82/09
R3
5

Portrait Edition

English Men of Letters

EDITED BY

JOHN MORLEY

VII.

SCOTT. By Richard H. Hutton

DICKENS. By Adolphus William Ward

SPENSER. By R. W. Church, Dean of St. Paul's

GEORGE N. MORANG & COMPANY
(Limited)
Toronto, Canada
1900

ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS.

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY.

Portrait Edition.

I.	IV.	VII.	X.
MILTON.	BENTLEY.	SCOTT.	COLERIDGE.
GIBBON.	COWPER.	DICKENS.	WORDSWORTH.
SHELLEY.	LANDOR.	SPENSER.	BURNS.
II.	V.	VIII.	XI.
SOUTHEY.	BURKE.	STERNE.	LOCKE.
BYRON.	MACAULAY.	SWIFT.	GOLDSMITH.
DEFOE.	FIELDING.	HUME.	GRAY.
III.	VI.	IX.	XII.
DRYDEN.	BUNYAN.	CHAUCER.	THACKERAY.
POPE	JOHNSON.	LAMB.	ADDISON.
SIDNEY.	BACON.	DE QUINCEY.	SHERIDAN.

XIII.

KEATS. HAWTHORNE. CARLYLE.

Copyright, 1894, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

SCOTT

BY

RICHARD H. HUTTON

PREFATORY NOTE.

It will be observed that the greater part of this little book has been taken in one form or other from Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, in ten volumes. No introduction to Scott would be worth much in which that course was not followed. Indeed, excepting Sir Walter's own writings, there is hardly any other great source of information about him; and that is so full, that hardly anything needful to illustrate the subject of Scott's life remains untouched. As regards the only matters of controversy,—Scott's relations to the Ballantynes, I have taken care to check Mr. Lockhart's statements by reading those of the representatives of the Ballantyne brothers; but with this exception, Sir Walter's own works and Lockhart's life of him are the great authorities concerning his character and his story.

Just ten years ago Mr. Gladstone, in expressing to the late Mr. Hope Scott the great delight which the perusal of Lockhart's life of Sir Walter had given him, wrote, "I may be wrong, but I am vaguely under the impression that it has never had a really wide circulation. If so, it is the saddest pity, and I should greatly like (without any censure on its present length) to see published an abbreviation of it." Mr. Gladstone did not then know that as long ago as 1848 Mr. Lockhart did

himself prepare such an abbreviation, in which the original eighty-four chapters were compressed into eighteen, —though the abbreviation contained additions as well as compressions. But even this abridgment is itself a bulky volume of 800 pages, containing, I should think, considerably more than a third of the reading in the original ten volumes, and is not, therefore, very likely to be preferred to the completer work. In some respects I hope that this introduction may supply, better than that bulky abbreviation, what Mr. Gladstone probably meant to suggest,—some slight miniature taken from the great picture with care enough to tempt on those who look on it to the study of the fuller life, as well as of that image of Sir Walter which is impressed by his own hand upon his works.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

ANCESTRY, PARENTAGE, AND CHILDHOOD 1

CHAPTER II.

YOUTH—CHOICE OF A PROFESSION 18

CHAPTER III.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE 30

CHAPTER IV.

EARLIEST POETRY AND BORDER MINSTRELSY 36

CHAPTER V.

SCOTT'S MATURER POEMS 44

CHAPTER VI.

COMPANIONS AND FRIENDS 60

CHAPTER VII.

FIRST COUNTRY HOMES 69

CHAPTER VIII.

REMOVAL TO ABBOTSFORD, AND LIFE THERE 75

CHAPTER IX.

PAGE
SCOTT'S PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BALLANTYNES . . . 84

CHAPTER X.

THE WAVERLEY NOVELS 94

CHAPTER XI.

SCOTT'S MORALITY AND RELIGION 122

CHAPTER XII.

DISTRACTIONS AND AMUSEMENTS AT ABBOTSFORD 128

CHAPTER XIII.

SCOTT AND GEORGE IV. 134

CHAPTER XIV.

SCOTT AS A POLITICIAN 139

CHAPTER XV.

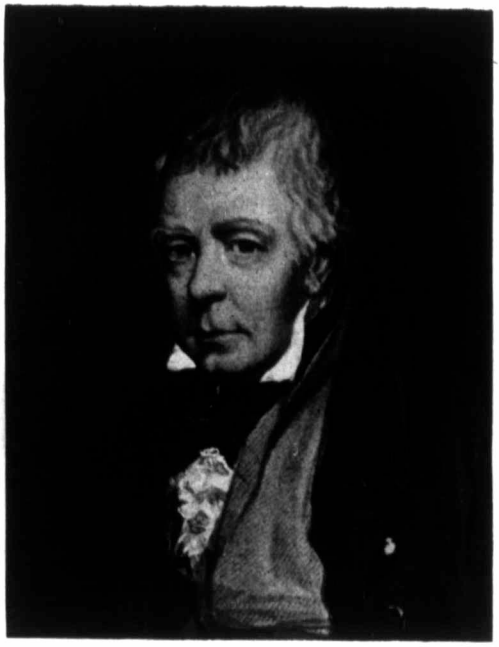
SCOTT IN ADVERSITY 148

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST YEAR 162

CHAPTER XVII.

THE END OF THE STRUGGLE 172



Sir W
riding
a Wri
first o
fessio
genera
rated
in Bo
Auld
of El
lands,
hange
uglies
mouth
amon
some
propo
lady i
which

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

CHAPTER I.

ANCESTRY, PARENTAGE, AND CHILDHOOD.

SIR WALTER SCOTT was the first literary man of a great riding, sporting, and fighting clan. Indeed, his father—a Writer to the Signet, or Edinburgh solicitor—was the first of his race to adopt a town life and a sedentary profession. Sir Walter was the lineal descendant—six generations removed—of that Walter Scott commemorated in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, who is known in Border history and legend as Auld Wat of Harden. Auld Wat's son William, captured by Sir Gideon Murray, of Elibank, during a raid of the Scotts on Sir Gideon's lands, was, as tradition says, given his choice between being hanged on Sir Gideon's private gallows, and marrying the ugliest of Sir Gideon's three ugly daughters, Meikle-mouthed Meg, reputed as carrying off the prize of ugliness among the women of four counties. Sir William was a handsome man. He took three days to consider the alternative proposed to him, but chose life with the large-mouthed lady in the end; and found her, according to the tradition which the poet, her descendant, has transmitted, an excel-

lent wife, with a fine talent for pickling the beef which her husband stole from the herds of his foes. Meikle-mouthed Meg transmitted a distinct trace of her large mouth to all her descendants, and not least to him who was to use his "meikle" mouth to best advantage as the spokesman of his race. Rather more than half-way between Auld Wat of Harden's times—i. e., the middle of the sixteenth century—and those of Sir Walter Scott, poet and novelist, lived Sir Walter's great-grandfather, Walter Scott generally known in Teviotdale by the surname of Beardie, because he would never cut his beard after the banishment of the Stuarts, and who took arms in their cause and lost by his intrigues on their behalf almost all that he had, besides running the greatest risk of being hanged as a traitor. This was the ancestor of whom Sir Walter speaks in the introduction to the last canto of *Marmion*:—

> "And thus my Christmas still I hold,
> Where my great grandsire came of old,
> With amber beard and flaxen hair,
> And reverend apostolic air,—
> The feast and holy tide to share,
> And mix sobriety with wine,
> And honest mirth with thoughts divine;
> Small thought was his in after time
> E'er to be hitch'd into a rhyme,
> The simple sire could only boast
> That he was loyal to his cost;
> The banish'd race of kings revered,
> And lost his land—but kept his beard."

Sir Walter inherited from Beardie that sentimental Stuart bias which his better judgment condemned, but which seemed to be rather part of his blood than of his mind. And most useful to him this sentiment un

doubtedly was in helping him to restore the mould and fashion of the past. Beardie's second son was Sir Walter's grandfather, and to him he owed not only his first childish experience of the delights of country life, but also,—in his own estimation at least,—that risky, speculative, and sanguine spirit which had so much influence over his fortunes. The good man of Sandy-Knowe, wishing to breed sheep, and being destitute of capital, borrowed 30*l.* from a shepherd who was willing to invest that sum for him in sheep; and the two set off to purchase a flock near Wooler, in Northumberland; but when the shepherd had found what he thought would suit their purpose, he returned to find his master galloping about a fine hunter, on which he had spent the whole capital in hand. *This* speculation, however, prospered. A few days later Robert Scott displayed the qualities of the hunter to such admirable effect with John Scott of Harden's hounds, that he sold the horse for double the money he had given, and, unlike his grandson, abandoned speculative purchases there and then. In the latter days of his clouded fortunes, after Ballantyne's and Constable's failure, Sir Walter was accustomed to point to the picture of his grandfather and say, "Blood will out: my building and planting was but his buying the hunter before he stocked his sheep-walk, over again." But Sir Walter added, says Mr. Lockhart, as he glanced at the likeness of his own staid and prudent father, "Yet it was a wonder, too, for I have a thread of the attorney in me," which was doubtless the case; nor was that thread the least of his inheritances, for from his father certainly Sir Walter derived that disposition towards conscientious, plodding industry, legalism of mind, methodical habits of work, and a

generous, equitable interpretation of the scope of all his obligations to others, which, prized and cultivated by him as they were, turned a great genius, which, especially considering the hare-brained element in him, might easily have been frittered away or devoted to worthless ends, to such fruitful account, and stamped it with so grand an impress of personal magnanimity and fortitude. Sir Walter's father reminds one in not a few of the formal and rather martinetish traits which are related of him, of the father of Goethe, "a formal man, with strong ideas of strait-laced education, passionately orderly (he thought a good book nothing without a good binding), and never so much excited as by a necessary deviation from the 'pre-established harmony' of household rules." That description would apply almost wholly to the sketch of old Mr. Scott which the novelist has given us under the thin disguise of Alexander Fairford, Writer to the Signet, in *Redgauntlet*, a figure confessedly meant, in its chief features, to represent his father. To this Sir Walter adds, in one of his later journals, the trait that his father was a man of fine presence, who conducted all conventional arrangements with a certain grandeur and dignity of air, and "absolutely loved a funeral." "He seemed to preserve the list of a whole bead-roll of cousins merely for the pleasure of being at their funerals, which he was often asked to superintend, and I suspect had sometimes to pay for. He carried me with him as often as he could to these mortuary ceremonies; but feeling I was not, like him, either useful or ornamental, I escaped as often as I could." This strong dash of the conventional in Scott's father, this satisfaction in seeing people fairly to the door of life, and taking his final leave of them there, with something of a ceremonious flourish

of observance, was, however, combined with a much nobler and deeper kind of orderliness. Sir Walter used to say that his father had lost no small part of a very flourishing business, by insisting that his clients should do their duty to their own people better than they were themselves at all inclined to do it. And of this generous strictness in sacrificing his own interests to his sympathy for others, the son had as much as the father.

Sir Walter's mother, who was a Miss Rutherford, the daughter of a physician, had been better educated than most Scotchwomen of her day, in spite of having been sent "to be finished off" by "the honourable Mrs. Ogilvie," whose training was so effective, in one direction at least, that even in her eightieth year Mrs. Scott could not enjoy a comfortable rest in her chair, but "took as much care to avoid touching her chair with her back, as if she had still been under the stern eyes of Mrs. Ogilvie." None the less Mrs. Scott was a motherly, comfortable woman, with much tenderness of heart, and a well-stored, vivid memory. Sir Walter, writing of her, after his mother's death, to Lady Louisa Stewart, says, "She had a mind peculiarly well stored with much acquired information and natural talent, and as she was very old, and had an excellent memory, she could draw, without the least exaggeration or affectation, the most striking pictures of the past age. If I have been able to do anything in the way of painting the past times, it is very much from the studies with which she presented me. She connected a long period of time with the present generation, for she remembered, and had often spoken with, a person who perfectly recollected the battle of Dunbar and Oliver Cromwell's subsequent entry into Edinburgh." On the day before the stroke of paralysis which carried her off, she

had told Mr. and Mrs. Scott of Harden, "with great accuracy, the real story of the Bride of Lammermuir, and pointed out wherein it differed from the novel. She had all the names of the parties, and pointed out (for she was a great genealogist) their connexion with existing families."[1] Sir Walter records many evidences of the tenderness of his mother's nature, and he returned warmly her affection for himself. His executors, in lifting up his desk, the evening after his burial, found "arranged in careful order a series of little objects, which had obviously been so placed there that his eye might rest on them every morning before he began his tasks. These were the old-fashioned boxes that had garnished his mother's toilette, when he, a sickly child, slept in her dressing-room,—the silver taper-stand, which the young advocate had bought for her with his first five-guinea fee,—a row of small packets inscribed with her hand, and containing the hair of those of her offspring that had died before her,—his father's snuff-box, and etui-case,—and more things of the like sort."[2] A story, characteristic of both Sir Walter's parents, is told by Mr. Lockhart which will serve better than anything I can remember to bring the father and mother of Scott vividly before the imagination. His father, like Mr. Alexander Fairford, in *Redgauntlet*, though himself a strong Hanoverian, inherited enough feeling for the Stuarts from his grandfather Beardie, and sympathized enough with those who were, as he neutrally expressed it, "out in '45," to ignore as much as possible any phrases offensive to the Jacobites. For instance, he always called Charles Edward not *the Pre-*

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 172-3. The edition referred to is throughout the edition of 1839 in ten volumes.

[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 241.

tender but *the Chevalier*,—and he did business for many Jacobites:—

"Mrs. Scott's curiosity was strongly excited one autumn by the regular appearance at a certain hour every evening of a sedan chair, to deposit a person carefully muffled up in a mantle, who was immediately ushered into her husband's private room, and commonly remained with him there until long after the usual bed-time of this orderly family. Mr. Scott answered her repeated inquiries with a vagueness that irritated the lady's feelings more and more; until at last she could bear the thing no longer; but one evening, just as she heard the bell ring as for the stranger's chair to carry him off, she made her appearance within the forbidden parlour with a salver in her hand, observing that she thought the gentlemen had sat so long they would be better of a dish of tea, and had ventured accordingly to bring some for their acceptance. The stranger, a person of distinguished appearance, and richly dressed, bowed to the lady and accepted a cup; but her husband knit his brows, and refused very coldly to partake the refreshment. A moment afterwards the visitor withdrew, and Mr. Scott, lifting up the window-sash, took the cup, which he had left empty on the table, and tossed it out upon the pavement. The lady exclaimed for her china, but was put to silence by her husband's saying, 'I can forgive your little curiosity, madam, but you must pay the penalty. I may admit into my house, on a piece of business, persons wholly unworthy to be treated as guests by my wife. Neither lip of me nor of mine comes after Mr. Murray of Broughton's.'

"This was the unhappy man who, after attending Prince Charles Stuart as his secretary throughout the greater part of his expedition, condescended to redeem his own life and fortune by bearing evidence against the noblest of his late master's adherents, when—

> "Pitied by gentle hearts, Kilmarnock died,
> The brave, Balmerino were on thy side."[1]

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 243-4.

"Broughton's saucer"—i. e. the saucer belonging to the cup thus sacrificed by Mr. Scott to his indignation against one who had redeemed his own life and fortune by turning king's evidence against one of Prince Charles Stuart's adherents,—was carefully preserved by his son, and hung up in his first study, or "den," under a little print of Prince Charlie. This anecdote brings before the mind very vividly the character of Sir Walter's parents. The eager curiosity of the active-minded woman, whom "the honourable Mrs. Ogilvie" had been able to keep upright in her chair for life, but not to cure of the desire to unravel the little mysteries of which she had a passing glimpse; the grave formality of the husband, fretting under his wife's personal attention to a dishonoured man, and making her pay the penalty by dashing to pieces the cup which the king's evidence had used,—again, the visitor himself, perfectly conscious no doubt that the Hanoverian lawyer held him in utter scorn for his faithlessness and cowardice, and reluctant, nevertheless, to reject the courtesy of the wife, though he could not get anything but cold legal advice from the husband:—all these are figures which must have acted on the youthful imagination of the poet with singular vivacity, and shaped themselves in a hundred changing turns of the historical kaleidoscope which was always before his mind's eye, as he mused upon that past which he was to restore for us with almost more than its original freshness of life. With such scenes touching even his own home, Scott must have been constantly taught to balance in his own mind, the more romantic, against the more sober and rational considerations, which had so recently divided house against house, even in the same family and clan. That the stern Calvinistic lawyer should have retained so much of

his grandfather Beardie's respect for the adherents of the exiled house of Stuart, must in itself have struck the boy as even more remarkable than the passionate loyalty of the Stuarts' professed partisans, and have lent a new sanction to the romantic drift of his mother's old traditions, and one to which they must have been indebted for a great part of their fascination.

Walter Scott, the ninth of twelve children, of whom the first six died in early childhood, was born in Edinburgh, on the 15th of August, 1771. Of the six later-born children, all but one were boys, and the one sister was a somewhat querulous invalid, whom he seems to have pitied almost more than he loved. At the age of eighteen months the boy had a teething-fever, ending in a life-long lameness; and this was the reason why the child was sent to reside with his grandfather—the speculative grandfather, who had doubled his capital by buying a racehorse instead of sheep—at Sandy-Knowe, near the ruined tower of Smailholm, celebrated afterwards in his ballad of *The Eve of St. John*, in the neighbourhood of some fine crags. To these crags the housemaid sent from Edinburgh to look after him, used to carry him up, with a design (which she confessed to the housekeeper)—due, of course, to incipient insanity—of murdering the child there, and burying him in the moss. Of course the maid was dismissed. After this the child used to be sent out, when the weather was fine, in the safer charge of the shepherd, who would often lay him beside the sheep. Long afterwards Scott told Mr. Skene, during an excursion with Turner, the great painter, who was drawing his illustration of Smailholm tower for one of Scott's works, that "the habit of lying on the turf there among the sheep and the lambs had given his mind a peculiar tenderness for

these animals, which it had ever since retained." Being forgotten one day upon the knolls when a thunderstorm came on, his aunt ran out to bring him in, and found him shouting, "Bonny! bonny!" at every flash of lightning. One of the old servants at Sandy-Knowe spoke of the child long afterwards as "a sweet-tempered bairn, a darling with all about the house," and certainly the miniature taken of him in his seventh year confirms the impression thus given. It is sweet-tempered above everything, and only the long upper lip and large mouth, derived from his ancestress, Meg Murray, convey the promise of the power which was in him. Of course the high, almost conical forehead, which gained him in his later days from his comrades at the bar the name of "Old Peveril," in allusion to "the peak" which they saw towering high above the heads of other men as he approached, is not so much marked beneath the childish locks of this miniature as it was in later life; and the massive, and, in repose, certainly heavy face of his maturity, which conveyed the impression of the great bulk of his character, is still quite invisible under the sunny ripple of childish earnestness and gaiety. Scott's hair in childhood was light chestnut, which turned to nut brown in youth. His eyebrows were bushy, for we find mention made of them as a "pent-house." His eyes were always light blue. They had in them a capacity, on the one hand, for enthusiasm, sunny brightness, and even hare-brained humour, and on the other for expressing determined resolve and kindly irony, which gave great range of expression to the face. There are plenty of materials for judging what sort of a boy Scott was. In spite of his lameness, he early taught himself to clamber about with an agility that few children could have surpassed, and to sit his first pony—a

little Shetland, not bigger than a large Newfoundland dog, which used to come into the house to be fed by him—even in gallops on very rough ground. He became very early a declaimer. Having learned the ballad of Hardy Knute, he shouted it forth with such pertinacious enthusiasm that the clergyman of his grandfather's parish complained that he "might as well speak in a cannon's mouth as where that child was." At six years of age Mrs. Cockburn described him as the most astounding genius of a boy, she ever saw. "He was reading a poem to his mother when I went in. I made him read on: it was the description of a shipwreck. His passion rose with the storm. 'There's the mast gone,' says he; 'crash it goes; they will all perish.' After his agitation he turns to me, 'That is too melancholy,' says he; 'I had better read you something more amusing.'" And after the call, he told his aunt he liked Mrs. Cockburn, for "she was a *virtuoso* like himself." "Dear Walter," says Aunt Jenny, "what is a *virtuoso?*" "Don't ye know? Why, it's one who wishes and will know everything." This last scene took place in his father's house in Edinburgh; but Scott's life at Sandy-Knowe, including even the old minister, Dr. Duncan, who so bitterly complained of the boy's ballad-spouting, is painted for us, as everybody knows, in the picture of his infancy given in the introduction to the third canto of *Marmion*:—

"It was a barren scene and wild,
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled;
But ever and anon between
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green;
And well the lonely infant knew
Recesses where the wall-flower grew,
And honeysuckle loved to crawl
Up the low crag and ruin'd wall.

I deem'd such nooks the sweetest shade
The sun in all its round survey'd ;
And still I thought that shatter'd tower
The mightiest work of human power ;
And marvell'd as the aged hind
With some strange tale bewitch'd my mind,
Of forayers, who, with headlong force,
Down from that strength had spurr'd their horse
Their southern rapine to renew,
Far in the distant Cheviots blue,
And, home returning, fill'd the hall
With revel, wassail-rout, and brawl.
Methought that still with trump and clang
The gateway's broken arches rang ;
Methought grim features, seam'd with scars,
Glared through the window's rusty bars ;
And ever, by the winter hearth,
Old tales I heard of woe or mirth,
Of lovers' slights, of ladies' charms,
Of witches' spells, of warriors' arms,
Of patriot battles, won of old
By Wallace wight and Bruce the bold ;
Of later fields of feud and fight,
When, pouring from their Highland height,
The Scottish clans, in headlong sway,
Had swept the scarlet ranks away.
While, stretch'd at length upon the floor,
Again I fought each combat o'er,
Pebbles and shells in order laid,
The mimic ranks of war display'd ;
And onward still the Scottish lion bore,
And still the scatter'd Southron fled before.
Still, with vain fondness, could I trace
Anew each kind familiar face
That brighten'd at our evening fire!
From the thatch'd mansion's grey-hair'd sire
Wise without learning, plain and good,
And sprung of Scotland's gentler blood ;
Whose eye in age, quick, clear, and keen,
Show'd what in youth its glance had been ;
Whose doom discording neighbours sought,
Content with equity unbought ;

To him the venerable priest,
Our frequent and familiar guest,
Whose life and manners well could paint
Alike the student and the saint;
Alas! whose speech too oft I broke
With gambol rude and timeless joke;
For I was wayward, bold, and wild,
A self-will'd imp, a grandame's child;
But, half a plague and half a jest,
Was still endured, beloved, caress'd."

A picture this of a child of great spirit, though with that spirit was combined an active and subduing sweetness which could often conquer, as by a sudden spell, those whom the boy loved. Towards those, however, whom he did not love he could be vindictive. His relative, the laird of Raeburn, on one occasion wrung the neck of a pet starling, which the child had partly tamed. "I flew at his throat like a wild-cat," he said, in recalling the circumstance, fifty years later, in his journal on occasion of the old laird's death; "and was torn from him with no little difficulty." And, judging from this journal, I doubt whether he had ever really forgiven the laird of Raeburn. Towards those whom he loved but had offended, his manner was very different. "I seldom," said one of his tutors, Mr. Mitchell, "had occasion all the time I was in the family to find fault with him, even for trifles, and only once to threaten serious castigation, of which he was no sooner aware, than he suddenly sprang up, threw his arms about my neck and kissed me." And the quaint old gentleman adds this commentary:—"By such generous and noble conduct my displeasure was in a moment converted into esteem and admiration; my soul melted into tenderness, and I was ready to mingle my tears with his." This spontaneous and fascinating sweet-

ness of his childhood was naturally overshadowed to some extent in later life by Scott's masculine and proud character, but it was always in him. And there was much of true character in the child behind this sweetness. He had wonderful self-command, and a peremptory kind of good sense, even in his infancy. While yet a child under six years of age, hearing one of the servants beginning to tell a ghost-story to another, and well knowing that if he listened, it would scare away his night's rest, he acted for himself with all the promptness of an elder person acting for him, and, in spite of the fascination of the subject, resolutely muffled his head in the bed-clothes and refused to hear the tale. His sagacity in judging of the character of others was shown, too, even as a school-boy; and once it led him to take an advantage which caused him many compunctions in after-life, whenever he recalled his skilful puerile tactics. On one occasion—I tell the story as he himself rehearsed it to Samuel Rogers, almost at the end of his life, after his attack of apoplexy, and just before leaving England for Italy in the hopeless quest of health—he had long desired to get above a school-fellow in his class, who defied all his efforts, till Scott noticed that whenever a question was asked of his rival, the lad's fingers grasped a particular button on his waistcoat, while his mind went in search of the answer. Scott accordingly anticipated that if he could remove this button, the boy would be thrown out, and so it proved. The button was cut off, and the next time the lad was questioned, his fingers being unable to find the button, and his eyes going in perplexed search after his fingers, he stood confounded, and Scott mastered by strategy the place which he could not gain by mere industry. "Often in after-life," said

Scott, in narrating the manœuvre to Rogers, "has the sight of him smote me as I passed by him; and often have I resolved to make him some reparation, but it ended in good resolutions. Though I never renewed my acquaintance with him, I often saw him, for he filled some inferior office in one of the courts of law at Edinburgh. Poor fellow! I believe he is dead; he took early to drinking."[1]

Scott's school reputation was one of irregular ability; he "glanced like a meteor from one end of the class to the other," and received more praise for his interpretation of the spirit of his authors than for his knowledge of their language. Out of school his fame stood higher. He extemporized innumerable stories to which his schoolfellows delighted to listen; and, in spite of his lameness, he was always in the thick of the "bickers," or street fights with the boys of the town, and renowned for his boldness in climbing the "kittle nine stanes" which are "projected high in air from the precipitous black granite of the Castle-rock." At home he was much bullied by his elder brother Robert, a lively lad, not without some powers of verse-making, who went into the navy, then in an unlucky moment passed into the merchant service of the East India Company, and so lost the chance of distinguishing himself in the great naval campaigns of Nelson. Perhaps Scott would have been all the better for a sister a little closer to him than Anne—sickly and fanciful—appears ever to have been. The masculine side of life appears to predominate a little too much in his school and college days, and he had such vast energy, vitality, and pride, that his life at this time would have borne a little taming under the influence of a sister thoroughly

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 128.

congenial to him. In relation to his studies he was wilful, though not perhaps perverse. He steadily declined, for instance, to learn Greek, though he mastered Latin pretty fairly. After a time spent at the High School, Edinburgh, Scott was sent to a school at Kelso, where his master made a friend and companion of him, and so poured into him a certain amount of Latin scholarship which he would never otherwise have obtained. I need hardly add that as a boy Scott was, so far as a boy could be, a Tory—a worshipper of the past, and a great Conservative of any remnant of the past which reformers wished to get rid of. In the autobiographical fragment of 1808, he says, in relation to these school-days, "I, with my head on fire for chivalry, was a Cavalier; my friend was a Roundhead; I was a Tory, and he was a Whig; I hated Presbyterians, and admired Montrose with his victorious Highlanders; he liked the Presbyterian Ulysses, the deep and politic Argyle; so that we never wanted subjects of dispute, but our disputes were always amicable." And he adds candidly enough: "In all these tenets there was no real conviction on my part, arising out of acquaintance with the views or principles of either party. . . . . I took up politics at that period, as King Charles II. did his religion, from an idea that the Cavalier creed was the more gentlemanlike persuasion of the two." And the uniformly amicable character of these controversies between the young people, itself shows how much more they were controversies of the imagination than of faith. I doubt whether Scott's *convictions* on the issues of the Past were ever very much more decided than they were during his boyhood; though undoubtedly he learned to understand much more profoundly what was really held by the ablest men on both

sides of these disputed issues. The result, however, was, I think, that while he entered better and better into both sides as life went on, he never adopted either with any earnestness of conviction, being content to admit, even to himself, that while his feelings leaned in one direction, his reason pointed decidedly in the other; and holding that it was hardly needful to identify himself positively with either. As regarded the present, however, feeling always carried the day. Scott was a Tory all his life.

CHAPTER II.

YOUTH—CHOICE OF A PROFESSION.

As Scott grew up, entered the classes of the college, and began his legal studies, first as apprentice to his father, and then in the law classes of the University, he became noticeable to all his friends for his gigantic memory,—the rich stores of romantic material with which it was loaded,—his giant feats of industry for any cherished purpose,—his delight in adventure and in all athletic enterprises,—his great enjoyment of youthful "rows," so long as they did not divide the knot of friends to which he belonged, and his skill in peacemaking amongst his own set. During his apprenticeship his only means of increasing his slender allowance with funds which he could devote to his favourite studies, was to earn money by copying, and he tells us himself that he remembered writing "120 folio pages with no interval either for food or rest," fourteen or fifteen hours' very hard work at the very least,—expressly for this purpose.

In the second year of Scott's apprenticeship, at about the age of sixteen, he had an attack of hæmorrhage, no recurrence of which took place for some forty years, but which was then the beginning of the end. During this illness silence was absolutely imposed upon him,—two old ladies putting their fingers on

their lips whenever he offered to speak. It was at this time that the lad began his study of the scenic side of history, and especially of campaigns, which he illustrated for himself by the arrangement of shells, seeds, and pebbles, so as to represent encountering armies, in the manner referred to (and referred to apparently in anticipation of a later stage of his life than that he was then speaking of) in the passage from the introduction to the third canto of *Marmion* which I have already given. He also managed so to arrange the looking-glasses in his room as to see the troops march out to exercise in the meadows, as he lay in bed. His reading was almost all in the direction of military exploit, or romance and mediæval legend, and the later border songs of his own country. He learned Italian and read Ariosto. Later he learned Spanish and devoured Cervantes, whose "*novelas*," he said, "first inspired him with the ambition to excel in fiction;" and all that he read and admired he remembered. Scott used to illustrate the capricious affinity of his own memory for what suited it, and its complete rejection of what did not, by old Beattie of Meikledale's answer to a Scotch divine, who complimented him on the strength of his memory. "No, sir," said the old Borderer, "I have no command of my memory. It only retains what hits my fancy; and probably, sir, if you were to preach to me for two hours, I would not be able, when you finished, to remember a word you had been saying." Such a memory, when it belongs to a man of genius, is really a sieve of the most valuable kind. It sifts away what is foreign and alien to his genius, and assimilates what is suited to it. In his very last days, when he was visiting Italy for the first time, Scott delighted in Malta, for it recalled to him Vertot's *Knights of Malta*.

and much other mediæval story which he had pored over in his youth. But when his friends descanted to him at Pozzuoli on the Thermæ—commonly called the Temple of Serapis—among the ruins of which he stood, he only remarked that he would believe whatever he was told, "for many of his friends, and particularly Mr. Morritt, had frequently tried to drive classical antiquities, as they are called, into his head, but they had always found his skull too thick." Was it not perhaps some deep literary instinct, like that here indicated, which made him, as a lad, refuse so steadily to learn Greek, and try to prove to his indignant professor that Ariosto was superior to Homer? Scott afterwards deeply regretted this neglect of Greek; but I cannot help thinking that his regret was misplaced. Greek literature would have brought before his mind standards of poetry and art which could not but have both deeply impressed and greatly daunted an intellect of so much power; I say both impressed and daunted, because I believe that Scott himself would never have succeeded in studies of a classical kind, while he might—like Goethe perhaps—have been either misled, by admiration for that school, into attempting what was not adapted to his genius, or else disheartened in the work for which his character and ancestry really fitted him. It has been said that there is a real affinity between Scott and Homer. But the long and refluent music of Homer, once naturalized in his mind, would have discontented him with that quick, sharp, metrical tramp of his own moss-troopers, to which alone his genius as a poet was perfectly suited.

It might be supposed that with these romantic tastes, Scott could scarcely have made much of a lawyer, though the inference would, I believe, be quite mistaken. His

father, however, reproached him with being better fitted for a pedlar than a lawyer,—so persistently did he trudge over all the neighbouring counties in search of the beauties of nature and the historic associations of battle, siege, or legend. On one occasion when, with their last penny spent, Scott and one of his companions had returned to Edinburgh, living during their last day on drinks of milk offered by generous peasant-women, and the hips and haws on the hedges, he remarked to his father how much he had wished for George Primrose's power of playing on the flute in order to earn a meal by the way, old Mr. Scott, catching grumpily at the idea, replied, "I greatly doubt, sir, you were born for nae better then a gangrel scrape-gut,"—a speech which very probably suggested his son's conception of Darsie Latimer's adventures with the blind fiddler, "Wandering Willie," in *Redgauntlet*. And, it is true that these were the days of mental and moral fermentation, what was called in Germany the Sturm-und-Drang, the "fret-and-fury" period of Scott's life, so far as one so mellow and genial in temper ever passed through a period of fret and fury at all. In other words these were the days of rapid motion, of walks of thirty miles a day which the lame lad yet found no fatigue to him; of mad enterprises, scrapes and drinking-bouts, in one of which Scott was half persuaded by his friends that he actually sang a song for the only time in his life. But even in these days of youthful sociability, with companions of his own age, Scott was always himself, and his imperious will often asserted itself. Writing of this time, some thirty-five years or so later, he said, "When I was a boy, and on foot expeditions, as we had many, no creature could be so indifferent which way our course was directed, and I acquiesced in what any one proposed; but if I was once

driven to make a choice, and felt piqued in honour to maintain my proposition, I have broken off from the whole party, rather than yield to any one." No doubt, too, in that day of what he himself described as "the silly smart fancies that ran in my brain like the bubbles in a glass of champagne, as brilliant to my thinking, as intoxicating, as evanescent," solitude was no real deprivation to him; and one can easily imagine him marching off on his solitary way after a dispute with his companions, reciting to himself old songs or ballads, with that "noticeable but altogether indescribable play of the upper lip," which Mr. Lockhart thinks suggested to one of Scott's most intimate friends, on his first acquaintance with him, the grotesque notion that he had been "a hautboy-player." This was the first impression formed of Scott by William Clerk, one of his earliest and life-long friends. It greatly amused Scott, who not only had never played on any instrument in his life, but could hardly make shift to join in the chorus of a popular song without marring its effect; but perhaps the impression suggested was not so very far astray after all. Looking to the poetic side of his character, the trumpet certainly would have been the instrument that would have best symbolized the spirit both of Scott's thought and of his verses. Mr. Lockhart himself, in summing up his impressions of Sir Walter, quotes as the most expressive of his lines:—

> "Sound, sound the clarion! fill the fife!
> To all the sensual world proclaim,
> One crowded hour of glorious life
> Is worth a world without a name."

And undoubtedly this gives us the key-note of Scott's personal life as well as of his poetic power. Above every-

thing he was high-spirited, a man of noble, and, at the same time, of martial feelings. Sir Francis Doyle speaks very justly of Sir Walter as "among English singers the undoubted inheritor of that trumpet-note, which, under the breath of Homer, has made the wrath of Achilles immortal;" and I do not doubt that there was something in Scott's face, and especially in the expression of his mouth, to suggest this even to his early college companions. Unfortunately, however, even "one crowded hour of glorious life" may sometimes have a "sensual" inspiration, and in these days of youthful adventure, too many such hours seem to have owed their inspiration to the Scottish peasant's chief bane, the Highland whisky. In his eager search after the old ballads of the Border, Scott had many a blithe adventure, which ended only too often in a carouse. It was soon after this time that he first began those raids into Liddesdale, of which all the world has enjoyed the records in the sketches—embodied subsequently in *Guy Mannering*—of Dandie Dinmont, his pony Dumple, and the various Peppers and Mustards from whose breed there were afterwards introduced into Scott's own family, generations of terriers, always named, as Sir Walter expressed it, after "the cruet." I must quote the now classic record of those youthful escapades:—

"Eh me," said Mr. Shortreed, his companion in all these Liddesdale raids, "sic an endless fund of humour and drollery as he had then wi' him. Never ten yards but we were either laughing or roaring and singing. Wherever we stopped, how brawlie he suited himsel' to everybody! He aye did as the lave did; never made himsel' the great man or took ony airs in the company. I've seen him in a' moods in these jaunts, grave and gay, daft and serious, sober and drunk—(this, however, even in our wildest rambles, was but rare)—but drunk or sober he was aye the gentleman. He looked excessively

heavy and stupid when he was *fou*, but he was never out o' gude humour."

One of the stories of that time will illustrate better the wilder days of Scott's youth than any comment :—

"On reaching one evening," says Mr. Lockhart, some Charlieshope or other (I forget the name) among those wildernesses, they found a kindly reception as usual: but to their agreeable surprise, after some days of hard living, a measured and orderly hospitality as respected liquor. Soon after supper, at which a bottle of elderberry wine alone had been produced, a young student of divinity who happened to be in the house was called upon to take the 'big ha' Bible,' in the good old fashion of Burns' Saturday Night: and some progress had been already made in the service, when the good man of the farm, whose 'tendency,' as Mr. Mitchell says, 'was soporific,' scandalized his wife and the dominie by starting suddenly from his knees, and rubbing his eyes, with a stentorian exclamation of 'By ——! here's the keg at last!' and in tumbled, as he spake the word, a couple of sturdy herdsmen, whom, on hearing, a day before, of the advocate's approaching visit, he had despatched to a certain smuggler's haunt at some considerable distance in quest of a supply of *run* brandy from the Solway frith. The pious 'exercise' of the household was hopelessly interrupted. With a thousand apologies for his hitherto shabby entertainment, this jolly Elliot or Armstrong had the welcome *keg* mounted on the table without a moment's delay, and gentle and simple, not forgetting the dominie, continued carousing about it until daylight streamed in upon the party. Sir Walter Scott seldom failed, when I saw him in company with his Liddesdale companions, to mimic with infinite humour the sudden outburst of his old host on hearing the clatter of horses' feet, which he knew to indicate the arrival of the keg, the consternation of the dame, and the rueful despair with which the young clergyman closed the book."[1]

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 269-71.

No wonder old Mr. Scott felt some doubt of his son's success at the bar, and thought him more fitted in many respects for a "gangrel scrape-gut."[1]

In spite of all this love of excitement, Scott became a sound lawyer, and might have been a great lawyer, had not his pride of character, the impatience of his genius, and the stir of his imagination rendered him indisposed to wait and slave in the precise manner which the prepossessions of solicitors appoint.

For Scott's passion for romantic literature was not at all the sort of thing which we ordinarily mean by boys' or girls' love of romance. No amount of drudgery or labour deterred Scott from any undertaking on the prosecution of which he was bent. He was quite the reverse, indeed, of what is usually meant by sentimental, either in his manners or his literary interests. As regards the history of his own country he was no mean antiquarian. Indeed he cared for the mustiest antiquarian researches—of the mediæval kind—so much, that in the depth of his troubles he speaks of a talk with a Scotch antiquary and herald as one of the things which soothed him most. "I do not know anything which relieves the mind so much from the sullens as trifling discussions about antiquarian *old womanries*. It is like knitting a stocking, diverting the mind without occupying it."[2] Thus his love of romantic literature was as far as possible from that of a mind which only feeds on romantic excitements; rather was it that of one who was so moulded by the transmitted and acquired love of feudal institutions with all their incidents, that he could not take any deep interest in any other

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 206.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 221.

fashion of human society. Now the Scotch law was full of vestiges and records of that period,—was indeed a great standing monument of it; and in numbers of his writings Scott shows with how deep an interest he had studied the Scotch law from this point of view. He remarks somewhere that it was natural for a Scotchman to feel a strong attachment to the principle of rank, if only on the ground that almost any Scotchman might, under the Scotch law, turn out to be heir-in-tail to some great Scotch title or estate by the death of intervening relations. And the law which sometimes caused such sudden transformations, had subsequently a true interest for him of course as a novel writer, to say nothing of his interest in it as an antiquarian and historian who loved to repeople the earth, not merely with the picturesque groups of the soldiers and courts of the past, but with the actors in all the various quaint and homely transactions and puzzlements which the feudal ages had brought forth. Hence though, as a matter of fact, Scott never made much figure as an advocate, he became a very respectable, and might unquestionably have become a very great, lawyer. When he started at the bar, however, he had not acquired the tact to impress an ordinary assembly. In one case which he conducted before the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, when defending a parish minister threatened with deposition for drunkenness and unseemly behaviour, he certainly missed the proper tone,—first receiving a censure for the freedom of his manner in treating the allegations against his client, and then so far collapsing under the rebuke of the Moderator, as to lose the force and urgency necessary to produce an effect on his audience. But these were merely a boy's mishaps. He was certainly by no means a Heaven-born orator, and therefore could not

expect to spring into exceptionally *early* distinction, and the only true reason for his relative failure was that he was so full of literary power, and so proudly impatient of the fetters which prudence seemed to impose on his extra-professional proceedings, that he never gained the credit he deserved for the general common sense, the unwearied industry, and the keen appreciation of the ins and outs of legal method, which might have raised him to the highest reputation even as a judge.

All readers of his novels know how Scott delights in the humours of the law. By way of illustration take the following passage, which is both short and amusing, in which Saunders Fairford—the old solicitor painted from Scott's father in *Redgauntlet*—descants on the law of the stirrup-cup. "It was decided in a case before the town bailies of Cupar Angus, when Luckie Simpson's cow had drunk up Luckie Jamieson's browst of ale, while it stood in the door to cool, that there was no damage to pay, because the crummie drank without sitting down; such being the circumstance constituting a Doch an Dorroch, which is a standing drink for which no reckoning is paid." I do not believe that any one of Scott's contemporaries had greater legal abilities than he, though, as it happened, they were never fairly tried. But he had both the pride and impatience of genius. It fretted him to feel that he was dependent on the good opinions of solicitors, and that they who were incapable of understanding his genius, thought the less instead of the better of him as an advocate, for every indication which he gave of that genius. Even on the day of his call to the bar he gave expression to a sort of humorous foretaste of this impatience, saying to William Clerk, who had been called with him, as he mimicked the air and tone of a Highland

lass waiting at the Cross of Edinburgh to be hired for the harvest, "We've stood here an hour by the Tron, hinny, and deil a ane has speered our price." Scott continued to practise at the bar—nominally at least—for fourteen years, but the most which he ever seems to have made in any one year was short of 230*l.*, and latterly his practice was much diminishing instead of increasing. His own impatience of solicitors' patronage was against him; his well-known dabblings in poetry were still more against him; and his general repute for wild and unprofessional adventurousness—which was much greater than he deserved—was probably most of all against him. Before he had been six years at the bar he joined the organization of the Edinburgh Volunteer Cavalry, took a very active part in the drill, and was made their Quartermaster. Then he visited London, and became largely known for his ballads, and his love of ballads. In his eighth year at the bar he accepted a small permanent appointment, with 300*l.* a year, as sheriff of Selkirkshire; and this occurring soon after his marriage to a lady of some means, no doubt diminished still further his professional zeal. For one third of the time during which Scott practised as an advocate he made no pretence of taking interest in that part of his work, though he was always deeply interested in the law itself. In 1806 he undertook gratuitously the duties of a Clerk of Session—a permanent officer of the Court at Edinburgh—and discharged them without remuneration for five years, from 1806 to 1811, in order to secure his ultimate succession to the office in the place of an invalid, who for that period received all the emoluments and did none of the work. Nevertheless Scott's legal abilities were so well known, that it was certainly at one time intended to offer

him a Barony of the Exchequer, and it was his own doing, apparently, that it was not offered. The life of literature and the life of the Bar hardly ever suit, and in Scott's case they suited the less, that he felt himself likely to be a dictator in the one field, and only a postulant in the other. Literature was a far greater gainer by his choice, than Law could have been a loser. For his capacity for the law he shared with thousands of able men, his capacity for literature with few or none.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE.

ONE Sunday, about two years before his call to the bar, Scott offered his umbrella to a young lady of much beauty who was coming out of the Greyfriars Church during a shower; the umbrella was graciously accepted; and it was not an unprecedented consequence that Scott fell in love with the borrower, who turned out to be Margaret, daughter of Sir John and Lady Jane Stuart Belches, of Invernay. For near six years after this, Scott indulged the hope of marrying this lady, and it does not seem doubtful that the lady herself was in part responsible for this impression. Scott's father, who thought his son's prospects very inferior to those of Miss Stuart Belches, felt it his duty to warn the baronet of his son's views, a warning which the old gentleman appears to have received with that grand unconcern characteristic of elderly persons in high position, as a hint intrinsically incredible, or at least unworthy of notice. But he took no alarm, and Scott's attentions to Margaret Stuart Belches continued till close on the eve of her marriage, in 1796, to William Forbes (afterwards Sir William Forbes), of Pitsligo, a banker, who proved to be one of Sir Walter's most generous and most delicate-minded friends, when his time of troubles came

towards the end of both their lives. Whether Scott was in part mistaken as to the impression he had made on the young lady, or she was mistaken as to the impression he had made on herself, or whether other circumstances intervened to cause misunderstanding, or the grand indifference of Sir John gave way to active intervention when the question became a practical one, the world will now never know, but it does not seem very likely that a man of so much force as Scott, who certainly had at one time assured himself at least of the young lady's strong regard, should have been easily displaced even by a rival of ability and of most generous and amiable character. An entry in the diary which Scott kept in 1827, after Constable's and Ballantyne's failure, and his wife's death, seems to me to suggest that there may have been some misunderstanding between the young people, though I am not sure that the inference is justified. The passage completes the story of this passion—Scott's first and only deep passion—so far as it can ever be known to us; and as it is a very pathetic and characteristic entry, and the attachment to which it refers had a great influence on Scott's life, both in keeping him free from some of the most dangerous temptations of the young, during his youth, and in creating within him an interior world of dreams and recollections throughout his whole life, on which his imaginative nature was continually fed—I may as well give it. "He had taken," says Mr. Lockhart, "for that winter [1827], the house No. 6, Shandwick Place, which he occupied by the month during the remainder of his servitude as a clerk of session. Very near this house, he was told a few days after he took possession, dwelt the aged mother of his first love; and he expressed to his friend Mrs.

Skene, a wish that she should carry him to renew an acquaintance which seems to have been interrupted from the period of his youthful romance. Mrs. Skene complied with his desire, and she tells me that a very painful scene ensued." His diary says,—"November 7th. Began to settle myself this morning after the hurry of mind and even of body which I have lately undergone. I went to make a visit and fairly softened myself, like an old fool, with recalling old stories till I was fit for nothing but shedding tears and repeating verses for the whole night. This is sad work. The very grave gives up its dead, and time rolls back thirty years to add to my perplexities. I don't care. I begin to grow case-hardened, and like a stag turning at bay, my naturally good temper grows fierce and dangerous. Yet what a romance to tell—and told I fear it will one day be. And then my three years of dreaming and my two years of wakening will be chronicled, doubtless. But the dead will feel no pain.—November 10th. At twelve o'clock I went again to poor Lady Jane to talk over old stories. I am not clear that it is a right or healthful indulgence to be ripping up old sores, but it seems to give her deep-rooted sorrow words, and that is a mental blood-letting. To me these things are now matter of calm and solemn recollection, never to be forgotten, yet scarce to be remembered with pain."[1] It was in 1797, after the break-up of his hopes in relation to this attachment, that Scott wrote the lines *To a Violet*, which Mr. F. T. Palgrave, in his thoughtful and striking introduction to Scott's poems, rightly characterizes as one of the most beautiful of those poems. It is, however, far from one character-

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 183-4.

istic of Scott, indeed, so different in style from the best of his other poems, that Mr. Browning might well have said of Scott, as he once affirmed of himself, that for the purpose of one particular poem, he "who blows through bronze," had "breathed through silver,"—had "curbed the liberal hand subservient proudly,"—and tamed his spirit to a key elsewhere unknown.

"The violet in her greenwood bower,
Where birchen boughs with hazels mingle,
May boast itself the fairest flower
In glen, or copse, or forest dingle.

"Though fair her gems of azure hue,
Beneath the dewdrop's weight reclining,
I've seen an eye of lovelier blue,
More sweet through watery lustre shining.

"The summer sun that dew shall dry,
Ere yet the day be past its morrow;
Nor longer in my false love's eye
Remain'd the tear of parting sorrow."

