But it has no more claim to be classed among plays or even among attempts at playwriting than any of Lily's courtly allegories in dialogue; effusions or elaborations of devout and decorous ingenuity with which a critic, or even a chronicler, of dramatic poetry or fiction has naturally no concern.

It is lamentable that neither Shakespeare nor Marlowe should have taken in hand so magnificent and suggestive a subject for historic drama as the reign of the greatest Plantagenet: it is deplorable that Peele should have ventured on it. Difficult and exacting as even the greatest among poets might or rather must have found it, that a man of any literary capacity whatsoever should have dropped upon the nascent stage an abortion so monstrous in its spiritless and shapeless misery as his villainous play of *Edward I* is a riddle beyond and also beneath solution. There is hardly a passable line or couplet

## 8 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

in all the vile expanse of its twenty-five chaotic scenes ; the treatment of character and the handling of incident would be disgraceful to a child. The community in platitude of metre, baseness of spirit, and brutality of dullness, between the detestable scenes which do their bestial and futile utmost to pollute such names as Joan of Arc and Eleanor of Castile, may not suffice as thoroughly as we may wish they might suffice to establish the infamous identity of the author of *Edward I* with the author of the Fourth Scene of the Fifth Act of *The First Part of King Henry VI* ; but at least it goes very far to confirm all rational English readers in their confidence that this villainy is the branding badge of but one minor poet—not of two curs, but of one cur. The heavy tumidity of *The Battle of Alcazar* is relieved by the really fine scene which reminded Lamb of Marlowe, and is rather honoured than disgraced by the kindly raillery of Shakespeare. The miserable traitor and apostate Stukeley would have had no more reason to thank George Peele than to thank the anonymous author of a later play devoted to the commemoration of his misdeeds for the feeble attempt to present them as the achievements or attempts of a melodramatic megalomaniac. The soliloquy which closes the fourth act is matchless, I should hope, for drivel of desperation and platitude of bombast, in all the dramatic memorials of ambitious and hopeless impotence.

The scriptural tragedy of *David and Bethsabe* hardly deserves either the exuberant effusion of Campbell's praise or the all but unqualified scorn of other critics. It is a poor thing on the whole ;

yet there is the mark of a real though certainly not a great poet on the earlier scenes. But Voltaire's farce on the same subject, "translated" with such adorable impudence "from the English of Hume," is much better worth reading and far more provocative of reproof. Whether Peele is or is not responsible for the authorship of *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* is a matter which may be left for debate to the wise men of Gotham who question the authenticity of Shakespeare's part in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. I should hardly suppose that even this meanest among the precursors of Shakespeare must be credited or discredited with the production of so lamentable if not so belated an attempt to reopen "King Cambyses' vein." The only redeeming point in all the narcotic or hypnotic rubbish is the sometimes rather amusing humour of the clown Subtle Shift—a not unwelcome survival of the Vice who gives occasional life to the mysteries and moralities which preceded the birth of tragedy or comedy in England as in France.

"These three gifted men," Greene, Peele, and Marlowe, have been thus bracketed by such critics as in three hundred years' time may possibly chain together the contemporary names of those three gifted men, Charles Mackay, Haynes Bayley, and Alfred Tennyson. It is shameful that it should not be (if it be not) superfluous to say that Marlowe differs from such little people as Peele and Greene, not in degree, but in kind; not as an eagle differs from wrens or titmice, but as an eagle differs from frogs or tadpoles. He first, and he alone, gave wings to English poetry; he first brought into its serene and radiant atmos-

phere the new strange element of sublimity. And, innovator as he was, revolutionist and creator, he was no less loyal and no less competent an artist, no less perfect and instinctive a workman in words, than Chaucer or than Spenser was before him. He had neither the boyish humour nor the childlike pathos of Chaucer: he had nothing of Spenser's incomparable melody and all but inexhaustible fancy; but among all English poets he was the first full-grown man; young indeed, and immature if set beside such disciples and successors as Shakespeare and Milton, but the first-born among us of their kind. Flutes and lutes and harps and harpsichords we had heard before the organ-music of his verse astonished and entranced all ears not naturally sealed against the higher strains of harmony, all hearts not religiously closed against the nobler tones of thought. And Shakespeare heard at once, and cast off shard by shard the crust of habit which fostered and sometimes fevered the jiggling vein of his rhyming mother-wit, sweet and exquisite as it was; and Milton long afterwards prolonged and magnified by reverberation the music of "Marlowe's mighty line." His place among poets is exactly as questionable as Dante's. M. de Lamartine thought little or nothing of Dante, and M. de Lamartine was once a very great poet indeed. When such another champion assails the fame of Marlowe, it will be time for those who know better to undertake his defence.

The reviler of Shakespeare can be no other than a scurrilous buffoon, "a decent priest where monkeys are the gods," and where Ibsen is the idol. The anatomist of Shakespeare—the superior person



who knows all about the weaknesses of that inferior nature, who can expound the qualities and define the influences which made him the man he was, and precluded him from the dubious chance of showing himself a greater and a stronger man than the soft, flaccid weaklings in whom his pitiful and unmanly ideal of heroic or philosophic manhood is so degradingly revealed—the thinker whose masculine intelligence can fathom Shakespeare's at a glance and dismiss it with a smile—is worthy to be classed and remembered as a representative man after the order of Archquack Emerson. Collier the cleric and Rymer the railer are dead and damned to something less, let us hope, than everlasting fame; pity may surely be allowed to believe in a briefer term of expiatory survival, a milder infliction of purgatorial remembrance, for their successors in the inheritance of contempt. "*Zoïle aussi éternel qu'Homère*"—what hardest of all hearts would not pity the case of Zoilus, eternally alive (or, in Browning's characteristically audacious phrase, "immortally immerded") in "the eternal cesspools" to which, when a living soul, he contributed all the irrepressible exuberance of effusive or explosive malignity which tortured what served him for a brain, and corroded what sufficed him for a heart? No other creature, alive or dead, can be quite so utterly and so hopelessly pitiable.

A much less incongruous and fissiparous trinity or triunity of pre-Shakespearean playwrights would be revealed in the reunion of three associated names much less inharmonious than the copulation of Greene's and Peele's with Marlowe's. Greene,

Peele, and Lodge hang very well together; three really good poets at their best, who can only have been whipped and spurred into scribbling for the stage by insanity of ambition or stimulation of hunger. The dullness of *The Wounds of Civil War* is so dense and malarious that it is difficult for a suffering reader to remember the existence of *Rosalynde*. Nothing more perfectly and absolutely worthless, or more difficult for patient application to dig through, has ever been reissued in the various reissues of Dodsley's *Old Plays*: stupendous as is the stupidity or perversity which has always ignored James Howard's really excellent comedy of *The English Monsieur*, and selected for infliction on modern readers a piece of noisome nonsense which must make his name a stench in the nostrils of the nauseated reader.

But enough or too much has before been written on this pigmy trinity of dwarfish dramatists. It is not with their names, it is with no such names as theirs, that poets or judges of poetry will ever associate the deathless name of Marlowe. To one man only did Shakespeare ever pay the tribute of a passing word—a word of honour, of regret, of admiration, and it might almost seem of affection. And to Marlowe alone it is that we can feel as though such a tribute had been due. But to him we may feel that it would be strange if not a word of homage had been offered, not a token of regard had been vouchsafed, by Shakespeare.

*Note.*—*The foregoing essay was the last prose composition completed by Swinburne before his death.*



GEORGE CHAPMAN



## GEORGE CHAPMAN

THE fame which from his own day to ours has never wholly failed to attend the memory of George Chapman has yet been hitherto of a looser and vaguer kind than floats about the memory of most other poets. In the great revival of studious enthusiasm for the works of the many famous men who won themselves a name during the seventy-five memorable years of his laborious life, the mass of his original work has been left too long unnoticed and unhonoured. Our "Homer-Lucan," as he was happily termed by Daniel in that admirable *Defence of Rhyme* which remains to this day one of the most perfect examples of sound and temperate sense, of pure style and just judgment, to be found in the literature of criticism, has received, it may be, not much less than his due meed of praise for those Homeric labours by which his name is still chiefly known: but what the great translator could accomplish when fighting for his own hand few students of English poetry have been careful to inquire or competent to appreciate.

And yet there are not many among his various and unequal writings which we can open without some sense of great qualities in the workman whose work lies before us. There are few poets from whose

remains a more copious and noble anthology of detached beauties might be selected. He has a singular force and depth of moral thought, a constant energy and intensity of expression, an occasional delicacy and perfection of fanciful or reflective beauty, which should have ensured him a place in the front rank at least of gnomic poets. It is true that his "wisdom entangles itself in overniceness"; that his philosophy is apt to lose its way among brakes of digression and jungles of paradox; that his subtle and sleepless ingenuity can never resist the lure of any quaint or perverse illustration which may start across its path from some obscure corner at the unluckiest and unlikeliest time; that the rough and barren byways of incongruous allusion, of unseasonable reflection or preposterous and grotesque symbolism, are more tempting to his feet than the highway of art, and the brushwood or the morass of metaphysics seems often preferable in his eyes to the pastures or the gardens of poetry. But from first to last the grave and frequent blemishes of his genius bear manifestly more likeness to the deformities of a giant than to the malformations of a dwarf, to the overstrained muscles of an athlete than to the withered limbs of a weakling.

He was born between Spenser and Shakespeare, before the first dawn of English tragedy with the morning star of Marlowe. Five years later that great poet began a life more brief, more glorious and more fruitful in proportion to its brevity than that of any among his followers except Beaumont and Shelley: each of these leaving at the close of some thirty years of life a fresh crown of immortality to

the national drama founded by the first-born of the three. A few months more and Shakespeare was in the world; ten years further and Ben Jonson had followed. This latter poet, the loving and generous panegyrist of Chapman, was therefore fifteen years younger than his friend; who was thus twenty years older than Fletcher, and twenty-seven years older than Beaumont. All these immortals he outlived on earth, with the single exception of Jonson, who died but three years after the death of the elder poet. No man could ever look round upon a more godlike company of his fellows; yet we have no record of his relations with any of these but Jonson and Fletcher.

The date of Chapman's birth is significant, and should be borne in mind when we attempt to determine his rank among the poets of that golden age. From the splendid and triumphant example of the one great poet whose popularity his earlier years must have witnessed, he may have caught a contagious love of allegory and moral symbolism; he certainly caught nothing of the melodious ease and delicate grace which gave Spenser his supremacy in the soft empire of that moonlight-coloured world where only his genius was at home. Chapman's allegories are harsh, crude, and shapeless; for the sweet airs and tender outlines and floating Elysian echoes of Spenser's vision he has nothing to offer in exchange but the thick rank mist of a lowland inhabited by monstrous hybrids and haunted by jarring discords. Behind Spenser came Sidney and the Euphuists; and in their schools neither Chapman nor any other was likely to learn much good. The

natural defects and dangers of his genius were precisely of the kind most likely to increase in the contagion of such company. He had received from nature at his birth a profuse and turbid imagination, a fiery energy and restless ardour of moral passion and spiritual ambition, with a plentiful lack of taste and judgment, and a notable excess of those precious qualities of pride and self-reliance which are at once needful to support and liable to misguide an artist on his way of work.

The two main faults of the school of poets which blossomed and faded from the brief flower of court favour during the youth of Chapman were tedious excess of talk and grotesque encumbrance of imagery; and Chapman had unhappily a native tendency to the grotesque and tedious, which all his study of the highest and purest literature in the world was inadequate to suppress or to chasten. For all his labours in the field of Greek translation, no poet was ever less of a Greek in style or spirit. He enters the serene temples and handles the holy vessels of Hellenic art with the stride and the grasp of a high-handed and high-minded barbarian. Nevertheless it is among the schools of Greek poetry that we must look for a type of the class to which this poet belongs. In the great age of Greece he would have found a place of some credit among the ranks of the gnomic poets, and written much grave and lofty verse of a moral and political sort in praise of a powerful conservative oligarchy, and in illustration of the public virtues which are fostered and the public vices which are repressed under the strong sharp tutelage of such

a government. At the many-headed beast of democracy he would have discharged the keenest arrows of his declamation, and sought shelter at need from its advance behind the shield of some tutelary Pittacus or Pisistratus.

What Pope said of Chapman's Homer may be applied with a difference to his original poetry; it might not be inaccurate to say that he often writes, not indeed as Homer, but as Theognis might have written before he came to years of discretion. He shows, we must admit, only in a few couplets or brief paragraphs the pure and luminous charm of perfect speech proper to a Greek moralist of the elegiac school; but he has more of a certain fire and force of fancy than we should look for in a poet of that order, where with far less of thick acrid smoke there is also less real heat and flame perceptible than struggles here through the fume and fog of a Cimmerian style. The dialect of Chapman's poems is undoubtedly portentous in its general barbarism; and that study of purer writers, which might in another case have been trusted to correct and chasten the turgid and fiery vigour of a barbarian imagination, seems too often to have encrusted the mind with such arrogance and the style with such pedantry as to make certain of these poems, full of earnest thought, of passionate energy, of tumid and fitful eloquence, the most indigestible food ever served up to the guests of a man of genius by the master of the feast.

Under no circumstances, probably, would Chapman have been always a pure and harmonious writer, capable of casting into fit and radiant form

the dark hard masses of his deep and ardent thought, of uttering the weighty and noble things he had to say in a fluent and lucid style ; but as it was, he appears from first to last to have erected his natural defects into an artificial system, and cultivated his incapacities as other men cultivate their faculties. " That Poesy should be as perval as oratory, and plainness her special ornament, were the plain way to barbarism " : so he tells us at the very outset of his career, in a letter of dedication prefixed to the second of his published poems, and containing several excellent reflections on the folly of those who expect grave and deep matter of poetry to be so handled that he who runs or lounges need not pause or rouse himself to read.

" That *energia*, or clearness of representation, required in absolute poems is not the perspicuous delivery of a low invention ; but high and hearty invention expressed in most significant and unaffected phrase." That is admirably said ; but when we turn to the practical comment supplied by the poetry which illustrates this critical profession of faith, we find it hard to stomach the preacher's application of his text. In this same dedication, which is well worth note and regard from all students of Chapman—and with all his shortcomings we may reasonably hope that the number of them will increase, with the first issue of his complete works, among all professed students of English poetry at its highest periods—he proceeds to a yet more distinct avowal of his main principle ; and it is something to know that he had any, though the knowledge be but too likely to depress the interest



and dishearten the sympathy of a reader who but for this assurance of design would probably have supposed that great part of these poems had been written in a chaotic jargon, where grammar, metre, sense, sound, coherence, and relevancy are hurled together on a heap of jarring and hurtling ruins, rather because the author wanted skill or care to write better than because he took pains to achieve so remarkable a result by the observance of fixed means for the attainment of a fixed purpose. It should seem to be with malice aforethought that he sets himself to bring to perfection the qualities of crabbed turgidity and barbarous bombast with which nature had but too richly endowed him, mingling these among many better gifts with so cunning a hand and so malignant a liberality as well-nigh to stifle the good seed of which yet she had not been sparing. "There is no confection made to last, but is admitted more cost and skill than presently-to-be-used simples; and in my opinion that which being with a little endeavour searched adds a kind of majesty to poesy is better than that which every cobbler may sing to his patch. Obscurity in affection of words and indigested conceits is pedantical and childish; but where it shroudeeth itself in the heart of his subject, uttered with fitness of figure and expressive epithets, with that darkness will I still labour to be shadowed."

This promise, we may add, was most religiously kept; but the labour was at least superfluous. To translate out of the crude and incoherent forms of expression in which they now lie weltering the scholastic subtleties and metaphysical symbols which

beset the reader's diverted and distracted attention at every step through the jungle of these poems, and thus to render what he had to say into some decent order and harmony, he would have found a harder if a more profitable labour than to fling forth his undigested thoughts and incongruous fancies in a mass of rich inextricable confusion for them to sift and sort who list. But this, we see, was far enough from his purpose. He takes his motto from Persius :

Quis leget hæc ? Nemo, hercule, nemo ;  
Vel duo vel nemo ;

and the label thus affixed to the forehead of one volume might have served for almost any other of his poems. His despair of a fit audience is less remarkable than the bitter and violent expression of his contempt for general opinion. "Such is the wilful poverty of judgments, wandering like passportless men in contempt of the divine discipline of poesy, that a man may well fear to frequent their walks. The profane multitude I hate, and only consecrate my strange poems to those searching spirits whom learning hath made noble, and nobility sacred." And this is throughout his manner of reference to the tastes and judgments of those common readers in whose eyes he took such less than little pains to make his work even passably attractive that we may presume this acrid tone of angry contempt, half haughty and half petulant in its endless repetition, to have had in it some salt of sincerity as well as some underlying sense of conscious failure in the pursuit of that success on the image or

idea of which he turns and tramples with passionate scorn. It is not usually till he has failed to please that a man discovers how despicable and undesirable a thing it would have been to succeed.

No student, however warm his goodwill and admiration for the high-toned spirit and genius of Chapman, will be disposed to wonder that he found cause to growl and rail at the neglect and distaste of the multitude for his writings. Demosthenes, according to report, taught himself to speak with pebbles in his mouth ; but it is presumable that he also learnt to dispense with their aid before he stood up against Æschines or Hyperides on any great occasion of public oratory. Our philosophic poet, on the other hand, before addressing such audience as he may find, is careful always to fill his mouth till the jaws are stretched wellnigh to bursting with the largest, roughest, and most angular of polygonal flintstones that can be hewn or dug out of the mine of human language ; and as fast as one voluminous sentence or unwieldy paragraph has emptied his mouth of the first batch of barbarisms, he is no less careful to refill it before proceeding to a fresh delivery. I sincerely think and hope that no poems with a tithe of their genuine power and merit were ever written on such a plan or after such a fashion as the *Shadow of Night* or *Andromeda Liberata* of Chapman. It is not merely the heavy and convulsive movement of the broken and jarring sentences, the hurried broken-winded rhetoric that seems to wheeze and pant at every painful step, the incessant byplay of incongruous digressions and impenetrable allusions, that make the first

reading of these poems as tough and tedious a task for the mind as oakum-picking or stone-breaking can be for the body. Worse than all this is the want of any perceptible centre towards which these tangled and ravelled lines of thought may seem at least to converge. We see that the author has thought hard and felt deeply ; we apprehend that he is charged as it were to the muzzle with some ardent matter of spiritual interest, of which he would fain deliver himself in explosive eloquence ; we perceive that he is angry, ambitious, vehement, and arrogant ; no pretender, but a genuine seer or Pythian bemused and stifled by the oracular fumes which choke in its very utterance the message they inspire, and for ever preclude the seer from becoming properly the prophet of their mysteries :

We understand a fury in his words,  
But not the words ;

and the fury which alone we understand waxes ten-fold hotter at our incompetence to comprehend what the orator is incompetent to express. He foams at the mouth with rage through all the flints and pebbles of hard language which he spits forth, so to say, in the face of "the prejudicate and peremptory reader" whose ears he belabours with "very bitter words," and with words not less turgid than were hurled by Pistol at the head of the recalcitrant and contumelious Mistress Tearsheet : nor assuredly had the poet much right to expect that they would be received by the profane multitude with more reverence and humility than was the poetic fury of "such a fustian rascal" by that

“honest, virtuous, civil gentlewoman.” The charge of obscurity is perhaps of all charges the likeliest to impair the fame or to imperil the success of a rising or an established poet. It is often misapplied by hasty or ignorant criticism as any other on the roll of accusations; and was never misapplied more persistently and perversely than to an eminent writer of our own time. The difficulty found by many in certain of Mr. Browning’s works arises from a quality the very reverse of that which produces obscurity properly so called. Obscurity is the natural product of turbid forces and confused ideas; of a feeble and clouded or of a vigorous but unfixed and chaotic intellect. Such a poet as Lord Brooke, for example—and I take George Chapman and Fulke Greville to be of all English poets the two most genuinely obscure in style upon whose works I have ever ventured to embark in search of treasure hidden beneath the dark gulfs and crossing currents of their rocky and weedy waters, at some risk of my understanding being swept away by the ground-swell—such a poet, overcharged with overflowing thoughts, is not sufficiently possessed by any one leading idea, or attracted towards any one central point, to see with decision the proper end and use with resolution the proper instruments of his design.

Now if there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning’s intellect it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. To charge him with obscurity is about as accurate as to call Lynceus

purblind or complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire. He is something too much the reverse of obscure ; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity, or even to realize with what spider-like swiftness and sagacity his building spirit leaps and lightens to and fro and backward and forward as it lives along the animated line of its labour, springs from thread to thread and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination. He never thinks but at full speed ; and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a wagon or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway. It is hopeless to enjoy the charm or to apprehend the gist of his writings except with a mind thoroughly alert, an attention awake at all points, a spirit open and ready to be kindled by the contact of the writer's.

To do justice to any book which deserves any other sort of justice than that of the fire or the waste-paper basket, it is necessary to read it in the fit frame of mind ; and the proper mood in which to study for the first time a book of Mr. Browning's is the freshest, clearest, most active mood of the mind in its brightest and keenest hours of work. Read at such a time, and not " with half-shut eyes falling asleep in a half-dream," it will be found (in Chapman's phrase) " pervial " enough to any but a sluggish or a sand-blind eye ; but at no time and in



no mood will a really obscure writer be found other than obscure. The difference between the two is the difference between smoke and lightning ; and it is far more difficult to pitch the tone of your thought in harmony with that of a foggy thinker than with that of one whose thought is electric in its motion. To the latter we have but to come with an open and pliant spirit, untired and undisturbed by the work or the idleness of the day, and we cannot but receive a vivid and active pleasure in following the swift and fine radiations, the subtle play and keen vibration of its sleepless fires ; and the more steadily we trace their course the more surely do we see that all these forked flashes of fancy and changing lights of thought move unerringly around one centre and strike straight in the end to one point. Only random thinking and random writing produce obscurity ; and these are the radical faults of Chapman's style of poetry. We find no obscurity in the lightning, whether it play about the heights of metaphysical speculation or the depths of character and motive ; the mind derives as much of vigorous enjoyment from the study by such light of the one as of the other. The action of so bright and swift a spirit gives insight as it were to the eyes and wings to the feet of our own ; the reader's apprehension takes fire from the writer's, and he catches from a subtler and more active mind the infection of spiritual interest ; so that any candid and clear-headed student finds himself able to follow for the time in fancy the lead of such a thinker with equal satisfaction on any course of thought or argument ; when he sets himself to refute Renan through the

dying lips of St. John or to try conclusions with Strauss in his own person, and when he flashes at once the whole force of his illumination full upon the inmost thought and mind of the most infamous criminal, a Guido Franceschini or a Louis Bonaparte, compelling the black and obscene abyss of such a spirit to yield up at last the secret of its profoundest sophistries, and let forth the serpent of a soul that lies coiled under all the most intricate and supple reasonings of self-justified and self-conscious crime. And thanks to this very quality of vivid spiritual illumination we are able to see by the light of the author's mind without being compelled to see with his eyes, or with the eyes of the living mask which he assumes for his momentary impersonation of saint or sophist, philosopher or malefactor ; without accepting one conclusion, conceding one point, or condoning one crime.

It is evident that to produce any such effect requires above all things brightness and decision as well as subtlety and pliancy of genius ; and this is the supreme gift and distinctive faculty of Mr. Browning's mind. If indeed there be ever any likelihood of error in his exquisite analysis, he will doubtless be found to err rather through excess of light than through any touch of darkness ; we may doubt, not without a sense that the fittest mood of criticism might be that of a self-distrustful confidence in the deeper intuition of his finer and more perfect knowledge, whether the perception of good or evil would actually be so acute in the mind of the supposed reasoner ; whether, for instance, a veritable household assassin, a veritable saviour of



society or other incarnation of moral pestilence, would in effect see so clearly and so far, with whatever perversion or distortion of view, into the recesses of the pit of hell wherein he lives and moves and has his being; recognizing with quick and delicate apprehension what points of vantage he must strive to gain, what outposts of self-defence he may hope to guard, in the explanation and vindication of the motive forces of his nature and the latent mainspring of his deeds. This fineness of intellect and dramatic sympathy which is ever on the watch to anticipate and answer the unspoken imputations and prepossessions of his hearer, the very movements of his mind, the very action of his instincts, is perhaps a quality hardly compatible with a nature which we might rather suppose, judging from public evidence and historic indication, to be sluggish and short-sighted, "a sly slow thing with circumspective eye" that can see but a little way immediately around it, but neither before it nor behind, above it nor beneath; and whose introspection, if ever that eye were turned inward, would probably be turbid, vacillating, cloudy and uncertain as the action of a spirit incapable of self-knowledge but not incapable of self-distrust, timid and impenitent, abased and unabashed, remorseless but not resolute, shameless but not fearless.

If such be in reality the public traitor and murderer of a nation, we may fairly infer that his humbler but not viler counterpart in private life will be unlikely to exhibit a finer quality of mind or a clearer faculty of reason. But this is a question of realism which in no wise affects the spiritual value

and interest of such work as Mr. Browning's. What is important for our present purpose is to observe that this work of exposition by soliloquy and apology by analysis can only be accomplished or undertaken by the genius of a great special pleader, able to fling himself with all his heart and all his brain, with all the force of his intellect and all the strength of his imagination, into the assumed part of his client ; to concentrate on the cause in hand his whole power of illustration and illumination, and bring to bear upon one point at once all the rays of his thought in one focus. Apart from his gift of moral imagination, Mr. Browning has in the supreme degree the qualities of a great debater or an eminent leading counsel ; his finest reasoning has in its expression and development something of the ardour of personal energy and active interest which inflames the argument of a public speaker ; we feel, without the reverse regret of Pope, how many a first-rate barrister or parliamentary tactician has been lost in this poet.

The enjoyment that Browning's best and most characteristic work affords us is doubtless far other than the delight we derive from the purest and highest forms of the lyric or dramatic art ; there is a radical difference between the analyst and the dramatist, the pleader and the prophet ; it would be clearly impossible for the subtle tongue which can undertake at once the apology and the anatomy of such motives as may be assumed to impel or to support a " Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau " on his ways of thought and action, ever to be touched with the fire which turns to a sword or to a scourge the

tongue of a poet to whom it is given to utter as from Patmos or from Sinai the word that fills all the heaven of song with the lightnings and thunders of chastisement. But in place of lyric rapture or dramatic action we may profitably enjoy the unique and incomparable genius of analysis which gives to these special pleadings such marvellous life and interest as no other workman in that kind was ever or will ever again be able to give : we may pursue with the same sense of strenuous delight in a new exercise of intellect and interest the slender and luminous threads of speculation wound up into a clue with so fine a skill and such happy sleight of hand in *Fifine at the Fair* or the sixth book of *Sordello*, where the subtle secret of spiritual weakness in a soul of too various powers and too restless refinement is laid bare with such cunning strength of touch, condemned and consoled with such far-sighted compassion and regret.

This last-named poem has been held especially liable to the charge which we have seen to be especially inapplicable to the general work of its author ; but although the manner of its construction should not seem defensible, as to me I may confess that it does not, it would be an utter misuse of terms to find in obscurity of thought or language the cause of this perceptible defect. The point of difference was accurately touched by the exquisite critical genius of Coleridge when he defined the style of Persius as "hard—not obscure" : for this is equally true in the main of the style of *Sordello* ; only the hard metal is of a different quality and temper, as the intellect of the

English thinker is far wider in its reach, far subtler in its action and its aim, than that of the Roman stoic. The error, if I may take on myself to indicate what I conceive to be the error, of style in *Sordello* is twofold; it is a composite style, an amalgam of irreconcilable materials that naturally refuse to coalesce; and, like a few of the author's minor poems, it is written at least partially in shorthand, which a casual reader is likely to mistake for cipher, and to complain accordingly that the key should be withheld from him.

A curious light is thrown on the method of its composition by the avowal put forth in the dedication of a reissue of this poem, that since its first adventure on publicity the writer had added and had cancelled a notable amount of illustrative or explanatory matter, preferring ultimately to leave his work such a poem as the few must like, rather than such as the many might. Against this decision no one has a right to appeal; and there is doubtless much in the work as it stands that all imaginative thinkers and capable students of poetry most assuredly must regard with much more than mere liking; but when the reader is further invited to observe that the sole aim kept in sight, the sole object of interest pursued by the author was the inner study of an individual mind, the occult psychology of a single soul, the personal pathology of a special intelligence, he has a right to suggest that in that case there is too much, and in any other case there is not enough, of external illustration and the by-play of alien actions and passions which now serve only to perplex the scheme

they ought to explain. If it was the author's purpose to give to his philosophic poem a background of historic action, to relieve against the broad mass and movement of outer life the solitary process of that inward and spiritual tragedy which was the main occupation of his mind and art, to set the picture of a human spirit in the frame of circumstances within which it may actually have been environed and beset with offers of help, with threats and temptations, doubts and prospects and chances of the day it had on earth—if this were his purpose, then surely there is not here enough of such relief to illustrate a design which there is more than enough of it to confuse. But if, as we are now obliged to assume, the author's purpose was studiously and strenuously to restrict within the limits of inner spiritual study the interest and the motive of his work, to concentrate our attention with his own upon the growth and the fortune, the triumph and the failure, the light and the darkness of this one human spirit, the soul of a man of genius fallen upon evil days and elect for great occasions and begirt with strange perplexities, then surely there is here far too much of external distraction and diversion for the reader's mind even to apprehend the issue, much less to comprehend the process, of this inner tragic action. The poem, in short, is like a picture in which the background runs into the foreground, the figures and the landscape confound each other for want of space and keeping, and there is no middle distance discernible at all. It is but a natural corollary to this general error that the body like the spirit of the poem, its form not less than its

thought, should halt between two or three diverse ways, and that the style should too often come to the ground between two stools or more ; being as it is neither a dramatic nor a narrative style, neither personal nor impersonal, neither lyric nor historic, but at once too much of all these and not enough of any. The result may be to the hasty reader no less repellent than the result of obscurity in thought or in style ; but from identity of effect we are not to infer an identity of cause. The best parts of this poem also belong in substance always and sometimes in form to the class of monodramas or soliloquies of the spirit ; a form to which the analytic genius of Mr. Browning leads him ever as by instinct to return, and in which alone it finds play for its especial faculties and security against its especial liabilities to error and confusion of styles ; a security for want of which his lyric and dramatic writing is apt to be neither dramatic nor lyrical, simply because of the writer's natural and inevitable tendency to analysis, which, by the nature of things as well as by the laws of art, can only explain and express itself either through the method of direct exposition or in the form of elaborate mental monologue.

The whole argument of the sixth book is monodramatic ; and its counterpart is to be sought in the most dramatic and to me the most delightful passage of equal length in the poem, the magnificent soliloquy of Salinguerra in the fourth book, full of the subtle life and reality and pathos which the author, to speak truth as it seems to me, too generally fails to transfer from monologue into dialogue, to translate into the sensible action and



passion of tragedy, or adequately to express in fullness and fitness of lyric form. The finest and most memorable parts of his plays not less than of his poems are almost always reducible in their essence to what I have called monodrama ; and if cast into the monodramatic form common to all his later writings would have found a better if not a keener expression and left a clearer if not a deeper impression on the mind. For one example, the communing of old King Victor with himself on his return to the palace he has resigned is surely far more impressive and memorable to any reader than the rest of the play where his character is exhibited in the mutual action and reaction of dialogue among characters who seem unable to say rightly what they should say except when alone or secure from interruption. Even Chapman, from whom I may be thought to have wandered somewhat far in this inquiry as to what is or is not properly definable as obscurity, has in my judgment a sounder instinct of dramatic dialogue and movement than the illustrious writer who has carved out for himself in the second period of his career a new and better way to the end appointed by nature for the exercise of his highest powers : and Chapman was certainly not remarkable among the great men of his day for the specially dramatic bent of his genius.

I have dwelt thus long on a seemingly irrelevant and discursive inquiry because I could discover no method so fit to explain the nature of the fault I cannot but find in the poet of whom I have to speak, as by contrast of his work with the work of another, upon whom this fault has been wrongly charged by

the inaccurate verdict of hasty judges. In answer to these I have shown that the very essence of Mr. Browning's aim and method, as exhibited in the ripest fruits of his intelligence, is such as implies above all other things the possession of a quality the very opposite of obscurity—a faculty of spiritual illumination rapid and intense and subtle as lightning, which brings to bear upon its central object by way of direct and vivid illustration every symbol and every detail on which its light is flashed in passing. Thus in *Fifine* the illustration derived from a visionary retrospect of Venice, and in *Sordello* the superb and wonderful comparison of the mental action of a man who puts by for a season the memories in which he has indulged for a moment before turning again to the day's work, with that of a fugitive slave who thinks over in a pause of his flight and puts aside for more practical means of revenge the thought of enchantments "sovereign to plague his enemies," as he buckles himself again to the grim business of escape—these and other such illustrative passages are not more remarkable for the splendour of their imaginative quality than for the aptness of their cunning application and the direct light reflected from them on the immediate argument which is penetrated and vivified throughout by the insinuation and exploration of its radiance.

Few poets, on the other hand, have been more unsparing in the use of illustration than Chapman; he flings about similes by the handful, many of them diffuse and elaborate in expression, most of them curiously thoughtful and ingenious, not a few of them eloquent and impressive; but in



many cases they tend rather to distract the attention of the reader than to elucidate the matter of his study. To his first poem, short as it is, Chapman appends a glossary to explain the accumulated allusions of a mythological kind, with this note at the foot of it: "For the rest of his own invention, figures and similes, touching their aptness and novelty, he hath not laboured to justify them, because he hopes they will be proved enough to justify themselves, and prove sufficiently authentical to such as understand them; for the rest, God help them" (for the poet evidently will not), "I cannot do as others, make day seem a lighter woman than she is, by painting her." The poem is, however, rich in fine verses which struggle into sight through the vaporous atmosphere of bombast and confusion; it is thoughtful, earnest, eloquent, with interludes of mere violent and dissonant declamation, and rarer flashes of high and subtle beauty. The licentious grammar and the shapeless structure of sentences that break all bounds of sense or harmony are faults that cannot be overlooked and must be condoned if we care to get at the kernel underlying these outer and inner husks of hard language. The same comment may be applied to the poems which follow; but the second Hymn, being longer and more discursive than the first, is more extravagant and incoherent, and its allegory more confused and difficult (whenever it is possible) to follow.

Whether or not there be as usual any reference to Elizabeth and her court under the likeness of Cynthia and her nymphs, or any allusion to English matters of contemporary interest, to perils and triumphs of

policy or war, in the "sweet chase" of the transformed nymph Euthymia under the shape of a panther or a boar by the hounds of the goddess which pursue her into the impenetrable thicket where the souls of such as have revolted from the empire of Cynthia are held in bondage and torment, and whence the hunters who hew themselves a way into the covert are forced to recoil in horror, it is easier to conjecture than to determine: but the "fruitful island" to which the panther flies and eludes the hounds who track her by scent should be recognizable as England, "full of all wealth, delight, and empery"; though the sequel in which the panther, turned into a huger boar than that of Calydon, lays waste its "noblest mansions, gardens, and groves" through which the chase makes way, may seem now more impenetrable to human apprehension than the covert before described. Leaving, however, to others, without heed of the poet's expressed contempt for our "flesh-confounded souls," the task of seeking a solution for riddles to us insoluble, we may note in this poem the first sign of that high patriotic quality which, though common to all the great of his generation, is more constantly perceptible in the nobler moods of Chapman's mind than in the work of many among his compeers. Especially in the reference of one elaborate simile to a campaign in the Netherlands, and the leadership of the English forces by

War's quick artisan,  
Fame-thriving Vere, that in those countries wan  
More fame than guerdon,

we trace the lifelong interest taken by this poet in

the fortunes of English fighting men in foreign wars, and the generous impulse which moved him twenty-eight years later, at the age of sixty-three, to plead in earnest and fervent verses the cause of Sir Horatio Vere, then engaged "with his poor handful of English" in the "first act" of the Thirty Years' War\* ("besieged and distressed in Mainhem," Chapman tells us), in the ears of the courtiers of James I. A quainter example of this interest in the foreign campaigns of his countrymen may be found in the most untimely intrusion of such another simile into the third sestiad of *Hero and Leander*.

Before I take in hand the examination of Chapman's works as a dramatist, I may sum up the best and the worst I have to say of his earlier poems in the remark that on a first plunge into their depths even the reader most willing to accept and most anxious to admire the firstfruits of a poet's mind which he knows to have elsewhere put forth such noble fruit as Chapman's will be liable to do them less than justice until his own mind recovers from the shock given to his taste by the crabbed and bombastic verbiage, the tortuous and pedantic obscurity, the rigidity and the laxity of a style which moves as it were with a stiff shuffle, at once formal and shambling; which breaks bounds with a limping gait, and plays truant from all rule without any of the grace of freedom; wanders beyond law and straggles out of order at the halting pace of age and gravity, and in the garb of a schoolmaster plays the pranks of a schoolboy with a ponderous and lumbaginous licence of movement, at

\* Carlyle's *Frederick the Great*, bk. iii, ch. xvi; vol. i, p. 329.

once rheumatic and erratic. With the recovery will probably come a reaction from this first impression ; and the student will perhaps be more than sufficiently inclined to condone these shortcomings in favour of the merits they obscure at first sight ; the wealth of imagery, the ardour of thought and feeling, the grave and vigorous harmony of the better parts, and the general impression left on us of communion with a strong, earnest, high-minded man of genius, set adrift without helm or rudder ; of lofty instincts and large aspirations that run rather to leaf than to fruit for want of an eye to choose their proper aim and a hand to use the means to it aright. The editor of the first and by no means the worst English anthology has gathered from these poems, and especially from *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, large handfuls of fine verses, which when thus culled out and bound up into separate sheaves make a better show than in the text where they lay entangled among weeds and briars. There are beauties enough lost in this thick and thorny jungle of scholastic sensuality to furnish forth a dozen or so of pilfering poeticules with abundance of purple patches to be sewn on at intervals to the common texture of their style. It is with a singular sense of jarring admiration and irritation that we find couplets and quatrains of the most noble and delicate beauty embedded in the cumbrous ore of crude pedantic jargon : but those who will may find throughout the two earliest publications of Chapman a profusion of good verses thickly scattered among an overgrowth of bad. The first poem, however, which leaves us on the whole with a general and

equable impression of content, is the small "epic song" or copy of verses on the second expedition to Guiana. Here the poet has got clear of those erotic subtleties and sensual metaphysics which were served up at his "banquet" in such clumsy vessels of the coarsest ware by the awkward and unwashed hands of an amorous pedant, soiling with the ink of the schools the lifted hem of the garment of love; he has found instead a fit argument for his genius in the ambition and adventure of his boldest countrymen, and applied himself to cheer and celebrate them "in no ignoble verse." The first brief paragraph alone is crabbed and inflated in style; from thence to the end, with but slight breaks or jars, the strong and weighty verse steps out with masculine dignity, and delivers in clear grave accents its cordial message of praise and good cheer.

At all times Chapman took occasion to approve himself a true son of the greatest age of Englishmen in his quick and fiery sympathy with the daring and the suffering of its warriors and adventurers; a sympathy which found vent at times where none but Chapman would have made room for it; witness the sudden and singular illustration, in his *Epicede* on the death of Prince Henry, of the popular anguish and dismay at that calamity by a "description of the tempest that cast Sir Th. Gates on the Bermudas, and the state of his ship and men, to this kingdom's plight applied in the Prince's death." It has been remarked by editors and biographers that between the years 1574, at or about which date, according to Anthony Wood, "he, being well-grounded in school learning, was sent to the university," and

1594, when he published his first poem, we have no trace or hint to guide us in conjecturing how his life was spent from fifteen to thirty-five. This latter age is the least he can have attained by any computation at the time when he put forth his *Shadow of Night*, full of loud and angry complaints of neglect and slight endured at the hands of an unthankful and besotted generation ; it is somewhat late in life for the first appearance of a poet, and the poem then issued is a more crude and chaotic performance than might be looked for from a writer who has no longer the plea of unripe age to put forward in excuse of the raw green fruits which he offers to the reader. Dr. Elze, in the learned and ingenious essay prefixed to his edition of Chapman's *Alphonsus*, points out that from the internal evidence of that play "we are driven to the alternative either of supposing Chapman to have been in Germany or of allowing him a German partner" (p. 33), and a little before observes that "there is ample room between his leaving the university without a degree in 1576 or 1578 and his first acknowledged publication in 1594 even for a lengthened stay in Germany." In default of evidence we might perhaps be permitted to throw out a guess that the future poet had in his youth seen some service and been possibly an eyewitness of some part of the campaigns in the Low Countries to which he refers in a manner showing his intimate acquaintance with the details of an action on the "most excellent river" Waal before "stately-sighted sconce-torn Nimiguen," fought between the cavalry of "the Italian Duke" and the English leader, Sir Francis



or Sir Horatio Vere, who drew the enemy's horse, by a feint made with his own, into an ambuscade of infantry by which they were put to rout. Both the text and the note appended show a willingness to display this knowledge of the strategy and geography of the skirmish with some ostentation of precision; his parting remark at the end of the note has a tone of satisfaction in the discovery of a new order of illustration. "And these like similes, in my opinion, drawn from the honourable deeds of our noble countrymen, clad in comely habit of poesy, would become a poem as well as further-fetched grounds, if such as be poets nowadays would use them." He was not himself, as we have seen, over-careful to use them at the right moment or turn them to the most natural account; but to the principle here advanced he remained staunch in his later writings.

It may be thought somewhat out of keeping with the general reputation of Chapman as a retired student of a grave and sober habit of life that he should be supposed to have ever taken any active part in a military campaign; but those were days when scholars and men of letters were not uncommonly found apt for employment in matters of war and policy, and gave good proof of a right to claim their place among other servants of the state for the performance of high patriotic duty; nor, unless we please, need we imagine Chapman to have served personally as a volunteer in the English ranks; but it is reasonable to conceive that either in person or by proxy he may have had special opportunities of studying the incidents of war in the

Netherlands, which he would evidently have been mindful to make the most of and quick to put to use. It is also possible that his relations with the stage may have begun at an earlier date than has yet been traced; and as we know that in 1585, when Chapman was twenty-six years old, Leicester brought over to Holland a company of actors in his train when he set sail as commander of the forces dispatched from England to the support of the States-General, and that others followed suit on their own score in succeeding years, those who are unwilling to allow him a chance of service as a soldier may prefer to conjecture that he was drawn to the seat of war by the more probable force of some poetic or theatrical connexion with either the general's first troupe of players or that which followed in its track five years later. That these earlier adventurers were succeeded by fresh companies in 1604 and 1605, and again forty years later, at an unpropitious date for actors in England, eleven years after the death of Chapman, I further learn from an article in the *Athenæum* (Sept. 5, 1874) on Herr von Hellwald's "History of the Stage in Holland"; and eight years later than the venture of the second company of players in 1590 we find Chapman classed by Meres among the best of our tragic writers for the stage, and repeatedly entered on Henslowe's books as debtor to the manager for some small advance of money on future dramatic work to be supplied to his company.

In any case it is remarkable that his first play should not have been brought on the stage till the poet was thirty-six, or published till he was rising



forty ; an age at which most men, who might have written such a play at sixteen, would have been unwilling to expose it to the light. It is even a more crude and graceless piece of work, if we consider it as designed for the stage, than his first venture of the preceding year if we regard it as intended for the study. The plot is more childish, though the language may be purer, than we find in the rudest sketches of Greene or Peele, whose day was now well over ; and even for the firstfruits of " a person of most reverend aspect, religious and temperate, qualities rarely meeting in a poet," it will be admitted that the moral tone of Chapman's two earliest comedies is not remarkably high. The first deals solely with the impossible frauds, preposterous adulteries, and farcical murders committed by a disguised hero who assumes the mask of as many pseudonyms to perpetrate his crimes as ever were assumed in Old or New Grub Street by a prudent member of the libellous order of rascally rhymesters to vent his villainies in shameful safety. The story is beneath the credulity of a nursery, and but for some detached passages of clear and vigorous writing the whole work might plausibly have been signed by any of the names under which a dunce of the order above mentioned might think it wisest to put forth his lyrics or his lies. In the better passages, and noticeably in a description of jewels engraved with figures of the gods, we catch a faint echo of the " mighty line " in which Marlowe would lavish on such descriptions the wealth and strength, the majesty and the fancy, of his full imperial style.

