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BY OLIPHANT SMEATON

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WILLIAM DUNBAR

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WILLIAM DUNBAR

BY
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SCOTS :
SERIES

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PREFACE

THE present Life of Dunbar is an attempt to place before the reader in a popular form the facts in the life of one of Scotland's greatest sons, who has by no means received the attention either his genius or his achievements merited. Being a popular sketch, therefore, in a popular series, I have purposely avoided, as far as possible, the discussion of recondite controversial topics, and the introduction of dry disquisitions on obscure points of diction or on matters which possess an interest merely antiquarian. I have also slightly modernised the archaic spelling of the extracts I have had occasion to quote, so that the general reader might be able to follow without difficulty the sense of the text.

Besides Sheriff Mackay, to whom I have confessed my obligations elsewhere, I must return thanks to my friend Dr. A. B. Grosart, whose pricelessly valuable volumes on sixteenth and seventeenth century literature have been of immense service; also to Mr. W. Keith Leask, M.A., for kindly revising the proofs, and for the suggestion of many valuable emendations.

OLIPHANT SMEATON.

EDINBURGH, *April* 1898.

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TO

SHERIFF ÆNEAS J. G. MACKAY

AND

DR. J. SCHIPPER

(PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH PHILOLOGY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA)

BY WHOSE LABOURS

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE POETRY OF

WILLIAM DUNBAR

HAS BEEN INCREASED

THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR

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WILLIAM DUNBAR AND HIS TIMES

CHAPTER I

SCOTLAND'S GOLDEN AGE

A SHORT, rather rotund figure, a face ruddy and stamped with evidences of the love of good cheer; eyes small, beady, and dark, twinkling at times with an ever-present sense of the humorous side of life, then anon blazing with a fierce, contemptuouss corn of meanness, hypocrisy, and injustice; a tongue as mellifluous in speech as his to whom was given the title 'Golden Mouth,' yet betimes capable of a sardonic sarcasm that burned like an acid where it lighted,—such is the portrait that has come down to us from various sources of that mighty genius, who, though, alas! all too little known among us of these latter days, has yet been adjudged by many of our most competent English critics to be the peer, if not in a few qualities the superior, of Chaucer and Spenser.

But William Dunbar, great though he was in his day, was not the only star that gleamed in the Scots literary firmament. The age was favourable to the fostering of literature and art, because a ruler occupied the throne

whose instincts were all towards culture and refinement. For the first decade of the sixteenth century, and onwards until that fatal September 9, 1513 saw the defeat and death, on the terrible field of Flodden, of the greatest of the Stuarts, was a veritable 'golden age' in early Scottish literature. The country, at peace during the long reign of James IV., had been steadily increasing in wealth and civilisation. The King, undoubtedly the ablest administrator of his dynasty, to whom the *sobriquet* of 'the Merry Monarch' was much more appropriately applicable than to his descendant Charles II., was at the height of his popularity. The country was prosperous, and its prosperity exercised a reflex influence on the intellectual character of the people. From Inverness to the Tweed, Scotland lay at its ruler's feet, in a measure never equalled during the reign of any of his predecessors. The Highlands and the Islands also were overawed by the martial attitude of him who, if first in joust and sword-play and in all the manly sports of the period, yet could strike swiftly and strongly when need arose.

Never had the Scottish Court been so brilliant as during his reign. The nobles, attracted from their gloomy castles and *peels* to the capital—the haughty Earls of Angus and of Mar, the Earls Crawford, Morton, Argyle, Athole, Lennox, Errol, and Caithness, the Lords Elphinstone, Forbes, Ross, Sinclair, and Maxwell—they with their fair dames, along with many other lords and gentlemen, maintained a style almost regal in its magnificence, and caused the Scottish Court to rank as one of the most brilliant in Europe during that period.

The King himself also was a man with but few peers among his royal brethren of the age. While fully capable of maintaining all the dignity of his position when occasion demanded, he loved to escape from the formality of the Court, and, like his son after him, to wander in disguise throughout his kingdom, learning, as did Haroun Alraschid, the habits and customs of his humblest subjects, and becoming familiar with their grievances.

Scottish trade was quadrupled during his reign, when, as Pitscottie tells us, 'there was great plenty for man and beast.' He it was also who first created a fleet to guard his country's commerce and fisheries. Hill Burton in his picturesque survey of the reign, says: 'King James took a deep personal interest in the progress of a shipping force, and felt great delight in visiting the shipping-yards, and encouraging inventions and projects in shipbuilding.' Sir Andrew Wood of Largo, and Sir Andrew Barton, in the *Yellow Caravel* and the *Great Michael*, were notable sea-captains in his reign, while the Scottish flag was respected in all waters.

The influence of the Renaissance, however, had extended north of the Tweed. The bonds of clerical intolerance and quibbling scholasticism had been burst. The treasures of Greece and of Rome (or, at least, their influence), which the industry of the great Oxford scholars, Grocyn, Linacre, Colet, and with them Erasmus, was unlocking for Englishmen, after the downfall of Constantinople scattered Byzantine *illuminati* over Europe, had been brought north to the three existing Scottish Universities—St. Andrews, Glasgow, and Aberdeen. Nay, there

is even a tradition, according to the late Professor Morley, that the great Erasmus himself had paid a visit to the Court of this munificent patron of learning.

But of all the boons James IV. conferred on his country, the greatest undoubtedly was the encouragement he extended to Walter Chepman and Andro Myllar, burgesses of Edinburgh, who first introduced printing into Scotland. The monarch granted them a patent to exercise their art. The wonder excited by the new art was intense. By the common people, nay, even by many of the more ignorant parochial clergy, the invention was characterised as simply a device of the Evil One to do away with the production of books within the sacred seclusion of the monastic Scriptoria. One parish priest in Fife is reported to have warned his flock never to open these printed books, otherwise the evil spirits that were residing in each letter of the volume would take possession of them. Not only, however, did James give Chepman and Myllar this patent, but he bought up the books as they were issued from the press, and bestowed on the printers many a goodly gift in money to keep the types a-moving. Thus the benefits of the new learning were diffused among the people of Scotland just at the auspicious moment when their minds were ready for the reception of the seeds of culture.

At the Court of the fourth James, where all learning was so nobly patronised, no branch of literature was more warmly encouraged than poetry. The sunshine of the royal countenance and approval fostered the genius of a crowd of singers in whom the poetic inspiration was genuinely present. No Court gathering at Holyrood,

Linlithgow, Perth, or Dunfermline was esteemed complete unless some one of the poets most in repute had composed an ode to be sung by the King's minstrels. The ruffling gallants in slashed doublets and crimson hose, with their gold chains and jewelled hunting-horns, to whom the embellishment of their person was the sole aim in life, had to give place in the esteem of the 'Merry Monarch' to the humble 'Makar,' whose quaintly sweet songs were the delight of himself and the fair ladies of his Court. Those were the golden days of Scotland's prosperity, when bluff King Hal and merry King Jamie were attached to one another by ties of friendship as real as they seemed enduring. Alas, that 'a woman's gage of love,' and she 'a false fair of France,' should have had power to shatter prospects so promising!

But while the century was yet young, and immediately subsequent to his marriage with Margaret of England in 1502, all was peaceful and prosperous. Then it was that at each courtly function four notable figures might have been observed, each concentrating upon himself a degree of attention only bestowed otherwise upon the King and the more important nobles of the realm. Yonder is the eldest of the quartette, a man of noble presence, but on whom the burden of a mighty weight of years lies heavily. Though attired in semi-clerical garb, his long silvery beard and flowing hoary locks proclaim that he is attached to the strict rule of none of the leading Orders in Scotland. But in good sooth the simple black robe of the scholar at the Court of James IV. will win him more regard than a canon's cope or the bishop's rochet. 'That is Robert

Henryson,[1] preceptor in the Benedictine convent at Dunfermline,' whispers one in the crowd, and we know that in spirit we stand beside the father of Scottish pastoral poetry who in *Robene and Makyne* produced a piece wherein we breathe the natural atmosphere of woodland life, free from all the extravagances of impossible shepherds and shepherdesses. Who has not that glorious opening stanza in his mind, beginning

> 'Robene sat on a good green hill
> Keeping ane flok of se [sheep],' etc. ?—

a passage which smacks so thoroughly of

> 'Flora and the country green,
> Dance, and *Provençal* song, and sunburnt mirth.'

Born in or near Dunfermline, Henryson appears to have spent all his days as a schoolmaster in his native town, and died at a patriarchal old age within sight and sound of the bells he had listened to in childhood. To great skill in versification and imaginative wealth, he unites a power of vigorous and incisive thinking surpassed by none of his contemporaries. His *Testament of Faire Creseide*, the *Abbaye Walk*, the *Bludy Serk*, and the *Garment of Gude Ladyis* are poems of a very high order of excellence, which deserve to be much better known than at present they are. While he cannot rival Dunbar in the vigour and picturesqueness of his poetic vocabulary, or Gavin Douglas in keenness of spiritual vision, he equals either

[1] The general consensus of opinion places Henryson's death in the year 1498; a few authorities are inclined to think he lived until 1503. I have here adopted the latter hypothesis merely for the sake of being able to group the four great poets of the reign conveniently together at an imaginary Court function.

in the almost photographic fidelity of those reproductions of the life of the period wherewith his poems are replete.

In the immediate company of the King and his youthful Queen, whom he is endeavouring to amuse with some brilliant sallies of wit that keep his auditors in a simmer of merriment, is a short, rotund, ruddy-visaged man, whose dress is so rich and unclerical that, were it not for 'his shaveling pate,' we would set him down as 'ane lord of hie degre.' This second laureate of the Court is reciting the stanzas of a poem he has composed on 'Ane Daunce in the Quene's Chaulmer,' which tickles the risible faculties of the two royal personages so persistently that at length James is obliged to cry, 'Hold ye, William Dunbar; by 'r Ladye, but I 'll have to get ye some fat benefice in the country to save our sides.' From which remark we glean the fact that the jolly priest is none other than the great author of *The Golden Targe*, *The Merle and the Nightingale*, *The Thistle and the Rose*, and the terrible *Flyting between Dunbar and Kennedy*.

But who is that tall, gaunt individual who watches Dunbar's efforts to amuse the King and Queen with a sort of sorrowful pity, as though he were grieved to behold the greatest genius of the Northland condescending to play the fool? Attired in the simple black robe of the scholar, with a skull-cap covering his head where the grizzled locks have yielded to the scythe of Time, he seems one with whom the years have dealt hardly. Presently attention is directed towards him by Dunbar appealing to him as 'gude Maister Walter Kennedy,' to settle some playful dispute between the 'Merry Monarch'

and his 'Laureate,' as James was wont to style the author of *The Golden Targe.* From the reference we recognise the fact that the arbiter selected is no other than Dunbar's great poetic rival and lifelong friend, with whom he carried on a sportive metrical warfare akin to the *jeu parti* of early Provençal poetry, or to that war in verse between the two great Italian poets, Luigi Pulci and Matteo Franco. As in the case of the Florentine rivals so in the Scottish, the 'Flyting,' though carried on with great apparent bitterness, caused no diminution in the friendship existing between Kennedy and Dunbar.

Had the opposite been true, the latter in his solemn *Lament for the Makars* would scarcely have written of his antagonist, then lying sick apparently unto death—

> 'Gude Maister Walter Kennedy
> In point of deid lies verily,
> Great ruth it were that so suld be,
> *Timor mortis conturbat me.*'

Walter Kennedy, who ranks only second to Dunbar as one of Scotland's greatest poets, was the sixth son of Lord Kennedy of Cassillis and Dunure, in Ayrshire. Born about the same time as his friend and rival, and educated for the Church, he was appointed Provost of Maybole, the patronage of which collegiate church was in the hands of his own family, who had founded it. He cannot have held this preferment long, probably it was only a temporary appointment, for when he wrote the *Flyting* he was deputy-clerk of Carrick, which, as Paterson states, he held under his brother David, Earl of Cassillis. In 1510 he is mentioned in a deed as Vicar of Douglas. In the

following year he held some appointment in connection with the College of Glasgow, and acquired the property of Glentig. In his worldly circumstances he seems to have been as prosperous and comfortable as Dunbar was unhappy.

As a poet one of Kennedy's chief excellences is his unrivalled power of word-painting, for which he is warmly eulogised by Sir David Lyndsay in the prologue to the *Complaynt of the Papyngo*—

> 'For quho can now the workis countrafait
> Of Kennedie with termes aureait?'

And the same author affords a very apt testimony to the estimation wherein Kennedy was held in his day by the following lines—

> 'Get he into the courte auctoritie,
> He will precell Quintyn and Kennedie.'

Alas! with the exception of his share in the *Flyting*, his religious poem *The Passion of Christ*, his *Invective against Mouththankless*, and his *Prais of Aige*, all his works have perished, although we learn from contemporary testimony he was quite as voluminous an author as Dunbar. That he was high in favour with James IV. and his Queen, and was moreover regarded as one of the representative poets of the age, is manifest from many existing evidences. His brother-poet Gavin Douglas ranked him above Dunbar, but the critical estimate of the hot-headed Bishop of Dunkeld is scarcely to be accepted save *cum grano salis*, seeing that the author of the *Thistle and the Rose* and he were at times not on very friendly terms. So

much so was this the case that Dunbar makes no mention of Gavin amongst the 'Makars' of his time. But the man of whom the gifted Bishop of Dunkeld could write in his *Palice of Honour* as 'Greit Kennedie' must have left the impress of his genius on the age in a very marked degree to have deserved such a distinguishing adjective.

Though he did not possess the many-sided mind so characteristic of Dunbar, though he was undoubtedly inferior to the latter in that masculine vigour of the understanding and in sheer fertility of imagination, Kennedy was incomparably a greater artist than his friend and rival. Relatively speaking, he occupied the position of Pope to Dryden in the hierarchy of genius. 'The *Prais of Aige* gives a favourable idea of Kennedy as a versifier,' says Lord Hailes; 'his lines are more polished than those of any of his contemporaries.' As a satirist he was inferior to Dunbar in piquancy, aptness of allusion, and mordant vitriolic sarcasm. But his views of life were more genial and more instinct with cheery *bonhomie.* While Dunbar resembled Juvenal, Kennedy rather owned Horace as master. Hence he was more of a humorist than a wit. In pathos also he exhibits a tenderer and more genuinely sympathetic touch than his friend, although he never reached the high-water mark of *The Lament for the Makars.*

But who is he that comes yonder, attended by quite a retinue of friends?—a young man of a singularly handsome exterior, which his plain clerical garb cannot conceal. At once he becomes the cynosure of neighbouring eyes. The Queen greets him with marked favour, and he replies to her remarks with courtly grace. The buzz of the

whispering crowd conveys the intelligence. The new-comer is Gavin Douglas, in the future to become Bishop of Dunkeld, but as yet only Rector of Prestonkirk and Provost of the Collegiate Church of St. Giles. As a scion of the all but princely House of Douglas, however, and the author of a poem still circulating in manuscript, called *The Palice of Honour*, he was flattered and caressed by all the leading courtiers of the time. Born in 1474, the third son of the great Earl of Angus, 'Archibald Bell-the-Cat,' young Gavin graduated in St. Andrews, then went abroad to study at Paris. On returning he commenced work as a priest, and having dedicated his poem to the King, was appointed by him Provost of St. Giles. After Flodden his troubles began. The marriage of his nephew with the widowed Queen blew into flame the jealousy of all the remaining Scots nobility against the Douglases. On Gavin a share of their malice fell. A vacancy occurred in the Archbishopric of St. Andrews, and the Queen appointed the poet to the primacy, very justly reasoning that his learning, his piety, and his surpassing genius rendered him a suitable occupant of the supreme See. But others disputed his claim, and even expelled him from the town of St. Andrews. With rare moderation in that turbulent age the youthful prelate retired from the contest. Nay, even when he was nominated to the See of Dunkeld, he only obtained possession of it after having suffered imprisonment for having obtained Bulls of Confirmation from Rome. On Albany's return to the regency of the kingdom in 1521, he at once set himself to reduce the overgrown power of the

Douglases. All the members of that noble family had to seek safety in flight. The Bishop of Dunkeld repaired to England. His high reputation as a poet and a scholar had, however, preceded him, and he experienced from Henry VIII. a most flattering reception. Assigned a liberal pension by the English monarch, and a palace in the Savoy as his residence, Gavin Douglas devoted himself earnestly to literature. He made the acquaintance of Polydore Vergil, who was then engaged on his *History of England*. To the historian the Bishop proved of great assistance in correcting many of his ideas regarding North Britain. Vossius and Bale even go the length of stating he wrote a History of Scotland in connection with Polydore Vergil's. But of this no trace can be found. If it ever existed, it probably shared the fate of all MSS. intrusted to that historian. While thus enjoying his learned leisure he was cut off by fever in 1522, in the forty-eighth year of his age.

The fame of Gavin Douglas as a poet rests on his fine poem *The Palice of Honour*. Written when he was but a young man, it has all the fire and warm, sensuous glow of youth, united to a piety as rare as it was humble. In Gavin Douglas, more than in any of his contemporaries, we see the love of external nature predominating. His fancy revels in a prodigious wealth of images drawn from the scenes amidst which he lived. He was the poet of the country, as Dunbar was the bard of the town. As Dr. Irving remarks in his *Lives of the Scottish Poets*, 'his writings present us with constant evidences of a prolific and exuberant imagination; and his very faults are those

of superabundance rather than deficiency. The beauties of external nature he seems to have surveyed with the eyes of a poet; the various aspects of human life with those of a philosopher.' While he altogether lacks the soaring sublimity of Dunbar, and the artistic finish of Kennedy, he surpasses both in his amatory warmth and his love of his fellows. He is dainty rather than strong, and more quaint and versatile than profound. His *King Hart* and his *Palice of Honour* will long be read for their pleasing pictures of rural scenery and country life, but we look in vain in them for the mighty, robust strength of Dunbar or the polished excellence of 'gude Maister Kennedy.' During the reign of James IV. the poet was probably the most popular singer of the four, but that was less due to his gifts of genius than to his graces of person and of manner, his strong, unbending integrity, and his unfeigned piety.

His liberal-mindedness and toleration is worthy of all praise, and stands out with brilliant lustre in an age when it was as rare as the phœnix. His remark regarding the burning of heretics, though it commends itself to modern ideas, undoubtedly was the cause of much of the clerical hostility wherewith he was pursued even to his dying day. 'Marry,' said he, 'where is the use of tainting our swete aire with the roasting of heretics, when they will be roasting in hell-fire soon enough to satisfy the most impatient of us?' The remark, also, to Beaton, Archbishop of Glasgow, when Gavin Douglas appealed to that prelate to stay the adherents of the Earl of Arran from attempting to apprehend the Earl of Angus, shows him to

have possessed a keen sense of humour. Beaton protested his inability to influence Arran, as he was ignorant of his designs, and thereupon proceeded to strengthen his assertion with an oath. Striking his right hand against his breast, he cried: 'Upon my conscience, my Lord Bishop of Dunkeld, I can do nothing.' Immediately thereafter the jingling sound which followed this action disclosed the fact to Douglas that Beaton wore a coat of mail beneath his clerical habit. 'Methinks, my Lord,' retorted the other dryly, 'your conscience is in a parlous case, for I perceive it clatters.'

The translation which he made into English verse of several of the books of Vergil's *Æneid* is a testimony to his merits at once as a scholar and a poet. For faithful reproduction of the original he is superior to Dryden, though, of course, he lacks the stately diction of the author of *Absalom and Achitophel.*

Such, then, were the four great Court singers of the last decade of the reign of James IV. of Scotland. The names of others occur, such as those mentioned in the *Lament for the Makars* and elsewhere, but they are little more than empty 'shadows cast on the background of Time.' Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount, as a poet, belongs to the succeeding reign. The four named above were beyond all question the 'singers' who, in the reign of 'Merry King Jamie,' cast such lustre on the Scottish Court that in England the saying passed current that the Muses had deserted the fields of 'Mirry Ingelonde' and taken up their abode amid the heath-clad mountains of 'Snell Scotland.'

CHAPTER II

BIRTH: PARENTAGE AND EARLY YEARS

THE precise date of William Dunbar's birth is wrapped in uncertainty. However, in the ancient registers of the University of St. Andrews, in the year 1477, we note the entry of the name of William Dunbar among the *Determinantes* of St. Salvator's College. As an academic degree, this corresponded to our Bachelorship of Arts, and students were not eligible for it until the third year of their studies at College.[1] This fact, therefore, establishes the exact time when he entered College as 1475, and as Schipper adroitly notes it is unlikely in those days he would do so before his fifteenth or sixteenth year, we therefore reach the date 1460 as the approximate year at least of his birth.[2]

Of his parentage and family the same uncertainty must be affirmed. Though the name of Dunbar and of that frowning fortress which of old crowned the beetling cliff looking seaward towards 'the May,' have been familiar enough in Scots history, the latter for that magnificent

[1] David Laing's *Life of Dunbar*.

[2] *William Dunbar: Sein Leben und seine gedichte, von Dr. J. Schipper, Professor der Englischen Philologie an der Universität in Wien.* Berlin, 1884.

defence of it by 'Black Agnes,' Countess of Dunbar and March, still the difficulty is to connect our poet directly with the family. That he was a distant kinsman is beyond a doubt, for in the *Flyting between Dunbar and Kennedy* the latter speaks of his poetical antagonist's 'forebears,' or ancestors, as belonging to 'Cospatrick's clan,' which had at an earlier day 'brought Scotland into confusion' by joining themselves to the English faction in the long wars between the two kingdoms. He likewise deduces, in the most direct terms, as Laing points out, the poet's descent from the attainted Earls of March, while he as expressly denies his connection with the branch of the family created Earls of Moray, or with the Dunbars of Westfield, the male descendants of the last Earl of Moray.

From the poet's own testimony it is known that he was a native of East Lothian, his father being a younger son of Sir Patrick Dunbar of Beil, who was one of the hostages for the ransom of King James I. in 1426. From a charter now in the muniment chest of the Earl of Rosebery, and dated August 10th, 1440, we note that one of his sons was named William. This Laing considers to have been either the father or the uncle of the poet. From a chance reference in an old Latin deed contained in the *Chart Book of the Priory of St Andrews*,[1] which I stumbled upon when investigating another point, I am inclined to think that his father's name was also William, and that he held some lay office in connection with the famous 'Lamp of Lothian,' otherwise the Franciscan Monastery of Haddington. That Dunbar was born in the vicinity of

[1] *Liber Cartarum Prioratus Sancti Andree in Scotia.*

some magnificent ecclesiastical establishment is, I think, rendered strongly probable from those lines—

> 'I was in youth on nurse's knee
> "Dandely, bischop, dandely,"
> And when that age now does me greif
> Ane simple Vicar I can not be.
> Excess of thought does me mischief.'

His prospects owing to his family connections were so golden that they seemed to betoken in the future nothing less than a bishopric. Now, in order to achieve this he must have had family associations with some religious establishment so near as to suggest the allusion. His unmistakable references to his 'Lothian extraction,' to localities in East Lothian, as well as Kennedy's sarcastic remarks in the *Flyting*, all go to render the hypothesis at least probable that the district around Haddington was the spot where Dunbar first saw the light.

Furthermore, from the internal evidence furnished by his poems I am inclined to think that, after receiving the rudiments of education at Haddington, he was sent to Edinburgh before proceeding to St. Andrews. The Franciscans, otherwise the Mendicant or Grey Friars, had a famous establishment in the capital, viz. the Monastery of the Observantines, situate on the ground now occupied by Greyfriars Churchyard. Thither Dunbar would naturally be sent from the sister Monastery in Haddington, to be further trained in the higher branches of letters. The School of the Observantines in Edinburgh was justly celebrated at a time when good teachers were scarce.

The character of a lad's education in those days, and

more particularly of a lad destined for the clerical profession, and coming moreover of an ancient and honourable family, was by no means so meagre as we are apt to suppose. The course is detailed for us by both Buchanan and Knox, whose prejudices would certainly not run in the direction of undue praise. The Schools of the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Benedictines were regarded as true nurseries of learning. Latin was thoroughly taught, as also the rudiments of Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, Music, and Theology—to which was added French. While the curriculum in question was but an expansion of the subjects embraced in the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* of the Middle Ages, there can be no question that the system was thorough when it could produce such polymaths as Buchanan, Andrew Melville, and my own ancestor, Thomas Smeaton, Principal of Glasgow University in 1580.