These lines obviously betray a feeling of resentment, which may or may not have been justified; but they are perhaps the most delicate produced by his pen. The pride which was always so notable a feature in Scott, probably sustained him through the keen, inward pain which it is very certain from a great many of his own words that he must have suffered in this uprooting of his most passionate hopes. And it was in part probably the same pride which led him to form, within the year, a new tie—his engagement to Mademoiselle Charpentier, or Miss Carpenter as she was usually called,—the daughter of a French royalist of Lyons who had died early in the revolution. She had come after her father's death to England, chiefly, it seems, because in the Marquis of Down-

shire, who was an old friend of the family, her mother knew that she should find a protector for her children. Miss Carpenter was a lively beauty, probably of no great depth of character. The few letters given of hers in Mr. Lockhart's life of Scott, give the impression of an amiable, petted girl, of somewhat thin and *espiègle* character, who was rather charmed at the depth and intensity of Scott's nature, and at the expectations which he seemed to form of what love should mean, than capable of realizing them. Evidently she had no inconsiderable pleasure in display; but she made on the whole a very good wife, only one to be protected by him from every care, and not one to share Scott's deeper anxieties, or to participate in his dreams. Yet Mrs. Scott was not devoid of spirit and self-control. For instance, when Mr. Jeffrey, having reviewed *Marmion* in the *Edinburgh* in that depreciating and omniscient tone which was then considered the evidence of critical acumen, dined with Scott on the very day on which the review had appeared, Mrs. Scott behaved to him through the whole evening with the greatest politeness, but fired this parting shot in her broken English, as he took his leave,—"Well, good night, Mr. Jeffrey,—dey tell me you have abused Scott in de *Review*, and I hope Mr. Constable has paid you very well for writing it." It is hinted that Mrs. Scott was, at the time of Scott's greatest fame, far more exhilarated by it than her husband with his strong sense and sure self-measurement ever was. Mr. Lockhart records that Mrs. Grant of Laggan once said of them, "Mr. Scott always seems to me like a glass, through which the rays of admiration pass without sensibly affecting it; but the bit of paper that lies beside it will presently be in a blaze, and no wonder." The bit of paper, however, never was in a blaze that I know of;

and possibly Mrs. Grant's remark may have had a little feminine spite in it. At all events, it was not till the rays of misfortune, instead of admiration, fell upon Scott's life, that the delicate tissue paper shrivelled up; nor does it seem that, even then, it was the trouble, so much as a serious malady that had fixed on Lady Scott before Sir Walter's troubles began, which really scorched up her life. That she did not feel with the depth and intensity of her husband, or in the same key of feeling, is clear. After the failure, and during the preparations for abandoning the house in Edinburgh, Scott records in his diary :— "It is with a sense of pain that I leave behind a parcel of trumpery prints and little ornaments, once the pride of Lady Scott's heart, but which she saw consigned with indifference to the chance of an auction. Things that have had their day of importance with me, I cannot forget, though the merest trifles; but I am glad that she, with bad health, and enough to vex her, has not the same useless mode of associating recollections with this unpleasant business." [1]

Poor Lady Scott! It was rather like a bird of paradise mating with an eagle. Yet the result was happy on the whole; for she had a thoroughly kindly nature, and a true heart. Within ten days before her death, Scott enters in his diary :—"Still welcoming me with a smile, and asserting she is better." She was not the ideal wife for Scott; but she loved him, sunned herself in his prosperity, and tried to bear his adversity cheerfully. In her last illness she would always reproach her husband and children for their melancholy faces, even when that melancholy was, as she well knew, due to the approaching shadow of her own death.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 273.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLIEST POETRY AND BORDER MINSTRELSY.

SCOTT'S first serious attempt in poetry was a version of Bürger's *Lenore*, a spectre-ballad of the violent kind, much in favour in Germany at a somewhat earlier period, but certainly not a specimen of the higher order of imaginative genius. However, it stirred Scott's youthful blood, and made him "wish to heaven he could get a skull and two cross-bones!" a modest desire, to be expressed with so much fervour, and one almost immediately gratified. Probably no one ever gave a more spirited version of Bürger's ballad than Scott has given; but the use to which Miss Cranstoun, a friend and confidante of his love for Miss Stuart Belches, strove to turn it, by getting it printed, blazoned, and richly bound, and presenting it to the young lady as a proof of her admirer's abilities, was perhaps hardly very sagacious. It is quite possible, at least, that Miss Stuart Belches may have regarded this vehement admirer of spectral wedding journeys and skeleton bridals, as unlikely to prepare for her that comfortable, trim, and decorous future which young ladies usually desire. At any rate, the bold stroke failed. The young lady admired the verses, but, as we have seen, declined the translator. Perhaps she regarded banking as safer, if less brilliant, work than the most

effective description of skeleton riders. Indeed, Scott at this time—to those who did not know what was in him, which no one, not even excepting himself, did—had no very sure prospects of comfort, to say nothing of wealth. It is curious, too, that his first adventure in literature was thus connected with his interest in the preternatural, for no man ever lived whose genius was sounder and healthier, and less disposed to dwell on the half-and-half lights of a dim and eerie world; yet ghostly subjects always interested him deeply, and he often touched them in his stories, more, I think, from the strong artistic contrast they afforded to his favourite conceptions of life, than from any other motive. There never was, I fancy, an organization less susceptible of this order of fears and superstitions than his own. When a friend jokingly urged him, within a few months of his death, not to leave Rome on a Friday, as it was a day of bad omen for a journey, he replied, laughing, "Superstition is very picturesque, and I make it, at times, stand me in great stead, but I never allow it to interfere with interest or convenience." Basil Hall reports Scott's having told him on the last evening of the year 1824, when they were talking over this subject, that "having once arrived at a country inn, he was told there was no bed for him. 'No place to lie down at all?' said he. 'No,' said the people of the house; 'none, except a room in which there is a corpse lying.' 'Well,' said he, 'did the person die of any contagious disorder?' 'Oh, no; not at all,' said they. 'Well, then,' continued he, 'let me have the other bed. So,' said Sir Walter, 'I laid me down, and never had a better night's sleep in my life.'" He was, indeed, a man of iron nerve, whose truest artistic enjoyment was in noting the forms of character seen in full daylight by the light of the most ordinary experience

Perhaps for that reason he can on occasion relate a preternatural incident, such as the appearance of old Alice at the fountain, at the very moment of her death, to the Master of Ravenswood, in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, with great effect. It was probably the vivacity with which he realized the violence which such incidents do to the terrestrial common sense of our ordinary nature, and at the same time the sedulous accuracy of detail with which he narrated them, rather than any, even the smallest, special susceptibility of his own brain to thrills of the preternatural kind, which gave him rather a unique pleasure in dealing with such preternatural elements. Sometimes, however, his ghosts are a little too muscular to produce their due effect as ghosts. In translating Bürger's ballad his great success lay in the vividness of the spectre's horsemanship. For instance,—

> "Tramp! tramp! along the land they rode,
> Splash! splash! along the sea;
> The scourge is red, the spur drops blood,
> The flashing pebbles flee,"

is far better than any ghostly touch in it; so, too, every one will remember how spirited a rider is the white Lady of Avenel, in *The Monastery*, and how vigorously she takes fords,—as vigorously as the sheriff himself, who was very fond of fords. On the whole, Scott was too sunny and healthy-minded for a ghost-seer; and the skull and cross-bones with which he ornamented his "den" in his father's house, did not succeed in tempting him into the world of twilight and cobwebs wherein he made his first literary excursion. His *William and Helen*, the name he gave to his translation of Bürger's *Lenore*, made in 1795, was effective, after all, more for its rapid movement, than for the weirdness of its effects.

If, however, it was the raw preternaturalism of such ballads as Bürger's which first led Scott to test his own powers, his genius soon turned to more appropriate and natural subjects. Ever since his earliest college days he had been collecting, in those excursions of his into Liddesdale and elsewhere, materials for a book on *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border;* and the publication of this work, in January, 1802 (in two volumes at first), was his first great literary success. The whole edition of eight hundred copies was sold within the year, while the skill and care which Scott had devoted to the historical illustration of the ballads, and the force and spirit of his own new ballads, written in imitation of the old, gained him at once a very high literary name. And the name was well deserved. The *Border Minstrelsy* was more commensurate *in range* with the genius of Scott, than even the romantic poems by which it was soon followed, and which were received with such universal and almost unparalleled delight. For Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* gives more than a glimpse of all his many great powers—his historical industry and knowledge, his masculine humour, his delight in restoring the vision of the "old, simple, violent world" of rugged activity and excitement, as well as that power to kindle men's hearts, as by a trumpet-call, which was the chief secret of the charm of his own greatest poems. It is much easier to discern the great novelist of subsequent years in the *Border Minstrelsy* than even in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, and *The Lady of the Lake* taken together. From those romantic poems you would never guess that Scott entered more eagerly and heartily into the common incidents and common cares of every-day human life than into the most romantic fortunes; from them you would never know how com-

pletely he had mastered the leading features of quite different periods of our history; from them you would never infer that you had before you one of the best plodders, as well as one of the most enthusiastic dreamers, in British literature. But all this might have been gathered from the various introductions and notes to the *Border Minstrelsy*, which are full of skilful illustrations, of comments teeming with humour, and of historic weight. The general introduction gives us a general survey of the graphic pictures of Border quarrels, their simple violence and simple cunning. It enters, for instance, with grave humour into the strong distinction taken in the debatable land between a "freebooter" and a "thief," and the difficulty which the inland counties had in grasping it, and paints for us, with great vivacity, the various Border superstitions. Another commentary on a very amusing ballad, commemorating the manner in which a blind harper stole a horse and got paid for a mare he had not lost, gives an account of the curious tenure of land, called that of the "king's rentallers," or "kindly tenants;" and a third describes, in language as vivid as the historical romance of *Kenilworth*, written years after, the manner in which Queen Elizabeth received the news of a check to her policy, and vented her spleen on the King of Scotland.

So much as to the breadth of the literary area which this first book of Scott's covered. As regards the poetic power which his own new ballads, in imitation of the old ones, evinced, I cannot say that those of the first issue of the *Border Minstrelsy* indicated anything like the force which might have been expected from one who was so soon to be the author of *Marmion*, though many of Scott's warmest admirers, including Sir Francis Doyle, seem to place *Glenfinlas* among his finest productions. But

in the third volume of the *Border Minstrelsy*, which did not appear till 1803, is contained a ballad on the assassination of the Regent Murray, the story being told by his assassin, which seems to me a specimen of his very highest poetical powers. In *Cadyow Castle* you have not only that rousing trumpet-note which you hear in *Marmion*, but the pomp and glitter of a grand martial scene is painted with all Scott's peculiar terseness and vigour. The opening is singularly happy in preparing the reader for the description of a violent deed. The Earl of Arran, chief of the clan of Hamiltons, is chasing among the old oaks of Cadyow Castle,—oaks which belonged to the ancient Caledonian forest,—the fierce, wild bulls, milk-white, with black muzzles, which were not extirpated till shortly before Scott's own birth:—

"Through the huge oaks of Evandale,
Whose limbs a thousand years have worn,
What sullen roar comes down the gale,
And drowns the hunter's pealing horn?

"Mightiest of all the beasts of chase
That roam in woody Caledon,
Crashing the forest in his race,
The mountain bull comes thundering on.

"Fierce on the hunter's quiver'd band
He rolls his eyes of swarthy glow,
Spurns, with black hoof and horn, the sand,
And tosses high his mane of snow.

"Aim'd well, the chieftain's lance has flown;
Struggling in blood the savage lies;
His roar is sunk in hollow groan,—
Sound, merry huntsman! sound the pryse!"

It is while the hunters are resting after this feat, that Bothwellhaugh dashes among them headlong, spurring his jaded steed with poniard instead of spur:—

"From gory selle and reeling steed,
Sprang the fierce horseman with a bound,
And reeking from the recent deed,
He dash'd his carbine on the ground."

And then Bothwellhaugh tells his tale of blood, describing the procession from which he had singled out his prey:—

"'Dark Morton, girt with many a spear,
Murder's foul minion, led the van;
And clash'd their broadswords in the rear
The wild Macfarlanes' plaided clan.

"'Glencairn and stout Parkhead were nigh,
Obsequious at their Regent's rein,
And haggard Lindsay's iron eye,
That saw fair Mary weep in vain.

"'Mid pennon'd spears, a steely grove,
Proud Murray's plumage floated high;
Scarce could his trampling charger move,
So close the minions crowded nigh.

"'From the raised vizor's shade, his eye,
Dark rolling, glanced the ranks along,
And his steel truncheon waved on high,
Seem'd marshalling the iron throng.

"'But yet his sadden'd brow confess'd
A passing shade of doubt and awe;
Some fiend was whispering in his breast,
"Beware of injured Bothwellhaugh!"

"'The death-shot parts,—the charger springs,—
Wild rises tumult's startling roar!
And Murray's plumy helmet rings—
Rings on the ground to rise no more.'"

This was the ballad which made so strong an impression on Thomas Campbell, the poet. Referring to some of the

lines I have quoted, Campbell said,—"I have repeated them so often on the North Bridge that the whole fraternity of coachmen know me by tongue as I pass. To be sure, to a mind in sober, serious, street-walking humour, it must bear an appearance of lunacy when one stamps with the hurried pace and fervent shake of the head which strong, pithy poetry excites."[1] I suppose anecdotes of this kind have been oftener told of Scott than of any other English poet. Indeed, Sir Walter, who understood himself well, gives the explanation in one of his diaries:—"I am sensible," he says, "that if there be anything good about my poetry or prose either, it is a hurried frankness of composition, which pleases soldiers, sailors, and young people of bold and active dispositions."[2] He might have included old people too. I have heard of two old men—complete strangers—passing each other on a dark London night, when one of them happened to be repeating to himself, just as Campbell did to the hackney coachmen of the North Bridge of Edinburgh, the last lines of the account of Flodden Field in *Marmion*, "Charge, Chester, charge," when suddenly a reply came out of the darkness, "On, Stanley, on," whereupon they finished the death of Marmion between them, took off their hats to each other, and parted, laughing. Scott's is almost the only poetry in the English language that not only runs thus in the head of average men, but heats the head in which it runs by the mere force of its hurried frankness of style, to use Scott's own terms, or by that of its strong and pithy eloquence, as Campbell phrased it. And in *Cadyow Castle* this style is at its culminating point.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 79.

[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 370.

CHAPTER V.

SCOTT'S MATURER POEMS.

SCOTT'S genius flowered late. *Cadyow Castle*, the first of his poems, I think, that has indisputable genius plainly stamped on its terse and fiery lines, was composed in 1802, when he was already thirty-one years of age. It was in the same year that he wrote the first canto of his first great romance in verse, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a poem which did not appear till 1805, when he was thirty-four. The first canto (not including the framework, of which the aged harper is the principal figure) was written in the lodgings to which he was confined for a fortnight in 1802, by a kick received from a horse on Portobello sands, during a charge of the Volunteer Cavalry in which Scott was cornet. The poem was originally intended to be included in the *Border Minstrelsy*, as one of the studies in the antique style, but soon outgrew the limits of such a study both in length and in the freedom of its manner. Both the poorest and the best parts of *The Lay* were in a special manner due to Lady Dalkeith (afterwards Duchess of Buccleugh), who suggested it, and in whose honour the poem was written. It was she who requested Scott to write a poem on the legend of the goblin page, Gilpin Horner, and this Scott attempted,—and, so far as the goblin himself was concerned, conspicuously

hailed. He himself clearly saw that the story of this unmanageable imp was both confused and uninteresting, and that in fact he had to extricate himself from the original groundwork of the tale, as from a regular literary scrape, in the best way he could. In a letter to Miss Seward, Scott says,—"At length the story appeared so uncouth that I was fain to put it into the mouth of my old minstrel, lest the nature of it should be misunderstood, and I should be suspected of setting up a new school of poetry, instead of a feeble attempt to imitate the old. In the process of the romance, the page, intended to be a principal person in the work, contrived (from the baseness of his natural propensities, I suppose) to slink down stairs into the kitchen, and now he must e'en abide there."[1] And I venture to say that no reader of the poem ever has distinctly understood what the goblin page did or did not do, what it was that was "lost" throughout the poem and "found" at the conclusion, what was the object of his personating the young heir of the house of Scott, and whether or not that object was answered;—what use, if any, the magic book of Michael Scott was to the Lady of Branksome, or whether it was only harm to her; and I doubt moreover whether any one ever cared an iota what answer, or whether any answer, might be given to any of these questions. All this, as Scott himself clearly perceived, was left confused, and not simply vague. The goblin imp had been more certainly an imp of mischief to him than even to his boyish ancestor. But if Lady Dalkeith suggested the poorest part of the poem, she certainly inspired its best part. Scott says, as we have seen, that he brought in the aged harper to save himself

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii, 217.

from the imputation of "setting up a new school of poetry" instead of humbly imitating an old school. But I think that the chivalrous wish to do honour to Lady Dalkeith, both as a personal friend and as the wife of his "chief,"—as he always called the head of the house of Scott,—had more to do with the introduction of the aged harper, than the wish to guard himself against the imputation of attempting a new poetic style. He clearly intended the Duchess of *The Lay* to represent the Countess for whom he wrote it, and the aged harper, with his reverence and gratitude and self-distrust, was only the disguise in which he felt that he could best pour out his loyalty, and the romantic devotion with which both Lord and Lady Dalkeith, but especially the latter, had inspired him. It was certainly this beautiful framework which assured the immediate success and permanent charm of the poem; and the immediate success was for that day something marvellous. The magnificent quarto edition of 750 copies was soon exhausted, and an octavo edition of 1500 copies was sold out within the year. In the following year two editions, containing together 4250 copies, were disposed of, and before twenty-five years had elapsed, that is, before 1830, 44,000 copies of the poem had been bought by the public in this country, taking account of the legitimate trade alone. Scott gained in all by *The Lay* 769*l.*, an unprecedented sum in those times for an author to obtain from any poem. Little more than half a century before, Johnson received but fifteen guineas for his stately poem on *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, and but ten guineas for his *London*. I do not say that Scott's poem had not much more in it of true poetic fire, though Scott himself, I believe, preferred these poems of Johnson's to anything that he himself ever wrote. But the disproportion in

the reward was certainly enormous, and yet what Scott gained by his *Lay* was of course much less than he gained by any of his subsequent poems of equal, or anything like equal, length. Thus for *Marmion* he received 1000 guineas long before the poem was published, and for *one half* of the copyright of *The Lord of the Isles* Constable paid Scott 1500 guineas. If we ask ourselves to what this vast popularity of Scott's poems, and especially of the earlier of them (for, as often happens, he was better remunerated for his later and much inferior poems than for his earlier and more brilliant productions) is due, I think the answer must be for the most part, the high romantic glow and extraordinary romantic simplicity of the poetical elements they contained. Take the old harper of *The Lay*, a figure which arrested the attention of Pitt during even that last most anxious year of his anxious life, the year of Ulm and Austerlitz. The lines in which Scott describes the old man's embarrassment when first urged to play, produced on Pitt, according to his own account, "an effect which I might have expected in painting, but could never have fancied capable of being given in poetry."[1]

Every one knows the lines to which Pitt refers:—

"The humble boon was soon obtain'd;
The aged minstrel audience gain'd.
But, when he reach'd the room of state,
Where she with all her ladies sate,
Perchance he wish'd his boon denied;
For, when to tune the harp he tried,
His trembling hand had lost the ease
Which marks security to please;
And scenes long past, of joy and pain,
Came wildering o'er his aged brain,—
He tried to tune his harp in vain!

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 226.

The pitying Duchess praised its chime,
And gave him heart, and gave him time,
Till every string's according glee
Was blended into harmony.
And then, he said, he would full fain
He could recall an ancient strain
He never thought to sing again.
It was not framed for village churls,
But for high dames and mighty earls;
He'd play'd it to King Charles the Good,
When he kept Court at Holyrood;
And much he wish'd, yet fear'd, to try
The long-forgotten melody.
Amid the strings his fingers stray'd,
And an uncertain warbling made,
And oft he shook his hoary head.
But when he caught the measure wild
The old man raised his face, and smiled;
And lighten'd up his faded eye,
With all a poet's ecstasy!
In varying cadence, soft or strong,
He swept the sounding chords along;
The present scene, the future lot,
His toils, his wants, were all forgot;
Cold diffidence and age's frost
In the full tide of song were lost;
Each blank in faithless memory void
The poet's glowing thought supplied;
And, while his harp responsive rung,
'Twas thus the latest minstrel sung.

* * * * * *

Here paused the harp; and with its swell
The master's fire and courage fell;
Dejectedly and low he bow'd,
And, gazing timid on the crowd,
He seem'd to seek in every eye
If they approved his minstrelsy;
And, diffident of present praise,
Somewhat he spoke of former days,
And how old age, and wandering long,
Had done his hand and harp some wrong."

These lines hardly illustrate, I think, the particular form of Mr. Pitt's criticism, for a quick succession of fine shades of feeling of this kind could never have been delineated in a painting, or indeed in a series of paintings, at all, while they *are* so given in the poem. But the praise itself, if not its exact form, is amply deserved. The singular depth of the romantic glow in this passage, and its equally singular simplicity,—a simplicity which makes it intelligible to every one,—are conspicuous to every reader. It is not what is called classical poetry, for there is no severe outline,—no sculptured completeness and repose,—no satisfying wholeness of effect to the eye of the mind,—no embodiment of a great action. The poet gives us a breath, a ripple of alternating fear and hope in the heart of an old man, and that is all. He catches an emotion that had its roots deep in the past, and that is striving onward towards something in the future;—he traces the wistfulness and self-distrust with which age seeks to recover the feelings of youth,—the delight with which it greets them when they come,—the hesitation and diffidence with which it recalls them as they pass away, and questions the triumph it has just won,—and he paints all this without subtlety, without complexity, but with a swiftness such as few poets ever surpassed. Generally, however, Scott prefers action itself for his subject, to any feeling, however active in its bent. The cases in which he makes a study of any mood of feeling, as he does of this harper's feeling, are comparatively rare. Deloraine's night-ride to Melrose is a good deal more in Scott's ordinary way, than this study of the old harper's wistful mood. But whatever his subject, his treatment of it is the same. His lines are always strongly drawn; his handling is always simple: and his subject always

romantic. But though romantic, it is simple almost to bareness,—one of the great causes both of his popularity, and of that deficiency in his poetry of which so many of his admirers become conscious when they compare him with other and richer poets. Scott used to say that in poetry Byron "bet" him; and no doubt that in which chiefly as a poet he "bet" him, was in the variety, the richness, the lustre of his effects. A certain ruggedness and bareness was of the essence of Scott's idealism and romance. It was so in relation to scenery. He told Washington Irving that he loved the very nakedness of the Border country. "It has something," he said, "bold and stern and solitary about it. When I have been for some time in the rich scenery about Edinburgh, which is like ornamented garden-land, I begin to wish myself back again among my honest grey hills, and if I did not see the heather at least once a year, *I think I should die.*"[1] Now, the bareness which Scott so loved in his native scenery, there is in all his romantic elements of feeling. It is while he is bold and stern, that he is at his highest ideal point. Directly he begins to attempt rich or pretty subjects, as in parts of *The Lady of the Lake*, and a good deal of *The Lord of the Isles*, and still more in *The Bridal of Triermain*, his charm disappears. It is in painting those moods and exploits, in relation to which Scott shares most completely the feelings of ordinary men, but experiences them with far greater strength and purity than ordinary men, that he triumphs as a poet. Mr. Lockhart tells us that some of Scott's senses were decidedly "blunt," and one seems to recognize this in the simplicity of his romantic effects. "It is a fact," he says,

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 248.

"which some philosophers may think worth setting down, that Scott's organization, as to more than one of the senses, was the reverse of exquisite. He had very little of what musicians call an ear; his smell was hardly more delicate. I have seen him stare about, quite unconscious of the cause, when his whole company betrayed their uneasiness at the approach of an overkept haunch of venison; and neither by the nose nor the palate could he distinguish corked wine from sound. He could never tell Madeira from sherry,—nay, an Oriental friend having sent him a butt of *sheeraz*, when he remembered the circumstance some time afterwards and called for a bottle to have Sir John Malcolm's opinion of its quality, it turned out that his butler, mistaking the label, had already served up half the bin as *sherry*. Port he considered as physic . . . . in truth he liked no wines except sparkling champagne and claret; but even as to the last he was no connoisseur, and sincerely preferred a tumbler of whisky-toddy to the most precious 'liquid-ruby' that ever flowed in the cup of a prince."[1]

However, Scott's eye was very keen:—"*It was commonly him*," as his little son once said, "*that saw the hare sitting.*" And his perception of colour was very delicate as well as his mere sight. As Mr. Ruskin has pointed out, his landscape painting is almost all done by the lucid use of colour. Nevertheless this bluntness of organization in relation to the less important senses, no doubt contributed something to the singleness and simplicity of the deeper and more vital of Scott's romantic impressions; at least there is good reason to suppose that delicate and complicated susceptibilities do at least

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 338.

diminish the chance of living a strong and concentrated life—do risk the frittering away of feeling on the mere backwaters of sensations, even if they do not directly tend towards artificial and indirect forms of character. Scott's romance is like his native scenery,—bold, bare and rugged, with a swift deep stream of strong pure feeling running through it. There is plenty of colour in his pictures, as there is on the Scotch hills when the heather is out. And so too there is plenty of intensity in his romantic situations; but it is the intensity of simple, natural, unsophisticated, hardy, and manly characters. But as for subtleties and fine shades of feeling in his poems, or anything like the manifold harmonies of the richer arts, they are not to be found, or, if such complicated shading is to be found—and it is perhaps attempted in some faint measure in *The Bridal of Triermain*, the poem in which Scott tried to pass himself off for Erskine,—it is only at the expense of the higher qualities of his romantic poetry, that even in this small measure it is supplied. Again, there is no rich music in his verse. It is its rapid onset, its hurrying strength, which so fixes it in the mind.

It was not till 1808, three years after the publication of *The Lay*, that *Marmion*, Scott's greatest poem, was published. But I may as well say what seems necessary of that and his other poems, while I am on the subject of his poetry. *Marmion* has all the advantage over *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* that a coherent story told with force and fulness, and concerned with the same class of subjects as *The Lay*, must have over a confused and ill-managed legend, the only original purpose of which was to serve as the opportunity for a picture of Border life and strife. Scott's poems have sometimes been depreciated as mere

novelettes in verse, and I think that some of them may be more or less liable to this criticism. For instance, *The Lady of the Lake*, with the exception of two or three brilliant passages, has always seemed to me more of a versified *novelette*,—without the higher and broader characteristics of Scott's prose novels—than of a poem. I suppose what one expects from a poem as distinguished from a romance—even though the poem incorporates a story—is that it should not rest for its chief interest on the mere development of the story; but rather that the narrative should be quite subordinate to that insight into the deeper side of life and manners, in expressing which poetry has so great an advantage over prose. Of *The Lay* and *Marmion* this is true; less true of *The Lady of the Lake*, and still less of *Rokeby*, or *The Lord of the Isles*, and this is why *The Lay* and *Marmion* seem so much superior as poems to the others. They lean less on the interest of mere incident, more on that of romantic feeling and the great social and historic features of the day. *Marmion* was composed in great part in the saddle, and the stir of a charge of cavalry seems to be at the very core of it. "For myself," said Scott, writing to a lady correspondent at a time when he was in active service as a volunteer, "I must own that to one who has, like myself, *la tête un peu exaltée*, the pomp and circumstance of war gives, for a time, a very poignant and pleasing sensation."[1] And you feel this all through *Marmion* even more than in *The Lay*. Mr. Darwin would probably say that Auld Wat of Harden had about as much responsibility for *Marmion* as Sir Walter himself. "You will expect," he wrote to the same lady, who was personally unknown to him at that time,

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 137.

"to see a person who had dedicated himself to literary pursuits, and you will find me a rattle-skulled, half-lawyer, half-sportsman, through whose head a regiment of horse has been exercising since he was five years old."[1] And what Scott himself felt in relation to the martial elements of his poetry, soldiers in the field felt with equal force. "In the course of the day when *The Lady of the Lake* first reached Sir Adam Fergusson, he was posted with his company on a point of ground exposed to the enemy's artillery, somewhere no doubt on the lines of Torres Vedras. The men were ordered to lie prostrate on the ground; while they kept that attitude, the captain, kneeling at the head, read aloud the description of the battle in Canto VI., and the listening soldiers only interrupted him by a joyous huzza when the French shot struck the bank close above them."[2] It is not often that martial poetry has been put to such a test; but we can well understand with what rapture a Scotch force lying on the ground to shelter from the French fire, would enter into such passages as the following:—

"Their light-arm'd archers far and near
Survey'd the tangled ground,
Their centre ranks, with pike and spear,
A twilight forest frown'd,
Their barbèd horsemen, in the rear,
The stern battalia crown'd.
No cymbal clash'd, no clarion rang,
Still were the pipe and drum;
Save heavy tread, and armour's clang,
The sullen march was dumb.
There breathed no wind their crests to shake,
Or wave their flags abroad;
Scarce the frail aspen seem'd to quake,
That shadow'd o'er their road.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 259.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 327.

Their vanward scouts no tidings bring,
Can rouse no lurking foe,
Nor spy a trace of living thing
Save when they stirr'd the roe;
The host moves like a deep-sea wave,
Where rise no rocks its power to brave,
High-swelling, dark, and slow.
The lake is pass'd, and now they gain
A narrow and a broken plain,
Before the Trosach's rugged jaws,
And here the horse and spearmen pause,
While, to explore the dangerous glen,
Dive through the pass the archer-men.

"At once there rose so wild a yell
Within that dark and narrow dell,
As all the fiends from heaven that fell
Had peal'd the banner-cry of Hell!
Forth from the pass, in tumult driven,
Like chaff before the wind of heaven,
The archery appear;
For life! for life! their plight they p'y,
And shriek, and shout, and battle-cry,
And plaids and bonnets waving high,
And broadswords flashing to the sky,
Are maddening in the rear.
Onward they drive, in dreadful race,
Pursuers and pursued;
Before that tide of flight and chase,
How shall it keep its rooted place,
The spearmen's twilight wood?
Down, down, cried Mar, 'your lances dow!
Bear back both friend and foe!'
Like reeds before the tempest's frown,
That serried grove of lances brown
At once lay levell'd low;
And, closely shouldering side to side,
The bristling ranks the onset bide,—
'We'll quell the savage mountaineer,
As their Tinchel cows the game!
They came as fleet as forest deer,
We'll drive them back as tame.'"

But admirable in its stern and deep excitement as that is, the battle of Flodden in *Marmion* passes it in vigour, and constitutes perhaps the most perfect description of war by one who was—almost—both poet and warrior, which the English language contains.

And *Marmion* registers the high-water mark of Scott's poetical power, not only in relation to the painting of war, but in relation to the painting of nature. Critics from the beginning onwards have complained of the six introductory epistles, as breaking the unity of the story. But I cannot see that the remark has weight. No poem is written for those who read it as they do a novel—merely to follow the interest of the story; or if any poem be written for such readers, it deserves to die. On such a principle—which treats a poem as a mere novel and nothing else,—you might object to Homer that he interrupts the battle so often to dwell on the origin of the heroes who are waging it; or to Byron that he deserts Childe Harold to meditate on the rapture of solitude. To my mind the ease and frankness of these confessions of the author's recollections give a picture of his life and character while writing *Marmion*, which adds greatly to its attraction as a poem. You have a picture at once not only of the scenery, but of the mind in which that scenery is mirrored, and are brought back frankly, at fit intervals, from the one to the other, in the mode best adapted to help you to appreciate the relation of the poet to the poem. At least if Milton's various interruptions of a much more ambitious theme, to muse upon his own qualifications or disqualifications for the task he had attempted, be not artistic mistakes—and I never heard of any one who thought them so—I cannot see any reason why Scott's periodic

recurrence to his own personal history should be artistic mistakes either. If Scott's reverie was less lofty than Milton's, so also was his story. It seems to me as fitting to describe the relation between the poet and his theme in the one case as in the other. What can be more truly a part of *Marmion*, as a poem, though not as a story, than that introduction to the first canto in which Scott expresses his passionate sympathy with the high national feeling of the moment, in his tribute to Pitt and Fox, and then reproaches himself for attempting so great a subject and returns to what he calls his "rude legend," the very essence of which was, however, a passionate appeal to the spirit of national independence? What can be more germane to the poem than the delineation of the strength the poet had derived from musing in the bare and rugged solitudes of St. Mary's Lake, in the introduction to the second canto? Or than the striking autobiographical study of his own infancy which I have before extracted from the introduction to the third? It seems to me that *Marmion* without these introductions would be like the hills which border Yarrow, without the stream and lake in which they are reflected.

Never at all events in any later poem was Scott's touch as a mere painter so terse and strong. What a picture of a Scotch winter is given in these few lines:—

> "The sheep before the pinching heaven
> To shelter'd dale and down are driven,
> Where yet some faded herbage pines,
> And yet a watery sunbeam shines:
> In meek despondency they eye
> The wither'd sward and wintry sky,
> And from beneath their summer hill
> Stray sadly by Glenkinnon's rill."

Again, if Scott is ever Homeric (which I cannot think

he often is, in spite of Sir Francis Doyle's able criticism,—(he is too short, too sharp, and too eagerly bent on his rugged way; for a poet who is always delighting to find loopholes, even in battle, from which to look out upon the great story of human nature), he is certainly nearest to it in such a passage as this:—

> "The Isles-men carried at their backs
> The ancient Danish battle-axe.
> They raised a wild and wondering cry
> As with his guide rode Marmion by.
> Loud were their clamouring tongues, as when
> The clanging sea-fowl leave the fen,
> And, with their cries discordant mix'd,
> Grumbled and yell'd the pipes betwixt."

In hardly any of Scott's poetry do we find much of what is called the *curiosa felicitas* of expression,—the magic use of *words*, as distinguished from the mere general effect of vigour, purity, and concentration of purpose. But in *Marmion* occasionally we do find such a use. Take this description, for instance, of the Scotch tents near Edinburgh:—

> "A thousand did I say? I ween
> Thousands on thousands there were seen,
> That chequer'd all the heath between
> The streamlet and the town;
> In crossing ranks extending far,
> Forming a camp irregular;
> Oft giving way where still there stood
> Some relics of the old oak wood,
> That darkly huge did intervene,
> *And tamed the glaring white with green;*
> In these extended lines there lay
> A martial kingdom's vast array."

The line I have italicized seems to me to have more of the poet's special magic of expression than is at all usual

with Scott. The conception of the peaceful green oak-wood *taming* the glaring white of the tented field, is as fine in idea as it is in relation to the effect of the mere colour on the eye. Judge Scott's poetry by whatever test you will—whether it be a test of that which is peculiar to it, its glow of national feeling, its martial ardour, its swift and rugged simplicity, or whether it be a test of that which is common to it with most other poetry, its attraction for all romantic excitements, its special feeling for the pomp and circumstance of war, its love of light and colour—and tested either way, *Marmion* will remain his finest poem. The battle of Flodden Field touches his highest point in its expression of stern patriotic feeling, in its passionate love of daring, and in the force and swiftness of its movement, no less than in the brilliancy of its romantic interests, the charm of its picturesque detail, and the glow of its scenic colouring. No poet ever equalled Scott in the description of wild and simple scenes and the expression of wild and simple feelings. But I have said enough now of his poetry, in which, good as it is, Scott's genius did not reach its highest point. The hurried tramp of his somewhat monotonous metre, is apt to weary the ears of men who do not find their sufficient happiness, as he did, in dreaming of the wild and daring enterprises of his loved Border-land. The very quality in his verse which makes it seize so powerfully on the imaginations of plain, bold, adventurous men, often makes it hammer fatiguingly against the brain of those who need the relief of a wider horizon and a richer world.

CHAPTER VI.

COMPANIONS AND FRIENDS.

I HAVE anticipated in some degree, in speaking of Scott's later poetical works, what, in point of time at least, should follow some slight sketch of his chosen companions, and of his occupations in the first period of his married life. Scott's most intimate friend for some time after he went to college, probably the one who most stimulated his imagination in his youth, and certainly one of his most intimate friends to the very last, was William Clerk, who was called to the bar on the same day as Scott. He was the son of John Clerk of Eldin, the author of a book of some celebrity in its time on *Naval Tactics*. Even in the earliest days of this intimacy, the lads who had been Scott's fellow-apprentices in his father's office, saw with some jealousy his growing friendship with William Clerk, and remonstrated with Scott on the decline of his regard for them, but only succeeded in eliciting from him one of those outbursts of peremptory frankness which anything that he regarded as an attempt to encroach on his own interior liberty of choice always provoked. "I will never cut any man," he said, "unless I detect him in scoundrelism, but I know not what right any of you have to interfere with my choice of my company. As it is, I fairly own that though I like many of you very much, and

have long done so, I think William Clerk well worth you all put together."[1] Scott never lost the friendship which began with this eager enthusiasm, but his chief intimacy with Clerk was during his younger days.

In 1808 Scott describes Clerk as "a man of the most acute intellects and powerful apprehension, who, if he should ever shake loose the fetters of indolence by which he has been hitherto trammelled, cannot fail to be distinguished in the highest degree." Whether for the reason suggested, or for some other, Clerk never actually gained any other distinction so great as his friendship with Scott conferred upon him. Probably Scott had discerned the true secret of his friend's comparative obscurity. Even while preparing for the bar, when they had agreed to go on alternate mornings to each other's lodgings to read together, Scott found it necessary to modify the arrangement by always visiting his friend, whom he usually found in bed. It was William Clerk who sat for the picture of Darsie Latimer, the hero of *Redgauntlet*,— whence we should suppose him to have been a lively, generous, susceptible, contentious, and rather helter-skelter young man, much alive to the ludicrous in all situations, very eager to see life in all its phases, and somewhat vain of his power of adapting himself equally to all these phases. Scott tells a story of Clerk's being once baffled—almost for the first time—by a stranger in a stage coach, who would not, or could not, talk to him on any subject, until at last Clerk addressed to him this stately remonstrance, "I have talked to you, my friend, on all the ordinary subjects —literature, farming, merchandise, gaming, game-laws, horse-races, suits-at-law, politics, swindling, blasphemy,

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 214.

and philosophy,—is there any one subject that you will favour me by opening upon?" "Sir," replied the inscrutable stranger, "can you say anything clever about '*bend-leather?*"[1] No doubt this superficial familiarity with a vast number of subjects was a great fascination to Scott, and a great stimulus to his own imagination. To the last he held the same opinion of his friend's latent powers. "To my thinking," he wrote in his diary in 1825, "I never met a man of greater powers, of more complete information on all desirable subjects." But in youth at least Clerk seems to have had what Sir Walter calls a characteristic Edinburgh complaint, the "itch for disputation," and though he softened this down in later life, he had always that slight contentiousness of bias which enthusiastic men do not often heartily like, and which may have prevented Scott from continuing to the full the close intimacy of those earlier years. Yet almost his last record of a really delightful evening, refers to a bachelor's dinner given by Mr. Clerk, who remained unmarried, as late as 1827, after all Sir Walter's worst troubles had come upon him. "In short," says the diary, "we really laughed, and real laughter is as rare as real tears. I must say, too, there was a *heart*, a kindly feeling prevailed over the party. Can London give such a dinner?"[2] It is clear ,then, that Clerk's charm for his friend survived to the last, and that it was not the mere inexperience of boyhood, which made Scott esteem him so highly in his early days.

If Clerk pricked, stimulated, and sometimes badgered Scott, another of his friends who became more and more intimate with him, as life went on, and who died before him, always

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 344.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 75.

soothed him, partly by his gentleness, partly by his almost feminine dependence. This was William Erskine, also a barrister, and son of an Episcopalian clergyman in Perthshire, —to whose influence it is probably due that Scott himself always read the English Church service in his own country house, and does not appear to have retained the Presbyterianism into which he was born. Erskine, who was afterwards raised to the Bench as Lord Kinnedder—a distinction which he did not survive for many months—was a good classic, a man of fine, or, as some of his companions thought, of almost superfine taste. The style apparently for which he had credit must have been a somewhat mimini-pimini style, if we may judge by Scott's attempt in *The Bridal of Triermain*, to write in a manner which he intended to be attributed to his friend. Erskine was left a widower in middle life, and Scott used to accuse him of philandering with pretty women,—a mode of love-making which Scott certainly contrived to render into verse, in painting Arthur's love-making to Lucy in that poem. It seems that some absolutely false accusation brought against Lord Kinnedder, of an intrigue with a lady with whom he had been thus philandering, broke poor Erskine's heart, during his first year as a Judge. "The Counsellor (as Scott always called him) was," says Mr. Lockhart, "a little man of feeble make, who seemed unhappy when his pony got beyond a footpace, and had never, I should suppose, addicted himself to any out of door's sports whatever. He would, I fancy, as soon have thought of slaying his own mutton as of handling a fowling-piece; he used to shudder when he saw a party equipped for coursing, as if murder was in the wind; but the cool, meditative angler was in his eyes the abomination of abominations. His small elegant features, hectic cheek

and soft hazel eyes, were the index of the quick, sensitive, gentle spirit within." "He would dismount to lead his horse down what his friend hardly perceived to be a descent at all; grew pale at a precipice; and, unlike the white lady of Avenel, would go a long way round for a bridge." He shrank from general society, and lived in closer intimacies, and his intimacy with Scott was of the closest. He was Scott's confidant in all literary matters, and his advice was oftener followed on questions of style and form, and of literary enterprise, than that of any other of Scott's friends. It is into Erskine's mouth that Scott puts the supposed exhortation to himself to choose more classical subjects for his poems:—

"'Approach those masters o'er whose tomb
Immortal laurels ever bloom;
Instructive of the feebler bard,
Still from the grave their voice is heard;
From them, and from the paths they show'd,
Choose honour'd guide and practised road;
Nor ramble on through brake and maze,
With harpers rude of barbarous days."

And it is to Erskine that Scott replies,—

"For me, thus nurtured, dost thou ask
The classic poet's well-conn'd task?
Nay, Erskine, nay,—on the wild hill
Let the wild heath-bell flourish still;
Cherish the tulip, prune the vine,
But freely let the woodbine twine,
And leave untrimm'd the eglantine:
Nay, my friend, nay,—since oft thy praise
Hath given fresh vigour to my lays;
Since oft thy judgment could refine
My flatten'd thought or cumbrous line,
Still kind, as is thy wont, attend,
And in the minstrel spare the friend!"

It was Erskine, too, as Scott expressly states in his

introduction to the *Chronicles of the Canongate*, who reviewed with far too much partiality the *Tales of my Landlord*, in the *Quarterly Review*, for January, 1817,—a review unjustifiably included among Scott's own critical essays, on the very insufficient ground that the MS. reached Murray in Scott's own handwriting. There can, however, be no doubt at all that Scott copied out his friend's MS., in order to increase the mystification which he so much enjoyed as to the authorship of his variously named series of tales. Possibly enough, too, he may have drawn Erskine's attention to the evidence which justified his sketch of the Puritans in *Old Mortality*, evidence which he certainly intended at one time to embody in a reply of his own to the adverse criticism on that book. But though Erskine was Scott's *alter ego* for literary purposes, it is certain that Erskine, with his fastidious, not to say finical, sense of honour, would never have lent his name to cover a puff written by Scott of his own works. A man who, in Scott's own words, died "a victim to a hellishly false story, or rather, I should say, to the sensibility of his own nature, which could not endure even the shadow of reproach,—like the ermine, which is said to pine if its fur is soiled," was not the man to father a puff, even by his dearest friend, on that friend's own creations. Erskine was indeed almost feminine in his love of Scott; but he was feminine with all the irritable and scrupulous delicacy of a man who could not derogate from his own ideal of right, even to serve a friend.

Another friend of Scott's earlier days was John Leyden, Scott's most efficient coadjutor in the collection of the *Border Minstrelsy*,—that eccentric genius, marvellous linguist, and good-natured bear, who, bred a shepherd in one of the wildest valleys of Roxburghshire, had accumulated

before the age of nineteen an amount of learning which confounded the Edinburgh Professors, and who, without any previous knowledge of medicine, prepared himself to pass an examination for the medical profession, at six months' notice of the offer of an assistant-surgeoncy in the East India Company. It was Leyden who once walked between forty and fifty miles and back, for the sole purpose of visiting an old person who possessed a copy of a border ballad that was wanting for the *Minstrelsy*. Scott was sitting at dinner one day with company, when he heard a sound at a distance, "like that of the whistling of a tempest through the torn rigging of a vessel which scuds before it. The sounds increased as they approached more near; and Leyden (to the great astonishment of such of the guests as did not know him) burst into the room chanting the desiderated ballad with the most enthusiastic gesture, and all the energy of what he used to call the *saw-tones* of his voice."[1] Leyden's great antipathy was Ritson, an ill-conditioned antiquarian, of vegetarian principles, whom Scott alone of all the antiquarians of that day could manage to tame and tolerate. In Scott's absence one day, during his early married life at Lasswade, Mrs. Scott inadvertently offered Ritson a slice of beef, when that strange man burst out in such outrageous tones at what he chose to suppose an insult, that Leyden threatened to "thraw his neck" if he were not silent, a threat which frightened Ritson out of the cottage. On another occasion, simply in order to tease Ritson, Leyden complained that the meat was overdone, and sent to the kitchen for a plate of literally raw beef, and ate it up solely for the purpose of shocking his crazy rival in anti

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 56.

quarian research. Poor Leyden did not long survive his experience of the Indian climate. And with him died a passion for knowledge of a very high order, combined with no inconsiderable poetical gifts. It was in the study of such eccentric beings as Leyden that Scott doubtless acquired his taste for painting the humours of Scotch character.

Another wild shepherd, and wilder genius among Scott's associates, not only in those earlier days, but to the end, was that famous Ettrick Shepherd, James Hogg, who was always quarrelling with his brother poet, as far as Scott permitted it, and making it up again when his better feelings returned. In a shepherd's dress, and with hands fresh from sheep-shearing, he came to dine for the first time with Scott in Castle Street, and finding Mrs. Scott lying on the sofa, immediately stretched himself at full length on another sofa; for, as he explained afterwards, "I thought I could not do better than to imitate the lady of the house." At dinner, as the wine passed, he advanced from "Mr. Scott," to "Shirra" (Sheriff), "Scott," "Walter," and finally "Wattie," till at supper he convulsed every one by addressing Mrs. Scott familiarly as "Charlotte."[1] Hogg wrote certain short poems, the beauty of which in their kind Sir Walter himself never approached; but he was a man almost without self-restraint or self-knowledge, though he had a great deal of self-importance, and hardly knew how much he owed to Scott's magnanimous and ever-forbearing kindness, or if he did, felt the weight of gratitude a burden on his heart. Very different was William Laidlaw, a farmer on the banks of the Yarrow, always Scott's friend, and afterwards his manager at Abbotsford, through

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 168-9.

whose hand he dictated many of his novels. Mr. Laidlaw was one of Scott's humbler friends,—a class of friends with whom he seems always to have felt more completely at his ease than any others—who gave at least as much as he received, one of those wise, loyal, and thoughtful men in a comparatively modest position of life, whom Scott delighted to trust, and never trusted without finding his trust justified. In addition to these Scotch friends, Scott had made, even before the publication of his *Border Minstrelsy*, not a few in London or its neighbourhood,—of whom the most important at this time was the grey-eyed, hatchet-faced, courteous George Ellis, as Leyden described him, the author of various works on ancient English poetry and romance, who combined with a shrewd, satirical vein, and a great knowledge of the world, political as well as literary, an exquisite taste in poetry, and a warm heart. Certainly Ellis's criticism on his poems was the truest and best that Scott ever received; and had he lived to read his novels,—only one of which was published before Ellis's death,—he might have given Scott more useful help than either Ballantyne or even Erskine.

CHAPTER VII.

FIRST COUNTRY HOMES.

So completely was Scott by nature an out-of-doors man that he cannot be adequately known either through his poems or through his friends, without also knowing his external surroundings and occupations. His first country home was the cottage at Lasswade, on the Esk, about six miles from Edinburgh, which he took in 1798, a few months after his marriage, and retained till 1804. It was a pretty little cottage, in the beautification of which Scott felt great pride, and where he exercised himself in the small beginnings of those tastes for altering and planting which grew so rapidly upon him, and at last enticed him into castle-building and tree-culture on a dangerous, not to say, ruinous scale. One of Scott's intimate friends, the master of Rokeby, by whose house and neighbourhood the poem of that name was suggested, Mr. Morritt, walked along the Esk in 1808 with Scott four years after he had left it, and was taken out of his way to see it. "I have been bringing you," he said, "where there is little enough to be seen, only that Scotch cottage, but though not worth looking at, I could not pass it. It was our first country house when newly married, and many a contrivance it had to make it comfortable. I made a dining-table for it with my own hands. Look at these two miserable willow-trees

on either side the gate into the enclosure; they are tied together at the top to be an arch, and a cross made of two sticks over them is not yet decayed. To be sure it is not much of a lion to show a stranger; but I wanted to see it again myself, for I assure you that after I had constructed it, *mamma* (Mrs. Scott) and I both of us thought it so fine, we turned out to see it by moonlight, and walked backwards from it to the cottage-door, in admiration of our own magnificence and its picturesque effect." It was here at Lasswade that he bought the phaeton, which was the first wheeled carriage that ever penetrated to Liddesdale, a feat which it accomplished in the first August of this century.

When Scott left the cottage at Lasswade in 1804, it was to take up his country residence in Selkirkshire, of which he had now been made sheriff, in a beautiful little house belonging to his cousin, Major-General Sir James Russell, and known to all the readers of Scott's poetry as the Ashestiel of the *Marmion* introductions. The Glenkinnon brook dashes in a deep ravine through the grounds to join the Tweed; behind the house rise the hills which divide the Tweed from the Yarrow; and an easy ride took Scott into the scenery of the Yarrow. The description of Ashestiel, and the brook which runs through it, in the introduction to the first canto of *Marmion* is indeed one of the finest specimens of Scott's descriptive poetry:—

"November's sky is chill and drear,
November's leaf is red and sear;
Late, gazing down the steepy linn,
That hems our little garden in,
Low in its dark and narrow glen,
You scarce the rivulet might ken,
So thick the tangled greenwood grew,
So feeble trill'd the streamlet through;
Now, murmuring hoarse, and frequent seen,
Through bush and briar no longer green,

An angry brook, it sweeps the glade,
Brawls over rock and wild cascade,
And, foaming brown with doubled speed,
Hurries its waters to the Tweed."

Selkirk was his nearest town, and that was seven miles from Ashestiel; and even his nearest neighbour was at Yair, a few miles off lower down the Tweed,—Yair of which he wrote in another of the introductions to *Marmion*:—

"From Yair, which hills so closely bind
Scarce can the Tweed his passage find,
Though much he fret, and chafe, and toil,
Till all his eddying currents boil."