The frank folly and reckless extravagance of

incident which appear to have won for Chapman's first play the favour of an audience not remarkable, it should seem, for captious nicety of critical taste and judgment, are less perceptible in his second venture ; but this also is a crude and coarse example of workmanship. The characters are a confused crowd of rough sketches, whose thin outlines and faint colours are huddled together on a ragged canvas without order or proportion. There is some promise of humour in the part of a Puritan adulteress, but it comes to little or nothing ; and the comedy rather collapses than concludes in a tangle of incongruous imbecilities and incoherent indecencies. The text is seemingly more corrupt than we find in Chapman's other plays, which are generally exempt from such gross and multitudinous misprints as deform the early editions of many Elizabethan dramatists ; their chief defect is the confusion and the paucity of stage directions. In the opening speech of *An Humorous Day's Mirth*, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth verse, we must supply with some such reading as this the evident hiatus of sense and metre in the fifteenth :

But pure religion being but mental stuff,  
And sense, indeed, [being] all \* [but] for itself  
'Tis to be doubted, etc.

The text and arrangement of the scenes throughout this comedy require a more careful revision than has yet been given ; since if the crudest work of a man

\* Perhaps an adjective has here dropped out, and we might read the hemistich thus : "all covetous for itself," or "careful," "curious," "gluttonous," any of which words would fit the metre and suit the sense of the passage.

of genius is not to be rejected from the list of his writings in which it has once found place, it claims at least so much of editorial care as may leave it in a reasonably legible form.

It appears that in the same year which gave to the press this loose and slipshod effort at a comedy, the most perfect of Chapman's plays, though not published till six years later, was completed for the stage. The admirable comedy of *All Fools* is the first work which bears full evidence of the vigorous and masculine versatility, the force and freshness of his free and natural genius. The dedication, which seems to have been cancelled almost as soon as issued, gives one of the most singular proofs on record of a poet's proverbial inability to discern between his worse and better work. The writer who ten years before was so loud in his complaint of men's neglect and so haughty in his claim on their attention for his crudest and faultiest work now assures the friend to whom he inscribes a poem of real excellence,

I am most loth to pass your sight

With any such-like mark of vanity,

Being marked with age for aims of greater weight

And drowned in dark death-ushering melancholy :

but for fear of piratical publishers who might print "by stealth" an unauthorized and interpolated edition, "without my passport, patched with others' wit," he consents to "expose to every common eye" what he calls

The least allowed birth of my shaken brain,

alleging as his excuse that "of two enforced ills I elect the least"; and with this most superfluous

apology he ushers in one of the most faultless examples of high comedy to be found in the whole rich field of our Elizabethan drama. The style is limpid and luminous as running water, the verse pure, simple, smooth and strong, the dialogue always bright, fluent, lively, and at times relieved with delicate touches of high moral and intellectual beauty; the plot and the characters excellently fitted to each other, with just enough intricacy and fullness of incident to sustain without relaxation or confusion the ready interest of readers or spectators.

The play and counterplay of action by which all the chief persons of the comedy trick and are tricked by each other in turn might easily have become perplexed or excessive in less careful and skilful hands; but the lightness and dexterity of handling which the poet has here for once manifested throughout the whole development of his dramatic scheme suffice to keep the course of the story clear and the attention of the reader alert without involution or fatigue: and over all the dialogue and action there plays a fresh and radiant air of mirth and light swift buoyancy of life which breathes rather of joyous strength and high-spirited health than of the fumes of "dark death-ushering melancholy"; and as in matter of fact death was not ushered by melancholy or any other evil spirit into the stout presence of the old poet till full thirty-five years after the appearance and twenty-nine years after the dedication of this play, we may hopefully set down this malcontent phrase to some untimely fit of spleen from which, having thus given it vent, he soon shook himself clear and struck his pen through the record of it. I

find but one slight and characteristic blemish worth noting in a comedy in which the proudest among his great compeers might have permissibly taken fresh pride ; it is that the final scene of discovery which winds up the main thread and reconciles the chief agents of the intrigue is somewhat hurriedly dispatched, with too rapid a change of character and readjustment of relations, to make room for a thin-spun and wire-drawn sample of that tedious burlesque declamation with which the author was too prone to indulge a taste not likely to be shared or relished by his readers for the minute dissection of a dead jest, so dry that it crumbles into dust under the scalpel of the anatomist. All the rest of the comedy is so light, bright, and easy in all its paces that we are the less disposed to tolerate the stiffness and elaboration of this oratorical interlude. But this is really the only spot or patch I can discover on the jocund face of a delightful comic poem.

It is not impossible that the merit of pure and lucid style which distinguishes the best comedies of Chapman from the bulk of his other writings may in part be owing to the slighter value set by the author on the workmanship of these. By temperament and inclination he was rather an epic or tragic than a comic poet ; and in writing verse of a tragic or epic quality he evidently felt it incumbent on him to assert the dignity of his office, to inflate and exalt his style with all helps of metaphor and hyperbole, to stiffen the march of his metre and harden the structure of his language ; and hence he is but too prone to rely at need on false props of adventitious and barbaric dignity, to strut on stilts or to swim

on bladders : whereas in writing for the comic stage he was content to forget, or at least to forgo, this imaginary dignity and duty ; he felt himself no longer bound to talk big or to stalk stiffly, and in consequence was not too high-minded to move easily and speak gracefully. It is clear that he set no great store by his comic talent as compared with the other gifts of his genius ; of all his comedies two only, *All Fools* and *The Widow's Tears*, have dedications prefixed to them, and in both cases the tone of the dedication is almost apologetic in its slighting reference to the slight worth of the work presented ; a tone by no means to be ascribed in this case to a general and genuine humility, since the dedications prefixed to his various poems, and to two among his tragedies published under his own eye, are remarkable for their lofty and dignified self-assertion. The fact that of these two tragedies, one, *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, was apparently unsuccessful on the stage, and the other, *Cæsar and Pompey*, seems never to have obtained a chance of appearing on the boards at all, may naturally have moved the author to assert their right to respect and acceptance with more studied emphasis than usual ; in the earlier instance at least he is emphatic enough in his appeal from the verdict of the " maligners " with whom he complains that it met " in the scenical representation," to the " approbation of more worthy judgments " which " even therein " it did not fail to obtain ; and in the second case, though he appears to apologize for the lack of " novelty and fashion " in a play " written so long since " that it " had not the timely ripeness of that age " (seventy-two)



“ that, I thank God, I yet find no fault withal for any such defects,” yet he is apparently and reasonably confident that the offering of his “ martial history ” is one honourable alike to poet and to patron. Both plays are rich in rhetorical passages of noble eloquence ; but in all points of workmanlike construction and dramatic harmony they are incomparably inferior to the better sort of his comedies.

The year of the publication of *All Fools* was memorable to Chapman for a more hazardous misadventure on a more serious stage than the failure of a comedy on the boards, for which he had to thank the merited success of a play whose strange fortune it was to prove as tragical in its sequence as merry in itself, thus combining in a new fashion the two main qualities of Bottom’s immortal interlude. All readers will remember the base offence taken and the base revenge threatened by the son of Darnley or of Rizzio for a passing jest aimed at those among his countrymen who had anticipated Dr. Johnson’s discovery of the finest prospect ever seen by a native of Scotland ; none can forget the gallantry with which Ben Jonson, a Scot by descent, of whom it might have been said as truly as of the greatest in the generation before him that he “ never feared the face of man,” approved himself the like-minded son of a Roman-spirited mother by coming forward to share the certainty of imprisonment and the probability of mutilation with the two comrades who without his knowledge had inserted such perilous matter into their common work ; and many will wish with me that he had never borne a nearer and less honourable relation to a king who combined

with the northern virulence and pedantry which he may have derived from his tutor Buchanan a savour of the worst qualities of the worst Italians of the worst period of Italian decadence. It was worthier of the great spirit and the masterful genius of Jonson to be the subject of his tyranny than the laureate of his court. Far more fitly, had such a one then been born, would that office have been filled by any scribbling Scot of the excremental school of letters who might have sought and found in his natural prince a congenial patron with whom to bathe his sympathetic spirit in the pure morality, while swimming with somewhat short strokes in "the deep delicious stream of the Latinity," of Petronius Arbiter. Such a Crispinulus or Crispinaccio would have found his proper element in an atmosphere whose fumes should never have been inhaled by the haughty and high-souled author of the *Poetaster*; and from behind his master's chair, with no need to seek for fear if not for shame the dastardly and lying shelter of a pseudonym which might at a pinch have been abjured, and the responsibility for its use shifted from his own shoulders to those of a well-meaning but invisible friend, the laurelled lackey of King James might as securely have launched his libels against the highest heads of poets to whom in that age all eyes looked up which would have looked down on him, as ever did the illustrious Latinist Buchanan against the mother of the worthy patron whose countenance would probably have sufficed to protect the meanest and obscurest creature of his common and unclean favour against all recrimination on the part of



Shakespeare or of Jonson, of Beaumont or of Webster, of Fletcher or of Chapman.

The comedy thus celebrated for the peril it brought upon the ears and noses of its authors has of itself merit enough to have won for writers of less previous note a sufficient share of more enviable celebrity. It is one of the most spirited and brilliant plays belonging to that class of which the two most famous examples are the *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Every Man in his Humour*; and for life and movement, interest and gaiety, it may challenge a comparison even with these. All the actors in *Eastward Ho*, down to the very slightest, such as the drawer, the butcher's man, and the keeper of the prison, have some quality and character of their own which gives them a place in the comic action; and in no play of the time do we get such a true taste of the old city life so often turned to mere ridicule and caricature by playwrights of less good humour, or feel about us such a familiar air of ancient London as blows through every scene; the homely household of the rich tradesman, the shop with its stall in front, the usurer's lodging, the waterside tavern, the Thames wharves, stand out as sharply as if etched by the pen of Dickens or the needle of Whistler. The London of Hogarth, as set before us in that immortal series of engravings for which he is said to have taken the hint from this comedy, does not seem nearer or more actual than this elder London of Jonson, Chapman, and Marston; and the more high-flying genius of Frank Quicksilver is as real and lifelike as the humbler debauchery and darker doom of Tom Idle. The parts of Mistress

Touchstone and Gertrude are worthy of Molière in his homelier mood ; and but for one or two momentary indecencies dropped here and there to attest the passage of Marston, the scenes in which they figure would be as perfect and blameless examples of pure broad comedy as any stage can show. The fluttering and exuberant ambition of the would-be Célimène or Millamant of the city is painted with such delightful force and freshness, her imperial volubility of contempt, the joyous and tremulous eagerness with which she obeys the precept of the Psalmist to "forget her own people and her father's house," her alternate phases of gracious patronage and overflowing obloquy, are so charming in the buoyancy and fertility of their changes that we are rejoiced when after the term of adversity so differently put to use by the prodigal daughter and the profligate apprentice Frank and Gertrude are alike restored to the favour of the excellent old citizen by the kind offices of his worthy son-in-law. Not only have the poets given proof of a gentler morality and a juster sense of justice than the great painter who followed long after in the track of their invention, but they have contrived even to secure our cordial regard for the kindly virtues of the respectable and industrious characters whose aim it is to rise by thrift and honesty ; and we salute the promotion of "Master Deputy's worship" to the proud office of substitute for the alderman of his ward with a satisfaction which no man surely ever felt in the exaltation of Hogarth's Lord Mayor to sit in judgment on his luckless fellow. The figures of Gertrude's gallant knight and his crew of Virginian adventurers,

whose expedition finally culminates in a drunken shipwreck on the Thames, are as vivid and as pleasant as any of these other studies ; and the scenes in which the jealous usurer is induced by the devices of Quicksilver and Sir Petronel to bring his disguised wife into the company of her paramour and reassure her supposed scruples with his pithy arguments against conjugal fidelity, while he lets fly at her supposed husband the well-worn jests which recoil on his own head, have in them enough of wit and humorous invention to furnish forth the whole five acts of an ordinary comedy of intrigue. Even in these sketches from the prosaic life of their day the great and generous poets of that age were as prodigal of the riches of their genius as in the tragic and romantic work of their higher moods. The style of Chapman is perceptible in some of the best of these scenes in the third act as well as in the moral passage of metrical philosophy put into the lips of the half-drowned Quicksilver in the fourth, where only the last editor has taken note of his handiwork.

Two allusions in the mouth of the usurer, one to "the ship of famous Draco," and one to the camel's horns of which we hear something too often from this poet, are in the unmistakable manner of Chapman. Other such points might perhaps be discovered ; but on the whole we may probably feel safe in assigning to each of the three associates as equal a share in the labour and the credit as they bore in the peril entailed on them by a comedy which, though disclaiming all unfriendly aim at rivalry with one of similar title already familiar to the stage, must probably and deservedly have eclipsed

the success of two plays not published till two years later under cognate names by Decker and Webster; though the plot of *Northward Ho* is not wanting in humour and ingenuity, and in *Westward Ho* there is one scene of exquisite and incongruous beauty in which we recognize at once the tender and reckless hand which five years earlier had inserted into the yet more inappropriate framework of the *Satiromastix* as sweet an episode of seeming martyrdom and chastity secured under the shelter of a sleep like death.

In his next play Chapman reassumed the more poetical style of comedy which in *Eastward Ho* had been put off for the plainer garb of realism. *The Gentleman Usher* is distinguishable from all his other works by the serious grace and sweetness of the love-scenes, and the higher tone of feminine character and masculine regard which is sustained throughout the graver passages. Elsewhere it should seem that Chapman had scorned to attempt or failed to achieve the task of rousing and retaining the chief interest of his reader in the fortune of two young lovers; but in this play he has drawn such a passionate and innocent couple with singular tenderness and delicacy. The broader effects of humour are comic enough, though perhaps somewhat too much prolonged and too often repeated; but the charm of the play lies in the bright and pure quality of its romantic part. The scene in which the prince and Margaret, debarred by tyranny and intrigue from the right of public marriage, espouse each other in secret by a pretty ceremony devised on the spot, in a dialogue of the wounded Strozza with the wife who

has restored him to spiritual strength by "the sweet food of her divine advice," are models of the simple, luminous, and fervent style of poetry proper to romantic comedy at its highest. A noble passage in the fifth act of this play contains, as far as I know, the first direct protest against the principle of monarchy to be found in our poetical or dramatic literature; his last year's hazardous experience of royal susceptibilities may not improbably have given edge to the author's pen as it set down these venturesome lines in a time when as yet no king had been taught, in the phrase of old Lord Auchinleck, that he had a joint in his neck.

And what's a prince? Had all been virtuous men,  
There never had been prince upon the earth,  
And so no subject: all men had been princes.  
A virtuous man is subject to no prince,  
But to his soul and honour; which are laws  
That carry fire and sword within themselves,  
Never corrupted, never out of rule:  
What is there in a prince that his least lusts  
Are valued at the lives of other men,  
When common faults in him should prodigies be,  
And his gross dōtage rather loathed than soothed?

I should be surprised to find in any poet of Chapman's age an echo of such clear and daring words as these, which may suffice to show that the oligarchic habit of mind to which I have before referred in him was the fruit of no sycophantic temper, no pliant and prostitute spirit, the property of a courtier or a courtesan, but sprung rather from pure intellectual haughtiness and a contempt for the mob of minds. Nevertheless it is well worth remark

that such a deliberate utterance of republican principle should then have been endured on the stage ; that so loud a blast of direct challenge to the dominant superstition of the day should have been blown so near the court in the ears of a popular audience by a poet who, though at no time chargeable with any stain of venal or parasitic servility, was afterwards the habitual and grateful recipient of patronage from princes and favourites, and at all times, it must be confessed, in' all his other works a strenuous and consistent supporter of the tradition of royalty against the conception of democracy.

The opening scene of *Monsieur d'Olive*, the next on the list of Chapman's comedies, is one of the most admirable in any play. More than once indeed the author has managed his overture, or what in the classic dialect of the old French stage was called the exposition, with a skill and animation giving promise of better things to come than he has provided ; as though he had spent the utmost art his genius could command in securing the interest of his audience at the first start, and then left it for chance to support, letting his work float at will on the lazy waters of caprice or negligence. No more impressive introduction to a play could have been devised than the arrival of the chief person, newly landed in high hopes and spirits from a long voyage, before the closed gates and curtained casements of an old friend's house, within which tapers are burning at noon, and before which the master walks sadly up and down, and repels his proffered embrace ; and the whole scene following which explains the trouble of one household and the mourning of another is a



model of clear, natural, dignified dialogue, in which every word is harmonious, appropriate, and noble. The grace and interest of this exposition are more or less well sustained during the earlier part of the play; but as the underplot opens out at greater length, the main interest is more and more thrust aside, cramped as it were for space and squeezed out of shape, till at last it is fairly hustled into a corner of the action to make way for the overwrought fooleries of the gull d'Olive and the courtiers who play upon his vanity; and this underplot, diverting enough in a slight way for one or two scenes, is stretched out on the tenterhooks of farcical rhetoric and verbose dialogue till the reader finds himself defrauded of the higher interest which he was led to expect, and wearied of the empty substitute which the waywardness or indolence of the author has chosen to palm off on him in its stead. Towards the end indeed there is a profuse waste of good points and promising possibilities; the humorous ingenuity of the devices so well contrived to wind up together and in order the double thread of the main plot is stinted of room to work in and display its excellent quality of invention, and the final scene, which should have explained and reconciled all doubts and errors at large with no less force and fullness of careful dramatic capacity than was employed upon their exposition, is hastily patched up and slurred over to leave place for a last superfluous exhibition of such burlesque eloquence as had already been admitted to encumber the close of another comedy, more perfect than this in construction, but certainly not more interesting in concep-



tion. In spite, however, of this main blemish in the action, *Monsieur d'Olive* may properly be counted among the more notable and successful plays of Chapman.

Of his two remaining comedies I may as well say a word here as later. *Mayday*, which was printed five years after the two last we have examined, is full of the bustle and jumble of intrigue which may be expected in such comedies of incident as depend rather on close and crowded action than on fine or forcible character for whatever they may merit of success. There is no touch in it of romance or poetical interest, but several of the situations and dialogues may have credit for some share of vigour and humour. But of these qualities Chapman gave much fuller proof next year in the unchivalrous comedy of *The Widow's Tears*. This discourteous drama is as rich in comic force as it is poor in amiable sentiment. There is a brutal exuberant fun throughout the whole action which finds its complete expression and consummation in the brawny gallantry and muscular merriment of Tharsalio. A speculative commentator might throw out some conjecture to the effect that the poet at fifty-three may have been bent on revenge for a slight offered to some unseasonable courtship of his own by a lady less amenable to the proffer of future fame than the "belle marquise" who has the credit for all time to come of having lent a humble ear to the haughty suit and looked with a gracious eye on the grey hairs of the great Corneille. But whether this keen onslaught on the pretensions of the whole sex to continence or constancy were or were not instigated

by any individual rancour, the comedy is written with no little power and constructed with no little ingenuity ; the metrical scenes are pure and vigorous in style, and the difficulty of fitting such a story to the stage is surmounted with scarcely less of dexterity than of daring. The action of the last scene is again hampered by the intrusion of forced and misplaced humours, and while the superfluous underlings of the play are breaking and bandying their barren jests, the story is not so much wound up as huddled up in whispers and by-play ; but it may certainly be pleaded in excuse of the poet that the reconciliation of the Ephesian matron to her husband was a somewhat difficult ceremony to exhibit at length and support with any plausible or effectual explanation.

Two other titles are usually found in the catalogue of Chapman's extant comedies ; but it seems to me as difficult to discover any trace of Chapman in the comedy of *The Ball* as of Shirley in the tragedy of *Chabot*. These two plays were issued by the same printer in the same year for the same publishers, both bearing the names of Chapman and Shirley linked together in the bonds of a most incongruous union : but I know not if there be any further ground for belief in this singular association. The mere difference in age would make the rumour of a collaboration between the eldest of old English dramatists and the latest disciple of their school so improbable as to demand the corroboration of some trustworthier authority than a bookseller's title-page bearing date five years after the death of Chapman. In the very next year a play was published under the name of Fletcher, who had then

been fifteen years dead ; this play was afterwards reclaimed by Shirley as the work of his own hand, and of his alone ; nor is there any doubt that Fletcher had not a finger in it. Of the authorship of *Chabot* there can be no question ; the subject, the style, the manner, the metre, the construction, the characters, all are perfectly Chapman's. *The Ball*, on the other hand, is as thoroughly in the lightest style of Shirley, and not a bad example of his airily conventional manner ; it is lively and easy enough, but much below the mark of his best comedies, such as *The Lady of Pleasure* (where an allusion to this earlier play is brought into the dialogue), which but for a single ugly incongruity would be one of the few finest examples of pure high comedy in verse that our stage could show against that of Molière. A foundling of yet more dubious parentage has been fathered upon Chapman by the tradition which has affixed to his name the putative paternity of " a comical moral censuring the follies of this age," anonymously published in his sixty-first year. It has been plausibly suggested that the title of this wonderful medley, *Two Wise Men and all the rest Fools*, was the first and last cause of its attribution to the hand of Chapman, and that the error arose from a confusion of this with the title of *All Fools*, the best of Chapman's comedies. In any case it is difficult to believe that this voluminous pamphlet in the form of dialogue on social questions can have been the work of any practised or professional dramatist. It is externally divided into seven acts, and might as reasonably have been divided into twenty-one. A careful and laborious perusal of the

bulky tract from prologue to epilogue, which has enabled me in some measure to appreciate the double scientific experiment of Mr. Browning on "Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis," emboldens me also to affirm that it has no vestige of dramatic action, no trace of a story, no phantom of a plot; that the reader who can believe the assertion of its title-page that it was "divers times" or indeed ever "acted" on any mortal stage by any human company before any living audience will have a better claim to be saved by his faith than the author by this sample at least of his works; that it contains much curious and sometimes amusing detail on social matters of the day, and is not wanting in broad glimpses or intervals of somewhat clownish humour. In the strong coarse satire on female Puritanism those who will may discern touches which recall the tone if not the handiwork of the author of *An Humorous Day's Mirth*. The fact that several names occurring in the course of the dialogue, though not in the long list of marvellously labelled interlocutors, are anagrams of the simplest kind, being merely common English names spelt backwards, may be thought to indicate some personal aim in this elaborate onslaught on usurers, money-lenders, brokers, and other such cattle; and if so we have certainly no right to lay an anonymous attack of the kind, even upon such as these, to the charge of a poet who, so far as we know, never published a line in his long life that he feared to subscribe with his own loyal and honourable name. Such a one is not lightly to be suspected of the least approach in form or substance to the dirty tactics of a verminous pseudonymuncle,

who at the risk of being ultimately shamed into avowal or scared into denial of his ignominious individuality may prefer for one rascally moment the chance of infamy as a slanderer to the certitude of obscurity as a scribbler.

Although, however, we may be inclined to allow no great weight to the tradition current fifty-seven years after the death of Chapman, which according to Langbaine was at that date the only authority that led him to believe in the general vague ascription of this work to the poet under whose name it has ever since found a questionable place in the corners of catalogues at the tail of his authentic comedies, the very fact of this early attribution gives it a certain external interest of antiquarian curiosity, besides that which it may fairly claim as a quaint example of controversial dialectics on the conservative side. The dialogues are not remarkable either for Platonic skill or for Platonic urbanity; for which reason they may probably be accepted with the more confidence as fairly expressive of the average of opinion then afloat among honest English citizens of the middle class, jealous of change, suspicious of innovation, indignant at the sight of rascality which they were slow to detect, much given to growl and wail over the decay of good old times and the collapse of good old landmarks, the degeneracy of modern manners, and the general intolerance of things in an age of hitherto unknown perversity; men of heavy-headed patience and heavy-witted humour, but by no means the kind of cattle that it would be safe for any driver to goad or load overmuch. The writer may be taken as an

exponent of Anglican conservatism if not of Catholic reaction in matters of religious doctrine and discipline ; he throws his whole strength as a dialectician (which is not Herculean, or quite equal to his evident goodwill) into the discussion of a proposal to secularize the festivals and suppress the holidays appointed by the Church ; and the ground of his defence is not popular but clerical ; these holidays are to be observed not for the labourer's but for the saint's sake ; and above all because our wiser forefathers have so willed it, for reasons which we are in duty bound to take on trust as indisputably more valid than any reasoning of our own. He has a hearty distrust of lawyers and merchants, and a cordial distaste for soldiers and courtiers ; his sentiments towards a Puritan are those of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, his opinion of an agitator is worthy of a bishop, and his view of a demagogue would do honour to a duke.

A very different work from the effusion of this worthy pamphleteer bears likewise, or at least has once borne, the dubious name of Chapman. This is a tragic or romantic drama without a title of its own, labelled it should seem for the sake of convenience by the licencer of plays as a "second Maiden's Tragedy." It was first printed in 1824 with a brief note of introduction, from which we learn that the manuscript was originally inscribed with the name of William Goughe ; that Thomas was then substituted for William, while a third Goughe, Robert, seems to have figured as one of the principal actors ; that a second correction struck out either Goughe at one sweep of the pen, and sup-



planted both names by that of George Chapman ; and that last of all this also was erased to make way for no less a claimant than William Shakespeare. To this late and impudent attempt at imposture no manner of notice need be accorded ; but the claim preferred for Chapman deserves some attention from all students of our dramatic poetry. In style and metre this play, which bears the date of his fifty-third year (1611), is noticeably different from all his acknowledged tragedies, one only excepted ; but it is not more different from the rest than this one, which, though not published till twenty years after the death of Chapman, has never yet been called in question as a dubious or spurious pretender to the credit of his authorship. And if, as I am unwilling to disbelieve, Chapman was actually the author of *Revenge for Honour*, one serious obstacle is cleared out of the way of our belief in the justice of the claim advanced for him to this play also.

Not that the two can be said to show many or grave points of likeness to each other ; but between all other tragedies assigned to Chapman such points of intimate resemblance do undoubtedly appear, while the points of unlikeness between any one of these and either of the plays in question are at once as many and as grave. Of the posthumous tragedy I purpose to say a word in its turn ; meantime we may observe that it is not easy to conjecture any motive of interest which might have induced a forger of names to attribute an illegitimate issue of this kind to Chapman rather than to another. His name was probably never one of those whose popularity would have sufficed to float the doubtful venture of a



spurious play. To Shakespeare or to Fletcher it was of course a profitable speculation for knavish booksellers to assign the credit or discredit of any dramatic bantling which they might think it but barely possible to leave undetected at the door of such a foster-father, or to pass off for a time on the thickest-witted of his admirers as a sinful slip of the great man's grafting in his idler hours of human infirmity. But if there was in effect no plea for the intrusion of such a changeling into the poetic household of Chapman, whose quiver was surely full enough without the insertion of a stranger's shaft, the gratuitous selection of this poet as sponsor for this play appears to me simply unaccountable. No plausible reason can as far as I see be assigned for the superscription of Chapman's name in place of the cancelled name of Goughe, unless the writer did actually believe that the genuine work of George Chapman had been wrongly ascribed to Thomas or William Goughe ; whereas no reader of the play will imagine it possible that the name of Shakespeare can have been substituted in good faith and singleness of heart by a corrector honestly desirous of repairing a supposed error.

Again, if the doubtless somewhat fragile claim of Chapman be definitely rejected, we find hitherto no other put forward to take its place. The author of *Death's Jest-book*, in that brilliant correspondence on poetical questions which to me gives a higher view of his fine and vigorous intelligence than any other section of his literary remains, reasonably refuses to admit a suggestion that the authorship of this nameless and fatherless poem might be ascribed to Massinger.

“ The poisoning and painting is like him, but also like Cyril Tourneur ; and it is too poetical for old Philip.” He might have added that it is also far too loose and feeble in construction for the admirable artist of whom Coleridge so justly remarked that his plays have the interest of novels ; but Beddoes, whose noble instinct for poetry could never carry him in practice beyond the production of a few lofty and massive fragments of half-formed verse which stand better by themselves when detached from the incoherent and disorderly context, was apparently as incapable of doing justice to the art of Massinger as of reducing under any law of harmony to any fitness of form his own chaotic and abortive conceptions of a plot ; for the most faithful admirer of that genius which is discernible beyond mistake in certain majestic passages of his blank verse must admit that his idea of a play never passed beyond the embryonic stage of such an organism as that upon which he conferred the gift of lyric utterance in his best and favourite song, and that his hapless dramatic offspring was never and could never have been more than “ a bodiless childful of life in the gloom, Crying with frog voice, What shall I be ? ”

Perhaps too for him the taint of Gifford’s patronage was still on Massinger, and the good offices of that rancorous pedant may have inclined him to undervalue the worth of a poet announced and accompanied by the proclamation of such a herald. This connexion, fortunate as in one way it was for the dramatist to whose works it secured for ever a good and trustworthy text admirably edited and arranged, was unfortunate in its influence on the minds of men

who less unnaturally than unjustly were led to regard the poet also with something of the distaste so justly and generally incurred by his editor. This prepossession evidently inflamed and discoloured the opinions of the good Leigh Hunt, who probably would under no conditions have been able adequately to estimate the masculine and unfastidious genius of such writers as Ben Jonson, Massinger, and Ford; and a like influence may not impossibly have disturbed the far surer judgment and affected the far finer taste of a student so immeasurably superior to either Hunt or Beddoes in the higher and rarer faculties of critical genius as Charles Lamb. To Massinger at least, though assuredly not to Ford (who had not yet been edited by Gifford when Lamb put forth his priceless and incomparable book of "Specimens"), the most exquisite as well as the most generous of great critics was usually somewhat less than liberal, if not somewhat less than just.

But what is most notable to me in the judgment above cited from the correspondence of Beddoes is that he should have touched on the incidental point of action which this anonymous play has in common with *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Duke of Milan*, and should also have remarked on the poetical or fanciful quality which does undoubtedly distinguish its language from the comparatively unimaginative diction of Massinger, without taking further account of the general and radical dissimilarity of workmanship which leaves the style of this poem equidistant from the three several styles of the sober Philip, the thoughtful George, and the fiery Cyril. It is singular that the name of a fourth poet, the quality of whose

peculiar style is throughout perceptible, should have been missed by so acute and well-read a student of our dramatic poetry. The style is certainly and equally unlike that of Chapman, Massinger, or Tourneur ; but it is very like the style of Middleton. The combination of the plots is as pitifully incongruous and formless, the movement of the metre as naturally sweet and fluent, the pathos of the situations as occasionally vivid and impressive, the play of the fancy as generally delicate and unaffected, as in the best or the worst works of the fitful and powerful hand which gave us *The Changeling* and *The Witch*, *The Spanish Gipsy* and *Women beware Women*. Were there but one grain of external evidence, though light as that which now inclines the scale of probabilities in favour of Chapman, I should not hesitate in assigning to it the workmanship of this poem also ; but as even such a grain of proof or of likelihood as this is wanting, we may remark one or two points in which a resemblance may be traced to the undoubted handiwork of Chapman ; such as a certain grotesque abruptness and violence in some of the incidents ; for example, the discharge of a pistol at the father of the heroine from the hand of her lover, by which that " ancient sinner " is " but mocked with death " ; a semi-burlesque interlude in a scene of tragic interest and prelude to a speech of vivid eloquence, which may recall the sudden and random introduction of deeds of violence into the action in some of Chapman's plays, as, for instance, the two attempts at murder in *The Gentleman Usher*, where, though the plot is neither ill devised nor ill arranged, yet some excesses

and singularities in the leading incidents are at once perceptible and pardonable ; and again, the manner of the ghost's reappearance at the close, where a disembodied spirit takes part in the stage business with all the coolness and deliberation of a living actor, and is apparently received among the company with little more sign of disturbance or surprise than if she were not confronted with her own dead body, can only be paralleled in Chapman's *Bussy d'Ambois* or the *Death's Jest-book* of Beddoes, in each of which a leading part is filled throughout the later scenes by a ghost who takes his full share of the action and the dialogue, and may be said to make himself generally and creditably useful, without exciting the slightest remark or perturbation among his fleshly fellows of the scene. The quaint materialism of these realistic and too solid spectres, who show no sign and no desire of dissolution by melting into air or evaporating into dew, has in it nothing of the fine imagination which raises the supernatural agencies employed by the author of *The Witch* into a middle region of malign and monstrous life as far above the common ground of mere prosaic phantoms as below the dark aerial height at which Shakespeare has clothed the forms with clouds and winged with winds the feet of the weird sisters. Nevertheless, both in *Bussy d'Ambois* and in this "second Maiden's Tragedy" (as the Master of the Revels has somewhat inaptly labelled it), the first introduction of ghostly agency is impressive : and the scene in this latter where the sleep of the dead is first disturbed and her tomb violated by the passion of the baffled tyrant is well worthy of the praise it has received

for the choice simplicity and earnest sweetness of style which yet hardly distinguish it above many other scenes and passages in this beautiful and singular poem, the story of whose fate has proved as strange and as fantastic as the incidents of its plot.

The first of Chapman's historic tragedies was published at the age of forty-eight, and stands now sixth on the list of the plays in which he had the help of no partner. He never wrote better and he seldom wrote worse than in this only play of his writing which kept any firm and durable hold on the stage. The impression made on Dryden by its "glaring colours" in the representation, and the indignant reaction of his judgment "in the reading," are probably known to more than have studied the work by the light of their own taste.

All his vituperation is well deserved by such excerpts as those which alone Sir Walter Scott was careful to select in his editorial note on this passage by way of illustration; not even the sharpest terms in the terrible and splendid arsenal of Dryden's satire can be too vivid or too vigorous in their condemnation of the damnable jargon in which the elder poet was prone to indulge his infirmity; whole sections of his poems and whole scenes of his plays are indeed but shapeless masses of bombast and bulky vacuity, with nothing better in them than most villainous "incorrect English, and a hideous mingle of false poetry and true nonsense; or at best a scantling of wit, which lies gasping for life and groaning beneath a heap of rubbish." The injustice of the criticism lies only in the assertion or implication that there was



nothing discoverable on all Chapman's ground but such cinder-heaps and windbags ; whereas the proportion of good to bad in this very play of *Bussy d'Ambois* is enough to outweigh even such demerits as it doubtless shares with too much of its author's work. There is a bright and fiery energy throughout, a vigour of ambitious aspiration, which is transmitted as it were by echo and reflection from the spirit of the poet into the spirit of his hero. The brilliant swordsman of the court of Henri III, who flashes out on us as the joyous central figure of one of the most joyous and vigorous in all the bright list of those large historic groups to which the strong swift hand of Dumas gave colour and life, has undergone at the heavier hand of the old English poet a singular transfiguration. He is still the irresistible duellist and amonist of tradition ; but instead of the grace and courtliness proper to his age and rank, Chapman has bestowed on him the grave qualities of an epic braggart, whose tongue is at least as long as his sword, and whose gasconades have in them less of the Gascon than of our "Homer-Lucan" himself, who with all his notable interest in the France of his time and her turbulent history had assuredly nothing of the lighter and more gracious characteristics of French genius. But in the broad full outline of this figure, and in the robust handling of the tragic action which serves for environment or for background to its haughty and dilated proportions, there is more proof of greatness than Chapman had yet given. His comic or gnostic poetry may be better or at least less faulty in its kind, but in that kind there is less room for the growth and



display of those greater qualities which not infrequently struggle through the hot and turbid atmosphere of his tragic writing, and show by a stormy and cloudy illumination the higher reaches of his real genius. Nor is there in these rugged outlying highlands of tragedy, and in the somewhat thick and troubled air of the brooding skies above them, no beauty perceptible but the beauty of cloud and flame, of flood and fell : they have intervals of pure sunshine and soft greensward, interludes of grave and tender harmony, aspects of deep and serene attraction. There is a noticeable abruptness and want of ease in the disposal of the incidents, as though the workman were not yet well broken in to his business ; and in effect Chapman never did learn to run with perfect ease and grace in tragic harness. Yet if his tragedies were erased from the roll of his works, and only the most perfect of his comedies and the better portions of his other poems were left for our judgment, the sentence that we should then have to pass would assuredly assign him a much lower place among English poets than he now may rightly claim to hold. A greater and a faultier genius finds expression in these tragic poems than in the more general and equable excellence of even his best comic or romantic plays.

The first in order of these, especially at first sight, is beyond question the most effective in point of dramatic interest. With all its tumid and turbid exuberance of speech, the action of this play never actually halts or flags. There is no depth or delicacy of character discernible in any of the leading parts ; in some cases indeed it is hard at first to

determine whether the author meant to excite the sympathies or the antipathies of his audience for a good or for a bad character; the virtue of the heroine collapses without a touch, and friends and foes change sides with no more reason shown than that the figure of the dance requires it. But the power of hand is gigantic which shifts and shuffles these puppets about the board; there are passages of a sublime and Titanic beauty, rebellious and excessive in style as in sentiment, but full of majestic and massive harmony. The magnificent speech of the hero, stricken to death and leaning on his sword to die, has been often quoted, and as a sample of fiery imagination clothed in verse of solemn and sonorous music it can never be overpraised; the inevitable afterthought that the privilege of tragic poetry to exceed the range of realism is here strained to the utmost and beyond it will recur on reading many of the most memorable passages in these plays, where the epic declamation of the speaker breaks the last limit of law to attain the last limit of licence possible to a style which even in outward form keeps up any pretence of dramatic plausibility. Any child may see and object that no man ever died with such a funeral oration on his lips; but any critic qualified to judge of such a poet in his strength and his weakness will temper the reflection with admiration of "that full and heightened style" which the third among English tragic poets has applauded in the tragedies of Chapman. The height indeed is somewhat giddy, and the fullness too often tends or threatens to dilate into tumidity; sometimes the foot slips and the style stumbles heavily from its

height, while for its fullness we find but the emptiness of a burst bladder ; but while the writer's head remains clear and his hand sure, the high air of this poetry is fresh and buoyant, and its full cadences have in them a large echo as of mountain winds and waters. And if Webster, with the generous justice proper to a great fellow-craftsman in the highest guild of art, was able to condone the manifest abuse in Chapman's work of rhetoric and mere poetry, those may well be content to do likewise who bear duly in mind the admirable absence of any such defect from the vivid and intense veracity of his own.

If the union of active interest with superb declamation may suffice to explain the prolonged good fortune of Chapman's first tragedy on the boards, we can discover no such pretext to account for the apparent favour shown to his next venture in the same field. It has no passage comparable for force and vehemence of imagination to the highest moods of the author of *Bussy d'Ambois* ; to the second evocation of the spirit in a speech of which Lamb said well that it was " tremendous, even to the curdling of the blood ; I know nothing in poetry like it " ; nor to the dying appeal of Bussy to his own surviving fame, or the sweet and weighty verses of invocation in which his mistress adjures " all the peaceful regents of the night " to favour the first meeting of the lovers. It is disfigured by no such bloated bombast and animated by no such theatrical changes of effect, such sudden turns and sharp surprises, as fit the earlier play to catch the eyes and ears of an audience more impressible than

critical. It has no such violent interlude of action and emotion as the scene in which Montsurry (Monsoreau) extorts by torture the confession of her guilt from the bleeding hand of his wife, an incident which singularly enough recalls a similar scene in the earliest play of the great French improvisatore who has told in such different fashion the story of the ambushade by which Bussy fell under the weight of treacherous numbers ; though Dumas, in accordance, I believe, with all tradition, assigns to the Duke of Guise the brutal act of force by which his wife was compelled to allure her lover into the snare set by her husband ; whereas the English poet has not only altered the persons of the agent and patient, but has increased the means of compulsion from a pinch on the arm to the application of the rack to a body already mangled by such various wounds that the all but unparalleled tenacity of life in the victim, who reappears in the last scene not perceptibly the worse for these connubial endearments, is not the least notable in a series of wonders among which we scarcely make account of the singular part assigned to "the affable familiar ghost" which moves so freely among the less incorporeal actors. To the tough nerves and vigorous appetite of the original audience this scene was no doubt one of the most acceptable in a closing act as remarkable for the stately passion of the style as for the high poetic interest of thought and action. Of these two qualities we find but one, and that the less dramatic, in the next work of the poet. No poem, I suppose, was ever cast in dramatic form which appealed so wholly to the pure intellect. The

singleness of purpose and the steadiness of resolution with which the poet has pursued his point and forborne all occasions to diverge from his path to it have made his work that which it is ; a sculptured type and monument of his high and austere genius in the fullness of its faculties and the ripeness of its aims. *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron, Marshal of France*, a small epic in ten books or acts, is the noblest memorial we have of its author's original powers. Considered from the point of view it requires us to assume if we would do any justice to the mind which conceived and the hand which completed such a design, it is a wholly great and harmonious work of genius. Here for once not a note is out of tune, not a touch is out of keeping ; the very inflation of the style is never the inflation of vacuity ; its majesty is no longer tumid, and its elevation is no longer insecure. This at least has a right to be counted for ever among the classic works of English poetry. We close the book at last with a full and satisfied sense of severe delight in the deep inner music which sounds on in the mind's ear after study of the thought and passion which inform it. The height and the harmony of this poem are equal forces in the composition of its excellence ; the height of its conception and the harmony of its completion were alike needed to do justice to such lofty thought and such profound passion as it was called upon to handle and to sound. The strength and wealth of intelligence and of language from the opening of the first act to the close of the tenth show not a sign anywhere of possible exhaustion or inadequacy to the large demands made on them by

the poet's high design. But that such a poem should ever have been "acted in two plays at the Blackfriars and other public stages" must seem to us one of the strangest records in theatrical history. Its appearance on any boards for a single night would have been remarkable enough; but its reappearance at various theatres is all but incredible. The standard of culture and the level of intelligence required in its auditors surpass what we can conceive any theatrical audience to have attained in any modern age. It is not merely that the hearer or spectator of such a poem in action would have to follow an unbroken line of high thought and lofty language without interlude or relief worth mentioning of lower or lighter material; he would have to forgo all points of interest whatever but the satisfaction of the pure intelligence. There is endless repetition with absolutely no progress; infinite effusion of speech without one break of material incident. Even the subtle action and reaction of the mind, the ebb and flow of spiritual forces, the coming and going of intellectual influences, are not here given with the strength and cunning of such a master's hand as might secure and sustain the interest of a student in tracing their various movements by the light of his guidance; those movements are too deep and delicate for the large epic touch of Chapman to pursue with any certitude. A few strong broad strokes often repeated suffice to complete the simple and vigorous outline which is all he can give us of a character. It has been observed that the portrait of the traitor marshal "is overlaid with so many touches that the outline is completely



disguised"; but as none of these are incongruous, none mistimed or misplaced, we may reply that it is of the very essence of this character to express its passion with such effusion and exuberance of verbal energy that the very repetition and prolongation of these effects tend rather to heighten than to weaken the design, to intensify than to impair the impression of the weakness and the force of the mind that thus pours itself out and foams itself away in large and swelling words. The quality of pathos is not among the dominant notes of Chapman's genius; but there is pathos of a high and masculine order in the last appeals and struggles of the ruined spirit and the fallen pride which yet retain some trace and likeness of the hero and the patriot that has been, though these be now wellnigh erased and buried under the disgrace of deeds which have left nothing in his place but the ruins of a braggart and a traitor. Upon the two high figures of the marshal and the king Chapman has expended his utmost power; and they confront each other on his page in gigantic outline like two studies of a great sculptor whose work is never at its best but when it assumes the heroic proportion of simple and colossal forms. There is no growth or development in either character; Chapman is always least happy when he tries his prentice hand at analysis; he only does well when as here he brings before us a figure at once full-grown, and takes no care but to enforce the first impression by constant deepening of the lines first drawn, not by addition of fresh light and shade, by softening or heightening of minor tones and effects. The high poetic austerity of this work as it now stands is all



the more striking from the absence of any female element ; the queen appears in the fourth act of the second part as little more than a dumb figure ; the whole interest is political, and the whole character is masculine, of the action and the passion on which the poet has fixed our attention and concentrated his own. A passage now cancelled in which the queen and Mademoiselle de Verneuil were brought forward, and the wife gave the mistress a box on the ear, had naturally drawn down a remonstrance from the French ambassador who saw the domestic life of his master's court presented with such singular frankness of exposition to the contemporary eyes of London playgoers ; and at his instigation the play was not unreasonably prohibited, by an act of censorship assuredly not so absurd or so arbitrary as in our own day has repeatedly exposed the direction of the English stage to the contempt and compassion of civilized Europe ; which has seen at once the classical and the contemporary masterpieces of Italy and of France, and among them the works of the greatest tragic dramatist whom the world has seen since the death of Shakespeare, forbidden by the imperial mandate of some Lord Chamberlain or other Olympian person to corrupt the insular chastity of an audience too virtuous to face the contamination of such writers as Hugo or Alfieri ; while the virtue thus tenderly guarded from the very sight of a Marion or a Mirra was by way of compensation—there is a law of compensation in all things—graciously permitted by leave of official examiners and under favour of a chaste Chamberlain to gloat upon the filthiest farces that could be raked from

the sweepings of a stage whose national masterpieces were excluded from our own. But it is only proper that the public virginity which averts her eyes from the successors of Euripides or of Shakespeare should open her bosom to the successors of Wycherley and Mrs. Behn. In the time of Chapman the Master of the Revels wielded with as fitful a hand as imperious an authority as any court official of later date ; yet then also there was so curious and scandalous an alternation of laxity with rigour in the direction of stage affairs that in the teeth of a direct prohibition the players, " when they saw that the whole court had left town, persisted in acting " the suppressed play with all the offending parts revived for the satisfaction of an audience of citizens whose uncourtly suffrage was possibly attracted by this defiance of the court ; and it may be conjectured that the savour of this political scandal gave zest and edge to their relish of the otherwise grave and sober entertainment set before them by the poet, whose somewhat weighty venture may thus have been floated into favour on the artificial tide of a chance which had made it the pretext of a popular cry. If, however, there was any such anti-Gallican or seditious element in the success of a play which must certainly, one would say, have needed all the outward and casual help it could get to impose itself on the goodwill of the multitude, the French envoy was not slack in bringing a counter-influence to bear against it ; for three of the recalcitrant actors were arrested at his suit ; but M. de Beaumont regretfully adds that " the principal person, the author, escaped." When three years later the poem was

published, his printers had probably learnt caution enough from this fresh experience to ensure the suppression in all published copies of every trace of the forbidden part ; and indeed there should seem to be two gaps in the printed text ; one at the sudden end of the brief fourth act of the first part, which breaks off sharply after the eloquent and elaborate narrative of the speeches exchanged on the occasion of Biron's embassy to England, between the marshal, Queen Elizabeth, and her prime minister ; one at the end of the first or opening of the second act of the second part, which acts in both editions of the play are run into each other without any mark of division ; but the great length of the fifth (or tenth) act as it now stands may suggest that this seeming confusion has been caused by a mere numerical derangement or misprint.

