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college education. His work shows thorough familiarity with the classics, and although some of his translations are far from being correct, still the degree of B.A., taken in 1583, and that of M.A., in 1587, were probably the reward of faithful study. Even in his college days he had turned his eyes to the stage. The time needed a great original mind, and the man was present in the person of Kit Marlowe. The upholders of the Classical Drama with such an able advocate as Sidney at their head, sought to lead the English mind to an appreciation of the Drama of the Unities; while such wits as Robert Greene and George Peele, to please the mob, broke away from its severe art altogether, and crowded the stage with fantastic scenes and fantastic figures that spoke in a rhyming verse obnoxious to the classical ear. As Symonds points out, in his able work on this period, Marlowe arose to amalgamate these two forces into a species of art at once more original and stronger than either of the forms that were its parents. Unrhyming verse he saw to be more natural for the presentation of life than the rude rhymes of the professional dramatists of his time; but he further saw that the dramatic unities of Time and Place could be abolished to advantage, and so he accepted the freedom of the Romantic situation, and at the same time gave his verse a classical strength by lopping off the cumbersome rhyme of the age.

The prologue to his first great play, "Tamburlaine," written while he was at college, shows that the boy of less than twenty-four knew that he had genius much above his fellows, and that the world would eagerly welcome his new numbers.

"From jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threatening the world with high astounding terms,
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
View but his picture in this tragic glass,
And then applaud his fortunes as you please."

The English world was not slow to recognize the beauty of the "New Drama," and Tamburlaine became the play of the hour, and from its appearance till the appearance of Edward II., Marlowe was the first playwright in England.

It is possible that, like Shakespeare, he was for a time on the stage. A ballad entitled "The Atheist's Tragedie" says:

"He had alsoe a player beene
Upon the Curtaine-stage."

But if it were so, it was for but a short time. Like his fellows his life was a lewd one. He was a rival of Greene and Peele, not only in literature, but in their vices as well. However, the fact that from the appearance of Tamburlaine to the creation of Edward II., we find continuous progress in his art, greater power in grasping situations, more profound and lofty thought, keener insight into character, and traces of assiduous study, we are inclined to think that his dissipation was spasmodic.—impulsive fits of riotousness, such as clouded the life of the man most like him in modern literature—Byron.

The charge of atheism has been so emphasized against him that we are too

apt to think of him as Marlowe, the Elizabethan Atheist. If we study his works carefully, and rest our opinion on them, rather than on the utterances of the drunkard Greene, or the felon, Bame, we will find but little ground for dogmatism on this point, and at the most can only infer that he had emancipated himself from the theology of his age, and was neither atheist nor Christian—like many another, an atheist in life and action, but a theist in his better moments.—and a theist far in advance of his age. Place Bame's charges under examination, and they can be credited by no discerning mind. No doubt, like many another impulsive young man, he gave vent to extravagant utterances about the Deity. Again, too, when under the influence of liquor, atheistical expressions may have escaped him. As J. M. Barrie strikingly puts it: "For when Kit is drunk he is an infidel."

Bame, among his "Opinions of Christopher Marlowe," has the following: "That yf ther be any God or good Religion, then it is the Papistes, because the service of God is performed with more ceremonyes, as elevacion of the masse, organs, singinge men, shaven crowns, etc. That all Protestantes ar hypocriticall Asses."

Against this should be placed the "Massacre of Paris," a drama written in his latter years. This drama is entirely in sympathy with the Protestants of France, and holds up with abhorrence, bordering on fanaticism, the character of Gulse and the Roman Catholic party. It gives a flat contradiction to Bame's assertions made after Marlowe's death. It may be objected that Marlowe was a dramatist, and was working as an artist, and not giving his own beliefs in this play. But Marlowe was unlike Shakespeare in this respect: his plays are reflections of himself. He was as subjective as Byron. Tamburlaine, Mortimer, Barabbas, Faustus, all depict his own life; and if we had no other material we could build up the character of the man from his creations.

If we examine Faustus carefully we will find that Marlowe was but a lip-atheist. Mephistophilis says:

"For when we hear one rack the name
of God,
Abjure the Scriptures and his Saviour,
Christ,
We fly, in hope to get his glorious soul;
Nor will we come, unless he use such means
Whereby he is in danger to be damn'd."

Here Marlowe has grasped the doctrine of free-will with a force that is only surpassed by his contemporary, Shakespeare, in Macbeth. He sees that the powers of evil can only work when the soul they would attack is willing to admit them. The moral beauty of Macbeth hinges on the strength with which Shakespeare has worked out the same idea. The witches had no power over Banquo's sturdy soul; but over Macbeth, who had, even when he met them, murder in his heart, their power becomes absolute.

Again, Mephistophilis declares:

"Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.
Thinkst thou that I, who saw the face
of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand
hells,
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?"

The material hell, to the mind of Marlowe or Shakespeare, must have seemed utter nonsense; but the reality of the Infinite,

no matter what their lives might be, was too evident to be denied by such men in their truest and best moments. And Marlowe, in this passage, has grasped the truth of the words "He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son hath not life." Hell or Heaven to these men were not things of the future, and while mad passion plunged Marlowe's soul into a hell upon earth, and shut him out from the presence of God, no man knew his position better than he did himself.

Faustus, like Marlowe, was no coward, but with "manly fortitude" dares all. To gain his end he would "jump the life to come," and even with the warning that Mephistophilis had given him he sells his soul to Lucifer. He believes, but would satisfy his ambition, no matter what the cost may be. The day of reckoning comes, and the awful cry, "See, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament," has a sincerity and strength that should stamp Marlowe as believing the thought of it when he penned it. This line is worthy of careful thought. If we were to examine English blank verse it would be difficult to find, even in Shakespeare, a single line of greater power. What other art could have produced the same feelings? Sculpture, music, painting, might struggle in vain to give the tragic beauty of this sinewy verse. Not only is the drama theistic in its spirit, but the chorus at the close, beginning:

"Cut is the branch that might have
grown full straight"

shows the limited human in contrast with the Infinite, and would have the "wise and prudent" reverence the power that "maketh for righteousness."

In Marlowe's latest and ablest work we have an utterance by Edward II., which is so sincere that we cannot leave this topic without quoting it.

"Now, sweet God in heaven,
Make me despise this transitory pomp,
And sit for aye enthroned in heaven!"

Compare this with Wolsey's:

"Had I but served my God with half
the zeal
I served my king, He would not in
mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies,"

and any candid reader will admit that Shakespeare and Marlowe on worldliness and transitory pomp are at one, and that they believed that the highest life was not that of the flesh, but of the spirit.

In Marlowe, however, these are but gleams of a spiritual life that never shone with such a full blaze of poetic insight as we find in almost any of Shakespeare's plays; but they go to show that Marlowe was no dogmatic atheist. This has been dwelt on at some length, as many students turn from him without examining his work carefully, thinking that but little that is good could be found in Marlowe, "the atheist," "Marlowe, the drunkard, slain in a tavern brawl."

Whatever his life may have been, English literature owes him an incalculable debt. He was pioneer to Shakespeare. He had a rough road to travel—a host of "rhyming mother-wits" to conquer.—burlesque and farce to vanquish; and he did his work so ably that, so far as form was concerned, he left Shakespeare nothing to discover.

Blank verse had been tried before him