At Ashestiel it was one of his greatest delights to look after his relative's woods, and to dream of planting and thinning woods of his own, a dream only too amply realized. It was here that a new kitchen-range was sunk for some time in the ford, which was so swollen by a storm in 1805 that the horse and cart that brought it were themselves with difficulty rescued from the waters. And it was here that Scott first entered on that active life of literary labour in close conjunction with an equally active life of rural sport, which gained him a well-justified reputation as the hardest worker and the heartiest player in the kingdom. At Lasswade Scott's work had been done at night; but serious headaches made him change his habit at Ashestiel, and rise steadily at five, lighting his own fire in winter. "Arrayed in his shooting-jacket, or whatever dress he meant to use till dinner-time, he was seated at his desk by six o'clock, all his papers arranged before him in the most accurate order, and his books of reference marshalled around him on the floor, while at least one favourite dog lay watching his eye, just beyond the line

of circumvallation. Thus, by the time the family assembled for breakfast, between nine and ten, he had done enough, in his own language, 'to break the neck of the day's work.' After breakfast a couple of hours more were given to his solitary tasks, and by noon he was, as he used to say, his 'own man.' When the weather was bad, he would labour incessantly all the morning; but the general rule was to be out and on horseback by one o'clock at the latest; while, if any more distant excursion had been proposed overnight, he was ready to start on it by ten; his occasional rainy days of unintermitted study, forming, as he said, a fund in his favour, out of which he was entitled to draw for accommodation whenever the sun shone with special brightness." In his earlier days none of his horses liked to be fed except by their master. When Brown Adam was saddled, and the stable-door opened, the horse would trot round to the leaping-on stone of his own accord, to be mounted, and was quite intractable under any one but Scott. Scott's life might well be fairly divided—just as history is divided into reigns—by the succession of his horses and dogs. The reigns of Captain, Lieutenant, Brown Adam, Daisy, divide at least the period up to Waterloo; while the reigns of Sybil Grey, and the Covenanter, or Douce Davie, divide the period of Scott's declining years. During the brilliant period of the earlier novels we hear less of Scott's horses; but of his deerhounds there is an unbroken succession. Camp, Maida (the "Bevis" of *Woodstock*), and Nimrod, reigned successively between Sir Walter's marriage and his death. It was Camp on whose death he relinquished a dinner invitation previously accepted, on the ground that the death of "an old friend" rendered him unwilling to dine out; Maida to whom he erected a marble

monument, and Nimrod of whom he spoke so affectingly as too good a dog for his diminished fortunes during his absence in Italy on the last hopeless journey.

Scott's amusements at Ashestiel, besides riding, in which he was fearless to rashness, and coursing, which was the chief form of sporting in the neighbourhood, comprehended "burning the water," as salmon-spearing by torchlight was called, in the course of which he got many a ducking. Mr. Skene gives an amusing picture of their excursions together from Ashestiel among the hills, he himself followed by a lanky Savoyard, and Scott by a portly Scotch butler —both servants alike highly sensitive as to their personal dignity—on horses which neither of the attendants could sit well. "Scott's heavy lumbering buffetier had provided himself against the mountain storms with a huge cloak, which, when the cavalcade was at gallop, streamed at full stretch from his shoulders, and kept flapping in the other's face, who, having more than enough to do in preserving his own equilibrium, could not think of attempting at any time to control the pace of his steed, and had no relief but fuming and *vesting* at the *sacré manteau*, in language happily unintelligible to its wearer. Now and then some ditch or turf-fence rendered it indispensable to adventure on a leap, and no farce could have been more amusing than the display of politeness which then occurred between these worthy equestrians, each courteously declining in favour of his friend the honour of the first experiment, the horses fretting impatient beneath them, and the dogs clamouring encouragement."[1] Such was Scott's order of life at Ashestiel, where he remained from 1804 to 1812. As to his literary work here, it was enormous

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 268-9.

Besides finishing *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, writing *Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake*, part of *The Bridal of Triermain*, and part of *Rokeby*, and writing reviews, he wrote a *Life of Dryden*, and edited his works anew with some care, in eighteen volumes, edited *Somers's Collection of Tracts*, in thirteen volumes, quarto, *Sir Ralph Sadler's Life, Letters, and State Papers*, in three volumes, quarto, *Miss Seward's Life and Poetical Works*, *The Secret History of the Court of James I.*, in two volumes, *Strutt's Queenhoo Hall*, in four volumes, 12mo., and various other single volumes, and began his heavy work on the edition of Swift. This was the literary work of eight years, during which he had the duties of his Sheriffship, and, after he gave up his practice as a barrister, the duties of his Deputy Clerkship of Session to discharge regularly. The editing of Dryden alone would have seemed to most men of leisure a pretty full occupation for these eight years, and though I do not know that Scott edited with the anxious care with which that sort of work is often now prepared, that he went into all the arguments for a doubtful reading with the pains that Mr. Dyce spent on the various readings of Shakespeare, or that Mr. Spedding spent on a various reading of Bacon, yet Scott did his work in a steady, workmanlike manner, which satisfied the most fastidious critics of that day, and he was never, I believe, charged with hurrying or scamping it. His biographies of Swift and Dryden are plain solid pieces of work—not exactly the works of art which biographies have been made in our day—not comparable to Carlyle's studies of Cromwell or Frederick, or, in point of art, even to the life of John Sterling, but still sensible and interesting, sound in judgment, and animated in style.

CHAPTER VIII.

REMOVAL TO ABBOTSFORD, AND LIFE THERE.

In May, 1812, Scott having now at last obtained the salary of the Clerkship of Session, the work of which he had for more than five years discharged without pay, indulged himself in realizing his favourite dream of buying a "mountain farm" at Abbotsford,—five miles lower down the Tweed than his cottage at Ashestiel, which was now again claimed by the family of Russell,—and migrated thither with his household gods. The children long remembered the leave-taking as one of pure grief, for the villagers were much attached both to Scott and to his wife, who had made herself greatly beloved by her untiring goodness to the sick among her poor neighbours. But Scott himself describes the migration as a scene in which their neighbours found no small share of amusement. "Our flitting and removal from Ashestiel baffled all description; we had twenty-five cartloads of the veriest trash in nature, besides dogs, pigs, ponies, poultry, cows, calves, bareheaded wenches, and bare-breeched boys."[1]

To another friend Scott wrote that the neighbours had "been much delighted with the procession of my furniture, in which old swords, bows, targets, and lances, made a very conspicuous show. A family of turkeys was

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 6.

accommodated within the helmet of some *preux chevalier* of ancient border fame; and the very cows, for aught I know, were bearing banners and muskets. I assure your ladyship that this caravan attended by a dozen of ragged rosy peasant children, carrying fishing-rods and spears, and leading ponies, greyhounds, and spaniels, would, as it crossed the Tweed, have furnished no bad subject for the pencil, and really reminded me of one of the gipsy groups of Callot upon their march." [1]

The place thus bought for 4000*l.*,—half of which, according to Scott's bad and sanguine habit, was borrowed from his brother, and half raised on the security of a poem at the moment of sale wholly unwritten, and not completed even when he removed to Abbotsford—"Rokeby"—became only too much of an idol for the rest of Scott's life. Mr. Lockhart admits that before the crash came he had invested 29,000*l.* in the purchase of land alone. But at this time only the kernel of the subsequent estate was bought, in the shape of a hundred acres or rather more, part of which ran along the shores of the Tweed—"a beautiful river flowing broad and bright over a bed of milk-white pebbles, unless here and there where it darkened into a deep pool, overhung as yet only by birches and alders." There was also a poor farm-house, a staring barn, and a pond so dirty that it had hitherto given the name of "Clarty Hole" to the place itself. Scott renamed the place from the adjoining ford which was just above the confluence of the Gala with the Tweed. He chose the name of Abbotsford because the land had formerly all belonged to the Abbots of Melrose,—the ruin of whose beautiful abbey was visible from many parts of the little

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 3.

property. On the other side of the river the old British barrier called "the Catrail" was full in view. As yet the place was not planted,—the only effort made in this direction by its former owner, Dr. Douglas, having been a long narrow stripe of firs, which Scott used to compare to a black hair-comb, and which gave the name of "The Doctor's Redding-Kame" to the stretch of woods of which it is still the central line. Such was the place which he made it the too great delight of the remainder of his life to increase and beautify, by spending on it a good deal more than he had earned, and that too in times when he should have earned a good deal more than he ought to have thought even for a moment of spending. The cottage grew to a mansion, and the mansion to a castle. The farm by the Tweed made him long for a farm by the Cauldshiel's loch, and the farm by the Cauldshiel's loch for Thomas the Rhymer's Glen; and as, at every step in the ladder, his means of buying were really increasing—though they were so cruelly discounted and forestalled by this growing land-hunger,—Scott never realized into what troubles he was carefully running himself.

Of his life at Abbotsford at a later period when his building was greatly enlarged, and his children grown up, we have a brilliant picture from the pen of Mr. Lockhart. And though it does not belong to his first years at Abbotsford, I cannot do better than include it here as conveying probably better than anything I could elsewhere find, the charm of that ideal life which lured Scott on from one project to another in that scheme of castle-building, in relation to which he confused so dangerously the world of dreams with the harder world of wages, capital, interest, and rent.

"I remember saying to William Allan one morning, as the whole party mustered before the porch after breakfast, 'A faithful sketch of what you at this moment see would be more interesting a hundred years hence than the grandest so-called historical picture that you will ever exhibit in Somerset House;' and my friend agreed with me so cordially that I often wondered afterwards he had not attempted to realize the suggestion. The subject ought, however, to have been treated conjointly by him (or Wilkie) and Edwin Landseer.

"It was a clear, bright September morning, with a sharpness in the air that doubled the animating influence of the sunshine, and all was in readiness for a grand coursing match on Newark Hill. The only guest who had chalked out other sport for himself was the staunchest of anglers, Mr. Rose; but he too was there on his *shelty*, armed with his salmon-rod and landing-net, and attended by his humorous squire, Hinves, and Charlie Purdie, a brother of Tom, in those days the most celebrated fisherman of the district. This little group of Waltonians, bound for Lord Somerville's preserve, remained lounging about to witness the start of the main cavalcade. Sir Walter, mounted on Sybil, was marshalling the order of procession with a huge hunting-whip; and among a dozen frolicsome youths and maidens, who seemed disposed to laugh at all discipline, appeared, each on horseback, each as eager as the youngest sportsman in the troop, Sir Humphry Davy, Dr. Wollaston, and the patriarch of Scottish *belles lettres*, Henry Mackenzie. The Man of Feeling, however, was persuaded with some difficulty to resign his steed for the present to his faithful negro follower, and to join Lady Scott in the sociable, until we should reach the ground of our *battue*. Laidlaw, on a long-tailed, wiry Highlander, yclept Hoddin Grey, which carried him nimbly and stoutly, although his feet almost touched the ground as he sat, was the adjutant. But the most picturesque figure was the illustrious inventor of the safety-lamp. He had come for his favourite sport of angling, and had been practising it successfully with Rose, his travelling-companion, for two or three days preceding this, but he had not prepared for coursing fields, and had left Charlie Purdie's

troop for Sir Walter's on a sudden thought; and his fisherman's costume—a brown hat with flexible brim, surrounded with line upon line, and innumerable fly-hooks, jack-boots worthy of a Dutch smuggler, and a fustian surtout dabbled with the blood of salmon,—made a fine contrast with the smart jackets, white cord breeches, and well-polished jockey-boots of the less distinguished cavaliers about him. Dr. Wollaston was in black, and, with his noble, serene dignity of countenance, might have passed for a sporting archbishop. Mr. Mackenzie, at this time in the seventy-sixth year of his age, with a white hat turned up with green, green spectacles, green jacket, and long brown leather gaiters buttoned upon his nether anatomy, wore a dog-whistle round his neck, and had all over the air of as resolute a devotee as the gay captain of Huntly Burn. Tom Purdie and his subalterns had preceded us by a few hours with all the greyhounds that could be collected at Abbotsford, Darnick, and Melrose; but the giant Maida had remained as his master's orderly, and now gambolled about Sibyl Grey, barking for mere joy, like a spaniel puppy.

"The order of march had been all settled, and the sociable was just getting under weigh, when *the Lady Anne* broke from the line, screaming with laughter, and exclaimed, 'Papa! papa! I know you could never think of going without your pet.' Scott looked round, and I rather think there was a blush as well as a smile upon his face, when he perceived a little black pig frisking about his pony, and evidently a self-elected addition to the party of the day. He tried to look stern, and cracked his whip at the creature, but was in a moment obliged to join in the general cheers. Poor piggy soon found a strap round his neck, and was dragged into the background. Scott, watching the retreat, repeated with mock pathos the first verse of an old pastoral song:—

> "What will I do gin my hoggie die?
> My joy, my pride, my hoggie!
> My only beast, I had nae mae,
> And wow! but I was vogie!"

The cheers were redoubled, and the squadron moved on. This pig had taken, nobody could tell how, a most sentimental attachment to Scott, and was constantly urging its pretension to be admitted a regular member of his *tail*, along with the greyhounds and terriers; but indeed I remember him suffering another summer under the same sort of pertinacity on the part of an affectionate hen. I leave the explanation for philosophers; but such were the facts. I have too much respect for the vulgarly calumniated donkey to name him in the same category of pets with the pig and the hen; but a year or two after this time, my wife used to drive a couple of these animals in a little garden chair, and whenever her father appeared at the door of our cottage, we were sure to see Hannah More and Lady Morgan (as Anne Scott had wickedly christened them) trotting from their pasture to lay their noses over the paling, and, as Washington Irving says of the old white-haired hedger with the Parisian snuff-box, 'to have a pleasant crack wi' the laird.'"[1]

Carlyle, in his criticism on Scott—a criticism which will hardly, I think, stand the test of criticism in its turn, so greatly does he overdo the reaction against the first excessive appreciation of his genius—adds a contribution of his own to this charming idyll, in reference to the natural fascination which Scott seemed to exert over almost all dumb creatures. A little Blenheim cocker, "one of the smallest, beautifullest, and tiniest of lapdogs," with which Carlyle was well acquainted, and which was also one of the shyest of dogs, that would crouch towards his mistress and draw back "with angry timidity" if any one did but look at him admiringly, once met in the street "a tall, singular, busy-looking man," who halted by. The dog ran towards him and began "fawning, frisking, licking at his feet;" and every time he saw Sir Walter

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 238—242.

afterwards, in Edinburgh, he repeated his demonstration of delight. Thus discriminating was this fastidious Blenheim cocker even in the busy streets of Edinburgh.

And Scott's attraction for dumb animals was only a lesser form of his attraction for all who were in any way dependent on him, especially his own servants and labourers. The story of his demeanour towards them is one of the most touching ever written. "Sir Walter speaks to every man as if they were blood-relations" was the common *formula* in which this demeanour was described. Take this illustration. There was a little hunchbacked tailor, named William Goodfellow, living on his property (but who at Abbotsford was termed Robin Goodfellow). This tailor was employed to make the curtains for the new library, and had been very proud of his work, but fell ill soon afterwards, and Sir Walter was unremitting in his attention to him. "I can never forget," says Mr. Lockhart, "the evening on which the poor tailor died. When Scott entered the hovel, he found everything silent, and inferred from the looks of the good women in attendance that the patient had fallen asleep, and that they feared his sleep was the final one. He murmured some syllables of kind regret: at the sound of his voice the dying tailor unclosed his eyes, and eagerly and wistfully sat up, clasping his hands with an expression of rapturous gratefulness and devotion that, in the midst of deformity, disease, pain, and wretchedness, was at once beautiful and sublime. He cried with a loud voice, 'The Lord bless and reward you!' and expired with the effort."[1] Still more striking is the account of his relation with Tom Purdie, the wide-

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vii. 218.

mouthed, under-sized, broad-shouldered, square-made, thin-flanked woodsman, so well known afterwards by all Scott's friends as he waited for his master in his green shooting-jacket, white hat, and drab trousers. Scott first made Tom Purdie's acquaintance in his capacity as judge, the man being brought before him for poaching, at the time that Scott was living at Ashestiel. Tom gave so touching an account of his circumstances—work scarce—wife and children in want—grouse abundant—and his account of himself was so fresh and even humorous, that Scott let him off the penalty, and made him his shepherd. He discharged these duties so faithfully that he came to be his master's forester and factotum, and indeed one of his best friends, though a little disposed to tyrannize over Scott in his own fashion. A visitor describes him as unpacking a box of new importations for his master "as if he had been sorting some toys for a restless child." But after Sir Walter had lost the bodily strength requisite for riding, and was too melancholy for ordinary conversation, Tom Purdie's shoulder was his great stay in wandering through his woods, for with him he felt that he might either speak or be silent at his pleasure. "What a blessing there is," Scott wrote in his diary at that time, "in a fellow like Tom, whom no familiarity can spoil, whom you may scold and praise and joke with, knowing the quality of the man is unalterable in his love and reverence to his master." After Scott's failure, Mr. Lockhart writes: "Before I leave this period, I must note how greatly I admired the manner in which all his dependents appeared to have met the reverse of his fortunes—a reverse which inferred very considerable alteration in the circumstances of every one of them. The butler, instead of being the easy chief of a large establishment,

was now doing half the work of the house at probably half his former wages. Old Peter, who had been for five and twenty years a dignified coachman, was now ploughman in ordinary, only putting his horses to the carriage upon high and rare occasions; and so on with all the rest that remained of the ancient train. And all, to my view, seemed happier than they had ever done before."[1] The illustration of this true confidence between Scott and his servants and labourers might be extended to almost any length.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scot* ix. 170.

CHAPTER IX.

SCOTT'S PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BALLANTYNES.

BEFORE I make mention of Scott's greatest works, his novels, I must say a few words of his relation to the Ballantyne Brothers, who involved him, and were involved by him, in so many troubles, and with whose name the story of his broken fortunes is inextricably bound up. James Ballantyne, the elder brother, was a schoolfellow of Scott's at Kelso, and was the editor and manager of the *Kelso Mail*, an anti-democratic journal, which had a fair circulation. Ballantyne was something of an artist as regarded "type," and Scott got him therefore to print his *Minstrelsy of the Border*, the excellent workmanship of which attracted much attention in London. In 1802, on Scott's suggestion, Ballantyne moved to Edinburgh; and to help him to move, Scott, who was already meditating some investment of his little capital in business other than literary, lent him 500*l*. Between this and 1805, when Scott first became a partner of Ballantyne's in the printing business, he used every exertion to get legal and literary printing offered to James Ballantyne, and, according to Mr. Lockhart, the concern "grew and prospered." At Whitsuntide, 1805, when *The Lay* had been published, but before Scott had the least idea of the prospects of gain which mere lite-

rature would open to him, he formally, though secretly joined Ballantyne as a partner in the printing business. He explains his motives for this step, so far at least as he then recalled them, in a letter written after his misfortunes, in 1826. "It is easy," he said, "no doubt for any friend to blame me for entering into connexion with commercial matters at all. But I wish to know what I could have done better—excluded from the bar, and then from all profits for six years, by my colleague's prolonged life. Literature was not in those days what poor Constable has made it; and with my little capital I was too glad to make commercially the means of supporting my family. I got but 600*l.* for *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and—it was a price that made men's hair stand on end—1000*l.* for *Marmion*. I have been far from suffering by James Ballantyne. I owe it to him to say, that his difficulties, as well as his advantages, are owing to me."

This, though a true, was probably a very imperfect account of Scott's motives. He ceased practising at the bar, I do not doubt, in great degree from a kind of hurt pride at his ill-success, at a time when he felt during every month more and more confidence in his own powers. He believed, with some justice, that he understood some of the secrets of popularity in literature, but he had always, till towards the end of his life, the greatest horror of resting on literature alone as his main resource; and he was not a man, nor was Lady Scott a woman, to pinch and live narrowly. Were it only for his lavish generosity, that kind of life would have been intolerable to him. Hence, he reflected, that if he could but use his literary instinct to feed some commercial undertaking, managed by a man he could trust, he might gain a considerable percentage on his little capital, without so embarking in commerce

as to oblige him either to give up his status as a sheriff, or his official duties as a clerk of session, or his literary undertakings. In his old schoolfellow, James Ballantyne, he believed he had found just such an agent as he wanted, the requisite link between literary genius like his own, and the world which reads and buys books; and he thought that, by feeling his way a little, he might secure, through this partnership, besides the then very bare rewards of authorship, at least a share in those more liberal rewards which commercial men managed to squeeze for themselves out of successful authors. And, further, he felt—and this was probably the greatest unconscious attraction for him in this scheme—that with James Ballantyne for his partner he should be the real leader and chief, and rather in the position of a patron and benefactor of his colleague, than of one in any degree dependent on the generosity or approval of others. "If I have a very strong passion in the world," he once wrote of himself—and the whole story of his life seems to confirm it—"it is pride."[1] In James Ballantyne he had a faithful, but almost humble friend, with whom he could deal much as he chose, and fear no wound to his pride. He had himself helped Ballantyne to a higher line of business than any hitherto aspired to by him. It was his own book which first got the Ballantyne press its public credit. And if he could but create a great commercial success upon this foundation, he felt that he should be fairly entitled to share in the gains, which not merely his loan of capital, but his foresight and courage had opened to Ballantyne.

And it is quite possible that Scott might have succeeded—or at all events not seriously failed—if he had

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 221.

been content to stick to the printing firm of James Ballantyne and Co., and had not launched also into the bookselling and publishing firm of John Ballantyne and Co., or had never begun the wild and dangerous practice of forestalling his gains, and spending wealth which he had not earned. But when by way of feeding the printing press of James Ballantyne and Co., he started in 1809 the bookselling and publishing firm of John Ballantyne and Co., using as his agent a man as inferior in sterling worth to James, as James was inferior in general ability to himself, he carefully dug a mine under his own feet, of which we can only say, that nothing except his genius could have prevented it from exploding long before it did. The truth was evidently that James Ballantyne's respectful homage, and John's humorous appreciation, all but blinded Scott's eyes to the utter inadequacy of either of these men, especially the latter, to supply the deficiencies of his own character for conducting business of this kind with proper discretion. James Ballantyne, who was pompous and indolent, though thoroughly honest, and not without some intellectual insight, Scott used to call Aldiborontiphoscophornio. John, who was clever but frivolous, dissipated, and tricksy, he termed Rigdumfunnidos, or his "little Picaroon." It is clear from Mr. Lockhart's account of the latter that Scott not only did not respect, but despised him, though he cordially liked him, and that he passed over, in judging him, vices which in a brother or son of his own he would severely have rebuked. I believe myself that his liking for co-operation with both, was greatly founded on his feeling that they were simply creatures of his, to whom he could pretty well dictate what he wanted,—colleagues whose inferiority to himself unconsciously flattered his pride.

He was evidently inclined to resent bitterly the patronage of publishers. He sent word to Blackwood once with great hauteur, after some suggestion from that house had been made to him which appeared to him to interfere with his independence as an author, that he was one of "the Black Hussars" of literature, who would not endure that sort of treatment. Constable, who was really very liberal, hurt his sensitive pride through the *Edinburgh Review*, of which Jeffrey was editor. Thus the Ballantynes' great deficiency—that neither of them had any independent capacity for the publishing business, which would in any way hamper his discretion—though this is just what commercial partners ought to have had, or they were not worth their salt,—was, I believe, precisely what induced this Black Hussar of literature, in spite of his otherwise considerable sagacity and knowledge of human nature, to select them for partners.

And yet it is strange that he not only chose them, but chose the inferior and lighter-headed of the two for far the most important and difficult of the two businesses. In the printing concern there was at least this to be said, that of part of the business—the selection of type and the superintendence of the executive part,—James Ballantyne was a good judge. He was never apparently a good man of business, for he kept no strong hand over the expenditure and accounts, which is the core of success in every concern. But he understood types; and his customers were publishers, a wealthy and judicious class, who were not likely all to fail together. But to select a "Rigdumfunnidos,"—a dissipated comic-song singer and horse-fancier,—for the head of a publishing concern, was indeed a kind of insanity. It is told of John Ballantyne, that after the successful negotiation with Constable for

Rob Roy, and while "hopping up and down in his glee," he exclaimed, "'Is Rob's gun here, Mr. Scott? Would you object to my trying the old barrel with a *few de joy?*' 'Nay, Mr. Puff,' said Scott, 'it would burst and blow you to the devil before your time.' 'Johnny, my man,' said Constable, 'what the mischief puts drawing at sight into *your* head?' Scott laughed heartily at this innuendo; and then observing that the little man felt somewhat sore, called attention to the notes of a bird in the adjoining shrubbery. 'And by-the-bye,' said he, as they continued listening, ''tis a long time, Johnny, since we have had "The Cobbler of Kelso."' Mr. Puff forthwith jumped up on a mass of stone, and seating himself in the proper attitude of one working with an awl, began a favourite interlude, mimicking a certain son of Crispin, at whose stall Scott and he had often lingered when they were schoolboys, and a blackbird, the only companion of his cell, that used to sing to him while he talked and whistled to it all day long. With this performance Scott was always delighted. Nothing could be richer than the contrast of the bird's wild, sweet notes, some of which he imitated with wonderful skill, and the accompaniment of the cobbler's hoarse, cracked voice, uttering all manner of endearing epithets, which Johnny multiplied and varied in a style worthy of the old women in Rabelais at the birth of Pantagruel."[1] That passage gives precisely the kind of estimation in which John Ballantyne was held both by Scott and Constable. And yet it was to him that Scott entrusted the dangerous and difficult duty of setting up a new publishing house as a rival to the best publishers of the day. No doubt Scott really

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 218.

relied on his own judgment for working the publishing house. But except where his own books were concerned, no judgment could have been worse. In the first place he was always wanting to do literary jobs for a friend, and so advised the publishing of all sorts of unsaleable books, because his friends desired to write them. In the next place, he was a genuine historian, and one of the antiquarian kind himself; he was himself really interested in all sorts of historical and antiquarian issues,—and very mistakenly gave the public credit for wishing to know what he himself wished to know. I should add that Scott's good nature and kindness of heart not only led him to help on many books which he knew in himself could never answer, and some which, as he well knew, would be altogether worthless, but that it greatly biassed his own intellectual judgment. Nothing can be plainer than that he really held his intimate friend, Joanna Baillie, a very great dramatic poet, a much greater poet than himself, for instance; one fit to be even mentioned as following—at a distance—in the track of Shakespeare. He supposes Erskine to exhort him thus:—

> "Or, if to touch such chord be thine,
> Restore the ancient tragic line,
> And emulate the notes that rung
> From the wild harp which silent hung
> By silver Avon's holy shore,
> Till twice a hundred years roll'd o'er,—
> When she, the bold enchantress, came
> With fearless hand and heart on flame,
> From the pale willow snatch'd the treasure,
> And swept it with a kindred measure,
> Till Avon's swans, while rung the grove
> With Montfort's hate and Basil's love,
> Awakening at the inspired strain,
> Deem'd their own Shakespeare lived again."

Avon's swans must have been Avon's geese, I think, if they had deemed anything of the kind. Joanna Baillie's dramas are "nice," and rather dull; now and then she can write a song with the ease and sweetness that suggest Shakespearian echoes. But Scott's judgment was obviously blinded by his just and warm regard for Joanna Baillie herself.

Of course with such interfering causes to bring unsaleable books to the house—of course I do not mean that John Ballantyne and Co. published for Joanna Baillie, or that they would have lost by it if they had—the new firm published all sorts of books which did not sell at all; while John Ballantyne himself indulged in a great many expenses and dissipations, for which John Ballantyne and Co. had to pay. Nor was it very easy for a partner who himself drew bills on the future—even though he were the well-spring of all the paying business the company had—to be very severe on a fellow-partner who supplied his pecuniary needs in the same way. At all events, there is no question that all through 1813 and 1814 Scott was kept in constant suspense and fear of bankruptcy, by the ill success of John Ballantyne and Co., and the utter want of straightforwardness in John Ballantyne himself as to the bills out, and which had to be provided against. It was the publication of *Waverley*, and the consequent opening up of the richest vein not only in Scott's own genius, but in his popularity with the public, which alone ended these alarms; and the many unsaleable works of John Ballantyne and Co. were then gradually disposed of to Constable and others, to their own great loss, as part of the conditions on which they received a share in the copyright of the wonderful novels which sold like wildfire. But though in this way

the publishing business of John Ballantyne and Co. was saved, and its affairs pretty decently wound up, the printing firm remained saddled with some of their obligations; while Constable's business, on which Scott depended for the means with which he was buying his estate, building his castle, and settling money on his daughter-in-law, was seriously injured by the purchase of all this unsaleable stock.

I do not think that any one who looks into the complicated controversy between the representatives of the Ballantynes and Mr. Lockhart, concerning these matters, can be content with Mr. Lockhart's—no doubt perfectly sincere—judgment on the case. It is obvious that amidst these intricate accounts, he fell into one or two serious blunders—blunders very unjust to James Ballantyne. And without pretending to have myself formed any minute judgment on the details, I think the following points clear:—(1.) That James Ballantyne was very severely judged by Mr. Lockhart, on grounds which were never alleged by Scott against him at all,—indeed on grounds on which he was expressly exempted from all blame by Sir Walter. (2.) That Sir Walter Scott was very severely judged by the representatives of the Ballantynes, on grounds on which James Ballantyne himself never brought any charge against him; on the contrary, he declared that he had no charge to bring. (3.) That both Scott and his partners invited ruin by freely spending gains which they only expected to earn, and that in this Scott certainly set an example which he could hardly expect feebler men not to follow. On the whole, I think the troubles with the Ballantyne brothers brought to light not only that eager gambling spirit in him, which his grandfather indulged with better success and more moderation when he bought

the hunter with money destined for a flock of sheep, and then gave up gambling for ever, but a tendency still more dangerous, and in some respects involving an even greater moral defect,—I mean a tendency, chiefly due, I think, to a very deep-seated pride,—to prefer inferior men as working colleagues in business. And yet it is clear that if Scott were to dabble in publishing at all, he really needed the check of men of larger experience, and less literary turn of mind. The great majority of consumers of popular literature are not, and indeed will hardly ever be, literary men; and that is precisely why a publisher who is not, in the main, literary,—who looks on authors' MSS. for the most part with distrust and suspicion, much as a rich man looks at a begging-letter, or a sober and judicious fish at an angler's fly,—is so much less likely to run aground than such a man as Scott. The untried author should be regarded by a wise publisher as a natural enemy,—an enemy indeed of a class, rare specimens whereof will always be his best friends, and who, therefore, should not be needlessly affronted—but also as one of a class of whom nineteen out of every twenty will dangle before the publisher's eyes wiles and hopes and expectations of the most dangerous and illusory character,—which constitute indeed the very perils that it is his true function in life skilfully to evade. The Ballantynes were quite unfit for this function; first, they had not the experience requisite for it; next, they were altogether too much under Scott's influence. No wonder that the partnership came to no good, and left behind it the germs of calamity even more serious still.

CHAPTER X.

THE WAVERLEY NOVELS.

In the summer of 1814, Scott took up again and completed—almost at a single heat,—a fragment of a Jacobite story, begun in 1805 and then laid aside. It was published anonymously, and its astonishing success turned back again the scales of Scott's fortunes, already inclining ominously towards a catastrophe. This story was *Waverley*. Mr. Carlyle has praised *Waverley* above its fellows. "On the whole, contrasting *Waverley*, which was carefully written, with most of its followers which were written extempore, one may regret the extempore method." This is, however, a very unfortunate judgment. Not one of the whole series of novels appears to have been written more completely extempore than the great bulk of *Waverley*, including almost everything that made it either popular with the million or fascinating to the fastidious; and it is even likely that this is one of the causes of its excellence.

"The last two volumes," says Scott, in a letter to Mr. Morritt, "were written in three weeks." And here is Mr. Lockhart's description of the effect which Scott's incessant toil during the composition, produced on a friend whose window happened to command the novelist's study:—

"Happening to pass through Edinburgh in June, 1814, I dined one day with the gentleman in question (now the Honourable William Menzies, one of the Supreme Judges at the Cape of Good Hope), whose residence was then in George Street, situated very near to, and at right angles with, North Castle Street. It was a party of very young persons, most of them, like Menzies and myself, destined for the Bar of Scotland, all gay and thoughtless, enjoying the first flush of manhood, with little remembrance of the yesterday, or care of the morrow. When my companion's worthy father and uncle, after seeing two or three bottles go round, left the juveniles to themselves, the weather being hot, we adjourned to a library which had one large window looking northwards. After carousing here for an hour or more, I observed that a shade had come over the aspect of my friend, who happened to be placed immediately opposite to myself, and said something that intimated a fear of his being unwell. 'No,' said he, 'I shall be well enough presently, if you will only let me sit where you are, and take my chair; for there is a confounded hand in sight of me here, which has often bothered me before, and now it won't let me fill my glass with a good will.' I rose to change places with him accordingly, and he pointed out to me this hand, which, like the writing on Belshazzar's wall, disturbed his hour of hilarity. 'Since we sat down,' he said, 'I have been watching it—it fascinates my eye—it never stops—page after page is finished, and thrown on that heap of MS., and still it goes on unwearied; and so it will be till candles are brought in, and God knows how long after that. It is the same every night—I can't stand a sight of it when I am not at my books.' 'Some stupid, dogged engrossing clerk, probably,' exclaimed myself, 'or some other giddy youth in our society.' 'No, boys,' said our host; 'I well know what hand it is—'tis Walter Scott's.'"[1]

If that is not extempore writing, it is difficult to say what extempore writing is. But in truth there is no

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 171-3.

evidence that any one of the novels was laboured, or even so much as carefully composed. Scott's method of composition was always the same; and, when writing an imaginative work, the rate of progress seems to have been pretty even, depending much more on the absence of disturbing engagements, than on any mental irregularity. The morning was always his brightest time; but morning or evening, in country or in town, well or ill, writing with his own pen or dictating to an amanuensis in the intervals of screaming-fits due to the torture of cramp in the stomach, Scott spun away at his imaginative web almost as evenly as a silkworm spins at its golden cocoon. Nor can I detect the slightest trace of any difference in quality between the stories, such as can be reasonably ascribed to comparative care or haste. There are differences, and even great differences, of course, ascribable to the less or greater suitability of the subject chosen to Scott's genius, but I can find no trace of the sort of cause to which Mr. Carlyle refers. Thus, few, I suppose, would hesitate to say that while *Old Mortality* is very near, if not quite, the finest of Scott's works, *The Black Dwarf* is not far from the other end of the scale. Yet the two were written in immediate succession (*The Black Dwarf* being the first of the two), and were published together, as the first series of *Tales of my Landlord*, in 1816. Nor do I think that any competent critic would find any clear deterioration of quality in the novels of the later years,—excepting of course the two written after the stroke of paralysis. It is true, of course, that some of the subjects which most powerfully stirred his imagination were among his earlier themes, and that he could not effectually use the same subject twice, though he now and then tried it. But making allowance

for this consideration, the imaginative power of the novels is as astonishingly *even* as the rate of composition itself. For my own part, I greatly prefer *The Fortunes of Nigel* (which was written in 1822) to *Waverley* which was begun in 1805, and finished in 1814, and though very many better critics would probably decidedly disagree, I do not think that any of them would consider this preference grotesque or purely capricious. Indeed, though *Anne of Geierstein*,—the last composed before Scott's stroke,—would hardly seem to any careful judge the equal of *Waverley*, I do not much doubt that if it had appeared in place of *Waverley*, it would have excited very nearly as much interest and admiration; nor that had *Waverley* appeared in 1829, in place of *Anne of Geierstein*, it would have failed to excite very much more. In these fourteen most effective years of Scott's literary life, during which he wrote twenty-three novels besides shorter tales, the best stories appear to have been on the whole the most rapidly written, probably because they took the strongest hold of the author's imagination.

Till near the close of his career as an author, Scott never avowed his responsibility for any of these series of novels, and even took some pains to mystify the public as to the identity between the author of *Waverley* and the author of *Tales of my Landlord*. The care with which the secret was kept is imputed by Mr. Lockhart in some degree to the habit of mystery which had grown upon Scott during his secret partnership with the Ballantynes; but in this he seems to be confounding two very different phases of Scott's character. No doubt he was, as a professional man, a little ashamed of his commercial speculation, and unwilling to betray it. But he was far from ashamed of his literary enterprise, though it seems

that he was at first very anxious lest a comparative failure, or even a mere moderate success, in a less ambitious sphere than that of poetry, should endanger the great reputation he had gained as a poet. That was apparently the first reason for secrecy. But, over and above this, it is clear that the mystery stimulated Scott's imagination and saved him trouble as well. He was obviously more free under the veil—free from the liability of having to answer for the views of life or history suggested in his stories; but besides this, what was of more importance to him, the slight disguise stimulated his sense of humour, and gratified the whimsical, boyish pleasure which he always had in acting an imaginary character. He used to talk of himself as a sort of Abon Hassan—a private man one day, and acting the part of a monarch the next—with the kind of glee which indicated a real delight in the change of parts, and I have little doubt that he threw himself with the more gusto into characters very different from his own, in consequence of the pleasure it gave him to conceive his friends hopelessly misled by this display of traits, with which he supposed that they could not have credited him even in imagination. Thus besides relieving him of a host of compliments which he did not enjoy, and enabling him the better to evade an ill-bred curiosity, the disguise no doubt was the same sort of fillip to the fancy which a mask and domino or a fancy dress are to that of their wearers. Even in a disguise a man cannot cease to be himself; but he can get rid of his improperly "imputed" righteousness—often the greatest burden he has to bear—and of all the expectations formed on the strength, as Mr. Clough says,—

> "Of having been what one has been,
> What one thinks one is, or thinks that others suppose one."

To some men the freedom of this disguise is a real danger and temptation. It never could have been so to Scott, who was in the main one of the simplest as well as the boldest and proudest of men. And as most men perhaps would admit that a good deal of even the best part of their nature is rather suppressed than expressed by the name by which they are known in the world, Scott must have felt this in a far higher degree, and probably regarded the manifold characters under which he was known to society, as representing him in some respects more justly than any individual name could have done. His mind ranged hither and thither over a wide field—far beyond that of his actual experience,—and probably ranged over it all the more easily for not being absolutely tethered to a single class of associations by any public confession of his authorship. After all, when it became universally known that Scott was the only author of all these tales, it may be doubted whether the public thought as adequately of the imaginative efforts which had created them, as they did while they remained in some doubt whether there was a multiplicity of agencies at work, or only one. The uncertainty helped them to realize the many lives which were really led by the author of all these tales, more completely than any confession of the individual authorship could have done. The shrinking of activity in public curiosity and wonder which follows the final determination of such ambiguities, is very apt to result rather in a dwindling of the imaginative effort to enter into the genius which gave rise to them, than in an increase of respect for so manifold a creative power.

When Scott wrote, such fertility as his in the production of novels was regarded with amazement approaching to absolute incredulity. Yet he was in this respect only

the advanced-guard of a not inconsiderable class of men and women who have a special gift for pouring out story after story, containing a great variety of figures, while retaining a certain even level of merit. There is more than one novelist of the present day who has far surpassed Scott in the number of his tales, and one at least of very high repute, who has, I believe, produced more even within the same time. But though to our larger experience, Scott's achievement, in respect of mere fertility, is by no means the miracle which it once seemed, I do not think one of his successors can compare with him for a moment in the ease and truth with which he painted, not merely the life of his own time and country—seldom indeed that of precisely his own time—but that of days long past, and often too of scenes far distant. The most powerful of all his stories, *Old Mortality*, was the story of a period more than a century and a quarter before he wrote; and others,—which though inferior to this in force, are nevertheless, when compared with the so-called historical romances of any other English writer, what sunlight is to moonlight, if you can say as much for the latter as to admit even that comparison,—go back to the period of the Tudors, that is, two centuries and a half. *Quentin Durward*, which is all but amongst the best, runs back farther still, far into the previous century, while *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman*, though not among the greatest of Scott's works, carry us back more than five hundred years. The new class of extempore novel writers, though more considerable than, sixty years ago, any one could have expected ever to see it, is still limited, and on any high level of merit will probably always be limited, to the delineation of the times of which the narrator has personal experience. Scott seemed to have had something very

like personal experience of a few centuries at least, judging by the ease and freshness with which he poured out his stories of these centuries, and though no one can pretend that even he could describe the period of the Tudors as Miss Austen described the country parsons and squires of George the Third's reign, or as Mr. Trollope describes the politicians and hunting-men of Queen Victoria's, it is nevertheless the evidence of a greater imagination to make us live so familiarly as Scott does amidst the political and religious controversies of two or three centuries' duration, to be the actual witnesses, as it were, of Margaret of Anjou's throes of vain ambition, and Mary Stuart's fascinating remorse, and Elizabeth's domineering and jealous balancings of noble against noble, of James the First's shrewd pedantries, and the Regent Murray's large forethought, of the politic craft of Argyle, the courtly ruthlessness of Claverhouse, and the high-bred clemency of Monmouth, than to reflect in countless modifications the freaks, figures, and fashions of our own time.

The most striking feature of Scott's romances is that, for the most part, they are pivoted on public rather than mere private interests and passions. With but few exceptions—(*The Antiquary*, *St. Ronan's Well*, and *Guy Mannering* are the most important)—Scott's novels give us an imaginative view, not of mere individuals, but of individuals as they are affected by the public strifes and social divisions of the age. And this it is which gives his books so large an interest for old and young, soldiers and statesmen, the world of society and the recluse, alike. You can hardly read any novel of Scott's and not become better aware what public life and political issues mean. And yet there is no artificiality, no elaborate attitudinizing before the antique mirrors of the past, like Bulwer's no

dressing out of clothes-horses like G. P. R. James. The boldness and freshness of the present are carried back into the past, and you see Papists and Puritans, Cavaliers and Roundheads, Jews, Jacobites, and freebooters, preachers, schoolmasters, mercenary soldiers, gipsies, and beggars, all living the sort of life which the reader feels that in their circumstances and under the same conditions of time and place and parentage, he might have lived too. Indeed, no man can read Scott without being more of a public man, whereas the ordinary novel tends to make its readers rather less of one than before.

Next, though most of these stories are rightly called romances, no one can avoid observing that they give that side of life which is unromantic, quite as vigorously as the romantic side. This was not true of Scott's poems, which only expressed one-half of his nature, and were almost pure romances. But in the novels the business of life is even better portrayed than its sentiments. Mr. Bagehot, one of the ablest of Scott's critics, has pointed out this admirably in his essay on *The Waverley Novels*. "Many historical novelists," he says, "especialy those who with care and pains have read up the detail, are often evidently in a strait how to pass from their history to their sentiment. The fancy of Sir Walter could not help connecting the two. If he had given us the English side of the race to Derby, *he would have described the Bank of England paying in sixpences, and also the loves of the cashier.*" No one who knows the novels well can question this. Fergus MacIvor's ways and means, his careful arrangements for receiving subsidies in black mail, are as carefully recorded as his lavish highland hospitalities; and when he sends his silver cup to the Gaelic bard who chaunts his greatness, the faithful historian does not for-

get to let us know that the cup is his last, and that he is hard-pressed for the generosities of the future. So too the habitual thievishness of the highlanders is pressed upon us quite as vividly as their gallantry and superstitions. And so careful is Sir Walter to paint the petty pedantries of the Scotch traditional conservatism, that he will not spare even Charles Edward—of whom he draws so graceful a picture—the humiliation of submitting to old Bradwardine's "solemn act of homage," but makes him go through the absurd ceremony of placing his foot on a cushion to have its brogue unlatched by the dry old enthusiast of heraldic lore. Indeed it was because Scott so much enjoyed the contrast between the high sentiment of life and its dry and often absurd detail, that his imagination found so much freer a vent in the historical romance, than it ever found in the romantic poem. Yet he clearly needed the romantic excitement of picturesque scenes and historical interests, too. I do not think he would ever have gained any brilliant success in the narrower region of the domestic novel. He said himself, in expressing his admiration of Miss Austen, "The big bow-wow strain I can do myself, like any now going, but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me." Indeed he tried it to some extent in *St. Ronan's Well*, and so far as he tried it, I think he failed. Scott needed a certain largeness of type, a strongly-marked class-life, and, where it was possible, a free, out-of-doors life, for his delineations. No one could paint beggars and gipsies, and wandering fiddlers, and mercenary soldiers, and peasants and farmers and lawyers, and magistrates, and preachers, and courtiers, and statesmen, and best of all perhaps queens

and kings, with anything like his ability. But when it came to describing the small differences of manner, differences not due to external habits, so much as to internal sentiment or education, or mere domestic circumstance, he was beyond his proper field. In the sketch of the St. Ronan's Spa and the company at the *table-d'hôte*, he is of course somewhere near the mark,—he was too able a man to fall far short of success in anything he really gave to the world; but it is not interesting. Miss Austen would have made Lady Penelope Penfeather a hundred times as amusing. We turn to Meg Dods and Touchwood, and Cargill, and Captain Jekyl, and Sir Bingo Binks, and to Clara Mowbray,—i. e. to the lives really moulded by large and specific causes, for enjoyment, and leave the small gossip of the company at the Wells as, relatively at least, a failure. And it is well for all the world that it was so. The domestic novel, when really of the highest kind, is no doubt a perfect work of art, and an unfailing source of amusement; but it has nothing of the tonic influence, the large instructiveness, the stimulating intellectual air, of Scott's historic tales. Even when Scott is farthest from reality—as in *Ivanhoe* or *The Monastery*—he makes you open your eyes to all sorts of historical conditions to which you would otherwise be blind. The domestic novel, even when its art is perfect, gives little but pleasure at the best; at the worst it is simply scandal idealized.

Scott often confessed his contempt for his own heroes. He said of Edward Waverley, for instance, that he was "a sneaking piece of imbecility," and that "if he had married Flora, she would have set him up upon the chimney-piece as Count Borowlaski's wife used to do with him. I am a bad hand at depicting a hero, pro-

perly so called, and have an unfortunate propensity for the dubious characters of borderers, buccaneers, highland robbers, and all others of a Robin-Hood description."[1] In another letter he says, "My rogue always, in despite of me, turns out my hero."[2] And it seems very likely that in most of the situations Scott describes so well, his own course would have been that of his wilder impulses, and not that of his reason. Assuredly he would never have stopped hesitating on the line between opposite courses as his Waverleys, his Mortons, his Osbaldistones do. Whenever he was really involved in a party strife, he flung prudence and impartiality to the winds, and went in like the hearty partisan which his strong impulses made of him. But granting this, I do not agree with his condemnation of all his own colourless heroes. However much they differed in nature from Scott himself, the even balance of their reason against their sympathies is certainly well conceived, is in itself natural, and is an admirable expedient for effecting that which was probably its real use to Scott,—the affording an opportunity for the delineation of all the pros and cons of the case, so that the characters on both sides of the struggle should be properly understood. Scott's imagination was clearly far wider—was far more permeated with the fixed air of sound judgment—than his practical impulses. He needed a machinery for displaying his insight into both sides of a public quarrel, and his colourless heroes gave him the instrument he needed. Both in Morton's case (in *Old Mortality*), and in Waverley's, the hesitation is certainly well described. Indeed in relation to the controversy between Covenanters and Royalists, while his political

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 175-6.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 46.

and martial prepossessions went with Claverhouse, his reason and educated moral feeling certainly were clearly identified with Morton.

It is, however, obviously true that Scott's heroes are mostly created for the sake of the facility they give in delineating the other characters, and not the other characters for the sake of the heroes. They are the imaginative neutral ground, as it were, on which opposing influences are brought to play; and what Scott best loved to paint was those who, whether by nature, by inheritance, or by choice, had become unique and characteristic types of one-sided feeling, not those who were merely in process of growth, and had not ranged themselves at all. Mr. Carlyle, who, as I have said before, places Scott's romances far below their real level, maintains that these great types of his are drawn from the outside, and not made actually to live. "His Bailie Jarvies, Dinmonts, Dalgettys (for their name is legion), do look and talk like what they give themselves out for; they are, if not *created* and made poetically alive, yet deceptively *enacted* as a good player might do them. What more is wanted, then? For the reader lying on a sofa, nothing more; yet for another sort of reader much. It were a long chapter to unfold the difference in drawing a character between a Scott and a Shakespeare or Goethe. Yet it is a difference literally immense; they are of a different species; the value of the one is not to be counted in the coin of the other. We might say in a short word, which covers a long matter, that your Shakespeare fashions his characters from the heart outwards; your Scott fashions them from the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of them. The one set become living men and women; the other amount to little more than mechanical cases, deceptively painted

automatons."[1] And then he goes on to contrast Fenella in *Peveril of the Peak* with Goethe's Mignon. Mr. Carlyle could hardly have chosen a less fair comparison. If Goethe is to be judged by his women, let Scott be judged by his men. So judged, I think Scott will, as a painter of character—of course, I am not now speaking of him as a poet,—come out far above Goethe. Excepting the hero of his first drama (Götz of the iron hand), which by the way was so much in Scott's line that his first essay in poetry was to translate it—not very well—I doubt if Goethe was ever successful with his pictures of men. *Wilhelm Meister* is, as Niebuhr truly said, "a ménagerie of tame animals." Doubtless Goethe's women—certainly his women of culture—are more truly and inwardly conceived and created than Scott's. Except Jeanie Deans and Madge Wildfire, and perhaps Lucy Ashton, Scott's women are apt to be uninteresting, either pink and white toys, or hardish women of the world. But then no one can compare the men of the two writers, and not see Scott's vast pre-eminence on that side.

I think the deficiency of his pictures of women, odd as it seems to say so, should be greatly attributed to his natural chivalry. His conception of women of his own or a higher class was always too romantic. He hardly ventured, as it were, in his tenderness for them, to look deeply into their little weaknesses and intricacies of character. With women of an inferior class, he had not this feeling. Nothing can be more perfect than the manner in which he blends the dairy-woman and woman of business in Jeanie Deans, with the lover and the sister. But once make a woman beautiful, or in any way an object of homage to him, and

[1] Carlyle's *Miscellaneous Essays*, iv. 174-5.