Dunbar appears to have made good use of his early opportunities. There are certain subjects only to be acquired by that steady drudgery for which youth alone is the season when it can be undertaken. Dunbar, in after life, by the accuracy of his scholarship, and the solid massiveness of his general knowledge, offered the best proof that could be afforded of his early industry. Unfortunately of his school life we have no details. In the school of the Observantines there was one peerless Latinist, John Leyrva, a Lombard, whose personality has been but a shadowy one until recent discoveries have proved that the supposed coterie of great Franciscan scholars in the Edinburgh of the fifteenth century was in reality but the different designations

of this one brilliant genius. That Dunbar was one of Leyrva's pupils is more than probable, particularly as the latter, when he returned to Italy, mentioned in one of his sonnets a Gulielmus Donbar as being '*carissimus discipulusque amicus.*'

From the School of the Observantines William Dunbar would carry away more of secular than of sacred learning. In his case, as in that of many others, the mistake was committed of attempting to force the square block into the round hole. A nature full of warm human affections, incapable, in his earlier years at least, of finding interest and solace in topics purely spiritual—intensely human, in fact, and relishing with a sort of fierce defiance all the pleasures of life which, as a Churchman, he should have abjured; a lusciously sensuous temperament, fond of everything that appealed to the innate sense of artistic beauty within—costly clothing, elegant furnishings, beautiful women, splendidly ornate architecture, and an ecclesiastical ritual as superbly spectacular in its appeals to the eye and ear as it was superlatively destitute of any element capable of touching the heart:—such was the youthful William Dunbar. Had his desires been consulted in the choice of vocation, in place of becoming a shaveling 'ready all men to beguile,'[1] despite all his supposed family interest, he would have elected to be a belted knight gaily tilting in the jousting lists for a smile from some fair Queen of Beauty, or joining in some headlong raid across the Border to perpetuate the hereditary feud between the two nations. Dunbar never should have been a churchman, and unless

[1] *Visitation of St. Francis*, line 45.

one realises this prime fact, the key to his character is lacking.

Our next authentic landmark in the life of our great Scots poet is associated with his residence at St. Andrews. The boy would naturally pass from Grammar School to College. At that time, in Scotland, there were only two Universities[1] capable of affording anything approaching advanced intellectual training to the numbers of brilliant young Scotsmen who were already becoming infected with the mental activity of the period—the faintly eddying backwash of that Renaissance tide of culture which, as we have already noted, reached England through Colet, Grocyn, and Linacre, and was yet to influence Scotland in greater measure in days to come.

But in 1475, when William Dunbar is supposed to have entered the University of St. Andrews, the latter had been nominally in existence for sixty-four years—1411 being the date of its foundation by Bishop Wardlaw of that diocese, with the express consent embodied in a Bull of Pope Benedict XIII. In Dunbar's day, one only of the three Colleges afterwards comprising it was in existence, viz. St. Salvator's, founded in 1458 by that 'father of Scots letters,' Bishop Kennedy. For seventeen years the academic machinery had been in operation, and from contemporary testimony we learn had been working satisfactorily. When Dunbar entered among the *Bajans*, or first-year's students, the teaching staff of the College was distributed through three faculties, viz. Arts, Theology, and Canon Law. The Professors, or Regents, as they

[1] Aberdeen was not yet founded.

were termed, were not set apart for the teaching of any specific subject. They carried their students on throughout all the three years of their academic residence, instructing them in each one of the subjects falling within the curriculum. These, however, were the days when it was still possible for a man to master the entire gamut of the arts and sciences, and pose as a full-blown polymath. Buchanan, Andrew Melville, the Scaligers, Erasmus, the Admirable Crichton, and others, were men who actually had mastered the whole round of letters.

That we are in absolute ignorance both as to the names of our poet's preceptors during those years of intellectual germination, also that we know next to nothing positively of the books read by our keen-witted 'child of the Muses,' is deeply to be regretted. Only by analogy can we shadow forth the course pursued. It is well known that, in his *Buke of Discipline*, Knox, while eradicating what he considered to be the errors of Romanism, was content to leave the Colleges very much as he found them, in which state they remained until reorganised by Principals Andrew Melville and Thomas Smeaton about 1579-80. James Melville alludes to this matter in his *Diary*,[1] and to the anxiety of his uncle and Smeaton for the acceptance of the new constitution of the Colleges. M'Crie in his *Life of Melville* also indicates that the latter had found the Universities in their pre-Reformation state,[2] and the new *Constitution*[3] expressly states that the reform was intended

[1] *Autobiography and Diary of James Melville*; Wodrow Society Publications.

[2] *Life of Andrew Melville*, by Thomas M'Crie, D.D.

[3] *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, vol. iii. pp. 178-182.

to expel the Papistical remnants which still clung to the academic system of St. Andrews.

This being so, the account which John Knox gives in the *Buke of Discipline*[1] of the 'course' followed in the 'Universitie of Sanctandrois' may be accepted as showing very closely, albeit after a lapse of eighty years, what was the 'academic custom' or curriculum in the oldest of the Scots seats of learning. Let us cite the entire passage from Knox, remembering that the course of study in the *first* and *second* Colleges were unitedly analogous to the curriculum in Dunbar's days: 'In the first Universitie and principall whiche is Sanctandrois, thair be thre Colledgeis. And in the first Colledge, quhilk is the entre of the Universitie, there be four classes or seigeis; the first to the new *Suppostis*, shalbe onlie Dialectique; the next only Mathematique, the thrid of Phisick only, the fourt of Medicyne. And in the second Colledge twa classes or seigeis; the first in Morall Philosophie, the Secound in the Lawis. . . . *Item*, in the first College and in the first classe shall be ane Reidar of Dialectique, wha shall accomplische his course hereof in one yeare. In the Mathematique which is the second classe, shalbe ane Reidar who shall compleit his course of Arithmetique, Geometrie, Cosmographie, and Astrologie in ane yeare. In the third classe, shalbe ane Reidar of Naturall Philosophie, who shall compleit his course in a year. And wha efter ther thre yearis by tryell and Examinatioun shall be fund sufficiently instructit in thir aforesaid Sciences, shallbe

[1] Knox's *Buke of Discipline*, MS. 1566, Wodrow Society Publications, Section iii., 'The Erectioun of Universiteis.'

Laureat and Graduat in Philosophie. Item in the Secound Colledge, in the first classe, one Reidar onlie in the Ethicques, Œconomicques, and Politiques, who shall compleit his course in the space of one yeare.'

From these extracts we gain an idea what the University must have been in Dunbar's days, and what the course of study to which he would be required to subject himself.

The authentic facts of our poet's academic years are, however, of the meagrest description. These have been already recorded, viz. that under the date 1477 among the *Determinantes* or Bachelors of Arts of St. Salvator's College appears the name *Gulielmus Donbar*;[1] while in 1479 it again occurs amongst those that have taken the degree of *Master of Arts*. On this point Laing aptly remarks: 'He is uniformly styled *Maister William Dunbar*, this designation till a late period being exclusively appropriated to persons who had taken that degree at some University.'[2]

That the standard of education at St. Andrews during the years of Dunbar's residence was regarded as high by competent extramural judges is proved by a curious side-light, whose assistance we obtain from a rare tract to which it is expedient to call attention. Jaspar Laet de Borchloen, the author of *De Eclipsi Solis Anni M.cccc.xci, currentis, Octava die Maii Pronosticum*, dedicated it to William Schevez, Archbishop of St. Andrews from 1477 to 1497. He praises the latter for his vast researches in the fields

[1] *Acta Facultatis Artium S. Andreae.*

[2] *Memoirs of William Dunbar.*

of sacred literature and pontifical law, and then adds a warm eulogy upon him for his unwearied efforts to advance the cause of learning and science in the University. Here was one individual at least with whom Dunbar must have had some relations, both pleasant and profitable, and I have little doubt that the poet placed on record his obligations to the great prelate in those two pieces, *The Manner of Passing to Confession* and *The Table of Confession*, where the soaring genius of Dunbar rises to an altitude of true sublimity only paralleled by the great Satanic soliloquies in Milton.

I have always entertained the opinion that after graduating at St. Andrews in 1479 Dunbar visited the Universities of Oxford and Paris. His exquisite little poem on 'Learning Vain without Guid Lyfe' is stated in the colophon to be written at Oxinfurde. The whole 'atmosphere' of the piece, moreover, is academically didactic—

> 'To speak of science, craft, or sapience,
> Of virtue, moral cunnying, or doctrine;
> Of Jure, of wisdom, or intelligence;
> Of every study, lear, or discipline;
> All is but tint, or ready for to tyne:
> The curious probation logicall;
> The eloquence of ornate rhetoric;
> The natural Science philosophical;
> The dirk appearance of Astronomie;
> The Theologis sermoun, the fables of Poetrie:
> Without Guid Lyfe all in the self does dee.'

Besides, the poem as a whole is evidently suggested by the custom of public disputation, which was so marked a feature in English University life, and which the poet would like to see introduced into the Scots academic

system. This, to my mind, is the meaning of the third stanza, beginning—

> 'Wherefore, ye Clerks greatest of constance,
> To us be mirrors in your governance,'

and the point is interesting as explaining what hitherto has been a puzzle to students of the poet—the purity of his Anglo-Saxon vocabulary.[1] Furthermore with regard to his studying at the University of Paris, although to Laing belongs the credit of having thrown out the tentative suggestion that the poet studied at Paris,[2] no definite settlement of the question could be arrived at until, after careful inspection of the registers of the old University of Paris, the name of 'Gul Donbere' was discovered, which I have little doubt refers to the poet. This fact would seem to indicate that Dunbar resided in Paris in 1480-81, or during parts thereof. At any rate a reasonable explanation has now been formulated or Dunbar's intimate knowledge of French—so intimate indeed as to warrant his appointment as Secretary and Interpreter to the various embassies despatched by James IV. to the French Court to promote his manifold matrimonial schemes. Dunbar, both at Oxford and Paris, had been patiently laying the foundations of that broad catholic culture which was to render him, before many years were over, the most accomplished scholar of that brilliant band which circled round the fourth James at Holyrood or at Falkland.

All this period of Dunbar's life, however, has simply to be pieced together by a sort of hypothetical literary synthesis resulting from the comparison of probabilities.

[1] Cf. Schipper and Laing. [2] Cf. Laing, *Memoirs*, p. 10.

After some time, profitably enough spent, doubtless, at Oxford and Paris, he probably returned to Edinburgh and resumed his theological studies in the Schools of the Observantine Franciscans. At least we gather as much from his poems[1] when he relates that he, as a friar of that Order,

> 'into every lusty toun and place,
> Of all England from Berwick to Calais,
> I have into thy habit made good cheer.'

But, as is well known by every good Catholic, the Franciscans declined to allow any one to become a preaching friar who had not been trained in their own schools in theology. That Dunbar was a member of that Order we learn from his own express testimony. We also know that he was trained in theology in Edinburgh, as is implied by one of the passages in the *Flyting*.[2] Only one conclusion is, therefore, left: that our great national poet was trained in theology in the Schools of the Observantines.

[1] *The Visitation of St. Francis.*
[2] *Flyting between Dunbar and Kennedy.*

CHAPTER III

LIFE AS A FRIAR: DISGUST WITH CLERICALISM

ABOUT the year 1483, when Dunbar must have reached his twenty-third year, the battle of life for him may be said to have commenced. He had received a careful scholastic and academic education, he had enjoyed the special privilege of a sound theological training by that Order of Friars which more than any of the others was distinguished by learning, piety, and good works. Now had come that Rubicon of life which by all of us must sooner or later be crossed—the choice of a profession. In Dunbar's case probably there was but little room for choice. To a younger son of the house of Biel the cowl was the only alternative to the sword. The other learned professions did not then exist in Scotland. Not until the 27th May 1532 was the Scots College of Justice instituted by James v. in the old Tolbooth—an historic scene which, as is well known, forms the subject of the magnificent window in the present Parliament House, Edinburgh. Accordingly, the Bar did not afford any scope for his great talents. Nor was Medicine in a condition very much better. A doctor in nine cases out of ten was identified with the ignorant quacks who called themselves 'barber surgeons.' Those

who belonged to a higher grade had all to study either at Paris or

'In Padua, far beyond the sea.'

That of course entailed an expense and hardship the former of which Dunbar's family was unable to face, while from the latter his own hedonistic pleasure-loving nature decidedly shrank. Than the Church, therefore, there was no alternative for Dunbar. From an early age indeed he appears to have practically resigned himself to the inevitable. In more than one of his poems he somewhat sadly recalls his boyhood's dreams, when a life on the tented field, and amid the clash of martial weapons, presented prospects to him of the most alluring kind. But with years came the realisation of that crushing fact, sooner or later to be learned by us all in the hard school of experience, that our individual desires obtain gratification in almost exactly inverse proportion to their intensity. To the wishes of his family he probably bowed, and prepared to enter that stately and magnificent organisation, which, with all its corruptions and short-comings, as a civilising agency in the diffusion of culture and intellectual light has done so much.[1]

To the youthful Dunbar, approaching the priesthood of the great Hierarchy in question, there must have been many solemn and soul-hallowing thoughts. That Rome at her best has produced some of the very noblest men that have adorned the bead-roll of the world's fame cannot be questioned. An Augustine, a Bede, an Alcuin, a Bernard of Clairvaux, and a Bernard of Cluny, a Thomas à Kempis, and others, must have been greatly good as well as grandly

[1] Newman, *Apologia pro sua Vita.*

great. Young Dunbar doubtless felt all the impressive influence of these mighty personalities, stirring up within him the desire to imitate, where he could not emulate. What noble-hearted young man at the outset of life has not felt the same? We ought not to be the 'dumb, driven cattle' of circumstances, but live in the glorious light of hopeful opportunities, making each circumstance a carrier to bear us onward to something higher. Not as machines or as automata, but as reason-crowned mortals capable of influencing Destiny as much as Destiny influences us—such is the attitude of mind of any man who has risen to eminence by breaking the chains binding him to precedent, and such was Dunbar's mental attitude when he wrote those inspired religious poems of his upon *The Nativity and Passion of Christ*, and one or two others. I like to think that our great poet wrote at least some of these between his twenty-fourth and thirtieth years. Of youth and immaturity they exhibit some signs, but all the rich, warm glow of early enthusiasm, before contact with the world had chilled it with the frost of sarcasm and the icy breath of indifference, is there present, united to that sensuously splendid picturesqueness of description, in which particular the early poems of Dunbar are still peerless in English literature. Only a young man addressing the young would suddenly break into this apostrophe at the close of a lofty and sublime piece of poetic rhetoric—

> 'I red thee, man, while thou art stark and young,
> With pith and strength into thy yearis grene,
> While thou art able baith in mind and tongue,

> Repent thee, man, and keep thy conscience clean ;
> To bide till age has mony perils seen :
> Small merit is for sinis for to irk,
> When thou are auld and may na wrongis work.'[1]

It is like the personal application of a rousing evangelical sermon.

To the priesthood, therefore, Dunbar advanced, imbued with lofty sentiments regarding the dignity and holiness of the office, and the opportunities for doing good which the position of a 'preaching friar' afforded him. The poetry we believe to have been his earliest, viz. one or two of his religious pieces, are filled with expressions how deeply he felt his own unfitness for the holy office. In *The Table of Confession* we obtain a glimpse of his self-abasement even after we have discounted the strong stock terms wherewith the rubric enjoins that the duty should be performed. Dunbar in youth was undoubtedly a deeply religious man. Alas that the scenes he witnessed within the pale of the Roman Catholic Church of the fifteenth century should have undermined his piety!

After he donned the habit of a preaching friar, Dunbar states[2] that he made good cheer in every flourishing town in England between Berwick and Calais: in it, also, he ascended the pulpit at Dernton and Canterbury; nay, even crossed the sea at Dover and instructed the inhabitants of Picardy. It is doubtless to this period of Dunbar's

[1] *The Manner of Passing to Confession.* My idea is that Dunbar, with regard to many of his religious pieces, re-wrote in age what he had roughly drafted in youth. The differences existing between various versions of the same poem leave no other explanation open.

[2] *Visitation of St. Francis.*

life that we must refer the allusion contained in Kennedy's portion of the *Flyting*, wherein he taunts Dunbar with his pilgrimage as a pardoner begging in all the churches from Ettrick Forest to Dumfries.

> 'From Ettrick Forest furthward to Dumfries,
> Thou beggit with ane pardon in all kirks,
> Collops, curds, meal, groats, grice [1] and geese,
> And under night whiles thou stole staigs [2] and stirks [3]
> Because that Scotland of that begging irks
> Thou shap'st in France to be a knight of the field,
> Thou hast thy clam shells,[4] and thy burdoun [5] keild [6]
> Unhonest ways all, wolroun, that thou works.[7]

The deceptions practised by the friars on the poor and ignorant, as well as the mournful difference between his ideal of the priesthood and the reality, led him after some years' experience of it to long to leave it. During his service in it he had picked up a shrewd, worldly wisdom, a keen knowledge of life and manners, and a wide experience in dealing with his fellow-men. In after years this knowledge was to prove invaluable to him. There can be no doubt, however, that the immediate effect of his years of clerical labour was a distinct lowering of his lofty religious ideals. He saw that, though in the past an exalted piety had been the passport to promotion in the Romish Church, the period for that had gone by. He noted that the attitude of mind which paid at that moment was a sort of easy-going Epicureanism—neither looking too deep into the distinctive

[1] Pigs. [2] Young horses. [3] Young bullocks.

[4] Clam shells employed by pilgrims to place in their hats, as denoting they had been to Palestine.—*Marmion* I. xxiii.

[5] *Burdoun*, pilgrim's staff. [6] *Keild*, marked with ruddle.

[7] From the *Flyting between Dunbar and Kennedy*.

bearing of doctrines upon life, nor setting up too high a standard of piety as the rule whereby to try his fellows. The Romish Church was tottering to her fall both in England and Scotland. Her clergy were timorous and weak, recognising that they no longer maintained that hold on the minds of the people which in past centuries had been their tower of strength, yet determined not to alter an iota of their faith or practice to win them back.[1] The people must come to them, not they go to the people. James IV. was too liberal-minded a sovereign to be a slavish supporter of the clergy. The consequence of this attitude of secular eclecticism, similar to that manifested by Lorenzo de Medici in Florence,[2] was a weakening of the temporal as well as the spiritual power of the Church. As Burton remarks, the discussion between the Papal Court and the Estates of the Kingdom of Scotland, with reference to the pretensions of the former to distribute all ecclesiastical patronage in the country, began in the reign of James IV. and speedily developed into a bitter quarrel.[3] The angry Statutes passed by the States again and again are sufficient proof how complete was the undermining of the Church's influence that had gone on. To estimate the power of the Romish Church in Scotland by the severity of the measures taken by the Government against Lollardry and the Reformed beliefs is no fair criterion. The bitterest enemies of Rome among the nobles, men who openly professed their contempt for all forms of worship, at once sided with the faith

[1] *Early Scottish History and Literature*, by J. M. Ross, chap. iv. p. 123.

[2] Sismondi, *History of the Italian Republics*.

[3] Hill Burton, *History of Scotland*, vol. iii. p. 40.

by law established, when they had to choose between a fresh system they knew not of, and the doctrines consecrated to them by centuries of service. To esteem the Romish Church the stronger, because she was able at the outset to crush the Reformed doctrines, is to misunderstand the whole situation. The irreligious nobility sided with Rome, because the priesthood of the ancient faith winked complacently at the vices of the great, provided the winking meant fat tithes and the protection of the baron's arm in times of unrest. For the Reformed faith inculcated an austerity of life and morals, even on the laity, compared with which many of the religious Orders were luxurious and sybaritic. Not until the tempting bait of the Romish Church lands was thrown into the scale did the Scots baronage come to the conclusion that Catholicism was really very unscriptural indeed. As Henry IV. considered the crown of France worth a mass, so the Scots nobles thought the acquisition of the Church lands was worth, at least, the trouble of emulating in an ethical sense Sir John Falstaff's recipe to 'purge and leave sack, and live cleanly as a nobleman should do.'

The consciousness therefore that the Church had for ever lost its hold on the heart of the people induced Dunbar to reconsider his resolution to live and die a Churchman.[1] How long he remained a priest is not very clear, but the period cannot have been less than five years —from 1483 to 1488,—for, as we shall see later, he was employed on the King's business in 1489-90. Only natural

[1] *Vide* Poems on *Dunbar's Dream*, *The Devil's Inquest*, *The Birth of Antichrist*, for indications of his past dissatisfaction.

was it that his action in turning his back on his brethren of the Observantine Franciscans should have blown into flame that slumbering jealousy wherewith Dunbar was ever regarded by the Order whose habit he had elected to wear. Again and again in his poems references occur to the hatred wherewith he was pursued by the whole Scots Franciscan Order, both Observantines and Conventuals.[1] As they were the only Order the worldly-minded King patronised—owing to the fact, as he said, that their vow of poverty precluded them from expecting much from him,[2] this may have accounted for his Majesty's reluctance to promote Dunbar to a benefice. The point in question, however, will be discussed hereafter. Dunbar must have adopted the dress of the secular clergy some time in 1488. It was many years before he again donned the purely clerical robes.

[1] Cf. the persecution of George Buchanan by the Franciscans.—*Life of Buchanan*, under years 1537-1550; also Besant's *Rabelais*, pp. 16-44.

[2] *History of Scotland from* 1436 *to* 1565, by Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY YEARS OF STATE SERVICE

To that period in Dunbar's life when he entered the personal service of James IV. we have now come. He was in his thirtieth year, and was rapidly approaching that golden prime of the maturity of his powers—a prime that was to be so glorious. During his clerical career he had doubtless made many friends, both at Court and in the Edinburgh of that day. Dunbar's cheerful *bonhomie*, his knowledge of men and manners, his manifold experiences during his years of travel, his genial wit and humour as well as his sunny, unconcealed Epicureanism and enjoyment of life, all combined to render him one of the most charming of companions, as he was one of the most faithful of friends. The young King, then only sixteen, had ascended the Scots throne in the June of the same year in which our poet put off the clerical dress. In view of subsequent events, I have always maintained that there was a connection between the two occurrences.

The closing years of the third James's reign were gloom-beset and disturbed. The partiality he had exhibited for unworthy favourites, and the dislike to the society of the nobles of his Court, which characterised his later years, culminated finally in that civil war in which the King met

with his death. But the influence on Scotland of this unrest was simply ruinous.[1] 'There is evidence that agriculture languished, and that grain had to be imported from England; nor can we wonder at this when we remember the horrible and widespread devastations of the century.'[2]

The accession of James IV. was therefore hailed on all sides as being the commencement of a new era of peace, plenty, and prosperity. Men's minds were weary of anarchy. They longed for tranquillity. Only the strong arm of a capable monarch was needed to lay Scotland at his feet in a manner never before witnessed in the history of the country, because he would receive the support of all sections of the community. That strong monarch was found in James IV., but the supreme success of his rule was due as much to the change coming over the temper of the people as to the vigorous rule of the sovereign.

James IV. was far older than his years. As Drummond of Hawthornden says,[3] 'The King in the strength and vigour of his youth, remembering that to live in idleness was to live to be contemned by the world, by change of objects to expel his present sadness, and to enable himself for wars when they should burst forth, gave himself to recreations and games, and with a decent pomp entertained all knightly exercises, keeping an open and magnificent Court.' To such a youth a man like William

[1] Pinkerton, *History of Scotland*, vol. i. b. viii.; Burton, *History of Scotland*, vol. iii. p. 191.

[2] *Scottish History and Literature*, chap. iv. pp. 119-121.

[3] *History of the Five Jameses*, by W. Drummond of Hawthornden, p. 66.

Dunbar would prove irresistibly attractive. The very qualities wherewith Dunbar had been endowed by Heaven in measure so bountiful were those in which the Scots 'Merry Monarch' was conspicuously lacking. Unlike his great-grandfather, whose *Kingis Quhair* has a distinct note of originality amid acknowledged obligations to 'my maisters dear, Gower and Chaucere,' unlike his son also, of whose authorship of *Christ's Kirk on the Green* and *Peblis to the Play* there seems little reason to doubt, James IV. had not a spark of that imaginative *afflatus* which viewed all things through the spectacles of idealism and romance.