The fittest symbol I can find for this great and central work of Chapman's genius would be one derived from itself ; we might liken the poem to that " famous mountain " which was to be carved into the colossal likeness of the hero, a giant holding a city in his left hand and pouring from his right an endless flood into a raging sea. This device of a mad and magnificent vanity gives as it were a reflection of the great and singular qualities of the poem ; it has an epic and Titanic enormity of imagination, the huge and naked solitude of a mountain rising from the sea, whose head is bare before the thunders, and whose sides are furrowed with stormy streams ; and from all its rocks and torrents, crags and scaurs and gulleys, there seems to look forth the likeness afar off of a single face,

superhuman and inordinate in the proportion of its prodigious features. The general effect is as that of some vast caprice of landscape ; at once fantastic, exaggerated, and natural. Around it we may group the remaining works of its author as lower spurs of the outlying range of mountains. None of these lesser poems were ever befriended by such an occasion as lifted for a season into perilous popularity the mightiest of their author's dramatic brood ; that the two likeliest in form and spirit to this giant brother of their race appear to have won no popular favour at all is certainly less remarkable than the record of its own success. *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* is a singular example of Chapman's passion for paradox. It is a work of mature power and serious interest, richer in passages of moral magnificence and interludes of exalted meditation than any but that greatest of his poems which we have just been considering ; from the large storehouse of these three plays a student may select at every step among their massive heaps of mental treasure fresh samples of rare thought and costly style, fresh ingots of weighty and glittering gold, fresh jewels of profound and living lustre. The third of these has less in common with the play of which it is the nominal sequel than with the two of intervening date ; it has indeed more of incident than they, but its value and interest mainly depend on its gnomic or contemplative passages. In the argument, the action, and the characters of this poem one chief aim of the author was apparently to reverse all expectations that might be excited by its title, and by way of counterpart to produce a figure in all points opposite to

that of his former hero. The brother and avenger of Bussy appears as the favourite and faithful follower of a leading accomplice in his murder ; he is as sober, sententious, and slow in action as his brother was boastful, impetuous, and violent ; he turns every chance of fortune and every change of place into an occasion for philosophic debate and moral declamation ; the shelter provided by his patron and the ambuscade prepared by his enemies are to him equally opportune for the delivery of a lecture on ethics, as close and serried in its array of argument as it is grave and measured in its eloquence of exposition. Hamlet himself gave less cause of complaint to the "poor ghost" whose second resurrection was insufficient to impel him to the discharge of his office than this yet more deliberate and meditative avenger of blood : and it is not without cause that the tardy shade of Bussy rises to rebuke the tardier hand of his brother in words heavier and more bitter than any that fall from the majesty of buried Denmark. The quaint contrast between the tragic violence of the story and the calm interest of the dialogue is not the only aspect afforded by this poem of its author's taste for extravagance of paradox and shocks of moral surprise. His delight throughout these historic plays is to put into the mouths of his chief speakers some defence of the most preposterous and untenable proposition, some apology for the most enormous and unpopular crime that his ingenuity can fix upon for explanation or excuse. Into the mouth of Biron he had already put a panegyric on the policy and the person of Philip II ; into the mouth of

Clermont he puts a vindication of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. This latter curious and courageous abuse of intellectual dexterity may perhaps have contributed to the ill success of a play which in any case must have disappointed, and that apparently by design and of malice prepense, the expectations appealed to by a title seemingly devised to trade upon the popularity of *Bussy d'Ambois*, and make its profit out of the artificial capital of a past success. The audience attracted by the promise implied in such a title may easily have been disinclined by such a disappointment to receive with toleration these freaks of dialectic ingenuity. It is not likely that a writer who must have been old enough at the age of thirteen to feel and to remember the shock of the first tidings of the hideous twenty-fourth of August 1572—that an English poet and patriot of the stalwart type which from all that we know of Chapman we might expect to find always as nobly exemplified in his life and writings as in those of such elder and younger contemporaries as Spenser and Jonson—should have indulged any more personal sentiment in these eccentric trials of intellectual strength than a wayward pleasure in the exercise and exhibition of his powers of argument and eloquence; but there was certainly in his nature something of the sophist as well as of the gnomic poet, of Thrasymachus as well as of Theognis. He seems to feel a gladiator's pleasure in the sword-play of a boisterous and high-handed sophistry less designed to mislead or convince than to baffle or bear down his opponent. We can imagine him setting up almost any debatable theorem as a



subject for dispute in the schools of rhetoric, and maintaining his most indefensible position with as much energy and cunning of argument as his native force of mind could bring to the support of his acquired skill of fence : we can perceive that in any such case he would argue his point and reinforce his reasoning with no less passion and profusion of thought and speech than if his heart and conscience were enlisted on the side which in fact he had taken up by mere chance or defiant caprice. This, however, is by no means the general character of the philosophy set forth and the eloquence displayed in this poem. The whole character of Clermont, conceived as it is in a spirit of direct defiance to all rules and traditions of dramatic effect, and elaborated as though in disdain of possible success or the anticipated chance of popularity, shows once more the masterly workmanship of a potent and resolute hand. In almost every scene there are examples of sound and noble thought clothed in the sober colours of terse and masculine poetry ; of deep and high meditation touched now and then with the ardour of a fervid spirit and the light of a subtle fancy. At every page some passage of severe beauty reminds us with how great a spirit we are called to commune, and stand in the presence of how proud and profound a mind. His equal love for the depths and the heights of speculation may too often impel this poet to overstrain his powers of thought and utterance in the strong effort to dive or to soar into an atmosphere too thin or a sea too stormy to admit the facile and natural play of his vigorous faculties ; but when these are displayed in their full



strength and clearness the study of them gives us some taste of the rare and haughty pleasure that their owner must have taken in their exercise. Here as elsewhere I had taken note in my mind of special verses and passages fit for extraction, which might give some sample of the general power and charm of the keen intellect and the fine imagination that shape and inform the scheme and action of the poem ; but to cite one or more instances of these would be to wrong the profuse and liberal genius which has sown them broadcast in so rich a soil. The reader who seeks them for himself with a judging eye and an apprehensive spirit will not be unlikely to make of *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, for the wealth and the weight of its treasures of ethical beauty, his chosen and peculiar favourite among the works of Chapman.

In the last of this stately line of tragic poems dealing with the recent or immediate history of France we find the same prevailing qualities of moral force and poetic dignity. The tragedy of *Chabot* is more equable and less ambitious in treatment than any of its compeers ; but the model given in its hero of majestic faith and august integrity may be classed among the purest and most perfect studies that we have from the sculptor's hand. The serene and stainless figure of a wholly righteous and loyal man is so thoroughly and truthfully sustained by the high instinct and spiritual sense of the poet that we may trace and recognize from the first a nature so inflexible at once and so sensitive as to refuse all shelter or compromise which might rather protect than vindicate his innocence from the attacks of

fraud and injustice, and when cleared of all their charges and restored to all his honours to lie down and die of the wound inflicted by the mere shame of suspicion : a heart so stout and so tender that it could resist all shocks and strokes of power or treachery, and bleed to death for grief to be distrusted where most of all it had deserved to find trust. But here again the singleness and purity of the interest could hardly be expected to secure success on the stage ; and though we have no hint as to the good or ill fortune of this high-toned poem, we may conjecture that it could hardly have been redeemed from popular indifference by the dramatic power and pathetic impression of the scene in which the wife and father-in-law of the arraigned admiral prevail by the justice and dignity of their appeal upon the pride and prepossession of the queen. Yet this at least, and the last scene in which Chabot dies at the feet of his repentant master with a prayer for the pardon of his enemy on the lips that kiss for the last time the hand which must confer it, should have found favour with an audience capable of doing justice to the high desert of such austere and unsexed excellence.

As we have no external ground for conjecture by what original impulse or bias of mind the genius of Chapman was attracted to the study and representation on an English stage of subjects derived from the annals of contemporary France, or what freak of perverse and erratic instinct may have led him to bring before a Protestant audience the leading criminals of the Catholic party under any but an

unfavourable aspect, so we have no means of guessing whether or not any conscious reason or principle induced him to present in much the same light three princes of such diverse characters as the first Francis and the third and fourth Henries of France. Indeed, but for a single reference to his ransom "from Pavian thraldom" (Act ii, Scène 3), we should be wholly at a loss to recognize in the royal master of Chabot the radiant and exuberant lover of the whole world of women,

ce roi sacré chevalier par Bayard,  
Jeune homme auquel il faut des plaisirs de vieillard,

who in our own age has been far otherwise presented on the theatre of a far mightier poet. There is no hint in the play that any more prevailing and less legitimate influence than a wife's was brought to bear in favour of Chabot on a king with whom his lawful consort might have been supposed of all women the least likely to prevail; and by this suppression or disguise of the personal interest actually exerted on behalf of his hero the dramatist has defrauded of her due credit the real friend of the fallen admiral; for it was not at the instance of the queen, but at the instance of Madame d'Etampes, a kinswoman of Chabot, that the chancellor Poyet was arrested and disgraced in the same year (1542) which had seen the fall, the restoration, and the death by heart-break of the faithful minister who owed not to the intercession of the king's wife but to his own alliance by blood with the king's mistress that revenge which at the first occasion given the duchess was not slow to exact from her lover on the

triumphant enemy of her kinsman. The haughty integrity which involved and upheld Chabot in danger and disgrace, and the susceptible pride which when restored to favour could no longer support him under the sense of past degradation, are painted from the life of history; but his poet may be thought to have somewhat softened the harsher features of that arrogance and roughness of temper which impaired the high qualities and imperilled the high station of the brave and upright admiral who dared his king to find a ground for his impeachment. And if we miss in Chapman's portrait those chivalrous and amorous features which long kept fresh in popular fancy the knightly fame of Francis I, the figure set before us is not wanting in a kingly grace and dignity which the dramatist has chosen to bestow with an equal hand on the grandson to whom neither history nor tradition has assigned even so much of "the king-becoming graces" as may be allowed to the conqueror of Marignano. Chapman indeed has in this case taken so little care to preserve the historic relations of his leading characters that the king by whose intervention Bussy d'Amboise was betrayed to the jealousy of Monsoreau appears not as the treacherous enemy but as the trusty friend and patron of his brother's rebellious favourite; pardons and prefers him to the rank of his own, and adopts him into that station by the surname of his eagle; while instead of the king it is here the Duke of Anjou who delivers his refractory minion into the murderous snare set for him by an injured husband. But if I read aright the hinted imputation of Brantôme, it would seem that some years

before he put into the hands of Monsoreau the intercepted correspondence of Bussy with his wife the king had already laid an ambush of "twelve good men" armed with pistols, and "mounted on Spanish horses taken from the stables of a very great personage who had set them on," to attempt the life of his brother's indomitable champion, who was preserved as well by his own presence of mind and discretion as by the good fortune which befell him to find the door of a neighbour's house ajar for him to slip through and fasten it against pursuit. Being compelled after this adventure to leave Paris in consequence of his threats "to slit folk's nostrils, and that he would kill everybody" in retaliation for this nocturnal assault, the gallant bravo was escorted out of the city by all the noble retainers of his ignoble patron the Duke of Anjou, but by three gentlemen only of the king's household brigade, his kinsman Brantôme, whom he charged at parting to bear back his defiance to the whole court, M. de Neuville, and the hero Crillon, who in spite of his attachment to the king's party refused to forsake the friendship of so stout a swordsman. Although the first standard edition of Brantôme's Lives was not published by a descendant of his family till thirty-two years after the death of Chapman, it is singular that the English poet who thought fit to choose as a subject for tragedy the fate of a man at the time of whose murder he had himself reached the age of twenty should also have thought fit so seriously to alter the facts of his story for no discernible reason but a desire to shift the charge of the principal villainy from the shoulders of a king

to those of his brother. In either play dedicated to the memory of Bussy—who at the wildest pitch of his windy and boisterous vanity can never have anticipated that twenty-eight years after his death he would figure on the page of a foreign poet as a herō of the Homeric or Lucanian type—the youngest son of Catharine de' Medici is drawn in colours as hateful as those of truth or tradition ; whereas the last king of his line is handled with such remarkable forbearance that his most notorious qualities are even less recognizable than those of his grandfather in the delicate and dignified study of Chapman. A reader indeed, if such a one were possible, who should come to the perusal of these plays with no previous knowledge of French history, would find little difference or distinction between Henri de Valois and Henri de Bourbon ; and would probably carry away the somewhat inaccurate impression that the slayer of the Duke of Guise and the judge of the Duke of Biron were men of similar tastes and manners, respectable if not venerable for their private virtues, elegant and sententious in their habitual choice of language, grave and decorous in their habitual carriage and discourse, and equally imbued with a fine and severe sense of responsibility for the conscientious discharge of the highest and hardest duties of their royal office. It is less remarkable, as the dramatist in his dedication to Sir Thomas Howard disclaims all pretension to observe “ the authentical truth of either person or action,” as a thing not to be expected “ in a poem whose subject is not truth, but things like truth,” that he should have provided to avenge the daring



and turbulent desperado who outbraved the gorgeous minions of the king with a simple dress set off by the splendour of six pages in cloth of gold, and then signalized by a fresh insult under the very eyes of Henri his enforced reconciliation with the luckless leader of their crew, a brother of whose name I know nothing but that Georges de Clermont d'Amboise, not a follower of Guise but a leader of the Huguenots, was slain seven years earlier than Bussy in the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Chapman's apology for the attribution of this name to the apparently imaginary avenger of his brother's blood is better worth remembering than such inquiries are worth pursuing. "Poor envious souls they are," says the poet, "that cavil at truth's want in these natural fictions"; a reasonable and memorable protest against the perverse or senseless paradox which confounds truth with fact and refuses to distinguish veracity from reality; and which would not be worth the passing notice of a contemptuous instant if men of genius would forbear to confuse the minds of their feeble and more servile admirers by the adoption and promulgation in the loudest tones of prophecy of such blatant and vacuous babble about "kinship of fiction to lying" and so forth as should properly be left to the lips of the dunces who may naturally believe it, being thick-witted enough to accept as serious reasoning and deliberate opinion the most wilful and preposterous paradoxes thundered forth from pulpit or from tripod in the most riotous and ludicrous paroxysms of wayward humour or fantastic passion.

That the "Roman tragedy" of *Cæsar and Pompey*



was earlier in date than most though later in publication than any except *Chabot* of the French series, we might have conjectured without the evidence of the dedication. It is more unequal and irregular in the proportion of its good parts and its bad than any of Chapman's tragedies except *Bussy d'Ambois*; I should imagine it to be a work of nearly the same period; though, as was before intimated, it bears more affinity to the sequel of that play and to the great tragic poem on Biron in the main quality of interest and the preponderance of speech over action. To this play we might adapt a well-known critical remark of Dr. Johnson's on *Henry VIII*, much less applicable in that case than in this, and say that the genius of the author comes in and goes out with Cato. Not that even in this case that rhetorical phrase would be wholly accurate; there are noble lines and passages discernible elsewhere; but the glory of the poem is given it by the scenes in which Cato is the leading figure. I know nothing in moral or contemplative poetry more admirable than the speech in the first scene on fear or mistrust of the gods, and the soliloquy in the last act on sleep and death. The serene and sublime emotion of heroic wisdom is in either passage so touched and tempered with something of the personal ardour of a noble passion that its tone and effect are not merely abstract or didactic but thoroughly dramatic and human, and the weighty words ring in the ear of our remembrance long after the mind has first unconsciously absorbed and retained the lofty sound and sense of the memorable and magnificent verse. It is especially in such examples as these that we

perceive the great quality of Chapman's genius, the true height and purity of its power; majestic intellect lighted and enkindled by poetic imagination, the high beauty of heroic thought warmed and winged with the spiritual fire of a living sentiment. It is true that those who read only the glorious excerpts given from this poem by Charles Lamb will have a nobler impression of its merit than they who read the whole; but those only who read the whole will know all its merit as well as all its demerit; they will find fresh treasures of fine thought and high expression embedded among dense layers of crabbed and confused rhetoric, wedged in between rocky strata of thick and turgid verse. As there is little other life or movement in the play but that of declamation or discussion, we might presume that if it had ever "touched at the stage" its reception would in all likelihood have been something less than favourable; but we have already remarked on such inexplicable variations of good and ill luck in the fortunes of Chapman's plays that no conclusion of the kind can be assumed as certain. That it never did lose on any boards its long-preserved immunity from the touch of actors or managers, we may, I suppose, after the author's assurance of its virginity at the date of publication, be tolerably confident.

Twenty years after the death of Chapman the long list of his dramatic works was completed by the publication of two tragedies in which, though there are but few qualities common to both, there are yet fewer traces of either the chief merits or the chief defects which distinguish and deform alike the

poems and the tragic plays published during the life of the author. There is nothing in them of bombast, of barbarism, or of obscurity ; there is assuredly no lack of incidents, and these, however crowded and violent in themselves, are conducted with such clearness and simplicity of exposition as to keep the attention and interest of the reader undistracted and unfatigued. The style in both is pure, lucid, and vigorous ; equably sustained at an even height above the lowlands of prosaic realism and beneath the cloudland of winds and vapours ; more forcible and direct in the first play, more florid and decorative in the second. On the other hand, these post-humous children have not the lofty stature, the kingly aspect, the gigantic sinews and the shining eyes which went far to redeem the halting gait and the irregular features of their elders. They want the breadth of brow, the weight of brain, the fullness of speech, and the fire of spirit which make amends for the harsh voice and stammering tongue that imperfectly deliver the message entrusted to them ; the tumultuous eloquence which bears down and sweeps away all physical impediment of utterance, the fervid vitality which transfigures and atones for all clumsiness of gesture or deformity of limb.

No thought so ripe and sweet, no emotion so exalted and august is here discernible as that which uplifts the contemplation and upholds the confidence of the highest in spirit and the deepest in thought among those earlier speakers who served as mouthpieces of the special genius of their high-minded and deep-souled creator. There is no trace of the ethical

power which informs and moulds the meditation of Clermont or of Cato, no relic of the imaginative passion which expands and inflates the fancy of Bussy or of Biron. In *Alphonsus* there is more of Chapman's quality at first perceptible than in *Revenge for Honour*; there is a certain hardness in the simplicity of tone, a certain rigidity in the sharp masculine lineaments of style and character, common to much of his work when free from the taint of crabbed or bombastic obscurity. The singular violation and confusion of history, which may be taken to mask the probable allusions to matters of more recent political interest, are ably explained and illustrated by Dr. Elze in the thoroughly efficient and sufficient introduction to his edition of this play; in which the student will observe, with gratitude for his help and admiration for his learning in all matters of social and historical illustration, that the German editor has kept well to such work as he was perfectly competent to discharge, and has never on this occasion exchanged the highest seat in the hall of scholarship for the lowest form in the school of criticism. By him as by others the actual merit of this most unhistoric of historical dramas has perhaps been somewhat underrated. Naked as it is of ornament, violent in most of its action and repulsive in several of its scenes, barren of beauty in language and poor in treasure of thought, it never fails in animation and interest; and the hardened student of our early stage who has once entered the shambles will hardly turn away in disgust or weariness from the fume and flow of monotonous bloodshed till his curiosity at least has

been satisfied by the final evolution of the tangled web of slaughter. In this catastrophe especially there is a remarkable sense of strong material effect, with a notable capacity for vigorous theatrical manipulation of incident, which is as notably deficient in the earlier and loftier works of Chapman.

In the tragedy of *Revenge for Honour* I have already noticed the curious change of style which distinguishes it from all other works of Chapman: a change from rigidity to relaxation, from energy to fluency, from concentration to effusion of language. It has something of the manner and metre of Fletcher and his school, something of the softness and facility which lend a half-effeminate grace to the best scenes of *Shirley*: while in the fifth act at least I observe something too much of the merely conventional imagery and the overflow of easy verbosity which are the besetting sins of that poet's style. Only in one image can I find anything of that quaint fondness for remote and eccentric illustration in which the verse of Chapman resembles the prose of Fuller: this is put into the mouth of the villain of the piece, who repudiates conscience as

a weak and fond remembrance  
Which men should shun, as elephants clear springs,  
Lest they behold their own deformities  
And start at their grim shadows.

Even here the fall of the verse is not that of Chapman, and the tone of the verses which immediately follow is so utterly alien from the prevailing tone of his that the authenticity of the scene, as indeed of the whole play, can only be vindicated by

## 100 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

a supposition that in his last years he may for once have taken the whim and had the power to change his style and turn his hand to the new fashion of the youngest writers then prospering on the stage. Only the silliest and shallowest of pedants and of sciolists can imagine that a question as to the date or the authorship of any poem can be determined by mere considerations of measure and mechanical computation of numbers ; as though the language of a poem were divisible from the thought, or (to borrow a phrase from the Miltonic theology) the effluence were separable from the essence of a man's genius. It should be superfluous and impertinent to explain that the expression is not to be considered apart from the substance ; but while men who do not know this are suffered to utter as with the authority of a pedagogue or a pulpiteer the verdict of the gerundgrinders and metremongers on the finest and most intricate questions of the subtlest and most sublime of arts, it is but too evident that the explanation of even so simple and radical a truth can be neither impertinent nor superfluous. It is not because a particular pronoun or conjunction is used in this play some fifty times oftener than it occurs in any other work of its author, a point on which I profess myself neither competent nor careful to pronounce, that I am prepared to decide on the question of its authenticity or its age. That question indeed I am diffident enough to regard as one impossible to resolve. That it is the work of Chapman I see no definite reason to disbelieve, and not a little reason to suppose that it may be. The selection and treatment of the subject recall the



trick of his fancy and the habit of his hand ; the process of the story is in parts quaint and bloody, galvanic and abrupt ; but the movement on the whole is certainly smoother, the evolution more regular, the arrangement more dramatic than of old. Accepting it as the last tragic effort of the author whose first extant attempt in that line was *Bussy d'Ambois*, we shall find perhaps in the general workmanship almost as much of likeness as of unlikeness. Considered apart and judged by its own merits, we shall certainly find it, like *Alphonsus*, animated and amusing, noticeable for a close and clear sequence of varying incident and interest, and for a quick light touch in the sketching of superficial character. These being its chief qualities, we may fairly pronounce that whether or not it be the work of Chapman it belongs less to his school than to the school of Shirley ; yet being as it is altogether too robust and masculine for a work of the latter school, it seems most reasonable to admit it as the child of an older father, the last-born of a more vigorous generation, with less of strength and sap than its brothers, but with something in return of the younger and lighter graces of its fellows in age. The hero and his father are figures well invented and well sustained ; the villains are not distorted or overdrawn, and the action is full of change and vivacity.

Of the poems published by Chapman after the first of his plays was given to the press, we may say generally that they show some signs of advance and none of retrogression from the standard of his earlier work. Out of many lovely lines embedded



## 102 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

in much thick and turbid matter I choose one couplet from *The Tears of Peace* as an example of their best beauties :

Free sufferance for the truth makes sorrow sing,  
And mourning far more sweet than banqueting.

In this poem, with much wearisome confusion and iteration of thought and imagery, reprobation and complaint, there are several noble interludes of gnomic and symbolic verse. The allegory is of course clouded and confounded by all manner of perversities and obscurities worth no man's while to elucidate or to rectify ; the verse hoarse and stiff, the style dense and convulsive, inaccurate and violent ; yet ever and anon the sense becomes clear, the style pure, the imagery luminous and tender, the verse gracious and majestic ; transformed for a moment and redeemed by great brief touches of high and profound harmony ; of which better mood let us take in proof a single instance, and that the most sustained and exquisite we shall find :

Before her flew Affliction, girt in storms,  
Gash'd all with gushing wounds, and all the forms  
Of bane and misery frowning in her face ;  
Whom Tyranny and Injustice had in chase ;  
Grim Persecution, Poverty, and Shame ;  
Detraction, Envy, foul Mishap and lame  
Scruple of Conscience ; Fear, Deceit, Despair ;  
Slander and Clamour, that rent all the air ;  
Hate, War, and Massacre ; uncrowned Toil  
And Sickness, t' all the rest the base and foil,  
Crept after ; and his deadly weight trod down  
Wealth, Beauty, and the glory of a crown.

These usher'd her far off ; as figures given  
To show, these crosses borne make peace with heaven.  
But now, made free from them, next her before,  
Peaceful and young, Herculean silence bore  
His craggy club ; which up aloft he hild ;  
With which and his fore-finger's charm he still'd  
All sounds in air ; and left so free mine ears,  
That I might hear the music of the spheres,  
And all the angels singing out of heaven ;  
Whose tunes were solemn, as to passion given ;  
For now, that Justice was the happiness there  
For all the wrongs to Right inflicted here.  
Such was the passion that Peace now put on ;  
And on all went ; when suddenly was gone  
All light of heaven before us ; from a wood,  
Whose sight foreseen now lost, amazed we stood,  
The sun still gracing us ; when now, the air  
Inflamed with meteors, we discover'd fair  
The skipping goat ; the horse's flaming mane ;  
Bearded and trainèd comets ; stars in wane  
The burning sword ; the firebrand-flying snake ;  
The lance ; the torch ; the licking fire ; the drake ;  
And all else meteors that did ill abode  
The thunder chid ; the lightning leapt abroad ;  
And yet when Peace came in all heaven was clear ;  
And then did all the horrid wood appear,  
Where mortal dangers more than leaves did grow ;  
In which we could not one free step bestow,  
For treading on some murder'd passenger  
Who thither was by witchcraft forced to err :  
Whose face the bird hid that loves humans best,  
That hath the bugle eyes and rosy breast,  
And is the yellow autumn's nightingale.

This is Chapman at his best ; and few then can  
better him. The language hardly holds lovelier

lines, of more perfect colour and more happy cadence, than some few of these which I have given to show how this poet could speak when for a change he was content to empty his mouth of pebbles and clear his forehead of fog. The vision of Home which serves as overture to this poem is not the only other noble feature which relieves a landscape in too great part made up of rocks and brambles, of mire and morass ; and for the sake of these hidden green places and sunny moments some yet may care to risk an hour or so of toil along the muddy and thorny lanes that run between.

From the opening verses of *The Tears of Peace* we get one of the few glimpses allowed us into the poet's personal life, his birthplace, the manner and the spirit of his work, and his hopes in his "retired age" for "heaven's blessing in a free and harmless life"; the passage has beauty as well as interest far beyond those too frequent utterances of querulous anger at the neglect and poverty to which he could not resign himself without resentment. It would have been well for himself as for us, who cannot now read such reiterated complaints without a sense of weariness and irritation, if he had really laid once for all to heart the noble verses in which he supposes himself to be admonished by the "spirit Elysian" of his divine patron Homer, who told him, as he says, "that he was angel to me, star, and fate."

Thou must not undervalue what thou hast,  
 In weighing it with that which more is graced ;  
 The worth that weigheth inward should not long  
 For outward prices. This should make thee strong

In thy close value ; Nought so good can be  
As that which lasts good between God and thee.  
Remember thine own verse—Should Heaven turn Hell  
For deeds well done, I would do ever well.

The dignity and serenity of spirit here inculcated are not compatible with the tone of fierce remonstrance and repining defiance which alternates with such higher tones of meditation and self-reliance as constantly exalt and dignify the praises of those patrons to whom he appeals for recognition as for a right not to be withheld without discredit to them and danger of future loss of that glory which he had to give. In all dedicatory verse known to me I find nothing that resembles the high self-respect and haughty gratitude of a poet who never forgets that for every benefit of patronage conferred he gives fully as much as he may receive. Men usually hurry over the dedications of poet to patron with a keen angry sense of shame and sorrow, of pity and repulsion and regret ; but it may be justly claimed for Chapman that his verses of dedication can give no reader such pain as those of others. His first and best patron in the court of James was that youth on whose coffin so many crowns of mourning verse were showered, and who does by all report seem to have well deserved that other than official regrets should go with him to his grave. A boy dying at eighteen after three years' proof of interest in the higher culture of his time, three years during which he had shown himself as far as we can see sincere and ardent in his love of noble things only, and only of noble men, of poetry and of heroes—champion of Raleigh in his prison and patron of Chapman in his

need—must certainly have been one worthy of notice in higher places than a court ; one who, even if born in a loftier atmosphere and likelier to bring forth seed of enduring honour, would assuredly have earned remark and remembrance as a most exceptional figure, of truly rare and admirable promise. The inscription of Chapman's Iliad to Prince Henry is one of his highest and purest examples of moral verse : the august praise and grave exaltation of his own great art give dignity to the words of admonition as much as of appeal with which he commends it to the acceptance and reverence of kings. We may well believe that the prince's death gave to the high heart of his old Homeric teacher and counsellor of royal and heroic things a sharper pain than the mere sense of a patron lost and of personal as well as of national hopes cut off. Yet in his special case there was good reason for special regret. The latter instalments of his lofty labour on the translation of Homer were inscribed to the ignoblest among the minions, as the former had been inscribed to the noblest among the children of the king. An austere and stately moralist like Chapman could hardly have sought a stranger patron than Carr ; and when we find him officiating as paranymp at those nuptials which recall the darkest and foulest history in all the annals of that reign, the poisonous and adulterous secrets of blood and shame in whose darkness nothing is discernible but the two masked and muffled figures of treachery and murder, we cannot but remember and apply the parallel drawn by Macaulay from the court of Nero ; nor can it be with simple surprise that we listen to the sermon or

the song composed by Seneca or by Lucan for the epithalamium of Sporus and Locusta.

The celebration of that monstrous marriage in ethic and allegoric verse brought nothing to Chapman but disquiet and discredit. Neither Andromeda Lady Essex nor Perseus Earl of Somerset had reason to thank or to reward the solitary singer whose voice was raised to call down blessings on the bridal bed which gave such a Julia to the arms of such a Manlius. The enormous absurdity of Chapman's ever unfortunate allegory was on this auspicious occasion so much more than absurd that Carr himself would seem to have taken such offence as his luckless panegyrist had undoubtedly no suspicion that he might give. And yet this innocence of intention affords one of the oddest instances on record of the marvellous want of common sense and common tact which has sometimes been so notable in men of genius. It is hardly credible that a grave poetic moralist of fifty-five should have written without afterthought this thrice unhappy poem of *Andromeda Liberata*. Its appearance did for once succeed in attracting attention; but the comment it drew down was of such a nature as at once to elicit from the author "a free and offenceless justification of a lately published and most maliciously misinterpreted poem"; a defence almost as amazing as the offence, and decidedly more amusing.

The poet could never imagine till now so far-fetched a thought in malice ("such was my simplicity," he adds with some reason) as would induce any reader to regard as otherwise than "harmlessly and gracefully applicable to the occasion"—these are his



actual words—the representation of “an innocent and spotless virgin [*sic*] rescued from the polluted throat of a monster, which I in this place applied to the savage multitude.” Such is the perversity of man, that on perusing this most apt and judicious allegory “the base, ignoble, barbarous, giddy multitude” of readers actually thought fit to inquire from what “barren rock” the new Perseus might be said to have unbound his fettered virgin; and in answer to this not unnatural inquiry Chapman had the audacious innocence to affirm—and I doubt not in all truth and simplicity—that the inevitable application of this happy and appropriate symbol had never so much as crossed his innocent mind. As if, he exclaims indignantly, the word “barren” could be applied to a man!—was it ever said a man was barren? or was the burden of bearing fruit ever laid on man? Whether this vindication was likely under the circumstances to mend matters much “the prejudicate and peremptory reader” will judge for himself. One rumour, however, the poet repudiates in passing with some violence of language; to the effect, we may gather, that he had been waylaid and assaulted as was Dryden by Rochester’s ruffians, but at whose instigation we can only conjecture. He will omit, he says, “as struck dumb with the disdain of it, their most unmanly lie both of my baffling and wounding, saying ‘Take this for your Andromeda’; not being so much as touched, I witness God, nor one syllable suffering.”

The rumour is singular enough, and it would be curious to know if at least any such threat or attempt were actually made. From Carr at all events we can



hardly believe that it would have come ; for it must be set down to his credit that in the days of obscurity which followed on his disgrace and retirement he seems to have befriended the poet whose humbler chances of court favour had presumably fallen with his own. It was unlikely that any man ever so slightly associated with the recollection of a matter which the king was probably of all men least desirous to keep in mind should again be summoned by two of the Inns of Court, as Chapman had been summoned the year before, to compose the marriage masque for a royal wedding. More inauspicious by far though far more innocent than those of Somerset were the nuptials he had then been chosen to celebrate ; the nuptials of Elizabeth, called the Queen of Hearts, with Frederick, one day to be surnamed the Winter-King. For that fatal marriage-feast of " Goody Palsgrave " and her hapless bridegroom he had been bidden to provide due decorations of pageantry and verse ; and had produced at least some bright graceful couplets and stanzas, among others hardly so definable. But to such a task he was now not likely to be called again ; the turning-point of his fortunes as far as they hung upon the chance of patronage at court was the wedding-day of Carr. As a favourite of the dead prince to whom his Homer had been inscribed in weighty and worthy verses, he may have been thought fit the year before to assist as the laureate of a day at the marriage which had been postponed by the death of the bride's brother in the preceding autumn ; and some remembrance of the favour shown him by the noble youth for whom the country if not the court

had good reason to mourn may have kept his name for a while before the eyes of the better part of the courtiers, if a better part there were : but if ever, as we may conjecture, his fortune had passed through its hour of rise and its day of progress, we must infer that its decline was sudden and its fall irremediable.

In the same year which witnessed the unlucky venture of his *Andromeda* Chapman put forth a poem on the death of Lord Russell of Thornhaugh, a patron, it should seem, of a far other kind than Carr ; distinguished as a soldier in the field now only memorable to us for the death of Sir Philip Sidney, where if report may be trusted his romantic or Homeric valour was worthy to have employed the pen of a translator of the Iliad ; and yet more remarkable for the comparative justice and mercy displayed in his military administration of Ireland. This epicede, longer and more ornate than that issued two years before on Prince Henry, is neither much worse nor much better in substance and in style. Each may boast of some fine and vigorous verses, and both are notable as examples of the poet's somewhat troubled and confused elevation of thought and language. In *Eugenia* especially the same high note of moral passion alternates with the same sharp tone of contemptuous complaint that we find in *The Tears of Peace* and in the very last verses affixed by way of epilogue to his translation of the Hymns and other Homeric fragments. This bitterness of insinuation or invective against meaner scholars or artists we should set down rather to a genuine hatred of bad work, a

genuine abhorrence of base ambition and false pretence, than to any unjust or malevolent instinct of mere jealousy ; which yet might perhaps be found pardonable to the neglected and laborious old age of a high-minded artist and hard-working scholar such as Chapman. There are impressive touches of a higher mood in the funeral hymn which completes the somewhat voluminous tribute of ceremonial verse offered up at the grave of Lord Russell ; but the greater part of the poem is more noticeable for quaintness than for any better quality, being indeed eccentric in execution as in conception beyond the wont even of Chapman. It carries, however, some weight of thought, and contains probably the longest and minutest catalogue ever given in verse of the signs of an approaching storm ; a description which shows at once the close and intense observation of nature, the keen and forcible power of reproduction, and the utter incompetence to select and arrange his material, alike and at all times distinctive of this poet.

Four years after the miscarriage of *Andromeda* we find his translation of Hesiod ushered in by a dignified appeal and compliment to "the truly Greek inspiration and absolutely Attic elocution" of no less a patron than Bacon ; "whose all-acknowledged faculty hath banished flattery therein even from the court ; much more from my country and more than upland simplicity." But for his *Odyssey* and *Hymns of Homer*, as well as for his plea addressed to the country on behalf of the beleaguered handful of troops serving with Sir Horace Vere, he sought or found no patronage but that of Carr ; and that this

should not have failed him gives evidence of some not ignoble quality in one whom we are accustomed only to regard as the unloveliest of the Ganymedes whose Jupiter was James. In the dedication of the Hymns he refers to the retired life of his disgraced patron in a tone which might not unworthily have saluted the more honourable seclusion of a better man. To these as to others of Chapman's moral verses Coleridge has paid a tribute of thoughtful and memorable praise, deserved no less by the fragments of ethical poetry printed some years earlier with a metrical version, after that of Petrarca, of the penitential Psalms. Among these there are many grains of genuine thought, of terse and grave expression, worth remark and remembrance. So much indeed may be said in parting of Chapman's poetry as a whole; in all his poems of dedication or mere compliment, as in the elaborate and eloquent rhapsody prefixed to Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, we shall find some weight of reflection and some energy of utterance: in the commendatory verses to Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* we shall find something better; four of the loveliest lines in the language, perfect for melody, purity, and simple sweetness of colour.

It is better to think of Chapman as the just and generous friend of other and younger men's genius than to remark except in passing on his quarrel in old age with Jonson, of which we know nothing but by an unhappy fragment of virulent and worthless verse, transcribed it should seem during his last illness by some foolish and officious friend or flatterer (as we may conceive) of

the old man's petulances and infirmities. For these there is reason to fear that we may have to make more allowance than must under all circumstances be claimed by age and sickness, even where adversity has no share in the sufferings of the last years of a laborious and noble life. After the fall of Chapman's fortunes, if as I have conjectured we may suppose them to have risen for a while under the patronage of Prince Henry and collapsed with the favour of Carr, he lived for twenty years without further success on the stage to which he had given so much of the best labour and the best faculty of his mind : and we may doubt whether the friends or patrons of his old age were numerous or generous enough to secure these latter years against neglect and obscurity. One comfort, however, must have been with him to the last, whether or not we agree with Gifford in accepting the apparent evidence for the poverty and solitude in which he died ; the comfort of great work done, the recollection of high hopes attained, the evidence of daring dreams made real and fruitful of fame not yet to be. Some ten years before his death the poet of sixty-five could look on his completed version of all the Homeric poems, and say :

The work that I was born to do is done.

It was a great work, and one wrought in a great spirit ; and if, as he says of Homer, not without evident and immediate reference to his own lot, " like a man *verecundi ingenii* (which he witnesseth of himself), he lived unhonoured and needy till his death," we may believe that he did not live dissatisfied or dejected. Unworthy indeed would the

workman have been of his own work if from the contemplation of it he had been too poor in spirit or too covetous of reward to draw the consolation of a high content. This strong and sovereign solace against all the evils that can beset the failing age and fallen fortunes of a brave man he surely deserved, if ever man deserved, to have and to retain. His work was done; neither time nor trouble could affect that; neither age nor misfortune could undo it. He had lived long and worked hard, and the end of all the valiant labour and strenuous endurance that must have gone to the performance of his task had not been less than triumphant. He had added a monument to the temple which contains the glories of his native language, the godlike images and the costly relics of its past; he had built himself a massive and majestic memorial, where for all the flaws and roughness of the weather-beaten work the great workmen of days unborn would gather to give honour to his name. He had kindled a fire which the changing winds of time were not to put out, the veering breath of taste and opinion was never to blow upon so hard but that some would return to warm themselves at its heat and to cheer themselves with its light. He showed what he could of Homer to the lifted eyes of Keats, and the strong and fiery reflection was to the greater poet as very dawn itself, the perfect splendour of Hellenic sunrise. Much of precious and undying praise has been worthily bestowed on it; but while anything of English poetry shall endure the sonnet of Keats will be the final word of comment, the final note of verdict on Chapman's Homer.



This of course was the sovereign labour of his life ; and to this the highest of his other works can only be considered as bringing some addition of honour. That there is yet in these enough to serve as the foundation of a lasting fame I have made it the purpose of my present task to show. But his name will always first recall neither the plays nor the poems which might well have sufficed for the work and the witness of a briefer or less fruitful life ; the great enterprise of which the firstfruits were given to the world in his fortieth year and the last harvest was garnered in his sixty-sixth must be the first and last claim of his memory on the reverence of all students who shall ever devote the best of their time and of their thought to loving research or to thankful labour in the full field of English poetry. The indomitable force and fire of Chapman's genius have given such breath and spirit to his Homeric poems that whatever their faults and flaws may be they are at least not those of other men's versions ; they have a seed and salt of personal life which divide them from the class of translated works and remove them (it might wellnigh be said) into the rank of original poems. By the standard of original work they may be more fairly and more worthily judged than by the standard of pure translation : and upon their worth as tested by that standard the judgment of Coleridge and of Lamb has been passed once for all, without fear of appeal or danger of reversal while the language in which the poems were written and the judgment given shall endure. To all lovers of high poetry the great old version of our Homer-Lucan must be dear for



its own sake and for that of the men who have loved and held it in honour ; to those who can be content with fire for light and force for harmony it must give pleasure inconceivable by such as cannot but remember and repine for the lack of that sweet and equal exaltation of style which no English poet of his age, and Chapman less than any, could hope even faintly to reproduce or to recall. In his original poems the most turgid and barbarous writer of a time whose poets had almost every other merit in a higher degree than those Grecian gifts of perfect form, of perfect light, and of perfect measure, which are the marks of the Homeric poems no less than of the Sophoclean drama, he could not so put off his native sin of forced and inflated obscurity as to copy in the hot high colours of a somewhat strained and tattered canvas more than the outlines of the divine figures which his strong hand and earnest eye were bent to bring before his readers' sight. It is much that his ardour and vigour, his energy and devotion, should have done the noble and memorable work they have. That "unconquerable quaintness" which Lamb was the first to point out as the one perpetual note of infirmity and imperfection in the great work of Chapman is more hopelessly alien from the quality of the original than any other defect but that of absolute weakness or sterility of spirit could be. Altering the verdict of Bentley on Pope, we may say that instead of a very pretty it is a very noble poem, but it must not be called Homer. Quaintness and he, to steal a phrase from Juliet, are many miles asunder.