Scott bowed so low before the image of her, that he could not go deep into her heart. He could no more have analysed such a woman, as Thackeray analyzed Lady Castlewood, or Amelia, or Becky, or as George Eliot analysed Rosamond Vincy, than he could have vivisected Camp or Maida. To some extent, therefore, Scott's pictures of women remain something in the style of the miniatures of the last age—bright and beautiful beings without any special character in them. He was dazzled by a fair heroine. He could not take them up into his imagination as real beings as he did men. But then how living are his men, whether coarse or noble! What a picture, for instance, is that in *A Legend of Montrose* of the conceited, pragmatic, but prompt and dauntless soldier of fortune, rejecting Argyle's attempts to tamper with him, in the dungeon at Inverary, suddenly throwing himself on the disguised Duke so soon as he detects him by his voice, and wresting from him the means of his own liberation! Who could read that scene and say for a moment that Dalgetty is painted "from the skin inwards"? It was just Scott himself breathing his own life through the habits of a good specimen of the mercenary soldier—realizing where the spirit of hire would end, and the sense of honour would begin—and preferring, even in a dungeon, the audacious policy of a sudden attack to that of crafty negotiation. What a picture (and a very different one) again is that in *Redgauntlet* of Peter Peebles, the mad litigant, with face emaciated by poverty and anxiety, and rendered wild by "an insane lightness about the eyes," dashing into the English magistrate's court for a warrant against his fugitive counsel. Or, to take a third instance, as different as possible from either, how powerfully conceived is the situation in *Old Mortality*, where Balfour of Burley, in his fanatic fury at the defeat of his plan for a

new rebellion, pushes the oak-tree, which connects his wild retreat with the outer world, into the stream, and tries to slay Morton for opposing him. In such scenes and a hundred others—for these are mere random examples—Scott undoubtedly painted his masculine figures from as deep and inward a conception of the character of the situation as Goethe ever attained, even in drawing Mignon, or Klärchen, or Gretchen. The distinction has no real existence. Goethe's pictures of women were no doubt the intuitions of genius; and so are Scott's of men—and here and there of his women too. Professional women he can always paint with power. Meg Dods, the innkeeper, Meg Merrilies, the gipsy, Mause Headrigg, the Covenanter, Elspeth, the old fishwife in *The Antiquary*, and the old crones employed to nurse and watch, and lay out the corpse, in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, are all in their way impressive figures.

And even in relation to women of a rank more fascinating to Scott, and whose inner character was perhaps on that account, less familiar to his imagination, grant him but a few hints from history, and he draws a picture which, for vividness and brilliancy, may almost compare with Shakespeare's own studies in English history. Had Shakespeare painted the scene in *The Abbot*, in which Mary Stuart commands one of her Mary's in waiting to tell her at what bridal she last danced, and Mary Fleming blurts out the reference to the marriage of Sebastian at Holyrood, would any one hesitate to regard it as a stroke of genius worthy of the great dramatist? This picture of the Queen's mind suddenly thrown off its balance, and betraying, in the agony of the moment, the fear and remorse which every association with Darnley conjured up, is painted "from the heart outwards," not "from the

skin inwards, if ever there were such a painting in the world. Scott hardly ever failed in painting kings or peasants, queens or peasant-women. There was something in the well-marked type of both to catch his imagination, which can always hit off the grander features of royalty, and the homelier features of laborious humility. Is there any sketch traced in lines of more sweeping grandeur and more impressive force than the following of Mary Stuart's lucid interval of remorse—lucid compared with her ordinary mood, though it was of a remorse that was almost delirious—which breaks in upon her hour of fascinating condescension?—

"'Are they not a lovely couple, my Fleming? and is it not heart-rending to think that I must be their ruin?'

"'Not so,' said Roland Græme, 'it is we, gracious sovereign, who will be your deliverers.' '*Ex oribus parvulorum!*' said the queen, looking upward; 'if it is by the mouth of these children that heaven calls me to resume the stately thoughts which become my birth and my rights, thou wilt grant them thy protection, and to me the power of rewarding their zeal.' Then turning to Fleming, she instantly added, 'Thou knowest, my friend, whether to make those who have served me happy, was not ever Mary's favourite pastime. When I have been rebuked by the stern preachers of the Calvinistic heresy—when I have seen the fierce countenances of my nobles averted from me, has it not been because I mixed in the harmless pleasures of the young and gay, and rather for the sake of their happiness than my own, have mingled in the masque, the song or the dance, with the youth of my household? Well, I repent not of it—though Knox termed it sin, and Morton degradation—I was happy because I saw happiness around me: and woe betide the wretched jealousy that can extract guilt out of the overflowings of an unguarded gaiety!—Fleming, if we are restored to our throne, shall we not have one blithesome day at a blithesome bridal, of which we must now name neither the bride nor the bridegroom? But that

bridegroom shall have the barony of Blairgowrie, a fair gift even for a queen to give, and that bride's chaplet shall be twined with the fairest pearls that ever were found in the depths of Lochlomond; and thou thyself, Mary Fleming, the best dresser of tires that ever busked the tresses of a queen, and who would scorn to touch those of any woman of lower rank—thou thyself shalt for my love twine them into the bride's tresses.—Look, my Fleming, suppose then such clustered locks as these of our Catherine, they would not put shame upon thy skill.' So saying she passed her hand fondly over the head of her youthful favourite, while her more aged attendant replied despondently, 'Alas, madam, your thoughts stray far from home.' 'They do, my Fleming,' said the queen, 'but is it well or kind in you to call them back?—God knows they have kept the perch this night but too closely.—Come, I will recall the gay vision, were it but to punish them. Yes, at that blithesome bridal, Mary herself shall forget the weight of sorrows, and the toil of state, and herself once more lead a measure.—At whose wedding was it that we last danced, my Fleming? I think care has troubled my memory—yet something of it I should remember, canst thou not aid me? I know thou canst.' 'Alas, madam,' replied the lady. 'What,' said Mary, 'wilt thou not help us so far? this is a peevish adherence to thine own graver opinion which holds our talk as folly. But thou art court-bred and wilt well understand me when I say the queen *commands* Lady Fleming to tell her when she led the last *branle*.' With a face deadly pale and a mien as if she were about to sink into the earth, the court-bred dame, no longer daring to refuse obedience, faltered out, 'Gracious lady—if my memory err not—it was at a masque in Holyrood—at the marriage of Sebastian.' The unhappy queen, who had hitherto listened with a melancholy smile, provoked by the reluctance with which the Lady Fleming brought out her story, at this ill-fated word interrupted her with a shriek so wild and loud that the vaulted apartment rang, and both Roland and Catherine sprung to their feet in the utmost terror and alarm. Meantime, Mary seemed, by the

train of horrible ideas thus suddenly excited, surprised not only beyond self-command, but for the moment beyond the verge of reason. 'Traitress,' she said to the Lady Fleming, 'thou wouldst slay thy sovereign. Call my French guards—*à moi! à moi! mes Français!*—I am beset with traitors in mine own palace—they have murdered my husband—Rescue! Rescue! for the Queen of Scotland!' She started up from her chair—her features late so exquisitely lovely in their paleness, now inflamed with the fury of frenzy, and resembling those of a Bellona. 'We will take the field ourself,' she said; 'warn the city—warn Lothian and Fife—saddle our Spanish barb, and bid French Paris see our petronel be charged. Better to die at the head of our brave Scotsmen, like our grandfather at Flodden, than of a broken heart like our ill-starred father.' 'Be patient—be composed, dearest sovereign,' said Catherine; and then addressing Lady Fleming angrily, she added, 'How could you say aught that reminded her of her husband?' The word reached the ear of the unhappy princess who caught it up, speaking with great rapidity, 'Husband!—what husband? Not his most Christian Majesty—he is ill at ease—he cannot mount on horseback—not him of the Lennox—but it was the Duke of Orkney thou wouldst say?' 'For God's love, madam, be patient!' said the Lady Fleming. But the queen's excited imagination could by no entreaty be diverted from its course. 'Bid him come hither to our aid,' she said, 'and bring with him his lambs, as he calls them—Bowton, Hay of Talla, Black Ormiston and his kinsman Hob—Fie, how swart they are, and how they smell of sulphur! What! closeted with Morton? Nay, if the Douglas and the Hepburn hatch the complot together, the bird when it breaks the shell will scare Scotland, will it not, my Fleming?' 'She grows wilder and wilder,' said Fleming. 'We have too many hearers for these strange words.' 'Roland," said Catherine, 'in the name of God begone!—you cannot aid us here—leave us to deal with her alone—away—away!"

And equally fine is the scene in *Kenilworth* in which

Elizabeth undertakes the reconciliation of the haughty rivals, Sussex and Leicester, unaware that in the course of the audience she herself will have to bear a great strain on her self-command, both in her feelings as a queen and her feelings as a lover. Her grand rebukes to both, her ill-concealed preference for Leicester, her whispered ridicule of Sussex, the impulses of tenderness which she stifles, the flashes of resentment to which she gives way, the triumph of policy over private feeling, her imperious impatience when she is baffled, her jealousy as she grows suspicious of a personal rival, her gratified pride and vanity when the suspicion is exchanged for the clear evidence, as she supposes, of Leicester's love, and her peremptory conclusion of the audience, bring before the mind a series of pictures far more vivid and impressive than the greatest of historical painters could fix on canvas, even at the cost of the labour of years. Even more brilliant, though not so sustained and difficult an effort of genius, is the later scene in the same story, in which Elizabeth drags the unhappy Countess of Leicester from her concealment in one of the grottoes of Kenilworth Castle, and strides off with her, in a fit of vindictive humiliation and Amazonian fury, to confront her with her husband. But this last scene no doubt is more in Scott's way. He can always paint women in their more masculine moods. Where he frequently fails is in the attempt to indicate the finer shades of women's nature. In Amy Robsart herself, for example, he is by no means generally successful, though in an early scene her childish delight in the various orders and decorations of her husband is painted with much freshness and delicacy. But wherever, as in the case of queens, Scott can get a telling hint from actual history, he can always so use it

as to make history itself seem dim to the equivalent for it which he gives us.

And yet, as every one knows, Scott was excessively free in his manipulations of history for the purposes of romance. In *Kenilworth* he represents Shakespeare's plays as already in the mouths of courtiers and statesmen, though he lays the scene in the eighteenth year of Elizabeth, when Shakespeare was hardly old enough to rob an orchard. In *Woodstock*, on the contrary, he insists, if you compare Sir Henry Lee's dates with the facts, that Shakespeare died twenty years at least before he actually died. The historical basis, again, of *Woodstock* and of *Redgauntlet* is thoroughly untrustworthy, and about all the minuter details of history,—unless so far as they were characteristic of the age,—I do not suppose that Scott in his romances ever troubled himself at all. And yet few historians—not even Scott himself when he exchanged romance for history—ever drew the great figures of history with so powerful a hand. In writing history and biography Scott has little or no advantage over very inferior men. His pictures of Swift, of Dryden, of Napoleon, are in no way very vivid. It is only where he is working from the pure imagination,—though imagination stirred by historic study,—that he paints a picture which follows us about, as if with living eyes, instead of creating for us a mere series of lines and colours. Indeed, whether Scott draws truly or falsely, he draws with such genius that his pictures of Richard and Saladin, of Louis XI. and Charles the Bold, of Margaret of Anjou and René of Provence, of Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Tudor, of Sussex and of Leicester, of James and Charles and Buckingham, of the two Dukes of Argyle—the Argyle of the time of the revolution, and the Argyle of George II.,—

of Queen Caroline, of Claverhouse, and Monmouth, and of Rob Roy, will live in English literature beside Shakespeare's pictures—probably less faithful if more imaginative—of John and Richard and the later Henries, and all the great figures by whom they were surrounded. No historical portrait that we possess will take precedence—as a mere portrait—of Scott's brilliant study of James I. in *The Fortunes of Nigel*. Take this illustration for instance, where George Heriot the goldsmith (Jingling Geordie, as the king familiarly calls him) has just been speaking of Lord Huntinglen, as "a man of the old rough world that will drink and swear:"—

"'O Geordie!' exclaimed the king, 'these are auld-warld frailties, of whilk we dare not pronounce even ourselves absolutely free. But the warld grows worse from day to day, Geordie. The juveniles of this age may weel say with the poet,—

"Ætas parentum pejor avis tulit
Nos nequiores—"

This Dalgarno does not drink so much, aye or swear so much, as his father, but he wenches, Geordie, and he breaks his word and oath baith. As to what ye say of the leddy and the ministers, we are all fallible creatures, Geordie, priests and kings as weel as others; and wha kens but what that may account for the difference between this Dalgarno and his father? The earl is the vera soul of honour, and cares nae mair for warld's gear than a noble hound for the quest of a foulmart; but as for his son, he was like to brazen us all out—ourselves, Steenie, Baby Charles, and our Council, till he heard of the tocher, and then by my kingly crown he lap like a cock at a grossart! These are discrepancies betwixt parent and son not to be accounted for naturally, according to Baptista Porta, Michael Scott *de secretis*, and others. Ah, Jingling Geordie, if your clouting the caldron, and jingling on pots, pans, and veshels of all manner of

metal, hadna jingled a' your grammar out of your head, I could have touched on that matter to you at mair length.' . . . . Heriot inquired whether Lord Dalgarno had consented to do the Lady Hermione justice. 'Troth, man, I have small doubt that he will,' quoth the king, 'I gave him the schedule of her worldly substance, which you delivered to us in the council, and we allowed him half an hour to chew the cud upon that. It is rare reading for bringing him to reason. I left Baby Charles and Steenie laying his duty before him, and if he can resist doing what *they* desire him, why I wish he would teach *me* the gate of it. O Geordie, Jingling Geordie, it was grand to hear Baby Charles laying down the guilt of dissimulation, and Steenie lecturing on the turpitude of incontinence.' 'I am afraid,' said George Heriot, more hastily than prudently, 'I might have thought of the old proverb of Satan reproving sin.' 'Deil hae our saul, neighbour,' said the king, reddening, 'but ye are not blate! I gie ye licence to speak freely, and by our saul, ye do not let the privilege become lost, *non utendo*—it will suffer no negative prescription in your nands. Is it fit, think ye, that Baby Charles should let his thoughts be publicly seen? No, no, princes' thoughts are *arcana imperii: qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare.* Every liege subject is bound to speak the whole truth to the king, but there is nae reciprocity of obligation—and for Steenie having been whiles a dike-louper at a time, is it for you, who are his goldsmith, and to whom, I doubt, he awes an uncomatable sum, to cast that up to him?"

Assuredly there is no undue favouring of Stuarts in such a picture as that.

Scott's humour is, I think, of very different qualities in relation to different subjects. Certainly he was at times capable of considerable heaviness of hand,—of the Scotch "wut" which has been so irreverently treated by English critics. His rather elaborate jocular introductions, under the name of Jedediah Cleishbotham, are clearly

laborious at times. And even his own letters to his daughter-in-law, which Mr. Lockhart seems to regard as models of tender playfulness and pleasantry, seem to me decidedly elephantine. Not unfrequently, too, his stereotyped jokes weary. Dalgetty bores you almost as much as he would do in real life,—which is a great fault in art. Bradwardine becomes a nuisance, and as for Sir Piercie Shafton, he is beyond endurance. Like some other Scotchmen of genius, Scott twanged away at any effective chord till it more than lost its expressiveness. But in dry humour, and in that higher humour which skilfully blends the ludicrous and the pathetic, so that it is hardly possible to separate between smiles and tears, Scott is a master. His canny innkeeper, who, having sent away all the pease-meal to the camp of the Covenanters, and all the oatmeal (with deep professions of duty) to the castle and its cavaliers, in compliance with the requisitions sent to him on each side, admits with a sigh to his daughter that "they maun gar wheat flour serve themsels for a blink,"—his firm of solicitors, Greenhorn and Grinderson, whose senior partner writes respectfully to clients in prosperity, and whose junior partner writes familiarly to those in adversity,—his arbitrary nabob who asks how the devil any one should be able to mix spices so well "as one who has been where they grow;"—his little ragamuffin who indignantly denies that he has broken his promise not to gamble away his sixpences at pitch-and-toss because he has gambled them away at "neevie-neevie-nick-nack,"—and similar figures abound in his tales,—are all creations which make one laugh inwardly as we read. But he has a much higher humour still. that inimitable power of shading off ignorance into knowledge and simplicity into wisdom, which makes his picture of Jeanie Deans, for

instance, so humorous as well as so affecting. When Jeanie reunites her father to her husband by reminding the former how it would sometimes happen that "twa precious saints might pu' sundrywise like twa cows riving at the same hayband," she gives us an admirable instance of Scott's higher humour. Or take Jeanie Deans's letter to her father communicating to him the pardon of his daughter and her own interview with the Queen:—

"DEAREST AND TRULY HONOURED FATHER.—This comes with my duty to inform you, that it has pleased God to redeem that captivitie of my poor sister, in respect the Queen's blessed Majesty, for whom we are ever bound to pray, hath redeemed her soul from the slayer, granting the ransom of her, whilk is ane pardon or reprieve. And I spoke with the Queen face to face, and yet live; for she is not muckle differing from other grand leddies, saving that she has a stately presence, and een like a blue huntin' hawk's, whilk gaed throu' and throu' me like a Highland durk—And all this good was, alway under the Great Giver, to whom all are but instruments, wrought for us by the Duk of Argile, wha is ane native true-hearted Scotsman, and not pridefu', like other folk we ken of—and likewise skeely enow in bestial, whereof he has promised to gie me twa Devonshire kye, of which he is enamoured, although I do still haud by the real hawkit Airshire breed—and I have promised him a cheese; and I wad wuss ye, if Gowans, the brockit cow, has a quey, that she suld suck her fill of milk, as I am given to understand he has none of that breed, and is not scornfu' but will take a thing frae a puir body, that it may lighten their heart of the loading of debt that they awe him. Also his honour the Duke will accept ane of our Dunlop cheeses, and it sall be my faut if a better was ever yearned in Lowden."—[Here follow some observations respecting the breed of cattle, and the produce of the dairy, which it is our intention to forward to the Board of Agriculture.]—"Nevertheless, these are but matters of the after-harvest, in respect of the great good which Providence hath gifted us with—and, in especial, poor

Effie's life. And oh, my dear father, since it hath pleased God to be merciful to her, let her not want your free pardon, whilk will make her meet to be ane vessel of grace, and also a comfort to your ain graie hairs. Dear Father, will ye let the Laird ken that we have had friends strangely raised up to us, and that the talent whilk he lent me will be thankfully repaid. I hae some of it to the fore; and the rest of it is not knotted up in ane purse or napkin, but in ane wee bit paper, as is the fashion heir, whilk I am assured is gude for the siller. And, dear father, through Mr. Butler's means I hae gude friendship with the Duke, for there had been kindness between their forbears in the auld troublesome time byepast. And Mrs. Glass has been kind like my very mother. She has a braw house here, and lives bien and warm, wi' twa servant lasses, and a man and a callant in the shop. And she is to send you doun a pound of her hie-dried, and some other tobaka, and we maun think of some propine for her, since her kindness hath been great. And the Duk is to send the pardon doun by an express messenger, in respect that I canna travel sae fast; and I am to come doun wi' twa of his Honour's servants—that is, John Archibald, a decent elderly gentleman, that says he has seen you lang syne, when ye were buying beasts in the west frae the Laird of Aughtermuggitie—but maybe ye winna mind him—ony way, he's a civil man—and Mrs. Dolly Dutton, that is to be dairy-maid at Inverara: and they bring me on as far as Glasgo', whilk will make it nae pinch to win hame, whilk I desire of all things. May the Giver of all good things keep ye in your outgauns and incomings, whereof devoutly prayeth your loving dauter,

"JEAN DEANS."

This contains an example of Scott's rather heavy jocularity as well as giving us a fine illustration of his highest and deepest and sunniest humour. Coming where it does, the joke inserted about the Board of Agriculture is rather like the gambol of a rhinoceros trying to imitate the curvettings of a thoroughbred horse.

Some of the finest touches of his humour are no doubt much heightened by his perfect command of the genius as well as the dialect of a peasantry, in whom a true culture of mind and sometimes also of heart is found in the closest possible contact with the humblest pursuits and the quaintest enthusiasm for them. But Scott, with all his turn for irony—and Mr. Lockhart says that even on his death-bed he used towards his children the same sort of good-humoured irony to which he had always accustomed them in his life—certainly never gives us any example of that highest irony which is found so frequently in Shakespeare, which touches the paradoxes of the spiritual life of the children of earth, and which reached its highest point in Isaiah. Now and then in his latest diaries—the diaries written in his deep affliction—he comes near the edge of it. Once, for instance, he says, "What a strange scene if the surge of conversation could suddenly ebb like the tide, and show us the state of people's real minds!

> 'No eyes the rocks discover
> Which lurk beneath the deep.'

Life could not be endured were it seen in reality." But this is not irony, only the sort of meditation which, in a mind inclined to thrust deep into the secrets of life's paradoxes, is apt to lead to irony. Scott, however, does not thrust deep in this direction. He met the cold steel which inflicts the deepest interior wounds, like a soldier, and never seems to have meditated on the higher paradoxes of life till reason reeled. The irony of Hamlet is far from Scott. His imagination was essentially one of distinct embodiment. He never even seemed so much as to contemplate that sundering of substance and form, that rending

away of outward garments, that unclothing of the soul, in order that it might be more effectually clothed upon, which is at the heart of anything that may be called spiritual irony. The constant abiding of his mind within the well-defined forms of some one or other of the conditions of outward life and manners, among the scores of different spheres of human habit, was, no doubt, one of the secrets of his genius; but it was also its greatest limitation.

CHAPTER XI.

MORALITY AND RELIGION.

THE very same causes which limited Scott's humour and irony to the commoner fields of experience, and prevented him from ever introducing into his stories characters of the highest type of moral thoughtfulness, gave to his own morality and religion, which were, I think, true to the core so far as they went, a shade of distinct conventionality. It is no doubt quite true, as he himself tells us, that he took more interest in his mercenaries and moss-troopers, outlaws, gipsies, and beggars, than he did in the fine ladies and gentlemen under a cloud whom he adopted as heroines and heroes. But that was the very sign of his conventionalism. Though he interested himself more in these irregular persons, he hardly ever ventured to paint their inner life so as to show how little there was to choose between the sins of those who are at war with society and the sins of those who bend to the yoke of society. He widened rather than narrowed the chasm between the outlaw and the respectable citizen, even while he did not disguise his own romantic interest in the former. He extenuated, no doubt, the sins of all brave and violent defiers of the law, as distinguished from the sins of crafty and cunning abusers of the law. But the leaning he had to the former was, as he was willing to

admit, what he regarded as a "naughty" leaning. He did not attempt for a moment to balance accounts between them and society. He paid his tribute as a matter of course to the established morality, and only put in a word or two by way of attempt to diminish the severity of the sentence on the bold transgressor. And then, where what is called the "law of honour" comes in to traverse the law of religion, he had no scruple in setting aside the latter in favour of the customs of gentlemen, without any attempt to justify that course. Yet it is evident from various passages in his writings that he held Christian duty inconsistent with duelling, and that he held himself a sincere Christian. In spite of this, when he was fifty-six, and under no conceivable hurry or perturbation of feeling, but only concerned to defend his own conduct —which was indeed plainly right—as to a political disclosure which he had made in his life of Napoleon, he asked his old friend William Clerk to be his second, if the expected challenge from General Gourgaud should come, and declared his firm intention of accepting it. On the strength of official evidence he had exposed some conduct of General Gourgaud's at St. Helena, which appeared to be far from honourable, and he thought it his duty on that account to submit to be shot at by General Gourgaud, if General Gourgaud had wished it. In writing to William Clerk to ask him to be his second, he says, "Like a man who finds himself in a scrape, General Gourgaud may wish to fight himself out of it, and if the quarrel should be thrust on me, why, *I will not baulk him, Jackie*. He shall not dishonour the country through my sides, I can assure him." In other words, Scott acted just as he had made Waverley and others of his heroes act, on a code of honour which he knew to be false, and he must have felt

in this case to be something worse. He thought himself at that time under the most stringent obligations both to his creditors and his children, to do all in his power to redeem himself and his estate from debt. Nay, more, he held that his life was a trust from his Creator, which he had no right to throw away merely because a man whom he had not really injured, was indulging a strong wish to injure him; but he could so little brook the imputation of physical cowardice, that he was moral coward enough to resolve to meet General Gourgaud, if General Gourgaud lusted after a shot at him. Nor is there any trace preserved of so much as a moral scruple in his own mind on the subject, and this though there are clear traces in his other writings as to what he thought Christian morality required. But the Border chivalry was so strong in Scott that, on subjects of this kind at least, his morality was the conventional morality of a day rapidly passing away.

He showed the same conventional feeling in his severity towards one of his own brothers who had been guilty of cowardice. Daniel Scott was the black sheep of the family. He got into difficulties in business, formed a bad connexion with an artful woman, and was sent to try his fortunes in the West Indies. There he was employed in some service against a body of refractory negroes—we do not know its exact nature—and apparently showed the white feather. Mr. Lockhart says that "he returned to Scotland a dishonoured man; and though he found shelter and compassion from his mother, his brother would never see him again. Nay, when, soon after, his health, shattered by dissolute indulgence, . . . gave way altogether, and he died, as yet a young man, the poet refused either to attend his funeral or to wear mourning for him, like the

rest of his family."[1] Indeed he always spoke of him as his "relative," not as his brother. Here again Scott's severity was due to his brother's failure as a "man of honour," i. e. in courage. He was forbearing enough with vices of a different kind; made John Ballantyne's dissipation the object rather of his jokes than of his indignation; and not only mourned for him, but really grieved for him when he died. It is only fair to say, however, that for this conventional scorn of a weakness rather than a sin, Scott sorrowed sincerely later in life, and that in sketching the physical cowardice of Connochar in *The Fair Maid of Perth*, he deliberately made an attempt to atone for this hardness towards his brother by showing how frequently the foundation of cowardice may be laid in perfectly involuntary physical temperament, and pointing out with what noble elements of disposition it may be combined. But till reflection on many forms of human character had enlarged Scott's charity, and perhaps also the range of his speculative ethics, he remained a conventional moralist, and one, moreover, the type of whose conventional code was borrowed more from that of honour than from that of religious principle. There is one curious passage in his diary, written very near the end of his life, in which Scott even seems to declare that conventional standards of conduct are better, or at least safer, than religious standards of conduct. He says in his diary for the 15th April, 1828,—"Dined with Sir Robert Inglis, and met Sir Thomas Acland, my old and kind friend. I was happy to see him. He may be considered now as the head of the religious party in the House of Commons—a powerful body which Wilberforce long commanded. It is a difficult situation, for the adaptation of religious motives to earthly

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 198-9.

policy is apt—among the infinite delusions of the human heart—to be a snare."[1] His letters to his eldest son, the young cavalry officer, on his first start in life, are much admired by Mr. Lockhart, but to me they read a little hard, a little worldly, and extremely conventional. Conventionality was certainly to his mind almost a virtue.

Of enthusiasm in religion Scott always spoke very severely, both in his novels and in his letters and private diary. In writing to Lord Montague, he speaks of such enthusiasm as was then prevalent at Oxford, and which makes, he says, "religion a motive and a pretext for particular lines of thinking in politics and in temporal affairs" [as if it could help doing that!] as "teaching a new way of going to the devil for God's sake," and this expressly, because when the young are infected with it, it disunites families, and sets "children in opposition to their parents."[2] He gives us, however, one reason for his dread of anything like enthusiasm, which is not conventional;—that it interferes with the submissive and tranquil mood which is the only true religious mood. Speaking in his diary of a weakness and fluttering at the heart, from which he had suffered, he says, "It is an awful sensation, and would have made an enthusiast of me, had I indulged my imagination on religious subjects. I have been always careful to place my mind in the most tranquil posture which it can assume, during my private exercises of devotion."[3] And in this avoidance of indulging the imagination on religious, or even spiritual subjects, Scott goes far beyond Shakespeare. I do not think there is a single study in all his romances

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 231.
[2] Ibid., vii. 255-6. [3] Ibid., viii. 292.

of what may be fairly called a pre-eminently spiritual character as such, though Jeanie Deans approaches nearest to it. The same may be said of Shakespeare. But Shakespeare, though he has never drawn a pre-eminently spiritual character, often enough indulged his imagination while meditating on spiritual themes.

CHAPTER XII.

DISTRACTIONS AND AMUSEMENTS AT ABBOTSFORD.

BETWEEN 1814 and the end of 1825, Scott's literary labour was interrupted only by one serious illness, and hardly interrupted by that,—by a few journeys,—one to Paris after the battle of Waterloo, and several to London, —and by the worry of a constant stream of intrusive visitors. Of his journeys he has left some records; but I cannot say that I think Scott would ever have reached, as a mere observer and recorder, at all the high point which he reached directly his imagination went to work to create a story. That imagination was, indeed, far less subservient to his mere perceptions than to his constructive powers. *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk*—the records of his Paris journey after Waterloo—for instance, are not at all above the mark of a good special correspondent. His imagination was less the imagination of insight, than the imagination of one whose mind was a great kaleidoscope of human life and fortunes. But far more interrupting than either illness or travel, was the lion-hunting of which Scott became the object, directly after the publication of the earlier novels. In great measure, no doubt, on account of the mystery as to his authorship, his fame became something oppressive. At one time as many as *sixteen* parties of visitors applied to see Abbotsford in a single day. Strangers,—especially the American travel-

lers of that day, who were much less reticent and more irrepressible than the American travellers of this,—would come to him without introductions, facetiously cry out "Prodigious!" in imitation of Dominie Sampson, whatever they were shown, inquire whether the new house was called Tullyveolan or Tillytudlem, cross-examine, with open note-books, as to Scott's age, and the age of his wife, and appear to be taken quite by surprise when they were bowed out without being asked to dine.[1] In those days of high postage Scott's bill for letters "seldom came under 150*l.* a year," and "as to coach parcels, they were a perfect ruination." On one occasion a mighty package came by post from the United States, for which Scott had to pay five pounds sterling. It contained a MS. play called *The Cherokee Lovers*, by a young lady of New York, who begged Scott to read and correct it, write a prologue and epilogue, get it put on the stage at Drury Lane, and negotiate with Constable or Murray for the copyright. In about a fortnight another packet not less formidable arrived, charged with a similar postage, which Scott, not grown cautious through experience, recklessly opened; out jumped a duplicate copy of *The Cherokee Lovers*, with a second letter from the authoress, stating that as the weather had been stormy, and she feared that something might have happened to her former MS., she had thought it prudent to send him a duplicate.[2] Of course, when fame reached such a point as this, it became both a worry and a serious waste of money, and what was far more valuable than money, of time, privacy, and tranquillity of mind. And though no man ever bore such worries with the equanimity of Scott, no man ever received less plea-

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 387.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 382.

sure from the adulation of unknown and often vulgar and ignorant admirers. His real amusements were his trees and his friends. "Planting and pruning trees," he said "I could work at from morning to night. There is a sort of self-congratulation, a little tickling self-flattery, in the idea that while you are pleasing and amusing yourself, you are seriously contributing to the future welfare of the country, and that your very acorn may send its future ribs of oak to future victories like Trafalgar,"[1]—for the day of iron ships was not yet. And again, at a later stage of his planting:—"You can have no idea of the exquisite delight of a planter,—he is like a painter laying on his colours,—at every moment he sees his effects coming out. There is no art or occupation comparable to this; it is full of past, present, and future enjoyment. I look back to the time when there was not a tree here, only bare heath; I look round and see thousands of trees growing up all of which, I may say almost each of which, have received my personal attention. I remember, five years ago, looking forward with the most delighted expectation to this very hour, and as each year has passed, the expectation has gone on increasing. I do the same now. I anticipate what this plantation and that one will presently be, if only taken care of, and there is not a spot of which I do not watch the progress. Unlike building, or even painting, or indeed any other kind of pursuit, this has no end, and is never interrupted; but goes on from day to day, and from year to year, with a perpetually augmenting interest. Farming I hate. What have I to do with fattening and killing beasts, or raising corn, only to cut it down, and to wrangle with farmers about prices, and to be constantly at the mercy of the seasons? There can be no

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 288.

such disappointments or annoyances in planting trees."[1] Scott indeed regarded planting as a mode of so moulding the form and colour of the outward world, that nature herself became indebted to him for finer outlines, richer masses of colour, and deeper shadows, as well as for more fertile and sheltered soils. And he was as skilful in producing the last result, as he was in the artistic effects of his planting. In the essay on the planting of waste lands, he mentions a story,—drawn from his own experience,—of a planter, who having scooped out the lowest part of his land for enclosures, and "planted the wood round them in masses enlarged or contracted as the natural lying of the ground seemed to dictate," met, six years after these changes, his former tenant on the ground, and said to him, "I suppose, Mr. R——, you will say I have ruined your farm by laying half of it into woodland?" "I should have expected it, sir," answered Mr. R——, "if you had told me beforehand what you were going to do; but I am now of a very different opinion; and as I am looking for land at present, if you are inclined to take for the remaining sixty acres the same rent which I formerly gave for a hundred and twenty, I will give you an offer to that amount. I consider the benefit of the enclosing, and the complete shelter afforded to the fields, as an advantage which fairly counterbalances the loss of one-half of the land."[2]

And Scott was not only thoughtful in his own planting, but induced his neighbours to become so too. So great was their regard for him, that many of them planted their estates as much with reference to the effect which their plantations would have on the view from Abbotsford, as with reference to the effect they would

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vii. 287-8.

[2] Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, xxi. 22-3.

have on the view from their own grounds. Many was the consultation which he and his neighbours, Scott of Gala, for instance, and Mr. Henderson of Eildon Hall, had together on the effect which would be produced on the view from their respective houses, of the planting going on upon the lands of each. The reciprocity of feeling was such that the various proprietors acted more like brothers in this matter, than like the jealous and exclusive creatures which landowners, as such, so often are.

Next to his interest in the management and growth of his own little estate was Scott's interest in the management and growth of the Duke of Buccleuch's. To the Duke he looked up as the head of his clan, with something almost more than a feudal attachment, greatly enhanced of course by the personal friendship which he had formed for him in early life as the Earl of Dalkeith. This mixture of feudal and personal feeling towards the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch continued during their lives. Scott was away on a yachting tour to the Shetlands and Orkneys in July and August, 1814, and it was during this absence that the Duchess of Buccleuch died. Scott, who was in no anxiety about her, employed himself in writing an amusing descriptive epistle to the Duke in rough verse, chronicling his voyage, and containing expressions of the profoundest reverence for the goodness and charity of the Duchess, a letter which did not reach its destination till after the Duchess's death. Scott himself heard of her death by chance when they landed for a few hours on the coast of Ireland; he was quite overpowered by the news, and went to bed only to drop into short nightmare sleeps, and to wake with the dim memory of some heavy weight at his heart. The Duke himself died five years later, leaving

a son only thirteen years of age (the present Duke), over whose interests, both as regarded his education and his estates, Scott watched as jealously as if they had been those of his own son. Many were the anxious letters he wrote to Lord Montague as to his "young chief's" affairs, as he called them, and great his pride in watching the promise of his youth. Nothing can be clearer than that to Scott the feudal principle was something far beyond a name; that he had at least as much pride in his devotion to his chief, as he had in founding a house which he believed would increase the influence—both territorial and personal—of the clan of Scotts. The unaffected reverence which he felt for the Duke, though mingled with warm personal affection, showed that Scott's feudal feeling had something real and substantial in it, which did not vanish even when it came into close contact with strong personal feelings. This reverence is curiously marked in his letters. He speaks of "the distinction of rank" being ignored by both sides, as of something quite exceptional, but it was never really ignored by him, for though he continued to write to the Duke as an intimate friend, it was with a mingling of awe, very different indeed from that which he ever adopted to Ellis or Erskine. It is necessary to remember this, not only in estimating the strength of the feeling which made him so anxious to become himself the founder of a house within a house,—of a new branch of the clan of Scotts,—but in estimating the loyalty which Scott always displayed to one of the least respectable of English sovereigns, George IV.,—a matter of which I must now say a few words, not only because it led to Scott's receiving the baronetcy, but because it forms to my mind the most grotesque of all the threads in the lot of this strong and proud man.

CHAPTER XIII.

SCOTT AND GEORGE IV.

THE first relations of Scott with the Court were oddly enough, formed with the Princess, not with the Prince of Wales. In 1806 Scott dined with the Princess of Wales at Blackheath, and spoke of his invitation as a great honour. He wrote a tribute to her father, the Duke of Brunswick, in the introduction to one of the cantos of *Marmion*, and received from the Princess a silver vase in acknowledgment of this passage in the poem. Scott's relations with the Prince Regent seem to have begun in an offer to Scott of the Laureateship in the summer of 1813, an offer which Scott would have found it very difficult to accept, so strongly did his pride revolt at the idea of having to commemorate in verse, as an official duty, all conspicuous incidents affecting the throne. But he was at the time of the offer in the thick of his first difficulties on account of Messrs. John Ballantyne and Co., and it was only the Duke of Buccleuch's guarantee of 4000*l.*—a guarantee subsequently cancelled by Scott's paying the sum for which it was a security—that enabled him at this time to decline what, after Southey had accepted it, he compared in a letter to Southey to the herring for which the poor Scotch clergyman gave thanks in a grace wherein he described it as "even this, the very least of Providence's mercies."

In March, 1815, Scott being then in London, the Prince Regent asked him to dinner, addressed him uniformly as Walter, and struck up a friendship with him which seems to have lasted their lives, and which certainly did much more honour to George than to Sir Walter Scott. It is impossible not to think rather better of George IV. for thus valuing, and doing his best in every way to show his value for, Scott. It is equally impossible not to think rather worse of Scott for thus valuing, and in every way doing his best to express his value for, this very worthless, though by no means incapable king. The consequences were soon seen in the indignation with which Scott began to speak of the Princess of Wales's sins. In 1806, in the squib he wrote on Lord Melville's acquittal, when impeached for corruption by the Liberal Government, he had written thus of the Princess Caroline :—

"Our King, too—our Princess,—I dare not say more, sir,—
May Providence watch them with mercy and might!
While there's one Scottish hand that can wag a claymore, sir,
They shall ne'er want a friend to stand up for their right.
Be damn'd he that dare not—
For my part I'll spare not
To beauty afflicted a tribute to give;
Fill it up steadily,
Drink it off readily,
Here's to the Princess, and long may she live."

But whoever "stood up" for the Princess's right, certainly Scott did not do so after his intimacy with the Prince Regent began. He mentioned her only with severity, and in one letter at least, written to his brother, with something much coarser than severity;[1] but the king's similar vices did not at all alienate him from what at

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 229-30.

least had all the appearance of a deep personal devotion to his sovereign. The first baronet whom George IV. made on succeeding to the throne, after his long Regency, was Scott, who not only accepted the honour gratefully, but dwelt with extreme pride on the fact that it was offered to him by the king himself, and was in no way due to the prompting of any minister's advice. He wrote to Joanna Baillie on hearing of the Regent's intention—for the offer was made by the Regent at the end of 1818, though it was not actually conferred till after George's accession, namely, on the 30th March, 1820,—"The Duke of Buccleuch and Scott of Harden, who, as the heads of my clan and the sources of my gentry, are good judges of what I ought to do, have both given me their earnest opinion to accept of an honour directly derived from the source of honour, and neither begged nor bought, as is the usual fashion. Several of my ancestors bore the title in the seventeenth century, and, were it of consequence, I have no reason to be ashamed of the decent and respectable persons who connect me with that period when they carried into the field, like Madoc,

> "The Crescent at whose gleam the Cambrian oft,
> Cursing his perilous tenure, wound his horn,"

so that, as a gentleman, I may stand on as good a footing as other new creations."[1] Why the honour was any greater for coming from such a king as George, than it would have been if it had been suggested by Lord Sidmouth, or even Lord Liverpool,—or half as great as if Mr. Canning had proposed it, it is not easy to conceive. George was a fair judge of literary merit, but not one to

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 13, 14.

be compared for a moment with that great orator and wit; and as to his being the fountain of honour, there was so much dishonour of which the king was certainly the fountain too, that I do not think it was very easy for two fountains both springing from such a person to have flowed quite unmingled. George justly prided himself on Sir Walter Scott's having been the first creation of his reign, and I think the event showed that the poet was the fountain of much more honour for the king, than the king was for the poet.

When George came to Edinburgh in 1822, it was Sir Walter who acted virtually as the master of the ceremonies, and to whom it was chiefly due that the visit was so successful. It was then that George clad his substantial person for the first time in the Highland costume—to wit, in the Steuart Tartans—and was so much annoyed to find himself outvied by a wealthy alderman, Sir William Curtis, who had gone and done likewise, and, in his equally grand Steuart Tartans, seemed a kind of parody of the king. The day on which the king arrived, Tuesday, 14th of August, 1822, was also the day on which Scott's most intimate friend, William Erskine, then Lord Kinnedder, died. Yet Scott went on board the royal yacht, was most graciously received by George, had his health drunk by the king in a bottle of Highland whiskey, and with a proper show of devoted loyalty entreated to be allowed to retain the glass out of which his Majesty had just drunk his health. The request was graciously acceded to, but let it be pleaded on Scott's behalf, that on reaching home and finding there his friend Crabbe the poet, he sat down on the royal gift, and crushed it to atoms. One would hope that he was really thinking more even of Crabbe, and much more of Erskine, than of the royal

favour for which he had appeared, and doubtless had really believed himself, so grateful. Sir Walter retained his regard for the king, such as it was, to the last, and even persuaded himself that George's death would be a great political calamity for the nation. And really I cannot help thinking that Scott believed more in the king, than he did in his friend George Canning. Assuredly, greatly as he admired Canning, he condemned him more and more as Canning grew more liberal, and sometimes speaks of his veerings in that direction with positive asperity. George, on the other hand, who believed more in number one than in any other number, however large, became much more conservative after he became Regent than he was before, and as he grew more conservative Scott grew more conservative likewise, till he came to think this particular king almost a pillar of the Constitution. I suppose we ought to explain this little bit of fetish-worship in Scott much as we should the quaint practical adhesion to duelling which he gave as an old man, who had had all his life much more to do with the pen than the sword—that is, as an evidence of the tendency of an improved type to recur to that of the old wild stock on which it had been grafted. But certainly no feudal devotion of his ancestors to their chief was ever less justified by moral qualities than Scott's loyal devotion to the fountain of honour as embodied in "our fat friend." The whole relation to George was a grotesque thread in Scott's life; and I cannot quite forgive him for the utterly conventional severity with which he threw over his first patron, the Queen, for sins which were certainly not grosser, if they were not much less gross, than those of his second patron, the husband who had set her the example which she faithfully, though at a distance, followed.

CHAPTER XIV.

SCOTT AS A POLITICIAN.

Scott usually professed great ignorance of politics, and did what he could to hold aloof from a world in which his feelings were very easily heated, while his knowledge was apt to be very imperfect. But now and again, and notably towards the close of his life, he got himself mixed up in politics, and I need hardly say that it was always on the Tory, and generally on the red-hot Tory, side. His first hasty intervention in politics was the song I have just referred to on Lord Melville's acquittal, during the short Whig administration of 1806. In fact Scott's comparative abstinence from politics was due, I believe, chiefly to the fact that during almost the whole of his literary life, Tories and not Whigs were in power. No sooner was any reform proposed, any abuse threatened, than Scott's eager Conservative spirit flashed up. Proposals were made in 1806 for changes—and, as it was thought, reforms—in the Scotch Courts of Law, and Scott immediately saw something like national calamity in the prospect. The mild proposals in question were discussed at a meeting of the Faculty of Advocates, when Scott made a speech longer than he had ever before delivered, and animated by a "flow and energy of eloquence" for which those who were accustomed to hear his debating speeches were quite unprepared. He

walked home between two of the reformers, Mr. Jeffrey and another, when his companions began to compliment him on his eloquence, and to speak playfully of its subject. But Scott was in no mood for playfulness. "No, no," he exclaimed, "'tis no laughing matter; little by little, whatever your wishes may be, you will destroy and undermine, until nothing of what makes Scotland Scotland shall remain!" "And so saying," adds Mr. Lockhart, "he turned round to conceal his agitation, but not until Mr. Jeffrey saw tears gushing down his cheek,—resting his head, until he recovered himself, on the wall of the Mound."[1] It was the same strong feeling for old Scotch institutions which broke out so quaintly in the midst of his own worst troubles in 1826, on behalf of the Scotch banking-system, when he so eloquently defended, in the letters of *Malachi Malagrowther*, what would now be called Home-Rule for Scotland, and indeed really defeated the attempt of his friends the Tories, who were the innovators this time, to encroach on those sacred institutions—the Scotch one-pound note, and the private-note circulation of the Scotch banks. But when I speak of Scott as a Home-Ruler, I should add that had not Scotland been for generations governed to a great extent, and, as he thought successfully, by Home-Rule, he was far too good a Conservative to have apologized for it at all. The basis of his Conservatism was always the danger of undermining a system which had answered so well. In the concluding passages of the letters to which I have just referred, he contrasts "Theory, a scroll in her hand, full of deep and mysterious combinations of figures, the least failure in any one of which may alter the result entirely," with

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. ii. 328.

"a practical system successful for upwards of a century." His vehement and unquailing opposition to Reform in almost the very last year of his life, when he had already suffered more than one stroke of paralysis, was grounded on precisely the same argument. At Jedburgh, on the 21st March, 1831, he appeared in the midst of an angry population (who hooted and jeered at him till he turned round fiercely upon them with the defiance, "I regard your gabble no more than the geese on the green,") to urge the very same protest. "We in this district," he said, "are proud, and with reason, that the first chain-bridge was the work of a Scotchman. It still hangs where he erected it a pretty long time ago. The French heard of our invention, and determined to introduce it, but with great improvements and embellishments. A friend of my own saw the thing tried. It was on the Seine at Marly. The French chain-bridge looked lighter and airier than the prototype. Every Englishman present was disposed to confess that we had been beaten at our own trade. But by-and-by the gates were opened, and the multitude were to pass over. It began to swing rather formidably beneath the pressure of the good company; and by the time the architect, who led the procession in great pomp and glory, reached the middle, the whole gave way, and he—worthy, patriotic artist—was the first that got a ducking. They had forgot the middle bolt,—or rather this ingenious person had conceived that to be a clumsy-looking feature, which might safely be dispensed with, while he put some invisible gimcrack of his own to supply its place."[1] It is strange that Sir Walter did not see that this kind of criticism, so far as it

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 47.

applied at all to such an experiment as the Reform Bill, was even more in point as a rebuke to the rashness of the Scotch reformer who hung the first successful chain-bridge, than to the rashness of the French reformer of reform who devised an unsuccessful variation on it. The audacity of the first experiment was much the greater, though the competence of the person who made it was the greater also. And as a matter of fact, the political structure against the supposed insecurity of which Sir Walter was protesting, with all the courage of that dauntless though dying nature, was made by one who understood his work at least as well as the Scotch architect. The tramp of the many multitudes who have passed over it has never yet made it to "swing dangerously," and Lord Russell in the fulness of his age was but yesterday rejoicing in what he had achieved, and even in what those have achieved who have altered his work in the same spirit in which he designed it.

But though Sir Walter persuaded himself that his Conservatism was all founded in legitimate distrust of reckless change, there is evidence, I think, that at times at least it was due to elements less noble. The least creditable incident in the story of his political life—which Mr. Lockhart, with his usual candour, did not conceal—was the bitterness with which he resented a most natural and reasonable Parliamentary opposition to an appointment which he had secured for his favourite brother, Tom. In 1810 Scott appointed his brother Tom, who had failed as a Writer to the Signet, to a place vacant under himself as Clerk of Session. He had not given him the best place vacant, because he thought it his duty to appoint an official who had grown grey in the service, but he gave Tom Scott this man's place, which was worth about 250*l.* a year. In the meantime Tom Scott's affairs did not

render it convenient for him to be come-at-able, and he absented himself, while they were being settled, in the Isle of Man. Further, the Commission on the Scotch system of judicature almost immediately reported that his office was one of supererogation, and ought to be abolished; but, to soften the blow, they proposed to allow him a pension of 130*l.* per annum. This proposal was discussed with some natural jealousy in the House of Lords. Lord Lauderdale thought that when Tom Scott was appointed, it must have been pretty evident that the Commission would propose to abolish his office, and that the appointment therefore should not have been made. "Mr. Thomas Scott," he said, "would have 130*l.* for life as an indemnity for an office the duties of which he never had performed, while those clerks who had laboured for twenty years had no adequate remuneration." Lord Holland supported this very reasonable and moderate view of the case; but of course the Ministry carried their way, and Tom Scott got his unearned pension. Nevertheless, Scott was furious with Lord Holland. Writing soon after to the happy recipient of this little pension, he says, "Lord Holland has been in Edinburgh, and we met accidentally at a public party. He made up to me, but I remembered his part in your affair, and *cut* him with as little remorse as an old pen." Mr. Lockhart says, on Lord Jeffrey's authority, that the scene was a very painful one. Lord Jeffrey himself declared that it was the only rudeness of which he ever saw Scott guilty in the course of a life-long familiarity. And it is pleasant to know that he renewed his cordiality with Lord Holland in later years, though there is no evidence that he ever admitted that he had been in the wrong. But the incident shows how very doubtful Sir Walter ought to have felt as to the purity

of his Conservatism. It is quite certain that the proposal to abolish Tom Scott's office without compensation was not a reckless experiment of a fundamental kind. It was a mere attempt at diminishing the heavy burdens laid on the people for the advantage of a small portion of the middle class, and yet Scott resented it with as much display of selfish passion—considering his genuine nobility of breeding—as that with which the rude working men of Jedburgh afterwards resented his gallant protest against the Reform Bill, and, later again, saluted the dauntless old man with the dastardly cry of "Burk Sir Walter!" Judged truly, I think Sir Walter's conduct in cutting Lord Holland "with as little remorse as an old pen," for simply doing his duty in the House of Lords, was quite as ignoble in him as the bullying and insolence of the democratic party in 1831, when the dying lion made his last dash at what he regarded as the foes of the Constitution. Doubtless he held that the mob, or, as we more decorously say, the residuum, were in some sense the enemies of true freedom. "I cannot read in history," he writes once to Mr. Laidlaw, "of any free State which has been brought to slavery till the rascal and uninstructed populace had had their short hour of anarchical government, which naturally leads to the stern repose of military despotism." But he does not seem ever to have perceived that educated men identify themselves with "the rascal and uninstructed populace," whenever they indulge on behalf of the selfish interests of their own class, passions such as he had indulged in fighting for his brother's pension. It is not the want of instruction, it is the rascaldom, i. e. the violent *esprit de corps* of a selfish class, which "naturally leads" to violent remedies. Such rascaldom exists in all classes, and not

least in the class of the cultivated and refined. Generous and magnanimous as Scott was, he was evidently by no means free from the germs of it.