But even at seventeen, as Maitland remarks,[1] James's strength lay in knowing by a sort of intuitive divination whom he could trust. The council of nobles and clergy, formed as a sort of consultative body of advisers for the young King, were many of them bitterly opposed to each other. But the faith shown by the youthful monarch in their loyalty to himself and the country acted as a sort of subtle coalescent to so many antagonistic elements. His very helplessness in youth was his strength. But within two years he had felt his feet. The council was gradually dispensed with, and James governed alone through his Parliament.

The same instinct led him to select William Dunbar as his confidential 'King's Messenger.' Why the fact never occurred to David Laing or Dr. Schipper, when compiling their exhaustive Lives of the poet, is a circumstance which to me is inexplicable. The matter is so unmistakable and so apparent that the wonder is that

[1] *History of Scotland*, by William Maitland, F.R.S.

any other explanation of the facts should have suggested itself.

My contention is that William Dunbar, after the death of the unfortunate James III.—than whom never has the character of monarch been more cruelly misread—considered that now, if ever, Scotland was to experience the prosperity for which men's minds were longing. His own fortunes in the tottering Romish Church were far from being promising. His family influence probably was exhausted. To play his last card then for his individual advancement, circumstances demanded that, as a secular cleric, and that alone, he should be introduced to the young monarch.

Who the good Samaritan was that brought Dunbar directly under the notice of his young King we have only traditionary hints whereon to base our hypothesis. Let us give them for what they are worth. Robert Blackadder, Bishop of Glasgow, over the elevation of whose See to archiepiscopal rank there was a quarrel so bitter between him and Schevez, Archbishop of St. Andrews,[1] had always been a firm friend to Dunbar. He knew and valued the genius of the young priest, and there is a strong presumption in favour of the theory that he was the individual to whom we are indebted for introducing Dunbar to the Court of King James. The prelate was a man of liberal culture and wide sympathies, a correspondent with some of the leading Italian prelates, and with Lorenzo de Medici,[2] regarding the influence of the new learning on the inter-

[1] Burton, vol. iii. p. 41; also Burns, *Calendar of State Papers in Venice.*

[2] *Loci Communes Petri Martyris Vermilii Florentini.*

pretation of Scripture, a true patriot and a loyal adviser of his sovereign as a member of the adjutory council. His life was exemplary amid an ecclesiastical hierarchy corrupt to the core, and, like Bishop Kennedy of St. Andrews in the previous reign, he was content to sacrifice his own comfort and prosperity to preserve the stability of the State. The Bishop, for he was not yet Archbishop, observing how easily the youthful monarch was led astray by immoral companions, is reported to have thrown Dunbar into the society of the King designedly, in the hope that he might exercise a restraining influence on the youthful ruler's headstrong sensuality. There is extant in the private collection of the late Duc d'Aumale at Chantilly —by the will of the latter now the property of the French Academy[1]—a letter of Blackadder's to the Bishop of Beauvais, wherein, after describing the excellences of the young King, he expresses regret over his glaring sensuality, but adds that he had placed a young man, a secular priest, among the royal attendants, from whose influence he expected much. The name of the young man was '*Gulielmus Dunbar*, a scholar, and also an excellent poet.'[2]

Such then was the means whereby Dunbar was brought into contact with the monarch. From collateral evidence we glean the fact that the introduction must have taken place about January 1490. Previously to that date our poet must have made that lengthened sojourn in the Bishop's house of which the latter speaks on many occasions—a sojourn which enabled the keen-witted pre-

[1] Cf. *Century Magazine*, September 1897, article by Pierre de Coubertin on 'Royalists and Republicans.'

[2] D'Aumale Collection.

late to gauge the calibre of the man in whom he was interesting himself, and to appraise him as 'without his marrow in our aige.'

There is some difficulty in precisely identifying the special services upon which Dunbar was employed by James IV. That the latter did employ him, and withal extensively, as soon as he discovered how implicitly he could trust him, is evident from Dunbar's own words. He states that he had travelled on the business of his master, not only through

> 'France, England, Ireland, Almanie,[1]
> But also Italy and Spain.'

That the period through which he had been so engaged was a lengthy one is manifest from the poems wherein Dunbar refers to the appointment of the French doctor and quack Damian to the Abbacy of Tungland. The latter seduced the monarch into the unprofitable pursuit after the 'Philosopher's Stone,' *Quinta Essentia*, and alchemy generally, for which he was liberally rewarded by his dupe. We shall have more to say of him anon; in the meantime let it be sufficient to remark that the date of his arrival at Court was early in 1501, and that two or three years after he was gratified with a benefice.[2] Dunbar contrasts this treatment with that meted out to himself, who received nothing, though he had been such a faithful servant to the King.

There is a mournful pathos in the lines—

> 'Therefore, O Prince, maist honourable,
> Be in this matter merciable:[3]

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[1] Almanie=Germany. [2] *The Fenyeit Friar of Tungland.* [3] Merciful

> And to thy old servants have an ee,
> That lang have trusted unto thee :
> If I be one of them mysel,
> Thorough all regions has tein hard tell,[1]
> Of which my writing witness bears,
> And yet thy danger aye me dares :
> But after danger cometh grace,
> As hath been heard in mony a place.'

From 1490 to 1500 Dunbar was seldom left unemployed. As Laing says, 'It is well known that James IV. maintained a constant and friendly intercourse with the Courts of France, Flanders, Spain, Denmark, and other countries, and that such international relations were carried on by the mission of heralds, envoys, and merchants, as well as in the more solemn way of embassies to foreign Courts, including that of England. The most probable conjecture is that Dunbar was employed in the course of these embassies, as it was usual on such occasions to appoint "ane clerk," for it must be considered that the literary attainments of the clergy, who were almost the only class of men who then received anything like a liberal education, eminently recommended them for service in foreign negotiations. In the safe-conduct granted to such embassies when passing through England to go beyond seas, as well as to the English Court, the names only of the two or three leading persons are mentioned, with a specified number of attendants and horses in their train.'[2]

I have quoted the above passage in order to give Laing's position, which, however, I esteem to be a mistaken one.[3] My view of the relations existing between Dunbar and

[1] Has suffered hardship.

[2] Laing's *Dunbar*.

[3] Cf. Rymer's *Foedera* and *Rotuli Scotiae*; Pinkerton's *History*, vol. ii.; Tytler, vol. iv.

James IV. is that the poet was the monarch's confidential agent. In his earlier years James was obliged to be guided in everything by his adjutory council. Gradually, as Maitland shows, with infinite tact he emancipated himself from their tutelage without offending one of them.[1] But this course of action demanded that he should have some one in his confidence who was content to be his instrument. I think that any unbiassed mind which reads the following poems by Dunbar: *Dunbar's Dirge to the King at Stirling*, *New Year's Gift to the King*, *Welcome to the Lord Treasurer*, *To the King* ('Sir, at this Feast,' etc.), *To the King* ('Of Benefice, Sir,' etc.), *Dunbar's Complaint to the King*, must admit that only a man on the closest terms of familiarity with his sovereign could have written them. Even after discounting the fact that the relations between royalty and the subject were very different in Scotland from what was the custom in France and England, still the matter remains inexplicable on any other hypothesis than that of friendly terms of familiarity. The man who could address his monarch in such terms as these—

> 'I grant my service is but light;
> Therefore of mercy, not of right,
> I ask you, Sir, no man to grief.
> None may remede my malady,
> So well as you, Sir, verily;
> For with a benefice ye may preif
> And if I mend not hastely:
> Excess of thought does me mischief:'[2]

—must have had a hold on him that was none of the slightest. Dunbar was a proud man. He realised that

[1] Maitland's *History of Scotland*. [2] *To the King*.

his master was also one upon whom obligations would be always binding were they once contracted. There were many other courtiers whose claims for recognition were also great, but not so outstanding as his. To impress them on the King at sundry times and seasons was the custom of the period, even as Chaucer addressed his well-known lines *To his Purse*. His contemporaries' appeals are lost, Dunbar's are preserved to earn for him the reputation of an importunate beggar, when in all probability his proud nature would be the least insistent of all in recalling his services to remembrance.

Dunbar, as 'King's Messenger,' would have many delicate missions to fulfil—of an amatory as well as of a political character. The King was a confirmed gallant, and on more than one occasion there is a strong suspicion that he made love by proxy. He was deeply attached to a daughter of Lord Drummond, and was determined to marry her despite all the remonstrances of his council. Kings in their minority, however, may 'propose,' but adjutory councils dispose. How they effected it is not known. Only one fact has come to light, that the other nobles dreaded any such renewed aggrandisement of the Drummond family as had been the case when Robert III. married Annabella, daughter of Sir John Drummond of Stobhall.[1] There is no doubt that Lady Margaret Drummond was the King's mistress, and strong presumption exists that the *affaire de cœur* was promoted, at least in its initial stages, by Dunbar.[2] But when the matter

[1] Drummond of Hawthornden, *History of the Five Jameses*.

[2] Burton, vol. iii. p. 81.

became serious, Lady Margaret and her sister died together at Drummond Castle, so suddenly and in such manner as to convince all that poison had been at work. I have a strong conviction that Dunbar's exquisite poem *Of Love Earthly and Divine* was directly inspired by the remembrance of the beautiful Margaret's untimely fate. Only for a reference to the matter have I space in this small volume. Elsewhere I hope to give the arguments leading me to adopt this conclusion.

But ere long Dunbar was employed on worthier work than acting as go-between for the royal 'lover and his lass.' At the time of the death of King James III. a new alliance was about to be concluded with Denmark. The disturbed state of the kingdom prevented the matter from being then consummated. That consequently led to rather strained relations existing between the two countries. For nearly three years Scotland was not in a position to re-conclude the alliance. But towards the close of the year 1490 the Scots Estates enacted that an embassy consisting of a lord (the Bishop of Aberdeen), a knight (Sir John Ogilvy of Airly), and a clerk should proceed to Denmark, and for their expenses each Estate was ordered to contribute £100.[1] William Dunbar was undoubtedly the 'clerk' referred to above. My proof of this assertion is to be discovered in these lines in the famous *Flyting* which speak of travelling 'mony hundreth myle . . . by Holland, Zealand, Zetland, and Norway coast.' Again and again Dunbar refers to Zealand or Denmark, exhibiting an intimate acquaintance with the country only

[1] Black Acts, fol. 85, cap. 23.

to be attained by a personal visit to it. Had I space I would cite the references.[1]

The next mission of State, wherein, from the internal evidence of his poems, it is almost certain he was employed, was to Rome. Pope Innocent VIII. and his successor, Alexander VI., had shown peculiar favour towards Scotland. In the first place they had withdrawn the excommunication pronounced upon the murderers of James III., and in the second, they had acceded to the King's request, and had raised the See of Glasgow to Archiepiscopal rank. In consequence of that favourable conjunction of circumstances, the Estates of the Realm considered it only consistent with their dignity to send a splendid embassy to France, to Spain, and finally to Rome. The Earl of Bothwell and the Bishop of Glasgow (who was repairing to Rome to receive the Archiepiscopal *pallium*) were the heads of the embassy, and in the Black Acts we note that a sum of £5000 was allocated for the expenses of the mission.[2] In the *Letter Book of St. Mark's Library* published in the *Calendar of Venetian State Papers*,[3] under date 3rd June 1495, the intimation is made of the arrival there of certain Scots ambassadors *en route* for Rome. That Dunbar visited Venice is proved by his references to the city in his poems, and I think this chain of evidence is sufficient to create at least the very strongest presumption, if we cannot

[1] *Vide* also *Calendar of State Papers*, and the *Flyting*, lines 377-384.

[2] In Rymer's *Foedera*, tom. xii. p. 446, we note that Henry VII., on 14th June 1493, granted passports and safe-conducts to the Earls of Bothwell and Morton, the Bishops of Glasgow and Aberdeen, the Lords Glamis and Oliphant, with 100 attendants, to travel through his dominions in order to visit King Charles of France and Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain.

[3] Vol. i. No. 628.

go the length of affirming the absolute certainty of it, that Dunbar was a member of the embassy. His friend and patron, Bishop Blackadder, was at the head of the mission, and there is Dunbar's own testimony in the *Flyting* that he was absent from Scotland in 1493-94, while Kennedy even alludes to the name of the vessel in which, as the Black Acts tell us, the embassy sailed, viz. the *Katherine*, as being that on which his poetical antagonist had been on board during his journey. I think the argument may fairly be regarded as conclusive.

From 1491, therefore, until the close of 1495, William Dunbar was ceaselessly travelling abroad in the service of his master. That fact is beyond doubt, whether he was a member of the embassy or alone.[1] But the fact that his name does not appear in the Treasurer's accounts as having debited the expenses of his missions inclines me to the belief that his charges were included in the £5000 guaranteed by the Scots Parliament to the embassy. To such a mind as Dunbar's, so impressionable and alive to all that savoured of artistic beauty, whether in literature or art, his travels abroad must have been to him as a second education. While in Spain he would be brought in contact with those romances in stone and lime wherewith that country abounds —the Moorish palaces. Than the Alhambra at Granada and the palaces and mosques of Cordova and Alcala de Henares—where resided Cardinal Ximenes, the Mæcenas of Spain, probably appointed Archbishop of Toledo

[1] There is an entry in the Treasurer's accounts which, though mentioning no names, seems to point to Dunbar: 'Item till a prest that wrote the instrumentis and oderis letteris, that past with the imbassitouris in France, 36s.'

while the ambassadors were there—nothing exists exactly similar to them either in design or magnificence until we reach the banks of the Ganges. Only the year before their arrival also, there had set sail from the bar of Saltes near Palos, with the *Pinta* and two other small vessels, that mighty navigator who was to revolutionise the geographical face of the world. In 1493 Columbus and his companions had returned with the intelligence of those wondrous worlds beyond the waste of seas.[1] Probably just when the Scottish embassy was in Spain the whole country would be ringing with the reports of the discovery of that new empire beyond the western main which was to make Ferdinand and Isabella the mightiest rulers of the world of their time. That Dunbar had been deeply impressed with what he saw and heard is evident from his reference to the New World in his poem on *The World's Instability*, the date of the composition of which cannot be later than 1496. In begging a benefice from his master, he recounts the unworthy persons that had received promotion, adding, with reference to some promise given him—

> 'Unworthy I, among the lave,
> A kirk does crave, but none can have;
> It might have come in shorter while
> From Calicut or the "New-Fund Isle."'

From Spain he would proceed to France, and then to Italy, where the monuments of 'the glory that was Greece' and 'the grandeur that was Rome' would look down upon him. Then the renown of Dante, of Boccaccio, of Petrarch, of Giotto, of Brunelleschi, of Donatello, of Perugino and

[1] Prescott, *Ferdinand and Isabella*.

Leonardo da Vinci, the magnificence of Lorenzo de Medici, the majestic dignity of Alexander VI., one of the greatest of the Popes,[1] together with that ineffable, inexplicable grace which resides in everything pertaining to Italian art and literature, and which afterwards reaches its efflorescence in Raphael and Tasso, powerfully impressed him. His poems teem with references to that Italian exuberance of beauty, with which no receptive mind can long be brought in contact without becoming fascinated by its witchery. When William Dunbar turned his footsteps homewards along with his companions he was a changed man. He had seen the evils of insularity and of those narrow, bigoted ideas Scotsmen, in those days, too often imbibed through remaining so persistently within the limits of their own country. His poems before and after this memorable epoch of travel are quite distinct in tone from each other. The former could not be mistaken as being the work of a man who had travelled little and was hide-bound by the prejudices of his isolated nation: the latter breathe the free, joyous air of a catholic liberality of sentiment and emancipation from that bigotry which is the bane of true genius.

From the State Papers[2] we learn that while journeying homewards letters reached Robert Blackadder, Archbishop of Glasgow, requesting him to return to Spain in order to confer with the representatives of Ferdinand and Isabella about a marriage between James and one of the Spanish princesses, although the curious fact is elicited from other sources that the ladies in question were either all

[1] Ranke's *Lives of the Popes.* [2] Bergenroth's *Calendar of State Papers.*

contracted in marriage or were already married. In all this diplomatic dealing glaring bad faith was kept with the Scots King. Blackadder reached Spain late in August 1495, and it is probable that Dunbar accompanied him. At all events, the Archbishop reached home in October of the next year, the other half of the embassy having returned some time previous.[1] Another Scots embassy was despatched to Spain from James IV. in November or December 1495, in order to strengthen the Archbishop's hands, and, as we note from the Treasurer's accounts, the two missions returned to Scotland together in the autumn of 1496, Dunbar having been absent considerably over four years from his native land.

[1] Mr. Paterson, in his edition of Dunbar, when criticising Laing's statement about the return of the embassy, mistakes the return of the *Katherine*, the vessel which conveyed them to Spain, for the return of the embassy itself. The latter did not return until 1496. The Bull of Pope Alexander VI., confirming the foundation of the University of Aberdeen, one of the objects of the mission, is dated Feb. 10, 1495.

CHAPTER V

THE EPOCH OF THE 'FLYTING'

THE closing years of the fifteenth century were in all probability spent by Dunbar in Edinburgh as a courtier, and as a Court poet. His intellectual vision had been widened by travel, and his society was now doubtless increasingly acceptable to the King. From many sources he had received gratifying proofs of his popularity, and doubtless his master did not forget his temporal wants. As a courtier, Dunbar boarded at the King's expense, and received each year his robe of red velvet fringed with costly fur. He was required to be present at every public function, and, if it presented scope for poetic treatment, to render it into verse. This was the office of a 'King's Makar' or laureate. That the work was expected of him, and was not merely of a voluntary character, appears from Dunbar's almost unknown poem addressed to the monarch, and entitled *On his Headache*, in which he apologises for the non-execution of some duty, stating that his 'head did so ache yesternight' that this day to 'make (compose) he did not feel able.' A similar complaint was made by Shadwell when he was laureate in the reign of James VII.[1]

Dunbar was now in the last years of that extraordinary

[1] Shadwell's Works, *To his Headache*.

century which had witnessed events so remarkable as the invention of printing, the discovery of America, and also the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope by Vasco da Gama,

> 'Whose martial fires with prudence close allied
> Ensured the smiles of fortune on his side,'[1]

the Fall of Constantinople with the consequent Revival of Learning, and the overthrow of the Moors in Spain. He was fully conscious how remarkable a century it had been, and his references to it on more than one occasion are characterised by a kind of wondering awe. Surely, he thinks, the end of all things cannot now be far off. As regards himself, the closing decade had among other things been memorable for the humorous passage-at-arms in which he had been engaged with his friend and great poetic rival, Walter Kennedy. Not with 'swords or staves' was the warfare waged. It took the shape of an interchange of bitter, satirical lampoons on each other, in which each attempted to vilify and depreciate the other's character as much as possible. The contest was not without precedent, and has not lacked imitators. Luigi Pulci and Matteo Franco in the Florence of Lorenzo de Medici, for the amusement of their readers, loaded each other with the grossest abuse, yet the intimacy of their friendship is said to have continued without interruption.[2] Probably during his Italian travels he had been brought in contact with the

[1] Camoens, *Lusiad*, b. I.

[2] *Life of Lorenzo de Medici*, by Roscoe. Dunbar could not have seen Lorenzo personally, as he died in 1492, but probably he saw the other members of the great family, particularly the sons of the great 'mediator of Italy,' Giovann and Piero.

very individuals themselves, and their example may have suggested to him the course which he afterwards followed. Among many imitations of the *Flyting*, that of Alexander Montgomerie, author of *The Cherrie and the Slae*, and Sir Patrick Hume of Polwart, is the best. The commencement of the *Flyting*, at least, and in all probability the greater part of it, was written during those years when Dunbar was absent from Scotland on the Continent. Indeed, the poet himself says as much in lines 89-96. At present, suffice it to say that the series opens with a letter from Dunbar to Sir John the Ross—a mutual friend of his own and of Kennedy's,—in which he sarcastically alludes to the boastful and self-complimentary style adopted by Kennedy and the well-known poet of the period, Quentin Shaw[1] in some conjunct production they had just published. That the piece in question is lost is to be regretted. We then could have noted the passage which excited Dunbar's mock wrath, and seen whether there was therein any reference to Dunbar himself. The latter probably despatched at the same time a letter to his friend Kennedy, proposing to him that they should engage in a 'Flyting' of such a character as that he had recently heard in Florence. From Florence I have always had the idea Dunbar had sent his letter home to Kennedy, enclosing at the same time to Sir John the Ross the 'Challenge' which now forms Part I. of the *Flyting*. This, I think, must have occurred in the year 1494 or 1495.

Sir John the Ross, on receiving a communication so

[1] That the latter is implied, and not an unknown poet of the name of Quentin, is far more likely to be the case.

extraordinary, would doubtless at once take steps to forward to Kennedy his antagonist's challenge, and also would make the matter as public as possible. As a courtier he would have every facility so to do. In all likelihood, from the numerous copies existing, every Court gallant and every lady fair esteemed it 'the correct thing' to boast a copy of the *Flyting* all to themselves, as the ladies and gentlemen of the Court of George III. were accustomed to carry about a volume of Fanny Burney's *Evelina* or *Cecilia*. The King in person would not doubtless be the last to see and 'admire' the work of him whom, for his sheer genius and keen intellectuality, he had chosen as his confidential messenger. Nay, when Kennedy's reply came, we can fancy how supremely James would enjoy the good hard hitting contained in it. Can we not picture the scene of the 'Merry Monarch,' himself a scholar who, as Don Pedro de Ayala, the Spanish Ambassador, reported to his master, 'spoke the following foreign languages—Latin very well, French, German, Flemish, Italian, and Spanish,'[1] and loved the literatures both of them and his own land, reading aloud the pithy passages to the lords of the Court with ever and anon the quizzical query put, 'How think ye, my lords, our laureate will thole this, or will reply to that other?' while the obsequious courtiers, each hungry to please the royal giver of good things, would fall into affected ecstasies of admiration where his majesty admired, and condemn beyond hope of redemption the places with which he was not so impressed? Doubtless for many a long day the two initial poems of the *Flyting* series

[1] Bergenroth's *Simancas Papers*, 169. 170.

would be regarded with wonderment supreme, and men would speculate anxiously as to who would be victor in a contest so novel.

Many months must probably have elapsed before Kennedy would receive his reply. There can be little doubt, I think, that the third part of the *Flyting*—in other words, Dunbar's second contribution to it—was not published until 1496, or even 1497. The date may perhaps have been slightly later; I do not think it can be assigned to a period any earlier. The balance of the internal evidence points, in my opinion, to its composition subsequent, not prior, to Dunbar's return home. I am aware that in taking this view I am placing myself in opposition to such peerless critics of Dunbar's verse as Dr. Schipper and Sheriff Æneas Mackay,[1] than the latter of whom few scholars in the kingdom have a more intimate and universal acquaintance with every point relating to early Scots literature. But the significance of Dunbar's and of Kennedy's words, stating that the former was residing in Scotland, and in Edinburgh, I cannot overlook. In a popular sketch such as the present, however, to enter into all the minutiæ of the controversy would be utterly out of place.

The reply of Dunbar to Kennedy would of course be speedily followed by the final response of the latter to his antagonist, which probably was written early in 1498. The evidence of the poems themselves may be cited to prove the intense interest excited by this 'Battle of the Poets.'

[1] Schipper's *William Dunbar: Sein Leben und seine Gedichte*; *Poems of William Dunbar*, edited for the Scottish Text Society by the late John Small, with Introduction by Æ. J. G. Mackay, LL.D.