The temperament of Chapman had more in it of

an Icelandic than a Hellenic poet's ; and had Homer been no more than the mightiest of skalds or the Iliad than the greatest of sagas, Chapman would have been fitter to play the part of their herald or interpreter. His fiery and turbid style has in it the action rather of earthquakes and volcanoes than of the oceanic verse it labours to represent ; it can give us but the pace of a giant for echo of the footfall of a god ; it can show but the huge movements of the heaving earth, inflated and inflamed with unequal and violent life, for the innumerable unity and harmony, the radiant and buoyant music of luminous motion, the simplicity and equality of passion and of power, the majestic monochord of single sound underlying as it were at the heart of Homeric verse the multitudinous measures of the epic sea.

The name of Chapman should always be held great ; yet must it always at first recall the names of greater men. For one who thinks of him as the author of his best play or his loftiest lines of gnomic verse a score will at once remember him as the translator of Homer or the continuator of Marlowe. The most daring enterprise of a life which was full of daring aspiration and arduous labour was this of resuming and completing the " mighty line " of *Hero and Leander*. For that poem stands out alone amid all the wide and wild poetic wealth of its teeming and turbulent age, as might a small shrine of Parian sculpture amid the rank splendour of a tropic jungle. But no metaphor can aptly express the rapture of relief with which you come upon it amid the poems of Chapman, and drink once more with your whole heart of that well of sweet

water after the long draughts you have taken from such brackish and turbid springs as gush up among the sands and thickets of his verse. Faultless indeed this lovely fragment is not ; it also bears traces of the Elizabethan barbarism, as though the great queen's ruff and farthingale had been clapped about the neck and waist of the Medicean Venus ; but for all the strange costume we can see that the limbs are perfect still. The name of Marlowe's poem has been often coupled with that of the " first heir " of Shakespeare's " invention " ; but with all reverence to the highest name in letters be it said, the comparison is hardly less absurd than a comparison of *Tamburlaine* with *Othello*. With all its overcrowding beauties of detail, Shakespeare's first poem is on the whole a model of what a young man of genius should not write on such a subject ; Marlowe's is a model of what he should. Scarcely the art of Titian at its highest, and surely not the art of Shakespeare at its dawn, could have made acceptable such an inversion of natural rule as is involved in the attempted violation by a passionate woman of a passionless boy ; the part of a Joseph, as no less a moralist than Henri Beyle has observed in his great work on *Love*, has always a suspicion about it of something ridiculous and offensive ; but only the wretchedest of artists could wholly fail to give charm to the picture of such a nuptial night as that of Hero and Leander. The style of Shakespeare's first essay is, to speak frankly, for the most part no less vicious than the matter : it is burdened and bedizened with all the heavy and fantastic jewellery of Gongora and Marini ; it is written

throughout in the style which an Italian scholar knows as that of the *seicentisti*, and which the duncery of New Grub Street in its immeasurable ignorance would probably designate as "Della-Cruscan"; nay, there are yet, I believe, in that quarter rhymesters and libellers to be found who imagine such men as Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri to have been representative members of the famous and farinaceous academy. Not one of the faults chargeable on Shakespeare's beautiful but faultful poem can justly be charged on the only not faultless poem of Marlowe. The absence of all cumbrous jewels and ponderous embroideries from the sweet and limpid loveliness of its style is not more noticeable than the absence of such other and possibly such graver flaws as deform and diminish the undeniable charms of *Venus and Adonis*.

With leave or without leave of a much-lauded critic who could see nothing in the glorified version or expansion by Marlowe of the little poem of Musæus but "a paraphrase, in every sense of the epithet, of the most licentious kind," I must avow that I want and am well content to want the sense, whatever it be, which would enable me to discern more offence in that lovely picture of the union of two lovers in body as in soul than I can discern in the parting of Romeo and Juliet. And if it be always a pleasure to read a page of Marlowe, to read it after a page of Chapman is to the capable student of high verse "a pleasure worthy Xerxes the great king." Yet there is not a little to be advanced in favour of Chapman's audacious and arduous undertaking. The poet was not alive, among all the mighty men

then living, who could worthily have completed the divine fragment of Marlowe. As well might we look now to find a sculptor who could worthily restore for us the arms of the Venus of Melos—"Our Lady of Beauty," as Heine said when lying at her feet stricken to death, "who has no hands, and cannot help us." For of narrative poets there were none in that generation of any note but Drayton and Daniel; and though these might have more of Marlowe's limpid sweetness and purity of style, they lacked the force and weight of Chapman. Nor is the continuation by any means altogether such as we might have expected it to be—a sequel by Marsyas to the song of Apollo. Thanks, as we may suppose, to the high ambition of the poet's aim, there are more beauties and fewer deformities than I have found in any of his other poems. There are passages indeed which at first sight may almost seem to support the otherwise unsupported tradition that a brief further fragment of verse from the hand of Marlowe was left for Chapman to work up into his sequel. This for instance, though somewhat over-fantastic, has in it a sweet and genuine note of fancy:

Her fresh-heat blood cast figures in her eyes,  
 And she supposed she saw in Neptune's skies  
 How her star wander'd, wash'd in smarting brine,  
 For her love's sake, that with immortal wine  
 Should be embathed, and swim in more heart's-ease  
 Than there was water in the Sestian seas.

Here again is a beautiful example of the short sweet interludes which relieve the general style of Chapman's narrative or reflective verse:

For as proportion, white and crimson, meet  
In beauty's mixture, all right clear and sweet,  
The eye responsible, the golden hair,  
And none is held without the other fair ;  
All spring together, all together fade ;  
Such intermix'd affections should invade  
Two perfect lovers.

And this couplet has an exquisite touch of fanciful colour :

As two clear tapers mix in one their light,  
So did the lily and the hand their white.

That at least might have been written by Marlowe himself. But the poem is largely deformed by excrescences and aberrations, by misplaced morals and mistimed conceits ; and at the catastrophe, perhaps half consciously oppressed and overcome by the sense that now indeed he must put forth all his power to utter something not unworthy of what the "dead shepherd" himself might have spoken over the two dead lovers, he puts forth all his powers for evil and for error, and gives such a narrative of their end as might have sufficed to raise from his grave the avenging ghost of the outraged poet who has been supposed—but unless it was said in some riotous humour of jesting irony, the supposition seems to me incredible—to have commended to Chapman, in case of his death, the task thus ill discharged of completing this deathless and half-accomplished work of a genius "that perished in its pride."

The faults and weaknesses of strong men seem usually an integral part of the character or the genius we admire for its strength ; and the faults ingrained in the work of Chapman were probably



indivisible from the powers which gave that work its worth. Those blemishes not less than those beauties of which the student is at almost every other step compelled perforce to take note seem inevitable by a poet's mind of his peculiar bent and bias. There are superfluities which we would fain see removed, deformities which we would fain see straightened, in all but the greatest among poets or men ; and these are doubtless in effect irremovable and incurable. Even the Atlantean shoulders of Jonson, fit to bear the weight of mightiest monarchies, have been hardly tasked to support and transmit to our own day the fame of his great genius, overburdened as it was with the twofold load of his theories on art and his pedantries of practice. And Chapman, though also a brother of the giant brood, had not the Herculean sinews of his younger friend and fellow-student. That weight which could but bend the back that carried the vast world of invention whose twin hemispheres are *Volpone* and the *Alchemist* was wellnigh enough to crush the staggering strength of the lesser Titan. His style reels and struggles under the pressure ; he snorts and heaves as Typhœus beneath Etna, sending up at each huge turn and convulsion of his uneasy bulk some shower of blinding sparkles or volume of stifling vapour. But for all the discords and contortions of his utterance the presence is always perceptible of a giant, and of one issued from the lineage of the early gods.

He alone, as far as I can see, among all the great men of his great age, had anything in common with Jonson for good or evil. It would not be

accurate to lay the heaviest faults of either poet to the account of his learning. A weight of learning at least equal to that which bowed and deformed the genius of Jonson and of Chapman served but to give new shape and splendour to the genius of Milton and of Landor. To these it was but as a staff to guide and a crown to glorify their labours ; a lantern by whose light they might walk, a well-spring from whose water they might draw draughts of fresh strength and rest. But by this light the two elder poets too often failed to walk straight and sure, drank too often from this fountain a heady or a narcotic draught. One at least, and not he who had drunk deepest of the divine and dangerous spring, seems at times under its influence to move and speak as under some Circean transformation. The learning of Jonson, doubtless far wider and sounder than that of Chapman, never allowed or allured him to exchange for a turbid and tortuous jargon the vigorous purity of his own English spirit and style. Nevertheless, of these four illustrious men whom I suppose to have been the most deeply read in classical literature, with the exception probably of Gray and possibly of Coleridge, among all our poets of the past, the two great republicans as surely were not as the two distinguished royalists surely were pedants : and Chapman, being the lesser scholar, was naturally the greater pedant of the pair.

As a dramatic poet he has assuredly never yet received his due meed of discerning praise ; but assuredly no man of genius ever did so much, as though by perverse and pre-pense design, to insure a

continuance of neglect and injustice. Had he allied himself with some enemy in a league against his own fame—had he backed himself against success for a wager, let his deserts be what they might—he could have done no more than he has done to make certain of the desired failure. With a fair share of comic spirit and invention, remarkable at least in a poet of such a grave and ambitious turn of genius, he has spiced and larded his very comedies with the thick insipid sauce of pedantic declamation. Their savourless interludes of false and forced humour may indeed be matched even in the greatest of Jonson's works; there is here hardly anything heavier than the voluminous foolery of *Scoto of Mantua* and the dolorous long-winded doggerel drivelled forth by that dreary trinity of dwarf, eunuch, and hermaphrodite, whom any patron of less patience than *Volpone*, with a tithe of his wit and genius, would surely have scourged out of doors long before they were turned forth to play by *Mosca*. But when on a fresh reading we skip over these blocks laid as if on purpose in our way through so magnificent a gallery of comic and poetic inventions, the monument of a mind so mighty, the palace of so gigantic a genius as Ben Jonson's, we are more than content to forget such passing and perishable impediments to our admiration of that sovereign intellect which has transported us across them into the royal presence of its ruling and informing power.

The "shaping spirit of imagination" proper to all great men, and varying in each case from all other, reforms of itself its own misshapen work,

treads down and triumphs over its own faults and errors, renews its faltering forces and resumes its undiminished reign. But he who in so high a matter as the dramatic art can sin so heavily, and so triumphantly tread under the penalty of his transgression, must be great among the greatest of his fellows. Such, with all his excesses and shortcomings in the way of dramatic work, was Jonson; such certainly was not Chapman. The tragedy, for example, of *Chabot*, a noble and dignified poem in the main, and the otherwise lively and interesting comedy of *Monsieur d'Olive*, are seriously impaired by a worse than Jonsonian excess in the analysis and anatomy of "humours." The turncoat advocate and the mock ambassador bestride the action of the plays and oppress the attention of the reader with a more "importunate and heavy load" than that of Sinbad's old man of the sea. Another point of resemblance to Jonson on the wrong side is the absence or insignificance of feminine interest throughout his works. No poet ever showed less love or regard for women, less care to study or less power to paint them. With the exception of a couple of passages in his two best comedies, the wide field of Chapman's writings will be found wellnigh barren of any tender or noble trace of passion or emotion kindled between man and woman.

These two passages stand out in beautiful and brilliant contrast to the general tone of the poet's mood; the praise of love has seldom been uttered with loftier and sweeter eloquence than in the well-known verses\* which celebrate it as "nature's second sun," inform-

\* *All Fools*, Act i, Scene 1.

ing and educating the latent virtues in man "as the sun doth colours"; the structure and cadence of the verse, the choice and fullness of the words, are alike memorable for the perfect power and purity, the strong simplicity and luminous completeness of workmanship which may be (too rarely) found and enjoyed in the poetry of Chapman. The passage in *The Gentleman Usher* (Act iv, Scene 3), which sets forth the excellence of perfect marriage, has less of poetic illustration and imaginative colour, but is a no less admirable model of clear and vigorous language applied to the fit and full expression of high thought and noble emotion. But as a rule we find the genius of Chapman at its best when furthest removed from female influence; as in the two plays of Biron and those nobler parts of the "Roman tragedy" of *Cæsar and Pompey* in which Cato discourses on life and death. The two leading heroines of his tragic drama, Tamyra and Caropia, are but a slippery couple of sententious harlots, who deliver themselves in eloquent and sometimes in exalted verse to such amorous or vindictive purpose as the action of the play may suggest. Whether the secret of this singular defect in a dramatic poet were to be sought in coldness of personal temperament, in narrowness of intellectual interest, or simply in the accidental circumstances which may have given a casual direction to his life and thought, we need not now think to conjecture. He was ready enough to read lectures on love or lust, to expatiate with a dry scholastic sensuality on the details and influences of form and colour, to apply the terms and subtleties of metaphysical definition

to the physical anatomy of beauty ; indeed, one at least of his poems may be described as a study in philosophic vivisection applied by a lover to his mistress, in which analysis and synthesis of material and spiritual qualities in action and reaction of cause and effect meet and confound each other—to say nothing of the reader. But of pure passion and instinctive simplicity of desire or delight there is little more trace than of higher emotion or deeper knowledge of such things as belong alike to mind and body, and hold equally of the spirit and the flesh.

Here again we find that Jonson and Chapman stand far apart from their fellow men of genius. The most ambitious and the most laborious poets of their day, conscious of high aims and large capacities, they would be content with no crown that might be shared by others ; they had each his own severe and haughty scheme of study and invention, and sought for no excellence which lay beyond or outside it ; that any could lie above, past the reach of their strong arms and skilful hands, past the scope of their keen and studious eyes, they would probably have been unable to believe or to conceive. And yet there were whole regions of high poetic air, whole worlds of human passion and divine imagination which might be seen by humbler eyes than theirs and trodden by feebler feet, where their robust lungs were powerless to breathe, and their strenuous song fell silent. Not greater spirits alone, such as Marlowe's and Shakespeare's, but such lesser spirits as Decker's had the secret of ways unknown to them in the world of poetry, the key of chambers from



which they were shut out. In Marlowe the passion of ideal love for the ultimate idea of beauty in art or nature found its perfect and supreme expression, faultless and unforced. The radiant ardour of his desire, the light and the flame of his aspiration, diffused and shed through all the forms of his thought and all the colours of his verse, gave them such shapeliness and strength of life as is given to the spirits of the greatest poets alone.

He, far rather than Chaucer or Spenser, whose laurels were first fed by the dews and sunbeams of Italy and France, whose songs were full of sweet tradition from oversea, of memories and notes which "came mended from their tongues"—he alone was the true Apollo of our dawn, the bright and morning star of the full midsummer day of English poetry at its highest. Chaucer, Wyatt, and Spenser had left our language as melodious, as fluent, as flexible to all purposes of narrative or lyrical poetry as it could be made by the grace of genius; the supreme note of its possible music was reserved for another to strike. Of English blank verse, one of the few highest forms of verbal harmony or poetic expression, the genius of Marlowe was the absolute and divine creator. By mere dint of original and god-like instinct he discovered and called it into life; and at his untimely and unhappy death, more lamentable to us all than any other on record except Shelley's, he left the marvellous instrument of his invention so nearly perfect that Shakespeare first and afterwards Milton came to learn of him before they could vary or improve on it. In the changes rung by them on the keys first tuned by Marlowe

we trace a remembrance of the touches of his hand ; in his own cadences we catch not a note of any other man's. This poet, a poor scholar of humblest parentage, lived to perfect the exquisite metre invented for narrative by Chaucer, giving it (to my ear at least) more of weight and depth, of force and fullness, than its founder had to give ; he invented the highest and hardest form of English verse, the only instrument since found possible for our tragic or epic poetry ; he created the modern tragic drama ; and at the age of thirty he went

Where Orpheus and where Homer are.

Surely there are not more than two or three names in any literature which can be set above the poet's of whom this is the least that can in simple truth be said. There is no record extant of his living likeness ; if his country should ever bear men worthy to raise a statue or a monument to his memory, he should stand before them with the head and eyes of an Apollo looking homeward from earth into the sun : a face and figure, in the poet's own great phrase,

Like his desire, lift upward and divine.

To all things alike we find applied in turn this fervour of ideal passion ; to the beauty of women, to the hunger after sway, to the thirst after knowledge, to the energy of friendship or ambition, to the energy of avarice or revenge. Sorrow and triumph and rapture and despair find in his poetry their most single and intense expression, extreme but not excessive ; the pleasures and the pains of each

passion are clothed with the splendour and harmony of pure conceptions fitted with perfect words.

There is the same simple and naked power of abstract outline in every stroke of every study which remains to us from his hand ; in the strenuous greed and fantastic hate of Barabas, in the hysteric ardours and piteous agonies of Edward, in the illimitable appetite of Tamburlaine for material rule and of Faustus for spiritual empire, and in the highest and haughtiest aspirations of either towards that ultimate goal of possession where he may lay hands on power unattainable and touch lips with beauty inexpressible by man, we trace the same ideal quality of passion. In the most glorious verses ever fashioned by a poet to express with subtle and final truth the supreme aim and the supreme limit of his art, the glory and the joy of his labour, the satisfaction and the insufficiency of its triumph in the partial and finite expression of an infinite delight and an indefinite desire, Marlowe has summed up all that can be said or thought on the office and the object, the means and the end of this highest form of spiritual ambition, which for him was as it were shadowed forth in all symbols and reflected in all shapes of human energy, in all exaltations of the spirit, in all aspirations of the will. Being a poet of the first order, he was content to know and to accept the knowledge that ideal beauty lies beyond the most beautiful forms and ideal perfection beyond the most perfect words that art can imbue with life or inflame with colour ; an excellence that expression can never realize, that possession can never destroy.

The nearer such an artist's work comes to this

abstract perfection of absolute beauty, the more clearly will he see and the more gladly will he admit that it never can come so near as to close with it and find, as in things of meaner life, a conclusion set in the act of fruition to the sense of enjoyment, a goal fixed at a point attainable where the delight of spiritual desire may be consummated, and consumed in the moment of its consummation. A man of the second order of genius is of his nature less quick to apprehend the truth that

If all the pens that ever poets held  
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,

and if one single and supreme poem could embody  
in distilled expression the spirit and the sense of

every sweetness that inspired their hearts,  
Their minds, and muses on admired themes,

there would remain behind all things attainable and expressible in sound or form or colour something that will not be expressed or attained, nor pass into the likeness of any perishable life ; but though all were done that all poets could do,

Yet should there hover in their restless heads  
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,  
Which into words no virtue can digest.

No poet ever came nearer than Marlowe to the expression of this inexpressible beauty, to the incarnation in actual form of ideal perfection, to the embodiment in mortal music of immortal harmony ; and he it is who has left on record and on evidence to all time the truth that no poet can ever come nearer. The lesser artist, with less liberty of action,

will be the likelier of the two to show less loyalty of submission to the eternal laws of thought which find their full and natural expression in the eternal canons of art. In him we shall find that intellectual energy has taken what it can of the place and done what it can of the work proper to ideal passion. This substitution of an intellectual for an ideal end, of energetic mental action for passionate spiritual emotion as the means towards that end, is as good a test as may be taken of the difference in kind rather than in degree between the first and the second order of imaginative artists. By the change of instrument alone a critic of the higher class may at once verify the change of object. In almost every page of Chapman's noblest work we discern the struggle and the toil of a powerful mind convulsed and distended as by throes of travail in the effort to achieve something that lies beyond the proper aim and the possible scope of that form of art within which it has set itself to work. The hard effort of a strong will, the conscious purpose of an earnest ambition, the laborious obedience to a resolute design is as perceptible in Jonson and Chapman as in Shakespeare and in Marlowe is the instinct of spiritual harmony, the loyalty and the liberty of impulse and of work. The lesser poets are poets prepense; the greater are at once poets of their own making and of nature's, equidistant in their line of life from the mere singing-bird and the mere student.

Of the first order we may be sure that in any age or country the men that compose it must have been what they were, great as poets or artists,

lyric or dramatic ; of the second order we may well believe that in a different time or place the names which we find written in its catalogue might have been distinguished by other trophies than such as they now recall. And this, which may seem to imply a superiority of intellectual power, does actually imply the reverse. Those are not the greatest among men of whom we can reasonably conceive that circumstance might have made them as great in some different way from that in which they walked ; those are not the highest poets or soldiers or statesmen whom it is possible or permissible to imagine as winning equal fame in some other field than their own, by the application to some other end of such energy and genius as made them great in the line which they were impelled to select at least as much by pressure of accident as by force of instinct, by the external necessity of chance as by the internal necessity of nature. Accident and occasion may be strongest with men of the second order ; but with minds of the first rank that which we call the impulse of nature is yet more strong than they. I doubt not that Jonson might in another age have sought and won distinction from the active life of soldiership or of statecraft ; I take leave to doubt whether Shakespeare, had he sought it, would have won.

I am not disinclined to admit the supposition that Chapman might have applied his power of moral thought and his interest in historic action to other ends than they ever served in literature or in life. But neither for his sake nor for ours am I disposed to regret that circumstance or



destiny should have impelled or induced him to take instead that way of work which has given his memory a right to live with that of men who could never have taken another way than they took; which has made it honourable and venerable to all who have any reverence for English poetry or regard for English fame; which has set him for ever in the highest place among the servants and interpreters of Homer, and allowed us to inscribe in our imagination, as on the pedestal of a statue reared in thought to the father of our tragic verse, the name of George Chapman not too discreditably far beneath the name of Christopher Marlowe.

## APPENDIX

The following list of passages extracted from Chapman's poems by the editor of the Elizabethan anthology published in 1600 under the name of *England's Parnassus; or, The Choicest Flowers of our Modern Poets*, was drawn up from my own copy of the original edition before I was aware that a similar list had been compiled by Mr. J. P. Collier to accompany and illustrate a private reprint of the book. From this source I learn that one extract given at p. 312 as from Chapman is in fact taken from the *Albion's England* of Warner; as indeed, though acquainted only with fragmentary excerpts from that poem, I had already conjectured that it must be. This is preceded by another extract signed with the name of Chapman, which

according to Mr. Collier is discoverable in *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*; but after a second and third search through every turn and recess of that dense and torrid jungle of bad and good verses I have failed to light on this particular weed or flower. Five other extracts have baffled alike my own researches and the far more capable inquisition of even Mr. Collier's learning; nor have they proved traceable by the energy and enthusiasm of Chapman's latest editor, who has properly included them in his text as authentic fragments of unknown poems by the writer to whom four of them have been assigned by Robert Allot, the editor of *England's Parnassus*. The second of these five passages he ascribes to Spenser; Spenser's it undoubtedly is not; and as it is followed by an excerpt from Chapman's *Hero and Leander*, which is likewise bestowed on Spenser by the too hasty liberality of the old editor, we have some additional reason to rely on the unmistakable evidence of the style, which bears immediate witness to the peculiar handiwork of Chapman. The last excerpt but one seems familiar to me, and is rather in the manner of Greene or Peele and their fellows than of Chapman or any later poet; I cannot but think that a student more deeply read than I in the poems interspersed among the romances of Greene and Lodge might be able to trace both the two last passages of the five here fathered on Chapman to the hand of one or the other. They have the fluency or fluidity rather of the blank verse written by the smaller scholastic poets whom we may see grouped about the feet of Marlowe; the same facile profusion and effusion of

classic imagery, the same equable elegance and graceful tenuity of style, crossed here and there by lines of really high and tender beauty. It may be thought that in that case they would have been as speedily and as surely tracked by Mr. Collier as were the verses transferred from Warner to Chapman; but the most learned and acute among scholars cannot always remember the right place for all things on which his eye must have lit in the course of a lifelong study; and I find in Mr. Collier's list two passages, one given at p. 22 of *England's Parnassus* under the heading "Bliss," the other at p. 108 under the heading "Gifts," marked as of unknown origin, of which the first occurs in the fifth sestiad of Chapman's *Hero and Leander*, the second in his *Shadow of Night*. These in the list that follows are assigned to their proper places. The number of the page referred to on the left is that in *England's Parnassus*; the number on the right refers to the page in which the same passage appears in the first edition of Chapman's collected poems.

*List of Passages extracted from Chapman's Poems in "England's Parnassus; or, The Choicest Flowers of our Modern Poets." 1600.*

PAGE	PAGE
3. The golden chain of Homer's high device .	6
9. Things senseless live by art, and rational die .	77
12. Sacred Beauty is the fruit of sight .	29
15. All excellence of shape is made for sight .	33
(In the next line E.P. reads :	
" To be a beetle else were no defame.")	
16. Rich Beauty, that each lover labours for	30, 31

PAGE		PAGE
16.	O Beauty, still thy empire swims in blood .	31
17.	*Beauty enchasing love, love gaining beauty .	29
„	This Beauty fair † is an enchantment made .	29
19.	Beauty (in) heaven and earth this grace doth win	76
20.	O Beauty, how attractive is thy power ! .	31
21.	So respected	
	Was Bashfulness in Athens . . . . .	86
„	Preferment seldom graceth Bashfulness . . . . .	83
22.	Hard it is	
	To imitate a false and forgèd bliss . . . . .	82
„	Bliss not in height doth dwell . . . . .	90
38.	All wealth and wisdom rests in true content ‡	29
40.	Action is fiery valour's sovereign good . . . . .	85
47.	Round-headed Custom th' apoplexy is § . . . . .	74
56.	In things without us no delight is sure . . . . .	76
67.	Fierce lightning from her eyes . . . . .	80
68.	Begin where lightness will, in shame it ends . . . . .	80
108.	Good gifts are often given to men past good . . . . .	13
110.	King Amalthea was transformed by Jove . . . . .	5

\* E.P. has three misprints in this extract; "gaining" for "gracing," "conflict" for "constant," "time content" for "true content"; but in a later extract at p. 38 it gives the right reading, and cites the two first lines of the stanza following, which with the third and fourth are here omitted. It attempts, however, to correct two seeming errors in the fifth and sixth: reading "is" for "in" and "thrones" for "thorns"; but in the first instance the text will be found right if the punctuation be corrected by striking out the period at the end of the line preceding; and "thorns" may be taken to mean the harsh doctrines of the stoics subsequently referred to. In the ninth line of this unlucky stanza E.P. misprints "grave" for "graven."

† So E.P. for "beauty's fair"; and in v. 5 reads "fault" for "fate," and in v. 8 "god self-love" for "good self-love."

‡ In this extract E.P. corrects "Bend in our circle" to "Bound"; a reading which seems to me preferable.

§ This is the reading in E.P. of the line

"But custom, that the apoplexy is";

the two following lines are transcribed exactly as they stand in the third sestiad of *Hero and Leander*.

## 138 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

PAGE	PAGE
120. Good deeds in case that they be evil placed * .	?
141. Many use temples to set godly faces . . .	?
161. The † noblest born dame should industrious be	86
164. In chastity is ever prostitute . . . . .	15
170. They double life that dead things' grief sustain .	77
172. Love is a golden bubble, full of dreams . . .	74
174. Love is a wanton famine, rich in food . . .	35
178. Love laws and judges hath in fee . . . . .	49
180. Love paints his longings in sweet virgins' eyes	87
181. Trifling attempts no serious acts advance . .	77
183. Pure love, said she, the purest grace pursues .	34
196. What doth make man without the parts of men	5
197. Like as rude painters that contend to show . .	6
198. Hymen that now is god of nuptial rights ‡ . .	82
„ Before them on an altar be presented . . . . .	86
„	In Athens §
„ The custom was that every maid did wear . . .	86
208. The mind hath in itself    a deity . . . . .	15
„ That mind most is beautiful and high . . . . .	16
221. We must in matters moral quite reject . . . . .	32
230. Too much desire to please pleasure divorces .	28
260. Like ¶ as a glass is an inanimate eye . . . . .	74
271. None is so poor of sense and eyne	
„ To whom a soldier doth not shine . . . . .	45
„ No elegancie ** can beautify . . . . .	44
273. Every good motion that the soul awakes . . .	?

\* This extract runs thus in E.P. :

“Good deeds, in case that they be evil placed,  
Ill deeds are reckonèd, and soon disgraced.  
That is a good deed that prevents a bad.”

The third line occurs in the third sestiad of *Hero and Leander* (p. 76).

† So E.P. for “And.”

‡ So E.P. for “rites.”

§ These two words are interpolated by the editor of E.P.

|| So E.P. for “herself.”

¶ So E.P. for “For” ; and in the next verse “outwardly” for “inwardly.”

\*\* So E.P. for “elegance.”

PAGE		PAGE
274.	As Phœbus throws His beams abroad though he in clouds be closed (These two are attributed to Spenser in E.P.)	74
285.	Time's golden thigh Upholds the flowery body of the earth . . . . .	72
292.	Virtue makes honour, as the soul doth sense . . . . .	32
„	Joy graven in sense like snow in water wastes . . . . .	72
295.	Good vows are never broken with good deeds . . . . .	76
„	We know not how to vow till love unblind us. . . . .	76
297.	Use makes things nothing huge, and huge things nothing . . . . .	32
303.	Wisdom and the sight of heavenly things Shines not so clear as earthly vanities ( <i>Blind Beggar of Alexandria</i> , vol. 1, p. 2.)	
305.	Best loves are lost for wit, when men blame fortune . . . . .	32
308.	Words well placed move things were never thought . . . . .	32
312.	Their virtues mount like billows to the skies . . . . .	?
„	Women were made for this intent, to put us into pain. ( <i>Warner's Albion's England.</i> )	
314.	Women never Love beauty in their sex, but envy ever . . . . .	83
„	Women are most won when men merit least * . . . . .	83
321.	Nothing doth the world so full of † mischief fill . . . . .	82
324.	The gentle humorous night Implies ‡ her middle course, and the sharp east . . . . .	?

\* In the third line of this extract E.P. reads "Love's *proper* lesson" instead of "*special*."

† So E.P. The right reading of this beautiful couplet is:

Ah, nothing doth the world with mischief fill,  
But want of feeling one another's ill.

*Hero and Leander*, 5th sestiad.

(E.P. prints "will" for "ill.")

‡ This word alone would suffice to vindicate the authenticity of the fragment. It recurs perpetually in the poems of Chapman, who always uses it in the same peculiar and licentious manner.



# 140 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

PAGE		PAGE
355.	With a brace of silver hinds . . . . .	9
356.	Nature's bright eyesight, and the world's fair soul . . . . .	10
357.	Amongst this gamesome crew is seen . . . . .	48
366.	In flowery season of the year . . . . .	43
	(With two lines prefixed at bottom of preceding page— The tenth of March when Aries received Dan Phoebus' rays into his horned head.)	
372.	Day's king, God of undaunted verse . . . . .	81
379.	All suddenly a light of twenty hues . . . . .	72, 73
395.	She lay, and seemed a flood of diamant . . . . .	29, 30
	(Omitting " Now Ovid's muse—to make me better.")	
399.	Their soft young cheek-balls to the eye . . . . .	47
407.	To make the wondrous power of love appear . . . . .	36
409.	*Then cast she off her robe and stood upright. . . . .	23
	„ Herewith she rose, like the autumnal star . . . . .	31
417.	See where she issues in her beauty's pomp . . . . .	?
	„ Her hair was loose, and 'bout her shoulders hung . . . . .	?
422.	Like † as a taper burning in the dark . . . . .	31
	„ Now as when heaven is muffled with the vapours . . . . .	33
424.	As when Jove at once from east to ‡ west . . . . .	33
464.	As she was looking in a glass . . . . .	32
	(Her glass in the text.)	
469.	In little time these ladies found . . . . .	47
481.	(Misprinted 465). In that mead-proud-making grass . . . . .	41, 42
485.	A soft enflowered bank embraced the fount . . . . .	23
488.	Grim Melampus with the Ethiop's feet . . . . .	13

There are thus in this anthology no less than eighty-one extracts ascribed to Chapman, besides

\* In the third line of this stanza *England's Parnassus* reads "her night" for "the night"; in the eighth "choisefull" for "charmfal"; in the ninth "varnishing" for "vanishing."

† So E. P. for "And."

‡ So E.P. for "and."

two of which one is known and the other suspected to be the work of his hand; these are wrongly assigned to Spenser. At the time of this publication Chapman was in his forty-second year; he had published but two plays and three volumes of verse, the third being his continuation of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. Of the eighty-three passages numbered above, thirty-two are taken from this poem, twenty-five from *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, ten from *The Shadow of Night*, eight from *The Contention of Phillis and Flora*, a quaint and sometimes a graceful version into the Elizabethan dialect of a Latin or more probably a quasi-Latin poem ascribed by Ritson to one of the most famous among mediæval masters; one is taken from the first scene of his first play, one is spurious, and six (including the passage wrongly referred in a former list to *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*), whether spurious or genuine, have yet to be traced to their true source. In his critical memoir of Marlowe (*Works*, vol. i, p. lvii, ed. 1850), Mr. Dyce observes that "the editor of *England's Parnassus* appears never to have resorted to manuscript sources"; and if, as is of course most probable, the supposition of that great scholar and careful critic be well founded, we must conclude that these passages, as well as the more precious and exquisite fragment of a greater poet which called forth this remark from his editor, were extracted by Allot from some printed book or books long lost to human sight. One small but noticeable extract of two lines and a half descriptive of midnight is evidently, I think, from a lost play. The taste of the worthy person who compiled this

first English anthology was remarkable apparently for its equal relish of good verse and bad ; but we may be grateful that it was by no means confined to the more popular and dominant authors of his age, such as Spenser and Sidney ; since his faculty of miscellaneous admiration has been the means of preserving many curious fragments of fine or quaint verse, and occasionally a jewel of such price as the fragment of Marlowe which alike for tone of verse and tune of thought so vividly recalls Shelley's poem, *The Question*, written in the same metre and spirit, that one is tempted to dream that some particles of the "predestined plot of dust and soul" which had once gone to make up the elder must have been used again in the composition of the younger poet, who in fiery freedom of thought and speech was like no other of our greatest men but Marlowe, and in that as in his choice of tragic motive was so singularly like this one.

THE EARLIER PLAYS OF  
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER



## THE EARLIER PLAYS OF BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

FOR any man born only a little lesser than the greatest, a little lower than the angels or the gods of song, it is the heaviest and most enduring of all conceivable misfortunes to have been rated for a time among them if not above them. That a Jephson or a Tate, a Cibber or an Ibsen, should for a moment be compared or preferred to Shakespeare by any howling dervish or laughing jackass of letters is a matter of no moment: that men of genius should ever have been thrust forward as claimants for so ridiculous a promotion is only too certain to impair or to imperil, it may be for only too many generations, the recognition of their genuine claims to honour. That typical Oxonicule, the Rev. William Cartwright, "the most florid and seraphical preacher in the university," not only damned himself to everlasting fame, but did what in him lay to damn the reputation of Fletcher by assuring his departed spirit that "Shakespeare to thee was dull," obscene, inartistic, and scurrilous: dull as compared to the author of *The Nice Valour*, obscene as compared to the author of *The Custom of the Country*, inartistic as compared to the author of *The Sea Voyage*, and scurrilous as compared to the



author of *The Scornful Lady*. The criticism is worthy of Matthew Arnold: and even he could not have surpassed it in perversity of cultivated impertinence and audacity of self-erratic conceit. But time has always done justice, when time was needed to do justice, on the academic aberrations of complacent incompetence and overweening culture. It is of far more importance that justice should be done to the victims of their admiration. To be dispraised is nothing: to be mispraised may be dangerous. Justice has never been done to Beaumont and Fletcher since the days in which their work was set up against Shakespeare's. It is time to consider so rich and various a treasure as they have bequeathed us without consideration or recollection of the fact that their garnets were once preferred to Shakespeare's rubies, their pearls to his diamonds. No other dramatic treasury can boast of so magnificent a display in quantity, in quality, and in variety of jewels.

It must be allowed that no expert in gems would have given much for the first sample of their workshop. The generous and cordial friendship of Ben Jonson could hardly have applauded so crude and juvenile a study in his school of comedy as *The Woman-Hater*. It is readable, absurd, and amusing: I cannot think that much more can be said for it. The rather dreary and mouldy Spanish tradition of jocularly on the subject of hunger and gluttony revives here in a final renaissance of farcical effect which may charitably be found not altogether unworthy of a tolerant rather than of a sympathetic smile: but the protagonist is a mere monomaniac,

and the heroine is too eccentric to pass muster except as a type of the very newest and oldest of new women whom we may meet in the pages of Aristophanes or the columns of the *Times*.

In the tragedy of *Thierry and Theodoret* a new touch is felt—a new voice is audible. There is here no trace of Jonson's influence; nor is there any sign of Shakespeare's except in so far as we may say that all subsequent good work in tragedy must inevitably bear witness to the effect of Marlowe's example and of his. For this is good work, as well as new: the impetuous and continuous rush of the fluent and fervent verse is only the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual ardour, headlong and heedless of reflection or restraint, which impels the writer's genius along its passionate and breathless course. Even if, as has been plausibly suggested, the staid and less vehement hand of Massinger may here and there be traced, this play is on the whole about the finest and the fullest evidence left us of Fletcher's magnificent but far from supreme power as a tragic poet. The men are nothing: at least they are but rough and rudely coloured sketches. The abnormal wickedness of Brunhalt, the abnormal goodness of Ordella, give all the life and interest to the tragic action that readers can ever find in it or that spectators ever can have found. It is not quite human life: for the interest excited is hardly in human nature. But, such as it is, the interest is unflinchingly sustained, and the style is as admirable in its impulsive fashion as is the style of Marlowe and Shakespeare and Webster in the nobler and more

serious manner appropriate to higher and sincerer inspiration.

Something more of such inspiration is perceptible in *Philaster*: and yet, leaving Shakespeare out of the question, we find here no figures comparable for creative power and living truth to *Faustus* and *Edward*, to *Vittoria* and *Bracciano*, the *Duchess* and her brothers. The boyish or feminine incapacity to draw even in outline, to paint even in monochrome, the likeness of a man, which is here so unmistakably displayed, was evidently no evidence of inferior power, no reason for inferior regard, in the estimate of contemporary admiration. Among all their tragic or serious heroes we may look in vain for the lifelike figure of a conceivable and acceptable man. A gallant and roistering humorist they could paint better and more delightfully, with more contagious sympathy and more audacious truth, than even the great *Dumas* himself; but the finest type of heroic manhood imaginable by either is a knight of *Malta*; an *Origen* in armour; a hero who renounces manhood. *Philaster* is something worse: he is hardly the shadow, the phantom, the wraith of a living man. The she-page *Bellario* is simply the loveliest and most interesting of all dramatic hermaphrodites from Shakespeare's *Viola* down to *Wycherley's Fidelia*: it is curious and significant that *Beaumont* and *Fletcher* could never create a man or a woman so attractive as this fantastic and pathetic figure, whose unquestionable and inimitable charm of perfect purity and more than manly womanhood threw so strange a fascination over the stage that it was a less outrageously than pardonably<sup>ly</sup> extravagant

exaggeration of the truth which Lamb allowed himself in the assertion that "for many years after the date of *Philaster's* first exhibition on the stage scarce a play can be found without one of these women pages in it." Certainly, as he adds, "our ancestors seem to have been wonderfully delighted with these transformations of sex." But after all it must be admitted that the vital and enduring fascination of this beautiful and famous play depends less on character or on incident than on the exquisite and living loveliness of the style—most attractive when least realistic, most memorable when least dramatic.

The authors of *The Maid's Tragedy* succeeded in showing themselves at all points superior to the authors of *Philaster*. Their poetic power is equal in charm and more perfectly adapted or subordinated to the demands of dramatic art, the laws of theatrical evolution or construction. That they could not draw even in outline the figure of a man—that a protagonist of heroic mould, such as Marlowe's *Faustus* or Webster's *Virginus*, was not only unrepresentable, but inconceivable by the purely passionate and impulsive nature of their tragic genius—this masterpiece would suffice to prove, even without the evidence of their later tragedies. The heroes, or rather the passive and the braggart figures of manhood proposed for our acceptance as the heroes of the play, are not above the rather lamentable level of *Philaster*. But the sinners are better than their elders; Pharamond and his Megra are little more than the sketches of a hot-blooded and headlong boy if set against the vivid, vigorous outlines of

Evadne and her king. Yet, exquisite though it is as a poem, this famous tragedy is the first example of an English play in which all other considerations are subordinate to the imperious demands, the dominant exactions, of stage effect. Evadne is the one thoroughly credible and thoroughly realized figure in the play: a bad woman who might not have made so bad a man. Of the two heroes it can only be further said that Amintor is abject and Melantius absurd: the king is now and then as theatrical in villainy as they in virtue, and Aspatia is not so much a woman as a mouthpiece and a subject for poetry incomparable in its kind. Shakespeare and Webster did not find it necessary and did not feel impelled to make their heroines talk so lyrically and evoke from other and minor figures such effusion of elegiac eloquence. In the earlier scenes she says now and then something that could not have been bettered by Webster or even by Shakespeare: but she never has enough of life and truth in her to stand beside "one of Shakespeare's women"—or of Webster's.

That Fletcher or any of his friends should have thought it probable or possible for *The Faithful Shepherdess* to find favour on the stage is the most wonderful and unimaginable witness we could have to the delight of an English audience in pure and absolute poetry throughout the age of Shakespeare—during the generation that reaches from the sunrise of Marlowe to the sunset of Shirley. That the loveliest of all pastoral plays ever set by fancy in the frame of a fantastic Arcadia should have evoked by its failure such noble tributes of indignant

admiration from contemporary poets is an accident which may well be held worthy of rejoicing and thanksgiving by all who believe that sympathy and gratitude rather than defamation and envy are natural to all men not utterly ignoble and all competitors not utterly incompetent. The difference between this poem and Milton's exquisitely imitative *Comus* is the difference between a rose with a leaf or two faded or falling, but still fragrant and radiant, and the faultless but scentless reproduction of a rose in academic wax for the admiration and imitation of such craftsmen as must confine their ambition to the laurels of a college or the plaudits of a school. The figures who play their parts on the woodland stage of this fairyland theatre are hardly amenable to criticism as actual or possible men and women. The lover whose love is curable by compliance and destructible by the destruction of his idol's ideal inaccessibility would be absurdly misplaced in the world of comedy or tragedy : in the world of fancy, a world made up of poetic artifice and tradition, he is a perfectly appropriate and coherent figure, native to his fantastic element. To the same world the constant Clorin and the wanton Cloe so unmistakably belong that the serious application of an ethical standard to their conduct or their characters is as inept as a poet's objection to the unimaginative realism of mathematics or a mathematician's to the sterile impotence of poetry if applied to the proof of a theorem or the solution of a problem. The most exquisitely appreciative and the most nearly infallible of critics fell surely for once into inconsistent partiality and untenable paradox when he



objected to the contrast of the lascivious with the virginal shepherdess on the score that "such weeds by juxtaposition do not set off but kill sweet flowers," and defended the outrageous obscenities of *The Virgin Martyr* on the plea that they "have a strength of contrast, a raciness and a glow in them which set off the religion of the rest, somehow as Caliban serves to show Miranda." Such dunghill weeds as those were never planted or watered by Fletcher.

It is curious from the historic or literary point of view that the first burlesque ever presented on our stage should still be so very much the best. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is at least as superior to *The Rehearsal* at all points as the fifth act of *The Chances* substituted by the author of *The Rehearsal* for Fletcher's original fifth act is superior in dramatic force, character, and humour to that hasty and headlong scrawl of a sketch. The seemingly incongruous interfusion of serious and sometimes noble poetry might have been expected to destroy the broad comic effect of parody and raillery which it actually heightens. The good old city poet whose Cockney heroics it made no unkindly fun of, and whose homely power of pathetic realism was a quality altogether beyond the reach of Beaumont or of Fletcher, might have smiled without wincing at so good-humoured and hurtless a caricature of his counter-jumping paladins.