One more illustration of Scott's political Conservatism, and I may leave his political life, which was not indeed his strong side, though, as with all sides of Scott's nature, it had an energy and spirit all his own. On the subject of Catholic Emancipation he took a peculiar view. As he justly said, he hated bigotry, and would have left the Catholics quite alone, but for the great claims of their creed to interfere with political life. And even so, when the penal laws were once abolished, he would have abolished also the representative disabilities, as quite useless, as well as very irritating when the iron system of effective repression had ceased. But he disapproved of the abolition of the political parts of the penal laws. He thought they would have stamped out Roman Catholicism; and whether that were just or unjust, he thought it would have been a great national service. "As for Catholic Emancipation," he wrote to Southey in 1807, "I am not, God knows, a bigot in religious matters, nor a friend to persecution; but if a particular set of religionists are *ipso facto* connected with foreign politics, and placed under the spiritual direction of a class of priests, whose unrivalled dexterity and activity are increased by the rules which detach them from the rest of the world—I humbly think that we may be excused from entrusting to them those places in the State where the influence of such a clergy, who act under the direction of a passive tool of our worst foe, is likely to be attended with the most fatal consequences. If a gentleman chooses to walk about with a couple of pounds of gunpowder in his pocket, if I give him the shelter of my roof, I may at least be permitted

to exclude him from the seat next to the fire."[1] And in relation to the year 1825, when Scott visited Ireland, Mr. Lockhart writes, "He on all occasions expressed manfully his belief that the best thing for Ireland would have been never to relax the strictly *political* enactments of the penal laws, however harsh these might appear. Had they been kept in vigour for another half-century, it was his conviction that Popery would have been all but extinguished in Ireland. But he thought that after admitting Romanists to the elective franchise, it was a vain notion that they could be permanently or advantageously deterred from using that franchise in favour of those of their own persuasion."

In his diary in 1829 he puts the same view still more strongly:—"I cannot get myself to feel at all anxious about the Catholic question. I cannot see the use of fighting about the platter, when you have let them snatch the meat off it. I hold Popery to be such a mean and degrading superstition, that I am not sure I could have found myself liberal enough for voting the repeal of the penal laws as they existed before 1780. They must and would, in course of time, have smothered Popery; and I confess that I should have seen the old lady of Babylon's mouth stopped with pleasure. But now that you have taken the plaster off her mouth, and given her free respiration, I cannot see the sense of keeping up the irritation about the claim to sit in Parliament. Unopposed, the Catholic superstition may sink into dust, with all its absurd ritual and solemnities. Still it is an awful risk. The world is in fact as silly as ever, and a good competence of nonsense will always find believers."[2] That is

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 34.

[2] Ibid., ix. 305.

the view of a strong and rather unscrupulous politician —a moss-trooper in politics — which Scott certainly was. He was thinking evidently very little of justice, almost entirely of the most effective means of keeping the Kingdom, the Kingdom which he loved. Had he understood—what none of the politicians of that day understood—the strength of the Church of Rome as the only consistent exponent of the principle of Authority in religion, I believe his opposition to Catholic emancipation would have been as bitter as his opposition to Parliamentary reform. But he took for granted that while only "silly" persons believed in Rome, and only "infidels" rejected an authoritative creed altogether, it was quite easy by the exercise of common sense, to find the true compromise between reason and religious humility. Had Scott lived through the religious controversies of our own days, it seems not unlikely that with his vivid imagination, his warm Conservatism, and his rather inadequate critical powers, he might himself have become a Roman Catholic.

CHAPTER XV.

SCOTT IN ADVERSITY.

WITH the year 1825 came a financial crisis, and Constable began to tremble for his solvency. From the date of his baronetcy Sir Walter had launched out into a considerable increase of expenditure. He got plans on a rather large scale in 1821 for the increase of Abbotsford, which were all carried out. To meet his expenses in this and other ways he received Constable's bills for "four unnamed works of fiction," of which he had not written a line, but which came to exist in time, and were called *Peveril of the Peak*, *Quentin Durward*, *St. Ronan's Well*, and *Redgauntlet*. Again, in the very year before the crash, 1825, he married his eldest son, the heir to the title, to a young lady who was herself an heiress, Miss Jobson of Lochore, when Abbotsford and its estates were settled, with the reserve of 10,000*l.*, which Sir Walter took power to charge on the property for purposes of business. Immediately afterwards he purchased a captaincy in the King's Hussars for his son, which cost him 3500*l.* Nor were the obligations he incurred on his own account, or that of his family, the only ones by which he was burdened. He was always incurring expenses, often heavy expenses, for other people. Thus, when Mr. Terry, the actor, became joint lessee and manager of the Adelphi

Theatre, London, Scott became his surety for 1250*l.*, while James Ballantyne became his surety for 500*l.* more, and both these sums had to be paid by Sir Walter after Terry's failure in 1828. Such obligations as these, however, would have been nothing when compared with Sir Walter's means, had all his bills on Constable been duly honoured, and had not the printing firm of Ballantyne and Co. been so deeply involved with Constable's house that it necessarily became insolvent when he stopped. Taken altogether, I believe that Sir Walter earned during his own lifetime at least 140,000*l.* by his literary work alone, probably more; while even on his land and building combined he did not apparently spend more than half that sum. Then he had a certain income, about 1000*l.* a year, from his own and Lady Scott's private property, as well as 1300*l.* a year as Clerk of Session, and 300*l.* more as Sheriff of Selkirk. Thus even his loss of the price of several novels by Constable's failure would not seriously have compromised Scott's position, but for his share in the printing-house which fell with Constable, and the obligations of which amounted to 117,000*l.*

As Scott had always forestalled his income,—spending the purchase-money of his poems and novels before they were written,—such a failure as this, at the age of fifty-five, when all the freshness of his youth was gone out of him, when he saw his son's prospects blighted as well as his own, and knew perfectly that James Ballantyne, unassisted by him, could never hope to pay any fraction of the debt worth mentioning, would have been paralysing, had he not been a man of iron nerve, and of a pride and courage hardly ever equalled. Domestic calamity, too, was not far off. For two years he had been watching the failure of his wife's health with in-

creasing anxiety, and as calamities seldom come single, her illness took a most serious form at the very time when the blow fell, and she died within four months of the failure. Nay, Scott was himself unwell at the critical moment, and was taking sedatives which discomposed his brain. Twelve days before the final failure,—which was announced to him on the 17th January, 1826,—he enters in his diary, "Much alarmed. I had walked till twelve with Skene and Russell, and then sat down to my work. To my horror and surprise I could neither write nor spell, but put down one word for another, and wrote nonsense. I was much overpowered at the same time and could not conceive the reason. I fell asleep, however, in my chair, and slept for two hours. On my waking my head was clearer, and I began to recollect that last night I had taken the anodyne left for the purpose by Clarkson, and being disturbed in the course of the night, I had not slept it off." In fact the hyoscyamus had, combined with his anxieties, given him a slight attack of what is now called *aphasia*, that brain disease the most striking symptom of which is that one word is mistaken for another. And this was Scott's preparation for his failure, and the bold resolve which followed it, to work for his creditors as he had worked for himself, and to pay off, if possible, the whole 117,000*l.* by his own literary exertions.

There is nothing in its way in the whole of English biography more impressive than the stoical extracts from Scott's diary which note the descent of this blow. Here is the anticipation of the previous day: "Edinburgh, January 16th.—Came through cold roads to as cold news. Hurst and Robinson have suffered a bill to come back upon Constable, which, I suppose, infers the ruin of both houses.

We shall soon see. Dined with the Skenes." And here is the record itself: "January 17th.—James Ballantyne this morning, good honest fellow, with a visage as black as the crook. He hopes no salvation; has, indeed, taken measures to stop. It is hard, after having fought such a battle. I have apologized for not attending the Royal Society Club, who have a *gaudeamus* on this day, and seemed to count much on my being the præses. My old acquaintance Miss Elizabeth Clerk, sister of Willie, died suddenly. I cannot choose but wish it had been Sir W. S., and yet the feeling is unmanly. I have Anne, my wife, and Charles to look after. I felt rather sneaking as I came home from the Parliament-house—felt as if I were liable *monstrari digito* in no very pleasant way. But this must be borne *cum cæteris;* and, thank God, however uncomfortable, I do not feel despondent."[1] On the following day, the 18th January, the day after the blow, he records a bad night, a wish that the next two days were over, but that "the worst *is* over," and on the same day he set about making notes for the *magnum opus*, as he called it—the complete edition of all the novels, with a new introduction and notes. On the 19th January, two days after the failure, he calmly resumed the composition of *Woodstock*—the novel on which he was then engaged—and completed, he says, "about twenty printed pages of it;" to which he adds that he had "a painful scene after dinner and another after supper, endeavouring to convince these poor creatures" [his wife and daughter] "that they must not look for miracles, but consider the misfortune as certain, and only to be lessened by patience and labour." On the 21st January, after a

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 197.

number of business details, he quotes from Job, "Naked we entered the world and naked we leave it; blessed be the name of the Lord." On the 22nd he says, "I feel neither dishonoured nor broken down by the bad, now truly bad, news I have received. I have walked my last in the domains I have planted--sat the last time in the halls I have built. But death would have taken them from me, if misfortune had spared them. My poor people whom I loved so well! There is just another die to turn up against me in this run of ill-luck, i. e. if I should break my magic wand in the fall from this elephant, and lose my popularity with my fortune. Then *Woodstock* and *Boney*" [his life of Napoleon] "may both go to the paper-maker, and I may take to smoking cigars and drinking grog, or turn devotee and intoxicate the brain another way."[1] He adds that when he sets to work doggedly, he is exactly the same man he ever was, "neither low-spirited nor *distrait*," nay, that adversity is to him "a tonic and bracer."

The heaviest blow was, I think, the blow to his pride. Very early he begins to note painfully the different way in which different friends greet him, to remark that some smile as if to say, "think nothing about it, my lad, it is quite out of our thoughts;" that others adopt an affected gravity, "such as one sees and despises at a funeral," and the best-bred "just shook hands and went on." He writes to Mr. Morritt with a proud indifference, clearly to some extent simulated:—"My womenkind will be the greater sufferers, yet even they look cheerily forward; and, for myself, the blowing off of my hat on a stormy day has given me more uneasiness."[2] To Lady Davy he writes

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 203-4.
[2] Ibid., viii. 235.

truly enough:—"I beg my humblest compliments to Sir Humphrey, and tell him, Ill Luck, that direful chemist, never put into his crucible a more indissoluble piece of stuff than your affectionate cousin and sincere well-wisher, Walter Scott."[1] When his *Letters of Malachi Malagrowther* came out he writes:—"I am glad of this bruilzie, as far as I am concerned; people will not dare talk of me as an object of pity—no more 'poor-manning.' Who asks how many punds Scots the old champion had in his pocket when

> 'He set a bugle to his mouth,
> And blew so loud and shrill,
> The trees in greenwood shook thereat,
> Sae loud rang every hill.'

This sounds conceited enough, yet is not far from truth."[2] His dread of pity is just the same when his wife dies:—"Will it be better," he writes, "when left to my own feelings, I see the whole world pipe and dance around me? I think it will. Their sympathy intrudes on my present affliction." Again, on returning for the first time from Edinburgh to Abbotsford after Lady Scott's funeral:—"I again took possession of the family bedroom and my widowed couch. This was a sore trial, but it was necessary not to blink such a resolution. Indeed I do not like to have it thought that there is any way in which I can be beaten." And again:—"I have a secret pride—I fancy it will be so most truly termed—which impels me to mix with my distresses strange snatches of mirth, 'which have no mirth in them.'"[3]

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 238.
[2] viii. 277. [3] viii., 347, 371, 381.

But though pride was part of Scott's strength, pride alone never enabled any man to struggle so vigorously and so unremittingly as he did to meet the obligations he had incurred. When he was in Ireland in the previous year, a poor woman who had offered to sell him gooseberries, but whose offer had not been accepted, remarked, on seeing his daughter give some pence to a beggar, that they might as well give her an alms too, as she was "an old struggler." Sir Walter was struck with the expression, and said that it deserved to become classical, as a name for those who take arms against a sea of troubles, instead of yielding to the waves. It was certainly a name the full meaning of which he himself deserved. His house in Edinburgh was sold, and he had to go into a certain Mrs. Brown's lodgings, when he was discharging his duties as Clerk of Session. His wife was dead. His estate was conveyed to trustees for the benefit of his creditors till such time as he should pay off Ballantyne and Co's. debt, which of course in his lifetime he never did. Yet between January, 1826, and January, 1828, he earned for his creditors very nearly 40,000*l.* *Woodstock* sold for 8228*l.*, "a matchless sale," as Sir Walter remarked, "for less than three months' work." The first two editions of *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, on which Mr. Lockhart says that Scott had spent the unremitting labour of about two years—labour involving a far greater strain on eyes and brain than his imaginative work ever caused him—sold for 18,000*l.* Had Sir Walter's health lasted, he would have redeemed his obligations on behalf of Ballantyne and Co. within eight or nine years at most from the time of his failure. But what is more remarkable still, is that after his health failed he struggled on with little more than half a brain,

but a whole will, to work while it was yet day, though the evening was dropping fast. *Count Robert of Paris* and *Castle Dangerous* were really the compositions of a paralytic patient.

It was in September, 1830, that the first of these tales was begun. As early as the 15th February of that year he had had his first true paralytic seizure. He had been discharging his duties as clerk of session as usual, and received in the afternoon a visit from a lady friend of his, Miss Young, who was submitting to him some manuscript memoirs of her father, when the stroke came. It was but slight. He struggled against it with his usual iron power of will, and actually managed to stagger out of the room where the lady was sitting with him, into the drawing-room where his daughter was, but there he fell his full length on the floor. He was cupped, and fully recovered his speech during the course of the day, but Mr. Lockhart thinks that never, after this attack, did his style recover its full lucidity and terseness. A cloudiness in words and a cloudiness of arrangement began to be visible. In the course of the year he retired from his duties of clerk of session, and his publishers hoped that, by engaging him on the new and complete edition of his works, they might detach him from the attempt at imaginative creation for which he was now so much less fit. But Sir Walter's will survived his judgment. When, in the previous year, Ballantyne had been disabled from attending to business by his wife's illness (which ended in her death), Scott had written in his diary, "It is his (Ballantyne's) nature to indulge apprehensions of the worst which incapacitate him for labour. I cannot help regarding this amiable weakness of the mind with something too nearly allied to contempt," and assuredly he

was guilty of no such weakness himself. Not only did he row much harder against the stream of fortune than he had ever rowed with it, but, what required still more resolution, he fought on against the growing conviction that his imagination would not kindle, as it used to do, to its old heat.

When he dictated to Laidlaw,—for at this time he could hardly write himself for rheumatism in the hand,—he would frequently pause and look round him, like a man "mocked with shadows." Then he bestirred himself with a great effort, rallied his force, and the style again flowed clear and bright, but not for long. The clouds would gather again, and the mental blank recur. This soon became visible to his publishers, who wrote discouragingly of the new novel—to Scott's own great distress and irritation. The oddest feature in the matter was that his letters to them were full of the old terseness, and force, and caustic turns. On business he was as clear and keen as in his best days. It was only at his highest task, the task of creative work, that his cunning began to fail him. Here, for instance, are a few sentences written to Cadell, his publisher, touching this very point—the discouragement which James Ballantyne had been pouring on the new novel. Ballantyne, he says, finds fault with the subject, when what he really should have found fault with was the failing power of the author:—"James is, with many other kindly critics, perhaps in the predicament of an honest drunkard, when crop-sick the next morning, who does not ascribe the malady to the wine he has drunk, but to having tasted some particular dish at dinner which disagreed with his stomach. . . . . I have lost, it is plain, the power of interesting the country, and ought, in justice to all parties, to retire while I have some credit.

But this is an important step, and I will not be obstinate about it if it be necessary. . . . . Frankly, I cannot think of flinging aside the half-finished volume, as if it were a corked bottle of wine. . . . . I may, perhaps, take a trip to the Continent for a year or two, if I find Othello's occupation gone, or rather Othello's *reputation*."[1] And again, in a very able letter written on the 12th of December, 1830, to Cadell, he takes a view of the situation with as much calmness and imperturbability as if he were an outside spectator. "There were many circumstances in the matter which you and J. B. (James Ballantyne) could not be aware of, and which, if you were aware of, might have influenced your judgment, which had, and yet have, a most powerful effect upon mine. The deaths of both my father and mother have been preceded by a paralytic shock. My father survived it for nearly two years—a melancholy respite, and not to be desired. I was alarmed with Miss Young's morning visit, when, as you know, I lost my speech. The medical people said it was from the stomach, which might be, but while there is a doubt upon a point so alarming, you will not wonder that the subject, or to use Hare's *lingo*, the *shot*, should be a little anxious." He relates how he had followed all the strict medical *régime* prescribed to him with scrupulous regularity, and then begun his work again with as much attention as he could. "And having taken pains with my story, I find it is not relished, nor indeed tolerated, by those who have no interest in condemning it, but a strong interest in putting even a face" (? force) "upon their consciences. Was not this, in the circumstances, a damper to an invalid already

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 11, 12.

afraid that the sharp edge might be taken off his intellect, though he was not himself sensible of that?" In fact, no more masterly discussion of the question whether his mind were failing or not, and what he ought to do in the interval of doubt, can be conceived, than these letters give us. At this time the debt of Ballantyne and Co. had been reduced by repeated dividends—all the fruits of Scott's literary work—more than one half. On the 17th of December, 1830, the liabilities stood at 54,000*l.*, having been reduced 63,000*l.* within five years. And Sir Walter, encouraged by this great result of his labour, resumed the suspended novel.

But with the beginning of 1831 came new alarms. On January 5th Sir Walter enters in his diary,—"Very indifferent, with more awkward feelings than I can well bear up against. My voice sunk and my head strangely confused." Still he struggled on. On the 31st January he went alone to Edinburgh to sign his will, and stayed at his bookseller's (Cadell's) house in Athol Crescent. A great snow-storm set in which kept him in Edinburgh and in Mr. Cadell's house till the 9th February. One day while the snow was still falling heavily, Ballantyne reminded him that a motto was wanting for one of the chapters of *Count Robert of Paris*. He went to the window, looked out for a moment, and then wrote,—

> "The storm increases; 'tis no sunny shower,
> Foster'd in the moist breast of March or April,
> Or such as parchèd summer cools his lips with.
> Heaven's windows are flung wide; the inmost deeps
> Call, in hoarse greeting, one upon another;
> On comes the flood, in all its foaming horrors,
> And where's the dike shall stop it?
>
> *The Deluge: a Poem.*"

Clearly this failing imagination of Sir Walter's was still a great deal more vivid than that of most men, with brains as sound as it ever pleased Providence to make them. But his troubles were not yet even numbered. The "storm increased," and it was, as he said, "no sunny shower." His lame leg became so painful that he had to get a mechanical apparatus to relieve him of some of the burden of supporting it. Then, on the 21st March, he was hissed at Jedburgh, as I have before said, for his vehement opposition to Reform. In April he had another stroke of paralysis which he now himself recognized as one. Still he struggled on at his novel. Under the date of May 6, 7, 8, he makes this entry in his diary:—"Here is a precious job. I have a formal remonstrance from those critical people, Ballantyne and Cadell, against the last volume of *Count Robert*, which is within a sheet of being finished. I suspect their opinion will be found to coincide with that of the public; at least it is not very different from my own. The blow is a stunning one, I suppose, for I scarcely feel it. It is singular, but it comes with as little surprise as if I had a remedy ready; yet God knows I am at sea in the dark, and the vessel leaky, I think, into the bargain. I cannot conceive that I have tied a knot with my tongue which my teeth cannot untie. We shall see. I have suffered terribly, that is the truth, rather in body than mind, and I often wish I could lie down and sleep without waking. But I will fight it out if I can."[1] The medical men with one accord tried to make him give up his novel-writing. But he smiled and put them by. He took up *Count Robert of Paris* again, and tried to recast it. On the 18th May he insisted on

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 65-6.

attending the election for Roxburghshire, to be held at Jedburgh, and in spite of the unmannerly reception he had met with in March, no dissuasion would keep him at home. He was saluted in the town with groans and blasphemies, and Sir Walter had to escape from Jedburgh by a back way to avoid personal violence. The cries of "Burk Sir Walter," with which he was saluted on this occasion, haunted him throughout his illness and on his dying bed. At the Selkirk election it was Sir Walter's duty as Sheriff to preside, and his family therefore made no attempt to dissuade him from his attendance. There he was so well known and loved, that in spite of his Tory views, he was not insulted, and the only man who made any attempt to hustle the Tory electors, was seized by Sir Walter with his own hand, as he got out of his carriage, and committed to prison without resistance till the election day was over.

A seton which had been ordered for his head, gave him some relief, and of course the first result was that he turned immediately to his novel-writing again, and began *Castle Dangerous* in July, 1831,—the last July but one which he was to see at all. He even made a little journey in company with Mr. Lockhart, in order to see the scene of the story he wished to tell, and on his return set to work with all his old vigour to finish his tale, and put the concluding touches to *Count Robert of Paris*. But his temper was no longer what it had been. He quarrelled with Ballantyne, partly for his depreciatory criticism of *Count Robert of Paris*, partly for his growing tendency to a mystic and strait-laced sort of dissent and his increasing Liberalism. Even Mr. Laidlaw and Scott's children had much to bear. But he struggled on even to the end, and did not consent to try the experiment of a

voyage and visit to Italy till his immediate work was done. Well might Lord Chief Baron Shepherd apply to Scott Cicero's description of some contemporary of his own, who "had borne adversity wisely, who had not been broken by fortune, and who, amidst the buffets of fate, had maintained his dignity." There was in Sir Walter, I think, at least as much of the Stoic as the Christian. But Stoic or Christian, he was a hero of the old, indomitable type. Even the last fragments of his imaginative power were all turned to account by that unconquerable will, amidst the discouragement of friends, and the still more disheartening doubts of his own mind. Like the headland stemming a rough sea, he was gradually worn away, but never crushed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST YEAR.

In the month of September, 1831, the disease of the brain which had long been in existence must have made a considerable step in advance. For the first time the illusion seemed to possess Sir Walter that he had paid off all the debt for which he was liable, and that he was once more free to give as his generosity prompted. Scott sent Mr. Lockhart 50*l.* to save his grandchildren some slight inconvenience, and told another of his correspondents that he had "put his decayed fortune into as good a condition as he could desire." It was well, therefore, that he had at last consented to try the effect of travel on his health,—not that he could hope to arrest by it such a disease as his, but that it diverted him from the most painful of all efforts, that of trying anew the spell which had at last failed him, and perceiving in the disappointed eyes of his old admirers that the magic of his imagination was a thing of the past. The last day of real enjoyment at Abbotsford—for when Sir Walter returned to it to die, it was but to catch once more the outlines of its walls, the rustle of its woods, and the gleam of its waters, through senses already darkened to all less familiar and less fascinating visions—was the 22nd September, 1831. On the 21st, Wordsworth had

come to bid his old friend adieu, and on the 22nd—the last day at home—they spent the morning together in a visit to Newark. It was a day to deepen alike in Scott and in Wordsworth whatever of sympathy either of them had with the very different genius of the other, and that it had this result in Wordsworth's case, we know from the very beautiful poem,—"Yarrow Revisited,"—and the sonnet which the occasion also produced. And even Scott, who was so little of a Wordsworthian, who enjoyed Johnson's stately but formal verse, and Crabbe's vivid Dutch painting, more than he enjoyed the poetry of the transcendental school, must have recurred that day with more than usual emotion to his favourite Wordsworthian poem. Soon after his wife's death, he had remarked in his diary how finely "the effect of grief upon persons who like myself are highly susceptible of humour" had been "touched by Wordsworth in the character of the merry village teacher, Matthew, whom Jeffrey profanely calls a half-crazy, sentimental person."[1] And long before this time, during the brightest period of his life, Scott had made the old Antiquary of his novel quote the same poem of Wordsworth's, in a passage where the period of life at which he had now arrived is anticipated with singular pathos and force. "It is at such moments as these," says Mr. Oldbuck, "that we feel the changes of time. The same objects are before us—those inanimate things which we have gazed on in wayward infancy and impetuous youth, in anxious and scheming manhood—they are permanent and the same; but when we look upon them in cold, unfeeling old age, can we, changed in our temper, our pursuits, our feelings,—changed in our form, our limbs, and our strength,—can we be ourselves called the

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 63.

same? or do we not rather look back with a sort of wonder upon our former selves as beings separate and distinct from what we now are? The philosopher who appealed from Philip inflamed with wine to Philip in his hours of sobriety, did not claim a judge so different as if he had appealed from Philip in his youth to Philip in his old age. I cannot but be touched with the feeling so beautifully expressed in a poem which I have heard repeated:—

'My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirr'd,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard.
Thus fares it still in our decay,
And yet the wiser mind
Mourns less for what age takes away
Than what it leaves behind.'" [1]

Sir Walter's memory, which, in spite of the slight failure of brain and the mild illusions to which, on the subject of his own prospects, he was now liable, had as yet been little impaired—indeed, he could still quote whole pages from all his favourite authors—must have recurred to those favourite Wordsworthian lines of his with singular force, as, with Wordsworth for his companion, he gazed on the refuge of the last Minstrel of his imagination for the last time, and felt in himself how much of joy in the sight, age had taken away, and how much, too, of the habit of expecting it, it had unfortunately left behind. Whether Sir Walter recalled this poem of Wordsworth's on this occasion or not—and if he recalled it, his delight in giving pleasure would assuredly have led him to let Wordsworth know that he recalled it—the mood it paints was unquestionably that in which his last day at Abbotsford

[1] *The Antiquary*, chap. x.

was passed. In the evening, referring to the journey which was to begin the next day, he remarked that Fielding and Smollett had been driven abroad by declining health, and that they had never returned; while Wordsworth—willing perhaps to bring out a brighter feature in the present picture—regretted that the last days of those two great novelists had not been surrounded by due marks of respect. With Sir Walter, as he well knew, it was different. The Liberal Government that he had so bitterly opposed were pressing on him signs of the honour in which he was held, and a ship of his Majesty's navy had been placed at his disposal to take him to the Mediterranean. And Wordsworth himself added his own more durable token of reverence. As long as English poetry lives, Englishmen will know something of that last day of the last Minstrel at Newark:—

"Grave thoughts ruled wide on that sweet day,
Their dignity installing
In gentle bosoms, while sere leaves
Were on the bough or falling;
But breezes play'd, and sunshine gleam'd
The forest to embolden,
Redden'd the fiery hues, and shot
Transparence through the golden.

"For busy thoughts the stream flow'd on
In foamy agitation;
And slept in many a crystal pool
For quiet contemplation:
No public and no private care
The free-born mind enthralling,
We made a day of happy hours,
Our happy days recalling.

* * * *

"And if, as Yarrow through the woods
And down the meadow ranging,
Did meet us with unalter'd face,
Though we were changed and changing;

If *then* some natural shadow spread
Our inward prospect over,
The soul's deep valley was not slow
Its brightness to recover.

"Eternal blessings on the Muse
And her divine employment,
The blameless Muse who trains her sons
For hope and calm enjoyment;
Albeit sickness lingering yet
Has o'er their pillow brooded,
And care waylays their steps—a sprite
Not easily eluded.

* * * * *

"Nor deem that localized Romance
Plays false with our affections;
Unsanctifies our tears—made sport
For fanciful dejections:
Ah, no! the visions of the past
Sustain the heart in feeling
Life as she is—our changeful Life
With friends and kindred dealing.

"Bear witness ye, whose thoughts that day
In Yarrow's groves were centred,
Who through the silent portal arch
Of mouldering Newark enter'd;
And clomb the winding stair that once
Too timidly was mounted
By the last Minstrel—not the last!—
Ere he his tale recounted."

Thus did the meditative poetry, the day of which was not yet, do honour to itself in doing homage to the Minstrel of romantic energy and martial enterprise, who, with the school of poetry he loved, was passing away.

On the 23rd September Scott left Abbotsford, spending five days on his journey to London; nor would he allow any of the old objects of interest to be passed with

out getting out of the carriage to see them. He did not leave London for Portsmouth till the 23rd October, but spent the intervening time in London, where he took medical advice, and with his old shrewdness wheeled his chair into a dark corner during the physicians' absence from the room to consult, that he might read their faces clearly on their return without their being able to read his. They recognized traces of brain disease, but Sir Walter was relieved by their comparatively favourable opinion, for he admitted that he had feared insanity, and therefore had "feared *them*." On the 29th October he sailed for Malta, and on the 20th November Sir Walter insisted on being landed on a small volcanic island which had appeared four months previously, and which disappeared again in a few days, and on clambering about its crumbling lava, in spite of sinking at nearly every step almost up to his knees, in order that he might send a description of it to his old friend Mr. Skene. On the 22nd November he reached Malta, where he looked eagerly at the antiquities of the place, for he still hoped to write a novel—and, indeed, actually wrote one at Naples, which was never published, called *The Siege of Malta*—on the subject of the Knights of Malta, who had interested him so much in his youth. From Malta Scott went to Naples, which he reached on the 17th December, and where he found much pleasure in the society of Sir William Gell, an invalid like himself, but not one who, like himself, struggled against the admission of his infirmities, and refused to be carried when his own legs would not safely carry him. Sir William Gell's dog delighted the old man; he would pat it and call it "Poor boy!" and confide to Sir William how he had at home "two very fine favourite dogs, so large that I am always afraid they look too large

and too feudal for my diminished income." In all his letters home he gave some injunction to Mr. Laidlaw about the poor people and the dogs.

On the 22nd of March, 1832, Goethe died, an event which made a great impression on Scott, who had intended to visit Weimar on his way back, on purpose to see Goethe, and this much increased his eager desire to return home. Accordingly on the 16th of April, the last day on which he made any entry in his diary, he quitted Naples for Rome, where he stayed long enough only to let his daughter see something of the place, and hurried off homewards on the 21st of May. In Venice he was still strong enough to insist on scrambling down into the dungeons adjoining the Bridge of Sighs; and at Frankfort he entered a bookseller's shop, when the man brought out a lithograph of Abbotsford, and Scott remarking, "I know that already, sir," left the shop unrecognized, more than ever craving for home. At Nimeguen, on the 9th of June, while in a steamboat on the Rhine, he had his most serious attack of apoplexy, but would not discontinue his journey, was lifted into an English steamboat at Rotterdam on the 11th of June, and arrived in London on the 13th. There he recognized his children, and appeared to expect immediate death, as he gave them repeatedly his most solemn blessing, but for the most part he lay at the St. James's Hotel, in Jermyn Street, without any power to converse. There it was that Allan Cunningham, on walking home one night, found a group of working men at the corner of the street, who stopped him and asked, "as if there was but one death-bed in London, 'Do you know, sir, if this is the street where he is lying?'" According to the usual irony of destiny, it was while the working men were doing him this hearty and

unconscious homage, that Sir Walter, whenever disturbed by the noises of the street, imagined himself at the polling-booth of Jedburgh, where the people had cried out, "Burk Sir Walter." And it was while lying here,—only now and then uttering a few words,—that Mr. Lockhart says of him, "He expressed his will as determinedly as ever, and expressed it with the same apt and good-natured irony that he was wont to use."

Sir Walter's great and urgent desire was to return to Abbotsford, and at last his physicians yielded. On the 7th July he was lifted into his carriage, followed by his trembling and weeping daughters, and so taken to a steamboat, where the captain gave up his private cabin—a cabin on deck—for his use. He remained unconscious of any change till after his arrival in Edinburgh, when, on the 11th July, he was placed again in his carriage, and remained in it quite unconscious during the first two stages of the journey to Tweedside. But as the carriage entered the valley of the Gala, he began to look about him. Presently he murmured a name or two, "Gala water, surely,—Buckholm,—Torwoodlee." When the outline of the Eildon hills came in view, Scott's excitement was great, and when his eye caught the towers of Abbotsford, he sprang up with a cry of delight, and while the towers remained in sight it took his physician, his son-in-law, and his servant, to keep him in the carriage. Mr. Laidlaw was waiting for him, and he met him with a cry, "Ha! Willie Laidlaw! O, man, how often I have thought of you!" His dogs came round his chair and began to fawn on him and lick his hands, while Sir Walter smiled or sobbed over them. The next morning he was wheeled about his garden, and on the following morning was out in this way for a couple of hours; within a day or two he

fancied that he could write again, but on taking the pen into his hand, his fingers could not clasp it, and he sank back with tears rolling down his cheek. Later, when Laidlaw said in his hearing that Sir Walter had had a little repose, he replied, "No, Willie; no repose for Sir Walter but in the grave." As the tears rushed from his eyes, his old pride revived. "Friends," he said, "don't let me expose myself—get me to bed,—that is the only place."

After this Sir Walter never left his room. Occasionally he dropped off into delirium, and the old painful memory,—that cry of "Burk Sir Walter,"—might be again heard on his lips. He lingered, however, till the 21st September,—more than two months from the day of his reaching home, and a year from the day of Wordsworth's arrival at Abbotsford before his departure for the Mediterranean, with only one clear interval of consciousness, on Monday, the 17th September. On that day Mr. Lockhart was called to Sir Walter's bedside with the news that he had awakened in a state of composure and consciousness, and wished to see him. "'Lockhart,' he said, 'I may have but a minute to speak to you. My dear, be a good man,—be virtuous,—be religious,—be a good man. Nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here.' He paused, and I said, 'Shall I send for Sophia and Anne?' 'No,' said he, 'don't disturb them. Poor souls! I know they were up all night. God bless you all!'" With this he sank into a very tranquil sleep, and, indeed, he scarcely afterwards gave any sign of consciousness except for an instant on the arrival of his sons. And so four days afterwards, on the day of the autumnal equinox in 1832, at half-past one in the afternoon, on a glorious autumn day, with every window wide open, and the ripple of the Tweed over its

pebbles distinctly audible in his room, he passed away, and "his eldest son kissed and closed his eyes." He died a month after completing his sixty-first year. Nearly seven years earlier, on the 7th December, 1825, he had in his diary taken a survey of his own health in relation to the age reached by his father and other members of his family, and had stated as the result of his considerations, "Square the odds and good night, Sir Walter, about sixty. I care not if I leave my name unstained and my family property settled. *Sat est vixisse.*" Thus he lived just a year—but a year of gradual death—beyond his own calculation.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE END OF THE STRUGGLE.

SIR WALTER certainly left his "name unstained," unless the serious mistakes natural to a sanguine temperament such as his, are to be counted as stains upon his name; and if they are, where among the sons of men would you find many unstained names as noble as his with such a stain upon it? He was not only sensitively honourable in motive, but, when he found what evil his sanguine temper had worked, he used his gigantic powers to repair it, as Samson used his great strength to repair the mischief he had inadvertently done to Israel. But with all his exertions he had not, when death came upon him, cleared off much more than half his obligations. There was still 54,000*l.* to pay. But of this, 22,000*l.* was secured in an insurance on his life, and there were besides a thousand pounds or two in the hands of the trustees, which had not been applied to the extinction of the debt. Mr. Cadell, his publisher, accordingly advanced the remaining 30,000*l.* on the security of Sir Walter's copyrights, and on the 21st February, 1833, the general creditors were paid in full, and Mr. Cadell remained the only creditor of the estate. In February, 1847, Sir Walter's son, the second baronet, died childless; and in May, 1847, Mr. Cadell gave a discharge in full of all

claims, including the bond for 10,000*l.* executed by Sir Walter during the struggles of Constable and Co. to prevent a failure, on the transfer to him of all the copyrights of Sir Walter, including "the results of some literary exertions of the sole surviving executor," which I conjecture to mean the copyright of the admirable biography of Sir Walter Scott in ten volumes, to which I have made such a host of references—probably the most perfect specimen of a biography rich in great materials, which our language contains. And thus, nearly fifteen years after Sir Walter's death, the debt which, within six years, he had more than half discharged, was at last, through the value of the copyrights he had left behind him, finally extinguished, and the small estate of Abbotsford left cleared.

Sir Walter's effort to found a new house was even less successful than the effort to endow it. His eldest son died childless. In 1839 he went to Madras, as Lieutenant-Colonel of the 15th Hussars, and subsequently commanded that regiment. He was as much beloved by the officers of his regiment as his father had been by his own friends, and was in every sense an accomplished soldier, and one whose greatest anxiety it was to promote the welfare of the privates as well as of the officers of his regiment. He took great pains in founding a library for the soldiers of his corps, and his only legacy out of his own family was one of 100*l.* to this library. The cause of his death was his having exposed himself rashly to the sun in a tiger-hunt, in August, 1846; he never recovered from the fever which was the immediate consequence. Ordered home for his health, he died near the Cape of Good Hope, on the 8th of February, 1847. His brother Charles died before him. He was rising rapidly in the diplomatic

service, and was taken to Persia by Sir John MacNeill, on a diplomatic mission, as attaché and private secretary. But the climate struck him down, and he died at Teheran, almost immediately on his arrival, on the 28th October, 1841. Both the sisters had died previously. Anne Scott, the younger of the two, whose health had suffered greatly during the prolonged anxiety of her father's illness, died on the Midsummer-day of the year following her father's death; and Sophia, Mrs. Lockhart, died on the 17th May, 1837. Sir Walter's eldest grandchild, John Hugh Lockhart, for whom the *Tales of a Grandfather* were written, died before his grandfather; indeed Sir Walter heard of the child's death at Naples. The second son, Walter Scott Lockhart Scott, a lieutenant in the army, died at Versailles, on the 10th January, 1853. Charlotte Harriet Jane Lockhart, who was married in 1847 to James Robert Hope-Scott, and succeeded to the Abbotsford estate, died at Edinburgh, on the 26th October, 1858, leaving three children, of whom only one survives. Walter Michael and Margaret Anne Hope-Scott both died in infancy. The only direct descendant, therefore, of Sir Walter Scott, is now Mary Monica Hope-Scott who was born on the 2nd October, 1852, the grandchild of Mrs. Lockhart, and the great-grandchild of the founder of Abbotsford.

There is something of irony in such a result of the Herculean labours of Scott to found and endow a new branch of the clan of Scott. When fifteen years after his death the estate was at length freed from debt, all his own children and the eldest of his grandchildren were dead; and now forty-six years have elapsed, and there only remains one girl of his descendants to borrow his name and live in the halls of which he was so proud. And yet this

and this only, was wanting to give something of the grandeur of tragedy to the end of Scott's great enterprise. He valued his works little compared with the house and lands which they were to be the means of gaining for his descendants; yet every end for which he struggled so gallantly is all but lost, while his works have gained more of added lustre from the losing battle which he fought so long, than they could ever have gained from his success.

What there was in him of true grandeur could never have been seen, had the fifth act of his life been less tragic than it was. Generous, large-hearted, and magnanimous as Scott was, there was something in the days of his prosperity that fell short of what men need for their highest ideal of a strong man. Unbroken success, unrivalled popularity, imaginative effort flowing almost as steadily as the current of a stream,—these are characteristics, which, even when enhanced as they were in his case, by the power to defy physical pain, and to live in his imaginative world when his body was writhing in torture, fail to touch the heroic point. And there was nothing in Scott, while he remained prosperous, to relieve adequately the glare of triumphant prosperity. His religious and moral feeling, though strong and sound, was purely regulative, and not always even regulative, where his inward principle was not reflected in the opinions of the society in which he lived. The finer spiritual element in Scott was relatively deficient, and so the strength of the natural man was almost too equal, complete, and glaring. Something that should "tame the glaring white" of that broad sunshine, was needed; and in the years of reverse, when one gift after another was taken away, till at length what he called even his "magic wand" was broken, and the old man

struggled on to the last, without bitterness, without defiance, without murmuring, but not without such sudden flashes of subduing sweetness as melted away the anger of the teacher of his childhood,—that something seemed to be supplied. Till calamity came, Scott appeared to be a nearly complete natural man, and no more. Then first was perceived in him something above nature, something which could endure though every end in life for which he had fought so boldly should be defeated,—something which could endure and more than endure, which could shoot a soft transparence of its own through his years of darkness and decay. That there was nothing very elevated in Scott's personal or moral, or political or literary ends,—that he never for a moment thought of himself as one who was bound to leave the earth better than he found it,—that he never seems to have so much as contemplated a social or political reform for which he ought to contend,—that he lived to some extent like a child blowing soap-bubbles, the brightest and most gorgeous of which—the Abbotsford bubble—vanished before his eyes, is not a take-off from the charm of his career, but adds to it the very speciality of its fascination. For it was his entire unconsciousness of moral or spiritual efforts. the simple straightforward way in which he laboured for ends of the most ordinary kind, which made it clear how much greater the man was than his ends, how great was the mind and character which prosperity failed to display, but which became visible at once so soon as the storm came down and the night fell. Few men who battle avowedly for the right, battle for it with the calm fortitude, the cheerful equanimity, with which Scott battled to fulfil his engagements and to save his family from ruin. He stood high amongst those—

"Who ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads,"

among those who have been able to display—

"One equal temper of heroic hearts
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will,
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

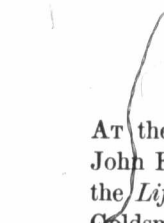
And it was because the man was so much greater than the ends for which he strove, that there is a sort of grandeur in the tragic fate which denied them to him, and yet exhibited to all the world the infinite superiority of the striver himself to the toy he was thus passionately craving.

THE END.

DICKENS

BY

ADOLPHUS WILLIAM WARD



At the
John F
the *Lif*
Goldsm
fame, w
my lov
Dicken
said, "
ships, t
of the
pher m
combin
erary n
given, a
Dicken
were th
cerning
was a
selled i

On M
three v
and his
superflu
ing essa
not be
of the
claimed
as well

My si
in conn

PREFACE.

At the close of a letter addressed by Dickens to his friend John Forster, but not to be found in the English editions of the *Life*, the writer adds to his praises of the biography of Goldsmith these memorable words: "I desire no better for my fame, when my personal dustiness shall be past the control of my love of order, than such a biographer and such a critic." Dickens was a man of few close friendships—"his breast," he said, "would not hold many people"—but, of these friendships, that with Forster was one of the earliest, as it was one of the most enduring. To Dickens, at least, his future biographer must have been the embodiment of two qualities rarely combined in equal measure—discretion and candour. In literary matters his advice was taken almost as often as it was given, and nearly every proof-sheet of nearly every work of Dickens passed through his faithful helpmate's hands. Nor were there many important decisions formed by Dickens concerning himself in the course of his manhood to which Forster was a stranger, though, unhappily, he more than once counselled in vain.

On Mr. Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*, together with the three volumes of *Letters* collected by Dickens's eldest daughter and his sister-in-law—his "dearest and best friend"—it is superfluous to state that the biographical portion of the following essay is mainly based. It may be superfluous, but it cannot be considered impertinent, if I add that the shortcomings of the *Life* have, in my opinion, been more frequently proclaimed than defined; and that its merits are those of its author as well as of its subject.

My sincere thanks are due for various favours shown to me in connexion with the production of this little volume by Miss

Hogarth, Mr. Charles Dickens, Professor Henry Morley, Mr. Alexander Ireland, Mr. John Evans, Mr. Robinson, and Mr. Britton. Mr. Evans has kindly enabled me to correct some inaccuracies in Mr. Forster's account of Dickens's early Chatham days on unimpeachable first-hand evidence. I also beg Captain and Mrs. Budden to accept my thanks for allowing me to see Gad's Hill Place.

I am under special obligations to Mr. R. F. Sketchley, Librarian of the Dyce and Forster Libraries at South Kensington, for his courtesy in affording me much useful aid and information. With the kind permission of Mrs. Forster, Mr. Sketchley enabled me to supplement the records of Dickens's life, in the period 1838–'41, from a hitherto unpublished source—a series of brief entries by him in four volumes of *The Law and Commercial Daily Remembrancer* for those years. These volumes formed no part of the Forster bequest, but were added to it, under certain conditions, by Mrs. Forster. The entries are mostly very brief; and sometimes there are months without an entry. Many days succeed one another with no other note than "Work."

Mr. R. H. Shepherd's *Bibliography of Dickens* has been of considerable service to me. May I take this opportunity of commending to my readers, as a charming reminiscence of the connexion between *Charles Dickens and Rochester*, Mr. Robert Langton's sketches illustrating a paper recently printed under that title?

Last, not least, as the Germans say, I wish to thank my friend Professor T. N. Toller for the friendly counsel which has not been wanting to me on this, any more than on former occasions.

A. W. W.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

PREFACE v

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE "PICKWICK" 1

CHAPTER II.

FROM SUCCESS TO SUCCESS 20

CHAPTER III.

STRANGE LANDS 49

CHAPTER IV.

"DAVID COPPERFIELD" 85

CHAPTER V.

CHANGES 108

CHAPTER VI.

LAST YEARS 146

CHAPTER VII.

THE FUTURE OF DICKENS'S FAME 192

CHA
eigh
at 1
7, 18
ham.
Offic
recal
of a
Chat
1821
Roch
hills
came
of hi
and p
was a
count
modi

1*

DICKENS.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE "PICKWICK."

[1812–1836.]

CHARLES DICKENS, the eldest son, and the second of the eight children, of John and Elizabeth Dickens, was born at Landport, a suburb of Portsea, on Friday, February 7, 1812. His baptismal names were Charles John Huffham. His father, at that time a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, and employed in the Portsmouth Dock-yard, was recalled to London when his eldest son was only two years of age; and two years afterwards was transferred to Chatham, where he resided with his family from 1816 to 1821. Thus Chatham, and the more venerable city of Rochester adjoining, with their neighbourhood of chalk hills and deep green lanes and woodland and marshes, became, in the words of Dickens's biographer, the birthplace of his fancy. He looked upon himself as, to all intents and purposes, a Kentish man born and bred, and his heart was always in this particular corner of the incomparable county. Again and again, after Mr. Alfred Jingle's spasmodic eloquence had, in the very first number of *Pickwick*,

epitomised the antiquities and comforts of Rochester, already the scene of one of the *Sketches*, Dickens returned to the local associations of his early childhood. It was at Chatham that poor little David Copperfield, on his solitary tramp to Dover, slept his Sunday night's sleep "near a cannon, happy in the society of the sentry's footsteps;" and in many a Christmas narrative or uncommercial etching the familiar features of town and country, of road and river, were reproduced, before in *Great Expectations* they suggested some of the most picturesque effects of his later art, and before in his last unfinished romance his faithful fancy once more haunted the well-known precincts. During the last thirteen years of his life he was again an inhabitant of the loved neighbourhood where, with the companions of his mirthful idleness, he had so often made holiday; where, when hope was young, he had spent his honey-moon; and whither, after his last restless wanderings, he was to return, to seek such repose as he would allow himself, and to die. But, of course, the daily life of the "very queer small boy" of that early time is only quite incidentally to be associated with the grand gentleman's house on Gad's Hill, where his father, little thinking that his son was to act over again the story of Warren Hastings and Daylesford, had told him he might some day come to live, if he were to be very persevering, and to work hard. The family abode was in Ordnance (not St. Mary's) Place, at Chatham, amidst surroundings classified in Mr. Pickwick's notes as "appearing to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, offices, and dock-yard men." But though the half-mean, half-picturesque aspect of the Chatham streets may already at an early age have had its fascination for Dickens, yet his childish fancy was fed as fully as were his powers of ob-

servation. Having learned reading from his mother, he was sent with his elder sister, Fanny, to a day-school kept in Gibraltar Place, New Road, by Mr. William Giles, the eldest son and namesake of a worthy Baptist minister, whose family had formed an intimate acquaintance with their neighbours in Ordnance Row. The younger Giles children were pupils at the school of their elder brother with Charles and Fanny Dickens, and thus naturally their constant playmates. In later life Dickens preserved a grateful remembrance, at times refreshed by pleasant communications between the families, of the training he had received from Mr. William Giles, an intelligent as well as generous man, who, recognising his pupil's abilities, seems to have resolved that they should not lie fallow for want of early cultivation. Nor does there appear to be the slightest reason for supposing that this period of his life was anything but happy. For his sister Fanny he always preserved a tender regard; and a touching little paper, written by him after her death in womanhood, relates how the two children used to watch the stars together, and make friends with one in particular, as belonging to themselves. But obviously he did not lack playmates of his own sex; and it was no doubt chiefly because his tastes made him disinclined to take much part in the rougher sports of his school-fellows, that he found plenty of time for amusing himself in his own way. And thus it came to pass that already as a child he followed his own likings in the two directions from which they were never very materially to swerve. He once said of himself that he had been "a writer when a mere baby, an actor always."