To the popular mind there is something invincibly attractive in watching two intellectual antagonists, in a figurative sense, 'rending and tearing each other.' One still recalls the amazing interest excited more than a couple of decades ago by the famous quarrel, finally fought out in the law-courts, between Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Robert Buchanan. The gladiatorial contest between the great Hector and Achilles of the Court of King James appears to have aroused an attention entirely incommensurate to the importance of the issues at stake. The very fact that the *Flyting* has been preserved in so many distinct forms in the old MSS. is proof of the widespread character of the interest it aroused. The 'publication' of Kennedy's second reply terminated the *Flyting*. Whether or no, as in the case of Luigi Pulci and Matteo Franco, the clergy interfered and interdicted further correspondence,[1] or whether the good sense of the combatants suggested that they had gone far enough, certain it is that the interchange of poems stopped when each party had contributed two poems to the series. The latter contributions are infinitely more scurrilous and abusive than the first. Every name that ingenuity could suggest as carrying with it the faintest suspicion of a vituperative meaning was hurled to and fro between the antagonists. The incidents of their respective lives, be they as destitute as could be of any flagitious associations, were all perverted for the purpose of holding the individual up to ridicule, or to lay charges of crimes the most absurd and impossible against him. When Dunbar stated that the vessel in which he had been

[1] Roscoe, *Life of Lorenzo de Medici.*

travelling had been wrecked, Kennedy instantly replied that he did not wonder at it—

> 'While thou, devil's birth Dunbar, was on the sea,
> The sauls had sunken through the sin of thee.'

In using the word 'published' above, it must not be supposed that as yet it was synonymous with printed. Although there were many books in Scotland at that time, they all came from England or the Continent. No printing-press was established in Scotland until 1507, when Walter Chepman and Andro Myllar obtained the King's permission to erect one. The following is the commencement of their royal charter granting them a monopoly of the trade:[1] 'James, etc.—To al and sindri our officiaris, lieges, and subdittis, quham it efferis, quhais knawledge thir our lettres salcum, gretting: Wit ye that forsamekill as our lovittis servitouris Walter Chepman and Andro Millar, burgesses of our burgh of Edinburgh, has at our instance and request, for our plesour, the honour and profitt of our Realme and Leigis, taken on them to furnis and bring hame, ane prent, with all stuff belangand tharto, and expert men to use the samyne, for imprenting within our Realme of the bukis of our Lawis, Actis of Parliament, Cronicles, Mess books, and portuus, efter the use of our Realme, with additions and legendis of Scottis Sanctis now gaderit to be ekit thereto and al otheris bukis that salbe seen necessar . . . we have granted and promittit to thame that thai sall nocht be hurt nor prevenit tharon be ony utheris to tak copyis of any bukis furth of our

[1] *Registrum Secr. Sig.*, iii. 129.

Realme to gar imprent the same in utheris countreis, to be brocht and sauld agane within our realm,' etc.

Prior to the establishment of this press in the Cowgate, there was absolutely no means of getting any work printed unless by sending it to England. The practice then of hand-copying, the process in vogue for so many hundreds of years prior to Faust and Gutenberg's great discovery, lingered on longer in Scotland than in almost any other corner of Europe. Though Chepman established his press in 1507, and for several years put out books from it, the national troubles after Flodden seem to have checked the nascent industry. It was not until 1542 that another printer settled for a time in Scotland, but not until 1580 that Vautrollier[1] and others appear to have finally established the industry on a permanent basis.[2]

Therefore, when Dunbar and Kennedy were engaged in their wordy warfare, any copies which the King or the courtiers desired had of course to be transcribed from the originals, exchanged by the principals in the *Flyting*. But as many persons in those days earned their living by making additional copies of volumes which were desired to be retained in duplicate, or in multiple, to prepare a series of copies would be a task of no difficulty to the scribes of the time.

During the final decade of the fifteenth century Dunbar's muse must have been very busy. Notwithstanding the fact that he was travelling all over Europe from the banks

[1] Cf. Calderwood's *Historie of the Kirk of Scotland*, vol. iv. p. 467; also Appendix, vol. viii. p. 283.

[2] Thomas Davidson, printer to James V., and Henry Charteris in 1568, made strenuous efforts to establish the industry, but the time was not ripe.

of the Tiber to those of the Guadalquivir, from the shores of the Seine to those of 'cauld Norway over the faem,' he was no idler, nor had he ever been one of the gilded youth of the Court who frittered away life on unworthy pleasures. Those ten years from 1490 to 1500 witnessed a mighty advance in Dunbar's intellectual stature, as we shall examine more closely when we reach the closing chapters of our monograph. He began them uttering the feeble note of a conventional singer, such as we trace in his *New Year's Gift to the King*, *The Tod and the Lamb*, and *The Twa Married Women and the Widow.* He ends them with the firm full utterance of a great and imperially strong singer, such as is perceptible in *The Ladies' Solicitors at Court*, *In Praise of Women*, and finally the imperishable piece which James seemed to regard with such favour, *Dunbar's Dirge to the King at Stirling.*[1]

Dunbar's experience, like Ulysses', of the 'customs and countries of many men,' enabled him to draw upon an exhaustless fund of illustration and example to render his verse more acceptable to those butterflies of the Court to whom the contemporary allusions in a poem were the sole element of interest. In this respect Dunbar was beyond question the most catholicly cultured of fifteenth-century singers. Nay, even with the exception of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, he need fear comparison with none of the greater poets of the succeeding century as well. *The*

[1] I adopt Schipper's chronology (as published in his edition of Dunbar) regarding the approximate dates for the composition of the poems. See also Sheriff Mackay's admirable remarks in the Scottish Text Society's edition of the poems.

Golden Targe, which was one of the earliest, if not the very earliest, of his youthful works, displays this quality very prominently. It is filled with allusions that would almost infallibly have betrayed the authorship, if through any chance it had been published anonymously. The famous lines beginning

> 'O reverend Chaucer, rose of rhetoris all,'

would be sufficient in themselves to have led any well-informed critic to have decided without hesitation that these stanzas were forged upon the same anvil as *The Twa Married Women and the Widow*, or the *New Year's Gift to the King*. The coinage from Dunbar's mint was not stamped like that of any other author. He was his own mint-master, and the phrases he employed are to be found in the poems of no other writer of his time.

CHAPTER VI

THE EPOCH OF THE KING'S MARRIAGE: DUNBAR AS A COURTIER IN ENGLAND

With the commencement of the sixteenth century we reach that period in Dunbar's life when the historic data upon which we can proceed in weaving a consecutive narrative of his life become more numerous and more reliable. There is a reference in one of his poems,

> 'When I was young and into ply,
> I had been bought in realms by
> Had I consented to be sauld.'[1]

From this allusion we glean the fact that his skill and resource in discharging his master's behests had been remarked by the Court officials of either England or France, and that he was sounded as to whether he felt inclined to transfer his services. Though Dunbar here utilises the incident to show, if James were slow to reward the poet according to his deserts, that other monarchs had indicated their disposition to make up for the neglect if they had the opportunity, still we may feel assured that the hints were sternly discouraged. A truer patriot than Dunbar did not exist in the Scotland of his day. He was not one of those the fervency of whose patriotism was in exact ratio with the scale of the rewards heaped on them.

[1] *The Petition of the Auld Gray Horse Dunbar to the King.*

Perhaps James may have relied too much on the absolute incorruptibility of his laureate's fidelity, and reserved his honours too persistently for those whose patriotism was a variable quantity.

We have seen that he visited the Courts of France and England in the previous century. That his work had been well done there can be little doubt, and now he was to experience the first official mark of his sovereign's confidence and regard. In the Privy Seal Register, under date August 15th, 1500,[1] stands the following entry: 'A Lettre made to Maister William Dunbar of the gift of ten li (£10) of pensioune to be paid to him from our Soverane Lord's Coffers by the Thesaurer (Treasurer) for all the days of his life, or until he be promovit by our Soverane Lord to a benefice of £40 or abone,' etc.

This yearly pension of £10 Laing thinks may have been granted in consequence of that very importunate address to the King in which he says,

> 'Sir, yet remember as of before
> How that my youth is done forlore
> In your service, with pain and grief,
> Good conscience cries "Reward therefore."'

I rather incline to think, however, with Schipper, that the above is one of Dunbar's later petitions to King James, as he could hardly say at forty that 'his youth was done forlore' in the King's service.[2] It is certainly more pleasant to believe that the poet's reward was unsought, and came to him as a tribute to his own merit. From the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer I observe that the

[1] *Vide Reg. Secr. Sigill.*, vol. ii. fol. 9.

[2] *Vide* Schipper's *Poems of William Dunbar*, p. 259.

pension was regularly paid at Whitsunday and Martinmas, until May 1507, when an alteration was made which shall be chronicled in its place.

With regard to the amount of the pension Laing very aptly remarks: 'The sum of ten pounds may appear small, and at that time one pound of English money was equal to three pounds ten shillings Scots. But we must be careful not to reckon the value of money in those days by the present standard.'[1] From the estimate of the purchasing-power of Scots money, comparatively with that of France and England, given by Ruddiman, Maitland, and Chalmers, I reckon that Dunbar's pension should have been equal upon an average to about £35 of our money. But then Dunbar was boarded at the King's expense, and as a courtier he received his robe, so that actually he must have been at very little expense for living.[2]

Besides, from the Treasurer's books the fact is apparent that Dunbar had received many gratuities from the King over and above his pension. In January 1506, and again in the same month of 1507, we read, 'To Master William Dunbar by the king's command because he lacked his gown at Yule, £5'; and in January 1512, 'Item to Master William Dunbar for his Yule livery six ells and a quarter of Paris black to make him a gown, £12, 10s.; also £3, 2s. 6d. for five quarters of scarlet, being his customary Yule livery'; also in the December of the same year 'forty pounds for his Martinmas fee.' All these facts go to prove

[1] Laing's *Dunbar*.

[2] Boece, as Principal of the University of Aberdeen, 'enjoyed a revenue of forty Scottish merks,' about £2, 4s. 6d. (Cf. Johnson's *Journey to the Hebrides*, and his remarks on the relative value of money.)

the following points—that Dunbar had no reason to complain of the King's liberality as yet, and, second, that the poet must have resided continuously at the Court at Holyrood or Falkland, and not, like his great rival Kennedy, 'among the leavis grene' of the country. Like Samuel Johnson towards Fleet Street, William Dunbar considered the High Street and Canongate of Edinburgh the fairest spots on earth. He was a lover of town life, of its luxuries, its amusements, and its gaieties. From the sentiments expressed in his *Dirge to the King at Stirling* (which must have been written before James's marriage), we can see how rural life palled upon him.[1] He was at one with Mæcenas, who thought the 'noise and smoke of happy Rome' to be preferred to Horace's Fons Bandusia and the delights of the Sabine farm; and to William Dunbar the scenes which he daily witnessed in the busy, dirty, crowded, malodorous streets of the capital, which he pictures so inimitably in his *Address to the Merchants of Edinburgh*, had a charm infinitely more fascinating than the matin-song of birds, heard in some leafy grove, than the slumber of the summer sunshine on the green Pentland slopes, over which the cloud-shadows flitted like the voiceless spirits of the past; better even than the multitudinous laughter of the sun-kissed sea, or its sullen rage as it dashed itself in breakers of creamy spume against the iron-bound shores of his native Firth.

But he was once more to be recalled from his much-loved occupation of 'brieving ballates for the King's

[1] Maitland's *History of Scotland*; Chalmers's *Caledonia*; Ruddiman's *Diplomata Scotiae*.

plesour,' to undertake the arduous duties of King's messenger. From the Treasurer's books we observe that his pension due at Martinmas or November 1501 was not paid with the others on the 20th December, but was 'payit him aftir he cam furth of Ingland.' The cause was his despatch on 'the marriage mission,' along with the ambassadors who were sent to England in October 1501, and returned in February 1502. This embassy, as I have said, was once more concerned with the question of the royal marriage. His subjects were becoming anxious over the question of the succession to the Crown, for if James died without issue the country would once more be rent by the civil dissensions of the various claimants to the throne.[1] Times and oft they had implored him to marry. As has already been pointed out, negotiations were opened with Ferdinand and Isabella for the hand of one of the Spanish princesses. After keeping him in suspense for some years the insulting offer is alleged to have been mooted of Ferdinand's natural daughter Donna Juana,[2] if her legitimacy could be legally secured by a Papal proclamation. James haughtily declined even the suggestion of such a union, and then the question of a matrimonial alliance with England was formally brought up. Not that the monarch was at all anxious to assume the conjugal yoke. Several ladies of high rank were his mistresses, by whom he had two or three illegitimate children.[3] He

[1] Tytler's *History of Scotland*; Burton's *History*.

[2] Bergenroth's *Calendar of State Papers*.

[3] Drummond, in his *History of the Five Jameses*, gives their names—Alexander, afterwards Archbishop of St. Andrews, so much admired by Erasmus; Margaret, married to John, Lord Gordon; James, Earl of Moray; and Jean, married to Malcolm, Lord Fleming.

would willingly have allowed matters to rest where they were. But the Estates of the Realm were so persistent in their requests that at length he assented to approach the Court of Henry VII. with regard to the matter. Across the Border the proposal was accorded most gratifying treatment. The whole nation was favourable to the union, in the hope that it would put an end to those centuries of hostility that had brought sorrow and loss to both countries. After the overtures had been received in so favourable a manner, the Scots monarch was invited to send an Embassy to the Court of Henry VII. to arrange the terms of the alliance with the Princess Margaret.

The ambassadors who are named in the safe-conduct, dated 2nd July 1500, were Robert Blackadder, Archbishop of Glasgow; Patrick Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, High Admiral; Andrew Forman, Apostolical Prothonotary (afterwards Bishop of Moray); and Sir Robert Lundy, Treasurer of Scotland, with a retinue of one hundred persons.[1] The royal pair being within the fourth degree of consanguinity, a Papal dispensation had to be obtained, dated at Rome 5th August 1500.[2] This fact, and the extreme youth of the Princess Margaret, occasioned some delay, as Laing records. But the negotiations were not interrupted, and under a new safe-conduct, dated 9th May 1501, and carrying with them the contract of marriage, dated 8th October 1501, the same ambassadors named above departed for London. William Dunbar was one of the company. Where Blackadder went he was almost certain to have insisted upon Dunbar being one of his company.

[1] *Rotuli Scotiae*, vol. ii. p. 542.

[2] Rymer's *Foedera*.

Dunbar in his poems more than once refers to the Princess's marriage jointure being worthy of James's liberality. The lands assigned her, as Rymer records,[1] were the forest of Ettrick, the manor and fortress of Newark, the county of March, the lordships of Dunbar and Cockburnspath, the lordship and palace of Linlithgow, the lordship and castle of Stirling, the earldom of Menteith, the lordship and castle of Down, and the palace and lordship of Methven—truly a noble wedding settlement.

Now it may be asked, What evidence have we on record that Dunbar *was* one of the ambassadorial party? The answer is—Absolutely decisive! The credit of disinterring this belongs to Laing. Let us in justice to himself permit him to tell it in his own words.[2] According to the Cotton MSS., 'the Scottish ambassadors on arriving in London entered at Bishopsgate, and were conveyed through Cornhill and Cheapside to the Lord St. John's without Smithfield, where they were lodged. In the Christmas week they were entertained at dinner by the Lord Mayor, and it was on this occasion that Dunbar recited his verses in praise of the City of London.'

In folio 199 of the Cotton MS. we read: 'This yere in the Cristmas weke, the Mair had to dyner the Ambasadors of Scotland, whom accompanyed my Lord Chauncelor and other Lords of this realme: where sittying at dyner, one of the said Scottis giving attendaunce upon a Bisshop Ambassador, the which was reported to be a Prothonotary of Scotland, and servant of the said Bisshop, made this

[1] Rymer's *Foedera*, tom. xiii. p. 62.
[2] Laing's *Dunbar*, vol. i. p. 272.

balade folowying.' Then is appended Dunbar's poem which begins—

> 'London, thou are of Townes A per se
> Soveraign of cities semeliest in sight
> Of high renown riches and royalty
> Of lordis, barons and many a goodly knight.'

In this poem Dunbar pays a noble tribute to the splendour of London, which seems to have impressed him deeply. Some of the phrases he employs are testimony of the pleasure he derived from his stay in the English metropolis. 'London, thou art the flour of cities all,' 'Gemme of all joy, jasper of jocunditie,' 'Empress of towns,' 'Sweet paradise precelling in pleasure,' 'O Town of Towns, patron without compare,' are some of the epithets showered by him on the London of Henry VII. Great as was his love for the Queen City of the Forth, honesty compelled him to grant that the palm must be assigned to the 'Empress-City of the Thames.' Patriotism did not blind him to the undeniable facts of the world around him, and he obtained his reward for his impartiality. During the Christmas festivities, 'The Rhymer of Scotland,' whose poem on London was the theme of praise universal, and whom we have seen to be beyond doubt Dunbar, received from Henry VII. a gift of £6, 13s. 4d. on the 31st December 1501, and on the 7th January 1502 another gratuity of the same amount.[1] The latter present in all probability would be bestowed upon him in consequence of some congratulatory Ode to the Princess Margaret in view of her approaching betrothal to the King of Scots,

[1] Privy Purse Expenses of Henry VII., in Bentley's *Excerpta Historica*.

Dunbar, while a noble genius, was also the most far-seeing of opportunists. Never was there a chance neglected by him of advancing his own interests. Genius in his eyes was shrewdness tempered by expediency. He saw in this visit his life's chance of distinguishing himself. He had no scruples on the score of delicacy, or hesitation in thrusting himself forward before the poets of the England of the time. Perhaps he entertained that lordly contempt for them which they deserved. Be this as it may, Dunbar left London a man of much greater consequence than when he entered it. Doubtless his firm friend and patron, Archbishop Blackadder, had been duly instrumental in furthering his interests amongst those at the English Court who were in a position to assist the poet. The miserly Henry VII. was not the man to present an unknown poet with gifts so valuable unless he had been specially brought under his notice by some of his leading courtiers.

Taking all these items of evidence into account, therefore, it is almost a certainty that William Dunbar was one of that brilliant company which on the 25th of January 1502 witnessed, at St. Paul's Cross, London, the ceremony of the formal affiancing of the Princess Margaret to King James.[1] The rite was celebrated with great pomp and solemnity, Patrick, Earl of Bothwell, being the King's proxy on the occasion, and Archbishop Blackadder, Testificator-in-Chief for the kingdom of Scotland. That Dunbar would be near his patron at the ceremony in order that he might see and hear all with a view to preserving a record of it in his verse, may be taken for

[1] Rymer, vol. xii. ; *Rotuli Scotiae.*

granted. As the princess was very young, only in her thirteenth year, the marriage-contract specially stipulated that her father should not be obliged to send her to Scotland before the 12th September 1503.[1]

Doubtless Dunbar, while in England, wrote many poems on subjects arising out of special circumstances of this visit. That none of these have as yet been discovered, close though the search made for them has been, is a matter occasioning not a little surprise in the minds of Dunbar students. He had every reason to exert his poetical abilities to the utmost when in England, for the recognition he received would be generous in the extreme. Dunbar was at that moment the greatest living English-speaking poet of his epoch. He alone, along with the brilliant group that surrounded the throne of James IV., saved the age from utter sterility, and threw a lustre over the literature of the Northern Kingdom which it was never again to lose. 'South of the Tweed,' as the late Professor Henry Morley remarks, 'in the twenty-four years of Henry VII.'s reign, from 1485 to 1509, the fields of literature lay still bound by the long winter of a Civil War. . . . It is evidence of the weakness of our literature under Henry VII., that two foreigners, a Frenchman and an Italian, Bernard André and Polydore Vergil, would have been named by the King himself, or by any Englishman, if he had then been asked who were the chief writers in England.'[2] Can the fact be wondered at then that William Dunbar, with his brilliant genius and

[1] This, however, was not observed. The Princess reached Scotland in August 1502.—*Burton*.

[2] *English Writers*, vol. vii. pp. 56-59.

surpassing faculty of musical rhythmical composition, must have struck the Londoners as a poet of the most superlative excellence.

But an epoch in Dunbar's life is now about to open—the most prolific as well as the most supreme in the history of his genius—an epoch when, as a laureate, he would be presented with a fitting theme for his verse. In July 1502 the Princess Margaret set out from her father's palace at Richmond on her journey towards Scotland.[1] Escorted as far as Colleweston by the King, he there resigned her to the care of the Earls of Northumberland and Surrey, who, with a magnificent retinue of lords and earls, knights and esquires, conducted her to the meeting-place on the borders of the two countries—Lamberton Kirk, where her husband-elect, with all pomp and splendour, was waiting to receive her. In the train of the Scots monarch rode William Dunbar, ready to welcome the Princess with 'ane ballate of gratulation.'

[1] Maitland's *History*.

CHAPTER VII

CELEBRATION OF THE MARRIAGE: DUNBAR'S EPITHALAMIUM

On the 5th August 1502 James IV. met his bride at Lamberton Kirk. On the succeeding day they travelled as far as Dalkeith; on the 7th the King escorted her to the gates of Edinburgh, which they entered amidst the enthusiastic joy of the inhabitants, and every demonstration of welcome. The King went to meet his fair Margaret arrayed magnificently in a jacket of crimson velvet, bordered with cloth of gold. His doublet was of violet satin, his hose of scarlet, his shirt bound with precious stones and pearls, his spurs gilt and long. He mounted the palfrey of the Princess, who sat on pillion behind him, and so moved on to Edinburgh. As they entered the city the houses and windows were hung with tapestry, and were full of lords and ladies, gentlemen and gentlewomen, and in the streets was so great a multitude of people that it was a fair thing to see. On the 8th of the same month the marriage ceremony took place in the Abbey of Holyrood, with, says Laing, a degree of solemnity and splendour which perhaps was never equalled in this part of the kingdom.[1] The Scots capital wore its

[1] Arnot's *History of Edinburgh*; Anderson's *Edinburgh*.

festal attire, fountains festooned with flowers flowed with wine in the open street, whole oxen and sheep were roasted in the High Street, every house was draped with 'cloth of gold or cramoisie,' every burgess and his wife sported it in new attire. Never was there such a season of rejoicing before or since in the old Scots capital.

William Dunbar was rejoicing with the others. He was glad that at last the King was honourably married, and that the standing scandal of his relations with several ladies of rank would now be at an end. Dunbar loved his monarch, and the depth of his affection was proved by the fact that he did not scruple to talk pretty straight to him, and to rebuke him sharply when he felt that such a course of action would tend to the King's good. The poet was no censorious hypocrite. His advice was based on sound moral principle, of which an echo would be awakened in every true heart—ay, in that of the King himself, who was very far indeed from being the heartless sensualist he is too often represented.

But Dunbar's joy would not be complete if it did not express itself through the medium of his beloved art. When the lovely Princess Margaret, escorted by her handsome husband-elect, arrived at Holyrood, she was in all probability received and welcomed by some spectacular entertainment. My theory is that Dunbar's exquisite little poem, which I cannot refrain from quoting here, formed the central item in a kind of masque.[1]

[1] John Young, Somerset Herald, in his interesting Journal of the Princess's progress from England to Scotland, written for Henry VII.'s own eye, remarks that at the festivities 'Mynstrells of Musicke' at different times played and sung ballads in the King's and Queen's presence.

The poem has lived, the masque has perished. The ode is inscribed 'To the Princess Margaret on her arrival at Holyrood,' and must therefore have been presented to her before her marriage on the following day. The piece is characterised by all Dunbar's poetic force and figurative felicity. It runs as follows:—

'Now fair, fairest of every fair,
Princess most pleasant and preclare,
The lustiest one alyve that bene,
Welcome of Scotland to be Quene.

Young tender plant of pulchritude,
Descendyd of Imperyalle blude:
Freshe fragrant floure of fayre hede shene,
Welcum of Scotland to be Quene.

Swete, lusty, lusum lady clere,
Most mighty Kingës daughter dere,
Borne of a princess most serene,
Welcum of Scotland to be Quene;

Welcum the Rose bothe red and white,
Welcum the flower of our delight:
Our Spirit Rejoicing from the splene,
Welcum of Scotland to be Quene.
Welcum of Scotland,' etc.

But Dunbar was not content with this. In view of the royal marriage, when all others were presenting gifts to the bride and bridegroom, Dunbar came forward with the richest gift of all, that magnificent Epithalamium *The Thistle and the Rose*, which to this day one reads with delight and admiration. In all likelihood the poem would be placed before the royal pair on their wedding day, or immediately after it, although it had been written some three months previous. To the English visitors the fact would be brought home that on the sterile soil of Scotland

had been reared a singer whose genius was so soaring that to find his compeer they had to go back to Geoffrey Chaucer. The effect produced by it was electrical. Contemporary chronicles all mention it, and the poem of that century which has been as frequently as any other found among the larger of the ancient collections, the Bannatyne and other MSS., is *The Thistle and the Rose.* It was the first great national poem which was felt worthy of national attention—for Barbour's *Bruce* and Blind Harry's *Wallace* can only be regarded as little better than rhyming chronicles, —and it placed Dunbar at the pinnacle of that reputation from which he was never afterwards to be displaced.