In theatrical magnificence of incident and effect *A King and No King* is as supreme a triumph as is *Othello* or *King Lear* in poetic sublimity and spiritual intensity of truth made manifest and awful in beauty

as in terror to all ages of mankind. To say that there is nothing more in it would be shamefully and stupidly false : there is much beautiful writing and much brilliant vivacity of charm. But all serious study of character, all rational or moral evolution of conduct, is wantonly if not shamelessly sacrificed to the immediate effect of vehement if not sometimes galvanic sensation or surprise. The outrages on human possibility in the parts of Gobrias and Arane, the magnanimous murderess in design and the virtuous promoter of a supposedly incestuous passion, would have been impossible to any other poet and even to any other playwright of genius in any way comparable either with Beaumont or with Fletcher. That any soldier king was ever such a blatant braggart and swaggering swashbuckler as Arbaces might surely have been questioned, as now perhaps it may not be, in the days of the poets who decked out his crazy and feather-headed vanity with the splendid plumage of rhetorical rhapsody which, as Macaulay long since observed, so singularly anticipates the discoveries of modern mechanism.

The peculiar boyishness which distinguishes alike the tragic and the comic genius of Beaumont and Fletcher, but more especially the tragic work of Fletcher and the comic work of Beaumont, displays itself most amusingly in the once-famous parts of the three beaten braggarts which in their day were classed with the incomparable figure of Bobadil. The far from subtle or exquisite humour of kicking and cudgelling may have been caught from the example of their illustrious friend and occasional model, Ben Jonson : but the lightness of touch, the

buoyancy of burlesque, must be allowed to give it a tone of contagious pleasantry which the heavier hand of the more serious artist has not given and perhaps did not care to give. The veriest horse-play of farce in the broadest scenes of Beaumont and Fletcher has more of good-humour and harmless or, anyhow, spiteless merriment than is to be looked for in the elaborate and deliberate brutality of such an unsavoury masterpiece as *The Silent Woman*.

The eccentric tragedy of *Cupid's Revenge* has always been a butt for the shafts of sarcasm rather than criticism. It is certainly somewhat grotesque and amorphous if not abnormal; we cannot be surprised that both Campbell and Dyce should have dismissed it with a bitter word of scorn. But a far greater than they or than any other critic of our great dramatic poets has not only embalmed its noblest passages in the deathless amber of a priceless volume, but has selected it for the supreme honour of a condensed rendering into narrative prose after the fashion of his incomparable *Tales from Shakespeare*. The rough and ready improvisation which reduces to a far lower level all the huddled and head-long later part of the play is as evidently due to enforced haste or natural weariness of the work in hand as is the inferiority of the latter part of Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* to the magnificent beauty and power of its opening scenes. To imagine in either or in any such case the necessary or the probable intervention or intrusion of a foreign hand and a feebler touch is a facile and uncritical evasion rather than explanation of a problem suggested by the naturally inevitable inequality of the finished

parts with the hurried parts of even a great writer's work, when casually compelled to write against time for the stage or for any other pulpit or tribune required for the utterance of whatever he has to say. But no pantomimic absurdity in the opening and no convulsive debility in the closing scenes of the play can efface or should be allowed to affect the impression of the two scenes between Leucippus and his mistress before and after his chivalrous and mendacious affirmation of her virtue has resulted, during his absence at the seat of war, in her marriage with his father: a situation treated with characteristic frankness, but handled with exceptional delicacy. It may be remembered that Mr. Samuel Pepys, on August 17, 1668, "saw *Cupid's Revenge*, under the new name of *Love Despised*, that hath something very good in it, though I like not the whole body of it." The somewhat eccentric judge who preferred Tuke as a dramatic poet to Shakespeare at his very highest was on this occasion exactly and excellently right. He and Lamb ("Powers eternal! such names mingled!") have alone been just in their expressed or implied judgment of this otherwise unlucky play.

There are some pretty lines thrown away here and there on the not very brilliant masque in celebration of the ill-omened nuptials of Prince Rupert's ill-starred mother; but Beaumont would perhaps have done as well to leave such work to the stronger and more inventive hand of his friend Ben Jonson, whose influence for good and evil, or at least for better and for worse, is evident in Beaumont's part of the *Four Plays in One*, which we must regret to remember

as the only surviving example of a form of dramatic entertainment to which a horrible as well as terrible little work of relentless and realistic genius never to be unquestioningly rejected from the Shakespearean Apocrypha must pretty certainly be admitted to belong. From what context of companion plays or playlets such an inhuman or at least such a merciless masterpiece of condensed and concentrated horror as *A Yorkshire Tragedy* can have been detached by its publisher or its author, no imaginable student above the lowest level of brainless and frontless duncery will care or will presume to conjecture. In the present unique instance it would not be difficult for the youngest possible reader of average intelligence to distinguish and to determine the parts assignable to Beaumont from the parts assignable to Fletcher. The Jonsonian induction is Beaumont's: he was never worse employed than in imitation of his great friend Ben: *exemplar vitiis imitabile* if ever there was one. No one but a poet born could have written *The Triumph of Honour*, though he could only have written it during a transitory eclipse or collapse of his better powers; no one but an imitator of Ben Jonson when least happily inspired could have scribbled the farcical part of it. *The Triumph of Love* should have been a beautiful and pathetic play instead of a beautiful and pathetic sketch: but as it is we must gladly acknowledge that one lovely scene in it has been overpraised neither by Charles Lamb nor by Leigh Hunt. *The Triumph of Death*, in which there certainly is no suggestion of loveliness or pathos, is a superb example of Fletcher's vehement

and fervent, though neither gentle nor sublime, genius for passionate and headlong tragedy. *The Triumph of Time* is a survival of the unfittest—a revival of the obsolete morality play, not improved by a dash of the contemporary masque. It is by no means worthless: but its author would probably have been the first to admit that it was not worth very much.

The noble and cordial verses in which Ben Jonson expressed the fervour of his love for a younger friend who had shown such religious devotion towards him should be borne in mind by the reader who cannot but think that the "religion" so affectionately acknowledged and so generously requited did not bring forth any very sweet or savory fruit in the rather too Jonsonian comedy of *The Scornful Lady*. In all the curious and interesting history of opinion—of moral and intellectual change and progress and reaction—there is nothing more singular than the variations of view among intelligent and honourable men as to decency and indecency, morality and immorality. It must surely be now incomprehensible to any student of letters or of ethics that so unquestionably good and true a man as Dr. Johnson should have denounced the noble and natural story of *Tom Jones* as a "corrupt" book, and agreed with the clergy of his day in commending to decent readers the infamous and abominable story of *Pamela*. If the one is sometimes blunt, the other is always vile. *The Scornful Lady* is, of course, not so ignoble and impure an abortion of immorality as Richardson's shamelessly shameful book; and in a rough way it



is a vigorous and memorable example of the very broadest comedy: but alike in matter and in manner, in language and in character, it is undeniably the coarsest work of its authors. And yet it was so long held comparatively blameless that this particular discredit has generally been transferred to a far less offensive work of more graceful if still somewhat graceless audacity in treatment and in humour. Even Wycherley, if at his worst more basely and brutally immoral, was hardly more impudent in theatrical invention or device of daringly and undeniably comic effect.

The strange and straggling tragicomedy of *The Coxcomb* is as unadvisedly and as singularly misnamed from the idiotic protagonist of the uninterestingly extravagant underplot as is a far more memorable example of dramatic poetry, the masterpiece at once of Middleton and of Rowley which was somehow most absurdly misbaptized as *The Changeling*. In the gentle and devoted heroine of the more serious part there is a touch of simplicity and sweetness, in devotion and submission, of daring and of patience, which distinguishes her as a daughter of Beaumont's genius from the more vehement and voluble children of Fletcher's. Another play which is no less obviously a compound work, not less interesting and not less insufficient to satisfy a serious and grateful admirer of their sometimes rather idle and irregular genius, is *The Honest Man's Fortune*. The hero is a nobler and manlier type of manhood than any of Fletcher's when left to work by himself; but the movement and ease and spontaneity of the action in all but his very worst

and hastiest and most puerile plays, if not even in those rather pitiful puerilities of invention and execution, will hardly be found in this more serious and ambitious poem. The two heroines are admirably sketched rather than admirably painted: but the simplicity and nobility of nature apparent and consistent in them both would be not less hard to find in the more theatrical and conventional heroines of Fletcher's later plays. There are noble passages and magnificent couplets in the little poem appended to this play: it would be difficult if not impossible to match them for moral dignity and for majesty of expression in any other work of Fletcher's: but few readers will probably agree with Leigh Hunt that they suffice to corroborate or to justify the expressed regret of Coleridge that Beaumont and Fletcher had not devoted their genius and their time to writing poems rather than to writing plays.

The ingrained and ineradicable juvenility of mind which distinguishes them from all other men of true and splendid genius is or should be at once apologetically and amusingly patent if not obvious to the readers of that admirably written comedy so childishly misnamed *The Captain*: misnamed from a Jonsonian figure of farce who is once happily humanized by generous sympathy and pity for the supposed sufferings of an elder soldier. The monstrous and abnormal criminality of the almost incredible heroine is more like the impudent fancy of a naughty boy than the corrupt imagination of a depraved man. But so bright and lively a piece of work would in common scholastic justice be set down so decidedly to the youngster's credit as to be

deservedly set against the discredit if not the disgrace due to the juvenile audacity of his immature imagination. And the first scene of cajolery in which the woman's magnificent art of passionate hypocrisy is brought to bear upon a half-conscious and half-reluctant victim, a would-be dupe who cannot dupe himself, is finer than anything I know of the kind in prose or poetry before the advent of Balzac's almighty and ever-living Valérie. Madame Marneffe is as matchless as Madame de Merteuil: but the patrician or the plebeian she-devil of immortal fiction might have given a smile of sympathy if not a hand of sisterhood to the hardly less terrible harlot of an English poet's invention.

In the magnificent melodrama or tragicomedy of *The Little French Lawyer*, it would be impossible to overpraise the brilliancy of invention, the deftness of composition, or the splendour of execution: but the brutality of boyhood is as evident as its joyfulness. From any other hand the ruffianly insolence which derides the infirmity of a veteran hero in the public street would be unendurable and unpardonable; but here the merciless infidelity of the bride who has played false to her earlier and younger lover makes it intelligible if inexcusable. And here the incomparable and inimitable lightness of touch which impairs the tragic work and glorifies the comic work of Fletcher must be allowed by all intelligent or æsthetic judges to redeem the offence which would else be given to the moral or ethical critic of the superb result or outcome of his weakness and his strength—his inevitable limitations and his

magnificent capacities. The juvenile horse-play of practical jokes which animates at once the serious comedy and the rampant farce of this dazzling and delightful poem, a poem in which no alloy of grave or of humorous prose can anywhere be found latent or apparent, contrives in some inexplicable if not inexcusable but bewitching if not irresistible fashion to succeed somehow in fusing them together with such instinctive alchemy of inspiration as to yield by way of product or result a deathless if not blameless masterpiece of comic poetry.

It is impossible to imagine that the author of this most brilliant and buoyant and high-spirited piece of work can have had anything to do, or that his even more glorious friend and compeer can have had anything to do, with one of the dullest and feeblest plays surviving—another survival of the unfittest—from the marvellous and matchless harvest of their time. The Apocrypha of the Scripture bequeathed to us by Beaumont and Fletcher may be more easily and more decisively tested and gauged and disposed of than the Apocrypha of Shakespeare's. That the bright and pleasant comedy of *The Widow* is Middleton's work alone will hardly be questioned by any reader whose time would not be better spent on even the most futile of employments or diversions than in the study of poetic or comic drama: and the most conscientious examination will only find in *The Faithful Friends* a passage or a verse here and there which may charitably be thought not quite bad enough for an old Sharpham or a new Shakespeare. It is perhaps not so utterly worthless and

hopeless a failure as *Cupid's Whirligig* or *Thomas Lord Cromwell*. But it is sad stuff.

The riotous and outrageous farce of *Wit at Several Weapons* is such a play as might conceivably have been written in his nonage by a bastard son of Ben Jonson who had inherited more of the worse than of the better qualities, intellectual and moral, of his illustrious father. Even Ben, whose indignant humour so often concerned itself with crime, would hardly have introduced at the very opening of the action as a figure of pure comedy a veteran in villainy who boasts to his own son of his early successes as a professional pimp, and his later gains by the robbery and ruin of little children confided to his guardianship. This is the most seriously and odiously revolting passage in all the various and voluminous work of these great dramatic poets—or of any that I can remember among their fellows. And this comes of taking life and character too lightly and too stagily. The play is throughout a very slight and rather childish piece of work, with some touches in it of fun rather than of humour—unless there be humour in a schoolboy's pillow-fight. But the intended fun of the opening could only seem funny to an exceptionally ill-conditioned schoolboy. It is only fair to add that some of the heroine's tricks and shifts to rid herself of an idiot suitor and attract a hesitating lover are really not unworthy to remind the reader of Molière in his broader and rougher mood of practical pleasantry.

The genius of Beaumont and Fletcher for pure comedy was at its nadir in *Wit at Several Weapons*: in *Wit Without Money* it rises easily and visibly to

its radiant zenith. The matchless instinct of expression, the incomparable lightness of touch, which distinguishes its best work from all other triumphs of poetic comedy in the language, carries off and sweeps away all too curious or serious consideration of character or conduct. But, indeed, if the protagonist is a somewhat too extravagant figure of humorous extravagance when he joyously makes away with his brother's fortune as well as his own, the younger brother is so noble a fellow when he refuses to resent his ruin, or to forget the finer qualities of his reckless and rapacious elder, that this single figure should suffice to confute all charges ever brought against his creator or his twin creators on the score of immoral incompetence to conceive or to present a morally attractive and admirable young English hero. Even Shakespeare—to say nothing of Jonson, who in this race is quite out of the running—can show no other to be set beside him.\*

The curious laxity with which educated and able men will fling about epithets when engaged in critical comment is rather singularly exemplified in the terms applied by Dyce as well as by Hallam to so magnificent a work of comic and tragic genius as *The Custom of the Country*. Dryden's previous attack on it as compared with his own dirty and greasy comedies and those of his brighter but not

\* Why Frank should be sometimes called Francisco is as insoluble a mystery as why the word "else," a word as necessary to the sense as to the metre, should have been persistently omitted by all editors in the penultimate scene of this comedy. "Do not allure me," says Valentine when secure of his bride. "Thou art no widow of this world (else)!" Without this obvious little word the line is immetrical nonsense.



less unsavoury rivals may be dismissed with a brief expression of regret that so great a writer should have shown himself so small a critic—so stupidly shameless in misjudgment alike from the moral or ethical and from the intelligent or æsthetic point of view. “The very grossest” (as Mr. Dyce unhappily miscalls it) of all these plays is beyond all question *The Scornful Lady*. *The Custom of the Country* is certainly almost as audacious a comic poem as is even the alarmingly fearless and morally rather than immorally impudent *Lysistrata*: but coarse or obscene it is not. There is not a dirty word in it: not a touch, not a whiff, of Swiftian or Carlylesque impurity.

When some forgotten fool observed to Byron that Italian was an easy language, the supreme and final and unapproachable master of serio-comic poetry replied with unusual good sense and accuracy: “A very easy language to know badly; a very difficult language to know well.” It would be no less easy to pass judgment on Fletcher as a tragic poet in a sweeping and summary fashion: it is certainly no less difficult to adjust the due balance of praise and blame, whether positive or comparative, which must determine the verdict to be passed on the admirable, though anything but impeccable, author of such tragedies as *Bonduca*, *Valentinian*, and *The Double Marriage*. Brilliant even to splendour, ardent even to satiety, they most indisputably are. That their somewhat hectic and feverish glory cannot endure a moment’s comparison with the sunlight or the starlight of Shakespeare’s, of Marlowe’s, and of Webster’s is anything but a reproach

to a poet whose fame, if eclipsed, is not and can never be effaced by theirs.

The dazzling tragedy of *Bonduca* is half lit up by the flame of the footlights and half by the radiance of a magnificent if uncertain day. That it wanes and withers into the dusk of an autumnal sunset before the deathless dawn of Tennyson's almost Æschylean *Boadicea* can only be acknowledged as inevitable. That more than one or two of his contemporaries might have made out of the subject a far more perfect and a far sublimer poem is as certain as that none of them could have turned it to such triumphant account from the not ignobly theatrical point of view. But the reader of Fletcher's tragedies can never quite get away from the besetting sense of the theatre. In this instance the incongruous and excessive admixture or immixture of broad and not always brilliant comedy deforms and degrades the tragic beauty of the nobler scenes. The death scene is splendid and memorable: but while reading it we must not remember such another and more magnificent example of poetic tribute to the sacred and heroic virtue of suicide in face of shame as Marston had set in the immolation of his Sophonisba. The best by far of Fletcher's martial heroes is Caratach: and his nephew is a much finer and more natural youngster than Shakespeare's far less lifelike and lovable Arthur in *King John*: who would have made us reasonably doubt whether the omnipotent hand of his creator could have created a living little boy if it had not left us at a later date the incomparable and unapproachable and adorable figure of Mamillius.



PHILIP MASSINGER



## PHILIP MASSINGER

IT is no less singular than certain that the fame of no English poet can ever have passed through more alternate variations of notice and neglect than that of the most temperate, studious, and conscientious of the successors of Shakespeare. In his own day Massinger would seem to have received, if not such honours as English lovers of dramatic poetry might think due to him in such days as ours, yet undoubtedly very much more recognition than was accorded to poets of far purer and more potent inspiration. Ford, as a master of perverse or noble passion, of stately style and severe fervour in presentation or suggestion of condensed and subdued tragedy, stands far above him: Tourneur stands higher than Ford; and Webster, if compared to them, is as Shakespeare if compared with Webster. But if Massinger cannot be classed as a poet with the least of these, it is no less certain that the best of them cannot be ranked as an artist, I do not say equal, but comparable to Massinger. That, as Coleridge said, he is "always entertaining"—that "his plays have the interest of novels"—is but one of the excellent qualities which make the long eclipse of his fame so inexplicable. After the Restoration, when Jonson and Fletcher were set



beside or above Shakespeare, Massinger was held unworthy of so much as a bare mention in the numerous and elaborate critical essays of the representative poet and critic of his age. Yet the subjects and the humours of Jonson's comedies must then as now have seemed far more obsolete, more stiff with old-fashioned wit and rusty with old-world allusions, than the less personal and satirical comedy of Massinger ; while the only qualities in which Fletcher excels him beyond all question or comparison are the qualities of poetry and fancy. And it will hardly be contended that these can have appealed with any particular force or likelihood of success to the admiring contemporaries of Etherege and Wycherley. On the other hand, coherence of composition, dexterity of plot, and harmony of parts are qualities which distinguish the best comedies of the Restoration beyond most of those belonging to the earlier and nobler period of English drama : and in these the best work of Massinger is pre-eminent above that of his more inspired and impulsive rivals. And yet it was not till the opening of the nineteenth century that his claims to honour or to notice were adequately or generally acknowledged. The two previous editions of his collected works, now only known even to the special student through the stripping and whipping inflicted by Gifford on their editors, would seem to have attracted but little general attention. There is indeed one memorable passage in the most delightful if not the most invaluable book bequeathed to us by that century, which proves that one great moralist of those days must have laid to heart the moral teaching of this

neglected poet. "Infidelity," observes Mr. James Boswell—whose wife may possibly have agreed with him; in which case the domestic atmosphere of Auchinleck must have been liable to occasional disturbance—"infidelity is by no means a light offence in a husband; because it must hurt a delicate attachment, in which a mutual constancy is implied, with such refined sentiments as Massinger has exhibited in his play of *The Picture*."

But when the conscientious devotion of Gifford had fairly brought Massinger to the front, and established his claims to notice and admiration as difficult to exaggerate and impossible to ignore, the reaction in his favour which set in and swept forward must at first seem almost astonishing to those who know anything of the greater dramatic poets with whom he must be compared—I do not say, with whom he challenges comparison: for the modest dignity of his self-respecting reserve precludes the notion of a challenge. It became a question, among men to whom the names at least of Marlowe and Webster should have been known if not familiar, whether Massinger ought not to take precedence, as a dramatic poet, of Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher—and therefore of all other imaginable rivals in the race for the first seat beneath Shakespeare's. The typic Hallam, who thought Racine "next to Shakespeare among all the moderns," gave upwards of five pages to Massinger, and less than two to Webster. And in our own day the process of reaction or retribution has been carried so far that a critic so immeasurably superior to Hallam in literary intelligence and ability as Leslie Stephen

has brought to bear upon the fame of Massinger so heavy and so well-directed a battery of adverse or depreciatory remarks that no student of the writer attacked can pretend to ignore the breaches made in the outworks of his reputation by the artillery of so formidable an assailant. To me, indeed, it seems impossible or futile to dispute the truth of his main contention. The student of dramatic poetry as it existed in the age which we call the age of Shakespeare will undoubtedly feel, when he comes to the time of Massinger, that he has come to the turning of the tide. The ebb may at first seem all but imperceptible: yet he cannot but perceive, if perception be possible at all to him, that the inevitable reflux has reluctantly but steadily begun; that nothing more must be looked for which may bear comparison, I do not say with the masterpieces of Marlowe, Shakespeare, or Webster, but with the masterpieces of Tourneur, Middleton, or Beaumont.

What Fletcher could do, when left alone, may not yet be altogether beyond the reach of ambitious emulation: tragedies as good as *Valentinian* or *The Double Marriage*, if no comedies as good as *Monsieur Thomas* or *The Spanish Curate*, may yet be hoped for—not without diffidence and misgiving; but the golden has given place to the silver age of English drama. This cannot be denied; but the silver age of English drama would eclipse the golden age of dramatic poetry in any other nation of modern times. And when Leslie Stephen objects to the admirers of Massinger that his morality is morbid, and proceeds to enforce this objection by the unimpeachable remark that a man who has “a vivid

perception of realities and a masculine grasp of facts " " will not represent vice as so ugly that it can have no charms, so foolish that it can never be plausible, or so unlucky that it can never be triumphant," his reader will remember that we have only to turn to the text of Massinger for evidence no less unimpeachable that the poet was of the same opinion as his critic. Luke and Overreach, the two typical villains of Massinger's invention, are as charming to those whom they seek to fascinate, as plausible to those whom they seek to inveigle, as triumphant in their good luck till the crash of retribution falls on them, as Goneril or Shylock, as Regan or Iago, as Edmund or as Richard.

On the other hand, it must be allowed that Leslie Stephen has hit the weak point of Massinger's proverbial morality when he strikes at the sentimental and rhetorical assumption or affectation of belief in the power of sentiment and rhetoric to work miracles impossible in nature. It is certain that the morality which " makes villains condemn themselves, because such a practice would save so much trouble to judges and moralists," and " fancies that a little rhetoric will change the heart as well as the passing mood," is a morality which " becomes necessarily effeminate." If Massinger's morality were altogether or were mainly of such a kind—I do not question that it sometimes is—this epithet would be too lenient and too temperate to define its imperfection or its default. Such an adjective as Catholic or papistical would be more appropriate, and would scarcely be too severe. But I cannot think—when allowance is made for the necessities

of stage effect—that this charge can be fairly or even plausibly maintained. When the element of supernatural religion or thaumaturgic theology is brought in to make part of the poetic structure or to quicken the dramatic movement, such monstrous miracles of conversion must be accepted as part of the stage business by the imagination of readers or spectators as frankly as they are accepted, under less reputable conditions, by the greasy and gibbering theologians of the gutter. And when this all-atoning and all-satisfying element of compulsory conversion is not brought in, I hardly think that the revulsions of conscience or the reversions of impulse to which Massinger subjects his characters are so liable as Leslie Stephen represents them to the charge of making those who undergo them or pass through them move and speak like the typical or exemplary puppets of the pulpit or the stage. In the play which heads the collected works of Massinger the supernatural element of miraculous or transcendent emotion or influence is of course the inevitable law of action and passion which impels hither and thither the agents or rather the patients of the story. The only persons exempt from it are tyrants or slaves—brutal satraps like Sapritius or bestial clowns like the two hideous buffoons who disfigure the background of a beautiful work of art. But the parts of Diocletian and his daughter, which are mainly to be attributed to the temperate and cautious hand of Massinger, are treated with so much artistic reserve and good sense that we can only “stare and gasp” when we find that in Hartley Coleridge’s opinion “the superhuman atrocity, obdu-

racy, and blasphemy of the persecutors, of the Princess Artemia herself, one would think would make an atheist shudder." The nervous system of an atheist must in that case be as sensitive as the cheek—I will not say, of a young person, but of the most abandoned and hardened libertine: to which all moralists know how proverbially easy it is to bring the shamefaced blush of revolted modesty. This unfortunate princess, on finding herself treacherously betrayed and befooled, breaks out into rather strong language of reproach and denunciation against her false lover and her Christian rival; but the only "blasphemies" in the play, if by the word "blasphemy" we are to understand insult and outrage levelled at the religion of others, are those aimed by the Christian saint and her satellites at the gods of their forefathers. And this form of blasphemy is of course both historically and dramatically justifiable.

The style of Massinger—a style as unlike that of any other English poet as that of Dryden or of Pope; as tempting to imitators as it is inimitable by parasites, and as apparently easy as it is really difficult to reproduce—is already recognizable in its fullest development of rhetoric and metre throughout those scenes of *The Virgin Martyr* in which his steadfast and equable hand is easily and unquestionably to be traced. It is radically and essentially unlike the style of his rivals: it is more serviceable, more businesslike, more eloquently practical, and more rhetorically effusive—but never effusive beyond the bounds of effective rhetoric—than the style of any Shakespearean or of any Jonsonian dramatist. And in the second play on the list of Massinger's we



find this admirably supple and fluent and impeccable style—as incapable of default from its own principle or ideal of expression as it is incapable of rising, like Webster’s or even like Dekker’s, to a purer note of poetry or a clearer atmosphere of passion—not less complete and rounded, not less pliant and perfect, than in the first act of *The Virgin Martyr*; “as fine an act,” said Coleridge, “as I remember in any play.” That great poet’s memory must have been somewhat shaken by indulgence in the excesses of a theosophist and a druggard when he could not remember as fine an act or a far finer act in the plays of one Shakespeare, of one Jonson, or of one Beaumont: ignorant as he seems to have been of what others remember at the mention of such names as Marlowe, Webster, Tourneur, Middleton, and Ford. And his opinion that “Massinger often deals in exaggerated passion” is but ill supported by the instance he cites in support of it. The author of *Remorse*—not quite so good a play as *The Unnatural Combat*—was convinced that the protagonist of this tragedy, “however he may have had the moral will to be so wicked, could never have actually done all that he is represented as guilty of without losing his senses. He would have been, in fact, mad.” He is represented as guilty of the murder by poison of a wife whose sufferings impel their son to seek his father’s life in a duel which results in the death of the patricidal champion of his mother; and afterwards as overcome by an incestuous passion for a daughter whom he has not seen since her childhood, and whose nubile beauty excites in his savage and sensual nature an emotion against which he struggles

with more resolution, and with more abhorrence of a temptation so inhuman and unnatural, than might have been expected from so unscrupulous a ruffian. This is doubtless a tragic record enough; but to say that it is the record of a lunatic is mere foolishness—a confession of presumptuous ignorance as to the darker elements of human character. A less defensible point is the occasional conventionality of expression; Massinger, though by no means generally inclined to pedantry or to rant, is liable now and then, for lack of imaginative passion, to stiffen and weaken his style with the bombast and the platitude of cheap classical rhetoric—the commonplace tropes and flourishes of the schoolroom or the schools. “Blustering Boreas” and Æolus with his stormy issue make their appearance when not only is there “no need of such vanity,” but when their intrusion chills and deadens the tragic effect and the poetic plausibility at which the writer must be supposed to aim. Compare the last declamation of Malefort with any one of all those put by Cyril Tourneur into the mouth of Vindice. Massinger’s, if written in Greek or Latin, would be admired on all hands as deserving of the highest honours that school or college could confer on the most brilliant and vigorous exercise in passionate and tragic verse which could be attempted in a foreign language by the most accomplished and the most able scholar: Tourneur’s would recall the passion and the perfection, the fervour and the splendour and the harmony, which even we at this distance of time, and through the twilight of a dead language, can recognize in the dialogue or the declamation of Æschylus himself.

On the other hand, the grim, narrow, sardonic humour of Cyril Tourneur is not comparable with the excellent comedy which lightens and relieves the fiery darkness and horror of this vehement and high-flown tragedy. The career of the chief comic personage is really worthy to be compared with that of almost any one among Fletcher's comic heroes ; and this is very high praise. Massinger's deficiency in wit would seem to have blinded most of his critics to the excellence of his humour ; which, if less buoyant and spontaneous than Fletcher's in the exuberance of its exultation, is at least as plausible and coherent in the felicity of its invention. All that Coleridge says of the fallacy implied in such figures of mere burlesque as that of the buffoon suitor in *The Maid of Honour* is no less true and rational than pointed and incisive ; they are too wilfully absurd to excite any emotion but that of incredulity, or that of compassion for a congenital infirmity or defect. But such figures as Belgarde in this play, or as Borachia in a later work, are brilliant and vivid creations of observant and original humour.

The objection raised by Coleridge, echoed by Hazlitt, and re-echoed by Leslie Stephen, that the fools or the villains of Massinger's invention are apt to talk of themselves as others would talk or think of them is too often but too well grounded. "Massinger," says Coleridge, "and all, indeed, but Shakespeare" (a sweeping impeachment which proves only the wide range of the critic's ignorance), "take a dislike to their own characters, and spite themselves upon them by making them talk like

fools or monsters." His obsequious backbiter Hazlitt, our English precursor or prototype of Sainte-Beuve, follows suit with the remark cited by Leslie Stephen, that Massinger's villains appear like drunkards or madmen. This objection is supported by Leslie Stephen with far more cogency and felicity of argument than either Hazlitt or Coleridge had brought to bear on it. The passage in which he presses and enforces his impeachment of Massinger on the ground of moral and dramatic veracity is too effective to be passed over or evaded by any champion or advocate who might think fit to undertake the defence of the poet. The "rants" of *Overreach*, he admits, "are singularly forcible, but they are clearly what other people would think about him, not what he would really think, still less what he would say, of himself. . . . Read 'he' for 'I,' and 'his' for 'my,' and it is an admirable bit of denunciation of a character probably" (no: palpably and notoriously) "intended as a copy from life. It is a description of a wicked man from outside; and wickedness seen from outside is generally unreasonable and preposterous. When it is converted, by simple alteration of pronouns, into the villain's own account of himself, the internal logic which serves as a pretext disappears, and he becomes a mere monster."

There is so much truth in this that I am not disposed to inquire whether there may not be something to be said in deprecation or extenuation of the charge; nor will I deny that the singular character of Sforza in *The Duke of Milan* is liable to the imputation of unnatural and inhuman incon-

sistency. Massinger was only too lamentably inclined to let moral or theatrical considerations prevail over the claims of dramatic or poetic harmony. The preacher or the scene-shifter supplants the poet or the playwright after a fashion so palpable or so primitive that we are disposed to condone, on comparison, the worst offences of Fletcher against the laws of æsthetic or intelligent art. For in Fletcher's work the levity of treatment is in keeping with the spontaneity of style ; with the brightness and lightness of fancy, the headlong ease and energetic idleness of irresponsible improvization. But in Massinger the sense of an artist's responsibility to himself and to those who are to judge of his work is so singularly and so admirably evident that it would be rather an injustice than an indulgence to extenuate his errors on the plea of carelessness or hurry or fatigue. And therefore, supposing that I wished, I should find it as impossible to impugn as to reinforce Leslie Stephen's impeachment of the dramatist who represents his Sforza in the finest scene of the play as a hero, and in all the other scenes of the play as a miserable and morbid egotist. But when we are told that this play "may be described as a variation upon the theme of *Othello*," we can only reply that it might more truthfully be described as a variation upon the theme of *The Comedy of Errors*, or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, or *The Taming of the Shrew*. Each one of these has some minor point in common with it ; irritability on the wife's part, jealousy on the husband's, or violence of temper—actual or assumed—on either part. But *Othello*, the most unsuspecting and the

most unselfish though the most passionate and the most sensitive of men, has almost as much in common with his destroyer as with the covetous and murderous egotist who leaves orders for his wife to be assassinated if he should happen to fall in battle.

In spite of this radical and central blemish, *The Duke of Milan* is a nobly written and an admirably constructed play. To do justice to its excellence, we should compare it, not with *Othello*—"which," in the classic phrase of Euclid, "is absurd"—but with Ford's "variation" on the same theme in his abortive tragedy of *Love's Sacrifice*. Ford was, in the main, a greater tragic poet than Massinger; but the blemish which disfigures the elder poet's work would be imperceptible in the work of his junior. The action of Ford's play, like the action of Massinger's, revolves on the jarring hinges of jealousy and intrigue, malevolence and revenge; but the treatment is puerile in its perversity, while the characters are preposterous in their incoherence. Massinger's tragedy, whatever objection may be taken to this or that point in it, is a high and harmonious work of art.

But on turning to his next play we find the poet on ground more thoroughly suited to his genius than the ground of pure or predominant tragedy. *The Bondman* is the first, as it is with one exception the best, of Massinger's romantic plays: tragic in dignity of style, but happy in consummation of event. In this field of work his hand is surer and steadier than Fletcher's: if it has not all Fletcher's grace and ease and lightness of touch, its treatment of subject is more serious, its grasp of character



more firm, its method of execution more conscientious and more composed. He sacrifices little where Fletcher sacrifices much to sensational and theatrical effect ; he is evidently and deeply in earnest where Fletcher seems to be thinking mainly of rhetorical or scenical display. Compare the famous declamation of Pisander against slavery, in the second scene of the fourth act of this play, with the noble address of Cæsar to the severed head of Pompey in the first scene of the second act of *The False One*. The style of Massinger is *sermoni propior*—nearer the level of eloquent prose : but it has a deeper and a graver note of masculine sincerity in the measured earnestness of its appeal than any that we find in the rushing ripples and the swirling eddies of Fletcher's effusive and impetuous rhetoric.

And here rather than elsewhere we may consider the claims of the noble tragic poem which the inappreciable devotion of Mr. Bullen rescued for the careful study and the grateful enjoyment of all its readers. The tragedy of *Sir John van Olden Barnavelte*, if it be indeed the work of Massinger and Fletcher, now that the date so plausibly assigned to it by its editor has happily been confirmed by such evidence as proves it no less accurate than plausible, ought henceforward to be printed at the head of Massinger's works. I must confess that on a first reading of this play I was hardly prepared to accept so confident a conclusion and so absolute an assertion as to the irrefragable certainty of its authorship with a faith as unqualified or a conviction so positive as Mr. Bullen's. But it seems to me now that his confidence was more

justifiable than I thought it at first sight ; that the hand of Massinger is as unmistakable in the two opening scenes as the hand of Fletcher in the third. Massinger reappears at the opening of the second act : his vigorous eloquence and his inveterate mannerism, his constant abundance of reciprocal argument and his occasional flaccidity of collapsing verse, could hardly be better exemplified than here. Such a nerveless and invertebrate line as this—" I love a soldier, and all I can do," or this—" Upon his favour, 'twill take from his pride," or this—" How much you promise, to win the old soldiers"—is a characteristic and a grievous example of Massinger's besetting sin as a versifier ; a sin which charity might explain but not excuse as the result of a too studious effort to bring the metrical language of the boards into the closest possible conformity with the actual language of real life. The scene is nevertheless a fine early example of Massinger's rhetorical and dialectic ability. " This tune goes manly," the student will say to himself on weighing the solid and vigorous verse with the eloquent and effective reasoning on both sides, and the spirited altercation which succeeds it.

In the next scene it becomes evident that to distinguish between the blended styles of Fletcher and Massinger is a far harder and more delicate task than to distinguish between the confronted styles of Shakespeare and Fletcher. In the last scene, for example, of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the reader stands convicted of eyeless and earless incompetence who cannot see at once and say for certain where Shakespeare breaks off, where

Fletcher strikes in, and again where Shakespeare resumes and winds up the broken thread of tragic harmony; but here, if Fletcher should ever be somewhat less exuberant and fervid or Massinger a little less self-controlled and staid than usual, it becomes a matter of some difficulty to distinguish the swifter from the steadier current in this noble stream of song. But on the whole I take the second scene of the second act—an excellent interlude of comedy—to be more probably Massinger's than Fletcher's. The vein of humour, the cast of dialogue, the sententious turns of phrase, the satire on feminine pretension and its cackling cry for women's rights, are all of such a nature as to remind us rather of such comedies as *The City Madam* than of such comedies as *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*. To Massinger I should also assign, on similar grounds to these, the authorship of the five short scenes following, full of spirit and movement, which conclude this vivid and animated second act.

An ounce of proof is worth a pound of assertion; and no more typical example of Massinger's dramatic style could be chosen than the speech of Barnavelt (Act ii, Scene 1) after the refusal of the foreign mercenaries to support the enterprise of his party against the authority of the Prince of Orange:

Oh, I am lost with anger! are we faln  
 So low from what we were, that we dare hear  
 This from our servants and not punish it?  
 Where is the terror of our name, our power  
 That Spain with fear hath felt in both his Indies?  
 We are lost for ever, and from freemen grown  
 Slaves so contemptible as no worthy prince,

That would have men, not sluggish beasts, his servants,  
Would e'er vouchsafe the owning. Now, my friends,  
I call not on your furtherance to preserve  
The lustre of my actions ; let me with them  
Be ne'er remembered, so this government,  
Your wives, your lives and liberties be safe :  
And therefore, as you would be what you are,  
Freemen and masters of what yet is yours,  
Rise up against this tyrant, and defend  
With rigour what too gentle lenity  
Hath almost lost.

In the qualities of passion and pathos, of poetic imagination and distinction of style, instinctive choice of inspired expression and exquisite phrase, Massinger has many superiors: in purity and lucidity of dignified eloquence he has none. But the eloquence of Fletcher, if less masculine and less thoughtful, has something of a more poetic quality about it—more impulse and vehemence of impetuous and unpremeditated effusion. The first scene of the third act is a magnificent example of his best style ; indeed, if style were everything in dramatic poetry, we could not but agree with Mr. Bullen that “ it shows us Fletcher at his highest ” ; but this very act, if I mistake not, shows us even higher qualities in the genius of Fletcher than such as can be displayed by the splendid style of even such noble declamation as this :

I never knew to flatter, to kneel basely,  
And beg from him a smile owes me an honour.  
Ye are wretches, poor starved wretches, fed on crumbs  
That he flings to ye from your own abundance :  
Wretched and slavish people ye are become,

That feel the griping yoke, and yet bow to it.  
 What is this man, this Prince, this God ye make now,  
 But what our hands have moulded, wrought to fashion,  
 And by our constant labours given a life to ?  
 And must we fall before him now, adore him,  
 Blow all we can to fill his sails with greatness ?  
 Worship the image we set up ourselves ?  
 Put fate into his hand ? into his will  
 Our lives and fortunes ? howl and cry to our own clay,  
 " Be merciful, O prince " ? O pitied people !

That in the next scene Massinger again resumes the place lately supplied by Fletcher I have no more doubt than Mr. Bullen has. In this play, earlier in date than any other extant from his hand, we find that at the age of thirty-five, three years before the publication of *The Virgin Martyr*, his style was not only formed but fixed ; there is no change, no modification, no development perceptible in any one of his many later works. We find also an exact harmony or rather identity of style between the language and versification of the scenes which are obviously and indisputably Fletcher's and the language and versification of the scenes undoubtedly written by Fletcher in the play already mentioned, which the all but irrefragable judgment of Mr. Dyce assigned to the joint authorship of Massinger and Fletcher, and which must probably have appeared about the same time as the yet nobler work which we are now engaged in examining. *The False One* is full of brilliant and powerful writing ; but, like the tragedy of *Barnavell*, it is admirable rather on that score than for constructive or impressive merit as a dramatic poem ; the persons represented are

rather mouthpieces for fine verse than characters of living men or women ; the development of the story is somewhat lamely and loosely conducted or evolved, and the upshot is consequently less effective than it should and than it would have been if the play had been built up or pieced together after a more dramatic and a more workmanlike fashion. Beaumont, we cannot doubt, would have looked to this more carefully than did the brother in art whom he had left to lament the loss of the younger and greater partner in their poetic firm just three years before the certain date of *Barnavelt* and the probable date of *The False One*. And we should not have had to observe and to lament a radical defect in these noble scenes, full as they are of magnificent eloquence and mastery in dramatic debate : we should not have been left in doubt, we should not have had to ask ourselves, in perplexity if not with irritation, whether we, the intended spectators or the actual readers of this play, were expected by the authors to sympathize with the calm and patriotic moderation of the Prince or with the fiery and intemperate enthusiasm of the Advocate.

To hold the balance equally and fairly between the extreme or excessive assertions or pretensions of principle or opinion on either side of a political or historical question may be the noblest aim and the highest honour of a constitutional historian : it cannot be the sole or the final object of a dramatic poet. Shakespeare, from the democratic or ochlocratic point of view, may have been as wrong as Hazlitt and Hallam thought him—as



unjust to the plebeians and the tribunes of historical or legendary Rome : but the tragedy of *Coriolanus*, in consequence and not in spite of that hypothetical iniquity, is a superb and perfect work of art. But here, where we listen alternately to two equally eloquent pleaders of whom we know nothing but that they are equal in eloquence, we feel that the demand made on our imagination, our interest, and our faith is somewhat unreasonable in its exactions. We cannot listen with equal confidence to the orators on either side ; and beyond the effect of their eloquence we are shown no reason, we are given no hint, why our sympathies should be enlisted on this side or on that. And this is so serious and so deep a defect in the conception as well as in the composition of a dramatic poem that we might too justly apply to this otherwise most admirable masterpiece the words in which Barnavelt (Act i, Scene 3) replies to the Prince's threatening suggestion of a cure for his errors which would make him shrink, and shake, too—shake off his head. “ You are too weak i' the hams, sir,” retorts the Advocate : and this noble poem, considered either as a work of art or as a study of character, is somewhat “ too weak i' the hams ”—too uncertain in its bearings and too equivocal in its effects. Fletcher never thoroughly outgrew this ingrained infirmity of his genius : we find him to the very last only too liable, through mere weakness of handling or uncertainty of design, to such error or such perversity as impairs or effaces the effect intended : his heroes swagger like cravens, his constancy is unstable as water, and his chastity is more immodest than wantonness itself.

But of Massinger we may confidently and thankfully affirm that no such accusation can reasonably be brought against any of his later and unassisted plays. And to him we must assign the credit of introducing the most beautiful and pathetic figure in all this populous tragedy of *Barnavelt*: though it is to Fletcher that we must pay homage and give thanks for the lovely later scene in which this little figure reappears. In the second scene of the third act the rhetoric is as characteristic of Massinger as the metrical construction and fusion of the verses. The style of the scenes immediately following is all but unmistakable as Fletcher's. The very fine one in which Leidenberch confesses to Barnavelt his previous revelation of their secrets is written exactly in the same running hand, so to speak—with the same impetuous fluency and vehemence of verse, which we find in such typical plays of Fletcher's as *The Loyal Subject* and *The Humorous Lieutenant*. Not only by the headlong rush and exuberance of the metre, the headlong violence and fervour of the dialogue, but by the sensational sophistry and the passionate paradox of the reasoning by which Barnavelt impels into suicide the penitent betrayer of his trust, we recognize beyond all possibility of mistake the hand of the English Euripides. The short scene which follows is as evidently an interlude inserted by Massinger between two scenes of Fletcher's: his curious and vexatious addiction to the use of the ablative absolute—a Latinizing habit peculiar to him, and suggestive of a recurrent stutter or twitch or accent—is no less obvious than objec-

tionable.\* But the next scene—the sixth of the third act—is in my opinion the most beautiful ever written by Fletcher. Mr. Bullen assigns to Massinger the “solemn and pathetic soliloquy” of the intending suicide: and there are touches in it which recall the manner of a poet somewhat overmuch given to indulgence in classical allusion of a cheap and facile kind; † but it is to me absolutely inconceivable that Massinger could have written what I am about to transcribe: for the pathos is suggestive and the writing is worthy of Webster; I had wellnigh written, of Shakespeare:

*Boy.* Shall I help you to bed, sir?

*Leidenberch.*

No, my boy, not yet.

*Boy.* 'Tis late, and I grow sleepy.

*Leid.*

Go to bed then,

For I must write, my child.

*Boy.*

I had rather watch, sir,

If you sit up, for I know you will wake me.