Of these two passions he could always, as a child and as a man, be "happy with either," and occasionally with both at the same time. In his tender years he was taken

by a kinsman, a Sandhurst cadet, to the theatre, to see the legitimate drama acted, and was disillusioned by visits behind the scenes at private theatricals; while his own juvenile powers as a teller of stories and singer of comic songs (he was possessed, says one who remembers him, of a sweet treble voice) were displayed on domestic chairs and tables, and then in amateur plays with his school-fellows. He also wrote a—not strictly original—tragedy, which is missing among his *Reprinted Pieces*. There is nothing unique in these childish doings, nor in the circumstance that he was an eager reader of works of fiction; but it is noteworthy that chief among the books to which he applied himself, in a small neglected bookroom in his father's house, were those to which his allegiance remained true through much of his career as an author. Besides books of travel, which he says had a fascination for his mind from his earliest childhood, besides the "Arabian Nights" and kindred tales, and the English Essayists, he read Fielding and Smollett, and Cervantes and Le Sage, in all innocence of heart, as well as Mrs. Inchbald's collection of farces, in all contentment of spirit. Inasmuch as he was no great reader in the days of his authorship, and had to go through hard times of his own before, it was well that the literature of his childhood was good of its kind, and that where it was not good it was at least gay. Dickens afterwards made it an article of his social creed that the imagination of the young needs nourishment as much as their bodies require food and clothing; and he had reason for gratefully remembering that at all events the imaginative part of his education had escaped neglect.

But these pleasant early days came to a sudden end. In the year 1821 his family returned to London, and soon his experiences of trouble began. Misfortune pursued the

elder Dickens to town, his salary having been decreased already at Chatham in consequence of one of the early efforts at economical reform. He found a shabby home for his family in Bayham Street, Camden Town; and here, what with the pecuniary embarrassments in which he was perennially involved, and what with the easy disposition with which he was blessed by way of compensation, he allowed his son's education to take care of itself. John Dickens appears to have been an honourable as well as a kindly man. His son always entertained an affectionate regard for him, and carefully arranged for the comfort of his latter years; nor would it be fair, because of a similarity in their experiences, and in the grandeur of their habitual phraseology, to identify him absolutely with the immortal Mr. Micawber. Still less, except in certain details of manner and incident, can the character of the elder Dickens be thought to have suggested that of the pitiful "Father of the Marshalsea," to which prison, almost as famous in English fiction as it is in English history, the unlucky navy-clerk was consigned a year after his return to London.

Every effort had been made to stave off the evil day; and little Charles, whose eyes were always wide open, and who had begun to write descriptive sketches of odd personages among his acquaintance, had become familiar with the inside of a pawnbroker's shop, and had sold the paternal "library" piecemeal to the original of the drunken second-hand bookseller, with whom David Copperfield dealt as Mr. Micawber's representative. But neither these sacrifices nor Mrs. Dickens's abortive efforts at setting up an educational establishment had been of avail. Her husband's creditors *would not* give him time; and a dark period began for the family, and more especially for the

little eldest son, now ten years old, in which, as he afterwards wrote, in bitter anguish of remembrance, "but for the mercy of God, he might easily have become, for any care that was taken of him, a little robber or a little vagabond."

Forster has printed the pathetic fragment of autobiography, communicated to him by Dickens five-and-twenty years after the period to which it refers, and subsequently incorporated with but few changes in the *Personal History of David Copperfield*. Who can forget the thrill with which he first learned the well-kept secret that the story of the solitary child, left a prey to the cruel chances of the London streets, was an episode in the life of Charles Dickens himself? Between fact and fiction there was but a difference of names. Murdstone & Grinby's wine warehouse down in Blackfriars was Jonathan Warren's blacking warehouse at Hungerford Stairs, in which a place had been found for the boy by a relative, a partner in the concern; and the bottles he had to paste over with labels were in truth blacking-pots. But the menial work and the miserable pay, the uncongenial companionship during worktime, and the speculative devices of the dinner-hour were the same in each case. At this time, after his family had settled itself in the Marshalsea, the haven open to the little waif at night was a lodging in Little College Street, Camden Town, presenting even fewer attractions than Mr. Micawber's residence in Windsor Terrace, and kept by a lady afterwards famous under the name of Mrs. Pipchin. His Sundays were spent at home in the prison. On his urgent remonstrance—"the first I had ever made about my lot"—concerning the distance from his family at which he was left through the week, a back attic was found for him in Lant Street, in the Borough, "where

Bob Sawyer lodged many years afterwards;" and he now breakfasted and supped with his parents in their apartment. Here they lived in fair comfort, waited upon by a faithful "orfling," who had accompanied the family and its fortunes from Chatham, and who is said by Forster to have her part in the character of the Marchioness. Finally, after the prisoner had obtained his discharge, and had removed with his family to the Lant Street lodgings, a quarrel occurred between the elder Dickens and his cousin, and the boy was in consequence taken away from the business.

He had not been ill-treated there; nor indeed is it ill-treatment which leads to David Copperfield's running away in the story. Nevertheless, it is not strange that Dickens should have looked back with a bitterness very unusual in him upon the bad old days of his childish solitude and degradation. He never "forgot" his mother's having wished him to remain in the warehouse; the subject of his employment there was never afterwards mentioned in the family; he could not bring himself to go near old Hungerford Market so long as it remained standing; and to no human being, not even to his wife, did he speak of this passage in his life until he narrated it in the fragment of autobiography which he confided to his trusty friend. Such a sensitiveness is not hard to explain; for no man is expected to dilate upon the days "when he lived among the beggars in St. Mary Axe," and it is only the Bounderbies of society who exult, truly or falsely, in the sordid memories of the time before they became rich or powerful. And if the sharp experiences of his childhood might have ceased to be resented by one whom the world on the whole treated so kindly, at least they left his heart unhardened, and helped to make him ever tender to

the poor and weak, because he too had after a fashion "eaten his bread with tears" when a puny child.

A happy accident having released the David Copperfield of actual life from his unworthy bondage, he was put in the way of an education such as at that time was the lot of most boys of the class to which he belonged. "The world has done much better since in that way, and will do far better yet," he writes at the close of his description of *Our School*, the Wellington House Academy," situate near that point in the Hampstead Road where modest gentility and commercial enterprise touch hands. Other testimony confirms his sketch of the ignorant and brutal head-master; and doubtless this worthy and his usher, "considered to know everything as opposed to the chief who was considered to know nothing," furnished some of the features in the portraits of Mr. Creakle and Mr. Mell. But it has been very justly doubted by an old schoolfellow whether the statement "We were First Boy" is to be regarded as strictly historical. If Charles Dickens, when he entered the school, was "put into Virgil," he was not put there to much purpose. On the other hand, with the return of happier days had come the resumption of the old amusements which were to grow into the occupations of his life. A club was founded among the boys at Wellington House for the express purpose of circulating short tales written by him, and he was the manager of the private theatricals which they contrived to set on foot.

After two or three years of such work and play it became necessary for Charles Dickens once more to think of earning his bread. His father, who had probably lost his official post at the time when, in Mr. Micawber's phrase, "hope sunk beneath the horizon," was now seeking em-

ployment as a parliamentary reporter, and must have rejoiced when a Gray's Inn solicitor of his acquaintance, attracted by the bright, clever looks of his son, took the lad into his office as a clerk at a modest weekly salary. His office associates here were perhaps a grade or two above those of the blacking warehouse; but his danger now lay rather in the direction of the vulgarity which he afterwards depicted in such samples of the profession as Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling. He is said to have frequented, in company with a fellow-clerk, one of the minor theatres, and even occasionally to have acted there; and assuredly it must have been personal knowledge which suggested the curiously savage description of *Private Theatres* in the *Sketches by Boz*, the all but solitary *unkindly* reference to theatrical amusements in his works. But whatever his experiences of this kind may have been, he passed unscathed through them; and during the year and a half of his clerkship picked up sufficient knowledge of the technicalities of the law to be able to assail its enormities without falling into rudimentary errors about it, and sufficient knowledge of lawyers and lawyers' men to fill a whole chamber in his gallery of characters.

Oddly enough, it was, after all, the example of the father that led the son into the line of life from which he was easily to pass into the career where success and fame awaited him. The elder Dickens having obtained employment as a parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Herald*, his son, who was living with him in Bentinck Street, Manchester Square, resolved to essay the same laborious craft. He was by this time nearly seventeen years of age, and already we notice in him what were to remain, through life, two of his most marked characteristics—strength of will, and a determination, if he did a thing at all, to do it

thoroughly. The art of short-hand, which he now resolutely set himself to master, was in those days no easy study, though, possibly, in looking back upon his first efforts, David Copperfield overestimated the difficulties which he had conquered with the help of love and Traddles. But Dickens, whose education no Dr. Strong had completed, perceived that in order to succeed as a reporter of the highest class he needed something besides the knowledge of short-hand. In a word, he lacked reading; and this deficiency he set himself to supply as best he could by a constant attendance at the British Museum. Those critics who have dwelt on the fact that the reading of Dickens was neither very great nor very extensive, have insisted on what is not less true than obvious; but he had this one quality of the true lover of reading, that he never professed a familiarity with that of which he knew little or nothing. He continued his visits to the Museum, even when in 1828 he had become a reporter in Doctors' Commons. With this occupation he had to remain as content as he could for nearly two years. Once more David Copperfield, the double of Charles Dickens in his youth, will rise to the memory of every one of his readers. For not only was his soul seized with a weariness of Consistory, Arches, Delegates, and the rest of it, to which he afterwards gave elaborate expression in his story, but his heart was full of its first love. In later days he was not of opinion that he had loved particularly wisely; but how well he had loved is known to every one who after him has lost his heart to Dora. Nothing came of the fancy, and in course of time he had composure enough to visit the lady who had been its object in the company of his wife. He found that Jip was stuffed as well as dead, and that Dora had faded into Flora; for it was as such that, not very chival-

rously, he could bring himself to describe her, for the second time, in *Little Dorrit.*

Before at last he was engaged as a reporter on a newspaper, he had, and not for a moment only, thought of turning aside to another profession. It was the profession to which—uncommercially—he was attached during so great a part of his life, that when he afterwards created for himself a stage of his own, he seemed to be but following an irresistible fascination. His best friend described him to me as "a born actor;" and who needs to be told that the world falls into two divisions only—those whose place is before the foot-lights, and those whose place is behind them? His love of acting was stronger than himself; and I doubt whether he ever saw a play successfully performed without longing to be in and of it. "Assumption," he wrote in after days to Lord Lytton, "has charms for me—I hardly know for how many wild reasons—so delightful that I feel a loss of, oh! I can't say what exquisite foolery, when I lose a chance of being some one in voice, etc., not at all like myself." He loved the theatre and everything which savoured of histrionics with an intensity not even to be imagined by those who have never felt a touch of the same passion. He had that "belief in a play" which he so pleasantly described as one of the characteristics of his life-long friend, the great painter, Clarkson Stanfield. And he had that unextinguishable interest in both actors and acting which makes a little separate world of the "quality." One of the staunchest friendships of his life was that with the foremost English tragedian of his age, Macready; one of the delights of his last years was his intimacy with another well-known actor, the late Mr. Fechter. No performer, however, was so obscure or so feeble as to be outside the pale of his sympa

thy. His books teem with kindly likenesses of all manner of entertainers and entertainments—from Mr. Vincent Crummles and the more or less legitimate drama, down to Mr. Sleary's horse-riding and Mrs. Jarley's wax-work. He has a friendly feeling for Chops the dwarf, and for Pickleson the giant; and in his own quiet Broadstairs he cannot help tumultuously applauding a young lady "who goes into the den of ferocious lions, tigers, leopards, etc., and pretends to go to sleep upon the principal lion, upon which a rustic keeper, who speaks through his nose, exclaims, 'Behold the abazid power of woobad!'" He was unable to sit through a forlorn performance at a wretched country theatre without longing to add a sovereign to the four-and-ninepence which he had made out in the house when he entered, and which "had warmed up in the course of the evening to twelve shillings;" and in Bow Street, near his office, he was beset by appeals such as that of an aged and greasy suitor for an engagement as Pantaloon: "Mr. Dickens, you know our profession, sir—no one knows it better, sir—there is no right feeling in it. I was Harlequin on your own circuit, sir, for five-and-thirty years, and was displaced by a boy, sir!—a boy!" Nor did his disposition change when he crossed the seas; the streets he first sees in the United States remind him irresistibly of the set-scene in a London pantomime; and at Verona his interest is divided between *Romeo and Juliet* and the vestiges of an equestrian troupe in the amphitheatre.

What success Dickens might have achieved as an actor it is hardly to the present purpose to inquire. A word will be said below of the success he achieved as an amateur actor and manager, and in his more than half-dramatic readings. But, the influence of early associations

and personal feelings apart, it would seem that the artists of the stage whom he most admired were not those of the highest type. He was subdued by the genius of Frédéric Lemaître, but blind and deaf to that of Ristori. "Sound melodrama and farce" were the dramatic species which he affected, and in which as a professional actor he might have excelled. His intensity might have gone for much in the one, and his versatility and volubility for more in the other; and in both, as indeed in any kind of play or part, his thoroughness, which extended itself to every detail of performance or make-up, must have stood him in excellent stead. As it was, he was preserved for literature. But he had carefully prepared himself for his intended venture, and when he sought an engagement at Covent Garden, a preliminary interview with the manager was postponed only on account of the illness of the applicant.

Before the next theatrical season opened he had at last —in the year 1831 — obtained employment as a parliamentary reporter, and after some earlier engagements he became, in 1834, one of the reporting staff of the famous Whig *Morning Chronicle*, then in its best days under the editorship of Mr. John Black. Now, for the first time in his life, he had an opportunity of putting forth the energy that was in him. He shrunk from none of the difficulties which in those days attended the exercise of his craft. They were thus depicted by himself, when a few years before his death he "held a brief for his brothers" at the dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund: "I have often transcribed for the printer from my short-hand notes important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising; writing on the palm

of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, and through the dead of the night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour. . . . I have worn my knees by writing on them on the old back row of the old gallery of the old House of Commons; and I have worn my feet by standing to write in a preposterous pen in the old House of Lords, where we used to be huddled together like so many sheep kept in waiting, say, until the woolsack might want restuffing. Returning home from excited political meetings in the country to the waiting press in London, I do verily believe I have been upset in almost every description of vehicle known in this country. I have been in my time belated on miry by-roads, towards the small hours, forty or fifty miles from London, in a wheelless carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken post-boys, and have got back in time for publication, to be received with never-forgotten compliments by the late Mr. Black, coming in the broadest of Scotch from the broadest of hearts I ever knew." Thus early had Dickens learnt the secret of throwing himself into any pursuit once taken up by him, and of half achieving his task by the very heartiness with which he set about it. When at the close of the parliamentary session of the year 1836 his labours as a reporter came to an end, he was held to have no equal in the gallery. During this period his naturally keen powers of observation must have been sharpened and strengthened, and that quickness of decision acquired which constitutes, perhaps, the most valuable lesson that journalistic practice of any kind can teach to a young man of letters. To Dickens's experience as a reporter may likewise be traced no small part of his political creed, in which there was a good deal of infidelity; or, at all events, his determined con-

tempt for the parliamentary style proper, whether in the mouth of "Thisman" or of "Thatman," and his rooted dislike of the "cheap-jacks" and "national dustmen" whom he discerned among our orators and legislators. There is probably no very great number of Members of Parliament who are heroes to those who wait attendance on their words. Moreover, the period of Dickens's most active labours as a reporter was one that succeeded a time of great political excitement; and when men wish thankfully to rest after deeds, words are in season.

Meanwhile, very tentatively and with a very imperfect consciousness of the significance for himself of his first steps on a slippery path, Dickens had begun the real career of his life. It has been seen how he had been a writer as a "baby," as a school-boy, and as a lawyer's clerk, and the time had come when, like all writers, he wished to see himself in print. In December, 1833, the *Monthly Magazine* published a paper which he had dropped into its letter-box, and with eyes "dimmed with joy and pride" the young author beheld his first-born in print. The paper, called *A Dinner at Poplar Walk*, was afterwards reprinted in the *Sketches by Boz* under the title of *Mr. Minns and his Cousin*, and is laughable enough. His success emboldened him to send further papers of a similar character to the same magazine, which published ten contributions of his by February, 1835. That which appeared in August, 1834, was the first signed "Boz," a nickname given by him in his boyhood to a favourite brother. Since Dickens used this signature not only as the author of the *Sketches* and a few other minor productions, but also as "editor" of the *Pickwick Papers*, it is not surprising that, especially among his admirers on the Continent and in America, the name should have clung to

him so tenaciously. It was on a steamboat near Niagara that he heard from his state-room a gentleman complaining to his wife: "Boz keeps himself very close."

But the *Monthly Magazine*, though warmly welcoming its young contributor's lively sketches, could not afford to pay for them. He was therefore glad to conclude an arrangement with Mr. George Hogarth, the conductor of the *Evening Chronicle*, a paper in connexion with the great morning journal on the reporting staff of which he was engaged. He had gratuitously contributed a sketch to the evening paper as a personal favour to Mr. Hogarth, and the latter readily proposed to the proprietors of the *Morning Chronicle* that Dickens should be duly remunerated for this addition to his regular labours. With a salary of seven instead of, as heretofore, five guineas a week, and settled in chambers in Furnival's Inn — one of those old legal inns which he loved so well—he might already in this year, 1835, consider himself on the high-road to prosperity. By the beginning of 1836 the *Sketches by Boz* printed in the *Evening Chronicle* were already numerous enough, and their success was sufficiently established to allow of his arranging for their republication. They appeared in two volumes, with etchings by Cruikshank, and the sum of a hundred and fifty pounds was paid to him for the copyright. The stepping-stones had been found and passed, and on the last day of March, which saw the publication of the first number of the *Pickwick Papers*, he stood in the field of fame and fortune. Three days afterwards Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the eldest daughter of the friend who had so efficiently aided him in his early literary ventures. Mr. George Hogarth's name thus links together the names of two masters of English fiction; for Lockhart speaks of

him when a writer to the signet in Edinburgh as one of the intimate friends of Scott. Dickens's apprenticeship as an author was over almost as soon as it was begun; and he had found the way short from obscurity to the dazzling light of popularity. As for the *Sketches by Boz*, their author soon repurchased the copyright for more than thirteen times the sum which had been paid to him for it.

In their collected form these *Sketches* modestly described themselves as "illustrative of every-day life and every-day people." Herein they only prefigured the more famous creations of their writer, whose genius was never so happy as when lighting up, now the humorous, now what he chose to term the romantic, side of familiar things. The curious will find little difficulty in tracing in these outlines, often rough and at times coarse, the groundwork of more than one finished picture of later date. Not a few of the most peculiar features of Dickens's humour are already here, together with not a little of his most characteristic pathos. It is true that in these early *Sketches* the latter is at times strained, but its power is occasionally beyond denial, as, for instance, in the brief narrative of the death of the hospital patient. On the other hand, the humour — more especially that of the *Tales*—is not of the most refined sort, and often degenerates in the direction of boisterous farce. The style, too, though in general devoid of the pretentiousness which is the bane of "light" journalistic writing, has a taint of vulgarity about it, very pardonable under the circumstances, but generally absent from Dickens's later works. Weak puns are not unfrequent; and the diction but rarely reaches that exquisite felicity of comic phrase in which *Pickwick* and its successors excel. For the rest, Dickens's favourite passions and favourite aversions alike reflect

themselves here in small. In the description of the election for beadle he ridicules the tricks and the manners of political party-life, and his love of things theatrical has its full freshness upon it—however he may pretend at Astley's that his "histrionic taste is gone," and that it is the audience which chiefly delights him. But of course the gift which these *Sketches* pre-eminently revealed in their author was a descriptive power that seemed to lose sight of nothing characteristic in the object described, and of nothing humorous in an association suggested by it. Whether his theme was street or river, a Christmas dinner or the extensive groves of the illustrious dead (the old clothes shops in Monmouth Street), he reproduced it in all its shades and colours, and under a hundred aspects, fanciful as well as real. How inimitable, for instance, is the sketch of "the last cab-driver, and the first omnibus cad," whose earlier vehicle, the omnipresent "red cab," was not the gondola, but the very fire-ship of the London streets.

Dickens himself entertained no high opinion of these youthful efforts; and in this he showed the consciousness of the true artist, that masterpieces are rarely thrown off at hazard. But though much of the popularity of the *Sketches* may be accounted for by the fact that commonplace people love to read about commonplace people and things, the greater part of it is due to genuine literary merit. The days of half-price in theatres have followed the days of coaching; "Honest Tom" no more paces the lobby in a black coat with velvet facings and cuffs, and a D'Orsay hat; the Hickses of the present time no longer quote "Don Juan" over boarding-house dinner-tables; and the young ladies in Camberwell no longer compare young men in attitudes to Lord Byron, or to "Satan"

Montgomery. But the *Sketches by Boz* have survived their birth-time; and they deserve to be remembered among the rare instances in which a young author has no sooner begun to write than he has shown a knowledge of his real strength. As yet, however, this sudden favourite of the public was unaware of the range to which his powers were to extend, and of the height to which they were to mount.

CHAPTER II.

FROM SUCCESS TO SUCCESS.

[1836–1841.]

Even in those years of which the record is brightest in the story of his life, Charles Dickens, like the rest of the world, had his share of troubles—troubles great and small, losses which went home to his heart, and vexations manifold in the way of business. But in the history of his early career as an author the word failure has no place.

Not that the *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, published as they were in monthly numbers, at once took the town by storm; for the public needed two or three months to make up its mind that "Boz" was equal to an effort considerably in advance of his *Sketches*. But when the popularity of the serial was once established, it grew with extraordinary rapidity until it reached an altogether unprecedented height. He would be a bold man who should declare that its popularity has very materially diminished at the present day. Against the productions of *Pickwick*, and of other works of amusement of which it was the prototype, Dr. Arnold thought himself bound seriously to contend among the boys of Rugby; and twenty years later young men at the university talked nothing but *Pickwick*, and quoted nothing but *Pickwick*, and the wittiest of undergraduates set the world at large

an examination paper in *Pickwick*, over which pretentious half-knowledge may puzzle, unable accurately to "describe the common Profeel-machine," or to furnish a satisfactory definition of "a red-faced Nixon." No changes in manners and customs have interfered with the hold of the work upon nearly all classes of readers at home; and no translation has been dull enough to prevent its being relished even in countries where all English manners and customs must seem equally uninteresting or equally absurb.

So extraordinary has been the popularity of this more than thrice fortunate book, that the wildest legends have grown up as to the history of its origin. The facts, however, as stated by Dickens himself, are few and plain. Attracted by the success of the *Sketches*, Messrs. Chapman & Hall proposed to him that he should write "something" in monthly numbers to serve as a vehicle for certain plates to be executed by the comic draughtsman, Mr. R. Seymour; and either the publishers or the artist suggested as a kind of leading notion, the idea of a "Nimrod Club" of unlucky sportsmen. The proposition was at Dickens's suggestion so modified that the plates were "to arise naturally out of the text," the range of the latter being left open to him. This explains why the rather artificial machinery of a club was maintained, and why Mr. Winkle's misfortunes by flood and field hold their place by the side of the philanthropical meanderings of Mr. Pickwick and the amorous experiences of Mr. Tupman. An original was speedily found for the pictorial presentment of the hero of the book, and a felicitous name for him soon suggested itself. Only a single number of the serial had appeared when Mr. Seymour's own hand put an end to his life. It is well known that among the applicants for the vacant office of illustrator of the *Pickwick Papers* was

Thackeray — the senior of Dickens by a few months — whose style as a draughtsman would have been singularly unsuited to the adventures and the gaiters of Mr. Pickwick. Finally, in no altogether propitious hour for some of Dickens's books, Mr. Hablot Browne ("Phiz") was chosen as illustrator. Some happy hits—such as the figure of Mr. Micawber—apart, the illustrations of Dickens by this artist, though often both imaginative and effective, are apt, on the one hand, to obscure the author's fidelity to nature, and on the other, to intensify his unreality. *Oliver Twist*, like the *Sketches*, was illustrated by George Cruikshank, a pencil humourist of no common calibre, but as a rule ugly with the whole virtuous intention of his heart. Dickens himself was never so well satisfied with any illustrator as with George Cattermole (*alias* "Kittenmoles"), a connection of his by marriage, who co-operated with Hablot Browne in *Master Humphrey's Clock;* in his latest works he resorted to the aid of younger artists, whose reputation has since justified his confidence. The most congenial of the pictorial interpreters of Dickens, in his brightest and freshest humour, was his valued friend John Leech, whose services, together occasionally with those of Doyle, Frank Stone, and Tenniel, as well as of his faithful Stanfield and Maclise, he secured for his Christmas books.

The *Pickwick Papers*, of which the issue was completed by the end of 1837, brought in to Dickens a large sum of money, and after a time a handsome annual income. On the whole this has remained the most general favourite of all his books. Yet it is not for this reason only that *Pickwick* defies criticism, but also because the circumstances under which the book was begun and carried on make it preposterous to judge it by canons applicable to its author's subsequent fictions. As the serial proceeded,

the interest which was to be divided between the inserted tales, some of which have real merit, and the framework, was absorbed by the latter. The rise in the style of the book can almost be measured by the change in the treatment of its chief character, Mr. Pickwick himself. In a later preface, Dickens endeavoured to illustrate this change by the analogy of real life. The truth, of course, is that it was only as the author proceeded that he recognised the capabilities of the character, and his own power of making it, and his book with it, truly lovable as well as laughable. Thus, on the very same page in which Mr. Pickwick proves himself a true gentleman in his leave-taking from Mr. Nupkins, there follows a little bit of the idyl between Sam and the pretty housemaid, written with a delicacy that could hardly have been suspected in the chronicler of the experiences of Miss Jemima Evans or of Mr. Augustus Cooper. In the subsequent part of the main narrative will be found exemplified nearly all the varieties of pathos of which Dickens was afterwards so repeatedly to prove himself master, more especially, of course, in those prison scenes for which some of our older novelists may have furnished him with hints. Even that subtle species of humour is not wanting which is content to miss its effect with the less attentive reader; as in this passage concerning the ruined cobbler's confidences to Sam in the Fleet:

"The cobbler paused to ascertain what effect his story had produced on Sam; but finding that he had dropped asleep, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, *sighed*, put it down, drew the bedclothes over his head, and went to sleep too."

Goldsmith himself could not have put more of pathos and more of irony into a single word.

But it may seem out of place to dwell upon details such

as this in view of the broad and universally acknowledged comic effects of this masterpiece of English humour. Its many genuinely comic characters are as broadly marked as the heroes of the least refined of sporting novels, and as true to nature as the most elaborate products of Addison's art. The author's humour is certainly not one which eschews simple in favour of subtle means, or which is averse from occasional desipience in the form of the wildest farce. Mrs. Leo Hunter's garden-party — or rather "public breakfast"—at The Den, Eatanswill; Mr. Pickwick's nocturnal descent, through three gooseberry-bushes and a rose-tree, upon the virgin soil of Miss Tomkins's establishment for young ladies; the *supplice d'un homme* of Mr. Pott; Mr. Weller junior's love-letter, with notes and comments by Mr. Weller senior, and Mr. Weller senior's own letter of affliction written by somebody else; the footmen's "swarry" at Bath, and Mr. Bob Sawyer's bachelors' party in the Borough — all these and many other scenes and passages have in them that jovial element of exaggeration which nobody mistakes and nobody resents. Whose duty is it to check the volubility of Mr. Alfred Jingle, or to weigh the heaviness, *quot libras*, of the Fat Boy? Every one is conscious of the fact that in the contagious high spirits of the author lies one of the chief charms of the book. Not, however, that the effect produced is obtained without the assistance of a very vigilant art. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the character which is upon the whole the most brilliant of the many brilliant additions which the author made to his original group of personages. If there is nothing so humorous in the book as Sam Weller, neither is there in it anything more pathetic than the relation between him and his master. As for Sam Weller's style of speech, scant justice

was done to it by Mr. Pickwick when he observed to Job Trotter, "My man is in the right, although his mode of expressing his opinion is somewhat homely, and occasionally incomprehensible." The fashion of Sam's gnomic philosophy is at least as old as Theocritus;[1] but the special impress which he has given to it is his own, rudely foreshadowed, perhaps, in some of the apophthegms of his father. Incidental Sam Wellerisms in *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* show how enduring a hold the whimsical fancy had taken of its creator. For the rest, the freshness of the book continues the same to the end; and farcical as are some of the closing scenes—those, for instance, in which a chorus of coachmen attends the movements of the elder Mr. Weller—there is even here no straining after effect. An exception might perhaps be found in the catastrophe of the Shepherd, which is coarsely contrived; but the fun of the character is in itself neither illegitimate nor unwholesome. It will be observed below that it is the constant harping on the same string, the repeated picturing of professional preachers of religion as gross and greasy scoundrels, which in the end becomes offensive in Dickens.

On the whole, no hero has ever more appropriately bidden farewell to his labours than Mr. Pickwick in the words which he uttered at the table of the ever-hospitable Mr. Wardle at the Adelphi.

"'I shall never regret,' said Mr. Pickwick, in a low voice—'I shall never regret having devoted the greater part of two years to mixing with different varieties and shades of human character; frivolous as

[1] See *Idyll.* xv. 77. This discovery is not my own, but that of the late Dr. Donaldson, who used to translate the passage accordingly with great gusto.

my pursuit of novelty may appear to many. Nearly the whole of my previous life having been devoted to business and the pursuit of wealth, numerous scenes of which I had no previous conception have dawned upon me—I hope to the enlargement of my mind, and to the improvement of my understanding. If I have done but little good, I trust I have done less harm, and that none of my adventures will be other than a source of amusing and pleasant recollection to me in the decline of life. God bless you all.'"

Of course Mr. Pickwick "filled and drained a bumper" to the sentiment. Indeed, it "snoweth" in this book "of meat and drink." Wine, ale, and brandy abound there, and viands to which ample justice is invariably done—even under Mr. Tupman's hear-trending circumstances at the (now, alas! degenerate) Leather Bottle. Something of this is due to the times in which the work was composed, and to the class of readers for which we may suppose it in the first instance to have been intended; but Dickens, though a temperate man, loved the paraphernalia of good cheer, besides cherishing the associations which are inseparable from it. At the same time, there is a little too much of it in the *Pickwick Papers*, however well its presence may consort with the geniality which pervades them. It is difficult to turn any page of the book without chancing on one of those supremely felicitous phrases in the ready mintage of which Dickens at all times excelled. But its chief attraction lies in the spirit of the whole—that spirit of true humour which calls forth at once merriment, good-will, and charity.

In the year 1836, which the commencement of the *Pickwick Papers* has made memorable in the history of English literature, Dickens was already in the full tide of authorship. In February, 1837, the second number of *Bentley's Miscellany*, a new monthly magazine which he had under-

taken to edit, contained the opening chapters of his story of *Oliver Twist*. Shortly before this, in September and December, 1836, he had essayed two of the least ambitious branches of dramatic authorship. The acting of Harley, an admirable dry comedian, gave some vitality to *The Strange Gentleman*, a "comic burletta," or farce, in two acts, founded upon the tale in the *Sketches* called *The Great Winglebury Duel*. It ran for seventy nights at Drury Lane, and, in its author's opinion, was "the best thing Harley did." But the adaptation has no special feature distinguishing it from the original, unless it be the effective bustle of the opening. *The Village Coquettes*, an operetta represented at the St. James's Theatre, with music by Hullah, was an equally unpretending effort. In this piece Harley took one part, that of "a very small farmer with a very large circle of intimate friends," and John Parry made his *début* on the London stage in another. To quote any of the songs in this operetta would be very unfair to Dickens.[1] He was not at all depressed by the unfavourable criticisms which were passed upon his libretto, and against which he had to set the round declaration of Braham, that there had been "no such music since the days of Shiel, and no such piece since *The Duenna*." As time went on, however, he became anything but proud of his juvenile productions as a dramatist, and strongly objected to their revival. His third and last attempt of this kind, a farce called *The Lamplighter*, which he wrote for Covent Garden in 1838, was never acted, having been withdrawn by Macready's wish; and in 1841 Dickens converted it into a story printed among the *Pic-*

[1] For operas, as a form of *dramatic* entertainment, Dickens seems afterwards to have entertained a strong contempt, such as, indeed, it is difficult for any man with a sense of humour wholly to avoid.

nic Papers, a collection generously edited by him for the benefit of the widow and children of a publisher towards whom he had little cause for personal gratitude. His friendship for Macready kept alive in him for some time the desire to write a comedy worthy of so distinguished an actor; and, according to his wont, he had even chosen beforehand for the piece a name which he was not to forget—*No Thoroughfare*. But the genius of the age, an influence which is often stronger than personal wishes or inclinations, diverted him from dramatic composition. He would have been equally unwilling to see mentioned among his literary works the *Life of Grimaldi*, which he merely edited, and which must be numbered among forgotten memorials of forgotten greatness.

To the earlier part of 1838 belong one or two other publications, which their author never cared to reprint. The first of these, however, a short pamphlet entitled *Sunday under Three Heads*, is not without a certain biographical interest. This little book was written with immediate reference to a bill "for the better observance of the Sabbath," which the House of Commons had recently thrown out by a small majority; and its special purpose was the advocacy of Sunday excursions, and harmless Sunday amusements, in lieu of the alternate gloom and drunkenness distinguishing what Dickens called a London *Sunday as it is*. His own love of fresh air and brightness intensified his hatred of a formalism which shuts its ears to argument. In the powerful picture of a Sunday evening in London, "gloomy, close, and stale," which he afterwards drew in *Little Dorrit*, he almost seems to hold Sabbatarianism and the weather responsible for one another. When he afterwards saw a Parisian Sunday, he thought it "not comfortable," so that, like others who hate bigotry, he may

perhaps have come to recognise the difficulty of arranging an English *Sunday as it might be made.* On the other hand, he may have remembered his youthful fancy of the good clergyman encouraging a game of cricket after church, when thirty years later, writing from Edinburgh, he playfully pictured the counterpart of *Sunday as Sabbath bills would have it:* describing how "the usual preparations are making for the band in the open air in the afternoon, and the usual pretty children (selected for that purpose) are at this moment hanging garlands round the Scott monument preparatory to the innocent Sunday dance round that edifice with which the diversions invariably close." The *Sketches of Young Gentlemen*, published in the same year, are little if at all in advance of the earlier *Sketches by Boz*, and were evidently written to order. He finished them in precisely a fortnight, and noted in his diary that "one hundred and twenty-five pounds for such a book, without any name to it, is pretty well." The *Sketches of Young Couples*, which followed as late as 1840, have the advantage of a facetious introduction, suggested by her Majesty's own announcement of her approaching marriage. But the life has long gone out of these pleasantries, as it has from others of the same cast, in which many a mirthful spirit, forced to coin its mirth into money, has ere now spent itself.

It was the better fortune of Dickens to be able almost from the first to keep nearly all his writings on a level with his powers. He never made a bolder step forwards than when, in the very midst of the production of *Pickwick*, he began his first long continuous story, the *Adventures of Oliver Twist.* Those who have looked at the MS. of this famous novel will remember the vigour of the handwriting, and how few, in comparison with his later

MSS., are the additions and obliterations which it exhibits. But here and there the writing shows traces of excitement; for the author's heart was in his work, and much of it, contrary to his later habit, was written at night. No doubt he was upheld in the labour of authorship by something besides ambition and consciousness of strength. *Oliver Twist* was certainly written *with a purpose*, and with one that was afterwards avowed. The author intended to put before his readers—"so long as their speech did not offend the ear"—a picture of "dregs of life," hitherto, as he believed, never exhibited by any novelist in their loathsome reality. Yet the old masters of fiction, Fielding in particular, as well as the old master of the brush whom Dickens cites (Hogarth), had not shrunk from the path which their disciple now essayed. Dickens, however, was naturally thinking of his own generation, which had already relished *Paul Clifford*, and which was not to be debarred from exciting itself over *Jack Sheppard*, begun before *Oliver Twist* had been completed, and in the self-same magazine. Dickens's purpose was an honest and a praiseworthy one. But the most powerful and at the same time the most lovable element in his genius suggested the silver lining to the cloud. To that unfailing power of sympathy which was the mainspring of both his most affecting and his most humorous touches, we owe the redeeming features in his company of criminals; not only the devotion and the heroism of Nancy, but the irresistible vivacity of the Artful Dodger, and the good-humour of Charley Bates, which moved Talfourd to "plead as earnestly in mitigation of judgment" against him as ever he had done "at the bar for any client he most respected." Other parts of the story were less carefully tempered. Mr. Fang, the police-magistrate, appears to

have been a rather hasty portrait of a living original; and the whole picture of Bumble and Bumbledom was certainly a caricature of the working of the new Poor-law, confounding the question of its merits and demerits with that of its occasional maladministration. On the other hand, a vein of truest pathos runs through the whole of poor Nancy's story, and adds to the effect of a marvellously powerful catastrophe. From Nancy's interview with Rose at London Bridge to the closing scenes—the flight of Sikes, his death at Jacob's Island, and the end of the Jew—the action has an intensity rare in the literature of the terrible. By the side of this genuine tragic force, which perhaps it would be easiest to parallel from some of the "low" domestic tragedy of the Elizabethans, the author's comic humour burst forth upon the world in a variety of entirely new types: Bumble and his partner; Noah Claypole, complete in himself, but full of promise for Uriah Heep; and the Jew, with all the pupils and supporters of his establishment of technical education. Undeniably the story of *Oliver Twist* also contains much that is artificial and stilted, with much that is weak and (the author of *Endymion* is to be thanked for the word) "gushy." Thus, all the Maylie scenes, down to the last in which Oliver discreetly "glides" away from the lovers, are barely endurable. But, whatever its shortcomings, *Oliver Twist* remains an almost unique example of a young author's brilliant success in an enterprise of complete novelty and extreme difficulty. Some of its situations continue to exercise their power even over readers already familiarly acquainted with them; and some of its characters will live by the side of Dickens's happiest and most finished creations. Even had a sapient critic been right who declared, during the progress of the story, that Mr. Dickens appeared to have worked

out "the particular vein of humour which had hitherto yielded so much attractive metal," it would have been worked out to some purpose. After making his readers merry with *Pickwick*, he had thrilled them with *Oliver Twist;* and by the one book as by the other he had made them think better of mankind.

But neither had his vein been worked out, nor was his hand content with a single task. In April, 1838, several months before the completion of *Oliver Twist*, the first number of *Nicholas Nickleby* appeared; and while engaged upon the composition of these books he contributed to *Bentley's Miscellany*, of which he retained the editorship till the early part of 1839, several smaller articles. Of these, the *Mudfog Papers* have been recently thought worth reprinting; but even supposing the satire against the Association for the Advancement of Everything to have not yet altogether lost its savour, the fun of the day before yesterday refuses to be revived. *Nicholas Nickleby*, published in twenty numbers, was the labour of many months, but was produced under so great a press of work that during the whole time of publication Dickens was never a single number in advance. Yet, though not one of the most perfect of his books, it is indisputably one of the most thoroughly original, and signally illustrates the absurdity of recent attempts to draw a distinction between the imaginative romance of the past and the realistic novel of the present. Dickens was never so strong as when he produced from the real; and in this instance—starting, no doubt, with a healthy prejudice—so carefully had he inspected the neighbourhood of the Yorkshire schools, of which Dotheboys Hall was to be held up as the infamous type, that there seems to be no difficulty in identifying the site of the very school itself; while the Portsmouth

Theatre is to the full as accurate a study as the Yorkshire school. So, again, as every one knows, the Brothers Cheeryble were real personages well known in Manchester,[1] where even the original of Tim Linkinwater still survives in local remembrance. On the other hand, with how conscious a strength has the author's imaginative power used and transmuted his materials: in the Squeers family creating a group of inimitable grotesqueness; in their humblest victim Smike giving one of his earliest pictures of those outcasts whom he drew again and again with such infinite tenderness; and in Mr. Vincent Crummles and his company, including the Phenomenon, establishing a jest, but a kindly one, for all times! In a third series of episodes in this book, it is universally agreed that the author has no less conspicuously failed. Dickens's first attempt to picture the manners and customs of the aristocracy certainly resulted in portraying some very peculiar people. Lord Frederick Verisopht, indeed—who is allowed to redeem his character in the end—is not without touches resembling nature.

"'I take an interest, my lord,' said Mrs. Wititterly, with a faint smile, 'such an interest in the drama.'

"'Ye-es. It's very interasting,' replied Lord Frederick.

"'I'm always ill after Shakspeare,' said Mrs. Wititterly. 'I scarcely exist the next day. I find the reaction so very great after a tragedy, my lord, and Shakspeare is such a delicious creature.'

"'Ye-es,' replied Lord Frederick. 'He was a clayver man.'"

But Sir Mulberry Hawk is a kind of scoundrel not frequently met with in polite society; his henchmen Pluck and Pyke have the air of "followers of Don John," and

[1] W. & D. Grant Brothers had their warehouse at the lower end of Cannon Street, and their private house in Mosely Street.

the enjoyments of the "trainers of young noblemen and gentlemen" at Hampton races, together with the riotous debauch which precedes the catastrophe, seem taken direct from the transpontine stage. The fact is that Dickens was here content to draw his vile seducers and wicked orgies just as commonplace writers had drawn them a thousand times before, and will draw them a thousand times again. Much of the hero's talk is of the same conventional kind. On the other hand, nothing could be more genuine than the flow of fun in this book, which finds its outlet in the most unexpected channels, but nowhere so resistlessly as in the invertebrate talk of Mrs. Nickleby. For her Forster discovered a literary prototype in a character of Miss Austen's; but even if Mrs. Nickleby was founded on Miss Bates, in *Emma*, she left her original far behind. Miss Bates, indeed, is verbose, roundabout, and parenthetic; but the widow never deviates into coherence.

Nicholas Nickleby shows the comic genius of its author in full activity, and should be read with something of the buoyancy of spirit in which it was written, and not with a callousness capable of seeing in so amusing a scamp as Mr. Mantalini one of Dickens's "monstrous failures." At the same time this book displays the desire of the author to mould his manner on the old models. The very title has a savour of Smollett about it; the style has more than one reminiscence of him, as well as of Fielding and of Goldsmith; and the general method of the narrative resembles that of our old novelists and their Spanish and French predecessors. Partly for this reason, and partly, no doubt, because of the rapidity with which the story was written, its construction is weaker than is usual even with Dickens's earlier works. Coincidences are repeatedly employed

to help on the action; and the *dénoûment*, which, besides turning Mr. Squeers into a thief, reveals Ralph Nickleby as the father of Smike, is oppressively complete. As to the practical aim of the novel, the author's word must be taken for the fact that "Mr. Squeers and his school were faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible." The exposure, no doubt, did good in its way, though perhaps Mr. Squeers, in a more or less modified form, has proved a tougher adversary to overcome than Mrs. Gamp.

During these years Dickens was chiefly resident in the modest locality of Doughty Street, whither he had moved his household from the "three rooms," "three storeys high," in Furnival's Inn, early in 1837. It was not till the end of 1839 that he took up his abode, further west, in a house which he came to like best among all his London habitations, in Devonshire Terrace, Regent's Park. His town life was, however, varied by long rustications at Twickenham and at Petersham, and by sojourns at the seaside, of which he was a most consistent votary. He is found in various years of his life at Brighton, Dover, and Bonchurch — where he liked his neighbours better than he liked the climate; and in later years, when he had grown accustomed to the Continent, he repeatedly domesticated himself at Boulogne. But already in 1837 he had discovered the little sea-side village, as it then was, which for many years afterwards became his favourite holiday retreat, and of which he would be the *genius loci*, even if he had not by a special description immortalised *Our English Watering-place*. Broadstairs—whose afternoon tranquillity even to this day is undisturbed except by the Ethiopians on their tramp from Margate to Rams-

gate—and its constant visitor, are thus described in a letter written to an American friend in 1843: "This is a little fishing-place; intensely quiet; built on a cliff, whereon—in the centre of a tiny semicircular bay—our house stands; the sea rolling and dashing under the windows. Seven miles out are the Goodwin Sands (you've heard of the Goodwin Sands?), whence floating lights perpetually wink after dark, as if they were carrying on intrigues with the servants. Also there is a big light-house called the North Foreland on a hill beyond the village, a severe parsonic light, which reproves the young and giddy floaters, and stares grimly out upon the sea. Under the cliff are rare good sands, where all the children assemble every morning and throw up impossible fortifications, which the sea throws down again at high-water. Old gentlemen and ancient ladies flirt after their own manner in two reading-rooms and on a great many scattered seats in the open air. Other old gentlemen look all day through telescopes and never see anything. In a bay-window in a one-pair sits, from nine o'clock to one, a gentleman with rather long hair and no neckcloth, who writes and grins as if he thought he were very funny indeed. His name is Boz."

Not a few houses at Broadstairs may boast of having been at one time or another inhabited by him and his. Of the long-desired Fort House, however, which local perverseness triumphantly points out as the original of *Bleak House* (no part even of *Bleak House* was written there, though part of *David Copperfield* was), he could not obtain possession till 1850. As like Bleak House as it is like Chesney Wold, it stands at the very highest end of the place, looking straight out to sea, over the little harbour and its two colliers, with a pleasant stretch of cornfields leading along the cliff towards the light-house which

Dickens promised Lord Carlisle should serve him as a night-light. But in 1837 Dickens was content with narrower quarters. The "long small procession of sons" and daughters had as yet only begun with the birth of his eldest boy. His life was simple and full of work, and occasional sea-side or country quarters, and now and then a brief holiday tour, afforded the necessary refreshment of change. In 1837 he made his first short trip abroad, and in the following year, accompanied by Mr. Hablot Browne, he spent a week of enjoyment in Warwickshire, noting in his *Remembrancer:* "Stratford; Shakspeare; the birthplace; visitors, scribblers, old woman (query whether she knows what Shakspeare did), etc." Meanwhile, among his truest home enjoyments were his friendships. They were few in number, mostly with men for whom, after he had once taken them into his heart, he preserved a life-long regard. Chief of all these were John Forster and Daniel Maclise, the high-minded painter, to whom we owe a charming portrait of his friend in this youthful period of his life. Losing them, he afterwards wrote when absent from England, was "like losing my arms and legs, and dull and tame I am without you." Besides these, he was at this time on very friendly terms with William Harrison Ainsworth, who succeeded him in the editorship of the *Miscellany*, and concerning whom he exclaimed in his *Remembrancer:* "Ainsworth has a fine heart." At the close of 1838, Dickens, Ainsworth, and Forster constituted themselves a club called the Trio, and afterwards the Cerberus. Another name frequent in the *Remembrancer* entries is that of Talfourd, a generous friend, in whom, as Dickens finely said after his death, "the success of other men made as little change as his own." All these, together with Stanfield, the Landseers, Douglas Jerrold, Macready, and

others less known to fame, were among the friends and associates of Dickens's prime. The letters, too, remaining from this part of Dickens's life, have all the same tone of unaffected frankness. With some of his intimate friends he had his established epistolary jokes. Stanfield, the great marine painter, he pertinaciously treated as a "very salt" correspondent, communications to whom, as to a "block-reeving, main-brace-splicing, lead-heaving, ship-conning, stun'sail-bending, deck-swabbing son of a sea-cook," needed garnishing with the obscurest technicalities and strangest oaths of his element. (It is touching to turn from these friendly buffooneries to a letter written by Dickens many years afterward—in 1867—and mentioning a visit to "poor dear Stanfield," when "it was clear that the shadow of the end had fallen on him. . . . It happened well that I had seen, on a wild day at Tynemouth, a remarkable sea effect, of which I wrote a description to him, and he had kept it under his pillow.") Macready, after his retirement from the stage, is bantered on the score of his juvenility with a pertinacity of fun recalling similar whimsicalities of Charles Lamb's; or the jest is changed, and the great London actor in his rural retreat is depicted in the character of a country gentleman strange to the wicked ways of the town. As in the case of many delightful letter-writers, the charm of Dickens as a correspondent vanishes so soon as he becomes self-conscious. Even in his letters to Lady Blessington and Mrs. Watson, a striving after effect is at times perceptible; the homage rendered to Lord John Russell is not offered with a light hand; on the contrary, when writing to Douglas Jerrold, Dickens is occasionally so intent upon proving himself a sound Radical that his vehemence all but passes into a shriek.

