

of moral play and miracle, having discarded the stiff, artificial rules of the classic stage, was now ready formed for the hands of its masters. The popularity it possessed and the vast influence it wielded, attracted and engrossed the great poetical genius of the land. The dramatic writings of this time not only rise superior to those of every other period in English history, but they excel those of any other country and of any other age. The writers of the Greek drama, long held up as models, celebrated, and justly celebrated, for the beauty of their language, for their vigor and grasp of thought, and for the originality of their genius, are forgotten when the name of Shakespeare is heard. Nor is Shakespeare the only great dramatist of this period. His inspired thoughts so tower above those of other writers:—

“Like seigniors and rich burgers of the flood,
Or, as it were, the pageants of the sea
Do over-peer the petty traffickers.”

that our eyes, dazzled by his brilliancy, do not recognize the beauties of his contemporaries. Yet these were no common men. In another country or in any other time, they would have been looked upon as though the genius of the drama were in them personified.

Of these, passing over the names of Sackville, John Lilly, of Peele, of Green, Massinger, of Heywood, of Shirley, of Marston, and many others, not because they are unworthy to be remembered, but because there is not space in this sketch for more than a bare reference to them, I would mention Marlowe, author of *Edward II.*, *Dr. Faustus* and other splendid tragedies.

In tragedy, Marlowe came nearer Shakespeare than has any other writer. He was cut off in early manhood, in a drunken brawl. Had he lived till his powers were matured, or had he given his noble intellect fair play, he would, as a tragedian, have proved himself a formidable rival even to the author of “*MacBeth*.” Of Marlowe’s