\* Mr. Bullen's note on a passage in this scene, explaining the word “fry” as here equivalent to “buzz, hiss,” is surely an oversight. Were this the sense, I do not see how the passage could be either parsed or construed. Grotius threatens, if the prince lays hands on Barnavelt, to set on fire the hall of justice or house of parliament:

“His court, our gift, and where the general States,  
Our equals, sit, I'll fry about their ears,  
And quench it in their blood.”

Any but the ordinary sense of a word not then so meanly familiar in its sound as now would reduce the whole passage to incoherent nonsense.

† I may observe that, while the metre is generally unmistakable as Fletcher's, there is one line in this scene—

“If you sit up, for I know you will wake me”—

as “weak i' the hams” as the weakest of Massinger's; but a single metrical slip is a matter of little, or rather of no significance if set against the whole weight of evidence inclining the other way, and impelling us to assign it to the author of *Bonduca*.

*Leid.* Indeed I will not : go, I have much to do ;  
Prithee, to bed ; I will not waken thee.

*Boy.* Pray, sir, leave writing till to-morrow.

*Leid.* Why, boy ?

*Boy.* You slept but ill last night, and talked in your  
sleep, too ;  
Tumbled, and took no rest.

*Leid.* I ever do so.  
Good boy, to bed ; my business is of weight  
And must not be deferred : good-night, sweet boy.

*Boy.* My father was not wont to be so kind,  
To hug me and to kiss me so.

*Leid.* Why dost thou weep ?

*Boy.* I cannot tell ; but sure a tenderness,  
Whether it be with your kind words unto me,  
Or what it is, has crept about my heart, sir,  
And such a sudden heaviness withal, too—

*Leid.* (*aside*) Thou bring'st fit mourners for my  
funeral.

*Boy.* But why do you weep, father ?

*Leid.* O, my boy,  
Thy tears are dewdrops, sweet as those on roses,  
But mine the faint and iron sweat of sorrow.  
Prithee, sweet child, to bed ; good rest dwell with  
thee,  
And heaven return a blessing : that's my good boy.

[*Exit* Boy

How nature rises now and turns me woman  
When I should most be man ! Sweet heart, farewell,  
Farewell for ever. When we get us children,  
We then do give our freedoms up to fortune  
And lose that native courage we are born to.  
To die were nothing,—simply to leave the light ;  
No more than going to our beds and sleeping ;  
But to leave all these dearnesses behind us,  
These figures of ourselves that we call blessings,

## 192 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

Is that which troubles. Can man beget a thing  
That shall be dearer than himself unto him ?

If the English world of letters owed nothing to Mr. Bullen but the discovery and recovery of such a jewel of dramatic poetry as this—a pearl richer than all our tribe—the debt would be not merely beyond all repayment but beyond all acknowledgment. The famous death-scene of Hengo in *Bonduca* is not more pathetic, nor more delightful as evidence of Fletcher's almost Shakespearcan tenderness for children.

The first three scenes of the following act are composed and written in the same poet's liveliest and most spirited style ; but, full as they are of active interest and animation, the most important part of this fourth act bears the evident sign-manual of Massinger. In the impeachment and defence of Barnavelt the poet who was above all things a pleader—who could never miss an opportunity of displaying his talents, as an advocate—found his first occasion for such display, and made use of it with such dexterous ability and such vigorous temperance of style as to give promise of even finer future work on the same lines ; of such noble instances of dramatic ratiocination as the pleading of Malefort before the council of war, of Sforza before the Emperor, of Donusa before the Viceroy, of Cleremond and Leonora before the Parliament of Love, of Paris before the senate, of Camiola before her rival and the King, of Antiochus and Flaminius before the senators of Carthage, of Charalois before the court of justice (twice in the same play) and we might perhaps add that of Luke with Sir John

Frugal on behalf of his debtors. If Massinger, like Heywood, had written a play on the legend of Lucretia, we may be sure that the heroine, on being awakened by Sextus, would have overwhelmed him with oratorical demonstration and illustration of the theorem that such a purpose as his in any man

Were most inhospitable ; this being granted,  
 (As you cannot deny it) 'tis in you  
 A more than barbarous cruelty ; kings being tyrants,  
 When they prefer their appetites (their conscience,  
 As a most dejected slave, cast down and trod on)  
 Before their nobler reason. Philomela—

And so forth, and so forth : it would be only too easy to continue. But if the irrepressible barrister too often intrudes or intrenches on the ground of the dramatic poet, it must be allowed that his pleading, if sometimes prosaic in expression and conventional in rhetoric, is seldom or never ineffective either through flatulence of style or through tenuity of matter. In the defence of Barnavelt there is, however, one sign of comparative immaturity in the art of composition which would suffice to distinguish it as the earliest of its author's surviving attempts in this line. It is strange to find Massinger writing as badly as Byron ; but Matthew Arnold's denunciation of a " famous passage " in the *Giaour*, " with those trailing relatives, that crying grammatical solecism, that inextricable anacolouthon," is but too well deserved by the otherwise effective and forcible speech of that Barnavelt

Who, when there was combustion in the state,  
 must be supposed to have said or done something ;



but what, we can only guess: for this unhappy relative is left hanging in the void, without a verb to support it, over a howling wilderness of ablatives absolute and parenthetical propositions.

The first scene of the fifth act must apparently be divided—"like a bribe-buck," as Sir John (not Barnavelt) would express it—between the two illustrious partners in this admirable play. The change of style and rhythm from Massinger's to Fletcher's, after the departure of the French ambassadors, must be perceptible to the dullest ear and eye, if not absolutely inattentive or unobservant. The ghastly jocularities of the scene succeeding, in which the three executioners play at dice for the office of headsman to the great Advocate, is more like Fletcher than Massinger: it may be compared with the farcical hanging scene in the tragedy of *Rollo Duke of Normandy*; though the humour of this later interlude is very inferior to that of a scene which may remind a modern reader of "the song that Jack the headsman sings," as quoted by his friend the friar in the third scene of the third act of the second part of Sir Henry Taylor's masterwork. But the final scene which follows is, I should say, beyond all question Fletcher's; and a magnificent example of his literary and dramatic power. The tragically humorous realism of the part immediately preceding the appearance of the condemned man is as fine in its way and as effective as the stately and fervent eloquence of his last appeals and protestations; the pathos, if not profound, is genuine, and the grasp of character more firm and serious than usual.

In energetic fertility of invention and fervid fluency of rhetoric *The Renegado* is a fairly representative example of Massinger's most characteristic work: it can hardly be placed in the first class of his plays, but must be allowed to stand high in the second rank. Hartley Coleridge's critical summary of this play is about the best thing in his essay on Massinger and Ford. *The Parliament of Love*, for all the miserable mutilation of its text, is still recognizable as one of its author's most brilliant and animated comedies; no less graceful and interesting in its graver parts than amusing and edifying in its lighter interludes. In the tragedy of *The Roman Actor*, if the interest is less keen and the emotion less vivid than that excited by the previous tragic poems of Massinger, the equable purity of style and the conscientious symmetry of composition will seem all the more praiseworthy if compared with the headlong and slipshod vehemence of many among his competitors; but in the hands (for instance) of Fletcher; the all-important figure of Domitia, though it might have been more theatrical and exaggerative, would have been more animated and interesting than it is. *The Great Duke of Florence*, if remarkable even among Massinger's works for elegance and grace of execution, does not aim high enough or strike deep enough to give more than the moderate pleasure of a temperate satisfaction.\*

\* The generous praise given to this play by a greater tragic poet than Massinger does no less honour to Ford than to the object of these well-turned lines:

“ Action gives many poems right to live ;  
This piece gave life to action ; and will give,  
For state and language, in each change of age,  
To time delight, and honour to the stage.”

*The Maid of Honour* leaves a deeper impression of the very noble and original character which gives its title to the play. The others, with the possible exception of the loyal and single-hearted Adorni, are somewhat conventional in comparison. It is impossible to take any sympathetic interest in the vacillations and infidelities of such half-hearted lovers and loyalists as figure too frequently on the stage of Massinger; who must have found them so serviceable in the development of a story, and for the presentation of a nobler nature in fuller relief against their ignoble or pitiable figures, that he could scarcely appreciate or foresee the inevitable effect or impression of such characters—a compromise between indifference and contempt. And it is a serious if not a ruinous defect in the structure of a poem or a play that this should be the impression left by any of its indispensable and leading characters.

In *The Picture*, an admirably written and admirably constructed play, the typically constant and devoted husband and wife are no sooner induced to doubt or to disbelieve in each other's constancy and fidelity than they begin to entertain, however uncertainly and faintly, the notion of revenge or retaliation in kind; and this without the slightest sense of attraction on the wife's part towards her tempters or on the husband's towards his temptress. One of Musset's brightest and gracefulest little comedies covers part of the same ground as this much more ambitious and elaborate play of Massinger's; but the subject is touched with a far lighter hand, and the figures are sketched in fainter but more attractive colours.

In his two next plays, *The Emperor of the East* and *Believe as you list*, Massinger has given a colouring of romance to historical characters—or at least to historical names—which in either case makes the drama something of a hybrid, but a hybrid of no unattractive or unlawful kind. The merit of either play is rather literary than dramatic; not that there is any lack of interest and action, but that, if set beside any play or any poem of strong human interest, the comparative tenuity of composition, the comparative tepidity of emotion excited or expressed, becomes manifest beyond all question. Massinger's *Pulcheria* may be compared with Corneille's by those who take pleasure in studying the secondary works of celebrated poets: they have in common at least the gift of sober and dignified eloquence or declamation. But Corneille's penultimate play, in spite of some better among many bad verses, is on the whole very dull and rather absurd in style and in design: Massinger's is at any rate vigorous and lively, well written and well composed.

In the very act of reading the Frenchman's dreary tragicomedy, it is difficult even to remember or to distinguish, among all its wordy and shadowy figures, who is supposed to be in lukewarm love with whom: in reading the Englishman's, if our interest is rather the interest of literary curiosity than of imaginative sympathy, we are at least amused and gratified by the freedom and the fluency of invention and of style. But neither Massinger, Corneille, nor even Sir Walter Scott—though *Count Robert of Paris* is worth far more than the common cry of critics has ever admitted—could succeed in giving

life and interest to any subject or to any hero selected from Byzantine history. One only poet has ever done that : and it is not the least among Sir Henry Taylor's many claims to a place of high honour among English poets and dramatists that such a success should have been reserved for him to attain at the very outset of his literary career.

It is a coincidence something more than singular that in his next play, *Believe as you list*, Massinger should again have so nearly anticipated Corneille in choice of subject, place, and time that two of the most important figures in either tragicomedy are identical, and might indeed be recognizable even without the identity of name. And the comparison is here of far more value than before : for Corneille in *Pulchérie* was at his weakest, and Massinger in *The Emperor of the East* was not a little beneath himself at his best. But in the tragic story of Antiochus Massinger has displayed his gift of noble writing and its quality of manly pathos as fully and as impressively as in any of his more famous works : and Corneille, in his corresponding play, has well deserved the triple honour of denunciation from Voltaire, of depreciation from Schlegel, and of acclamation from Victor Hugo. " *Le Nicomède* si moqué du dernier siècle pour sa fière et naïve couleur " is in its own way as noble and original a work as Massinger's ; and if the final upshot of neither play is satisfactory to the sympathies or adequate to the expectations of the reader, this is but another point of curious interest in the comparison of two poems equally admirable in vigour of handling and singular in selection of subject. But

the parallel runs far closer than this: the Prusias of Massinger is essentially identical with the yet more abject Prusias of Corneille, the Flaminius of Corneille with the yet more arrogant and insolent Flaminius of Massinger. And the patient heroism of Antiochus under his sufferings is matched by the haughtier heroism of Nicomedes in the face of conspiracy and danger. Ford's admirable Warbeck is not a nobler or more interesting figure than either. A certain deficiency in constructive power, a certain monotony in dramatic arrangement and effect, may perhaps be found alike in the English and in the French play: there is something of pettiness, if not something of discrepancy or confusion, in the motive and the conduct of the intrigue which winds and unwinds itself around or beneath the central character of Corneille's; while in Massinger's the varied and protracted martyrdom of an innocent and heroic victim becomes even before we reach the fifth act too positively painful and oppressive for the reader to find relief in any lighter interlude, were it even far more exhilarating than the defiant buffoonery of the indomitable fat Flamen. The unmistakable reference in Massinger's prologue to "a late and sad example" of royal misfortune "too near" the subject-matter of his play—the crushing defeat and the wandering exile of Charles I's luckless brother-in-law, the Prince Palatine—is a noticeable instance of his unflagging interest in contemporary history as well as in social and political questions more particular to England.

His next surviving play, *The Fatal Dowry*, is on the whole the finest example of tragedy he has left



us : the most perfect in build, the most pathetic in effect, and the most interesting in development, harmony, and variety of character. The attention and admiration of the reader are seized and kindled at the very opening, and are kept alive and alight to the last moment of the action. And on this occasion we may feel confident in attributing to Massinger all but all that is of value in a work which we owe in part to another hand than his. Nathaniel Field, his colleague in its composition, is a dramatist of genuine and original quality ; but it is impossible to suppose that the better and greater part of this play can be either his work or any man's work but Massinger's. Gifford, with commendable candour and good taste, assigns to Field the fine scene (as he justly calls it) in which the last honours are paid to the father of the hero who has sacrificed his own liberty to the claims of filial respect : but except for this one scene we must agree with him in regretting that Massinger did not take upon himself the execution of the whole. His calm command of earnest and impressive eloquence was never put to nobler service : his austere sympathy with self-denying courage or self-renouncing resolution was never more worthily expressed than in the devotion of Charalois to his father and of Romont to his friend. But it is undeniable that the best character in this play—the best in each sense of the word, at once most effective from the dramatic point of view, and most attractive if considered as a separate figure—is a subordinate though neither superfluous nor insignificant person. Romont is one of the noblest of Massinger's men ; and Shakespeare

has hardly drawn nobler men more nobly than Massinger. Fletcher's handling of such characters is absolutely schoolboyish in its perverse conventionality. Massinger's heroes have always some touch of manly reason and loyal good sense which preserves them from the ideal absurdity of Fletcher's alternately blatant and abject martialists.

The figure of the heroine, on the other hand, is too thinly and feebly drawn to attract even the conventional and theatrical sympathy which Fletcher might have excited for a frail and penitent heroine : and the almost farcical insignificance and baseness of her paramour would suffice to degrade his not involuntary victim beneath the level of any serious interest or pity. Rowe, in the play which he founded on Massinger's, has very skilfully removed this blemish. The victim of a Lothario we may pity, excuse, and understand ; the victim of a Novall is fit for enlistment in the sisterhood of the streets. Rowe's place is rather low and Massinger's place is rather high among dramatic poets ; but in this instance the smaller man's poetic or dramatic instinct was juster and worthier than the greater man's. That his play is on the whole immeasurably inferior in composition and execution to the original from which it was rather treacherously conveyed or derived is as certain as that the *Phèdre* of Racine is poetically inferior to the *Hippolytus* of Euripides ; but Rowe's Calista is as much more pardonable than Massinger's Beaumelle as the passionate penitence of the French playwright's heroine is more credible and more interesting than the unimaginable atrocity—the murderous mendacity in suicide—of

the Greek's. Nevertheless it is curious to observe the influence of a tradition rather Spanish than French or English in the deliberate immolation of the wretched girl by her husband's hand before her father's face; and to compare it with Heywood's treatment of a similar subject in a far less ambitious and a far more pathetic tragedy than any of Massinger's. The English gentleman dismisses his adulterous wife from his house, to live and die in seclusion: the French or rather the Spanish hero butchers his poor traitress in cold blood, after killing her paramour before her eyes and bringing her to trial and sentence from the lips of her father and his benefactor. The situation is theatrically superb; but the morality—even from the theatrical point of view—belongs rather to the southern than the northern side of the Pyrenees.

In tragedy Massinger was excelled by other dramatic poets of his time: in the line of severe and serious tragicomedy he certainly has never been and probably never will be equalled. The hideous hero of *A New Way to pay Old Debts* may perhaps be now and then too strongly and even coarsely coloured: the epilepsy of rage and remorse which overtakes him in the last scene may be too obviously the device of a preacher or a moralist who thinks rather of impressing his audience with dread of a special providence or a judicial visitation than of working out the subject of a dramatic poem in a natural and logical manner: but for all that, and in spite of his theatrical and incredible expositions of his own wickedness and baseness to men whom he wishes to conciliate or attach, Sir Giles Overreach

will always and deservedly retain his place among the great original figures or types created by the genius and embodied in the art of our chief dramatic poets. The spirit, eloquence, and animation of the whole play are not more admirable than the perfect harmony and proportion of all the figures displayed in stronger or slighter relief by the natural progress of the well-constructed plot. Much of the same praise may be given to the first four acts of *The City Madam*; and the figure of Luke Frugal, if less imposing and impressive than that of Overreach, is drawn with far subtler skill and finer insight into the mystery of ingrained and incurable wickedness. The self-deceit of the suffering hypocrite, his genuine penitence and humility while under a cloud of destitution and contempt, may probably be accepted as the deepest and truest touch of nature, as it is certainly the most daring and original, to be found in the works of Massinger. Up to the fifth act the conduct of the whole scheme of the play is almost beyond praise: it is lighter and easier, more simple and more clear, than the evolution of Jonson's best comedies: the variety of living character is as striking as the excellence of artistic composition. But all the energetic advocacy of Gifford, earnest and plausible as it is, cannot suffice to vindicate the taste or justify the judgment of a comic poet who has chosen to deface the closing scenes of a comedy with such monstrous and unnatural horror as deforms the fifth act of this play. We know, he pleads, that the inhabitants of Virginia in his days did not offer human sacrifice to god or devil (in other words, that they were neither Catholics nor

Calvinists). But Massinger and his contemporaries did not know this, and must be excused for believing that they did. And therefore we must accept as a natural and agreeable incident in a comic poem the projected transportation and immolation of Lady Frugal and her daughters "as an oblation unto Hecate (!) and wanton Lust, her favourite." Admitting that so subtle and splendid a scoundrel as Luke could be fool enough to swallow such a bait and monster enough to entertain such a proposal, we may surely crave leave to object that such a conception is as monstrous, from an æsthetic point of view, in a comedy, as it would be, from an ethical point of view, in real life ; that it jars and unhinges and disjoints the whole structure of the play. Luke, under the impression of supernatural agency—duped by his former dupes, and befooled by his former victims—is no longer the same man : the supple, pliable, quick-witted, humble, and resentful rascal whom his creator had made as visible and credible to us as Tartuffe himself subsides into a devil and a fool, whom the simplest device can delude and the insanest atrocity cannot revolt.

In these two noble and memorable plays Massinger is no less a patriot than a poet ; his wise and thoughtful interest in matters affecting the social interests of the commonweal is as evident as his mature and masterly power of construction and of style. He was, it is evident, as all loyal Englishmen must be, at once truly conservative and thoroughly liberal in his views and in his aims ; all the more bitter and unsparing in his hatred of corruption and his abhorrence of abuses that he foresaw, as did no

other writer for the theatres, the inevitable result of lawless extortion and transgression on the part of the rulers of England. He was the Falkland as Fletcher was the Rupert of the stage; and a wiser counsellor than ever won the ear of the king who found his dramatic satire "too insolent" in its exposure of the royal claims on "benevolences" and the royal defiance of the law to be endured without modification or excision. Coleridge's remarks on Massinger as a politician are equally inaccurate and perverse; nor are his strictures on the dramatist and the moralist much more valid or profound. It is true that some of his objections to Massinger's treatment of character are not without force; and to the examples which he selects as typically blameable he might well have added that of the judicial frenzy which falls at last as a retribution for his crimes on the head of Sir Giles Overreach.

It has sometimes struck me as possible if not probable that the first actor of this famous part may have suggested or insisted on this tragic exaggeration of its climax. We all remember how a similar addition to the catastrophe of Dr. Johnson's *Irene* was urged upon the author of that tragedy by the fruitless importunity of Garrick: "The fellow wants me to make Mahomet run mad, that he may have an opportunity of tossing his hands and kicking his heels." The dumb despair in which Luke finally leaves the scene is as much more impressive as it is more lifelike than the raging desperation of Sir Giles. But there is critical truth as well as friendly cordiality in the pleasant commendatory verses of



Sir Thomas Jay, whom Massinger, with characteristic modesty and unselfishness, had rebuked for classing him as "equal with those glorious men, Beaumont and Fletcher." The good knight does no more than justice to his friend in applauding

The crafty mazes of the cunning plot,  
The polished phrase, the sweet expressions, got  
Neither by theft nor violence ; the conceit  
Fresh and unsullied.

The steady and conscientious independence of his genius and his principles had fully and nobly asserted itself in Massinger's studies from contemporary life in England : in his three remaining plays he has given a freer if not a looser rein to his fancy, with less of the ethical and more of the sentimental in its action. *The Guardian* is much more like a play of Fletcher's—such a play, for example, as *Women Pleased* or *The Pilgrim*—than any other of Massinger's unassisted works : I need hardly add that its plot is unusually multifarious, improbable, and amusing. It is always excellently and sometimes exquisitely written : there is no very severe or serious grasp of character, though all the figures are as lively and easy as some of the incidents are violent and absurd. *The Bashful Lover*, his next play but one, is little less well written and well arranged, but very inferior in interest, and more markedly conventional in character than any other play of Massinger's ; nevertheless it is an able and in some degree an admirable piece of work.

One play alone remains for us to notice : for there is neither any internal nor any external evidence of

the slightest value or the faintest plausibility for Massinger's alleged association with Middleton and Rowley in their comedy of *The Old Law*. But this one remaining play is the flower of all his flock; so lovely and attractive in its serious romance, so ripe and rich in its broader strokes of humour, so full of a peculiarly sweet and fascinating interest, as to justify more than ever the compliment of a comparison which its author's diffidence had reprovingly deprecated on the lips of Sir Thomas Jay. As I have so lately had to protest against Coleridge's occasional if not general misjudgment of Massinger, I am bound as well as glad to quote his atoning tribute to the merit and the charm of *A Very Woman*—"one of the most perfect plays we have. There is some good fun in the first scene between Don John Antonio" disguised as a slave "and Cuculo, his master"—and more, the greater poet might have added, in the later scenes between each of them and the bibulous wife of Cuculo; "and can anything exceed the skill and sweetness of the scene between him and his mistress, in which he relates his story?" The exquisite temperance and justice and delicacy of touch in that almost unrivalled example of narrative by dialogue are hardly to be equalled or approached in any similar or comparable scene of Fletcher's; but the loveliest passage in it—the loveliest both for natural grace of feeling and for melodious purity of expression—has perhaps somewhat more of the peculiar cadence of Fletcher's very finest versification than of Massinger's. Mr. Dyce, in his admirable introduction to the works of Beaumont and Fletcher, suggests that this play may be a recast of an earlier

play by those poets—*A Right Woman*, which was “certainly never given to the press,” and in which “Massinger might have been originally concerned.” Possibilities are almost infinite in such cases; but I cannot believe in the probability of any theory which would tend to deprive Massinger of any part of the honour and the gratitude which we owe to the writer of this most beautiful and delightful play. The great argument against the likelihood, if not against the possibility, that Fletcher can have had any hand or any finger in the text as it now stands is the utter absence of his besetting faults. Violent as are the passions and violent as are the revolutions of passion represented in the course of the story, the poet’s aim is evidently to make them appear, if not always reasonable, yet always natural and inevitable; Fletcher, in his usual mood at least, would have rioted in exaggeration of their contrasts, improbabilities, and inconsistencies. His hunger and thirst after sensation at any price could never have allowed him to be content with so moderate, so gradual, and so rational an evolution of the story.

That Massinger was both greater and more trustworthy as a dramatic artist than as a dramatic poet has already been admitted and avowed: but this crowning work of his noble and accomplished genius, at once so delicate and so masculine in its workmanship, would suffice to ensure him a place of honour among the poets as well as among the dramatists of his incomparable time. Upon the whole, however, I venture to think that his highest and most distinctive claims to honour are rather moral and

intellectual (or, if Greek adjectives be preferred to Latin as more fashionable and sonorous, we will say rather ethical and æsthetic) than imaginative and creative. Be this as it may, there can be no question that the fame of Philip Massinger is secure against all chance of oblivion or eclipse as long as his countrymen retain any sense of sympathetic admiration and respect for the work and the memory of a most admirable and conscientious writer, who was also a most rational and thoughtful patriot.



JOHN DAY





## JOHN DAY

ONE of the very greatest poets that ever glorified the world has left on record his wish that Beaumont and Fletcher had written poems instead of plays ; and his wish has been echoed by one of the finest and surest critics of poetry, himself an admirable and memorable poet, unequalled in his own line of terse and pathetic narrative or allegory. I am reluctant if not ashamed, and sorry if not afraid, to differ from Coleridge and Leigh Hunt ; yet I cannot but think that it would have been a pity, a mistake, and a grievous loss to poetic or creative literature if the great twin brethren of our drama had not given their whole soul and their whole strength to the stage. I cannot imagine that any poetry they might have left us, had they gone astray after Spenser with the kinsmen of the elder of the two, could have been worth *Philaster* or *The Spanish Curate*, *The Maid's Tragedy* or *The Knight of Malta*. But I do sincerely regret that a far humbler labourer in the same Elysian field should have wasted the treasure of a sweet bright fancy and the charm of a true lyrical gift on work too hard and high for him. John Day should never have written for the stage of Shakespeare. The pretty allegory of his *Peregrinatio Scholastica*, a really charming example of that

singular branch of mediæval literature which had yet to find its last consummate utterance in the *Pilgrim's Progress* of a half-inspired but wholly demented and demoralized Christomaniac, is perhaps better reading than his comedies ; and it is not the least of our many debts to the industrious devotion of Mr. Bullen that we owe to him the publication of this long buried and forgotten little work of kindly and manly and rather pathetic fancy. There is nothing in it of such reptile rancour as hisses and spits and pants with all the recreant malignity of a fangless viper, through the stagnant and fetid fenlands of *The Return from Parnassus*. We are touched and interested by the modest plea—it is rather a plea than a plaint—of the poor simple scholar ; but perhaps we only realize how hard and heavy must have been the pressure of necessity or mischance on his gentle and fanciful genius when we begin to read the first extant play in which he took a fitful and indistinguishable part. And yet there is good matter in *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green*, however hasty and headlong be the management or conduct of the huddled and muddled combination or confusion of plots. The scene in which poor Bess, driven toward suicide by the villainy of her guardian and the infidelity of her betrothed, first comes across her disguised and unrecognized father, and turns all her own sorrow into pity for him and devotion to the needs of a suffering stranger, is a good example of that exquisite simplicity in expression of pathetic fancy which was common to all the dramatic poets of the divine Shakespearean generation, and peculiar to them.

Art thou blind, sayest thou? Let me see thy face :  
O, let me kiss it too, and with my tears  
Wash off those blemishes which cruel time  
Hath furrowed in thy cheeks! O, couldst thou see,  
I'd show thine eyes whom thou dost represent.  
I called thee father—ay, thou shalt be my father ;  
Nor scorn my proffer : were my father here  
He'd tell thee that his daughter held him dear ;  
But in his absence, father, thou art he.

It would seem that the very existence and presence of Shakespeare on English earth must have infected with a celestial contagion of incomparable style the very lowliest of his followers in art and his fellows in aspiration. It would also seem that the instinct of such emotion, the capacity of such expression, had died out for ever with the afterglow of his sunset. Even the grateful and joyful appreciation of the legacies bequeathed to us by the poets of that transcendent age is now no natural and general property of all Englishmen who can read, but the exceptional and eccentric quality of a few surviving students who prefer old English silver and gold to new foreign brass and copper.

Shakespeare and Marlowe to the vile seem vile :  
Filths savour but themselves.

Themselves, that is, and their Ibsens. " Like lips,  
like lettuce."

There is some good simple fun too in this homely and humble old play : the Norfolk yeomen are not all unworthy compatriots of Tennyson's immortal Northern Farmers ; there is something in young Tom's reflection, " Well, I see I might ha' kept

company with honest men all the days o' my life ere I should ha' learned half this knavery." Worse jests than this have found wider echoes of laughter ; and Tom approves himself a good fellow, and a living creature of a real creator, when he risks his life for the blind old beggar : " I'll take up my lodging on God's dear ground ere thou shalt take any harm." It is a pity we have lost the double sequel to this play ; I for one, at all events, should rejoice to read " the second part of Strowd " and " the third part of Tom Strowd." His evident popularity does credit to the honest and wholesome taste of his audience. It is a curious sign of the times that Day and his comrade Chettle should have ventured and found it profitable to venture a trespass on ground preoccupied already by Marlowe, if not by Shakespeare ; and we can only wonder whether Duke Humphrey and Cardinal Beaufort reappeared and renewed their tragic wrangling on the stage of the second or the third part of a story transported from the traditional date of Henry the Third to the theatrically popular date of Henry the Sixth. It is perhaps needless to remind any reader that the blind beggar who played his part on the Bethnal Green of our old ballad-mongers was supposed to be the surviving son of the great Earl Simon, blinded and left for dead on the battlefield of Evesham.

A quaint and primitive little play, *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, printed in the year which Henslowe gives as the date of the production of *The Blind Beggar*, who was not to see the light of print till fifty-nine years later, has been conjecturally and

plausibly assigned by Mr. Gosse to the hand of Day. The fluent simplicity of rhyming verse is sometimes sweet as well as smooth. In the first scene of the second act there is so singular an instance of the crude and childish licence which allowed an actor in the play to address the audience, that I should have expected to find it a familiar quotation in the notes or commentaries of editors who were scholars, and not such impudently ignorant impostors as have sometimes undertaken a work of which they did not understand the simplest and most elementary conditions. “ (*He speaks to the people.*) Well, I pray you look to my master, for here I leave him amongst you.” There are touches of pleasant fancy and joyous music in this evidently juvenile poem which may recall to a modern reader the lighter moods of Keats. Its author, like the author of *Doctor Dodipoll*, must have had Shakespeare on the brain ; no reader of either play can miss or can mistake the gracious influence of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. The pun on the words *Pan* and *pot* anticipates a jest unconsciously borrowed and worked to death by the typically Caledonian humour of Carlyle.

Any form of tribute to the memory of Sir Philip Sidney, any kind of witness to the popularity of the *Arcadia*, does honour to his lovers in the past and gives pleasure to its lovers in the present ; but one at least of these latter must express a wish that the playwrights would have left that last and loveliest of chivalrous and pastoral romances reverentially and lovingly alone. The prologue to *The Isle of Gulls* is a bright and amusing little sample of



dramatic satire ; its three types of critic, the lover of libel, the lover of ribaldry, and the lover of fustian, are outlines of figures not unworthy of Ben Jonson. But there is little or rather nothing in the five acts thus ingeniously introduced of the peculiar charm which pervades the whole atmosphere of the *Arcadia* : Day's young princes are mere puppets, with no trace of likeness to the noble original figures of Pyrocles and Musidorus ; not for a moment can his light and loose-tongued heroines, whatever grace of expression and of verse may be wasted on the wanton and fantastic exposure of their trivial inclinations, recall the two glorious sister figures of Sidney's divine invention. There is only one "person of the play" who has any life or likeness of life in him : the rascally adventurer Manasses, moralist and satirist, informer and swindler and preacher ; a very model and prototype of the so-called new journalist. The scene in which he explains his professional aptitudes and relates his varied experience is the only vigorous piece of writing in the ragged and slipshod little play ; his Puritan sermon anticipates with quite curious precision the peculiar eloquence of Mr. Chadband. There is some rough and ready fun in the part of Miso ; but the whole concern is on the whole but "an indigest deformèd lump." The soliloquy which opens the fifth act has real sweetness as well as smoothness of metre as well as fancy. A few lines may serve to give the reader a taste of Day's simple and gentle genius or gift of style :

Farewell, bright sun, thou lightener of all eyes ;  
Thou fall'st to give a brighter beam to rise :

Each tree and shrub wear trammels of thy hair,  
But these are wires for none but kings to wear.

For *these* we should probably read *hers*. The play is as carelessly printed as it was carelessly composed.

The gentle minutes, crowned with crystal flowers,  
Losing their youths, are grown up perfect hours  
To hasten my delight : the bashful moon,  
That since her dalliance with Endymion  
Durst never walk by day, is under sail.

What follows is pretty and musical, but these are the best lines.

Shakespeare and Heywood have both touched smilingly on the "infinite variety" in style and subject of their contemporary playwrights: neither has included in his list of the sundry sorts and kinds of play then aiming at popularity or bidding for success one curious and interesting class, generally perhaps interesting on historical rather than literary grounds: the biographical drama. There are better and there are worse examples of this kind than *The Travels of Three English Brothers*; the anonymous play of *Sir Thomas More*, which has scenes and passages in it of a quiet beauty and grave charm peculiar to the unknown and un conjecturable writer, is very much better, and probably the finest existing poem of its class; *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, by the new or German Shakespeare, must alike in reason and in charity be hopefully accepted as the worst. The curious and amorphous play in which three men of genius—no competent reader of their remaining works will deny the claim to that distinction of Rowley, of Wilkins, or of Day—took it by

turns to dash off a sketch of incidents supplied by report, and to compile a supplement of inventions huddled up at random, is almost equally interesting and disappointing to a student of heroic biography or a lover of the drama which depends on adventure and event. Heywood was the man who should have undertaken this subject : he would have made out of it a simple and a noble work of artless and unconscious art. The three adventurous brothers, whose doings and sufferings, wise or unwise and deserved or undeserved, can hardly be remembered without sympathy by any not unworthy countryman of Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Richard Burton, do not seem to have made any complaint of the liberties taken by their three volunteer laureates with their persons or their names, their characters or their experiences. And yet the representation of a Christian hero, who might conceivably and quite possibly have been sitting among the audience, fastened in the stocks and distended on the rack before the eyes of "the great Turk," must make a modern Englishman feel that the honest and admiring enthusiasm of a dramatic poet no greater than Rowley or Wilkins or Day might be almost more terrible as an infliction than the pitiless and unscrupulous animosity of Aristophanes or Shakespeare or Molière. Cleon or Lucy or Cotin may have held up his head and smiled upon the foolish and vulgar spectator who could imagine him accessible or vulnerable by the satire of *The Knights*, or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, or *Les Femmes Savantes* : an English gentleman must have been a very Stoic if he could so far sacrifice his natural

instinct of personal reserve and noble shyness as to abstain from wincing at his exhibition or exposure as a hero and a martyr, on the chance that the groundlings might be kindled and stimulated by his example to a keener sense of religious or patriotic duty.

The quaint and original prologue to this singular play is perceptibly and demonstrably the work of Rowley: who, though assuredly no dunce, would seem to have anticipated the brilliant and convenient theory of certain modern dunces that good metre and musical verse must needs imply tenuity of meaning and deficiency of thought—as in the notorious and lamentable instances of Coleridge and Shelley, whose melodious emptiness and vacuous efflorescence of mere colour and mere sound were so justly and so loudly derided and deplored by contemporary criticism. The singular point in Rowley's case is that he really could write excellent good verse if he chose, but usually preferred to hobble and stagger rather than walk steady or run straight. Lamb, who liked him so well, and took such pleasure in culinary humour, must surely have missed this curious illustration of the process by which fact has to be trimmed up with fiction for the purposes of the historic stage :

Who gives a fowl unto his cook to dress  
Likewise expects to have a fowl again ;  
Though in the cook's laborious workmanship  
Much may be diminisht, somewhat added,  
(The loss of feathers and the gain of sauce),  
Yet in the back surrender of this dish  
It is, and may be truly called, the same.

Such are our acts : should our tedious Muse  
 Pace the particulars of our travellers,  
 Five days would break the limits of our scenes  
 But to express the shadows : therefore we  
 (Leaving the feathers and some needless stuff)  
 Present you with the fairest of our feast,  
 Clothing our truth within an argument  
 Fitting the stage and your attention,  
 Yet not so hid but that she may appear  
 To be herself, even truth.

Eccentric in expression as this apology may seem, I know not where to look for an apter or happier explanation and vindication of the method by which the nudity and aridity of mere casual fact must needs be clothed and vivified by poetry or fiction with the likeness and the spirit of enduring and essential truth. The symbol or emblem is less refined and ingenious than that of *The Ring and the Book*, but hardly less exact in its aptitude of application.

A curious use of a word which conveys to modern English ears none but a very different meaning may be noted in the dedication, where the authors express a modest wish to have "a safe harbour and umbrage for our well-willing yet weak labours." One or two necessary corrections or completions of an obviously defective text may be worth transcription :

Refrain therefore, and [know,] whate'er you are (p. 38).  
 I thank thee : less [or more] I cannot give thee (p. 45).

An over-austere or impatient critic might set down his opinion that the opening scene of *Law*

*Tricks* was less like the professional writing of a sane adult than the furtive scribbling of a clever child ; that a few pretty verses sprinkled here and there throughout the infantile five acts of this innocent little play could hardly carry weight enough with even the most uncritical reader to make him doubt whether a schoolboy with a touch of ambition to give something like shape to his rudest fancy and something of colour to his crudest emotion might not have written it against time between school hours—and hesitated to submit it to the judicial and jocose opinion of any but his most intimate and most closely coeval friend ; that the two pages are the only satisfactory figures in it—their elders, virtuous or murderous, being comically rather than lamentably like the creatures of such a boy's brain. The mention of " Justice Slender " in the first scene is noticeable as an early and blundering reference to the text of a play which, though published four years before, can hardly have been known to Day except on the stage ; the hastiest reader of Shakespeare's first rough draft could hardly have confused the two immortal cousins as the memory of a playgoer who had but once seen it acted may apparently if not evidently have done. The dialogue is sometimes bright and pleasant ; it shoots and sparkles through the rhyming retort of fencing epigrams as lightly and gracefully as Shakespeare's in any of his earliest and idlest wit-combats or encounters of fancy. There are not a few notable words and phrases in the text worth registering for an English dictionary that should be worthy to stand beside Littré's ; and there are touches of



humour illustrative of manners which might repay the notice of a social historian. This passage, for instance, anticipates the aristocratic satire of *Etherege*: "Still in the bogs of melancholy! 'tis staler than tobacco: not so much but the singing cobbler is grown melancholy, and corrects shoes in humour; fie on't!"\* That modern American slang has its roots in old or obsolete English is a truth once more attested by this curious passage: "Why, she is of my near affinity! Should I see my near affinity go in tatters?" (Act ii, Scene 1). It may possibly be just worth notice that the same speaker in a later scene echoes the famous and defiant query of Ancient Pistol, "Have we not Hiren here?" and it seems to me certainly worth while to note a singularly modern or modern-sounding use of a commonplace adjective just afterwards: "We will be odd in all things." I do not know whether camp-ball and football be the same game, but I should guess so from Tom Strowd's offer (*The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green*, v. i) to "play gole at camp-ball." Football was then held

\* For "doubt" (Act ii, Scene 1) we must obviously read "doubted"—certainly not "do't," which is hardly sense, as tobacco is not exactly an aphrodisiac. Profligate the prince is, says the jesting speaker; "and that which makes him doubted most, he is in love with the Indian punk Tobacco." In the ninth line of p. 23 "induce" is, of course, a misprint for "endure." In the second line of p. 42 a stage direction has crept into the text; the words "discover Lurdo behind the arras" can only mean "*Lurdo is discovered*"; as part of the speech into which the printer has jumbled them they are mere nonsense. In the sixth line of the pretty rhyming scene which follows, the word "away" is a palpable mistake for "awry." The right reading is pathetic and consistent; the wrong reading stultifies a very graceful passage. On p. 78 there are two consecutive and curious errors: "ungive" for "ungyve" (= unfetter), and "Heate" for "Hecate."

a plebeian game—witness Shakespeare, to say nothing of Beaumont and Fletcher. Anyhow, the word is a rare one.

There is about as much substance in *Humour out of Breath* as in a broken thread of gossamer ; but even in the slightest and lightest of dramatic play-things misconstrued by the very clumsiest craftsmen who opened their toyshop on the stage of Shakespeare there is a touch, a hint, an indication of something more graceful and fanciful and child-like in its pretty silly idleness or waywardness or incompetence than can be found among the wares of earlier or later "factors for the scene." Mr. Bullen's generous commendation of such merit as may be discovered in action or in character by a kindly or friendly reader will be accepted rather than controverted by a reasonably good-humoured critic ; who nevertheless may be expected to regret that a little more than the less than little which has been was not made of the faintly pencilled outlines and suggestions which promise now and then something better than we find realized in this unsteady and headlong little play. The divine and universal influence of Shakespeare lends it something of life and light and charm ; we feel once more that the very humblest and hastiest of his faithful and loyal followers has something to give us which no later stage poet of more vigorous and serious ability, no Dryden or Otway or Southerne or Rowe, can give. There is more merit in the least of these four playwrights, whichever he may be, than it is now the fashion to allow him ; but in all those later days of luminous decadence there was but one of their kind

who could write a verse or two after the manner of the Shakespearean age in its earliest and simplest expression of dramatic rapture by alternate or elegiac rhyme. No competent judge of poetic style would assign the following verses to a poet or a dramatist of the Restoration :

Why was I destined to be born above,  
 By midwife Honour to the light conveyed,  
 Fame's darling, the bright infant of high love,  
 Crowned, and in Empire's golden cradle laid ;  
 Rocked by the hand of empresses, that yield  
 Their sceptres formed to rattles for my hand,  
*Born to the wealth of the green floating field,*  
*And the rich dust of all the yellow land ?*

Any one who knows anything of the subject, if asked to name at a venture the author of these last two lovely lines, would assuredly name Tennyson. They belong to Nathaniel Lee, and occur in the first scene of the most hopelessly and obviously delirious or lunatic performance that surely can ever have got itself acted. I wish I could find anything in Day so wholly and so delightfully worthy of the hand which wrote the lovely scene of lyric and romantic courtship between Antipholus of Syracuse and Luciana : but there is some light faint breath of the luminous April air which stirs and shines through every scene of Shakespeare's earliest plays in the opening of this fantastic little comedy. And there is something of a higher note in the utterance of the banished Duke's irreconcilable son, when he refuses to acquiesce with his father and sisters in submission to adversity without hope of retribution

or restoration, but repudiates all treacherous means of revenge on their supplanter :

I will not play the coward, kill him first  
And send my challenge after.

This almost tragic figure, which might have been borrowed from Marston and tempered or toned down in the borrowing, seems to bring luck to the lesser and gentler poet ; the character of his mistress takes something of life and charm on it when he leaves her, rejected and contemptuous, and the page to whom she has confessed that she " cannot live without him " replies, " O that he knew it, lady ! " The rejoinder is worthy of a greater and more famous dramatist. " He does : he would never have left me else. He does. " And the wrangling and love-making dialogue that follows is worthy either of Marston or of Jonson. But on the whole this play might not unjustly be described as Marston and water. Antonio, though he has some very pretty and fanciful verses to say, is a very thin " moonshine shadow " of Andrugio. But in lighter things the lighter touch of Day is graceful and pleasant enough ; the scene of blind man's buff in which the prisoner escapes by the help of his princess and her page, and leaves his gaoler in gaol, is as pretty an interlude of farce as even Molière could have devised by way of relief to the graver interest of romantic comedy.\*

\* In the third line of the second speech of this play there is an obviously ridiculous misprint : the " steeds still armed " could only have been " banded with steel, " not " branded "—or fired.