To the young Queen also the poem would in all probability prove for its author a means of introduction. Even so proud a lady as the daughter of Henry VII. might feel flattered by a tribute so glorious, yet withal so delicate, as that paid in *The Thistle and the Rose.* That Margaret was afterwards upon terms of the closest intimacy with Dunbar is evident from the testimony of his poems. No man would dare to make mention of the Queen in the manner in which Dunbar did without having good grounds for so doing, least of all the Court poet, the permanence of whose position was dependent solely on the favour wherein he stood with his royal master and his lady.[1] Such compositions as *To the Quene—Of James Doig, Keeper of the Queen's Wardrop, Madame your men said they would ride, A Dance in the Quene's Chamber*, and other poems, are proof positive of a close intimacy existing between the young girl dragged from her home atmosphere

[1] Cf. Mackay's *Life of Dunbar*, and Schipper.

of quiet comfort to stand in the fierce light that beat upon the Scots throne, and the large-hearted, joyous-spirited laureate of the Court, who, while he could with all the dignity and authority of his grey[1] hairs read the monarch, in *The Thistle and the Rose*, a stern lesson about relinquishing, now he was married, all unlawful loves—

> 'Hold no other flower in such duty
> As the fresh Rose of colour red and white,
> For if thou dost, hurt is thine honesty,'

yet could so far enter into the giddy gaieties of the Court as to dance a 'dirry dantoun' in the Queen's chamber—and that so energetically as to lose his slipper in his exertions. No wonder that the lonely girl, to whom all in the Court appeared so strange and so unwonted, clung with an earnestness of affection, unusual in one occupying so exalted a position, to this keenly sympathetic, yet intellectually peerless singer of the far North. Margaret doubtless felt that in this great-souled man there was to be found at once a protector, an adviser, and a friend. We shall yet see that her goodwill was to bear abundant fruit in the days that were to come. For the delicate, unobtrusive kindness he showed the girl-wife he was to reap his reward when his patron and monarch was no more.

For the next two or three years Dunbar's life was that of a courtier, enjoying to the full the pleasures and the jubilations which attended the home-bringing of a Queen to preside over all the pomp and the pageant of the Scottish Court. Contemporary chronicles tell us that for nearly two years the pleasures and the merry-making went on.

[1] That Dunbar had already grown grey in the service of the Court, see the poem *The Auld Gray Horse Dunbar.*

James apparently was determined that his young wife should be kept from brooding over the severance of all her early relations, until new links were forged in the chain of life that would bind her to the land of her adoption. In those 'spectacles' and exhibitions William Dunbar took his full share, and the poems of his which are by general consent attributed to this period are filled with allusions to the splendour and the gaiety of the Court, to the bustle and the business of the crowded capital city, to the constant succession of impressive pageants which passed up and down the streets of the romantic town, from Holyrood to the Castle, from the Castle to the Kirk of St. Giles, or the stately pile of Craigmillar.

Nay, the whole many-sided life of that brilliant time lives for us once more in the undying verse of the great poet. Once more we seem to see the Court of James IV. before us—to behold the King and the gay courtier gallants, accompanied by Queen Margaret, Mrs. Musgrave her Lady of the Bedchamber, and her five Maids of Honour, sweeping away in a glittering cavalcade, on some hawking expedition to the Hunter's Bog, and to Duddingston, or to hunt the red deer in the Forest of Drumsheugh, or across the Borough-muir towards Braid or Pentland. Or, again, we behold the lists set in the tilting-ground at Greenside, while thousands of spectators lining the green slopes of the Calton Hill observe with shouts of pride that no one can excel their own manly monarch in all the knightly sports of the period.[1]

Or we are carried on the wings of imagination, by the magic wand of the poet, into the stately Church of St. Giles,

[1] Letter of Don Pedro de Ayala, Ambassador from Spain to Scotland, in Bergenroth's *Simancas State Papers*.

at Easter-tide, when midnight mass is being celebrated at the Pontifical High Altar before the King and Queen. Once more we seem to see the splendour of that shrine, the value of the jewels and the ornaments whereon were reckoned by tens of thousands of pounds—now flashing and gleaming under the glow of numberless candles shedding light over the wondrous scene,—now wellnigh concealed by the rolling clouds of incense that rise like a holocaust heavenwards. We hear the sweet voices of the choristers rising and falling in cadence, the storm of music that rolls overhead from the great organ, and the sudden hush of the mighty throng of worshippers as the elevation of the Host takes place.

But not alone the fashionable life at Court or the ornate ecclesiastical ritual finds a place in the verse of this great poetical artist. The High Street and the Canongate of the Edinburgh of the sixteenth century rise again before us in vision as we read. We see the towering tenements with their fronts of polished ashlar, or of timber from the Boroughmuir, and their 'forestairs,' or outside flights of steps, whereon lords and ladies stand to gossip and to flirt after their 12-o'clock dinners. We note also the sign-poles of those merchants apostrophised by Dunbar,[1] whose 'booths' are in evidence everywhere, clustering like bees round the walls of the collegiate Church of St. Giles. Once more there is brought home to us that vivid picture of city life drawn with such supreme skill and picturesqueness in his *Address to the Merchants of Edinburgh.* The very figures seem animate in that bustling crowd which fills

[1] *Address to the Merchants.*

the thoroughfares—those thoroughfares down which none could pass without having their nostrils saluted with 'the stink of haddocks and of skate,' and without having their ears deafened by the innumerable street cries, or by the scoldings of carlines flyting and fleeching—those thoroughfares, like that 'stinkand style,'[1] the houses of which 'keep the light from your parish kirk,' and which seem planted in their position for no other reason than to congest the stream of traffic at the least convenient place.

We are led by our guide down past the High Cross, where gold and silver should have been sold, but where, alas! we discover only curds and milk, past the 'Butter Tron,' where cluster the butter-wives, with the noisy sellers of 'cockles and wilks,' and those white meal-puddings called 'Jock and Jame.' The headlong merriment and good-humoured horse-play increases the nearer we approach Holyrood. Street minstrels hoarsely bawl out of tune the two airs—their sole repertoire—'Now the day dawns,' and 'Into June'; the apprentices of the tailors, the shoemakers, and 'the other viler crafts,' shouting the excellences of their masters' wares, add to the perpetual Babel; while the vast army of beggars, of which the burgh is but a nest, molest honest people with their persistent cries for alms, so that 'one may not walk the streets in comfort through the importunities of the crooked, the blind, and the lame.'

Yet cheek by jowl with the beggar in rags passes the haughty noble followed by his armed retainers; the great ecclesiastic too, in dress as rich as the proudest of the nobility, muttering as he walks meaningless *benedicites*

[1] The block of buildings afterwards called the Luckenbooths.

in response to requests for his blessing; also the ruffling gallant in slashed doublet and scarlet hose, ogling amorously the fair ones who from out their furred hoods flirt as persistently and bewitchingly as their descendants of to-day. Oh, it is a wondrous picture; so absolutely true to life that we almost think we can see the brilliant scene before us changing and rechanging, arranging and rearranging its elements with kaleidoscopic rapidity. To those grand old streets of the Edinburgh of to-day the associations of four centuries seem to cling. They furnished Ramsay with the materials for his vivid panoramic sketch of the Edina of his day, they furnished Claudero and Robert Fergusson with theirs, and, mightiest of all, the great Wizard of the North himself with his. But as vivid and lifelike as any of these are those pictures of the Edinburgh of the first decade of the sixteenth century, when Margaret Tudor came north to wed James Stuart, and when the Scots Thistle was intertwined with the English Rose.

The results accruing from the union in question may not have been all that Dunbar anticipated or foretold. He built his hopes high, and in his visions of the future the two countries were represented as proceeding hand in hand towards a political millennium of peace, progress, and prosperity. But the benefits resulting from the English alliance were not to be wholly nullified even by the persistent pigheadedness and perversity of James IV. Though the most harassing and devastating invasions Scotland had ever experienced since the days of Wallace and Bruce were inflicted on the unhappy country by the 'loving brother of "the English Rose"'—invasions in which the

Earl of Hertford literally 'harried the land from Forth to Tweed,' and, with the zeal of Reforming Protestantism, sent the fires of such exquisite specimens of early ecclesiastical architecture as the Abbeys of Melrose, Dryburgh, Kelso, and Holyrood blazing up to heaven as a testimony of his anti-Papal orthodoxy,[1] still out of evil was to come good, and exactly one hundred years thereafter, on a blustery Saturday night, Sir Robert Carey was to kneel at the bedside of James's great-grandson in the same Holyrood to which the 'Merry Monarch' brought his English bride—to kneel, I say, and to hail him King of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, in consequence of his lineal descent from the 'faire Southern Rose,' as Gavin Douglas styled Margaret Tudor. And from the Union of the Crowns has resulted that political Union from which Scotland to-day reaps benefits so incalculable.[2]

From the year 1502 until the terrible day of Flodden Dunbar's life was spent peacefully at Court 'breiving ballates' for the amusement and delight of the monarch and his Court. But he had now another reader, who, if she could give him nothing else, gave him, like Desdemona, 'a world of sighs, when he did speak of some distressful stroke,' and laughed gleefully at his headlong humour and hilarity. The very fact that he had such an admirer of his genius put him on his mettle. If previous to 1502 Dunbar wrote well, his work subsequent to that date is infinitely better, evincing the presence of a new element in his verse which previously had no place therein. That new element was love.

To this period must be assigned, amongst others, such

[1] Burton, Tytler, and Mackenzie.

[2] Hume and Smollett's *England*; Pitscottie; Rymer's *Foedera*.

historically important poems as *Beauty and the Prisoner*, *The Visitation of St. Francis*, that infinitely humorous autobiographic revelation, *The Dream*, one of Dunbar's noblest allegorical pieces, and the witty yet biting satire, *The Fenyeit Friar of Tungland*, written to expose the adventurer, John Damien, who wormed himself into the good graces of the King so effectually as to be appointed Abbot of Tungland in 1504. To this period likewise, I think, we may attribute that little group of didactic poems wherein our poet's power of philosophic reasoning is evinced in a very admirable manner, viz. *In Asking Sowld Discretioun be*, *Discretioun of Giving*, and *Discretioun in Taking*. In these Dunbar consoles himself on being overlooked, when favours were being lavishly distributed among the courtiers, with the reflection that if his reward does not come now it will reach him on some future occasion.

Probably as a result of the earnest solicitation of the Queen, Dunbar received a hint that James contemplated presenting him to a benefice at the first favourable opportunity. In that case the necessity was imperative that he should resume his clerical office and dress. Though there may have been some little irritation shown by the monks of the Observantine Monastery of the Grey Friars when their brilliant brother assumed the secular character, his offence was not unforgivably dire in these years of an easy-going, pluralistic absentee clergy, one-half of whom never set eyes on their benefices from year's end to year's end.[1] Accordingly Dunbar was duly received back into the Order,

[1] *Early Scottish History and Literature*, by J. M. Ross; *Sketches of Early Scottish History*, by Cosmo Innes; John Major's *History of Scotland*, i.-vi. (1518).

probably as a brother unattached to any house. The immediate result of this is seen by an entry which occurs in the Treasurer's book: '1504. Item the xvii day of March—To the King's offering at Maister William Dunbar's first mass vii French Crowns, or £4, 18s. in Scottish money.' From the amount of the monarch's offering we may gauge the extraordinary esteem in which Dunbar was held by the gay monarch. Two crowns were reckoned an excellent 'handsel' of the new priest's position. All the money on such an occasion was handed over to the celebrant, and, if he were popular, as Dunbar undoubtedly was, the sum collected oftentimes attained a large amount. We have no means of ascertaining what it was on the important occasion under notice. If the others present when William Dunbar celebrated mass for the first time—probably in the Abbey of Holyrood, or mayhap, at the instance of generous Gavin Douglas,[1] in the Collegiate Church of St. Giles—took their cue from the King, our impecunious poet, who shortly before had been complaining of the manner in which 'my painful purse so prickles me,' would once in his life at least have had a purse full to overflowing. Alas! alas! William Dunbar, like many another rare genius, found his 'painful purse' prickle him many times between the terminal poles of the cradle and the grave.

But a further mark of the King's favour reached him a year or two afterwards. In 1507 his pension was augmented to £20 per annum—an exceedingly welcome addition to the poet's meagre resources. The *Epithalamium* had received its recompence!

[1] Gavin Douglas and Dunbar, according to tradition, were friends in earlier years, but quarrelled over some trifling matter.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE BRILLIANT COURT OF SCOTLAND'S 'MERRY MONARCH'

THE last eight years in the reign of James IV. marked the most brilliant epoch in the history of Scotland as an independent kingdom. Commerce, Literature, Science, the Arts, all flourished in a most remarkable degree, being fostered by the enlightened tastes of the great monarch. As Laing says,[1] 'The accounts of the Lord High Treasurer, while they exhibit numberless instances of his prodigality in encouraging and rewarding those who contributed to the King's own personal gratification (pantomimic exhibitions, pipers, fiddlers, jesters, and common minstrels, as well as foreign impostors and mere pretenders to science), and present a singular picture of his daily occupations, at the same time show that the monarch was a munificent encourager of the useful arts, and that his liberality displayed itself in acts of charity and kindness to his domestic servants. He also appears to have expended large sums of money in building or adorning the royal palaces of Holyrood, Linlithgow, Stirling, and Falkland, in the erection of religious foundations, in the prosecution

[1] Laing's *Life of Dunbar*; also Schipper and Mackay.

of maritime enterprises, and in the extension of commerce; while the internal prosperity of the country was essentially promoted by a strict and impartial administration of justice.'

Until 1509 Dunbar's relations with his sovereign were those of a humble though intimate friend. By the poet, the 'monarch' was never lost sight of in the friend, however free and easy might be the relations on which they stood towards each other. Though he might sport and jest with him the one moment, he was ready the next to read him a stern rebuke if he considered he was doing what was wrong or derogatory to his dignity. In 1509, however, Dunbar's tone begins to change. He saw individual after individual promoted to the enjoyment of a benefice, yet he was always left out in the cold. In vain he appealed to the King in every conceivable way to grant him this, the summit of his desires. No great appointment was it that he coveted. Formerly he had set his mind on being a bishop, in accordance with the predictions of his nurse; but now a church, thatched with heather and situated in some moorland district, would have appeared a paradise to him. Whether, had his humble wishes been granted, he would have remained content in his banishment from the gaieties of Edinburgh and the Court we have the example of Herrick at Dean Prior to warn us against jumping to hasty conclusions. It is amusing to consider with what ingenuity and address he varies the tone of his petitions for preferment. In general, as Schipper says, he appears to base his claims for promotion to a benefice on the magnitude of the services he had rendered, his

youth having been spent in the King's employment.[1] 'But whether in the form of a satirical or a pathetic appeal to the King, or simply as a congratulation on the New Year, or whether under some humorous personation, he brought forward his request, still the burden's song was a benefice.'[2] Sometimes his indignation is aroused when he conceives himself slighted aud unduly passed over. In one of his 'Addresses to the King,' when many benefices were vacant, he asks, with not a little irritation in his tone, on observing successive preferments heaped on the same parties, whether it is more charity to give drink to him who stands in need of it, or to fill 'a full man till he burst,' while his companion, who by the way is every whit as deserving as he to drink wine, is allowed to die of thirst. As the years flit by, and still he approaches no nearer to the goal of his hopes, a bitter note of complaint and upbraiding begins at times to strike into the stately music of his verse. The nearer we draw to Flodden the bitterer it becomes, until it seems to culminate in the passionate and angry *Remonstrance to the King* written in 1510. In this terrible satire—and, of a truth, never was poem before or after addressed to monarch couched in such a strain—what fierce moral indignation we witness! After reiterating all the flatterers and gold-seekers, adventurers and swindlers, architects and shipbuilders, astrologers and minstrels, coiners and tumblers, that came in for the profuse bounty of the monarch, while he received nothing, he suddenly flashes out into the splendidly

[1] Schipper's *William Dunbar: Leben und Gedichte*, chap. iii. pp. 104-132.

[2] Laing's *Dunbar*.

audacious prophecy—verified, however, as thoroughly as Shakespeare's about his verse :—

'And though that I among the lave,
Unworthy be ane place to have,
Or in their number to be told,
As long in mind my work shall hold
As whole in every circumstance,
In form, in matter and substance,
Without wearing or consumption,
Rust, canker, or corruption,
As any of their workïs all
Suppose that my reward be small.'

There is something infinitely pathetic in the spectacle of this soaring genius, when already the shadows of life were lengthening for him, when the frosts of the 'fifties' were powdering his locks with the snows of impending age, being compelled to stoop to expedients so humiliating and unbecoming. Seemingly he had fully made up his mind either to obtain some satisfaction from the monarch, or to retire to some religious house wherein to end his days. That his efforts were at length in a measure successful is satisfactory to learn. Probably he had imparted to the Queen his intentions, and she had straightway communicated the matter to her husband. At all events Dunbar in another poem speaks of the Queen as having been his 'advocate, both fair and sweet.'[1] James, with that princely generosity which always characterised him, when he realised that his old favourite was really languishing in poverty, and must needs leave the Court unless some substantial help were given, in 1510, a few days after the date, it may be supposed, of the *Remonstrance*, ordered his pension to be

[1] *To the King—That he were John Thomson's man.*

increased from £20 to £80 Scots, a very substantial addition, which placed the bard beyond all apprehension on the score of poverty. But there is no question that, welcome though the increase was, he would have infinitely preferred if it had come in the form of a stipend from a benefice.

Though we are anticipating somewhat the chronological sequence of the events in Dunbar's life, this appears a suitable place to answer once for all the many calumnies that have been cast on the poet's memory through the manifest reluctance of James IV. to appoint Dunbar to an ecclesiastical office. Several writers, and these scholars who ought to have better recognised the significance of outstanding historic facts, have asserted that the cause of this reluctance on the part of the monarch was due to the scandalous immorality of Dunbar's life, to his drunkenness, to his illicit relations with Mrs. Musgrave, the Queen's Lady of the Bedchamber, and finally to the fact that he had several illegitimate children living. One and all of these are unfounded falsehoods. Attention the most cursory to the plain evidence offered by the facts of Dunbar's life would have completely exploded those fairy tales had the retailers of them taken the pains to investigate the matter. In the first place, had his life been so scandalous, Dunbar would not have been re-admitted into the Observantine division of the great Order of the Franciscan Monks. Of all the religious organisations they alone in the sixteenth century preserved some regard for the principles of morality and decency. Again, Dunbar would not have been permitted to celebrate his first mass in the presence of the King and Queen—an honour eagerly

coveted—if his life had been at all scandalous. The same argument applies to his relations with Mrs. Musgrave, although we have every reason to believe that for her Dunbar cherished a deep and lifelong passion after her arrival in Scotland with Margaret in 1503. She had been chosen by Henry VII. as a counsellor and friend for his young daughter, because she was a woman of unimpeachable virtue and high moral principle.[1] That she would stoop to folly with a priest is so utterly inconceivable that it does not speak much for the perception of the advocates of the theory that they should believe a woman of her standing would throw away all her worldly advantages without some return being forthcoming. Besides, her husband was living, to wit, Sir John Musgrave, whose name occurs frequently with that of his wife in the books of the Treasurer down to 1513, when on the war breaking out they appear to have returned to England. Besides, the terms in which Dunbar addresses her are not those likely to be employed by a successful suitor for the favours of the lady. Although he styles her 'My Heart's Treasure' and 'sweet assured foe,' he also characterises her as 'the cruel breaker of my heart in two,' 'the final ender of my life for ever,' adding 'Have mercy, love, have mercy, Lady Bright.' The second last stanza, to my mind, settles the question—

> 'White Dove, where is your sober humbleness?
> Sweet gentle Turtle, where is your pity went?
> Where is your ruth? the fruit of nobleness,
> Of womanhood the treasure, and the rent:
> Vertue is never put out of meek intent,
> Nor out of gentle heart is fundin pity,
> Since merciless no noble wight might be.'

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[1] *Vide* Young's *Memoirs of the Princess Margaret's Journey.*

By these arguments, I think, the calumnies against Dunbar are completely dissipated. To find a reason for the King's persistent delay in presenting him to a benefice, I think we must look to the great regard cherished by James for the society of his witty laureate. The very thought of parting with him was seemingly displeasing to the monarch.[1] He could not appoint him to one of the metropolitan benefices, as these were all the 'preserves' of the great families, the Douglases, the Hamiltons, the Lennoxes, and others. To confer on him any other preferment would assuredly mean his departure from the Court, and if we can place any reliance on the testimonies of favour already shown to him, that was a contingency to be avoided by the King at all costs. Had Dunbar been an immoral man he would not have been so marked out for special favour as to have his pension increased on two occasions. To my mind the only reason for the reluctance of James to appoint Dunbar to a benefice lay in the fact that he could not bring himself to lack the witty sallies and the bright healthy humour of the brilliant poet.

We must now turn our steps backward somewhat in order to take note of the publication in printed form of several of our poet's works. Of the establishment of Chepman and Myllar's printing-press in Edinburgh we have already made mention. In 1508, however, among the first books issued from the new press was a volume of poetry containing in all eleven distinct pieces. Five out

[1] Laing's *Dunbar*. *Vide* also Sheriff Mackay's excellent work for this whole period of Dunbar's life.

of the eleven separate publications were poems by William Dunbar,[1] viz. *The Golden Targe*, *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy*, *The Ballad of Lord Barnard Stewart*, *The Twa Maryit Women and the Wedo*, *The Ballad of Kind Kittock*, *The Testament of Andrew Kennedy*, and finally *The Lament for the Makars.* That the poet superintended the passing of these poems of his through the press is more than probable, and the fact must have sent a strange thrill of joy through him when he realised that at last his works were to be distributed throughout the country, nay, throughout all countries, by means of an agency whose power of reproduction was apparently illimitable. His prophecy was assuredly beginning to work out its fulfilment.

From the testimony of the *Lament for the Makars* we learn that Dunbar received a severe warning in 1508 that his health was no longer what it once was. He suffered at that date from a dangerous illness, from the effects of which he did not recover for some time. In consequence he became exceedingly low-spirited, and in his dejection penned that immortal elegy which, had Dunbar written nothing else, would have placed him in the very front rank of British poets. Its pathos is so subtle yet so overpowering, the music of its rhythm so faultless and so fascinating, the tenor of its thought so lofty and inspired, and the effect of its solemn repetend, *Timor mortis conturbat me—The fear of death distresses me*, so overpowering, that no one can read the poem without experiencing a thrill of awe. 'We see the once gay Dunbar, now advanced in

[1] This volume is now in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh. It was discovered last century in Ayrshire. The printing is very poor, the text literally swarming with errors.

years, deprived of his joyous companions, and probably jostled out of Court by younger and more fashionable wits.'[1] The poet feels that the time cannot be far distant when the Church's sublime service for the dead, from which the recurring burden is taken, would be chanted over him, as it had been over so many of his contemporary 'Makars,' and he shuddered as he regarded the prospect. The poem has a distinct poetic affinity with Thomas de Celano's terrible dirge—

> 'Dies irae, dies illa,
> Solvet saeclum in favilla,'

—and it is no despite to the latter sublime composition to be placed side by side with the former.

From the *Lament* we obtain a valuable catalogue of those Scots singers who had flourished either prior to Dunbar, or been contemporaries of his earlier years,—Heryot and Andrew of Wyntoun, Maister John Clerke, James Affleck, Holland, Sir Mungo Lockhart of the Lee, Sir Gilbert Hay and Blind Harry, Alexander Trail and Patrick Johnstoun, Mersar and Rowl of Aberdeen, Robert Henryson and Sir John the Ross, Quintin Shaw and Walter Kennedy; but three-fourths of them are destitute entirely of any significance to give them identity or personality. No wonder that Dunbar felt that life was slipping away from him, and that the last great Enemy was ever drawing nearer to him. When so many had been taken, how could he hope to escape? Sooner or later he would reach the place where that Shadow feared of man sat waiting and watching for him, at whose icy touch the lofty and the

[1] Lord Hailes.

lowly, the prince and the peasant, bow their head obediently and pass within the Silence!