In these early years, at all events, Dickens was happy in

the society of his chosen friends. His favourite amusements were a country walk or ride with Forster, or a dinner at Jack Straw's Castle with him and Maclise. He was likewise happy at home. Here, however, in the very innermost circle of his affections, he had to suffer the first great personal grief of his life. His younger sister-in-law, Miss Mary Hogarth, had accompanied him and his wife into their new abode in Doughty Street, and here, in May, 1837, she died, at the early age of seventeen. No sorrow seems ever to have touched the heart and possessed the imagination of Charles Dickens like that for the loss of this dearly-loved girl, "young, beautiful, and good." "I can solemnly say," he wrote to her mother a few months after her death, "that, waking or sleeping, I have never lost the recollection of our hard trial and sorrow, and I feel that I never shall." "If," ran part of his first entry in the Diary which he began on the first day of the following year, "she were with us now, the same winning, happy, amiable companion, sympathising with all my thoughts and feelings more than any one I knew ever did or will, I think I should have nothing to wish for but a continuance of such happiness. But she is gone, and pray God I may one day, through his mercy, rejoin her." It was not till, in after years, it became necessary to abandon the project, that he ceased to cherish the intention of being buried by her side, and through life the memory of her haunted him with strange vividness. At the Niagara Falls, when the spectacle of Nature in her glory had produced in him, as he describes it, a wondrously tranquil and happy peace of mind, he longed for the presence of his dearest friends, and "I was going to add, what would I give if the dear girl, whose ashes lie in Kensal Green, had lived to come so far along with us; but she has been here

many times, I doubt not, since her sweet face faded from my earthly sight." "After she died," he wrote to her mother in May, 1843, "I dreamed of her every night for many weeks, and always with a kind of quiet happiness, which became so pleasant to me that I never lay down at night without a hope of the vision coming back in one shape or other. And so it did." Once he dreamt of her, when travelling in Yorkshire; and then, after an interval of many months, as he lay asleep one night at Genoa, it seemed to him as if her spirit visited him and spoke to him in words which he afterwards precisely remembered, when he had awaked, with the tears running down his face. He never forgot her, and in the year before he died he wrote to his friend: "She is so much in my thoughts at all times, especially when I am successful and have greatly prospered in anything, that the recollection of her is an essential part of my being, and is as inseparable from my existence as the beating of my heart is!" In a word, she was the object of the one great imaginative passion of his life. Many have denied that there is any likeness to nature in the fictitious figure in which, according to the wont of imaginative workers, he was irresistibly impelled to embody the sentiment with which she inspired him; but the sentiment itself became part of his nature, and part of his history. When in writing the *Old Curiosity Shop* he approached the death of Little Nell, he shrunk from the task: "Dear Mary died yesterday, when I think of this sad story."

The *Old Curiosity Shop* has long been freed from the encumbrances which originally surrounded it, and there is little except biographical interest in the half-forgotten history of *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Early in the year 1840, his success and confidence in his powers induced

him to undertake an illustrated weekly journal, in which he depended solely on his own name, and, in the first instance, on his own efforts, as a writer. Such was his trust in his versatility that he did not think it necessary even to open with a continuous story. Perhaps the popularity of the *Pickwick Papers* encouraged him to adopt the time-honoured device of wrapping up several tales in one. In any case, his framework was in the present instance too elaborate to take hold of the public mind, while the characters introduced into it possessed little or nothing of the freshness of their models in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. In order to re-enforce Master Humphrey, the deaf gentleman, and the other original members of his benevolent conclave, he hereupon resorted to a natural, but none the less unhappy, expedient. Mr. Pickwick was revived, together with Sam Weller and his parent; and a Weller of the third generation was brought on the stage in the person of a precocious four-year-old, "standing with his little legs very wide apart as if the top-boots were familiar to them, and actually winking upon the house-keeper with his infant eye, in imitation of his grandfather." A laugh may have been raised at the time by this attempt, from which, however, every true Pickwickian must have turned sadly away. Nor was there much in the other contents of these early numbers to make up for the disappointment. As, therefore, neither "Master Humphrey's Clock" nor "Mr. Weller's Watch" seemed to promise any lasting success, it was prudently determined that the story of the *Old Curiosity Shop*, of which the first portion had appeared in the fourth number of the periodical, should run on continuously; and when this had been finished, a very short "link" sufficed to introduce another story, *Barnaby Rudge*, with

the close of which *Master Humphrey's Clock* likewise stopped.

In the *Old Curiosity Shop*, though it abounds in both grotesquely terrible and boisterously laughable effects, the key-note is that of an idyllic pathos. The sense of this takes hold of the reader at the very outset, as he lingers over the picture, with which the first chapter concludes, of little Nell asleep through the solitary night in the curiosity-dealer's warehouse. It retains possession of him as he accompanies the innocent heroine through her wanderings, pausing with her in the church-yard where all is quiet save the cawing of the satirical rooks, or in the school-master's cottage by the open window, through which is borne upon the evening air the distant hum of the boys at play upon the green, while the poor schoolmaster holds in his hand the small cold one of the little scholar that has fallen asleep. Nor is it absent to the last when Nell herself lies at rest in her little bed. "Her little bird—a poor slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage; and the strong heart of its child-mistress was mute and motionless forever." The hand which drew Little Nell afterwards formed other figures not less affecting, but none so essentially poetic. Like many such characters, this requires, for its full appreciation, a certain tension of the mind; and those who will not, or cannot, pass in some measure out of themselves, will be likely to tire of the conception, or to declare its execution artificial. Curiously enough, not only was Little Nell a favourite of Landor, a poet and critic utterly averse from meretricious art, but she also deeply moved the sympathy of Lord Jeffrey, who at least knew his own mind, and spoke it in both praise and blame. As already stated, Dickens only

with difficulty brought himself to carry his story to its actual issue, though it is hard to believe that he could ever have intended a different close from that which he gave to it. His whole heart was in the story, nor could he have consoled himself by means of an ordinary happy ending.

Dickens's comic humour never flowed in a pleasanter vein than in the *Old Curiosity Shop*, and nowhere has it a more exquisite element of pathos in it. The shock-headed, red-cheeked Kit is one of the earliest of those ungainly figures who speedily find their way into our affections—the odd family to which Mr. Toots, Tom Pinch, Tommy Traddles, and Joe Gargery alike belong. But the triumph of this serio-comic form of art in the *Old Curiosity Shop* is to be found in the later experiences of Dick Swiveller, who seems at first merely a more engaging sample of the Bob Sawyer species, but who ends by endearing himself to the most thoughtless laugher. Dick Swiveller and his protégée have gained a lasting place among the favourite characters of English fiction, and the privations of the Marchioness have possibly had a result which would have been that most coveted by Dickens—that of helping towards the better treatment of a class whose lot is among the dust and ashes, too often very bitter ashes, of many households. Besides these, the story contains a variety of incidental characters of a class which Dickens never grew weary of drawing from the life. Messrs. Codlin, Short, and Company, and the rest of the itinerant showmen, seem to have come straight from the most real of country fairs; and if ever a *troupe* of comedians deserved pity on their wanderings through a callous world, it was the most diverting and the most dismal of all the mountebanks that gathered round the stew

of tripe in the kitchen of The Jolly Sandboys—Jerry's performing dogs.

"'Your people don't usually travel in character, do they?' said Short, pointing to the dresses of the dogs. 'It must come expensive if they do.'

"'No,' replied Jerry—'no, it's not the custom with us. But we've been playing a little on the road to-day, and we come out with a new wardrobe at the races, so I didn't think it worth while to stop to undress. Down, Pedro!'"

In addition to these public servants we have a purveyor of diversion—or instruction—of an altogether different stamp. "Does the caravan look as if *it* know'd em?" indignantly demands the proprietress of Jarley's wax-work, when asked whether she is acquainted with the men of the Punch show. She too is drawn, or moulded, in the author's most exuberant style of fun, together with *her* company, in which "all the gentlemen were very pigeon-breasted and very blue about the beards, and all the ladies were miraculous figures; and all the ladies and all the gentlemen were looking intensely nowhere, and staring with extraordinary earnestness at nothing."

In contrast with these genial products of observation and humour stand the grotesquely hideous personages who play important parts in the machinery of the story, the vicious dwarf Quilp and the monstrous virago Sally Brass. The former is among the most successful attempts of Dickens in a direction which was full of danger for him, as it is for all writers; the malevolent little demon is so blended with his surroundings—the description of which forms one of the author's most telling pictures of the lonely foulnesses of the river-side—that his life seems natural in its way, and his death a most appropriate ending to it. Sally Brass, "whose accomplishments were all

of a masculine and strictly legal kind," is less of a caricature, and not without a humorously redeeming point of feminine weakness; yet the end of her and her brother is described at the close of the book with almost tragic earnestness. On the whole, though the poetic sympathy of Dickens when he wrote this book was absorbed in the character of his heroine, yet his genius rarely asserted itself after a more diversified fashion.

Of *Barnaby Rudge*, though in my opinion an excellent book after its kind, I may speak more briefly. With the exception of *A Tale of Two Cities*, it was Dickens's only attempt in the historical novel. In the earlier work the relation between the foreground and background of the story is skilfully contrived, and the colouring of the whole, without any elaborate attempt at accurate fidelity, has a generally true and harmonious effect. With the help of her portrait by a painter (Mr. Frith) for whose pictures Dickens had a great liking, Dolly Varden has justly taken hold of the popular fancy as a charming type of a pretty girl of a century ago. And some of the local descriptions in the early part of the book are hardly less pleasing: the Temple in summer, as it was before the charm of Fountain Court was destroyed by its guardians; and the picturesque comforts of the Maypole Inn, described beforehand, by way of contrast to the desecration of its central sanctuary. The intrigue of the story is fairly interesting in itself, and the gentlemanly villain who plays a principal part in it, though, as usual, over-elaborated, is drawn with more skill than Dickens usually displays in such characters. After the main interest of the book has passed to the historical action of the George Gordon riots, the story still retains its coherence, and, a few minor improbabilities apart, is successfully conducted to its close. No historical novel can

altogether avoid the banalities of the species; and though Dickens, like all the world, had his laugh at the late Mr. G. P. R. James, he is constrained to introduce the historical hero of the tale, with his confidential adviser, and his attendant, in the familiar guise of three horsemen. As for Lord George Gordon himself, and the riots of which the responsibility remains inseparable from his unhappy memory, the representation of them in the novel sufficiently accords both with poetic probability and with historical fact. The poor lord's evil genius, indeed, Gashford—who has no historical original—tries the reader's sense of verisimilitude rather hard; such converts are uncommon except among approvers. The Protestant hangman, on the other hand, has some slight historical warranty; but the leading part which he is made to play in the riots, and his resolution to go any lengths "in support of the great Protestant principle of hanging," overshoot the mark. It cannot be said that there is any substantial exaggeration in the description of the riots; thus, the burning of the great distiller's house in Holborn is a well-authenticated fact; and there is abundant vigour in the narrative. Repetition is unavoidable in treating such a theme, but in *Barnaby Rudge* it is not rendered less endurable by mannerism, nor puffed out with rhetoric.

One very famous character in this story was, as personages in historical novels often are, made up out of two originals.[1] This was Grip the Raven, who, after seeing

[1] As there is hardly a character in the whole world of fiction and the drama without some sort of a literary predecessor, so Dickens may have derived the first notion of Grip from the raven Ralpho—likewise the property of an idiot—who frightened Roderick Random and Strap out of their wits, and into the belief that he *was* the personage Grip so persistently declared himself to be.

the idiot hero of the tale safe through his adventures, resumed his addresses on the subject of the kettle to the horses in the stable; and who, "as he was a mere infant when Barnaby was gray, has very probably gone on talking to the present time." In a later preface to *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens, with infinite humour, related his experiences of the two originals in question, and how he had been ravenless since the mournful death before the kitchen fire of the second of the pair, the *Grip* of actual life. This occurred in the house at Devonshire Terrace, into which the family had moved two years before (in 1839).

As Dickens's fame advanced his circle of acquaintances was necessarily widened; and in 1841 he was invited to visit Edinburgh, and to receive there the first great tribute of public recognition which had been paid to him. He was entertained with great enthusiasm at a public banquet, voted the freedom of the city, and so overwhelmed with hospitalities that, notwithstanding his frank pleasure in these honours, he was glad to make his escape at last, and refreshed himself with a tour in the Highlands. These excitements may have intensified in him a desire which had for some time been active in his mind, and which in any case would have been kept alive by an incessant series of invitations. He had signed an agreement with his publishers for a new book before this desire took the shape of an actual resolution. There is no great difficulty in understanding why Dickens made up his mind to go to America, and thus to interrupt for the moment a course of life and work which was fast leading him on to great heights of fame and fortune. The question of international copyright alone would hardly have induced him to cross the seas. Probably he felt instinctively that to see men and cities was part of the training as well as of the recreation

which his genius required. Dickens was by nature one of those artists who when at work always long to be in sympathy with their public, and to know it to be in sympathy with them. And hitherto he had not met more than part of his public of readers face to face.

CHAPTER III.

STRANGE LANDS.

[1842–1847.]

A JOURNEY across the Atlantic in midwinter is no child's-play even at the present day, when, bad though their passage may have been, few people would venture to confess doubts, as Dickens did, concerning the safety of such a voyage by steam in heavy weather. The travellers —for Dickens was accompanied by his wife—had an exceptionally rough crossing, the horrors of which he has described in his *American Notes*. His powers of observation were alive in the midst of the lethargy of sea-sickness, and when he could not watch others he found enough amusement in watching himself. At last, on January 28, 1842, they found themselves in Boston harbour. Their stay in the United States lasted about four months, during which time they saw Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Chicago, and Buffalo. Then they passed by Niagara into Canada, and after a pleasant visit to Montreal, diversified by private theatricals with the officers there, were safe at home again in July.

Dickens had met with an enthusiastic welcome in every part of the States where he had not gone out of the way

of it; in New York, in particular, he had been fêted, with a fervour unique even in the history of American enthusiasms, under the resounding title of "the Guest of the Nation." Still, even this imposed no moral obligation upon him to take the advice tendered to him in America, and to avoid writing about that country—"we are so very suspicious." On the other hand, whatever might be his indignation at the obstinate unwillingness of the American public to be moved a hair's-breadth by his championship of the cause of international copyright,[1] this failure could not, in a mind so reasonable as his, have outweighed the remembrance of the kindness shown to him and to his fame. But the truth seems to be that he had, if not at first, at least very speedily, taken a dislike to American ways which proved too strong for him to the last. In strange lands, most of all in a country which, like the United States, is not in the least ashamed to be what it is, travellers are necessarily at the outset struck by details; and Dickens's habit of minute observation was certain not to let him lose many of them. He was neither long enough in the country to study very closely, nor was it in his way to ponder very deeply, the problems involved in the existence of many of the institutions with which he found fault. Thus, he was indignant at the sight of slavery, and even ventured to "tell a piece of his mind" on the subject to a judge in the South; but when, twenty years later, the great struggle came, at the root of which this question lay, his sympathies were with the cause of disunion and slavery in its conflict with the "mad and

[1] After dining at a party including the son of an eminent man of letters, he notes in his *Remembrancer* that he found the great man's son "decidedly lumpish," and appends the reflexion, "Copyrights need be hereditary, for genius isn't."

villanous" North. In short, his knowledge of America and its affairs was gained in such a way and under such circumstances as to entitle him, if he chose, to speak to the vast public which he commanded as an author of men and manners as observed by him; but he had no right to judge the destinies and denounce the character of a great people on evidence gathered in the course of a holiday tour.

Nor, indeed, did the *American Notes*, published by him after his return home, furnish any serious cause of offence. In an introductory chapter, which was judiciously suppressed, he had taken credit for the book as not having "a grain of any political ingredient in its whole composition." Indeed, the contents were rather disappointing from their meagreness. The author showed good taste in eschewing all reference to his personal reception, and good judgment in leaving the copyright question undiscussed. But though his descriptions were as vivid as usual—whether of the small steamboat, "of about half a pony power," on the Connecticut river, or of the dismal scenery on the Mississippi, "great father of rivers, who (praise be to Heaven) has no young children like him!"—and though some of the figure-sketches were touched off with the happiest of hands, yet the public, even in 1842, was desirous to learn something more about America than this. It is true that Dickens had, with his usual conscientiousness, examined and described various interesting public institutions in the States—prisons, asylums, and the like; but the book was not a very full one; it was hardly anything but a sketch-book, with more humour, but with infinitely less poetic spirit, than the *Sketch-book* of the illustrious American author whose friendship had been one of the chief personal gains of Dickens's journey.

The *American Notes*, for which the letters to Forster had furnished ample materials, were published in the year of Dickens's return, after he had refreshed himself with a merry Cornish trip in the company of his old friend, and his two other intimates, "Stanny" and "Mac." But he had not come home, as he had not gone out, to be idle. On the first day of the following year, 1843, appeared the first number of the story which was to furnish the real *casus discriminis* between Dickens and the enemies, as well no doubt as a very large proportion of the friends, whom he had left behind him across the water. The American scenes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* did not, it is true, begin till the fifth number of the story; nor is it probable from the accounts of the sale, which was much smaller than Dickens had expected, that these particular episodes at first produced any strong feeling in the English public. But the merits of the book gradually obtained for it a popularity at home which has been surpassed by that of but one or two other of Dickens's works; and in proportion to this popularity was the effect exercised by its American chapters. What that effect has been, it would be hypocrisy to question.

Dickens, it is very clear, had been unable to resist the temptation of at once drawing upon the vast addition to his literary capital as a humourist. That the satire of many of the American scenes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is, as satire, not less true than telling, it needs but a small acquaintance with American journalism and oratory even at the present day to perceive; and the heartrending history of Eden, as a type of some of the settlements "vaunted in England as a mine of Golden Hope," at least had the warrant of something more than hearsay and a look in passing. Nor, as has already been observed, would it have

been in accordance either with human nature, or with the fitness of things, had Dickens allowed his welcome in America to become to him (as he termed it in the suppressed Preface to the *Notes*) "an iron muzzle disguised beneath a flower or two." But the frankness, to say the least, of the mirror into which he now invited his late hosts to gaze was not likely to produce grateful compliments to its presenter, nor was the effect softened by the despatch with which this *souvenir* of the "guest of the nation" was pressed upon its attention. No doubt it would have been easy to reflect that only the evil, not the good, sides of social life in America were held up to derision and contempt, and that an honourable American journalist had no more reason to resent the portraiture of Mr. Jefferson Brick than a virtuous English paterfamilias had to quarrel with that of Mr. Pecksniff. Unfortunately, offence is usually taken where offence is meant; and there can be little doubt as to the *animus* with which Dickens had written. Only two months after landing at Boston Dickens had declared to Macready, that "however much he liked the ingredients of this great dish, he could not but say that the dish itself went against the grain with him, and that he didn't like it." It was not, and could not be, pleasant for Americans to find the "*New York Sewer*, in its twelfth thousand, with a whole column of New Yorkers to be shown up, and all their names printed," introduced as the first expression of "the bubbling passions of their country;" or to be certified, apropos of a conversation among American "gentlemen" after dinner, that dollars, and dollars only, at the risk of honesty and honour, filled their souls. "No satirist," Martin Chuzzlewit is told by a candid and open-minded American, "could, I believe, breathe this air." But satire in such passages as

these borders too closely on angry invective; and neither the irresistible force nor the earnest pathos of the details which follow can clear away the suspicion that at the bottom lay a desire to depreciate. Nor was the general effect of the American episodes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* materially modified by their conclusion, to which, with the best of intentions, the author could not bring himself to give a genuinely complimentary turn. The Americans did not like all this, and could not be expected to like it. The tone of the whole satire was too savage, and its tenor was too hopelessly one-sided, for it to pass unresented; while much in it was too near the truth to glance off harmless. It is well known that in time Dickens came himself to understand this. Before quitting America, in 1868, he declared his intention to publish in every future edition of his *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* his testimony to the magnanimous cordiality of his second reception in the States, and to the amazing changes for the better which he had seen everywhere around him during his second sojourn in the country. But it is not likely that the postscript, all the more since it was added under circumstances so honourable to both sides, has undone, or will undo, the effect of the text. Very possibly the Americans may, in the eyes of the English people as well as in their own, cease to be chargeable with the faults and foibles satirised by Dickens; but the satire itself will live, and will continue to excite laughter and loathing, together with the other satire of the powerful book to which it belongs.

For in none of his books is that power, which at times filled their author himself with astonishment, more strikingly and abundantly revealed than in *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*. Never was his inventive

force more flexible and more at his command; yet none of his books cost him more hard work. The very names of hero and novel were only the final fortunate choice out of a legion of notions; though "Pecksniff" as well as "Charity" and "Mercy" ("not unholy names, I hope," said Mr. Pecksniff to Mrs. Todgers) were first inspirations. The MS. text too is full of the outward signs of care. But the author had his reward in the general impression of finish which is conveyed by this book as compared with its predecessors; so that *Martin Chuzzlewit* may be described as already one of the masterpieces of Dickens's maturity as a writer. Oddly enough, the one part of the book which moves rather heavily is the opening chapter, an effort in the mock-heroic, probably suggested by the author's eighteenth century readings.

A more original work, however, than *Martin Chuzzlewit* was never composed, or one which more freshly displays the most characteristic qualities of its author's genius. Though the actual construction of the story is anything but faultless—for what could be more slender than the thread by which the American interlude is attached to the main action, or more wildly improbable than the hazardous stratagem of old Martin upon which that action turns?—yet it is so contrived as to fulfil the author's avowed intention of exhibiting under various forms the evil and the folly of selfishness. This vice is capable of both serious and comic treatment, and commended itself in each aspect to Dickens as being essentially antagonistic to his moral and artistic ideals of human life. A true comedy of humours thus unfolded itself with the progress of his book, and one for which the types had not been fetched from afar: "Your homes the scene; yourselves the actors here," had been the motto which he had at first

intended to put upon his title-page. Thus, while in "the old-established firm of Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son" selfishness is cultivated as a growth excellent in itself, and the son's sentiment, "Do other men, for they would do you," is applauded by his admiring father, in young Martin the vice rather resembles a weed strong and rank, yet not so strong but that it gives way at last before a manly endeavour to uproot it. The character of the hero, though very far from heroic, is worked out with that reliance upon the fellow-feeling of candid readers which in our great novelists of the eighteenth century has obtained sympathy for much less engaging personages. More especially is the young man's loss of self-respect in the season of his solitary wretchedness depicted with admirable feeling. It would not, I think, be fanciful to assert that in this story Dickens has with equal skill distinguished between two species of unselfishness. Mark Tapley's is the actively unselfish nature, and though his reiteration of his guiding motive is wearisome and occasionally absurd, yet the power of coming out jolly under unpropitious circumstances is a genuinely English ideal of manly virtue. Tom Pinch's character, on the other hand, is unselfish from innate sweetness; and never has the art of Dickens drawn a type which, while closely approaching the border-line of the grotesque, is yet so charmingly true to nature.

Grotesque characters proper are numerous enough in this book, but all the others pale before the immortal presence of Mrs. Gamp. She had been traced to an original in real life, but her literary right to stand on her own legs has been most properly vindicated against any supposition of likeness to the different type, the subject of Leigh Hunt's *Monthly Nurse*—a paper, by-the-way, distinguished by shrewdness as well as feeling. Imagination has never

taken bolder flights than those requisite for the development of Mrs. Gamp's mental processes:

"'And which of all them smoking monsters is the Ankworks boat, I wonder? Goodness me!' cried Mrs. Gamp.

"'What boat did you want?' asked Ruth.

"'The Ankworks package,' Mrs. Gamp replied. 'I will not deceive you, my sweet. Why should I?'

"'That is the Antwerp packet in the middle,' said Ruth.

"'And I wish it was in Jonadge's belly, I do!' cried Mrs. Gamp, appearing to confound the prophet with the whale in this miraculous aspiration."

A hardly inferior exertion of creative power was needed in order to fix in distinct forms the peculiarities of her diction, nay, to sustain the unique rhythm of her speech:

"'I says to Mrs. Harris,' Mrs. Gamp continued, 'only t' other day, the last Monday fortnight as ever dawned upon this Piljian's Projiss of a mortal wale; I says to Mrs. Harris, when she says to me, "Years and our trials, Mrs. Gamp, sets marks upon us all"—"Say not the words, Mrs. Harris, if you and me is to be continual friends, for sech is not the case."'"

Yet the reality of Mrs. Gamp has been acknowledged to be such that she has been the death of her sisterhood in a great part (to say the least) of our hospital wards and sick-rooms; and as for her oddities of tongue, they are, with the exception of her boldest figures, but the glorified type of all the utterances heard to this day from charwomen, laundresses, and single gentlemen's house-keepers. Compared with her, even her friend and patron, Mr. Mould, and her admirer, Mr. Bailey, and in other parts of the book the low company at Todgers's and the fine company at Mr. Tigg Montague's sink into insignificance. The aged Chuffey is a grotesque study of a very different kind, of which the pathos never loses itself in exaggeration. As

for Pecksniff, he is as far out of the range of grotesque as, except when moralising over the banisters at Todgers's, he is out of that of genial characters. He is the richest comic type, while at the same time one of the truest, among the innumerable reproductions in English imaginative literature of our favourite national vice—hypocrisy. His friendliness is the very quintessence of falsehood: "Mr. Pinch," he cries to poor Tom over the currant-wine and captain's biscuits, "if you spare the bottle, we shall quarrel!" His understanding with his daughters is the very perfection of guile, for they confide in him, even when ignorant of his intentions, because of their certainty "that in all he does he has his purpose straight and full before him." And he is a man who understands the times as well as the land in which he lives; for, as M. Taine has admirably pointed out, where Tartuffe would have been full of religious phrases, Pecksniff presents himself as a humanitarian philosopher. Comic art has never more successfully fulfilled its highest task after its truest fashion than in this picture of the rise and fall of a creature who never ceases to be laughable, and yet never ceases to be loathsome. Nothing is wanting in this wonderful book to attest the exuberance of its author's genius. The kindly poetic spirit of the Christmas books breathes in sweet Ruth Pinch; and the tragic power of the closing chapters of *Oliver Twist* is recalled by the picture of Jonas before and after his deed of blood. I say nothing of merely descriptive passages, though in none of his previous stories had Dickens so completely mastered the secret of describing scenery and weather in their relation to his action or his characters.

Martin Chuzzlewit ran its course of twenty monthly numbers; but already a week or two before the appear-

ance of the first of these, Dickens had bestowed upon the public, young and old, the earliest of his delightful *Christmas Books*. Among all his productions perhaps none connected him so closely, and as it were personally, with his readers. Nor could it well have been otherwise; since nowhere was he so directly intent upon promoting kindliness of feeling among men — more especially good-will, founded upon respect, towards the poor. Cheerfulness was, from his point of view, twin-sister to charity; and sulkiness, like selfishness, belonged, as an appropriate ort, to the dust-heap of "Tom Tiddler's Ground." What more fit than that he should mingle such sentiments as these with the holly and the mistletoe of the only English holiday in which remains a vestige of religious and poetic feeling? Beyond all doubt there is much that is tedious in the *cultus* of Father Christmas, and there was yet more in the days when the lower classes in England had not yet come to look upon a sufficiency of periodical holidays as part of their democratic inheritance. But that Dickens should constitute himself its chief minister and interpreter was nothing but fit. Already one of the *Sketches* had commended a Christmas-dinner at which a seat is not denied even to "poor Aunt Margaret;" and Mr. Pickwick had never been more himself than in the Christmas game of Blind-man's-buff at Dingley Dell, in which "the poor relations caught the people who they thought would like it," and, when the game flagged, "got caught themselves." But he now sought to reach the heart of the subject; and the freshness of his fancy enabled him delightfully to vary his illustrations of a text of which it can do no man harm to be reminded in as well as out of season.

Dickens's Christmas books were published in the Christmas seasons of 1843–1846, and of 1848. If the palm is

to be granted to any one among them above its fellows, few readers would hesitate, I think, to declare themselves in favour of *The Cricket on the Hearth*, as tender and delicate a domestic idyl as any literature can boast. But the informing spirit proper of these productions, the desire to stir up a feeling of benevolence, more especially towards the poor and lowly, nowhere shows itself more conspicuously than in the earliest, *A Christmas Carol in Prose*, and nowhere more combatively than in the second in date, the "Goblin Story" of *The Chimes*. Of the former its author declared that he "wept and laughed and wept again" over it, "and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner in the composition; and thinking thereof he walked about the black streets of London, fifteen and twenty miles many a night, when all the sober folks had gone to bed." Simple in its romantic design like one of Andersen's little tales, the *Christmas Carol* has never lost its hold upon a public in whom it has called forth Christmas thoughts which do not all centre on "holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch;" and the Cratchit household, with Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, are living realities even to those who have not seen Mr. Toole—an actor after Dickens's own heart—as the father of the family, shivering in his half-yard of comforter.

In *The Chimes*, composed in self-absorbed solitude at Genoa, he imagined that "he had written a tremendous book, and knocked the *Carol* out of the field." Though the little work failed to make "the great uproar" he had confidently anticipated, its purpose was certainly unmistakable; but the effect of hard exaggerations such as Mr. Filer and Alderman Cute, and of a burlesque absurdity

like Sir Joseph Bowley, was too dreary to be counteracted by the more pleasing passages of the tale. In his novel *Hard Times* Dickens afterwards reproduced some of the ideas, and repeated some of the artistic mistakes, to be found in *The Chimes*, though the design of the later work was necessarily of a more mixed kind. The Christmas book has the tone of a *doctrinaire* protest against *doctrinaires*, and, as Forster has pointed out, is manifestly written under the influence of Carlyle. But its main doctrine was one which Dickens lost no opportunity of proclaiming, and which here breaks forth in the form of an indignant appeal by Richard Fern, the outlaw in spite of himself: "Gentlefolks, be not hard upon the poor!" No feeling was more deeply rooted in Dickens's heart than this; nor could he forbear expressing it by invective and satire as well as by humorous and pathetic pictures of his clients, among whom Trotty Veck too takes a representative place.

The Cricket on the Hearth, as a true work of art, is not troubled about its moral, easily though half-a-dozen plain morals might be drawn from it; a purer and more lightsome creation of the fancy has never been woven out of homespun materials. Of the same imaginative type, though not executed with a fineness so surpassing, is *The Battle of Life*, the treatment of a fancy in which Dickens appears to have taken great pleasure. Indeed, he declared that he was "thoroughly wretched at having to use the idea for so short a story." As it stands, it is a pretty idyl of resignation, very poetical in tone as well as in conception, though here and there, notwithstanding the complaint just quoted, rather lengthy. It has been conjectured, with much probability, that the success which had attended dramatic versions of Dickens's previous

Christmas books caused "those admirable comedians, Mr. and Mrs. Keeley," to be in his mind "when he drew the charming characters of Britain and Clemency Newcome." At all events the pair serve as good old bits of English pottery to relieve the delicate Sèvres sentiment of Grace and Marion. In the last of Dickens's Christmas books, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*, he returns once more to a machinery resembling those of the earliest. But the fancy on which the action turns is here more forced, and the truth which it illustrates is after all only a half-truth, unless taken as part of the greater truth, that the moral conditions of man's life are more easily marred than mended. Once more the strength of the book lies in its humorous side. The picture of the good Milly's humble protégés, the Tetterby family, is to remind us that happiness consists precisely in that which the poor and the rich may alike obtain, but which it is so difficult for the poor, amidst their shifts and shabbiness, to keep fresh and green. Even without the evil influence of an enchanted chemist, it is hard enough for the Mrs. Tetterbys of real life always to be ministering angels to their families; for the hand of every little Tetterby not occasionally to be against the other little Tetterbys, and even for a devoted Johnny's temper never to rise against Moloch. All the more is that to be cherished in the poor which makes them love one another.

More than one of these Christmas books, both the humour and the sentiment of which are so peculiarly English, was written on foreign soil. Dickens's general conceptions of life, not less than his literary individuality, had been formed before he became a traveller and sojourner in foreign lands. In Italy, as elsewhere, a man will, in a sense, find only what he takes there. At all

events the changed life brought with it for Dickens, though not at once, a refreshment and a brief repose which invigorated him for some of the truest efforts of his genius. His resolution to spend some time on the Continent had not been taken rashly, although it was at least hastened by business disappointments. He seems at this time, as was virtually inevitable, to have seen a good deal of society in London, and more especially to have become a welcome guest of Lady Blessington and Count d'Orsay at Gore House. Moreover, his services were beginning to be occasionally claimed as a public speaker; and altogether he must have found more of his time than he wished slipping through his hands. Lastly, he very naturally desired to see what was to be seen, and to enjoy what was to be enjoyed, by one gifted with a sleepless observation and animated by a genuine love of nature and art. The letters, public and private, which he wrote from Italy, are not among the most interesting productions of his pen; even his humour seems now and then ill at ease in them, and his descriptive power narrow in its range. His eyes were occasionally veiled, as are those of most travellers in quest of "first impressions." Thus I cannot but think his picture of Naples inadequate, and that of its population unjust. Again, although he may have told the truth in asserting that the Eternal City, at first sight, "looked like—I am half afraid to write the word—like LONDON," and although his general description of Rome has been pronounced correct by competent judgment, yet it is impossible to ignore in it the undertone of Bow Bells. On the other hand, not even in his newspaper letters can he be said to fall into affectation; his impressions are never given pretentiously, and are accordingly seldom altogether worthless; while his criticisms of works

of art, when offered, are candid and shrewd, besides being invariably his own.

Thus, there was never anything truer in its way than the account which he gave to Maclise of his first impressions a few days after his arrival at Albaro, a suburb of Genoa, where he found himself settled with his family in July, 1844. He re-christened his abode, the Villa Bagnerello ("it sounds romantic, but Signor Banderello is a butcher hard by"), "the Pink Jail." Here, with abundance of space and time, and with a view from his writing-table of "the sea, the mountains, the washed-out villas, the vineyards, the blistering hot fort, with a sentry on the drawbridge standing in a bit of shadow no broader than his own musket, and the sky," he began his *villeggiatura*, and resolving not to know, or to be known where it could be helped, looked round him at his leisure. This looking round very naturally took up some time; for the circuit of Dickens's daily observation was unusually wide. Soon he was seeking winter-quarters in Genoa itself, and by October was established in the Palazzo Peschiere, situate on a height within the walls of the city, and overlooking the whole of it, with the harbour and the sea beyond. "There is not in Italy, they say (and I believe them), a lovelier residence." Even here, however, among fountains and frescoes, it was some time before he could set steadily to work at his Christmas story. At last the bells of Genoa chimed a title for it into his restless ears; and, though longing with a nostalgy that was specially strong upon him at periods of mental excitement for his nightly walks in the London streets, he settled down to his task. I have already described the spirit in which he executed it. No sooner was the writing done than the other half of his double artist-nature was seized with an-

other craving. The rage which possesses authors to read their writings aloud to sympathizing ears, if such can be found, is a well-worn theme of satire; but in Dickens the actor was almost as strong as the author, and he could not withstand the desire to interpret in person what he had written, and to watch its effect with his own eyes and ears. In the first days of November, therefore, he set off from Genoa, and made his way home by Bologna, Venice, Milan, and the Simplon Pass. Of this journey his *Pictures from Italy* contains the record, including a chapter about Venice, pitched in an unusually poetic key. But not all the memories of all the Doges could have stayed the execution of his set purpose. On the 30th of November he reached London, and on the 2d of December he was reading the *Chimes*, from the proofs, to the group of friends immortalised in Maclise's inimitable sketch. Three days afterwards the reading was repeated to a slightly different audience; and, indeed, it would seem, from an enthusiastic postscript to a letter addressed to his wife, that he had read at least part of the book to Macready on the night before that of the first conclave. The distance was no doubt wide between the intimacy of these friendly readings and the stormy seas of public audiences; but, however unconsciously, the first step had been taken. It may be worth noticing, in connexion with this, that the scheme of a private dramatic performance, which was to occupy much of Dickens's "leisure" in the year following, was proposed for the first time on the occasion of the first reading of the *Chimes*. Before Christmas he was back again in his "Italian bowers." If the strain of his effort in writing the *Chimes* had been severe, the holiday which followed was long. In the later winter and early spring of 1845 he and the ladies of his family saw Rome and

Naples, and in June their Italian life came to an end, and they were in London before the close of the month. Projects of work remained in abeyance until the absorbing fancy of a private play had been realised with an earnestness such as only Dickens could carry into his amusements, and into this particular amusement above all others. The play was *Every Man in his Humour;* the theatre, the little house in Dean Street, of whose chequered fortunes no theatrical history has succeeded in exhausting the memories; and the manager was, of course, "Bobadil," as Dickens now took to signing himself. His joking remark to Macready, that he "thought of changing his present mode of life, and was open to an engagement," was after all not so very wide of the mark. According to the inevitable rule in such things, he and his friends —among whom Mark Lemon, Douglas Jerrold, and Forster were conspicuous — were "induced" to repeat their performance at a larger house for a public charity, and later in the year they played *The Elder Brother* for Miss Fanny Kelly's benefit. Leigh Hunt, whose opinion, however, could hardly fail to be influenced by the circumstances under which Ben Jonson's comedy was afterwards performed by the amateurs, and who was no longer the youthful Draco of the *News*, afterwards spoke very highly of Dickens's Bobadil. It had "a spirit in it of intellectual apprehension beyond anything the existing stage has shown." His acting in the farce which followed Leigh Hunt thought "throughout admirable; quite rich and filled up."

Christmas, 1845, had passed, and *The Cricket on the Hearth* had graced the festival, when an altogether new chapter in Dickens's life seemed about to open for him. The experience through which he now passed was one on

which his biographer, for reasons easy to guess, has touched very slightly, while his *Letters* throw no additional light on it at all. Most people, I imagine, would decline to pronounce upon the qualifications requisite in an editor of a great political journal. Yet, literary power of a kind which acts upon the multitude rapidly and powerfully, habits of order so confirmed as to have almost become second nature, and an interest in the affairs of the nation fed by an ardent enthusiasm for its welfare—these would seem to go some way towards making up the list. Of all these qualifications Dickens at various times gave proof, and they sufficed in later years to make him the successful conductor of a weekly journal which aimed at the enlightenment hardly less than at the entertainment of no inconsiderable portion of the British public. But, in the first place, political journalism proper is a craft of which very few men have been known to become masters by intuition, and Dickens had as yet had no real experience of it. His zealous efforts as a reporter can hardly be taken into account here. He had for a short time edited a miscellany of amusement, and had failed to carry beyond a beginning the not very carefully considered scheme of another. Recently, he had resumed the old notion of *Master Humphrey's Clock* in a different shape; but nothing had come of his projected cheap weekly paper for the present, while its title, "*The Cricket*," was reserved for a different use. Since his reporting days he had, however, now and then appeared among the lighter combatants of political literature. In 1841 he had thrown a few squibs in the *Examiner* at Sir Robert Peel and the Tories; and from about the same date he had, besides occasionally contributing to the literary and theatrical columns of the same weekly journal, now and then discussed in it sub-

jects of educational or other general interest.[1] Finally, it is stated by Forster that in 1844, when the greatest political struggle of the last generation was approaching its climax, Dickens contributed some articles to the *Morning Chronicle* which attracted attention and led to negotiations with the editor that arrived at no positive result. If these contributions treated any political questions whatever, they were, with the exception of the few *Examiner* papers, and of the letters to the *Daily News* to be mentioned in this chapter, the only articles of this kind which, to my knowledge, he ever wrote.

For, from first to last, whether in the days when Oliver Twist suffered under the maladministration of the Poor-law, or in those when Arthur Clennam failed to make an impression upon the Circumlocution Office, politics were with Dickens a sentiment rather than a study or a pursuit. With his habits of application and method, it might have taken but a very short time for him to train himself as a politician; but this short time never actually occurred. There is, however, no reason to suppose that when, in 1841, a feeler was put out by some more or less influential persons at Reading, with regard to his willingness to be nominated for the representation of that borough, he had any reason for declining the proposal besides that which he stated in his replies. He could not afford the requisite expense; and he was determined not to forfeit his independence through accepting Government—by which I hope he means Whig party—aid for meeting the cost of the contest. Still, in 1845, though slack of faith in the "people who govern us," he had not yet become the irreclaim-

[1] From a list of MSS. at South Kensington, kindly furnished me by Mr. R. F. Sketchley, I find that Mr. R. H. Shepherd's *Bibliography of Dickens* is incomplete on this head.

able political sceptic of later days; and without being in any way bound to the Whigs, he had that general confidence in Lord John Russell which was all they could expect from their irregular followers. As yet, however, he had shown no sign of any special aptitude or inclination for political work, though if he addressed himself to questions affecting the health and happiness of the humbler classes, he was certain to bring to them the enthusiasm of a genuine sympathy. And a question of this kind was uppermost in Englishmen's minds in this year 1845, when at last the time was drawing near for the complete abolition of the tax upon the staple article of the poor man's daily food.

The establishment of a new London morning paper, on the scale to which those already in existence had attained, was a serious matter in itself; but it seems to have been undertaken in no spirit of diffidence by the projectors and first proprietors of the *Daily News*. With the early history of the experiment I cannot here concern myself; it is, however, an open secret that the rate of expenditure of the new journal was at first on a most liberal, not to say lavish, scale, and that the losses of the proprietors were for many years very large indeed. Established on those principles of Radicalism which, on the whole, it has in both good and evil times consistently maintained, the *Daily News* was to rise superior to the opportunism, if not to the advertisements, of the *Times*, and to outstrip the cautious steps of the Whig *Morning Chronicle*. Special attention was to be given to those industrial enterprises with which the world teemed in that speculative age, and no doubt also to those social questions affecting the welfare and elevation of the masses and the relations between employers and employed, which were attracting more and

more of the public attention. But in the first instance the actual political situation would oblige the new journal to direct the greater part of its energies to one particular question, which had, in truth, already been threshed out by the organs of public opinion, and as to which the time for action had at last arrived. No Liberal journal projected in 1845, and started early in 1846, could fail to concentrate its activity for a time upon the question of the Corn-laws, to which the session of 1846 was to give the death-blow.

It is curious enough, on opening the first number of the *Daily News*, dated January 21, 1846, to find one's self transplanted into the midst of one of the most memorable episodes of our more recent political history. The very advertisements of subscriptions to the Anti-Corn-law League, with the good old Manchester names figuring conspicuously among them, have a historic interest; and the report of a disputation on free-trade at Norwich, in which all the hits are made by Mr. Cobden, another report of a great London meeting on the same subject, and some verses concerning the people's want of its bread, probably written by Mr. Charles Mackay, occupy an entire page of the paper. Railway news and accounts of railway meetings fill about the same space; while the foreign news is extremely meagre. There remain the leading articles, four in number—of which three are on the burning question of the day—and the first of a series of *Travelling Letters Written on the Road, by Charles Dickens* (the Avignon chapter in the *Pictures from Italy*.)[1] The hand of the editor is trace-

[1] By an odd coincidence, not less than four out of the six theatres advertising their performances in this first number of the *Daily News* announce each a different adaptation of *The Cricket on the Hearth*. Amongst the curiosities of the casts are observable: At the Adelphi,

able only in this *feuilleton* and in the opening article of the new paper. On internal evidence I conclude that this article, which has little to distinguish it from similar manifestoes, unless it be a moderation of tone that would not have suited Captain Shandon, was not written by Dickens alone or unassisted. But his hand is traceable in the concluding paragraphs, which contain the following wordy but spirited assertion of a cause that Dickens lost no opportunity of advocating:

"We seek, so far as in us lies, to elevate the character of the Public Press in England. We believe it would attain a much higher position, and that those who wield its powers would be infinitely more respected as a class, and an important one, if it were purged of a disposition to sordid attacks *upon itself*, which only prevails in England and America. We discern nothing in the editorial plural that justifies a gentleman, or body of gentlemen, in discarding a gentleman's forbearance and responsibility, and venting ungenerous spleen against a rival, by a perversion of a great power—a power, however, which is only great so long as it is good and honest. The stamp on newspapers is not like the stamp on universal medicine-bottles, which licenses anything, however false and monstrous; and we are sure this misuse of it, in any notorious case, not only offends and repels right-minded men in that particular instance, but naturally, though unjustly, involves the whole Press, as a pursuit or profession, in the feeling so awakened, and places the character of all who are associated with it at a great disadvantage.

"Entering on this adventure of a new daily journal in a spirit of honourable competition and hope of public usefulness, we seek, in our new station, at once to preserve our own self-respect, and to be respected, for ourselves and for it, by our readers. Therefore, we

---

Wright as Tilly Slowboy, and at the Haymarket Buckstone in the same character, with William Farren as Caleb Plummer. The latter part is taken at the Princess's by Compton, Mrs. Stirling playing Dot. At the Lyceum, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Mary Keeley, and Mr. Emery, appear in the piece.

beg them to receive, in this our first number, the assurance that no recognition or interchange of trade abuse, by us, shall be the destruction of either sentiment; and that we intend proceeding on our way, and theirs, without stooping to any such flowers by the roadside."

I am unable to say how many days it was after the appearance of this first number that Dickens, or the proprietors of the journal, or, as seems most likely, both sides simultaneously, began to consider the expediency of ending the connexion between them. He was "revolving plans for quitting the paper" on January 30, and resigned his editorship on February 9 following. In the interval, with the exception of two or three more of the *Travelling Letters*, very few signs of his hand appear in the journal. The number of January 24, however, contains an editorial contribution, in the shape of "a new song, but an old story," concerning *The British Lion*, his accomplishment of eating Corn-law Leagues, his principal keeper, *Wan Humbug*, and so forth. This it would be cruel to unearth. A more important indication of a line of writing that his example may have helped to domesticate in the *Daily News* appears in the number of February 4, which contains a long letter, with his signature, urging the claims of Ragged Schools, and giving a graphic account of his visit to one in Saffron Hill. After he had placed his resignation in the hands of the proprietors, and was merely holding on at his post till the time of his actual withdrawal, he was naturally not anxious to increase the number of his contributions. The *Hymn of the Wiltshire Labourers*—which appeared on February 14—is, of course, an echo of the popular cry of the day; but the subtler pathos of Dickens never found its way into his verse. The most important, and so far as I know, the last, of his contributions to the *Daily News*, consisted of

a series of three letters (March 9, 13, and 16) on capital punishment. It was a question which much occupied him at various times of his life, and on which it cannot be shown that he really changed his opinions. The letters in the *Daily News*, based in part on the arguments of one of the ablest men of his day, the "unlucky" Mr. Wakefield, are an interesting contribution to the subject; and the first of them, with its Hogarthian sketch of the temptation and fall of Thomas Hocker, Sunday-school teacher and murderer, would be worth reprinting as an example of Dickens's masterly use of the argument *ex concreto*.

The few traditions which linger in the *Daily News* office concerning Dickens as editor of the paper, agree with the conjecture that his labours on its behalf were limited, or very nearly so, to the few pieces enumerated above. Of course there must have been some inevitable business; but of this much may have been taken off his hands by his sub-editor, Mr. W. H. Wills, who afterwards became his *alter ego* at the office of his own weekly journal and his intimate personal friend. In the days of the first infancy of the *Daily News*, Mr. Britton, the present publisher of that journal, was attached to the editor as his personal office attendant; and he remembers very vividly what little there can have been to remember about Dickens's performance of his functions. His habit, following a famous precedent, was to make up for coming late—usually about half-past ten P.M.—by going away early—usually not long after midnight. There were frequently sounds of merriment, if not of modest revelry, audible from the little room at the office in Lombard Street, where the editor sat in conclave with Douglas Jerrold and one or two other intimates. Mr. Britton is not sure that the

work did not sometimes begin *after the editor had left;* but at all events he cannot recollect that Dickens ever wrote anything at the office—that he ever, for instance, wrote about a debate that had taken place in Parliament on the same night. And he sums up his reminiscences by declaring his conviction that Dickens was "not a newspaper man, at least not when in 'the chair.'" And so Dickens seems on this occasion to have concluded; for when, not long after quitting the paper, he republished with additions the *Travelling Letters* which during his conduct of it had been its principal ornaments, he spoke of "a brief mistake he had made, not long ago, in disturbing the old relations between himself and his readers, and departing for a moment from his old pursuits." He had been virtually out of "the chair" almost as soon as he had taken it. His successor, but only for a few months, was his friend Forster.

Never has captive released made a more eager or a better use of his recovered freedom. Before the summer had fairly set in Dickens had let his house, and was travelling with his family up the Rhine towards Switzerland. This was, I think, Dickens's only passage through Germany, which in language and literature remained a *terra incognita* to him, while in various ways so well known to his friendly rivals, Lord Lytton and Thackeray. He was on the track of poor Thomas Hood's old journeyings, whose facetious recollections of Rhineland he had some years before reviewed in a spirit of admiration rather for the author than for the book, funny as it is. His point of destination was Lausanne, where he had resolved to establish his household for the summer, and where by the middle of June they were most agreeably settled in a little villa or cottage which did not belie its name of

Rosemont, and from which they looked upon the lake and the mighty Alpine chain beyond. If Rome had reminded Dickens of London, the green woods near Lausanne recalled to him his Kentish glades; but he had the fullest sense and the truest enjoyment of the grandeurs of Alpine scenery, and lost no opportunity of becoming acquainted with them. Thus his letters contain an admirable description (not untinged with satire) of a trip to the Great St. Bernard and its convent, many years afterwards reproduced in one of the few enjoyable chapters of the Second Part of *Little Dorrit*. More interesting, however, because more characteristic, is the freshness and candour with which in Switzerland, where by most English visitors the native inhabitants are "taken for granted," he set himself to observe, and, so far as he could, to appreciate, the people among whom he was a temporary resident. His solutions of some of the political difficulties, which were mostly connected with religious differences, at that time rife in Switzerland, are palpably one-sided. But the generosity of spirit which reveals itself in his kindly recognition of the fine qualities of the people around him is akin to what was best and noblest in Dickens.

He had, at the same time, been peculiarly fortunate in finding at Lausanne a circle of pleasant acquaintances, to whom he dedicated the Christmas book which he wrote among the roses and the foliage of his lake-side cottage. Of course *The Battle of Life* was read aloud by its author to so kindly an audience. The day of parting, however, soon came; on the 16th of November *paterfamilias* had his "several tons of luggage, other tons of servants, and other tons of children," in travelling order, and soon had safely stowed them away at Paris "in the most preposterous house in the world. The like of it cannot, and so far

as my knowledge goes, does not, exist in any other part of the globe. The bedrooms are like opera-boxes; the dining-rooms, staircases, and passages quite inexplicable. The dining-room"—which in another letter he describes as "mere midsummer madness"—"is a sort of cavern, painted (ceiling and all) to represent a grove, with unaccountable bits of looking-glass sticking in among the branches of the trees. There is a gleam of reason in the drawing-room, but it is approached through a series of small chambers, like the joints in a telescope, which are hung with inscrutable drapery." Here, with the exception of two brief visits to England, paid before his final departure, he spent three months, familiarising himself for the first time of his life with the second of his "Two Cities."