In the moral and satirical allegory of the scholar's pilgrimage, for the survival or revival of which Day and we owe sincere thanks to Mr. Bullen, the opening attack on the tricks of tradesmen is noticeable for a realistic force of humour not unworthy of Dekker. The wealth of curious terms and phrases would amply repay the research of a social historian or an intelligent lexicographer.\* There are such vivid and picturesque touches in the description of "Poneria, or Sin," as would be famous if they had but had the luck to be laid on by the hand of no better a poet than Bunyan. For example: "Her hair, that hung in loose trammels about her shoulders, like find threads of gold, *seemed like a curled flame that burns downwards.*" The entire allegory is alive with ingenious and imaginative invention of incident and symbol. There are touches of genuine if not very subtle or recondite humour in the seventeenth tractate: the description of "a kind of justice in law" and his household is hardly unworthy of Fielding or of Dickens; and "the new vicar, made out of an old friar that had been twice turned at a religion-dresser's," is a clergyman fit to stand beside the reverend and immortal figure of Parson Trulliber. In the nineteenth tractate it is curious to come once more upon the old mediæval fable or allegory of human life as a tree growing in the side of a gulf or pit, with God as a raging lion and the devil as a

\* In his description of Envy, Day uses the word "hag" as a masculine substantive, and Anger he defines as "a right low country boot-haler." The rare word "swelted" which occurs in the sixth tractate—"the beauteous flowers were nothing else but swelted weeds"—is apparently another form of "wilted."

fiery serpent above it and beneath, and the white mouse Day and the black mouse Night ever nibbling at the root of it.\*

The best known or rather the least unknown of Day's works belongs to the same category of allegorical satire. Leigh Hunt, who spoke of it with his usual and unfailing charm of sympathetic and sensitive appreciation in that delightful book which will always be especially cherished by all to whom his genius and Richard Doyle's are dear, was as right as might have been expected in his objection that the characters who play their parts in *The Parliament of Bees* were too unlike the makers of honey to represent them fairly in sight of the laziest and most indulgent fancy. He knew this quaint and queer and beautiful poem only by the extracts given in Lamb's priceless "Specimens," and consequently could not guess that it was mainly intended as a direct and obvious presentation, satirical or panegyric, of contemporary and characteristic types of men and women under the merely nominal and transparent form of bees. It is a real pity that the happy and happy-making author of *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* should never have read even the title of the original version unearthed by the deservedly fortunate and thank-worthy research of Mr. Bullen: "An old Manuscript containing the Parliament of Bees, found in a hollow tree in a garden at Hybla, in a strange language, and now faithfully translated into easy English verse by John Day, Cantabrig."—who ven-

\* In the seventh tractate there is a curious phrase which is new to me: "he is his own as sure as a club."



tures to append the motto chosen by Shakespeare for the first book which ever bore on its title-page the most illustrious of all mortal or immortal names. Balzac, if not Hugo, might have been interested to learn from the dedication "how Lewis the eleventh (of that name) King of France took notice, and bountifully rewarded a decayed gardener, who presented him with a bunch of carrots."

The partnership of Dekker in this work, detected and verified by Mr. Bullen, is confirmed beyond all question by comparison of the good metre in the charming sixth scene with the scandalously slipshod verse which here and there disfigures those which precede and follow it: a perverse and villainous defect peculiar to Dekker alone among all his fellows; a sin out of which even the merciless lash of Ben Jonson failed to whip him into repentance and reformation. The changes from the manuscript in the printed text are sometimes at least such improvements as transfigure rather poor verse into really good poetry; and sometimes of a much more dubious kind. A passage which does not reappear in the printed *Parliament of Bees*, but recurs in Dekker's *Wonder of a Kingdom*, seems to me better expressed in its original manuscript form:

He that will read my acts of charity  
Shall find them writ in ashes, which the wind  
Shall scatter ere he spells them.

In the text of Dekker's play we find this surely inferior version:

He that will read the wasting of my gold  
Shall find it writ in ashes, which the wind  
Will scatter ere he spends it.

But if Wordsworth, Landor, and even Tennyson, did not always change for the better, we can hardly expect a more infallible felicity in revision from Dekker or from Day.

That the third "Character" belongs to Dekker seems to me evident from the cancelled couplet which announces without introducing an important figure in *The Wonder of a Kingdom*, the disowned and impoverished brother of the profligate and ruffianly braggart. As that gallant and ill-requited soldier is the next "Character," this scene must also, I presume, be Dekker's. But it is Day, I think, who touches the loathsome lips of the typical and eternal poetaster—sycophant and slanderer, coward and liar—with indirect and involuntary praise of Persius. I doubt whether Dekker could have construed a dozen consecutive lines of the noble young Roman stoic.

How Day could have had the heart to cancel some of the sweetest lines he ever wrote I cannot conjecture ; but the strange fact is that these pretty verses were struck away from the sixth and grace-fullest scene of the most delightful little poem he has left us :

A pair of suns move in his spherelike eyes ;  
Were I love's pirate, he should be my prize.  
Only his person lightens all the room,  
For where his beauty shines night dares not come.  
His frown would school a tyrant to be meek ;  
Love's chronicle is painted on his cheek,  
Where lilies and fresh roses spread so high  
As death himself to see them fade would die.

This passage can hardly have been cancelled

because the characteristics of fascinating youth described in it were rather human than apiarian : the whole poem, on that score, would at once deserve the castigation of fire.

The seventh interlude, brightly and lightly written after the ready fashion of Dekker, has just the straightforward simplicity of his satire in its caricatures of parsimony and prodigality, with something of his roughness and laxity in metre. In the ninth and tenth we find him again, and recognize in each the first shape or sketch of yet another scene in the tragicomedy to which so much was transferred from this as yet unpublished poem. The eighth, a sequel or counterpart to the sixth, is no less evidently the work of Day : as smooth and musical in metre, as extravagant and fantastic in conceit. The two sweet and graceful scenes which wind up the pretty and fanciful web of this lyric and satiric poem are perhaps the best evidence left us of Day's especial and delightful gift ; fresh, bright, and delicate as the spirit and the genius of the poet and critic who discovered him, and gave his modest and gentle name the imperishable and most enviable honour of association with the name of Lamb.

ROBERT DAVENPORT



## ROBERT DAVENPORT

THE posthumous fortune of Robert Davenport is unique in the record of English poets. A moderate amount of modest recognition would seem to have fallen to his lot in life ; and then, after a century and a half of all but absolute oblivion, he was discovered and held up to honour by a critic from America. For once it is not to Charles Lamb that we owe the resurrection of a true and fine dramatic poet whose work belongs to the age of Shakespeare—to the half-century which closed on the outbreak of the civil war. Lamb did not discover Davenport till 1827—nineteen years after the memorable issue of his first “Specimens.” Washington Irving had long before introduced him to the readers of *Bracebridge Hall* with a most cordial and generous commendation of a poet who had chosen for his heroine a martyr or confessor to the religion of matrimony.

This was hardly so new or so exceptional a choice as the kindly critic seems to have thought it—forgetting apparently that the creator of Juliet was also the creator of Imogen ; and that Imogen, Hermione, and Desdemona are somewhat more typical and memorable examples of Shakespeare’s women than Juliet, Ophelia, or Anne Page. But we should not consider too curiously—we should not



be over-exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain criticism, when it is animated by genuine goodwill and instinct with a cordial sincerity. It is so much to his honour that Washington Irving should have been the first to introduce Davenport to his countrymen, that we may well overlook any seeming inaccuracy or impropriety in the terms of introduction. He is by no means exceptional among his fellows as an admiring student and a fervent painter of virtue and devotion on the part of an injured and long-suffering wife ; nor yet, on the other hand, as an admiring preacher and a fervent advocate of that abject and grovelling servility which was exacted from the ideal wife in ages whose ideal was the prone and preposterous patience of Griselda.

Nor is he, it must in fairness be added, exceptional among the followers of Shakespeare or of Fletcher as a lover and honourer of a far nobler type of womanhood. The heroine of his first extant play is a figure not unworthy to be set beside Ordella and Juliana : nay, a partial though not a disingenuous advocate might be permitted to plead that she is a more real and credible angel, less excessive and " exaggerative " in her devotion, than is either of these. Nor can I agree with Mr. Collier's verdict that " Davenport's production is inferior in most respects to the earlier work of Chettle and Munday " on the same subject. No doubt it " goes precisely over the same ground, and " (we must admit) " with many decided marks of imitation, especially in the conduct of the story " ; but what is best and most characteristic in Davenport's work is not only not derived from Chettle's, but is apparently inspired by

a wish to do better and a resolution to do otherwise than his predecessor. The two plays, valuable in themselves to all lovers and students of dramatic poetry, are invaluable as types of the sunrise and the sunset of the Shakespearean half-century. The earlier playwright's touch is lighter and swifter, but his method is thinner and shallower: Davenport has followed very closely on his track—as closely as Shakespeare on the track left open by the author of *The Taming of a Shrew*: but, like Shakespeare, he has deepened the lines and heightened the colours of the original poem. Chettle's Fitzwater is an admirable sketch, admirably completed by Davenport: Davenport's King John is perhaps less real and credible—he is certainly more effusive and poetic in his penitence—than Chettle's.

It is amusing to find in Mr. Bullen's reprint of the first edition that among the actors of *King John and Matilda* the representative of the venerable hero Fitzwater was one "whose action gave grace to the play," and that the murderer Brand was represented by an actor "who performed excellently well." These two were evidently recognized by the audience as the most effective and important figures in the composition of the play; though the eponymous persons are presented in a careful and workmanlike manner. There is true and keen pathos in the horrible scenes which represent the agony of a mother and her child slowly starved to death under the eye of their jeering gaoler: but few if any readers will differ from Mr. Bullen's objection that even tragedy has no right to deal with such harrowing elaborations of physical horror. Nevertheless it

must be allowed that the picture of a noble child's affectionate courage and devotion is as beautiful as the situation is hideous ; and that Davenport has at least spared us one dreadful detail on which his predecessor had expatiated—the fruitless attempt of the mother to feed her dying child with her own flesh and blood. Still on the whole he is the crueller of the two in his expansion and prolongation of the intolerable scene : though we may admit that he has nowhere else shown anything like such intensity of tragic and pathetic power. It is little less than bewildering to compare the remorseless and fearful realism of these revoltingly admirable scenes with the vile fantastic jargon of John's parting address to Matilda in the first scene of the play. Davenport has here successfully emulated the demerit of the worst passage in Chettle's tragedy—that in which young Bruce gives vent to what he too truly calls his " execrable execrations." Lamb has done no more than justice to the " passion and poetry " of the last scene : quaint and exuberant as the rhetoric may seem to a modern reader, it is singularly beautiful and musical as a close to so dark a tragedy.

The excess of stale second-hand euphuism in the poetical or sentimental parts of *The City Nightcap* is evidently due, as Mr. Bullen has shown, to the servile and belated fidelity with which the author has followed an already obsolete model in the artificial and overloaded style of Robert Greene. In the very first scene there are no less than six direct plagiarisms from the text of the romance by that poet on which the play is mainly founded : and there is not one of these passages which would not

be better away. Was it modesty, sheer laziness, or inveterate admiration for an early favourite, which so woefully misguided a poet who could write when it pleased him with such masculine purity and simplicity? The barren and cumbersome profusion of these faded artificial flowers, colourless now and scentless always, is not the only fault of a play in which there is so much of interest, pathos, passionate and poetic beauty. The virtuous hero is a most vile rascal—a bloody and cowardly cur; while the irrational brutality and the infernal rascality of a Leontes who is also an Iago—of a jealous husband whose jealousy induces him to hire false witnesses against the honour of his wife—are too plainly the qualities of an incurably criminal lunatic to make it possible or leave it credible that such a demoniac should be capable of repentance and reform. This fault is common to Greene's story and Davenport's play; but one of the finest passages in the latter is very closely modelled upon the fervent and eloquent prose of the older poet. Noble as are the parting speeches with which the innocent victims of perjury take leave of their betrayer in the trial scene of the play, it is to Robert Greene, and not to Robert Davenport, that the main honour is due for their piercing and pathetic eloquence. Indeed, the protest of Philomela is much finer, more dignified, and more proper than the more piteous appeal of *Abstemia*.

But the admirable if audacious broad comedy of the underplot is unsuggested by anything in Greene's novelette. Davenport is always more original and

usually more powerful as a comic than as a tragic writer. A curious if also an undesirable or indeed regrettable result of the poverty in stage properties which otherwise so happily distinguished the Shakespearean theatre was the possibility of such a bedroom scene as that which opens the second act being represented by any actors and tolerated by any spectators. The nakedness of the stage must have served, as it were, as a screen or a veil for the nakedness of the situation: which would otherwise have defied even the impudence of a Wycherley to venture on it, and might have made the chaste muse of Aphra Behn (first inventress though not sole patentee of the heroic negro) blush like a black dog—of the fairer sex.

In 1639 two little poems by Davenport, as well as his dramatic masterpiece, were given to the press. *A Crown for a Conqueror* is suggestive rather of a fool's cap for the poet: I am confident that Quarles has left behind him no worse trash. The "Dialogue supposed between a Lover and the Day" is a very different piece of work: it is even exquisitely pretty here and there, and written, as the author says in his dedication, "rather with a native familiarity than an impertinent elegance": which latter phrase would be only too appropriate a designation, too accurate a description, of his own too frequent style. *A Survey of the Sciences*, now first printed, is equally quaint, ingenious, and humorous—sometimes intentionally but oftener unintentionally provocative of a smile.

By far the best of Davenport's three surviving plays is that one which had never been reissued

until 1890. *A New Trick to cheat the Devil* is a masterpiece in its way, though it may be but "a stumbling-block" to readers who cannot imagine themselves more credulous or otherwise credulous than they are, and "foolishness" to such as will not understand that the superstitions of their forefathers were no whit more irrational and idiotic, unmanly and unworthy, than those which lead fools by the nose—by the nose of a palpably insensitive intelligence—on the track of the male and female Sludges who reap so rich a harvest from the typical idiocies and the representative lunacies of our own sagacious and contemptuous age. The construction of this externally eccentric play is so ingenious that the final solution, though admirably sufficient when we come to it, hangs far beyond conjecture, swings high out of apprehension, till the very close and consummation of it all; the supernatural machinery is so deftly handled, and so naturally adapted to the situations of the subjects on whom it is set to work, that on a first reading it may probably and plausibly seem as real and serious as in other plays of the same age—*A Mad World, my Masters*, or *Grim, the Collier of Croydon*; and yet, when the unexpected explanation is sprung upon us, and the terror is resolved into laughter, and divine admonition relaxes into human reprobation, the upshot is as satisfactory, and if the date of the play be considered is even as plausible, as that of any more famous and elaborate comedy applauded by the admirers of Congreve or of Sheridan. The style is far better and purer than that of Davenport's other two plays: the flowery verbosity which decorates and disfigures



them is happily absent here. Nor do even the quasi-miraculous incidents of the story tax our faith or outrage our patience so severely as those of Fletcher's *Night-Walker*—by no means one of its illustrious author's worst plays. The more serious parts of Davenport's tragicomedy may well sustain a comparison with Beaumont's work as well as Fletcher's; for the vigorous and masterly metre, infinitely superior to that of his two other plays, is but the natural and fitting raiment for the fresh and virile humour of dialogue and situation.

The exposition of the play is bright, brief, and straightforward, though the rhapsody in which Slightall plights his faith to Anne Changeable is about the worst piece of sheer nonsense to be found in the whole blatant record of euphuism. It does not prevent her father from giving his consent and blessing; but Mrs. Changeable opposes the match on behalf of the young Lord Skales, who has sent a proxy to propose in his name for her daughter's hand. Anne, forgetful of the fascinating and seductive eloquence which has just paid homage to "those intrammelled rays, those starry eyes Endymion blushes on" (whatever that may mean), "those ruby lips, where a red sea of kisses is divided by rocks of pearl," is easily persuaded to accept the nobleman and forsake the commoner; who thereupon, like any modern French hero, abjures "affection and all loyal love," and resolves to seek comfort in the career of a professional seducer and rioter. A usurer is found ready to make his profit of this rational resolution, on the assurance of the scrivener with whom he deals that the youngster is "well

possessed," having "three fair lordships, besides sheep-walks, parks, and other large demesnes," and that under the influence of a man of his who soothes him up in all his riots, and leads him to gamble and guzzle in places of bad fame, he may be led to sell his landed property on terms convenient to the conspirators. His honest and loyal servant Roger is unable to counteract the influence of this pimp and swindler Geoffrey; but the eloquent simplicity of his remonstrance may remind us of that admirable song on which Leigh Hunt wrote so admirable a commentary, *The Old and Young Courtier*.

The opening of the second act is as vivid and animated as was the opening of the first. Changeable begins by maintaining a better fight than Major Ponto or poor Frank Berry could have attempted against an imperious wife and an ambitious daughter: but Thackeray himself could hardly have bettered the sardonically comic effect of the scene when the noble suitor arrives, and disgusts the young woman who but a moment before was revelling in the reflection that his lordship was coming to see her ladyship. Mrs. Changeable's prostrate exultation could hardly have been bettered by any dramatic satirist—hardly even by Congreve or Molière. "I feel state come upon me," says her daughter;

Speak, good mother,  
How shall I bear myself?

The worthy Mistress Changeable is at no loss for an answer:

Why, such at first  
As you must be hereafter; like a lady,

Proud, but not too perverse ; coy, not disdainful ;  
 Strange, but yet not too strait ; like one that would,  
 Were she well wooed, but yet not to be won  
 Without some formal courtship : had it been  
 My case, my wench, when I was young like thee,  
 I could have borne it bravely. See, he's come ;  
 Husband, your duty ; *girl, your modest blush,*  
*Mixt with a kind of strange but loving welcome.*

This last touch seems to me worthy of Shakespeare rather than of Jonson. Anne, however, is even more disgusted than disappointed at sight of his luckless lordship ; and the satire aimed at the superstition or tradition of titular nobility is as remarkable as Chapman's attack on the institution of monarchy in a play which had been printed thirty-six years earlier. The spirit, humour, and vigour of the dialogue, till it rises to the culmination of contempt in Anne's inquiry whether her new suitor could not lend his lordship to a friend whom, had he but that slight addition, she gladly would embrace, may bear comparison with the work of any comic poet but Shakespeare. The squabble between the usurer and scrivener over the leavings of their victim is excellent ; there is hardly in all Ben Jonson's work a better or neater little bit of satiric realism : but the next scene has merit of a higher kind. Slightall, now thoroughly ruined, takes leave of his good and his evil counsellor like a generous and good-humoured gentleman : the honest Roger begs his master to keep the money bestowed on him at parting, and refuses to take it except as " a steward to your use, and always ready to furnish your least wants " ; but the unlucky

fellow is now so case-hardened against all coming troubles or comforts that even the appearance of Anne, in a penitent and pathetic state of mind, cannot move him to give over his fancy of applying to the devil for redemption from present wretchedness. Mad with misery and indignation, he rejects her offers and repels her apologies; breaks from her, and leaves her in a rage of repentance, for the treason of which she will not hold herself guilty—the true culprits being “her mother and that lord.”

The third act, by way of relief, changes both scene and tone, style and subject, after a fashion somewhat astonishing to modern readers; but the episode contained in it is a consummate and a blameless example at once of the broadest and the highest comedy. Old Friar Bernard and young Friar John, belated after nightfall on their return from visiting the sick, take shelter under the roof of a hostess who in her husband's absence has only a cock-loft at her disposal; in which she has no sooner locked up her reverend casuals than her lover the constable knocks at the door, bringing a couple of manchets and a bottle of wine. She lets him in, and produces for his entertainment a roast chicken piping hot, warning him not to speak loud enough to wake the two abbey lubbers whom she has locked up fast, being unable to get rid of them, with neither light nor bed nor any other comfort. Friar John, however, finding these conditions not overconducive to a good night's rest, peeps down from the cock-loft, and is watching with hungry envy the festive preparations below, when they are cut short by a fresh knock at the door and a call

from the hostess's husband outside for admittance. The constable is in an agony.

Dost thou not think he'll spare an officer,  
But fall on the king's image ?

He creeps under the bed : the supper is whisked into a cupboard, the fire put out, and the host at length admitted. He has travelled hard, and is very hungry ; be the time of night what it may, something he must and will have : his wife is obliged to rekindle the fire. The worthy host, now in high spirits, expresses a wish for company : " I had not such an appetite to be merry for an hour this seven year ; that I could tell where to call up some good fellow that I knew ! we would not part these two hours." The vigilant Friar John takes this as his cue, and forthwith makes such a noise in the garret that the hostess is compelled to confess what guests she has locked up in the straw-loft. He beshrews her for giving no better welcome to the very men he would have wished to meet with, and sends her up to release and bring them down. Unluckily, there is nothing for supper ; " not so much as a cantle of cheese or crust of bread that can this night be come by," protests the inwardly furious hostess. But Friar John, to the horror and amazement of his superior, offers to procure supper by art magic, and conjures the demon Asteroth to provide a couple of loaves baked in Madrid, the best wheat being in Spain ; bids mine host put but his hand into the corner, pull them forth, and place them behind the salt. Next, he calls for " a cup of divine claret ; no, a bottle of some two quarts " ; and the

host finds it in the place indicated. Asteroth must be but once more employed as purveyor, and provide a pullet piping hot: he, John, smells it smoking, and sauce to it. Ay, but where?

*John.* Somewhere about this room: who hath the key Of that same cupboard?

*Host.* Marry, Nan, my wife.

*John.* Call for it, good mine host.  
You see I come near nothing, use fair play,  
Saw neither fire nor candle to provide this,  
Touched neither lock nor key within your house,  
But was asleep i' the straw; unlock, mine host,  
See what the cupboard yields.

The men fall to and sup heartily. "Good Dame," says the attentive John, "methinks you do not eat." "I could eat *thee*," mutters the hostess to herself. The host now naturally wishes for a sight of so obliging a devil as Asteroth; but John assures him that it must be under some other likeness than his own, or the sight of him in his terrors would drive the spectator mad.

Have you no neighbour whom you best affect,  
Whose shape he might assume to appear less terrible?

*Host.* Yes, twenty I could name.

*John.* Soft, let me pause;  
It must be some that still wake at these hours,  
We have no power o'er sleepers: say I bring him  
In person of some watchman?

*Host.* No shape better.

*John.* Or in the habit of your constable?

*Host.* Why, he's my honest gossip.

*John.* Why, then, his.  
But, mine host, resolve me one thing: should great



Asteroth appear to you in your gossip's shape,  
How would you deal with him ?

*Host.* Why, as my friend,  
My neighbour and my gossip.

*John.* No such thing :  
You must imagine him what he appears,  
An evil spirit, to kick him and defy him  
As you would do the devil : otherwise,  
When you are late abroad, and we gone hence,  
He'll haunt your house hereafter.

Is it necessary to add that after a thunder-peal of resonant invocations Asteroth appears as required "from underneath the bed, in shape of Master Constable," to be forthwith kicked out of the room ? and that the hostess follows to let him out of doors, "lest he should bear down part of the house" ? -

*John.* We'll take our leaves ; make much of our good dame,  
And think no worse of your good officer,  
Your gossip and your neighbour, in whose form  
Asteroth so late appeared.

\* \* \* \* \*

Only commend us to my dame, your wife,  
And thank her for our lodging.

The jest, of course, is old enough ; but I cannot imagine that it can ever have been presented with such fullness of comic effect, such ripe and rich humour, or such excellent spontaneity and simplicity of natural and artistic style.

The next scene brings us back into an atmosphere of more serious emotion. The faithful Roger refuses the proffered patronage of Lord Skales, and tells

him he has driven a better man than himself to ruin—one whom his old servant will follow “to his grave, or to his better fortunes.” Anne denounces his lordship to his face as a noble thief who has stolen a contracted wife from her husband; her father as a gentle fool, her mother as a scold, and the subordinates according to their respective deserts. Her noble suitor, however, is rather attracted than repelled by the ingenuous expression of her high spirit.

To modern unbelievers in demonology the incidents of the two remaining acts, though excellently constructed and arranged, may probably appear too extravagant to evoke any more serious interest than that of perplexed curiosity. But the solution is so ingenious, and the stage effect of it so striking, that the play cannot fairly be said to fall off in merit towards the close; and enough has now been shown of it to justify the claim of its author to honourable remembrance, and to enhance the claim of his editor to our deepest and most cordial gratitude.



THOMAS NABBES



## THOMAS NABBES

IN the second issue of Lamb's *Selections from the Dramatic Poetry of the Shakespearean Age*, we find for the first time the name of Nabbes admitted to the company of names honoured by the notice of the greatest and surest critic that ever wrote or ever will write on a subject of unsurpassable interest to any historic student of English letters and of English character. This name was hardly worthy of inclusion in the priceless volume which first revived and revealed to modern readers the now deathless glories of Marlowe and of Webster, of Dekker and of Ford ; but to all true lovers of the incomparable and unapproachable work bequeathed us by our greatest school of writers it will seem worthy of honourable mention. Nabbes is to Shirley what Shirley is to Massinger ; but the inspiration then afloat and alive in the air of English poetry was so strong and keen and true that even the subordinates of the subordinates of Shakespeare are still and will always be memorable men. Any other nation but theirs would have long since registered their names among those which ought not to be forgotten.

*Covent Garden*, his earliest extant play, may be remembered as a late and slight example of a class which contains such admirable masterpieces



as *Eastward Ho!* and *Every Man in his Humour*; the realistic comedy of old-world London. It is "pleasant"—as its title-page not too arrogantly affirms—for students of the time who can be content with a modest allowance of comic or farcical humour interwoven with serious action and emotion. The more ambitious and eloquent rhetoric of the graver scenes has now and then some savour of the great style then gradually dying out; but the best character is the really humorous and original figure of the "complimenting vintner"—a new and amusing specimen of the old English host.\*

In the dedication of this comedy Nabbes compares Suckling to Pindar and himself to Bacchylides—Apollo alone knows why. He should have been sentenced to translate into Pindaric verse the immortal *Ballad on a Wedding*. His next attempt found no such distinguished patron, and suggested no such inexplicable comparisons. The "pleasant" comedy of *Tottenham Court* is only less unpleasantly unsatisfactory than Suckling's own abortive and illegitimate plays to the lover of comedy or melodrama. There are glimpses in it of a poet, and there are traces of a dramatist; but the incidents and the intrigues, instead of being fused or welded into harmony by the strong hand of a poet or the technical skill of a playwright, are not so much as pasted or stitched together with any decent pretension to plausible coherence. It is as far from success on the lines of Etherege and Wycherley as on the

\* A word rather overfamiliar as the synonym of the French *chauvin* occurs—to me unintelligibly—in the fifth scene of the third act: "pity from an Executioner, or bashfulness from a Jingo." The editor suggests no explanation.

lines of Jonson or Fletcher. There is matter enough in this failure for one romantic comedy of an earlier date and for more than one realistic comedy of a later ; but there is a plentiful lack of construction, composition, dramatic tact and inventive instinct. These awkward and abortive efforts of a decadent school may be found serviceable if not valuable as foils to the finished and admirable work of the great comic dramatists who arose at once after the Restoration. There is here some little savour lingering of poetry, of sentiment, of honest love and cordial simplicity ; but it is unmistakably flat and stale. Manners and morals are not very far above the later level : in wit and humour, strength of hand and excellence of workmanship, there can be no possible comparison. How far this anæmic and crestfallen generation of pithless poets and nerveless dramatists had sunk below the level of their fathers' days may be measured by the fact that a typical gallant of their pitiful time can find no stronger evidence to offer of his devotion to women than this : that he would not only " spin, or thread their needles," but even " read Spenser and the *Arcadia*, for their company."

Euripides himself could not have written a tragedy more spiritless and shapeless, more imbecile and insipid, than *Hannibal and Scipio*. The yawning reader will be reminded, and will yawn again over the recollection, of Lodge's *Marius and Sylla*. There are touches of rhetoric less merely vacuous than usual here and there ; the style and the metre are not so piteously prosaic as those of the dramatic date when James Thomson and Samuel

Johnson were taken for dramatic poets ; but the two distinguishing qualities of the verbosity which pervades and dilates it are flatulence and platitude.

When Lee makes temperate Scipio fret and rave,  
And Hannibal a whining amorous slave,

he is less unbearably unreadable than Nabbes.

*The Bride* is a play which would have done no discredit to Shirley : it stands well above his worst or hastiest comic work, if far beneath his thought-fullest and his best. We may think that "the picture would have been better if the artist had taken more pains" ; and again we may doubt. There is something flaccid and relaxed in the constitution or composition of this comedy : it has enough of real and vital merit to surprise and disappoint the reader who finds it on the whole so strangely wanting in the vigorous and coherent sufficiency of a really good play. The broad comic effect of one character, "an owner of rarities and antiquities," is exactly such as we find in the personal caricatures which still amuse the too infrequent reader in Foote's comedies or farces : and the humour of the arrogant and amorous French cook anticipates the more finished and maturer dignity of Thackeray's immortal Mirobolant. The simple justice and his imperious wife are really good studies in the school of Jonson. It is something for a writer of the Shakespearean decadence to have shown himself at once a not unworthy follower and a not unworthy precursor of men so far greater than himself as the authors of *Pendennis* and *The Silent Woman*.

The tragedy of intrigue is a subordinate form of

drama which cannot flourish but in a period of decadence, and cannot but flourish then. There are much worse examples of it extant in our own literature than a luckless play which was "denied the credit which it might have gained from the stage" on which the author's previous attempt at tragedy had found acceptance or toleration. It is not easy to imagine the reader who would not rather read or the audience who would not rather sit out the five acts of *The Unfortunate Mother* than the five acts of *Hannibal and Scipio*. And if the eye of Charles Lamb had happened to rest or to alight on the following lines, they would, if I mistake not, have had a fair chance of being embalmed for immortality—

If greatness

Were not a relative to all that's good  
 And glorious in the general speculation  
 Of things that do affect us, not in sense,  
 But the bright part of reason, emulous man  
 Would not through danger manage actions  
 So full of wonder, nor employ his faculties  
 In high designs : but like a heavy lump  
 That only by its weight moves to its centre,  
 And there sleeps, so should we : leave not so much  
 As the record of any memorable  
 And brave achievement, for a monument  
 That once such men had being.

This passage is worthy of Massinger or Ford.

*Microcosmus* is an ingenious and graceful masque, with enough in it of humour and poetry to keep the fancy and invention which they serve and inform alive and agreeable to the taste of modern readers

not overintolerant of facile moral allegory. The lesser masque of *The Spring's Glory* is noticeable only for the quaint and amusing passage at arms between Christmas, Shrovetide, and Lent. There is no great matter to be looked for in the minor poems of a minor poet; but a tolerant curiosity may be amused now and then by some of those appended to this masquetelet. The modest and good-humoured author may never find many readers; but none will regret the time spent on reading him, or question his claim to a place among English poets above the station of many whose names, if not their works, are more familiar to the docile and conventional student of English poetry.

RICHARD BROME





## RICHARD BROME

IF the futile and venerable custom of academic disputations on a given theme of debate were ever to revive in the world of scholarship and of letters, an amusing if not a profitable theme for discussion might be the question whether a minor artist of real and original merit is likelier to gain or to lose by the association of his name with that of a master in his art. And no better example could be taken than that afforded by the relation of Dick Brome to Ben Jonson. The well-known first line of the commendatory verses with which his master and patron condescended to play the part of sponsor to his first comedy must probably be familiar to many who care to know no more than that Ben had " Dick " for a servant once, and testified that he " performed a servant's faithful parts " ; and further, that when Dick took to play-writing Ben encouraged him with sublime condescension and approval of the success attained by his disciple through dutiful observation of those laws of comedy " which I, your master, first did teach the stage." From this Olympian nod of supercilious approbation it might be inferred, and indeed has very probably been inferred by the run of readers, that Brome, as dramatist and humorist, was little or nothing more than a shadow

or an echo, more or less definite or distinct, of his master's figure and his master's voice. And unquestionably he must have learnt much and gained much by such intercourse and such discipleship. His first play, *The Northern Lass*, appearing and succeeding as it did under the kindly if haughty patronage of his master, and deserving as it certainly was of that patronage and success, might perhaps have been better and might perhaps have been worse if the author's agile and active talent had been uninfluenced and unmodified by the rigid example and the imperious authority of Ben Jonson. The stage is so crowded and the action is so crossed by the coming and going of so many ludicrous and serious figures, that the attention if not the patience of the reader is overstrained by the demand made on it; and the movements of the figures through the mazes of a complex dramatic dance are not so happily regulated as to avoid or to avert an irritating sense of confusion and fatigue. But there are scenes and touches of character in it worthy of very high praise: the gentle heroine, tender and true (if somewhat soft and simple) as a "northern lass" should appear in compliance with tradition, is a figure very gracefully outlined, if not quite adequately finished or relieved: there is something more of sentimental interest or romantic suggestion in the ingenious if incomposite plot than might have been expected from a disciple of Jonson's: and the direct imitation of his Bobadil and Master Mathew is too lively and happy to be liable to the charge of servile or sterile discipleship. And there are few scenes in all the range of serio-comic drama more effective and

impressive on even a second or third reading than that in which the friend of an intending bridegroom attempts to break off his match with a woman whom he believes unworthy by denunciation of his friend's imaginary vices, and is fascinated himself by the discovery of her unshaken and unselfish devotion.

The modern reader of this play, the earliest attempt of its author and an excellent example of his talent, will probably be struck by the evidence it affords that Brome in our own day would have won higher distinction as a novelist than he did in his own as a playwright. Were he now alive, he would be a brilliant and an able competitor in their own field of work and study with such admirable writers as Mrs. Oliphant and Mr. Norris. His powers of observation and invention were not, if I mistake not, inferior to theirs; and the bent of his mind was not more technically dramatic. In fact, his characters are cramped and his plots are distorted by compression into dramatic shape: they would gain both in execution and in effect by expansion, dilation, or dilution into the form of direct and gradual narrative.

The opening scene of *The Sparagus Garden* is as happily humorous and as vividly natural as that of any more famous comedy. Tim Hoyden is a figure not unworthy of comparison with Sir Mannerly Shallow in Crowne's excellent broad comedy of *The Country Wit*—as that rural knight may be held worthy to rank as a precursor, a herald from afar, a daystar announcing the sunrise, of Congreve's matchless and inimitable Sir Wilfrid Witwould. But in Congreve's time, and even in Crowne's, the

construction of a play—its carpentry, to use a French term beloved of the great Dumas—was too well understood for it to have been possible that a writer of brilliant ability and conscientious energy should have offered to the public a play so roughly put together—so loose on its hinges and so shaky in its joints. “It is no common play,” says a friend of the author in a remarkably well-written copy of commendatory verses ;

Nor is thy labyrinth [? so] confused but we  
In that disorder may proportion see.

That is, I should be inclined to add, on a second reading. The actual audience of that ideal time for dramatists and poets must have been as quick to seize the clue and follow the evolution of the most complicated plot or combination of plot with underplot or counterplot as to catch and relish the finer graces of poetry, the rarer beauties of style, the subtler excellences of expression. The influence of Jonson is here still patent and palpable enough ; but the incomposite composition of so vigorous and humorous a piece of work will recall to the mind of a critical reader, not the faultless evolution of such a flawless masterpiece as *The Alchemist*, but the disjointed and dislocated elaboration of so magnificent a failure—if failure we may diffidently venture to call it—as *The Devil is an Ass*. It is surely a very bad fault for either a dramatist or a novelist to cram into the scheme of a story or to crowd into the structure of a play, too much bewildering ingenuity of incident or too much confusing presentation of

character : but such a fault is possible only to a writer of real if not high ability.

*A Mad Couple well Matched* is very clever, very coarse, and rather worse than dubious in the bias of its morality ; but there is no fault to be found with the writing or the movement of the play ; both style and action are vivid and effective throughout. That " a new language and quite a new turn of comic interest came in with the Restoration " will hardly be allowed by the readers of such plays as this. That well-known and plausible observation is typical of a stage in his studies when Lamb was apparently if not evidently unversed in such reading as may be said to cast over the gap between Etherege and Fletcher a bridge on which Shirley may shake hands with Shadwell, and Wycherley with Brome. A more brutal blackguard, a more shameless ruffian, than the leading young gentleman of this comedy will hardly be found on the stage of the next theatrical generation. Variety of satirical observation and fertility of comic invention, with such vigorous dialogue and such strong sound English as might be expected from a disciple of his master's, give to this as to others of Brome's comedies a quality which may fairly and without flattery be called Jonsonian ; and one of the minor characters is less a reminiscence of Juliet's nurse than an anticipation of Miss Hoyden's. No higher praise could be given, as no higher could be deserved.

The prologue to *The Novella* is really worthy of Dryden : its Jonsonian self-confidence and defiance are tempered by a certain grace and dexterity of expression which recalls the style and the manner

of the later rather than the earlier laureate. In this brilliant and audacious comedy the influence of Ben Jonson's genius and example is exceptionally perceptible and exceptionally happy; for here it is the author of *Volpone*, not the author of *Bartholomew Fair*, who has inspired and guided the emulous ability of his servant. The metre and style are models of comic language and versification; the action, if a little complicated and more than a little improbable, is as lively as in any of Fletcher's rather than of Jonson's comedies. The plot is as usual a little too exacting in its demands on the attention of reader or spectator; there is not quite sufficient distinctness of outline in the various figures of seniors and juniors, pantaloons and harlequins, Gérontes and Léandres, to make it at first sight as amusingly easy as it should be to follow their various fortunes through so many rather diverting than edifying evolutions and complications; but, daring even to the verge of impudence as is the central conception of the subject, the tone or atmosphere of this Venetian comedy is less greasy than that of the author's London studies in vicious or dubious lines of life; a fresh point in common, I need hardly observe, between the disciple and his master.

In *The Court Beggar* and *The City Wit*, twin comedies of coarse-grained humour and complicated intrigue, we breathe again the grimier air of Cockney trickery and Cockney debauchery; but the satire on "projectors" or speculators in monopoly is even now as amusing as it is creditable to the author to have seconded in his humbler fashion the noble satirical enterprise of Massinger and Ben Jonson



against the most pernicious abuses of their time. The three wits of the court, the country, and the city are good strong sketches in caricature; and there are passages of such admirable eloquence in such excellent verse of the higher or graver comic style as would not have misbeseeemed the hand of Jonson himself. The opening scene, for instance, in which the heroine remonstrates with her father for exchanging the happy and honoured life of a hospitable and charitable country gentleman for the mean and improvident existence of an intriguing parasite, is as fine an example of earnest or serious comedy as may be found in *Shirley* at his best: and the scene in the second act between the grave and eloquent dotard Sir Raphael and the unmercifully ingenious Lady Strangelove is even a better because a more humorous piece of high comic work; so good, indeed, that in its kind it could hardly be bettered. But *The City Wit* is the finer and shapelier comedy of the two; well conceived, well constructed, and well sustained. The conception, if somewhat farcically extravagant in outline, is most happily and ingeniously worked out; and the process or progress of the comic action is less broken, less intermittent, more workmanlike and easier to follow, than in most if not in all of the author's preceding plays. Even where the comic types are far enough from original, there is something original and happy in the treatment and combination of their active or passive humours.

*The Damselle*, a spirited and well-written comedy, is so inferior in tone and composition as to suggest a reversion on the author's part to the cruder and



coarser effects or attempts of his dramatic nonage. Justice Bumpsey is one of Brome's very best and most original creations—so fresh, and so genuine a sample of comic or farcical invention that Jonson might have applauded it with less extravagance or perversion of generosity than his cordial kindness of nature led him sometimes to indulge in. There are passages and scenes of genuine eloquence and of pathetic sincerity in this rough and wayward piece of dramatic composition or incomposition; but the presentation of the plot or plots is as clumsy and confusing as their evolution is awkward and confused; and the noisome villainy of a character at first presented as a possible object of sympathy, and finally as a repentant and redeemed transgressor, might have made Wycherley himself—or any one but Wycherley—recoil. But there is no sign of decadence in literary ability or inventive humour; indeed, if I mistake not, two or three better comedies than this might have been carved out of the material here compressed and contorted into the mould of one. In the first scene of the second act a dramatic and effective touch of satire will remind the reader of Mr. Pickwick's horror and Mr. Perker's protest against his horror at the existence—in his day as in Brome's—of witnesses whose oaths were as readily on hire as the principles of a disunionist politician—or, if the phrase be preferred, of a separatist statesman.

*The Queen's Exchange* is one of the last examples of its kind; a survival from the old school of plays founded on episodes of imaginary history and built up with incidents of adventurous romance; active in invention and agile in movement, unambitious

in style, and not unamusing in result. The clowneries and the villainies, the confusions and the conversions of character and fortune, seem curiously archaic or old-fashioned for the date of this belated tragicomedy; but to lovers of the better sort of drama it will be none the less acceptable or tolerable on that account.

One of the most fanciful and delightful farces in the world is *The Antipodes*. In this charming and fantastic play a touch of poetic humour, a savour of poetic style, transfigures and exalts wild farce to the level of high comedy. The prologue to this, one of his latest comedies, is as remarkable for its exceptional quality of style as is the admirable dedication of his earliest, *The Northern Lass*. After a satirical apology for his inability to compete with the fashionable writers of plays

that carry state

In scene magnificent and language high

And clothes worth all the rest, except the action,

he reminds his audience that

Low and home-bred subjects have their use

As well as those fetched from on high or far ;

And 'tis as hard a labour for the Muse

To move the earth, as to dislodge a star.

Had these two last lines been Dryden's, they would have been famous. And had the play thus introduced been Jonson's, it must have taken high rank in the second if not in the first class of his works as a successful comedy of humours. Joylesse and his wife, with the "fantastic" Lord Letoy, are faithful but not servile studies after the manner of the master,

who had been dead but a year when it came out, and as we learn from the author's postscript was generally applauded. The small part of the curate or chaplain Quailpipe might have been of service to Macaulay in a famous chapter of his history as an example of the humble if not contemptible position occupied in great households by men of his cloth or calling.

If Shirley may be described as a bridge between Fletcher and Etherege, Brome may be defined as a link between Jonson and Wycherley. But if some of his stage effects are crude enough in their audacity of presentation and suggestion to anticipate the tone and manner of the theatre under Charles II, the upshot of such a play as this pays at least a conventional deference to the proprieties and moralities. Virtue—of a kind—presides over the solution of a tangled and crowded intrigue, which might perhaps have gained rather than lost in clearness or vivacity if impression and effect by a little more reserve in the exercise or reticence in the display of ingenuity and invention. Perplexity and surprise ought hardly to be the mainsprings of comic art as displayed either in the evolution of intrigue or in the development of character. But no such fault, and indeed no fault of any kind, can be found with the play within this play. Even on a third or fourth reading it is impossible for even a solitary reader to reopen it at almost any part without an irresistible impulse to laugh—not to smile approval or appreciation, but to laugh out aloud and uncontrollably. The logic of the burlesque, its topsy-turvy coherence, its preposterous harmony, its incongruous congruity of contradictions, is as perfect as its exuberance of

spontaneous and various fertility in fancy and in fun is inexhaustible and superb. The delicious inversion of all social or natural relations between husband and wife, mistress and servant, father and son, poet and puritan, lawyer and client, courtiers and clowns, might satisfy the most exacting socialist ; and the projects for the relief, encouragement, and support of criminals and scoundrels in general at the expense of the State could hardly be held unworthy of consideration by the latest and loudest apostles of professional philanthropy. Something of Jonson's influence is still perceptible in the conception and construction of this play ; but in joyous ease and spontaneity of comic imagination and expression the disciple has excelled his master.

*The English Moor, or The Mock Marriage*, is an ingenious and audacious comedy of ill-contrived and ill-combined intrigue, at once amusing and confusing, which might have been better than it is if both characters and incidents had been fewer, but more neatly and lucidly developed and arranged ; rich in good suggestions and good possibilities, but imperfect in evolution and insufficient in impression through overmuch crowding and cramping of the various figures and the complicated action. *The Love-sick Court* is such an example of unromantic romance and unimaginative invention as too often wearies and disappoints the student of English drama in its first period of decadence ; yet even in the decadence of the greatest and most various school of tragic and of comic poetry that ever this country or this world has witnessed there are signs of life and survivals of style which give to all but its

very meanest examples a touch of comparative interest and a tone of comparative distinction.

In *The Covent Garden Weeded* the studious though not servile imitation of Ben Jonson is obvious enough to explain though not to justify the sneer of Randolph at the taste of the audiences who were more contented with what Brome swept from his master than with the worst leavings and the flattest dregs of that master's exhausted genius and decrepit industry. This clever and ingenious comedy is evidently built more or less on the lines of Jonson's most realistic and gigantic farce: and the obligation is no less directly than honourably acknowledged by Brome at the very opening of the very first scene, where Justice Cockbrain, "the Weeder of the Garden," cites with all due accuracy, as well as all due respect, the authority of his reverend ancestor Justice Adam Overdo. It cannot, of course, bear comparison with that huge and unlovely though wonderful and memorable masterpiece; but it is easier in movement and lighter in handling of humours and events.