Solemn indeed are the closing stanzas of this mighty threnody—worthy to rank beside the noblest elegies the world has yet seen. The pathos becomes well-nigh overwhelming, as after having recounted the departure behind the veil of all those whom he held dear of old, he breaks into the anguished moan of the concluding lines—

> 'Since he has all my brethren tane,
> He will not let me live alane,
> By force, I maun his next prey be;
> *Timor mortis conturbat me.*
>
> Since then for Death remede is none,
> Best is't that we for Death dispone,
> After our death that live may we;
> *Timor mortis conturbat me.*'

CHAPTER IX

THE YEARS IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING FLODDEN

We are now rapidly approaching that great crisis in Scots history whereby the shadow on the dial of time was put back quite half a century. If James IV. had not rushed so rashly on his doom at the fatal field of Flodden by permitting his chivalry and the wiles of the seductive Lady Ford of Wark to induce him to leave his advantageous ground to fight on equal terms on the plain, the history of Scotland might have had to be written from an entirely different standpoint. The death of James IV. ended the Augustan age of the Scottish monarchy. In August 1513 Scotland was still in the enjoyment of all those social, intellectual, and commercial privileges won for her by the genius of her strong-handed monarch and the industry of her sons; by September the country had been thrown back into that anarchy that was rampant during the long minority of James II. 'Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child' was never to be more terribly demonstrated than in the minority of James V., when the Douglas ambition reached its height.[1]

All these evils, however, were still in the future, and never did the country seem more peacefully prosperous,

[1] Burton and Maitland. Cf. Pitscottie.

never was it making more rapid strides along the best lines of progress and development, as it did in the three years immediately preceding Flodden. Henry and James were excellent friends, despite the tiffs they periodically had, and the long centuries of enmity seemed at last at an end, when from Italy there rolled up that thundercloud which was to wreck the peace of Scotland. A few years before Pope Julius II. had seized the territories of Parma and Piacenza in Upper Italy,[1] and added them to the already extensive dominions of the Church. Louis XII., however, had already had his eye upon them. The Pope, afraid of losing them, flattered the young King Henry VIII. of England into attacking Louis in France, calculating that the latter having his hands full in France would not think of meddling him in Northern Italy. But Louis and his Queen played the same game on Henry as the Pope had played on him. James IV. was induced by the Queen's *gage d'amour* 'to ride one day's journey into England' and strike a blow for 'his lady.' And to please a woman, who was simply using him as a tool, James was ready to risk crown, Queen, and life itself.

I mention these facts because again and again Dunbar refers to them, not directly, but by implication, in the poems of these later days. He was one of the few who stoutly defended the policy of cultivating good relations with England.[2] During those last years of peace, when the flush of prosperity was at its fairest, when Margaret still swayed her husband's heart, and at the Scots Court none

[1] Ranke's *History of the Popes*, vol. i. p. 42.
[2] Mackay's *Life of Dunbar*.

were more welcome than the ambassadors of England, Dunbar, through his verse, endeavoured as far as possible to incline the scales in favour of the English alliance. Probably this was the secret of his great popularity with the Queen. In the fine poem written the very year of Flodden, *No Treasure avails without Gladness*, he strongly inculcates the duty of living at peace with all men—

> 'Follow on peace, flee trouble and debate,
> With famous folks hold thou thy company:
> Be charitable and humble in thine estate,
> For worldly honour lasteth but a cry.'

But I am once more running ahead of the story of our poet's life. In the year 1511 the Queen had undertaken a pilgrimage to St. Duthac's of Tain—a shrine exceedingly popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[1] On returning she paid a visit to the town of Aberdeen, where she received a reception so splendid that Dunbar, who accompanied her, was ordered to celebrate the proceedings in verse as a testimony of Her Majesty's gratitude. The greatest preparations had been made by the townspeople to do honour to the illustrious visitor, and an amusing proclamation still stands in the Burgh Records of the period as having been made by 'the Belman, wha wes ordainit to pass through the hail toune and command and charge all manner of persones that hes any middens upon the forgait before their gates, and doors, to devoid, redd, and cleanse the same betwix this and Sonday, under the pain of xl.s., and also to remove all swine cruiffs from the High Street under the penalty of the swyne being

[1] Mackay's *Introduction* and *Life*.

escheated and a fine of viij.s.' A sum of £200 was arranged to be raised as a *propine* or gift to Her Majesty, and commissioners were appointed to grant certain tacks or leases in reversion, and also to let the rights of the fishings belonging to the community for that purpose. Further resolutions were passed for cleaning and adorning the town, hanging the streets with arras and tapestry. Altogether the inhabitants seem to have incurred a degree of expense considerably beyond their means.[1]

Dunbar's poem gives us an admirable picture of the proceedings as viewed by an eye-witness. Never is our poet seen to greater advantage than when describing a pageant such as this. His laudatory apostrophe to the town of Aberdeen is not so well known as it should be—

> 'Blythe Aberdeen, thou beryl of all townis,
> The lamp of beauty, bounty, and blytheness;
> Unto the heaven upheavéd thy renown is
> Of virtue, wisdom, and of worthiness;
> High notit is thy name of nobelness
> Into the coming of our lusty quene,
> The well of wealth, good cheer and merryness:
> Be blythe and blissful, burgh of Aberdeen.'

The procession, as described by Dunbar, was splendid in the extreme. The Queen was met by the magistrates, 'richlie arrayit, as became them to be,' and escorted into the town, four young gentlemen holding a pall of crimson velvet over her, while the thunder of cannon was heard all along the route. Another fair procession met her at the city gate, which led her up to the several masques that were got up to greet her at different parts of the town.

[1] Schipper's *Poems of William Dunbar*.

Thus she encountered the Holy Virgin, then the Three Kings of the East offering Gold, Incense, and Myrrh to the infant Christ, after that Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise. Then patriotism received its tribute. Robert Bruce, the national hero of the Scots people, was to be seen as a crowned king in a succeeding masque, followed by all the noble Stuarts who came after him. Then homage was paid to the beauty of the Queen by twenty-four beautiful young ladies, all splendidly clothed in green, who came singing and playing on timbrels to meet her, followed by the great barons of the neighbourhood with their ladies. Amid the cheers of the inhabitants of the town Her Majesty was conducted through the streets, all hung with tapestry, while the fountain at the High Cross flowed with wine, to her lodgings, where, as a last surprise, a cup heaped with gold coins was offered to her as a *propine*.

Dunbar appears to have enjoyed himself thoroughly during his trip with the Queen. The whole tone of the poem is one of pleasure and delight, and his advice to the Queen,

> 'Therefore so long as Queen thou bearest crown,
> Be thankfull to this burgh of Aberdeen,'

is dedicated by maxims of sound State policy. She had won popularity; let her do her best to keep it.

On returning to Edinburgh Dunbar appears to have discovered that some of his enemies in his absence had been slandering him to his royal master. For a time even there appears to have been a coolness existing between Dunbar and his sovereign.[1] In his poem *How shall I*

[1] From his poem *Of Men Evill to Please* we learn that in consequence of this coolness Dunbar received no Christmas present.

Governe me? he complains bitterly that, do what he liked, be he merry or be he sad, attend Court or keep away from it, his motives were misunderstood.

> 'If I be seen in Court owre long,
> Then will they murmur them amang,
> My friendis are not worth a flee,
> That I so long without guerdon gang.
> Lord God, how shall I governe me?
>
> If Court reward then purchase I,
> Then have they malice and envy,
> And secretly they on me lee,
> And do me injure privily,
> Lord God, how shall I govern me?'

Probably the mischief arose out of Dunbar's poem on 'Covetyce,' in which he lashed the vices current at Court, by lamenting that the manly amusements in which the courtiers used to excel, and the King pre-eminently so, were all banished from it, and that only card-playing and dicing were fashionable. Schipper suggested, and with reason, that the King's predilection for such amusements increased as he advanced in years. But seemingly the estrangement had not lasted very long, for in his poem *Rule of Anis Self*, written towards the commencement of 1512, he seems to imply that his relations with the King were as of old. His maxim, 'He ruleth well who well himself can guide,' might be assumed by many an ethical philosopher as summing up the whole of morals from the *γνῶθι σέαυτον* of Solon to the Golden Rule, 'Do unto others as thou wouldst they should do unto you.'

During the year 1512, also, Dunbar seems to have felt the approach of age coming on him, slowly it might be, but still too surely to be misunderstood. The gaieties of

the Court began to pall on him, and with this feeling his desire to be settled in some quiet sphere of religious work grew daily greater. Not by him was the wish cherished to pose as a great ecclesiastic. Rather did he long for some sequestered country nook, even though, as we have noted previously, the church were covered with thatch. In his exquisite poem on 'Content,' he seems to imply that he had now given up all hope of high preferment.[1] But he comforts himself with the consideration, from which Bunyan might have borrowed one of his lyrics, 'If we naught climb, we take no fall,' and sets himself to be satisfied with his position and station. He concludes with the pithy epigrammatic maxim, than which Rochefoucauld himself has nothing more incisive: 'He has enough that is content.' Another poem, whose date is assigned to the end of 1512 or the commencement of 1513 is even more significant in revealing how brief man's little life-span was now appearing to the lonely, saddened man. In *None may assure in this World* he laments his lost youth, and bewails the pains of age which are stealing on him—

> 'Lord, how shall I my days dispone,
> For lang service reward is none,
> And short my lyfe may here indure,
> And lossit is my time bygone.
> Into this world may none assure.'

His entreaties to the King to be allowed to retire to some quiet country parish, where he might 'set his saul rycht' with his Maker before the last great summons reached him to join the choir invisible are pathetic in the extreme. No longer does he complain of poverty. The King's

[1] Schipper's *Dunbar*.

bounty had placed him beyond that. His wishes were only to be allowed to fill a niche in the spiritual hierarchy, where he could 'servè God, honour the King, and purge his own soul.' I am inclined to disagree with Schipper's chronology of the famous poem *Sir, yet Remember*, and to attribute it to the last year of the King's life. From the internal evidence of the piece the reader will observe that it is not so much of poverty that the poet now complains, but of the fact that men the most unworthy and unsuitable are preferred to benefices before him. Even Jock the cattleman is able to take his choice of livings, while Dunbar can only say—

> 'And when that age now does me grief
> Ane simple Vicar I can not be.'

Therefore, he has taken the neglect so much to heart, he says, that a 'deidly malady' has seized upon him. Not so much upon merit as upon mercy does he go in claiming his right to preferment, as appears from the stanza previously cited—

> 'None may remede my malady,
> So well as you, Sir, verily;
> For with a benefice ye may prief
> And if I mend not hastily,
> Excess of thought does me mischief.'

Not only does he appeal to the monarch in his own name, but he induces his friends, and especially the Queen, 'that sweet meek rose,' to press his claims upon the King that he might be allowed to retire from Court to a benefice. It is only just to suppose that had he lived James would have acceded to the longing desire of his faithful friend and servitour. Though he might resist the appeal

as long as possible, and endeavour to satisfy him by increasing his pensions, a course which would not entail the poet's departure from the Court, still when he saw that Holyrood no longer had power to charm and please the world-weary man, whose locks were whitening with the snows of age, doubtless he would have advanced Dunbar to the summit of his ambition—a vicarship in some quiet country parish, 'far from the madding crowd.' But, alas! whatever he may have been contemplating to do when he returned from riding his one day's journey into England was rendered of no avail by the terrible disaster of Flodden. However, as we shall see, there is strong reason to believe that the Queen, when she was regent, carried into effect what it may have been the intention of the monarch to do when he came back in triumph. But the last official mention we have of William Dunbar in the Treasurer's books is on the 14th May 1513, when he received his usual half-yearly instalment of his pension. This was three months before the King set out for Flodden. The Treasurer's accounts, however, from August 8th, 1513 to June 1st, 1515, have not been preserved. In those of a subsequent date the name of William Dunbar does not appear.

CHAPTER X

THE DARK DAYS OF FLODDEN

THE first half of the year 1513 was as prosperous as its predecessors in Scotland. Commerce was flourishing, and Scots vessels were trading to every country open to trade relations. The Scots navy was at this time regarded as the strongest in Europe. Even although Sir Andrew Barton had recently been defeated and slain by the two sons of the Earl of Surrey, Lord Thomas and Sir Edward Howard, in a naval battle in the Downs, Scotland possessed the *Great Michael*, the largest warship in the world of its day. Walter Chepman was busily engaged printing off all the standard works of the period, which were being circulated amongst the nobility and gentry of the country, whereby intellectual culture was greatly promoted. Into some channel the spiritual sympathies of the nation had to flow. Not into that of religion could the newly awakened zeal of the country discharge itself. The Romish Church was every year becoming further divorced from the great heart of the people. Sunk in sensuality, worldly pride, the most degraded superstition, and an ignorance that was even lower than the common people of the townships of Scotland, its pretensions to teach or to preach religion were ridiculed and mocked. The great ecclesiastics, such as

Blackadder, Archbishop of Glasgow, Forman, Bishop of Moray, and others, were practically temporal lords, though they arrogated to themselves all the privileges of Churchmen without considering themselves bound by any of their responsibilities. In consequence, in 1513, a widespread irreligion was diffusing itself over the country side by side with the advancing culture. Had the superstition of the whole nation been less profound, the result would have been universal atheism. But for once superstition played the part of an angel of light.

Such was the position of affairs when, to Dunbar's distress, intelligence was brought to Court that England and Spain, instigated by Pope Julius II. and his successor, the great Leo X., were at war with France. With the keen prevision of a statesman, he could foresee what would follow. France had not extended her coveted citizenship to the Scots nation for nothing. Before many days had passed his apprehensions were verified. Queen Anne of France, wife of Louis XII., sent the Sieur de Martignan with her gage of love, a richly perfumed and jewelled glove, accompanied by a letter in which she styled James 'her own peculiar knight,' and entreated him as her chosen champion to march for her sake one day's journey into English territory.[1]

The Court was immediately broken up into two great factions. There was first the English, headed by the Queen, whose own brother was to be the object of her husband's attack. With her sympathised all the older

[1] Pitscottie informs us that the letter was accompanied by a gift of 15,000 French crowns—about £8000.

nobles and barons, who knew and prized the value of peace, and the older clergy, headed by the new Archbishop of Glasgow (Beaton). Of this party William Dunbar,[1] both by policy and inclination, would be a member, the object of their efforts being to preserve peace between Henry VIII. and James IV., by dissuading the latter from acceding to the request of the Queen of France. The other side, represented by the young Archbishop Stuart of St. Andrews,[2] natural son of the King, Forman, Bishop of Moray,[3] and most of the younger clergy who were supposed to be secular in their sympathies, strongly advocated the maintenance of the traditional policy—'no amity with England.' With this party the King was in open agreement. His amorous heart had been set on fire by the Queen of France's letter, and he at once issued a proclamation to the feudal nobles all over the country, summoning them to meet on the Boroughmuir—the ground now covered by the suburbs of Merchiston and Morningside.

From the poems written after all the pitiful tragedy of Flodden was over, we can see that Dunbar had done all that man could to deter the monarch from his mad scheme. In the piece addressed to the 'Queen-Dowager' he alludes with the utmost delicacy, yet with a touching

[1] Cf. Mackay's *Introduction*, which is here, as elsewhere, of the greatest historic value.

[2] The friend and correspondent of Erasmus. He was only nineteen at this time.

[3] Forman was a candidate for the Archbishopric of Bourges, and was successful. He was favoured by King Louis XII., and the ground on which the latter demanded the support of the Chapter was the signal service Forman had done to France by bringing about the invasion of England by the King of Scots. See Burton's *Scot Abroad*.

pathos, to the efforts he had made to persuade the King to adopt other courses—

> 'I me commend with all humility,
> Unto thy beauty blissful and benign,
> To whom I am and aye shall servant be,
> With stedfast heart and faithful true meaning,
> Unto the dead, to whom I maid pleiding.[1]
> And for whose sake I shall my pen address
> Songis to make for thy recomforting,
> That thou may live in joy and lustiness.'

Owing to the powerful combination against it, the cause of the English war was not popular in Scotland. All kinds of persuasions were tried to turn James from his resolution. But in vain. Supernatural portents even were not lacking. Let us hear what Drummond of Hawthornden tells us of the matter: 'After the army had mustered in the Borrowmuir of Edinburgh' (a field then spacious and delightful by the shades of many stately and aged oaks), 'about the midst of the night there is a proclamation heard at the Mercat Cross of the Town, *summonding* a great many burgesses, gentlemen, barons, and noblemen to appear within forty days before the tribunal of one "Plotcock." The Provost of the Town,[2] in his Timber Gallery, having heard his own name cited, cried out "That he declined that Judicatory, and appealed to the mercy of God Almighty." But that was not all: "While the King, full of cares and perplexities, in the Church of St. Michael,

[1] 'Withouten depairting,' some editions read.

[2] This is a mistake. Richard Lawson of Highriggs was Provost from 1504-8, and we know from Pitscottie (i. 266) that it was to him the incident happened, while the Provost of the year was the Earl of Angus, who accompanied the King to Flodden and perished there. The interim Provost, in the absence of Angus, was Alexander, Lord Home, Great Chamberlain of Scotland.

Linlithgow, heard Evensong (as it then was called), while he was at his devotions, an ancient man came in, his amber-coloured locks hanging down upon his shoulders, his forehead high and inclining to baldness, his garment of azure colour, somewhat long, girded about him with a towel or Table napkin, of a comely and reverend aspect. Having enquired for the King, he intruded himself into the crowd, passing through all till he came to him; with a clownish simplicity, leaning over the Canon's Seat where the King sate, "Sir (said he) I am sent hither to intreat you for a time to delay your Expedition, and to proceed no further in your intended journey: for if you do ye shall not prosper in your Enterprise, nor any of your followers. I am further charged to warn you, if ye be so refractory as to go forward, not to use the acquaintance, company, or counsel of Women, as ye tender your honour, life, and estate." After this warning he withdrew himself back again into the crowd. When service was ended, the King enquired earnestly for him, but he could nowhere be found, neither could any of the bystanders (of whom divers did narrowly observe him, meaning afterwards to have discoursed further with him) feel or perceive how, when, or where he passed from them, having as it were vanished among their hands.'[1]

Drummond adds: 'Nothing was the King moved with these advertisements, thinking them scenick pieces acted by those who hated the French and favoured the English faction, though they were so boldly and to the life personated that they appalled and struck with fear ordinary

[1] Drummond, *History of the Five Jameses.*

and vulgar judgments, as Tragi-Comedies of Spirits.' Now I have always had the idea that Dunbar, in some way or other, was connected with this scheme. The last card which the Queen's party could play was to appeal to the superstitious fears of the King. But, alas! James seemed to penetrate the disguise. Dunbar certainly was privy to some secret of the kind, for the word 'servant' was a peculiar one to use in the verse we have quoted above from the *Ode to the Queen-Dowager.* Be this as it may, their efforts were entirely unavailing, and in a few days the great army set forward on its march for the Border.

For a long time uncertainty prevailed whether Dunbar might not have accompanied his sovereign to the field of Flodden, and fallen with him there, seeing that no mention was thereafter made of him in the Treasurer's books. He had courage and patriotism enough for that, and the theory was mooted that James, being so certain of victory as he was, might have taken Dunbar with him to celebrate the triumph, as Edward II., under similar circumstances, brought the poetical Carmelite friar Baston to the battle of Bannockburn. How the whirligig of time would have brought in its revenges if Dunbar, like Baston, had been captured, and been obliged to ransom himself by writing a poem on the victors whose prospective rout he had been brought to witness!

But there seems strong presumption in favour of the theory that Dunbar was left behind to comfort the Queen, who had begged to be allowed to accompany her husband to the campaign, hoping, as Drummond and Maitland assert, to be able to influence the Earl of Surrey in favour

of peace. But the King declined to allow her to accompany him. There is no ground for believing, notwithstanding the subsequent moral deterioration of Margaret's nature when she sank into the position of a mere paid English spy, that at this time she was other than genuinely attached to her husband, and feared any danger happening to him.

Of course we have only the bare records of history to guide us with regard to what took place inside the walls of the capital after the march of the army, and while those who were left behind were awaiting news of the mighty battle that was imminent. All contemporary records describe the tension as terrible. Scarce a house was there, 'gentle or simple,' that had not a member of it away with the King. As the days crept on, and still no word reached the watchers of the issue of the battle, anxiety seems to have given place to anguish. Then, to quote Aytoun's telling lines—

> 'News of battle! who hath brought it?
> News of triumph? who should bring
> Tidings from our noble army,
> Greetings from our gallant King?
> All last night we watched the beacons,
> Blazing on the hills afar,
> Each one bearing as it kindled,
> Message of the opened war:
> All night long the northern streamers,
> Shot across the trembling sky,
> Fearful lights that never beacon
> Save where kings and heroes die.'[1]

Doubtless the horror, the misery, and distress which fell on Edinburgh when at last the terrible truth became known

[1] *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers.*

was shared to the full by William Dunbar. It is harder to stand and wait than to buckle on one's armour in the battle of life and to rush into the fray. Though a portentous silence shrouds all the sayings and the doings of that fateful time, save what are contained in the barest of annals, one can conceive all the more vividly, because so much is left to the imagination, the keen edge of that passionate pain and mental torture, that invincible longing for the return, be it but for a moment, and be that return purchased by periods of the most prolonged physical suffering, of a beloved face on whose lineaments death had set its seal, and whose smile was to lighten the gloom of life for the watcher nevermore—all these feelings, in fine, which afterwards he was to embody in the noble consolatory poem *The Merle and the Nightingale*, and *Of Love Earthly and Divine*. Not alone to the stricken Queen would he be called upon to render consolation, in both his spiritual and his secular capacities,—and that he did so is manifest from the *Ode to the Queen-Dowager*,—but to those other families, of whom there was scarce one but was mourning the loss of father, brother, husband, son, or mayhap of some other near tie, not yet sanctioned by the Church, yet as binding between loving hearts as if sealed by bell, book, and candle.

It is only in these poems, such as *Ane Orisoune, when the Governor passed into France*, written on the occasion when the Duke of Albany, who had been appointed Regent of the country in the name of James v., went for a season to the French Court, and there seemed some uncertainty whether he would ever return, that we catch

a glimpse of what Dunbar really was in the habit of doing with his glorious gift of verse. That a large number of his pieces, and these perhaps his finest, were lost during the miserable confusion of the post-Flodden anarchy is almost certain. Besides acting the part of consoler to those bereaved, he probably did his share in strengthening the hands of the Lord Home, Great Chamberlain of the city, who had been appointed Deputy Provost, in maintaining order and in preventing the citizens lapsing into despair complete, until the full intelligence of the disaster reached them. His poems only give us hints, without any direct statement of what was the specific object of the efforts which we know he was putting forth for the salvation and succour of his stricken country. In all probability he helped by deed as well as by word in the erection of that rampart or city wall which was drawn round the town in the space of a few days, when the news was brought to Edinburgh that the victorious English army was hastening towards the Scots capital. With a feverish energy, men, women, and children, hoary patriarchs on whose head the snows of the seventies lay deep, as well as tender babes scarce permitted to leave their mothers' sides, were one and all eager and ready to take a share in the work.

There was only one gleam of glory to brighten the universal gloom of the national disaster, and that lay in the fact that the lives of Scotland's bravest and best had gone out in a blaze of splendid courage. All day long, when the battle was already a foregone conclusion, there was no thought of either surrender or retreat in the minds of the Scots nobles. One by one they fell around their

King, standing at bay like a wounded lion, doggedly desperate and sternly defiant, until they each one met his fate. To break that ring of steel by any other means than pouring a pitiless hail of cloth-yard arrows into its closely packed mass was more than the Earl of Surrey could effect, while for every Scots life that was extinguished its English fellow followed it. Only the great superiority in numbers, when the English reserves were brought up, put the matter beyond a doubt, and the fall of darkness alone saved the Scots from utter extinction. As it was, the issue was left undecided, and had there been a general left on the Scots side to draw off the troops that were left in good order, in particular carrying away with them the artillery, Flodden field might have gone down to history as a drawn engagement. But no commander was left. The English occupied the ground on the following day, found the Scots artillery unguarded, seized it, and of course justly claimed the victory.[1] The Scots forces dribbled away in the night. When morning light dawned the ring of corpses round the King was there—but the living had disappeared. They had wisely retreated across the Border, prepared to make there their last stand in defence of their hearths and homes. But Surrey was too wary a general to attack a foe at bay; besides, his army was in urgent need of rest. Therefore he slowly retreated homewards. But some days elapsed before this fact was known in Edinburgh.

The suffering which Dunbar must have passed through during this terrible period has not been recorded in his

[1] Cf. Burton, Maitland, and Mackenzie.

verse with that fulness which we should look for.[1] This fact causes me to think that we have received only a very small moiety of his work. That he should not have described the horror of the time could only have resulted from two causes—either he must have accompanied the King to Flodden and been one of the tale of dead, comprising one archbishop, two bishops, two mitred abbots, twelve earls, thirteen peers, five eldest sons of peers, and of gentlemen over three thousand, who were left on the field; or his works must in large part have been lost during the years elapsing between his death and the permanent establishment of printing in Scotland by Vautrollier about 1580. But we have evidence almost absolute that Dunbar was alive in 1517, when John, Duke of Albany, who in 1515 had been chosen regent after the widowed Queen's marriage with the Earl of Angus, had found himself compelled, by his inability to restore order to the kingdom, to return to his estates in France. Dunbar, as Schipper says, must have been deeply affected by the distracted state into which the country had been thrown by its party dissensions after the King's untimely death, and he records his feelings in the *Orisoune*, *when the Governor passed into France.*

As soon as practicable after the whole of the sad story had been brought from Flodden, the Scots Estates met and appointed the Queen as temporary regent and guardian to the young Prince James, then about two years of age. This was done in the hope that the fact would incline her brother to be magnanimous and merciful.[2] Such an effect

[1] Paterson's *Life and Poems of William Dunbar.* [2] Burton and Maitland.

the appointment to some extent produced, and the war, in the meantime at least, was not renewed.

The interest to us, however, in the appointment is that Margaret in all likelihood used the power she had to advance the interest of her faithful friend and laureate. When the first poignancy of sorrow was past, when she was urged by every consideration, both public and personal, to come forth from her retirement and place her hand, feeble and wavering though it was, on the helm of state, it is only just to suppose that those who had comforted her in her sorrow should participate in her advancement. Dunbar was assuredly alive at this time. Only his genius could have produced such poems as *Love Earthly and Divine* and the *Orisoune.* We are either shut up to that conclusion, or to the alternative that there were two poets living at this period, both of them capable of executing work of a quality so high. The very idea is preposterous. Therefore, I consider that the explanation given by Laing, Schipper, and Mackay[1] of the circumstance that Dunbar's name appears no more in the Treasurer's book because he had at length reached the summit of his ambition in his later years—a benefice—to be the only legitimate conclusion deducible from the facts. His pension would then of course stop, as one of the conditions of it when conferred was that on the recipient being appointed to a benefice of £100 the pension would cease. I do not see that any conclusion other than this would really meet all the exigencies of the case.

[1] See Laing's *Dunbar*, Schipper's *Leben und Gedichte*, and Mackay's *Introduction.*

After the disaster of Flodden many of the great Church offices were vacant, and remained so for some time. In August 1514, shortly before her marriage with the Earl of Angus, the Queen-Dowager wrote a letter to Pope Leo X. in which she gives a list of all the great benefices in question, and whom she desired to appoint to them.[1] The fact that Dunbar's name does not appear there is no argument that he did not receive preferment. Only the greater benefices are named, such as Dunbar could have no hope of receiving, seeing that Gavin Douglas, the relative of the man she was about to marry, had great difficulty in securing the bishopric of Dunkeld, after being disappointed of the abbacy of Aberbrothick (Arbroath).

At last, then, in his fifty-third or fifty-fourth year, the weary poet seems to find a resting-place in some quiet benefice, where he could write and read and muse all day long without being compelled to torture his brains into song to flatter the vanity of his royal patrons or to amuse the giddy *habitués* of the Court. Where it was situated, alas! we know not. In fact, Dunbar's closing years are entirely wrapped in obscurity. In all probability he retired to his benefice, glad to escape from the quarrels of a Court that was every day becoming more divided and anarchic. Possibly he never again visited it. The only subsequent reference to Dunbar occurs in one of Sir David Lindsay's poems, written about the year 1530, viz. *The Testament and Complaynt of the King's Papyngo*[2]—

> 'For why the bell of rhetorick bene rung,
> By Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate aureat,

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[1] *Epistolae Regum Scotorum*, vol. i. p. 199. [2] In the Prologue, Stanza II.

Who dare presume their poems to impugn,
Whose sweet sentence through Albions been sung?
Or who can now the workis countrafeit
Of Kennedy with termës aureate,
Or of Dunbar, who language had at large
As may be seen intil his Golden Targe.'

From these lines we gather that Dunbar had been dead for some time; and, as Laing adds, 'from the manner in which Lyndsay laments Bishop Douglas, who died in 1522, it may be inferred that our author's decease was previous to that of the prelate. We cannot greatly err in supposing that he died about the year 1520, when he was about sixty years of age.'

But if we know not where he died, nor when, nor under what circumstances his last years were spent, if we know not where he lies, and if we cannot repair to his tomb in the fond pilgrimage of sincere admiration, in his poems he has raised a monument to himself, as Horace writes of his own book, *perennius aere*—more lasting than brass,—a monument which, as the years and the centuries roll by, will be ever increasingly valued by all who revere the productions of a genius as profound as it was soaring.

CHAPTER XI

DUNBAR AS AN ALLEGORIST AND SATIRIST

We have now completed our survey of the life of our great Scots poet. Before closing this little volume, however, I should like to devote a few pages to a critical analysis of his genius and of his works. Along with Robert Burns, Dunbar must undoubtedly be regarded as the greatest imaginative poet Scotland has produced. Sir Walter Scott remarks: 'This darling of the Scottish Muses has been justly raised to a level with Chaucer by every judge of poetry to whom his obsolete language has not rendered him unintelligible';[1] while George Ellis, an English critic, and therefore not likely to be biassed by patriotic prejudices, goes further, and says, 'William Dunbar, the greatest poet that Scotland has produced,'[2] and did space permit quite as decisive testimonies could be cited from Malcolm and David Laing, Warton, Dr. Irving, Mr. Gilchrist, Thomas Campbell, and Mr. Fraser-Tytler. That of Dr. Drake, however, is so eulogistic that I cannot refrain from quoting it. Speaking of Chaucer, he declares 'it is evident that a union of talents of this wide range must necessarily be of rare occurrence: nor

[1] Sir Walter Scott's *Memoirs of George Bannatyne*; also *History of Scotland.*

[2] Ellis's *Specimens of the Early English Poems*, vol. i. p. 377.

can we wonder that a century should elapse before a poet in any high degree approaching the genius of Chaucer made his appearance in this island. Not indeed until Dunbar arose in the sister kingdom had we another instance of the combination of first-rate abilities for humour and comic painting, with an equally powerful command over the higher regions of fiction and imagination.'[1]

These testimonies, then, are calculated to outweigh that silly criticism of James Russell Lowell[2]—whose mania for saying smart things perpetually led him into errors in fact—when, after praising a few lines on which he had stumbled in *The Merle and the Nightingale*, he goes on to say: 'But except this lucky poem, I find little else in the serious verses of Dunbar that does not seem to me tedious and pedantic. *I dare say a few more lines might be found* scattered here and there, but I hold it sheer waste of time to hunt after those thin needles of wit buried in unwieldy haystacks of verse. If that be genius, the less we have of it the better.' In pointing out to Mr. Lowell, a year or two before his death, the glaring contradiction contained in these two sentences, that great man, who was nothing if not the most honourable and straightforward of critics, confessed to me that he had only read half a dozen pieces at most of Dunbar's work. Probably Sir Walter Scott's remark would be applicable here, that he is appreciated only by those 'to whom his obsolete language has not rendered him unintelligible.'

[1] Drake's *Mornings in Spring*, vol. ii. p. 5.

[2] Lowell's *Essays on the English Poets*, Scott Library Edition, p. 14.

If Dunbar—to compare him with a posterior as well as an anterior rival—did not possess Spenser's limpid sweetness, his genius was of a stronger, bolder cast than that of the author of the *Faerie Queen.* If the circle of his flight did not extend so far, he soared into realms of pure imagination quite as high as Spenser ever attempted. Were Dunbar's vocabulary as familiar to English readers as that of his rival, the fact would to most be self-evident.

To those who can enjoy Dunbar without requiring the constant aid of a glossary, he is himself his own exceeding great reward. The many-sidedness of his genius has a ring almost Shakespearian about it. To no other poet has the faculty been given of attaining excellence so supreme in so many diverse kinds of metrical compôsition. *The Golden Targe* is an allegory as purely imaginative as the *Faerie Queen* itself; *The Thistle and the Rose* a marriage song worthy to take rank beside Spenser's *Epithalamium.* In the mock-heroic or Hudibrastic vein, have we not the *Joust between the Tailor and the Soutar*, *The Fenyeit Friar of Tungland*, and many others that exhibit a sense of the ludicrous and incongruous, every whit as keen as Butler's? Then in pure satire his *Tidings frae the Session*, *The Devil's Inquest*, *The Visitation of St. Francis*, and many others, to say nothing of his share in the terrible *Flyting*, are admirable specimens of the lash of ridicule applied to contemporary vices and follies. But, over and above all these, the man whose genius could rise to such a soaring flight of imaginative sublimity as in the *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, and yet pour forth on the other hand an elegiac strain of

such unfeigned pathos as the *Lament for the Makars*, must assuredly be held to rank with the very greatest masters of his craft in English literature.

But to look a little more narrowly into the components of Dunbar's genius, let us consider first the work accomplished by him in Allegory and Satire. Warton incisively remarks: 'The imagination of Dunbar is not less suited to satirical than sublime allegory, and he is the first poet who has appeared in this way of writing since *Piers Plowman*.'[1] And Professor Henry Morley, speaking of *The Thistle and the Rose*, says: 'The bold touch of direct counsel to the King (about honouring the Rose above all other flowers) brings an old form of allegory here into close contact with the life of its own day. In the *Golden Targe* there is the playful grace of the poet who is the first since Chaucer in whom we recognise again a master in his art. Dunbar was a man of genius, a born poet, with wide range of powers, cultivated mind, and perfect training in the mechanism of verse.'

Dunbar, like Chaucer, understood the subtle secret of rendering allegory intensely attractive, which 'the moral Gower' and 'Lydgate aureate' did not. If we judge Dunbar's use of allegory by the definition of it given by the rhetoricians, our poet will not be found to exactly conform to the strict letter of the law. Principal Campbell asserts allegory to be the picture of something through the agency of something else;[2] while Dr. Blair regards it as continued metaphor, 'as the representation of some one

[1] Warton's *History of English Poetry*, sec. xxx. p. 505.
[2] Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*.

thing by another that resembles it, and is made to stand for it.'[1] In allegorical poetry Dunbar takes a place with his *Thistle and the Rose*, *The Golden Targe*, and *The Merle and the Nightingale*, which is by the side of the very highest masters in European literature. Granted that the machinery of his allegories is still the conventional and hackneyed form of walking out early on a May morning and falling asleep in some cave convenient—such caves seem to have been vastly more plentiful then than now,—where he experiences the visions recorded, being generally awakened by an irruption of the real world into the ideal, such as a salute fired by the cannon of a ship in the bay. The descriptive powers of our poet are of the very highest order. Nature as it is, not as he conceives it should be, is painted on his canvas. His vocabulary is rich and full, though he manifests an excessive preference for Latinised forms, such as 'preclare,' 'pulcritude,' 'matutine,' 'armipotent,' 'mellifluate,' which, however, the genius of the language soon rejected. His figures of speech are almost invariably startlingly original, being used moreover with great propriety, and that exquisite sympathy between the thought that imparts life and the style that receives it. He is greater in pure description than any other poet in our language save Thomson. His descriptive pictures are gems in miniature. He never lavishes a superfluous word on any scene. Yet one is conscious how rich exceedingly are his poetic cameos in artistic finish and metrical deftness. Take for example the following allegorical picture of a spring morning, which

[1] Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*.

is intended to indicate also the fresh active longings of the country at the commencement of a new century, and the feelings with which that brilliant intellectual group which surrounded the throne of the warrior king regarded the prospects of learning and art :—

> 'When March with her varying winds was past,
> And April had with her silver showers
> Tane leave of Nature with an orient blast,
> And lushy May that Mother is of flowers
> Had made the birdis to begin their hours,
> Among the tender odours red and white,
> Whose harmony to hear it was delight :
>
> In bed at morning, sleeping as I lay,
> Methought Aurora with her crystal een
> In at the window lookit by the day,
> And hailëd me with visage pale and green ;
> And on whose hand a lark sang loud, I wene,
> "Awake, lovers, out of your slumbering,
> See how the lusty morning doth upspring."
>
> Methought fresh May before my bed upstood,
> In weeds depaint of many a diverse hue,
> Sober, benign, and full of mansuetude,
> In bright attire of flowers forgit new,
> Heavenly of colour, white, red, brown, and blue,
> Bathed all in dew, and gilt with Phoebus' beams,
> While she the house illumined by her gleams.'

May then rebukes the poet for not rising early according to his invariable custom in the past to celebrate the approach of the spring, especially as the lark has now announced the dawn of day, and his heart in former years had always—

> 'Glad and blissful been
> Sangis to make under the leavis green.'

May commands him to rise and to perform his annual homage to the flowers, the birds, and the sun. They both enter a delicious garden, filled with the richest colours and odours. The sun suddenly appears in his glory, and is thus described in the luminous language of Dunbar—

> 'The purple sun with tender beamis red,
> In orient bright as angel did appear,
> Through golden skyis putting up his head,
> Whose glorious tresses shone so wondrous clear,
> That all the world took comfort far and near.'

This introduction to *The Thistle and the Rose* will enable my readers to understand the character of the poem. Thereafter Nature, and the beasts, the birds, and the trees, all assemble to do homage to the Rose, the personification of the various inanimate forces of Nature being very skilfully managed. The whole purpose of the piece is to offer a delicate yet lofty compliment to Margaret Tudor, and in his design the poet succeeds admirably. Allegory as a subtle warp is deftly interwoven with the web of fact, and the whole texture of the work is of the most exquisitely felicitous character.

In *The Golden Targe*, on the other hand, the design of the poet is to evince the gradual and imperceptible influence of love when indulged beyond the limits of reason. The poet walks out once more at the dawn of a bright May day, and, lulled by the music of the birds and the murmuring of waters, falls asleep on the flower-bed, which he calls 'Flora's mantle.' In a vision he sees a ship approach whose sails were white as 'the blossom upon the

spray,' whose masts are of gold, 'bright as the star of day.' She arrives at the shore, and out of her are landed upon the blooming meadows a hundred ladies clad in loose green attire richly ornamented. In this brilliant assemblage the author sees Dame Nature, 'Venus Queen,' Aurora, May, Lady Flora, Juno, Latona, Proserpine, Diana, and others — all crowned with diadems, glittering like the morning star. The poet leaves his ambush under the trees, and presses forward to gain a better view, when he is espied by Venus, who bids her 'archers keen' arrest the intruder, whereupon all the fair ladies, dropping their gay attire, arm themselves with bows, and form themselves in battle-array. The position of the spy would have become critical had he not at the last moment been championed by Reason armed with the Golden Targe. All the efforts of Beauty and her fair fellow-warriors to overcome the poet are unavailing so long as he is defended by Reason, but at length a magical powder is thrown into the eyes of Reason, who is suddenly deprived of all his powers and reels like a drunken man. Immediately the poet receives a deadly wound and is taken prisoner by Beauty. The allegory is admirably constructed, the Abstract Qualities and Moral Virtues being endowed with all the life-like truth of reality. There is a directness, a poetic swiftness almost Homeric in the action of this allegorical epic, united to a warm imaginative glow, a vigour of thought, and a metrical felicity that is even more marked in the latter piece than in the former.

The opening of *The Golden Targe* has been greatly admired for the magical truth of its description. Such a

stanza as the following whets one's appetite to have more of the royal fare provided in the poem—

> 'The crystal air, the sapphire firmament,
> The ruby skyis of the orient,
> Kissed beryl beams on emerald boughs so green,
> The rosy garth depaint and redolent,
> With purple azure, gold and gulës gent,
> Arrayit was by Dame Flora, the queen,
> So nobily that joy was to be seen:
> The rock again the river resplendent
> As low illuminit all the leavis sheen.'

The other poems which also come under the head of 'allegories,' though less distinctively so, are *Beauty and the Prisoner*, *The Merle and the Nightingale*, and one or two smaller pieces of less literary value. *The Merle and the Nightingale*—a dialogue between the two birds on earthly as against heavenly love—was written late in life, after the death of the King. Interesting indeed is the task to compare the special characteristics of the allegorical poems produced by Dunbar previous to the fatal day of Flodden and those dated subsequent to it. The difference is marked. In *The Merle and the Nightingale* all the joyous pleasure in life, the keen delight in its enjoyments, the insatiable appetite for novelty and intellectual improvement, seem to have passed away for ever. In their stead there is a world-weary sadness, an unutterable longing for rest and perfect peace wherein to hear the voice of God speaking to him. *The Thistle and the Rose* and *The Golden Targe* were written by a man in the full flush of life's meridian, eager to drink the cup of pleasure to the very dregs; *The Merle and the Nightingale* is the work of

the same spirit when his very pleasures have palled on him, when he sees that the world after all is but a sorry place, and that if there remained not for us a rest when the day of toil was done, the human lot were wretched indeed.

> 'The nightingale said, "Fool, remember thee,
> That both in youth and age, and every hour,
> The love of God most deir to man should be,
> That him of naught wrought like His own figure,
> And died Himself from death him to succour;
> O whether was producèd their true love or none:
> God is most true and stedfast paramour,
> All love is lost but upon Him allone."'

Dunbar as a satirist of contemporary men and manners was one of the most trenchant writers that ever lifted pen in this department of letters. If the current definition of Satire be accepted by us, to wit, a discourse or poem in which wickedness or folly is exposed by severity and held up to ridicule and contempt,[1] then some of Dunbar's finest work falls within this category. He has many satiric styles aptly proportioned to the degree of folly or culpability with which he was dealing,—a light, airy style of persiflage and banter, wherein the sting is scarcely perceptible in the genial laughter and fun of merry-making. He had carefully studied the maxims and examples of Horace in respect to this manner, and his imitations of the great Roman satirist's work are both felicitous and pointed. In this category I would place *The Ballad of Kind Kittok*, *James Doig, Keeper of the Queen's Wardrobe*, *Of a Blackamoor*, *The Joust between the Tailor and the Soutar*, and *The Testament of Mr. Andrew Kennedy*. The last named is a clever specimen of macaronic verse, and is perhaps as early

[1] *Satires and Satirists*, by James Hannay.

an instance of its use as we have in English literature. The following is a stanza of it—

> 'I wish no priests for me to sing,
> Dies illa, dies irae,
> Nor yet no bells for me to ring,
> Sicut semper solet fiere ;
> But a bag-pipe to play a spring,
> Et unum ale-wisp ante me ;
> Instead of banners let them bring
> Quatuor lagenas ceruisie.'

The second class of Dunbar's satirical poems are those in which he describes, with a keenness of analysis rarely equalled, and a perception into human motives almost startling in its truth and its unerringness, certain of the more venial kinds of culpable folly. Though he hits hard at times, there is still more of fun and frolic in his satirical representations than sarcasm or malice. Among these pieces are the poems *In Praise of Women*, *To the Merchants of Edinburgh*, *The Dance in the Queen's Chamber*, *Against Treason*, and *How shall I Governe me?* From the last-named satire I quote the two concluding stanzas—

> 'I would my guiding were devised ;
> If I spend little I am despised,
> If I be noble, gentle, and free,
> A prodigal man I then am prized.
> Lord God, how shall I govern me ?
>
> Now judge they me both good and ill,
> And sooth I may no man's tongue still,
> To do the best my mind shall be :
> Let every man say what he will,
> The gracious God must govern me.'

But when we reach the third class of Dunbar's satires—the class represented by *The Fenyeit Friar of Tungland*,

The Two Married Women and the Widow, *The Devil's Inquest*, *The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, *The Birth of Antichrist*, and several other pieces of a like character—we enter a different atmosphere altogether. From the genial jesting and ironical incongruities in the style of Horace and of Persius, we are introduced at once into the bitter vitriolic scourgings of Juvenal. The lash of the satirist is all the more merciless when it is artistically laid on. Every word tells. The instinct and the unerring skill of the great literary artist are everywhere visible. Not a false stroke is to be traced in any of his greater satires. They are terrible in the very concentrated essence of their bitterness. As Dr. J. M. Ross remarks,[1] 'The real strength of Dunbar lies in his satirical humour. Here he is thoroughly independent, and portrays the aspects of the society about him with incomparable vigour and pungency. He has no shame, no scruples, no reticence, he shrinks from no foulness of language or grossness of incident. There is really no limit to the variety of his humour.' It is by turns mirthful, mocking, sarcastic, grotesque, profane, stern, and intense; it even shows its Protean character by the multiplicity of its metrical forms. In Dunbar's satires one notes the natural directness of Hall, the subtle depth of Donne, the delicate humour of Breton, the sturdy vigour of Dryden, the scalding, vitriolic bitterness of Swift, the pungency of Churchill, the rural 'smack' of Gay, united to an approach at least to the artistic perfection of Pope. There is one satire of Dunbar's which, taken all in all, is one of the most extra-

[1] *Scottish History and Literature*, by J. M. Ross, LL.D., p. 198.

ordinary productions that has ever emanated from the human intellect. The student of literature who peruses with care for perhaps the hundredth time *The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, equally with the cursory reader who mayhap tumbles across it without the slightest knowledge of the author's other works, are both equally startled by the amazing realistic power, the profound depth of a moral earnestness at times falling but little short of Dantean impressiveness, and the weird, lurid grandeur of its sublimity. The whole atmosphere of the piece seems electric with a horror that deepens as the fiery lines rush to their conclusion. Calderon, in some of the most powerful scenes in his *Autos Sacramentales*, has probed depths of imaginative power equally grand and terrible. But the great Spaniard writes from the point of view of a reverential, ethical anatomist, who sorrows even where he most trenchantly satirises: Dunbar has a mocking, malicious smile on his lips from start to finish, as though he had realised from the evidence of his own heart the deep, saddening truth that mankind at heart were irretrievably corrupt. With him satire broadens into the malignity of sarcasm, the light persiflage dies out of his verse, and a fierce, acrimonious, caustic venom is spirted into the lines —a venom whose acid burns where it lights. As Ross remarks,[1] 'It is an allegoric satire, grim and grand, grotesque and horrible.' The scene is laid in no imaginary fairyland of sensuous beauty, where mythological figures are grouped together in 'most admired disorder,' and take part in vain and ridiculous exploits. Hell is rudely opened to our

[1] *Scottish History and Literature*, p. 200.

view, and the vices that make havoc of our nature are shown disporting themselves in a ghastly revel under the leadership of 'Mahoun.' It is the night before Lent, when the carnival riot is at its maddest. Everything is morally real, though presented in such a farcical guise. The very idea of a 'Dance in Hell' is startling, but to Dunbar, as in the case of Burns with *Tam o' Shanter*, the wild humour of the conception has a weird fascination, as Ross aptly puts it, and 'never until just at the close does the author seek by light-heeled levity to mitigate the horror of the infernal vision.' Even the terrible realism of Burns pales before this awful satire. As evincing the marvellous minuteness of detail by which the poem is characterised, and how the horror is built up bit by bit, with an accretion of elements, each successive one more terrific than the preceding, we learn that the dance which Mahoun orders to be performed is to be executed by those fiends only who in the other world had never made confession to the priest, and as a consequence had never received absolution. The 'Seven Deadly Sins' are Pride, Anger, Envy, Avarice, Sloth, Lust, and Gluttony. Then the dance commences. No music, however, is heard in the hideous halls of Hell, but at last a Highland coronach is shouted by a 'Macfadyane,' and kindles a reckless fury in the breasts of the dancers—this last touch being a cut at the Celtic hordes which ever and anon poured over the fertile plains of the Lowlands. The portraits of 'Anger,' 'Envy,' and 'Lust,' in particular, are painted with great vigour and realistic force. The concluding stanza, as Warton states, is exclusively a satire on the Highlanders. After the Dance of

the Seven Sins is over, Mahoun or Mahomet, whose name is always accepted in early English literature, and in particular in ballad minstrelsy, as a synonym for the devil, expresses a desire to see a Highland pageant. One of the fiends is sent again to summon Macfadyane. As soon as the latter commenced his coronach, immediately he gathered round him a prodigious crowd of Celts, who took up great room in hell. These 'worthies' began to chatter in their own language, and the devil is so stunned with the horrid din that he casts them down to his deepest abyss and smothers them with smoke. The closing pictures of the 'Highland pageant' are thus represented in this wonderful satire—

'Then the foul monster, Gluttony,
Of wame insatiable and greedy,
To dance he did him dress:
Him followed many a foul drunkart,
With can and collop, cup and quart,
In surfeit and excess.
Full many a waistless wally-drag,[1]
With wames unwieldable furth did wag
In grease that did increase.
"Drunk," aye they cried, with many a gape,
The fiends gave them hot lead to laip,[2]
Their leveray[3] was not less.
No minstrels played to them: nor doubt
That gleemen there were shutten out,
By day and eik by night:
Except a minstrel that slew a man,
So to his heritage he wan,
Entering by bill of right.
Then cried Mahoun for a Highland padyane,[4]
Strait ran a fiend to fetch Makfadyane
Far northwest in a nook,

---

[1] A silly, useless person. [2] Lap. [3] Reward. [4] Pageant.