*The New Academy, or The New Exchange*, is a tangled and huddled comedy of unattractive and improbable intrigue, nor unrelieved by glimpses of interest and touches of humour; worth reading once as a study of manners and language,\* but hardly worth tracing out and unravelling through all the incoherent complications and tedious convolutions of its misshapen and misconstructed plot. The romantic tragicomedy of *The Queen and Concubine* is a rather pallid study in the school of

\* I have not met elsewhere with the quaint verb "to snook" ("over my wife at home," says "an uxorious citizen").

Fletcher, with touches of Jonsonian farce and more than Jonsonian iteration of cheap humours and catchpenny catchwords : but it is not unamusing in its vehement exaggeration of wickedness and goodness, of improbable impulse and impossible reaction ; and there is still a certain lingering fragrance—the French word *relent* would perhaps express it better—of faint and fading poetry in the tone of style and turn of phrase, which no later playwright could regain or reproduce.

The best of all Brome's plays is curiously enough the only one that has attained any posthumous popularity or any durable celebrity. It has nothing of such brilliant, spontaneous, and creative humour as flashes and vibrates through every scene of *The Antipodes* ; nothing of such eccentric, romantic, and audacious originality as modesty must blush to recognize and weep to acknowledge in *The Novella* ; but for sustained interest and coherent composition of quaint, extravagant, and consistent characters with fresh, humorous, and plausible results, for harmony of dramatic evolution and vivacity of theatrical event, I doubt whether it could be matched, and I am certain that it could not be excelled, outside the range of Shakespeare's comedies and farces. The infusion of romantic interest and serious poetry in *Beggar's Bush* may give to Fletcher's admirable tragicomedy a higher literary place on the roll of the English drama ; but the superiority of the minor poet as a dramatic artist, and not merely as a theatrical craftsman, is patent and palpable beyond discussion or dispute.\*

\* The text of Brome's plays, which, though reprinted with



In the dramatic literature of any country but ours the name of Richard Brome would be eminent and famous: being but an Englishman, he is naturally regarded by critics and historians after the order of Hallam as too ineffably inferior for mention or comparison with such celebrities as Regnard or Goldoni. That such a character as Justice Clack is worthy of Molière in his broader and happier moods of humour could hardly seem questionable even to the dullest of such dullards if his creator had but "taken the trouble to be born" in France, in Italy, or in any country but their own. As it is, I cannot suppose it possible that English readers will ever give him a place beside the least of those inferior humorists who had the good fortune or the good sense to be born outside the borders of England.

all their imperfections on their heads, have never yet been edited, might supply the English dictionary with several rare and noticeable words. In *The City Wit* a short dramatic entertainment or interlude is announced as a "ballet." In *A Jovial Crew* we find the word "gentile" (once used, and afterwards cancelled, by Ben Jonson): "Provided your department be gentile" (a verse but too suggestive of Mr. Turveydrop and the Prince Regent); "gently" or "gentilely": "They live very civilly and gently among us"—Act i, Scene 1; "remore" as a verb: "Should that remore us"—same scene; "rake-shame," a curious variant or synonym of "rakehell": "It had been good to have apprehended the Rakeshame"—Act iii, Scene 1. "Skise," apparently a variant of the Shakespearean word "skirr": "Skise out this away, and skise out that away"—Act iv, Scene 1; "yawdes" for jades: "Your yawdes may take cold, and never be good after it"—same scene. In the first scene of the second act there is a curious mention of Bath, and of Captain Dover's games on the glorious Cotswold Hills: "We are not for London." "What think you of the Bath then?" "Worse than t'other way. I love not to carry my Health where others drop their Diseases. There's no sport i' that." "Will you up to the hill-top of sports, then, and Merriments, *Dover's Olimpicks* or the *Cotswold Games*?" "No, that will be too publique for our Recreation."



JAMES SHIRLEY



## JAMES SHIRLEY

IF ever the time-honoured French fashion of republishing the select works of an author in place of a complete edition might reasonably find favour in the eyes of an English student, it certainly might in the case of Shirley. A considerable section or division of the six goodly volumes which contain the first collection ever made of his multitudinous works is taken up by such vapid and colourless sketches, such mere shadows or phantoms of invertebrate and bloodless fancy, as leave no trace behind on the memory but a sense of tedious vanity and unprofitable promptitude of apparently copious but actually sterile invention. Very possibly he never wrote anything quite so bad, so insolently faulty, and so impudently preposterous, as the very worst improvisations of his master Fletcher; but even such otherwise unqualified rubbish as *The Sea Voyage* or *The Nice Valour* has the one qualifying merit, the one extenuating circumstance, of being readable—not without irritation, indignation, and astonishment, but at all events without stupefying fatigue and insuperable somnolence.

Too many of Shirley's plays may be read or skimmed without exciting any more active or stimulating emotions than these. Royal Masters,

Duke's Mistresses, Constant Maids, Young Admirals, Balls, Coronations, and Humorous Courtiers pass before the reader's half-closed eyes in a long thin stream of indistinguishable figures and memorable events. They never, as far as he can observe or can remember, sink below a certain modest level of passable craftsmanship and humble merit ; but they never rise into palpable distinction or cohere into substantial form. The worst that can be said of them is not that they are wanting in merits or abounding in faults, but that they do not exist ; they have absolutely no principle of life, no reason for being, no germ of vitality whatever. It would be something if even they were bad ; it would be something if even they were dull ; but they are not bad, they are nothing ; they are not dull, they are null. You read them, and feel next day as if you had read nothing. The leading articles of last week's journals have left as much mark on your memory, as much impression on your mind. Perhaps you can hardly tell—they may be rather good of their kind than bad ; but their kind has no right to propagate, no reason to produce. Once or twice the writer may remind you of Jonson—with all the sap squeezed out of him, or of Fletcher—with all his grace evaporated ; but as a rule they are simply wearisome and conventional, anæmic and invertebrate. Even those who loathe the Puritans with a loathing equal to that of Butler may admit, as one at least of their number is ready to do, that if the advent of those brainless and brutish devil-worshippers had cut off nothing better worth keeping than the average of Shirley's supply for the London

stage, literature and art and poetry would have had no very heavy charge to bring against their deadliest and most desperate enemies.

On the other hand, it would be unjust to undervalue the merit of the work which seventy years since found its first articulate admirer in Campbell, and has lately found a no less cordial than capable advocate in Mr. Gosse. Nor will any one deny the claim of Shirley to the neutral credit of such negative commendation as may be due to a writer alike incapable of the faults and of the excellences which distinguish or disfigure the work of greater men. In Defoe's phrase, "he can't commit their crimes; it would task a stronger genius than his to do so. But then the question with regard to a poet's claims is not a question of abstinence, but of achievement; he must be judged by consideration of what he has accomplished, not of what he has avoided. Virtue which depends on incompetence to sin can hardly be commended for withstanding temptation. "J'admire Scipion, soit," says Victor Hugo; "j'admire moins Origène."

Abstinence, however, is not Shirley's only virtue; if it were, he would now be sleeping with Tate and Home, Cumberland and Jephson, Talfourd and Sheridan Knowles. There are very remarkable and admirable exceptions to the general mediocrity of his level, conventional, unambitious, and languid work. The terrible sarcasm which lashed him into oblivion for a century and a half may possibly, if not justifiably, have been provoked by the revival of his first play, a year after the author's death: a resurrection which may not unnaturally have been

regarded by Dryden—it must assuredly be regarded by modern students—as an example of the survival of the unfittest. That *Love Tricks, or the School of Complement* (in modern English, of accomplishments), should have been reissued on the stage forty-two years after its first appearance is so unaccountable a fact that it may be allowed to account for the contempt with which the Laureate of the Restoration referred to the memory of Shirley fifteen years later.

This first attempt of its author is a feebly preposterous and impotently imitative abortion, and the product of second-hand humour and second-rate sentiment: but though always absurd it is not always dull; there are one or two redeeming touches which indicate or suggest a latent or dormant capacity for better things. There is a pleasant anticipation of modern progress on the social lines of French democracy in the first scene, when an amorous elder on the eve of marriage reflects and resolves thus manfully: "I will get but one child, and that shall be a boy, lest having too many children I undo my heir, and my goods be divided." That a royalist playwright of retrogressive and reactionary England should thus early have foreseen and forecast the future of "the great nation," under the practical and exemplary influence of the most advanced and enlightened children of its unspeakably sublime revolution, may perhaps be no less edifying than amusing to readers not inoculated with incurable Gallomania.

The absurd fancy of representing an old man under the delusion that his youth had been restored to him

can only be excelled in preposterous and irritating inanity of impotent invention by the ineffable notion of introducing a young libertine, in the heyday of impudent vigour and rampant recklessness, whom a virtuous young woman, assisted by acquaintances of such virtue as will ignore blows and kicks administered by the subject of the experiment, succeeds in persuading that he is dead. How such impudent and insufferable nonsense can ever have crawled on to the stage or crept into print it is difficult to understand. *The Witty Fair One* is woefully witless stuff—inane, incoherent, incomposite, impossible, and dull. A pretty piece of smooth and smirking verse, which might have passed unobserved among far nobler passages in almost any play of Dekker's or Middleton's or Marston's, attracted the attention of a critic who did not think overmuch of Shakespeare to a somewhat vapid and flaccid play of Shirley's. I doubt if the reader whom this quotation may induce or impel to peruse *The Brothers* will bless the memory of the critic who suggested such an enterprise. "They did not think," says one of the actors in the last scene, "to find this pale society of ghosts"; which shows that he had not had time to keep company with his fellow phantoms, the other and latter ghosts of their romantic or sentimental invention. A paler or more featureless "society" it would be difficult to find.

But when Shirley was not astray on the track of his adored Fletcher, limping and wheezing and hobbling behind that splendid if not always reliable racer, he could run better than might have been expected by a spectator of his performances in a field



reserved for steeds of finer blood and higher mettle. I can by no means agree with Mr. Dyce that the happiest efforts of his genius will perhaps be found in the tragic portions of these variegated dramas, his romantic or tragicomic studies in the school of Fletcher rather than Beaumont. Such a tragedy as *The Traitor*, such a comedy as *The Example*, may defy comparison with the best of these hybrid and imitative creatures of overworked invention and fatigued or enfeebled fancy. Even *The Maid's Revenge*, for which his very editors have hardly a good word, is a failure which makes us feel that it ought to have been a success; crude, rude, coarse, and rough as it is, there is more suggestion if not more presentation of natural passion and dramatic life in it than in a later play, so much better polished and composed, so much more equable and elaborate, as *The Cardinal*. But the fiendish atrocity of Catalina is a flight beyond the gentle capacity of Shirley: his pinion flags in the attempt, and his voice cracks in the effort to express such murderous and perfidious passions. A very fine tragedy might have been made out of the story: but when we think what Middleton and Rowley would have given us, had they happily chanced to undertake it, we cannot be thankful enough that the story of Beatrice and De Fleres fell into the right hands, and was treated by artists who could make at once the most and the best of it, as they would have made, and Shirley could not make, of the story of Antonio and Berinthia.

In *The Brothers*, his next play, Shirley now and then touches a note of feeling and expression more natural

and more graceful, more proper and peculiar to his talent. The subject, in stronger hands, might have been the groundwork of a very noble play; in Shirley's it is but faintly attempted and inadequately carried out, with nothing like the vigour and vitality of Mr. Norris's admirable story, *Major and Minor*. One scene, however, is worthy of Fletcher: that master of tender fancy and romantic emotion might well have approved and enjoyed so charming a study in his school of art as the interview between the disinherited lover and the girl who would share his fallen fortunes, but finds him unwilling—too loyal and unselfish, or too diffident and half-hearted—to prove unkind, and marry her. That the woman's part is finer than the man's is typical of the author's somewhat feminine if not effeminate genius. He looks on vice and virtue, prosperity and adversity, action and passion, in the spirit of an amiable woman whose instincts are innocent and domestic, but whose literary ambition is apt to tempt her into unseemly affectation of a man's unconscious tone, and indecorous imitation of his natural manner. He tries now and then to play Tom Jones, but his heart is with Sir Charles Grandison. His passion, at its highest and keenest, is never anything more than intensified sentiment. Even in *The Witty Fair One*, gross and monstrous in its coarseness and absurdity as is the more original and rememberable portion of the plot, there are touches of liveliness and ingenuity; such as the amusing if rather easy and trivial device of the letter returned by a mistake which brings about one or two fairly effective scenes: but even this better part is not vigorously or tho-

roughly conceived and carried out. The best thing in the play, the ingenious device by which Violetta discovers her regard and gains herself a lover, is borrowed—and certainly not heightened or bettered in the borrowing—from Marston's Dulcibel in *The Fawn*. One excellent touch of humour and good sense in this abortive comedy bears evidence to the unchanged and unchangeable absurdity of affectation which will probably always distinguish a fool whelped in England from a fool whelped in any other country. "What say you to England?" asks a simple young fellow who has just been desired to name what kingdom or province he has most mind to travel in. "By no means," replies the tutor who has undertaken to imbue him with the principles of culture; "it is not in fashion with gentlemen to study their own nation; you will discover a dull easiness if you admire not, and with admiration prefer not, the weeds of other regions before the most pleasant flowers of your own garden." The most "cultured" Oxonicule of the present day could have said no better and no more.

The fifth of Shirley's plays is his first really good one: and *The Wedding* is a tragicomedy which would have done no discredit to an older and more famous poet. Fletcher, who had been dead four years when it first appeared in print, has left us much worse as well as much better work than this. The first and central incident of the action may or may not have been borrowed from an earlier play that Field had published, a comedy, twenty-seven years before, in which the bridal of an innocent girl was broken off by the intervention of a slanderer and the

defamation of her chastity. The effect is less striking from a theatrical point of view in Shirley's play than in Field's ; but the incident is at once more credible and more explicable. The slanderer in Field's play is a rather theatrical villain—an improbable compound of Pistol and Iachimo : the motive which impels the unconscious calumniator in Shirley's is honest and friendly. And in composition and execution this play is so far ahead of any previous work from the same hand that the first audience or the first reader might well have been inclined to question the authenticity of its ascription to the author of Shirley's previous plays. The farcical underplot is not very refined or very subtle, but not less amusing than Massinger's or Fletcher's rougher work on the same or a similar line : and the construction would be almost blameless if the conduct of the disguised girl on whose perfidy the whole plot hinges had been more rational and less theatrical. The eternal " she-page " who pesters and infests the plays of the period is a more positive nuisance in Shirley's than even in Massinger's. The Viola-Cesario of Shakespeare's invention, the Bel-lario-Euphrasia of Beaumont's or Fletcher's, must regretfully be held responsible for numberless idiocies of imitation. In the hands of Ford or Dekker this common type of deformed devotion becomes too tragic and pathetic to fall under the same reprobation as the tricks and shifts of these more conventional playwrights. Poor Winnifrede in *The Witch of Edmonton* is a more touching and life-like figure than the jaded invention of such imitative dealers in sentiment or sensation could evoke.

It is amusing to find in the next work of so fervent a royalist as Shirley so sharp a stroke of satire aimed at his fellows of the court as might have been dealt by a writer of the opposite party at the conspirators against the constitution who were soon to succeed in plunging their country into civil war and bringing their leader to the scaffold. "I shall quickly learn to forget myself," says "a foolish ambitious steward" in the tragicomedy of *The Grateful Servant*, "when I am great in office; I will oppress the subject, flatter the prince, take bribes on both sides, do right to neither, serve heaven as far as my profit will give me leave, and tremble only at the summons of a parliament." Charles I had been six months on the throne when this comedy was licensed. Like the great majority of Shirley's plays, it is "too bad for a blessing, too good for a curse": and the reader will not improbably "wish from his soul it were better or worse." There is no lack of pretty flowery writing in it, which seems to have taken the fancy of Campbell more than the more serious merit of its author's better plays; but there is not much else. Conventional motives and fantastic impulses take the place of noble passions and natural emotions; the curious mixture or alternation of shameless and unnatural brutality in the villainous libertine of the play with the most refined and rose-coloured devotion in its sentimental heroine is not only significant but typical of the decadence from the age of Shakespeare and Webster which found its fittest and its fairest representatives in Davenport and Shirley. That the inevitable "she-page" was not yet unacceptable to an overtolerant audience is no less evident than

inexplicable. The fantastic unreason of Spanish chivalry and the fantastic perversity of English sentimentalism have seldom been exemplified in a more ludicrously serious manner than by a lover's offer to cede his mistress to his sovereign out of regard for her (" I love her still, and in that study her advancement ! ") and by the author's evident belief that this monstrous prostitution of sentimental servility is (in his own words) a " miracle of honour, and of love." It is enough to make one think that the court whose fashionable sentiment found its prophet or exponent in Shirley—the court of Henrietta Maria—might have been the court of Blanche Amory, the immortal young lady who had always on hand a whole stock of sham or second-hand emotions.

Two years after the appearance of this pretty but uninteresting sample of sentimental and ineffectual invention, the one play which gives its author a place among the tragic poets of Shakespeare's age and country was licensed for the stage, and found its way into print four years afterwards. The gravest error or defect of Shirley's work as a dramatist is usually perceptible in the management of his underplots ; his hand was neither strong enough to weld nor skilful enough to weave them into unity or harmony with the main action ; and the concurrent or alternate interests, through lack of coherence and fusion, become a source of mere worry and weariness to the distracted attention and the jaded memory. But the main plot of *The Traitor*, founded on the assassination or immolation of Alessandro de' Medici by his kinsman Lorenzino (whom Shirley—and for



that matter Musset and Dumas—probably did not know to have been a brother dramatist), is very neatly and happily interwoven with a story which at first sight recalls that of the fatal marriage and breach of promise through which the name of Buon-delmonti had attained a significance so tragical for Florence three hundred and twenty-two years earlier. This underplot, however, is more probably a device of the author's or an adaptation from some serviceable "novel" or romance than a distorted reflection of so remote an actual tragedy.

The unreal unselfishness of unnatural devotion and the sentimental vehemence of moral paradox, which mark the decline of English tragedy from the level of Shakespeare's more immediate followers, are flagrant in the folly of such a conception as this of a lover who insists on resigning his mistress against her will to a friend already betrothed or pledged in honour to another woman. Chivalry has destroyed itself—plucked out its own eyes, and cut its own throat—when it descends to such heartless and senseless depths of sentimental superstition. But it must be allowed that this perverse and preposterous improbability is skilfully and delicately adapted to bring into fuller relief the most beautiful figure on all the overcrowded stage of Shirley's invention. His place among our poets would be very much higher than it is if he could have left us but one or two others as thoroughly realized and as attractively presented as the noble and pathetic conception of Amideia. There is something in the part which reminds us of Beaumont's *Aspatia*; but even though the forsaken heroine of the elder poet has



yet more exquisite poetry to utter than any that Shirley could produce, her character is less noble and attractive, the manner of her death is less natural and far less touching. The lover in either case is equally contemptible; but the heroic part of Sciarrha is as superior in truthfulness as it is inferior in popularity to the famous but histrionic part of the boastful martialist Melantius. The King in *The Maid's Tragedy* is certainly not better drawn than his equally licentious but less tyrannous counterpart in *The Traitor*; and the very effective scene in which Calianax denounces Melantius to the King, only to be stormed down and put to silence by the denial of his accomplice and the laughing incredulity of the victim, is surpassed by the admirable device in which the chief conspirator's superb and subtle audacity of resource confounds the loyalty of Sciarrha and confirms the confidence of Alessandro. A more ingenious, natural, and striking situation—admirable in itself, and more admirable in its introduction and its assistance to the progress or evolution of the plot—it would be difficult to find in any play. The swiftness and sharpness of suspicious intuition, the promptitude and impudence of intelligent hypocrisy, which distinguish the conduct of Shirley's ideal conspirator, are far above the level of his usual studies or sketches of the same or a similar kind. Nor is there, if I mistake not, so much of really beautiful writing, of pure and vigorous style, of powerful and pathetic simplicity, in any earlier or later work of its author. Of Shakespeare or of Marlowe or of Webster we can hardly hope to be reminded while reading Shirley: but we are reminded

of Fletcher at his best by the cry of sympathy with which Amidea receives the assurance that the rival who has unwittingly and reluctantly supplanted her is also the victim of her lover's infidelity and ingratitude.

Alas, poor maid !  
We two keep sorrow alive then.

This indeed, if I may venture to say so, seems to me a touch not unworthy of Webster himself—the nearest of all our poets to Shakespeare in command of spontaneous and concentrated expression for tragic and pathetic emotion.

It is somewhat singular that Shirley's next play, a severely moral if audaciously realistic tragedy of illicit passion, should have found favour on the stage of the Restoration. Its tone is certainly so unlike that of *The Kind Keeper* or *The Country Wife* that its toleration by the patrons of Wycherley and of Dryden is hard to explain—except perhaps by the sisterly sympathy which may have been awakened in the various foundresses of ducal houses for the doings and sufferings of so impudent a strumpet as its heroine. The advance in experience or intelligence of such characters which distinguishes *Love's Cruelty* from *The Maid's Revenge* must be unmistakable by the most innocent reader ; the perfidious and poisonous Catalina is a violent and boyish caricature, the lascivious and murderous Clariana is a real and unmerciful portrait. The development of her character from mere wayward and capricious curiosity of coquettish irritation into lecherous and irreclaimable ferocity of jealous egotism is at least

as well conceived and executed as any other study from the same hand. Her soft-hearted but high-minded husband, her penitent young lover and his profligate old father, are more solid and vivid figures than their easy-going creator could usually present : and it is singular that Macaulay should so completely have overlooked or forgotten the point of the catastrophe as to cite this play as an instance in which " the outraged honour of families is repaired by a bloody revenge." No two catastrophes could well be more widely dissimilar than this one and that of *The Fatal Dowry* : the only point they have in common is that in each case an adulteress dies by a violent death. In the one case, a penitent woman is executed by the unrelenting justice of an inflexible husband : in the other, an impenitent woman assassinates her paramour, and is slaughtered by him in return ; a comfortable consummation which surely carries with it no particular reference to outraged honour.

The comedy which bears the pretty title of *Changes, or Love in a Maze*, has some pretty passages and scenes, but it is far too " high fantastical " for any serious interest in the action or the agents to be possible : and there is unpleasant evidence in one place that no amount of noble or royal patronage could make a gentleman at heart of the playwright who was capable of representing as other than the vilest of all villains and the meanest of all hounds a wretch who by way of excuse for his own rascality would support or encourage a suggestion against the character and honour of a lady whom he has deserted for a wealthier object of courtship. On the other

hand, the noble unselfishness of the hopeless lover who is ready to serve her at the cost of his own happiness is painted with so fine and warm a sympathy as almost to renew our better opinion of the poet. But except for the ingenuity of intrigue, which from a theatrical point of view is really creditable, and really amusing in the upshot, it is too slight a thing to deserve any very serious praise, as it is altogether too slight a thing to deserve any serious blame. *The Bird in a Cage* is a play of much the same weight: not ill done, if not particularly worth doing; with farcical passages which may be found fairly diverting by idle or indulgent readers, and a pretty touch of humanity in advance of an age little inclined to such tenderness for animals as moves the imprisoned princess to set free her captive birds.

The bright light comedy of *Hyde Park* is the second really good play of its kind on the long list of Shirley's works. In vigour of style and force of interest it is notably inferior to *The Wedding*: its tone is altogether more modern, more remote from tragicomedy, less serious and less ambitious; but it belongs unmistakably to a period of transition. It is a quasi-poetic or semi-poetic piece of work, and so far belongs or aims at belonging to the same class as *The Spanish Curate* or *The Guardian*—not to say as *Twelfth Night* or *Much Ado about Nothing*. It aims also at a transient sort of realism, a photographic representation of the fancies or the follies of the hour, its passing affectations or extravagances of the drawing-room or the race-course, which anticipates in some degree the enterprise, if not the superb and perfect

mastery in that line, of such artists as Congreve and Vanbrugh. The versatility and flexibility of talent required and displayed in such an attempt, admitting it to be fairly and moderately successful, may reasonably challenge our praise; but Mistress Carol, though bright and pleasant enough, is as far beneath the level of Millamant as beneath the level of Viola.

Between the sunset of Fletcher and the sunrise of Etherege the moonlight of Shirley's more modest and subdued genius serves well enough to display him as a successor of the poetic or romantic dramatist whose fancy walks hand in hand with humour, and a precursor of the prosaic or realistic playwright whose cynical humour has swallowed up sentiment and fancy as a stork might swallow a frog; but this moonlit or starlit period of transition is noticeable rather for its refraction of the past than its anticipation of the coming day. The characters in such comedies as this of Shirley's seem to be playing at reality as shadows might play at being substantial, as ghosts might play at being alive, as children do play at being "grown-up;" and this at least is a charge which can no more be brought against the ruffians and strumpets of Wycherley's or Shadwell's invention than against the noble men or women of Shakespeare's or of Webster's. The return of the shipwrecked husband to his supposed widow is borrowed from Marston's *What you Will*; and though Shirley's comedy is far more neatly and reasonably constructed, far more satisfactory to an æsthetic or intelligent judge of composition, it has nothing of such intellectual force or such

literary merit as must be recognized here and there in the rougher and more vigorous work of the elder and greater though ruder and faultier poet. Marston, with all his shortcomings, is one of Jonson's if not of Shakespeare's men-at-arms; Shirley, with all his merits, is but one of Fletcher's body-guard.

There is some honest fun, though there is no great matter, in the little satirical comedy of *The Ball*: the sham traveller is a more original and amusing figure than a copy of Ben Jonson's rather ponderous Puntarvolo could have been; and even after all his precursors the braggart and beaten coward contrives to have some amusing and original touches of baseness and comicality about him, which may make us tolerate the reappearance of an almost worn-out and wearisome type of farce. The ladies and their lovers are so lamentably shadowy and shapeless that a modern reader has no difficulty in understanding the curious admission of the poet in a later and better and less reticent play that he had been "bribed to a modest admission of their antic gambols." Had he rejected the bribe, supposing it to have ever been offered, a less decorous and a less vacuous comedy might have been better worth our reading: but possibly, if not probably, the assertion or imputation may be merely part of the character to whom it is assigned. Shirley, however, must have all due credit for this fresh stripe of satire applied to the same idiotic affectation which he had lashed with as wholesome and cordial a stroke of contempt just four years earlier, in a passage already quoted. "You must encourage strangers, while you live;



it is the character of our nation, we are famous for dejecting our own countrymen.”

Shirley's next play, *The Young Admiral*, is amusing enough for a lazy and consequently a tolerant reader to take up and put down with as much satisfaction as he might hope to derive from a novel obviously and exclusively intended for railway reading; it is not at all discreditable, and now and then promises—and breaks its promise—to be seriously interesting as well as tolerably entertaining; the hero and heroine are a very creditable couple of ultimately triumphant victims, the kings and knaves, bullies and fools, play their parts very decently and enduringly. On the whole, we may say of this and indeed most of Shirley's plays that it admirably anticipates and agreeably realizes Mrs. John Knightley's immortal receipt for “nice smooth gruel—thin, but not too thin.”

The one thing memorable about this anæmic and invertebrate play is the fact that it had the dishonour to be commended for its decency and propriety by the mean puritan who then dishonoured even the discreditable post of dramatic censor. A censor of a far different kind has made of Shirley's next play the central point of his impeachment, the crowning witness in favour of his plea for puritans against playwrights, for William Prynne against William Shakespeare. A better point could not have been made; a better witness could not have been cited. It would be worse than useless for a lover of poetry and a hater of puritanism to undertake the defence of the admirably constructed and excellently written tragicomedy which Charles I set



Shirley to write on a subject supplied by the royal and kindly patron. The subject is excellent in its way, and suggestive of even better and stronger dramatic effects than Shirley has made out of it ; but the utter vileness, the abject and atrocious treachery of the two mean tricksters and traffickers in women who play the leading parts in this comedy, cannot reasonably be condoned on consideration of the brilliant and striking situations which are brought about by the villainy of these gilded and varnished rascals. Fletcher was not a severe moralist ; he is usually considered by modern critics to have sometimes broken the bounds of good taste and artistic tact in his pictures of headlong youth and light-hearted passion : but not one of his *Rubilios*, *Valentines*, or *Pinieros*, can be imagined capable of such baseness as would disgrace a professional pander. *The Gamester* is a very clever, very powerful, and very amusing play : but Wycherley's *Plain Dealer*, though doubtless more impudent in its indecency, is certainly less immoral in its consummation. Fletcher in his own way, like Congreve in his, has always at least the graceless grace of high-bred wantonness ; Shirley is nothing if not moral ; or rather he is ruffianly and repulsive.

*A Contention for Honour and Riches* is a bright and ingenious little interlude in which the author shows himself as faithful and as able an imitator of Jonson as in the costly *Triumph of Peace* which soon afterwards eclipsed all previous pageants of the kind for gorgeous extravagance of elaborate profusion. In the dramatic or literary part of this glorified puppet-show there is some very pretty, humorous, and

ingenious writing ; the final interlude of burlesque is so especially well conceived and invented that it may provoke even a modern and private reader to a quiet and approving smile. Four or five months later the best of Shirley's comedies was licensed for the stage. To have written such a tragedy as *The Traitor*, such a comedy as *The Example*, should be sufficient to secure for their author a doubly distinguished place among the poets of his country. A judgment unblinded by perversity, prepossession, or malevolence must allow that the noble tone of this poem is at least as typical of its author's tone of mind as the baser tone of a preceding play : a candid and clear-headed critic would have admitted that the moral credit due to the author of *The Example* was enough to counterbalance, if not to efface and obliterate, the moral discredit due to the author of *The Gamester*.

The noble, high-spirited, simple-hearted and single-minded heroine would suffice to sweeten and redeem an otherwise condemnable or questionable piece of work ; her husband is a figure not unworthy to be set beside her ; and the passionate young tempter whose chivalrous nature is so gracefully displayed in the headstrong, punctilious, perverse, and generous course of conduct which follows on the fact of his conversion would be as thoroughly successful and complete a study as either, if it were not for the luckless touch of incongruous melodrama which throws the lady of his love into a swoon at the sight of his preposterous poniard and the sound of his theatrical threats. But all that can be done to redeem this conventional and sensational error is admirably well done in the

sequel of this noble and high-toned play ; a model of simple construction and harmonious evolution, in which the broad comedy of the underplot is rather a relief than an encumbrance to the progress of the more serious action.

*The Opportunity* is a lighter and slighter piece of work, but as lively, ingenious, and amusing in its complications and solutions, its intrigue and its results, as any comedy of accidents and errors not glorified by the sign-manual of Plautus, Shakespeare, or Molière. The night-scene under the balcony is as dexterously contrived as the night-scene in *George Dandin*, and more plausible as well as more decorous in its arrangement and its upshot. *The Coronation* is a too characteristic example of that uninteresting ingenuity in construction and that unprofitable fertility of invention which must be allowed to distinguish the duller and emptier plays of Shirley. It opens with some promise of interest, but the promise is almost immediately falsified : the passage in the first scene which, in Gifford's opinion, " cannot be exceeded for truth and humour," is the only passage in the play which deserves the attributes of " liveliness " and " pretty perversity " : the laboured complications and revolutions of character and event are perverse enough in their mechanical intricacy, but their liveliness and prettiness are less easy to discover. The publisher's attribution of this play to Fletcher is only exceeded in idiotic monstrosity of speculative impudence by the publisher's attribution of *The London Prodigal* to Shakespeare. And the title-page which brackets Shirley's name with Chapman's as joint author of the pathetic and

stately tragedy of *Chabot* makes almost as exorbitant a demand upon our credulity.

But the comedy which was licensed six months afterwards is the most brilliant though by no means the most blameless of Shirley's plays. His gift of graceful and humorous writing was never more happily exercised and displayed than in the glittering and shifting scenes of *The Lady of Pleasure*. In style and in versification it is equally superior to most of his other comedies : the rivalry of the two heroines in fashionable extravagance and display could hardly have been more lifelike and amusing if painted or photographed by Etherege or Congreve. But it is impossible to reconcile the morality of *Love for Love* with the morality of *A Woman killed with Kindness* : the endeavour to do so must needs result in a more revolting and unnatural violation or adulteration of morality than even the brutal and impudent genius of a Wycherley could have attempted or conceived. Charles Lamb was as absolutely and unanswerably right as usual in his contention on behalf of the great comic dramatists who flourished after the Restoration that the characters of their plays are outside the pale of moral criticism : and Macaulay, in his energetic attempt at a refutation of this plea, gave evidence of a more than Caledonian incapacity to appreciate the finer shades of critical reasoning and the subtler touches of humorous logic. Now Shirley, in this splendid and sparkling comedy of high life, has fallen into the very pit which Congreve so skilfully and Vanbrugh so nearly avoided.

A little more, or a little less, and we might say of his characters what Lamb says of Congreve's, that

they do not offend our moral sense ; “ in fact they do not appeal to it at all. They seem engaged in their proper element. They break through no laws, or conscientious restraints. They know of none. They have got out of Christendom into the land—what shall I call it ?—of cuckoldry, the Utopia of gallantry, where pleasure is duty, and the manners perfect freedom.” In that land the escapades of such characters as Aretina, Kickshaw, and Decoy would be simply amusing and becoming : but in this half-way house on the border which divides the generation of Massinger from the generation of Etherege they are partly diverting and partly shocking. The infusion of a little morality makes the whole affair immoral : the intrusion of a somewhat equivocal and utterly incongruous penitence reduces a comic intrigue to the level of a serious crime. “ Il est vrai,” says the great Dumas, in an admirable chapter of his delightful memoirs, “ que du temps de Molière cela s’appelait le cocuage, et qu’on en riait ; que de nos jours cela s’appelle l’adultère, et qu’on en pleure.” It is so obviously impossible to reconcile or to harmonize these two points of view that the very attempt must needs be no less offensive to the intelligence of good taste than repulsive to the instinct of good feeling. With this very serious reserve, it would be difficult to overpraise a play in which the genius and the art of Shirley are seen together at their brightest and their best.

*The Royal Master* is a fair example of Shirley’s ingenious and fertile talent ; there is a somewhat faded and conventional grace in the style of it which seems not unsuitable to a rather slight and artificial

but neither ill-conceived nor ill-conducted plot. *The Duke's Mistress* has a little more life and spirit with interest enough of story to make it a better specimen of the same class. *The Doubtful Heir* is perhaps the best ; with the usual faults or conventions of romantic tragicomedy and the particular weaknesses of the author's style and manner it combines some peculiar merits of genuine grace and tenderness. There are touches in it of something more like spontaneous pathos and serious interest than we find in most of Shirley's plays. As much may be said, though it may seem strange to say it, for his remarkable attempt at a miracle-play, revived under new conditions and adapted to maturer tastes. In the very first scene of *St. Patrick for Ireland* there is a note of truer and purer poetry than usual : the style is a little fresher, the movement more lively, and the action more amusing ; and in the parts of Conallus and Emeria there are situations of real interest and touches of real pathos.

*The Constant Maid* is a comedy of some spirit and originality ; but a mother's attempt to win or to test the affections of her daughter's lover is a revolting if not a ridiculous mainspring for the action of a play. A farcical character which may remind the reader of Bob Acres will only increase his appreciation of Sheridan's superior art and intelligence ; though there is some crude and rough-hewn humour in Shirley's caricature of a loutish lover. But the two plots are so badly mixed that any reader or spectator would have supposed it the first attempt of an awkward and ambitious novice in comedy. The farce of *The Humorous Courtier* is not unhappily



nor unamusingly conceived, but the execution is too extravagant and the infusion of serious villainy too incongruous to pass muster with the idlest or most tolerant of readers. The so-called pastoral in which Sidney's voluminous romance is condensed into dramatic form is so perfunctory in style and so halting in metre as to be worthier of a Davenant or a Killigrew than of even a second-rate or third-rate dramatic poet ; but the reader who spends an hour or so on perusal of *The Arcadia* must admit that the playwright's work was neatly done—and not worth doing. How and why such a play could have been either required of any writer or performed by any actors is a problem insoluble by the modern reader ; who will find the complicated action as flat as the invertebrate versification, and will not find any shadow of serious interest or any plausible pretence to evoke it from the limbo of an obsolete popularity. Any tribute to the memory of the noble poet and hero whose literary monument is the noble poem of *Astrophel and Stella* does credit to the man who offers it ; but a more singular sort of tribute than this was never paid by the most injudicious and ineffectual perversity or debility of devotion.

In *The Gentleman of Venice* the bright and lively talent of Shirley rises again after the eclipse through which it would seem to have passed. The two plots are more neatly interwoven into a more amusing and coherent story than usual : though the one may be somewhat too threadbare in its antiquity, the other somewhat too unseemly in its extravagance. But the writing throughout is graceful, easy, and pleasant to read ; and the characters, if rather theatrical



and rather thin, are at all events alive enough to amuse and amusing enough to satisfy a not exacting or intolerant reader. *The Politician*, if not one of Shirley's best plays, is one of his liveliest and most effective; the pathos of the scene immortalized by insertion in Lamb's immortal volume of "Specimens" is so simple and so pure as to remind us rather of Heywood than of Shirley; and if the attempt at a similar effect in the part of an injured and misused wife is not equally happy or impressive, it is not for lack of graceful and facile writing. The worst of Shirley's tragedies is certain to be better, and very much better, than the worst of Shirley's comedies. Among these latter *The Imposture* is one of the many that will be found tolerable by the tolerant reader, though possibly by him alone; its complications of incident and intrigue, if (as usual) rather ingenious than interesting, relieved as they are by scenes of farcical horse-play, may serve to keep his idle attention idly awake.

If the treatment of character and passion had been equal to the development of interest and the management of the story, the vigorous and well-built tragedy of *The Cardinal* might have been what its author avowedly thought it, the flower of his flock; it is indeed a model of composition, simple and lucid and thoroughly well sustained in its progress towards a catastrophe remarkable for tragic originality and power of invention; with no confusion or encumbrance of episodes, no change or fluctuation of interest, no breach or defect of symmetry. But the story is more interesting than the actors; and the points of resemblance between this play and *The*

*Duchess of Malfy* are consequently as noticeable as the points of resemblance between Macedon and Monmouth. There is a wicked cardinal in each, and the principal victim of his crimes is an innocent duchess.

The very spirited and amusing comedy of *The Sisters* is only not one of Shirley's very best; *The Country Captain*, discovered and reissued by Mr. Bullen, is indisputably one of them. The traditional attribution of this brilliant play to the Duke of Newcastle will hardly persuade any competent reader that it is not mainly if not altogether the work of Shirley; though the burlesque picture of the trained bands may possibly be assigned to the professional hand of the martial and equestrian duke. The parody of Donne's most elaborately eccentric style in the verses ascribed to a fashionable poetaster seems curiously out of date in a generation of writers equally incapable of emulating the peculiar merits and of copying the peculiar mannerisms of the great poet who is to the Cowleys and Clevelands of Shirley's day as a giant to pigmies who cannot even mimic his gait; for the strong uneven stride of his verse is no more like the mincing amble of Cowley's than Wordsworth is like Moore. The attack on monopolists does credit to the independence and courage of the assailant; but it is unfortunate that a figure of mere farce should so much as recall what it does not pretend to compete with, the most famous character on the stage of Massinger. The humour is throughout as much stronger as it is coarser than usual with Shirley: the more high-flown parts are more than fair examples of his fluent and flowery

style of rhetoric—not glaringly artificial, but suggestive rather of perfumery than of natural perfume. Some parts of the action, like some parts of the dialogue, are exceptionally daring in the licence if not the licentiousness of their freedom; but the upshot is more satisfactory to the moral and intellectual taste or judgment of a critical reader than is that of *The Lady of Pleasure*—the only other play of Shirley's which can be compared with it for sheer brilliance and vivacity of movement and of style.

*The Court Secret*, of apparently later date, is a thin dry cobweb of a play, with a few tender and graceful touches here and there which hardly serve to lighten or relieve the empty complications and confusions of its tedious and conventional story. But there are signs even here that the writer's invention, though now a spur-galled and broken-winded jade, was once a racer of some mettle. It is agreeable to reflect that the condensed satire of the following brief description is inapplicable to any politician of our own day.

Why, there's

A statesman that can side with every faction;  
 And yet most subtly can untwist himself  
 When he hath wrought the business up to danger!  
 He lives within a labyrinth.

There are some "pretty little tiny kickshaws" among Shirley's poems. His *Good Night* is a curious anticipation of Shelley's, though less graceful and serious in expression; but it would be flattery to honour his elegies with the qualification of mediocrity; and his *Narcissus* must surely be the very feeblest and faintest copy among all the innumerable

imitations of Shakespeare's too popular first poem. *The Triumph of Beauty* is poor meagre stuff; the interlude of *Cupid and Death* is livelier and not ungraceful, though much beneath what it might have been. *The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses* is a very fair piece of work, more solid in versification than usual, though wanting alike in the stately grace of Ovid and the sprightly facility of Heywood; but memorable only as containing the one universally popular and famous poem of so fertile a writer as Shirley. This celebrated dirge or monody is no doubt a noble poem, but it has also been a very lucky one. There is many a yet finer lyric of the same age and kind which has had but two or three readers where Shirley's lament has had a thousand.

His last work, the allegorical comedy of *Honorina and Mammon*, is not merely a recast or expansion of a twenty-six years older work, but a great improvement on that clever and bright little interlude. Shirley's wit, style, and humour are all at their best in the curious and ingenious drama with which he took a final farewell of the stage. It is amusing to find in his last as in his first play a touch of satire which would have been even more timely and appropriate in a satirist of our own generation. "I'll—build a bridge," says one of Lady Mammon's suitors, "from Dover cliff to Calais." "A draw-bridge?" asks a countryman; and another observes, with due reticence,

This may be done; but I am of opinion  
We shall not live to see it.

Amen to that: but the loyal and sensible old poet is

surely deserving of serious praise and credit for his contemptuously imaginative anticipation of the most monstrous project ever hatched—except perhaps its fellow-folly, a submarine instead of an aerial conspiracy against the beneficence of nature.

The works of Shirley fall naturally into three categories or classes ; those in the first class are very good, those in the second class are very fair, those in the third class are very poor. *The Traitor*, *The Example*, *The Lady of Pleasure*, and *The Country Captain* belong beyond all question to the first class : *The Wedding*, *Hyde Park*, *The Gamester*, and *The Cardinal* stand high in the second. If these, with perhaps two or three more, were all we had of Shirley, it would be simply impossible to see the point or understand the meaning of Dryden's bitter sneer at his " tautology." But to the patient reader of all his plays the truth of the imputation will be as evident as the cruelty of the insult. The general charge of repetition, monotony, wearisome reiteration of similar types and similar effects, can hardly be disputed or denied. Of Heywood, whom Dryden in his headlong ignorance and his headstrong arrogance chose or chanced to bracket with Shirley as a subject for indiscriminate satire, this cannot either truthfully or plausibly be affirmed. He has always something to say, even though it be said in the homeliest of bald and prosy styles : Shirley at his worst has really nothing to say whatever. But the demerits of his duller and unhappier hours would hardly be remembered by the admirers of his better work if he had never been overpraised by such critics as depreciate or ignore his betters.

The "poet-critic" who ignores the existence of Tourneur and dismisses Webster with a sneer expatiates with exuberance of unction on the attractions and fascinations of Shirley: and this enthusiasm on the part of Campbell inclines us to remember—if ever it were possible we should forget—that a breath of Cyril Tourneur's fiery passion would suffice to blast the fairest fruits of Shirley's garden into dust and ashes, and a glance from the eye of John Webster to strike its chirping and twittering birds into breathless and cowering silence. When we turn to such poets as these we can hardly see or hear or remember Shirley as a singer or a creator at all; but it is as unjust and ungracious to insist on the inferiority in kind which is established by such a comparison, as it would be preposterous and absurd to question it. The place of James Shirley among English poets is naturally unpretentious and modest: it is indisputably authentic and secure.





University of California  
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY  
305 De Neve Drive - Parking Lot 17 • Box 951388  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90095-1388

Return this material to the library from which it was borrowed.

...  
OCT 10 2005  
JUN 17 2005



3 1158 01299 4702

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**AA** 000 293 538 5

Un