When he the coronach did shout
Then Gaels so gathered him about
  In hell great room they took.
These termagants, with tag and tatter,
Full loud in Ersche[1] began to clatter,
And roup like raven and rook.
The Devil so deived[2] was with their yell,
That in the deepest pot of hell,
  He smothered them with smoke.'

Only one more extract shall we cite, and that is from the wonderful satire *The Devil's Inquest.* In a dream the poet sees the 'foul fiend' passing to and fro, and everywhere finding his own. All classes of men whom he accosts swear by the most holy oaths that they speak the truth, yet they all lie and cheat. The different characters, says Ross, are set before us with that picturesque terseness of touch in which Dunbar excelled all his predecessors except Chaucer. Here are one or two stanzas as an example—

'A goldsmith said, the gold is so fine
That all the workmanship I tine.
  The fiend receive me if I lie.
Think on, quoth the Devil, that thou art mine,
  Renounce thy God and come to me.

A tailor said, in all the town
Be there a better well made gown,
  I give me to the fiend all free.
Gramery, tailor, said Mahoun,
  Renounce thy God and come to me.

A baker said, I forsake God
And all His works, even and odd,
  If fairer bread there needs to be.

---

[1] Gaelic. [2] Deafened.

The Devil laughed, and on him could nod,
  Renounce thy God and come to me.

By God's blood, quoth the tavernier,
There is such wine in my celleir,
  Has never come in this countrie.
Tut, quoth the Devil, thou sells owre dear,
  Renounce thy God and come to me.'

CHAPTER X

DUNBAR AS A LOVE-POET AND ELEGIST

DUNBAR'S powers as a writer of amatory verse were of a high order. Whether or not we believe the charge, that the only experience he ever enjoyed of love was of an illicit character, certain it is that the Court Laureate was not deficient in the department of his art which to many of the courtiers, and certainly to the King, presented itself as the chief end of poesy. With such sentiments current in the Court, the fact is not without its own significance that erotic poetry should form a part so infinitesimal of Dunbar's work. Albeit of a nature in earlier years so instinct with gaiety and fun, loving life for the very joy of living, the fact would have been more than remarkable if he had passed from the cradle to the grave heart-whole. But, as has been already indicated, his love for the beautiful Mrs. Musgrave, or Lady Musgrave, as she would be termed to-day, speedily became of a very Platonic character. From the internal evidence of the three or four pieces which constitute the amatory verse of William Dunbar, I am inclined to think, with Schipper and Sheriff Mackay,[1] that the connection between them was in every respect innocent. There are always persons in this world whose

[1] Sheriff Mackay's *Introduction*.

imaginations seem to be in a chronic state of 'cesspoolism,' if the word will be pardoned. On the conduct of others they always put the very worst construction, and as though their own motives were perpetually savouring of the moral sewer-pipe, they accredit other people with actions of which they had no more thought than a babe unborn. Dunbar's freedom of speech, due to the inherent coarseness of his age, the somewhat liberal licence he allows himself in the description of the notorious immoralities of his age, united to the fact that, in place of lashing the vice with a whip of scorpions, he pokes genial fun at the peccadilloes, rallies the King gaily over his pre-nuptial amours, as in *The Tod and the Lamb*, and is not ashamed to portray in broad colours the rustic love-making that finds representation in *A Brash of Wooing*, have been urged against him as proof positive of his immoral life. It has gained him a worse name than he deserves. He describes in those early poems what was the custom of the Court in the days of James's bachelorhood, but we have not a tittle of evidence to prove that the poet was personally guilty of the slightest indiscretion that might cast disgrace on his cloth. The coarseness of the age and the licence of its manners cannot be alleged as faults against Dunbar; while, had he been more squeamish and queasy-stomached about calling a spade a spade, he would not have come down to posterity as that unrivalled portrayer of contemporary men and manners which he undoubtedly was. Do not let us therefore condemn Dunbar for encouraging immorality, when in reality he was doing nothing more than painting faithfully the manners of the Augustan age in Scots literature!

But to return to Dunbar's amatory poetry. In a chronological order, the poem *To a Lady*, and commencing 'Sweet rose of virtue and of gentleness,' marks the first mention made of the tender passion. That he did not realise then how hopeless was his passion is evident. He speaks of her as 'merciless,' but such a word must not be conceived to carry with it the least suggestion of dishonour in any of the favours he hoped to receive from his lady-love. Dante towards his Beatrice, Petrarch towards Laura, were not more content with a look, a smile, or a word of thanks, than was William Dunbar to his lady-love, in whose honour he writes those charming odes in which he immortalises the perfections of the lady of his heart. The unfamiliarity of the language to many will detract from the supreme delight in store for those who possess the *Sesamé* of acquaintance with it. The latter then will be able to corroborate my criticisms, when I say that these love-poems are only excelled in Scots literature by Robert Burns's songs.[1] There is visible in them a tender grace, an exquisite sympathy with the object of his affection, a sweetness of rhythmical flow, and an artistic deftness in technical craftsmanship, that stamp the poems as almost *sui generis*. With the best of the Elizabethans we can claim kinship for him, and some of Thomas Watson's finest pieces in the *Hecatompathia* are more than rivalled by these noble odes. To Watson's eleventh sonnet,[2]

> 'O golden bird and Phœnix of our age,
> Whose swete records and more than earthly voice,'

---

[1] See Mr. Logie Robertson on this subject in his excellent paper 'Dunbar and Burns.'

[2] Vide *Poems of Thomas Watson* (1552-1597), in the Arber Reprints.

I consider Dunbar's ode to his mistress as bearing a close affinity. The following is the poem in full—

> 'Sweet Rose of virtue and of gentleness,
> Delightsome lily of every lustiness,
> Richest in bounty and in beauty clear,
> And every virtue that is held most deir,
> Except only that ye are merciless.
> Into your garth this day I did pursue:
> There saw I flowers that fresh were of hue,
> Both white and red most lusty to be seen,
> And wholesome herbs upon their stalks so green;
> Yet leaf nor flower found I none of rue.
> I doubt that March, with his cold blasts so keen,
> Has slain this gentle herb, that I do mean:
> Whose piteous death does to my heart such pain
> That I would fain go plant his root again,
> So comforting his leaves to me have been.'[1]

The ode which in point of time comes next bears internal evidence that Dunbar realised the fact that his fair charmer was not prepared to accord him even so much as a look whereon his love-sick heart might feed. Yet his feelings were under such admirable control that, while he complains of her pitilessness, he nevertheless remarks that he would not have her other than she is. Nobler tribute to pure sweet womanhood has never been paid than in those beautiful lines in the poem which opens—

> 'My heart's tresoúr and sweet assured foe.'

The second stanza is undoubtedly one of the finest Dunbar ever penned—

> 'Have mercy, love, have mercy, lady bright,
> What have I wrought against your womanheid
> That you should murder me, a sackless wight

[1] Cf. the last stanza of Burns's *Mary Morison*.

> Trespassing on you nor in word nor deed,
> That ye consent thereto, O God forbid.
> Leave cruelty and save your man for shame,
> Or through the world quite losëd is your name.'

The last of the pieces in which Dunbar deals with the passion of love is that entitled *Inconstancy of Love.* In it the great poet, while recognising the hopelessness of his passion, yet declares at the same time that were Mistress Musgrave to give him encouragement the slightest she would lower herself even in his estimation who suffered by what he called her cruelty. It is a charming little lyric, with much of the daintiness of Suckling and Herrick visible in it, united to a vigour and swiftness of thought to which the Cavalier poets were strangers. Rather of some of the Elizabethan odes does it savour, particularly of some of Lyly's and Fletcher's. The poem runs as follows—

> 'Who will behold of love the chance,
> With sweet deceiving countenance,
> In whose fair dissimulance
> May none assure :
> What is begun with inconstance
> And ends not but in variance
> She holdeth with continuance
> No serviture.
>
> Discretion and considerance,
> Are both out of her governance ;
> Wherefore of it the short pleasance
> May not endure.
> She is so new of acquaintance,
> The old goes from rememberance,
> Thus I give o'er the observance
> Of love's sweet[1] cure.

[1] This is one of Brandl's conjectural emendations. Schipper reads 'of love's cure.'

It is a point of ignorance,
To love in such distemperance,
Since time misspendit may avance
No creäture.
In love to keep allegiance,
It were as nice[1] an ordinance,
As though one bid a dead man dance,
In sepulture.'

These fragments render one's regret all the more poignant that our poet did not write more amatory verses, or, if he did so, that more of it has not come down to our days. What we have only whets our appetite for more. As a love-poet, then, Dunbar stands high, not by any means in the highest place, but so far forward in the great Temple of Poesy as to render his work eminently worthy of attention by every student of the erotic verse of our literature.

But as an elegist Dunbar once more steps into a supreme place. Elegiac poetry demands for its successful execution qualities of genius so opposite in character, and yet, at the same time, so subtly complementary to one another in the production of a great imaginative creation, that the individuals are few indeed who have taken a high place in this form of composition. With the exception of the *Bion* of Moschus, the *Lycidas* of Milton, the *Adonais* of Shelley, the *In Memoriam* of Tennyson, the *Thyrsis* of Arnold, and the *Ave atque Vale* of Swinburne, we have really no great elegiac strains in the history of the literature of the world. To these I would add Dunbar's *Lament for the Makars*. To a noble elevation of sentiment, to a pathos that is all the more

[1] 'Nice' here takes its primitive meaning of foolish or silly.

profound because seemingly so unpremeditated, there is united a stately march of rhythm that is suggestive of the muffled music at some great military funeral, and a choice dignity yet severity of diction that is eminently in keeping with the nature of the theme. With Sheriff Mackay[1] I warmly agree when he remarks, with his usual penetration and cultured critical instinct, that an oration of Bossuet or Massillon, of Taylor or South, with its splendours of pulpit eloquence, brings less intimately home to us the lessons of death. To the other great elegy which came from the same pen, that upon the *Death of Bernard Stewart, Lord of Aubigny*, the same criticism applies, though in a modified form. The latter poem has not the same elevation as the *Lament*, it does not touch the same high-water mark of pure pathos and supreme sympathy with suffering. Great though it is, and of a greatness unapproached by any of the other elegies in his own country's literature, it will never evoke the same profound sense of regret, the same depth of feeling, as the other. The *Lament for the Makars*[2] commences as follows—

> 'I that in health was and gladness,
> Am troubled now with great sickness,
> Enfeebled wlth infirmity.
> *Timor mortis conturbat me.*
>
> Our pleasure here is all vain glory,
> This false world is but transitory,
> The flesh is britle, the fiend is slee.[3]
> *Timor mortis conturbat me.*

[1] *Introduction* to the Poems of Dunbar.

[2] Makars is the old word for poets; as a poet—derived from the Greek *poio* to do—implied one who did or made something, so the Scots term by analogy expresses the same idea.

[3] Cunning.

The state of man doth change and vary,
Now sound, now sick, now blyth, now sary,[1]
Now dancing merry, now "like to dee,"
Timor mortis conturbat me.

No state on earth here stands sicker,
As with the wind waves the wicker,[2]
So waves this world's vanity.
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Unto the Death go all estates,
Princes, Prelates, and Potestates,
Both rich and poor of all degree.
Timor mortis conturbat me.

The poet then proceeds to name the various classes that have to bow to death, and also those of the tuneful poetic choir of which he was then the only one surviving, with the exception of Kennedy, who lay at death's door. Ross comments on the omission of the name of James I., to which I would add that of Gavin Douglas, though regarding the latter the poet might argue that he could not be included, seeing he was not dead but in excellent health. The solemn and ever-recurring burden of the poem produces a profound effect upon the mind, which the pathetic and affecting conclusion tends to deepen. The *Lament for the Makars* is one of those imperishable poems which every century will only tend to make more widely popular.

The *Elegy on the Death of Bernard Stewart, Lord of Aubigny*, is likewise a piece that deserves to be more generally known. Its merits will appear on perusal. I cite a stanza or two of it—

[1] Sorry. [2] 'Wicker' means reeds.

'Complain should every noble valiant knight,
The death of him that doughty was in deed;
That many a foe in field has put to flight,
In weighty wars, by wisdom and manhead:
To the Turk sea all lands did his name dread,
Whose force all France in fame did magnifie,
Of so high price shall none his place posseid,[1]
For he is gone, the Flower of Chivalrie.

O duleful death! O dragon dolorous,
What hast thou done to dulefullie devour,
The prince of knighthood, noble and chivalrous,
The wit of wars, of arms and honour;
The top of courage, the strength of arms in stour,
The fame of France, the fame of Lombardy,
The choice of chieftains, awful in armoúr,
The charbúckell[2] chief of every chivalry.'

Space will not permit of further citation, anxious though I am to give it. Sufficient, however, has been adduced in the way of example to prove my contention that in elegy, as in satire and allegorical composition, Dunbar's place in English literature is by prescriptive right to be enrolled among the very highest masters of the craft.

[1] Possess. [2] The carbuncle, esteemed then of great value.

CHAPTER XIII

DUNBAR AS A PAINTER OF CONTEMPORARY MANNERS—AS A DIDACTIC OR RELIGIOUS POET—CONCLUSION

And now, before bringing this little sketch to a conclusion, I would like to add a single word upon Dunbar's powers as a painter of contemporary manners. From the work of Pitscottie and other early Scots chroniclers we are enabled to form a very exact and fair estimate as to whether Dunbar is to be regarded as a faithful and veracious mirror of the spirit of his time. The great office of the poet, as of the dramatist, is to hold the mirror up to nature, to reflect in his verse the most delicate *nuances* as well as the most startling colours of the age wherein he lived. Valuable indeed it is to the antiquary, to the historian, and to the artist to have the spirit of the age portrayed with such matchless truth as it exists for us in the verse of Dunbar. As a painter of contemporary manners, then, his powers were of the noblest order. He had all the vividness of a Callot, united to the broad humour of a Teniers, and the minute touch of a Meissonier. To Dunbar every historian from Drummond to Burton, as well as every Scots artist from Jameson to our own immortal Sir Noel Paton, has repaired for information regarding the humours of the age in the reign of the greatest of the

Stuarts. As Tytler[1] very pithily puts it, the whole life of James and his Court, of the Edinburgh of the sixteenth century, and the Scotland of the same period, flash back once more upon us from the literary mirror of this great artist. His poems enable us to accompany the King to his chapel-royal at Stirling; we see the boys of the choir bending down to remove his spurs, and to receive their accustomed largesse; we follow James in his progresses through his royal burghs, and listen to the thanks of the guidwife of the King's lodging as the generous monarch bestows his gratuity on her; we climb the romantic crag on which St. Anthony's Chapel is situated and almost hear his confession; we can follow him into his study, and find him adding to the scanty library which was all the times permitted even to a king, the works of Quintilian and Virgil, and the 'Sangbuiks' in which he took such delight; his shooting at the butts with his nobles; his bandying jokes with his artillerymen; his issuing to the chase or the tournament from his royal castles of Stirling or Falkland, surrounded by a cavalcade of noble knights and beautiful damsels; his presence at the christening of the Earl of Buchan's son, and the gold piece which he drops into the caudle—all are conjured up before us, as by the wand of potent magician, in the pages of these wonderfully varied poems. So realistic are the pictures, so graphically portrayed are the sayings and doings of the characters, that we lose sight of our prosaic present altogether, and seem transported back into that romantic time, rose-tinted and fascinating with all the glories of the past, which lives in

[1] Tytler's *Lives of Scottish Worthies.*

the verse of William Dunbar. The reader who studies with care *Dunbar's Dirge to the King*, *Tidings from the Session*, *The Devil's Inquest*, *To the Merchants of Edinburgh*, *The Joust between the Tailor and the Soutar*, *The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy*—the last named of which I have said nothing in my poetical criticisms, because it is only valuable from a biographical and historic point of view,—*The Testament of Mr. Andro Kennedy*, *The Queen's Reception at Aberdeen*, and other poems of a kindred nature, will have thereby gained an insight into the manners of the Scotland of the sixteenth century obtainable in no other way. To substantiate a statement so sweeping, I trust I shall not be thought tedious if I cite a few lines from Dunbar's remarkable poem, the *Remonstrance to the King*, upon which I have already drawn some pages back.

The poet is speaking of the crowd of needy adventurers that throng the Court.

> 'Kirkmen, courtmen, and craftsmen fine,
> Doctors in jure and medicyne:
> Divinours, rhetours, and philosophours:
> Astrologists, artists, and Oratours:
> Men of armes and valiant Knights:
> And mony other goodly wights:
> Musicians, minstrels, and merry singers,
> Chevalouris, callandaris, and flingars,
> Cunyeours, carvours, and carpenters,
> Buildars of barks and ballingars,
> Masouns, lying upon the land,
> And ship wrights hewing upon the strand,
> Glasing wrights, goldsmiths, and lapidaris,
> Printers, paintours, and potingaris.'

All these mingle and elbow and jostle each other at

the King's motley Court in order to obtain an audience with the man whose smile made or marred them. Oh, it was a strange rout! but how it lives and moves and has its being in the pages of this wonderful literary artist!

Finally, of Dunbar as a didactic or religious poet I should like to say a word. His work in this department is full of significance to the student of Scots literature. The poems falling under this category evince an exalted spiritual enthusiasm, a noble belief in all the great Christian verities, with a passionate assertion of the proposition that religion is not a thing of rites and ceremonies, but a relation established between man and his Maker. Crashaw has risen to no more exalted height of spiritual fervour than appears in his pieces on the *Nativity and Passion of Christ*: while all the calm, devotional elevation of Herbert, the purity and incisiveness of Vaughan, and the vigorous thought of Quarles appear in such poems as *Love Earthly and Divine*, *The Manner of Passing to Confession*, *The Table of Confession*, *The Resurrection of Christ*, and the two *Ballads on Our Lady*. The mind that could rise to such a soaring altitude of spiritual enthusiasm as is evinced in the following lines must have been deeply imbued with true religious feeling—

> 'Though I have naught thy precious feet to kiss,
> As had the Madelene when she did mercy crave,
> I shall as she weep tears for mine amiss,
> And every morrow seek thee at thy grave:
> Therefore forgive me as Thou her forgave;
> That seest my heart as hers is penitent,
> That precious body ere that I receave,
> I cry Thee mercy and leisure to repent.

> 'To make me, Jesu, on Thee for to remember,
> I ask Thy Passioun in me so to abound;
> While naught of me unmenyeit be ane member,[1]
> But feeling woe with Thee in every wound,
> And every stroke make through my heart a stound
> That ever did asting Thy fair flesh innocent,
> So that no part be of my body sound,
> But cry Thee mercy and leisure to repent.'

Dunbar was a careful metrical craftsman. To any one who reads his works with attention the conviction is powerfully driven home that a more fastidious furbisher of his work after its first rough execution has rarely been known in Scots literature. Though his spontaneity and facility were quite equal to that of Burns and Scott, he was a much more careful artist than either of them. He was fond of experimenting in various measures, and there is scarcely a metrical form among those that are better known among scholars which Dunbar did not essay. That he was equally successful in all cannot be asserted, but in most of them, and particularly in those which were the popular measures of the day, he exhibits a technical perfection and an artistic grace rare indeed in his age.

We have already noted that in some respects he is surpassed by his rival Kennedy in mellifluous sweetness and rhythmic music. But what Dunbar might lack in polish as compared with his friend and rival, he more than redeemed by his vigour and robust force. This is at once visible when we compare, side by side, such poems as Kennedy's *Passion of Christ* and Dunbar's pieces on the same theme, or on *The Nativity* or his *Ballad of Our Lady*. Kennedy has sweetness with grace,

[1] 'While naught of me be untouched by Thy anguish.'

Dunbar has both sweetness and grace, with intellectual force superadded.

Lastly, Dunbar's diction is eminently worthy of study. As has been previously remarked, it is notable for its pure Anglo-Saxon foundation. Though he uses many Latinised forms, and also several that exhibit traces of that influence exercised on the style of our sixteenth-century Scots writers by their intimate intercourse with France, still Dunbar generally prefers a Saxon to a Latin or Gallic derivative, where the first named will express his meaning with equal precision and force. His vocabulary, as a whole, is rich, and his command over the resources of the language quite as imperial as that of Chaucer. This fact is most apparent in his *Thistle and the Rose* and in *The Golden Targe*.

Such then was William Dunbar, who with the mighty ploughman-poet of Ayr and 'the last and greatest of the minstrels' form the supreme trio of Scottish poets. Great as compared with his contemporaries, he becomes greater when we estimate his rank by the work of the other singers both of his own century and those that succeed. He is verily a giant in an age of pigmies. By Edinburgh citizens also Dunbar has every claim to be regarded as one of the oldest, if not the oldest, of that glorious family of sons who loved the 'romantic town' with a veneration that partook somewhat of the nature of a religious worship. Though Dunbar was not a native of the city, though his experiences of his life within her walls were not altogether of the pleasantest character,

though he suffered the continual pinch of poverty, being oppressed with what was to a courtier the direst of all diseases, atrophy of the purse, still his happiness throughout these years was unquestionable. The epithets employed in *Dunbar's Dirge to the King at Stirling* were not wholly the result of the artistic exigencies of the case, but to some extent at least expressed his own personal feelings. If Edinburgh were Paradise, as he states, and Stirling its antipodes, Dunbar testified to his desire to remain in Paradise by clinging with a devotion that was both patriotic and pathetic to the city of his adoption. But, alas! she repaid his love by over two centuries of neglect. Only with the advent of the present century, and the awakening of a genuine patriotic enthusiasm among her sons, has his name and fame been disinterred by the fond admiration of Sir Walter Scott, David Laing, Hill Burton, Æneas Mackay, and, earliest of all, Lord Hailes. Among the memorials raised to commemorate the men who lived and loved and laboured in the queen city of the Forth, not the least noble tribute is due by right prescriptive to him who was Scotland's earliest poet, who, in the truest sense of the word, was national, and who, by the indefeasible passport of his supreme genius, has an indisputable title, in the apostolic succession of British poetry, to that place between Chaucer and Spenser —that place which can only be claimed by one whose genius was co-ordinate with theirs.

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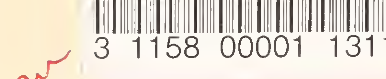
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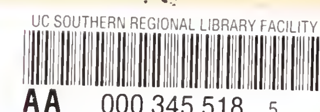
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