Dickens came to know the French language well enough to use it with ease, if not with elegance; and he lost no opportunity, it need hardly be said, of resorting to the best of schools for the purpose. Macready, previously addressed from "Altorf," had made him acquainted with Regnier, of the Théâtre Français, who in his turn had introduced him to the greenroom of the house of Molière. Other theatres were diligently visited by him and Forster, when the latter arrived on a visit; and celebrities were polite and hospitable to their distinguished English *confrère*. With these, however, Dickens was not cosmopolitan enough to consort except in passing; the love of literary society *because* it is literary society was at no time one of his predilections or foibles. The streets of Paris were to him more than its *salons*, more even than its theatres. They are so to a larger number of Englishmen than that which cares to confess it, but Dickens would have been the last to disown the impeachment. They were the

proper sphere for his powers of humorous observation, as he afterwards showed in more than one descriptive paper as true to life as any of his London *Sketches*. And, moreover, he *needed* the streets for the work which he had in hand. *Dombey and Son* had been begun at Rosemont, and the first of its twenty monthly numbers had been published in October, 1846. No reader of the book is likely to forget how, after writing the chapter which relates the death of little Paul, Dickens during the greater part of the night wandered restlessly with a heavy heart about the Paris streets. Sooner, however, than he had intended, his residence abroad had to come to a close; and early in 1847 he and his family were again in London.

Dombey and Son has, perhaps, been more criticised than any other amongst the stories of its author; and yet it certainly is not the one which has been least admired, or least loved. Dickens himself, in the brief preface which he afterwards prefixed to the story, assumed a half-defiant air which sits ill upon the most successful author, but which occasionally he was tempted to assume. Before condescending to defend the character of Mr. Dombey as in accordance with both probability and experience, he "made so bold as to believe that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing the characters of men is a rare one." Yet, though the drawing of this character is only one of the points which have been objected against the story, not only did the book at the time of publication far surpass its predecessor in popularity, but it has, I believe, always preserved to itself a special congregation of enthusiastic admirers. Manifestly, this novel is one of its author's most ambitious endeavours. In it, more distinctly even than in *Chuzzlewit*, he has chosen for his theme one of the chief vices of human nature, and has striven to show

what pride cannot achieve, what it cannot conquer, what it cannot withstand. This central idea gives to the story, throughout a most varied succession of scenes, a unity of action to be found in few of Dickens's earlier works. On the other hand, *Dombey and Son* shares with these earlier productions, and with its successor, *David Copperfield*, the freshness of invention and spontaneous flow of both humour and pathos which at times are wanting in the more powerfully conceived and more carefully constructed romances of Dickens's later years. If there be any force at all in the common remark that the most interesting part of the book ends together with the life of little Paul, the censure falls upon the whole design of the author. Little Paul, in something besides the ordinary meaning of the words, was born to die; and though, like the writer, most readers may have dreaded the hour which was to put an end to that frail life, yet in this case there could be no question—such as was possible in the story of Little Nell—of any other issue. Indeed, deep as is the pathos of the closing scene, its beauty is even surpassed by those which precede it. In death itself there is release for a child as for a man, and for those sitting by the pillow of the patient; but it is the gradual approach of death which seems hardest of all for the watchers to bear; it is the sinking of hope which seems even sadder than its extinction. What old fashion could that be, Paul wondered with a palpitating heart, that was so visibly expressed in him, so plainly seen by so many people? Every heart is softened and every eye dimmed as the innocent child passes on his way to his grave. The hand of God's angel is on him; he is no longer altogether of this world. The imagination which could picture and present this mysterious haze of feeling, through which the narrative moves,

half like a reality, half like a dream, is that of a true poet, and of a great one.

What even the loss of his son could not effect in Mr. Dombey is to be accomplished in the progress of the story by a yet stronger agency than sorrow. His pride is to be humbled to the dust, where he is to be sought and raised up by the love of his despised and ill-used daughter. Upon the relations between this pair, accordingly, it was necessary for the author to expend the greatest care, and upon the treatment of those relations the criticism to which the character of Mr. Dombey has been so largely subjected must substantially turn. The unfavourable judgments passed upon it have, in my opinion, not been altogether unjust. The problem obviously was to show how the father's cold indifference towards the daughter gradually becomes jealousy, as he finds that upon her is concentrated, first, the love of his innocent little son, and then that of his haughty second wife; and how hereupon this jealousy deepens into hate. But, unless we are to suppose that Mr. Dombey hated his daughter from the first, the disfavour shown by him on her account to young Walter Gay remains without adequate explanation. His dislike of Florence is not manifestly founded upon his jealousy of what Mrs. Chick calls her brother's "infatuation" for her; and the main motives at work in the unhappy man are either not very skilfully kept asunder, or not very intelligibly intermixed. Nor are the later stages of the relations between father and daughter altogether satisfactorily conceived. The momentary yielding of Mr. Dombey, after his "coming home" with his new wife, is natural and touching; but his threat to visit his daughter with the consequences of her step-mother's conduct is sheer brutality. The passage in which Mr. Dombey's ultimatum to

Mrs. Dombey is conveyed by him in her presence through a third person is so artificial as to fall not very far short of absurdity. The closing scene which leads to the flight of Florence is undeniably powerful; but it is the development of the relations between the pair in which the art of the author is in my judgment occasionally at fault.

As to the general effect of the latter part of the story —or rather of its main plot—which again has been condemned as melodramatic and unnatural, a distinction should be drawn between its incidents and its characters. Neither Edith Dombey nor Mr. Carker is a character of real life. The pride of the former comes very near to bad breeding, and her lapses into sentiment seem artificial lapses. How differently Thackeray would have managed the "high words" between her and her frivolous mother! how differently, for that matter, he *has* managed a not altogether dissimilar scene in the *Newcomes* between Ethel Newcome and old Lady Kew! As for Mr. Carker, with his white teeth and glistening gums, who calls his unhappy brother "Spaniel," and contemplates a life of sensual ease in Sicily, he has the semi-reality of the stage. Possibly the French stage had helped to suggest the *scène de la pièce* between the fugitives at Dijon—an effective situation, but one which many a novelist might have worked out not less skilfully than Dickens. His own master-hand, however, re-asserts itself in the wondrously powerful narrative of Carker's flight and death. Here again he excites terror—as in the same book he had evoked pity—by foreshadowing, without prematurely revealing, the end. We know what the morning is to bring which rises in awful tranquillity over the victim of his own sins; and, as in Turner's wild but

powerful picture, the engine made by the hand of man for peaceful purposes seems a living agent of wrath.[1]

No other of Dickens's books is more abundantly stocked than this with genuinely comic characters; but nearly all of them, in accordance with the pathetic tone which is struck at the outset, and which never dies out till the story has run its course, are in a more subdued strain of humour. Lord Jeffrey was, I think, warranted in his astonishment that Dickens should devote so much pains to characters like Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox. Probably the habit remained with him from his earliest times of authorship, when he had not always distinguished very accurately between the humorous and the *bizarre*. But Polly and the Toodles household, Mrs. Pipchin and her "select infantine boarding-house," and the whole of Doctor Blimber's establishment, from the Doctor himself down to Mr. Toots, and up again, in the scale of intellect, to Mr. Feeder, B.A., are among the most admirable of all the great humourist's creations. Against this ample provision for her poor little brother's nursing and training Florence has to set but her one Susan Nipper; but she is a host in herself, an absolutely original character among the thousands of *soubrettes* that are known to comedy and fiction, and one of the best tonic mixtures ever composed out of much humour and not a few grains of pathos. Her tartness has a cooling flavour of its own; but it is the Mrs. Pipchinses only

[1] It is, perhaps, worth pointing out, though it is not surprising, that Dickens had a strong sense of what I may call the poetry of the railway-train. Of the effect of the weird *Signalman's Story* in one of his Christmas numbers it is not very easy to rid one's self. There are excellent descriptions of the *rapidity* of a railway journey in the first chapter of *The Lazy Tour*, and in another *Household Words* paper, called *A Flight*.

upon whom she acts, as their type acted upon her, "like early gooseberries." Of course she has a favourite figure of speech belonging to herself, which rhetoricians would probably class among the figures "working by surplusage:"

"'Your Toxes and your Chickses may draw out my two front double teeth, Mrs. Richards, but that's no reason why I need offer 'em the whole set.'"

Dickens was to fall very largely into this habit of "labelling" his characters, as it has been called, by particular tricks or terms of speech; and there is a certain excess in this direction already in *Dombey and Son*, where not only Miss Nipper and Captain Cuttle and Mr. Toots, but Major Bagstock too and Cousin Feenix, are thus furnished forth. But the invention is still so fresh and the play of humour so varied, that this mannerism cannot be said as yet seriously to disturb them. A romantic charm of a peculiar kind clings to honest Captain Cuttle and the quaint home over which he mounts guard during the absence of its owner. The nautical colouring and concomitant fun apart—for only Smollett could have drawn Jack Bunsby's fellow, though the character in his hands would have been differently accentuated—Dickens has never approached more nearly to the manner of Sir Walter Scott than in this singularly attractive part of his book. Elsewhere the story passes into that sphere of society in describing which Dickens was, as a novelist, rarely very successful. But though Edith is cold and unreal, there is, it cannot be denied, human nature in the pigments and figments of her hideous old mother; and, to outward appearance at all events, the counterparts of her apoplectic admirer, Major Bagstock, still pace those pavements and promenades which it suits them to frequent. Cousin Feenix is like-

wise very far from impossible, and is besides extremely delightful—and a good fellow too at bottom, so that the sting of the satire is here taken away. On the other hand, the meeting between the *sacs et parchemins* at Mr. Dombey's house is quite out of focus.

The book has other heights and depths, and pleasant and unpleasant parts and passages. But enough has been said to recall the exuberant creative force, and the marvellous strength of pathos and humour which *Dombey and Son* proves that Dickens, now near the very height of his powers as a writer of fiction, possessed. In one of his public readings many years afterwards, when he was reciting the adventures of Little Dombey, he narrates that "a very good fellow," whom he noticed in the stalls, could not refrain from wiping the tears out of his eyes as often as he thought that Toots was coming on. And just as Toots had become a reality to this good fellow, so Toots and Toots's little friend, and divers other personages in this story, have become realities to half the world that reads the English tongue, and to many besides. What higher praise could be given to this wonderful book? Of all the works of its author none has more powerfully and more permanently taken hold of the imagination of its readers. Though he conjured up only pictures familiar to us from the aspect of our own streets and our own homes, he too wielded a wizard's wand.

After the success of *Dombey* it might have seemed that nothing further was wanting to crown the prosperity of Dickens's literary career. While the publication of this story was in progress he had concluded arrangements for the issue of his collected writings, in a cheap edition, which began in the year 1847, and which he dedicated "to the English people, in whose approval, if the books be true

in spirit, they will live, and out of whose memory, if they be false, they will very soon die." He who could thus proudly appeal to posterity was already, beyond all dispute, the people's chosen favourite among its men of letters. That position he was not to lose so long as he lived; but even at this time the height had not been reached to which (in the almost unanimous judgment of those who love his writings) he was in his next work to attain.

CHAPTER IV.

"DAVID COPPERFIELD."

[1847–1851.]

THE five years, reckoned roughly, from the beginning of 1847 to the close of 1851, were most assuredly the season in which the genius of Dickens produced its richest and rarest fruit. When it opened he was still at work upon *Dombey and Son;* towards its end he was already engaged upon the earliest portions of *Bleak House.* And it was during the interval that he produced a book cherished by himself with an affection differing in kind, as well as in degree, from the common fondness of an author for his literary offspring, and a pearl without a peer amongst the later fictions of our English school—*David Copperfield.* To this period also belong, it is true, not a few lesser productions of the same ready pen; for the last of his Christmas books was written in 1848, and in 1850 his weekly periodical, *Household Words*, began to run its course. There was much play too in these busy years, but all more or less of the kind which his good-humoured self-irony afterwards very correctly characterised:

"'Play!' said Thomas Idle. 'Here is a man goes systematically tearing himself to pieces, and putting himself through an incessant course of training, as if he were always under articles to fight a match for the champion's belt, and he calls it "Play." Play!' ex

claimed Thomas Idle, scornfully contemplating his one boot in the air; 'you can't play. You don't know what it is. You make work of everything!'"

"A man," added the same easy philosopher, "who can do nothing by halves appears to me to be a fearful man." And as at all times in Dickens's life, so most emphatically in these years when his physical powers seemed ready to meet every demand, and the elasticity of his mind seemed equal to every effort, he did nothing by halves. Within this short space of time not only did he write his best book, and conduct a weekly journal of solid merit through its most trying stage, but he also established his reputation as one of the best "unpolitical" speakers in the country; and as an amateur actor and manager successfully weathered what may be called three theatrical seasons, to the labours and glories of which it would be difficult to find a parallel even in the records of that most exacting of all social amusements. One likes to think of him in these years of vigorous manhood, no longer the fair youth with the flowing locks of Maclise's charming portrait, but not yet, I suppose, altogether the commanding and rather stern presence of later years. Mr. Frith's portrait was not painted till 1859, by which time the face occasionally had a more set expression, and the entire personality a more weather-beaten appearance, than this well-known picture suggests. But even eight years before this date, when Dickens was acting in Lord Lytton's comedy the part of a young man of *mode*, Mr. Sala's well-known comparison of his outward man to "some prosperous sea-captain home from a sea-voyage," was thought applicable to him by another shrewd observer, Mr. R. H. Horne, who says that, fashionable "make-up" notwithstanding, "he presented a figure that would have made a good portrait of a Dutch

privateer after having taken a capital prize." And in 1856 Ary Scheffer, to whom when sitting for his portrait he had excused himself for being a difficult subject, "received the apology as strictly his due, and said, with a vexed air, 'At this moment, *mon cher* Dickens, you look more like an energetic Dutch admiral than anything else;' for which I apologised again." In 1853, in the sympathetic neighbourhood of Boulogne, he was "growing a mustache," and, by 1856, a beard of the *Henri Quatre* type had been added; but even before that time we may well believe that he was, as Mr. Sala says, "one of the few men whose individuality was not effaced by the mournful conventionality of evening-dress." Even in morning-dress he unconsciously contrived, born actor as he was, to have something unusual about him; and, if report speaks the truth, even at the sea-side, when most prodigal of ease, he was careful to dress the character.

The five years of which more especially I am speaking brought him repeatedly face to face with the public, and within hearing of the applause that was becoming more and more of a necessity to him. They were thus unmistakably amongst the very happiest years of his life. The shadow that was to fall upon his home can hardly yet have been visible even in the dim distance. For this the young voices were too many and too fresh around him behind the garden-wall in Devonshire Terrace, and amongst the autumnal corn on the cliffs at Broadstairs. "They are all in great force," he writes to his wife, in September, 1850, and "much excited with the expectation of receiving you on Friday;" and I only wish I had space to quote the special report sent on this occasion to the absent mother concerning her precocious three-year-old. What sorrowful experiences he in these years underwent were

such as few men escape amongst the chances of life. In 1848 he lost the sister who had been the companion of his earliest days, and three years later his father, whom he had learned to respect as well as love. Not long afterwards his little Dora, the youngest of his flock, was suddenly taken from him. Meanwhile, his old friends clung to him. Indeed, I never heard that he lost the affection of any one who had been attached to him; and though the circle of his real intimates was never greatly widened, yet he was on friendly or even familiar terms with many whose names belong to the history of their times. Amongst these were the late Lord Lytton—then Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton—whose splendid abilities were still devoted mainly to literary labours, and between whom and Dickens there were more points of contrast than might at first sight appear. Of Thackeray, too, he seems to have been coming to know more; and with Leech, more especially during a summer sojourn of both their families at Bonchurch, in 1849, he grew intimate. Mr. Monckton Milnes—then, and since as Lord Houghton, *semper amicus, semper hospes* both to successful merit and to honest endeavour—Lord Carlisle, and others who adorned the great world under more than one of its aspects, were, of course, welcome friends and acquaintances; and even Carlyle occasionally found his way to the house of his staunch admirer, though he might declare that he was, in the language of Mr. Peggotty's house-keeper, "a lorn lone creature, and everything went contrairy with him."

It is not very easy to describe the personal habits of a man who is found seeing the spring in at Brighton and the autumn out at Broadstairs, and in the interval "strolling" through the chief towns of the kingdom at the head of a large company of ladies and gentlemen, according to

the description which he put into Mrs. Gamp's mouth, "with a great box of papers under his arm, a-talking to everybody wery indistinct, and exciting of himself dreadful." But since under ordinary circumstances he made, even in outward matters and arrangements of detail, a home for himself wherever he was, and as a rule cared little for the society of companions whose ideas and ways of life were foreign to his own, certain habits had become second nature to him, and to others he adhered with sophistical tenacity. He was an early riser, if for no other reason, because every man in whose work imagination plays its part must sometimes be alone; and Dickens has told us that there was to him something incomparably solemn in the still solitude of the morning. But it was only exceptionally, and when hard-pressed by the necessities of his literary labours, that he wrote before breakfast; in general he was contented with the ordinary working hours of the morning, not often writing after luncheon, and, except in early life, never in the evening. Ordinarily, when engaged on a work of fiction, he considered three of his not very large MS. pages a good, and four an excellent, day's work; and, while very careful in making his corrections clear and unmistakable, he never rewrote what a morning's labour had ultimately produced. On the other hand, he was frequently slow in beginning a story, being, as he himself says, affected by something like despondency at such times, or, as he elsewhere humorously puts it, "going round and round the idea, as you see a bird in his cage go about and about his sugar before he touches it." A temperate liver, he was at the same time a zealous devotee of bodily exercise. He had not as yet given up riding, and is found, in 1848, spending the whole of a March day, with Forster, Leech, and Mark Lemon, in rid-

ing over every part of Salisbury Plain. But walking exercise was at once his forte and his fanaticism. He is said to have constructed for himself a theory that, to every portion of the day given to intellectual labour should correspond an equal number of hours spent in walking; and frequently, no doubt, he gave up his morning's chapter before he had begun it, "entirely persuading himself that he was under a moral obligation" to do his twenty miles on the road. By day he found in the London thoroughfares stimulative variety, and at a later date he states it to be "one of his fancies that even his idlest walk must have its appointed destination;" and by night, in seasons of intellectual excitement, he found in these same streets the refreshment of isolation among crowds. But the walks he loved best were long stretches on the cliffs or across the downs by the sea, where, following the track of his "breathers," one half expects to meet him coming along against the wind at four and a half miles an hour, the very embodiment of energy and brimful of life.

And besides this energy he carried with him, wheresoever he pitched his tent, what was the second cause of his extraordinary success in so much of the business of life as it fell to him to perform. He hated disorder as Sir Artegal hated injustice; and if there was anything against which he took up his parable with burning indignation, it was slovenliness, and half-done work, and "sloddiness" of all kinds. His love of order made him always the most regular of men. "Everything with him," Miss Hogarth told me, "went as by clock-work; his movements, his absences from home, and the times of his return were all fixed beforehand, and it was seldom that he failed to adhere to what he had fixed." Like most men endowed with a superfluity of energy, he prided himself on his punctual-

ity. He could not live in a room or in a house till he had put every piece of furniture into its proper place, nor could he begin to work till all his writing-gear was at hand, with no item missing or misplaced. Yet he did not, like so many, combine with these habits and tendencies a saving disposition. "No man," he said of himself, "attaches less importance to the possession of money, or less disparagement to the want of it, than I do." His circumstances, though easy, were never such as to warrant a display to which, perhaps, certain qualities of his character might have inclined him; even at a much later date he described himself—rather oddly, perhaps—as "a man of moderate savings, always supporting a very expensive public position." But, so far as I can gather, he never had a reasonable want which he could not and did not satisfy, though at the same time he cared for very few of the pursuits or amusements that are apt to drain much larger resources than his. He never had to think twice about country or sea-side quarters; wherever it might suit his purpose or fancy to choose them, at one of his south-coast haunts or, for his wife's health, at Malvern, thither he went; and when the whim seized him for a trip *en garçon* to any part of England or to Paris, he had only to bid the infallible Anne pack his trunk. He was a provident as well as an affectionate father; but the cost of educating his numerous family seems to have caused him no serious anxiety. In 1849 he sent his eldest son to Eton. And while he had sworn a kind of *vendetta* against begging-letter writers, and afterwards used to parry the attacks of his pertinacious enemies by means of carefully-prepared written forms, his hand seems to have been at all times open for charity.

Some of these personal characteristics of Dickens were

to be brought out with remarkable vividness during the period of his life which forms the special subject of the present chapter. Never was he more thoroughly himself than as a theatrical manager and actor, surrounded by congenial associates. He starred it to his heart's content at the country seat of his kind Lausanne friends, Mr. and Mrs. Watson. But the first occasion on which he became publicly known in both the above-mentioned capacities was the reproduction of the amateur performance of *Every Man in his Humour*. This time the audiences were to be in Manchester and Liverpool, where it was hoped that a golden harvest might be reaped for Leigh Hunt, who was at that time in sore straits. As it chanced, a civil-list pension was just about this time—1847—conferred upon the most unaffectedly graceful of all modern writers of English verse. It was accordingly resolved to divert part of the proceeds of the undertaking in favour of a worthy playwright, the author of *Paul Pry*. The comedy was acted with brilliant success at Manchester, on July 26, and at Liverpool two days later; and then the "managerial miseries," which Dickens had enjoyed with his whole heart and soul, were over for the nonce. Already, however, in the following year, 1848, an excellent reason was found for their recommencement; and nine performances of Ben Jonson's play, this time alternated with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, were given by Dickens's "company of amateurs"—the expression is his own—at the Haymarket, and in the theatres of five of the largest towns in the kingdom, for the benefit of Sheridan Knowles. Nothing could have been more honourable than Dickens's readiness to serve the interests of an actor with whom, but for his own generous temper, he would only a few months before have been involved in a wordy quarrel. In *The*

Merry Wives, the manager acted Justice Shallow to Mark Lemon's Falstaff. Dame Quickly was played by Mrs. Cowden Clarke, who speedily became a favourite correspondent of Dickens. But the climax of these excitements arrived in the year of wonders, 1851, when, with a flourish of trumpets resounding through the world of fashion as well as of letters, the comedy *Not so Bad as We Seem*, written for the occasion by Bulwer Lytton, was performed under Dickens's management at Devonshire House, in the presence of the Queen, for the benefit of the Guild of Literature and Art. The object was a noble one, though the ultimate result of the scheme has been an almost pitiable failure; and nothing was spared, by the host or the actors, to make the effect worthy of it. While some of the most popular men of letters took parts in the clever and effective play, its scenery was painted by some of the most eminent among the English artists. Dickens was fired by the ardour of the enterprise, and, proceeding on his principle that the performance could not possibly "be a success if the smallest pepper-corn of arrangement were omitted," covered himself and his associates with glory. From Devonshire House play and theatre were transferred to the Hanover Square Rooms, where the farce of *Mr. Nightingale's Diary* was included in the performance, of which some vivid reminiscences have been published by one of the few survivors of that noble company, Mr. R. H. Horne. Other accounts corroborate his recollections of the farce, which was the triumph of "gag," and would have been reckoned a masterpiece in the old *commedia dell' arte*. The characters played by Dickens included Sam Weller turned waiter; a voluble barrister by the name of Mr. Gabblewig; a hypochondriac suffering from a prescription of mustard and milk: the Gampish

mother of a charity-boy (Mr. Egg); and her brother, a stone-deaf old sexton, who appeared to be "at least ninety years of age." The last-named assumption seems to have been singularly effective:

"After repeated shoutings ('It's of no use whispering to me, young man') of the word 'buried'—'*Brewed!* Oh yes, sir, I have brewed many a good gallon of ale in my time. The last batch I brewed, sir, was finer than all the rest—the best ale ever brewed in the county. It used to be called in our parts here "Samson with his hair on!" in allusion'—here his excitement shook the tremulous frame into coughing and wheezing—'in allusion to its great strength.' He looked from face to face to see if his feat was duly appreciated, and his venerable jest understood by those around; and then, softly repeating, with a glimmering smile, 'in allusion to its great strength,' he turned about, and made his exit, like one moving towards his own grave while he thinks he is following the funeral of another."

From London the company travelled into the country, where their series of performances was not closed till late in the succeeding year, 1852. Dickens was from first to last the manager, and the ruling spirit of the undertaking. Amongst his latest recruits Mr. Wilkie Collins is specially mentioned by Forster. The acquaintance which thus began soon ripened into a close and lasting friendship, and became, with the exception of that with Forster himself, the most important of all Dickens's personal intimacies for the history of his career as an author.

Speech-making was not in quite the same sense, or to quite the same degree, as amateur acting and managing, a voluntary labour on Dickens's part. Not that he was one of those to whom the task of occasionally addressing a public audience is a pain or even a burden. Indeed, he was a born orator; for he possessed both that strong and elastic imaginative power which enables a man to place

himself at once in sympathy with his audience, and that gift of speech, pointed, playful, and where necessary impetuous, which pleads well in any assembly for any cause. He had moreover the personal qualifications of a handsome manly presence, a sympathetic eye, and a fine flexible voice, which, as his own hints on public speaking show, he managed with care and intelligence. He had, he says, "fought with beasts (oratorically) in divers arenas." But though a speaker in whom ease bred force, and force ease, he was the reverse of a mere builder of phrases and weaver of periods. "Mere holding forth," he declared, "I utterly detest, abominate, and abjure." His innate hatred of talk for mere talk's sake had doubtless been intensified by his early reporting experiences, and by what had become his stereotyped notion of our parliamentary system. At the Administration Reform meeting in 1855 he stated that he had never before attended a public meeting. On the other hand, he had been for already several years in great request for meetings of a different kind, concerned with the establishment or advancement of educational or charitable institutions in London and other great towns of the country. His addresses from the chair were often of remarkable excellence; and this not merely because crowded halls and increased subscription-lists were their concomitants, and because the happiness of his humour—never out of season, and even on such occasions often singularly prompt—sent every one home in good spirits. In these now forgotten speeches on behalf of Athenæums and Mechanics' Institutes, or of actors' and artists' and newsmen's charities, their occasional advocate never appears occasional. Instead of seeming to have just mastered his brief while the audience was taking its seats, or to have become for the first time deeply inter-

ested in his subject in the interval between his soup and his speech, the cause which Dickens pleads never has in him either an imperfectly informed or a half-indifferent representative. Amongst many charming illustrations of a vein of oratory in which he has been equalled by very few if by any public men of his own or the succeeding generation, I will instance only one address, though it belongs to a considerably later date than the time of *David Copperfield*. Nothing, however, that Dickens has ever written—not even *David Copperfield* itself—breathes a tenderer sympathy for the weakness of unprotected childhood than the beautiful little speech delivered by him on February 9, 1858, on behalf of the London Hospital for Sick Children. Beginning with some touches of humour concerning the spoilt children of the rich, the orator goes on to speak of the "spoilt children" of the poor, illustrating with concrete directness both the humorous and the pathetic side of his subject, and after a skilfully introduced sketch of the capabilities and wants of the "infant institution" for which he pleads, ending with an appeal, founded on a fancy of Charles Lamb, to the support of the "dream-children" belonging to each of his hearers: "the dear child you love, the dearer child you have lost, the child you might have had, the child you certainly have been." This is true eloquence, of a kind which aims at something besides opening purse-strings. In 1851 he had spoken in the same vein of mixed humour and pathos on behalf of his clients, the poor actors, when, unknown to him, a little child of his own was lying dead at home. But in these years of his life, as indeed at all times, his voice was at the service of such causes as had his sympathy; it was heard at Birmingham, at Leeds, at Glasgow; distance was of little moment to his ener-

getic nature; and as to trouble, how could he do anything by halves?

There was yet a third kind of activity, distinct from that of literary work pure and simple, in which Dickens in these years for the first time systematically engaged. It has been seen how he had long cherished the notion of a periodical conducted by himself, and marked by a unity of design which should make it in a more than ordinary sense his own paper. With a genius like his, which attached itself to the concrete, very much depended at the outset upon the choice of a title. *The Cricket* could not serve again, and for some time the notion of an omnipresent *Shadow*, with something, if possible, tacked to it "expressing the notion of its being cheerful, useful, and always welcome," seemed to promise excellently. For a rather less ambitious design, however, a rather less ambitious title was sought, and at last fortunately found, in the phrase, rendered proverbial by Shakspeare, "*Household Words.*" "We hope," he wrote a few weeks before the first number appeared, on March 30, 1850, "to do some solid good, and we mean to be as cheery and pleasant as we can." But *Household Words*, which in form and in cost was to be a paper for the multitude, was to be something more than agreeable and useful and cheap. It was to help in casting out the many devils that had taken up their abode in popular periodical literature, the "bastards of the Mountain," and the foul fiends who dealt in infamous scurrility, and to do this with the aid of a charm more potent than the most lucid argument and the most abundant facts. "In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor," says the *Preliminary Word* in the first number, "we would tenderly cherish that light of fancy which is inherent in the human

breast." To this purpose it was the editor's constant and deliberate endeavour to bind his paper. "KEEP 'HOUSEHOLD WORDS' IMAGINATIVE!" is the "solemn and continual Conductorial Injunction" which three years after the foundation of the journal he impresses, with the artful aid of capitals, upon his faithful coadjutor, Mr. W. H. Wills. In his own contributions he was not forgetful of this maxim, and the most important of them, the serial story, *Hard Times*, was written with the express intention of pointing it as a moral.

There are, I suppose, in addition to the many mysterious functions performed by the editor of a literary journal, two of the very highest significance; in the first place, the choice of his contributors, and then, if the expression may be used, the management of them. In both respects but one opinion seems to exist of Dickens's admirable qualities as an editor. Out of the many contributors to *Household Words*, and its kindred successor, *All the Year Round*—some of whom are happily still among living writers—it would be invidious to select for mention a few in proof of the editor's discrimination. But it will not be forgotten that the first number of the earlier journal contained the beginning of a tale by Mrs. Gaskell, whose name will long remain a household word in England, both North and South. And a periodical could hardly be deemed one-sided which included among its contributors scholars and writers of the distinction belonging to the names of Forster and Mr. Henry Morley, together with humorous observers of men and things such as Mr. Sala and Albert Smith. On the other hand, *Household Words* had what every literary journal ought to have, an individuality of its own; and this individuality was, of course, that of its editor. The mannerisms of Dickens's style afterwards came to be im-

itated by some among his contributors; but the general unity perceptible in the journal was the natural and legitimate result of the fact that it stood under the independent control of a vigorous editor, assisted by a sub-editor—Mr. W. H. Wills—of rare trustworthiness. Dickens had a keen eye for selecting subjects from a definite field, a ready skill for shaping, if necessary, the articles accepted by him, and a genius for providing them with expressive and attractive titles. Fiction and poetry apart, these articles have mostly a social character or bearing, although they often deviate into the pleasant paths of literature or art; and usually, but by no means always, the scenes or associations with which they connect themselves are of England, English.

Nothing could surpass the unflagging courtesy shown by Dickens towards his contributors, great or small, old or new, and his patient interest in their endeavours, while he conducted *Household Words*, and afterwards *All the Year Round*. Of this there is evidence enough to make the records of the office in Wellington Street a pleasant page in the history of journalism. He valued a good workman when he found him, and was far too reasonable and generous to put his own stamp upon all the good metal that passed through his hands. Even in his Christmas Numbers he left the utmost possible freedom to his associates. Where he altered or modified it was as one who had come to know the pulse of the public; and he was not less considerate with novices, than he was frank and explicit with experts, in the writer's art. The articles in his journal being anonymous, he was not tempted to use names as baits for the public, though many who wrote for him were men or women of high literary reputation. And he kept his doors open. While some editors deem it their duty to ward off would-be contributors, as some ministers of state

think it theirs to get rid of deputations, Dickens sought to ignore instead of jealously guarding the boundaries of professional literature. Nothing in this way ever gave him greater delight than to have welcomed and published several poems sent to him under a feigned name, but which he afterwards discovered to be the first-fruits of the charming poetical talent of Miss Adelaide Procter, the daughter of his old friend "Barry Cornwall."

In the preparation of his own papers, or of those which, like the Christmas Numbers, he composed conjointly with one or more of his familiars, he spared no labour and thought no toil too great. At times, of course, he, like all periodical writers who cannot be merry every Wednesday or caustic every Saturday, felt the pressure of the screw. "As to two comic articles," he exclaims on one occasion, "or two any sort of articles, out of me, that's the intensest extreme of no-goism." But, as a rule, no great writer ever ran more gaily under his self-imposed yoke. His "Uncommercial Travels," as he at a later date happily christened them, familiarised him with whatever parts or aspects of London his long walks had still left unexplored; and he was as conscientious in hunting up the details of a complicated subject as in finding out the secrets of an obscure pursuit or trade. Accomplished antiquarians and "commissioners" assisted him in his labours; but he was no *roi fainéant* on the editorial sofa which he so complacently describes. Whether he was taking *A Walk in a Workhouse*, or knocking at the door of another with the supernumerary waifs in Whitechapel, or *On* (night) *Duty with Inspector Field* among the worst of the London slums, he was always ready to see with his own eyes; after which the photographic power of his pen seemed always capable of doing the rest. Occasionally he treats topics more

properly journalistic, but he is most delightful when he takes his ease in his *English* or his *French Watering-place*, or carries his readers with him on *A Flight to Paris*, bringing before them, as it were, in breathless succession, every inch of the familiar journey. Happiest of all is he when, with his friend Mr. Wilkie Collins—this, however, not until the autumn of 1857—he starts on *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, the earlier chapters of which furnish some of the best specimens of his most humorous prose. Neither at the same time does he forget himself to enforce the claim of his journal to strengthen the imaginary side of literature. In an assumed character he allows a veteran poet to carry him *By Rail to Parnassus*, and even good-humouredly banters an old friend, George Cruikshank, for having committed *Frauds on the Fairies* by re-editing legendary lore with the view of inculcating the principle of total abstinence.

Such, then, were some of the channels in which the intense mental and physical energy of Dickens found a congenial outlet in these busy years. Yet in the very midst of this multifarious activity the mysterious and controlling power of his genius enabled him to collect himself for the composition of a work of fiction which, as I have already said, holds, and will always continue to hold, a place of its own among its works. "Of all my books," he declares, "I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child—and his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD!" He parted from the story with a pang, and when in after life he returned to its perusal, he was hardly able to master the emotions which it recalled; perhaps even he

hardly knew what the effort of its production had cost him.

The first number of *David Copperfield* was published in May, 1849—the last in November, 1850. To judge from the difficulty which Dickens found in choosing a title for his story—of which difficulty plentiful evidence remains in MS. at South Kensington—he must have been fain to delay longer even than usual on the threshold. In the end the name of the hero evolved itself out of a series of transformations, from Trotfield and Trotbury to Copperboy, Copperstone—"Copperfull" being reserved as a *lectio varians* for Mrs. Crupp—and *Copperfield*. Then at last the pen could fall seriously to work, and, proceeding slowly at first—for the first page of the MS. contains a great number of alterations—dip itself now into black, now into blue ink, and in a small writing, already contrasting with the bolder hand of earlier days, produce page upon page of an incomparable book. No doubt what so irresistibly attracted Dickens to *David Copperfield*, and what has since fascinated many readers, more or less conscious of the secret of the charm, is the autobiographical element in the story. Until the publication of Forster's *Life* no reader of *Copperfield* could be aware of the pang it must have cost Dickens to lay bare, though to unsuspecting eyes, the story of experiences which he had hitherto kept all but absolutely secret, and to which his own mind could not recur without a quivering sensitiveness. No reader could trace, as the memory of Dickens always must have traced, some of the most vivid of those experiences, imbued though they were with the tints of a delightfully playful humor, in the doings and dealings of Mr. Wilkins Micawber, whose original, by a strange coincidence, was passing tranquilly away out of

life, while his comic counterpart was blossoming into a whimsical immortality. And no reader could divine, what very probably even the author may hardly have ventured to confess to himself, that in the lovely little idyl of the loves of Doady and Dora—with Jip, as Dora's father might have said, intervening—there were, besides the reminiscences of an innocent juvenile amour, the vestiges of a man's unconfessed though not altogether unrepressed disappointment—the sense that "there was always something wanting." But in order to be affected by a personal or autobiographical element in a fiction or poem, it is by no means necessary to be aware of its actual bearing and character, or even of its very existence. *Amelia* would gain little by illustrative notes concerning the experiences of the first Mrs. Fielding. To excite in a work of fiction the peculiar kind of interest of which I am speaking the existence of an autobiographical substratum need not be apparent in it, nor need its presence be even suspected. Enough, if it be *there*. But it had far better be away altogether, unless the novelist has so thoroughly fused this particular stream of metal with the mass filling his mould that the result is an integral artistic whole. Such was, however, the case with *David Copperfield*, which of all Dickens's fictions is on the whole the most perfect as a work of art. Personal reminiscences which lay deep in the author's breast are, as effects, harmonised with local associations old and new. Thus, Yarmouth, painted in the story with singular poetic truthfulness, had only quite recently been seen by Dickens for the first time, on a holiday trip. His imagination still subdued to itself all the elements with which he worked; and, whatever may be thought of the construction of this story, none of his other books equals it in that harmony of tone

which no artist can secure unless by recasting all his materials.

As to the construction of *David Copperfield*, however, I frankly confess that I perceive no serious fault in it. It is a story with a plot, and not merely a string of adventures and experiences, like little Davy's old favourites upstairs at Blunderstone. In the conduct of this plot blemishes may here and there occur. The boy's flight from London, and the direction which it takes, are insufficiently accounted for. A certain amount of obscurity, as well perhaps as of improbability, pervades the relations between Uriah and the victim, round whom the unspeakably slimy thing writhes and wriggles. On the other hand, the mere conduct of the story has much that is beautiful in it. Thus, there is real art in the way in which the scene of Barkis's death—written with admirable moderation—prepares for the "greater loss" at hand for the mourning family. And in the entire treatment of his hero's double love story Dickens has, to my mind, avoided that discord which, in spite of himself, jars upon the reader both in *Esmond* and in *Adam Bede*. The best constructed part of *David Copperfield* is, however, unmistakably the story of Little Emily and her kinsfolk. This is most skilfully interwoven with the personal experiences of David, of which—except in its very beginnings—it forms no integral part; and throughout the reader is haunted by a presentiment of the coming catastrophe, though unable to divine the tragic force and justice of its actual accomplishment. A touch altered here and there in Steerforth, with the Rosa Dartle episode excluded or greatly reduced, and this part of *David Copperfield* might challenge comparison as to workmanship with the whole literature of modern fiction.

Of the idyl of Davy and Dora what shall I say? Its earliest stages are full of the gayest comedy. What, for instance, could surpass the history of the picnic—where was it? perhaps it was near Guildford. At that feast an imaginary rival, "Red Whisker," made the salad—how could they eat it?—and "voted himself into the charge of the wine-cellar, which he constructed, *being an ingenious beast*, in the hollow trunk of a tree." Better still are the backward ripples in the course of true love; best of all the deep wisdom of Miss Mills, in whose nature mental trial and suffering supplied, in some measure, the place of years. In the narrative of the young house-keeping David's real trouble is most skilfully mingled with the comic woes of the situation; and thus the idyl almost imperceptibly passes into the last phase, where the clouds dissolve in a rain of tears. The genius which conceived and executed these closing scenes was touched by a pity towards the fictitious creatures of his own imagination, which melted his own heart; and thus his pathos is here irresistible.

The inventive power of Dickens in none of his other books indulged itself so abundantly in the creation of eccentric characters, but neither was it in any so admirably tempered by taste and feeling. It contains no character which could strictly be called grotesque, unless it be little Miss Mowcher. Most of her outward peculiarities Dickens had copied from a living original; but receiving a remonstrance from the latter, he good-humouredly altered the use he had intended to make of the character, and thereby spoiled what there was in it—not much, in my opinion—to spoil. Mr. Dick belongs to a species of eccentric personages—mad people, in a word—for which Dickens as a writer had a curious liking; but though

there is consequently no true humour in this character, it helps to bring out the latent tenderness in another. David's Aunt is a figure which none but a true humourist such as Sterne or Dickens could have drawn, and she must have sprung from the author's brain armed *cap-à-pie* as she appeared in her garden before his little double. Yet even Miss Betsey Trotwood was not altogether a creation of the fancy, for at Broadstairs the locality is still pointed out where the "one great outrage of her life" was daily renewed. In the other chief characters of this story the author seems to rely entirely on natural truthfulness. He must have had many opportunities of noting the ways of seamen and fishermen, but the occupants of the old boat near Yarmouth possess the typical characteristics with which the experience and the imagination of centuries have agreed to credit the "salt" division of mankind. Again, he had had his own experience of shabby-genteel life, and of the struggle which he had himself seen a happy and a buoyant temperament maintaining against a sea of trouble. But Mr. Micawber, whatever features may have been transferred to him, is the type of a whole race of men who will not vanish from the face of the earth so long as the hope which lives eternal in the human breast is only temporarily suspended by the laws of debtor and creditor, and is always capable of revival with the aid of a bowl of milk-punch. A kindlier and a merrier, a more humorous and a more genuine character was never conceived than this; and if anything was wanted to complete the comicality of the conception, it was the wife of his bosom with the twins at her own, and her mind made up *not* to desert Mr. Micawber. Delightful too in his way, though of a class more common in Dickens, is Tommy Traddles, the genial picture of whose married life in chambers in Gray's Inn,

with the dearest girl in the world and her five sisters, including the beauty, on a visit, may have been suggested by kindly personal reminiscences of youthful days. In contrast to these characters, the shambling, fawning, villanous hypocrisy of Uriah Heep is a piece of intense and elaborate workmanship, almost cruelly done without being overdone. It was in his figures of hypocrites that Dickens's satirical power most diversely displayed itself; and by the side of Uriah Heep in this story, literally so in the prison-scene at the close, stands another species of the race, the valet Littimer, a sketch which Thackeray himself cou'd not have surpassed.

Thus, then, I must leave the book, with its wealth of pathos and humour, with the glow of youth still tinging its pages, but with the gentler mood of manhood pervading it from first to last. The *reality* of *David Copperfield* is, perhaps, the first feature in it likely to strike the reader new to its charms; but a closer acquaintance will produce, and familiarity will enhance, the sense of its wonderful *art*. Nothing will ever destroy the popularity of a work of which it can truly be said that, while offering to his muse a gift not less beautiful than precious, its author put into it his life's blood.

CHAPTER V.

CHANGES.

[1852–1858.]

I HAVE spoken of both the intellectual and the physical vigour of Charles Dickens as at their height in the years of which the most enduring fruit was the most delightful of all his fictions. But there was no break in his activity after the achievement of this or any other of his literary successes, and he was never harder at work than during the seven years of which I am about to speak, although in this period also occasionally he was to be found hard at play. Its beginning saw him settled in his new and cheerfully-furnished abode at Tavistock House, of which he had taken possession in October, 1851. At its close he was master of the country residence which had been the dream of his childhood, but he had become a stranger to that tranquillity of mind without which no man's house is truly his home. Gradually, but surely, things had then, or a little before, come to such a pass that he wrote to his faithful friend: "I am become incapable of rest. I am quite confident I should rust, break, and die, if I spared myself. Much better to die, doing. What I am in that way Nature made me first, and my way of life has of late, alas! confirmed." Early in 1852 the youngest of his children had been born to him—the boy whose

babyhood once more revived in him a tenderness the depth of which no eccentric humours and fantastic *sobriquets* could conceal. In May, 1858, he had separated from the mother of his children; and though self-sacrificing affection was at hand to watch over them and him, yet that domestic life of which he had become the prophet and poet to hundreds of thousands was in its fairest and fullest form at an end for himself.

In the earlier of these years Dickens's movements were still very much of the same kind, and varied much after the same fashion, as in the period described in my last chapter. In 1852 the series of amateur performances in the country was completed; but time was found for a summer residence in Camden Crescent, Dover. During his stay there, and during most of his working hours in this and the following year—the spring of which was partly spent at Brighton—he was engaged upon his new story, *Bleak House*, published in numbers dating from March, 1852, to September, 1853. "To let you into a secret," he had written to his lively friend, Miss Mary Boyle, from Dover, "I am not quite sure that I ever did like, or ever shall like, anything quite so well as *Copperfield*. But I foresee, I think, some very good things in *Bleak House*." There is no reason to believe that, by the general public, this novel was at the time of its publication a whit less favourably judged or less eagerly read than its predecessor. According to the author's own testimony it "took extraordinarily, especially during the last five or six months" of its issue, and "retained its immense circulation from the first, beating dear old *Copperfield* by a round ten thousand or more." To this day the book has its staunch friends, some of whom would perhaps be slow to confess by which of the elements in the story they are most forcibly attract

ed. On the other hand, *Bleak House* was probably the first of Dickens's works which furnished a suitable text to a class of censors whose precious balms have since descended upon his head with constant reiteration. The power of amusing being graciously conceded to the "man of genius," his book was charged with "absolute want of construction," and with being a heterogeneous compound made up of a meagre and melodramatic story, and a number of "odd folks that have to do with a long Chancery suit." Of the characters themselves it was asserted that, though in the main excessively funny, they were more like caricatures of the stage than studies from nature. Some approval was bestowed upon particular figures, but rather as types of the influence of externals than as real individualities; and while the character of the poor crossing-sweeper was generously praised, it was regretted that Dickens should never have succeeded in drawing "a man or woman whose lot is cast among the high-born or wealthy." He belonged, unfortunately, "in literature to the same class as his illustrator, Hablot Browne, in design, though he far surpasses the illustrator in range and power." In other words, he was essentially a caricaturist.

As applied to *Bleak House*, with which I am at present alone concerned, this kind of censure was in more ways than one unjust. So far as constructive skill was concerned, the praise given by Forster to *Bleak House* may be considered excessive; but there can be no doubt that, as compared, not with *Pickwick* and *Nickleby*, but with its immediate predecessor, *David Copperfield*, this novel exhibits a decided advance in that respect. In truth, Dickens in *Bleak House* for the first time emancipated himself from that form of novel which, in accordance with his great eighteenth-century favourites, he had hitherto more

or less consciously adopted — the novel of adventure, of which the person of the hero, rather than the machinery of the plot, forms the connecting element. It may be that the influence of Mr. Wilkie Collins was already strong upon him, and that the younger writer, whom Dickens was about this time praising for his unlikeness to the "conceited idiots who suppose that volumes are to be tossed off like pancakes," was already teaching something to, as well as learning something from, the elder. It may also be that the criticism which as editor of *Household Words* Dickens was now in the habit of judiciously applying to the fictions of others, unconsciously affected his own methods and processes. Certain it is that from this point of view *Bleak House* may be said to begin a new series among his works of fiction. The great Chancery suit and the fortunes of those concerned in it are not a disconnected background from which the mystery of Lady Dedlock's secret stands forth in relief; but the two main parts of the story are skilfully interwoven as in a Spanish double-plot. Nor is the success of the general action materially affected by the circumstance that the tone of Esther Summerson's diary is not altogether true. At the same time there is indisputably some unevenness in the construction of *Bleak House*. It drags, and drags very perceptibly, in some of its earlier parts. On the other hand, the interest of the reader is strongly revived when that popular favourite, Mr. Inspector Bucket, appears on the scene, and when, more especially in the admirably vivid narrative of Esther's journey with the detective, the nearness of the catastrophe exercises its exciting influence. Some of the machinery, moreover—such as the Smallweed family's part in the plot —is tiresome; and particular incidents are intolerably horrible or absurd—such as on the one hand the spontaneous

combustion (which is proved possible by the analogy of historical facts!), and on the other the intrusion of the oil-grinding Mr. Chadband into the solemn presence of Sir Leicester Dedlock's grief. But in general the parts of the narrative are well knit together; and there is a subtle skill in the way in which the two main parts of the story converge towards their common close.

The idea of making an impersonal object like a great Chancery suit the centre round which a large and manifold group of characters revolves, seems to savour of a drama rather than of a story. No doubt the theme suggested itself to Dickens with a very real purpose, and on the basis of facts which he might well think warranted him in his treatment of it; for, true artist though he was, the thought of exposing some national defect, of helping to bring about some real reform, was always paramount in his mind over any mere literary conception. *Primâ facie*, at least, and with all due deference to Chancery judges and eminent silk gowns like Mr. Blowers, the length of Chancery suits was a real public grievance, as well as a frequent private calamity. But even as a mere artistic notion the idea of Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce as diversely affecting those who lived by it, those who rebelled against it, those who died of it, was, in its way, of unique force; and while Dickens never brought to any other of his subjects so useful a knowledge of its external details—in times gone by he had served a "Kenge and Carboys" of his own—hardly any one of those subjects suggested so wide a variety of aspects for characteristic treatment.

For never before had his versatility in drawing character filled his canvas with so multitudinous and so various a host of personages. The legal profession, with its servitors and hangers-on of every degree, occupies the centre

of the picture. In this group no figure is more deserving of admiration than that of Mr. Tulkinghorn, the eminently respectable family solicitor, at whose very funeral, by a four-wheeled affliction, the good-will of the aristocracy manifests itself. We learn very little about him, and probably care less; but he interests us precisely as we should be interested by the real old family lawyer, about whom we might know and care equally little, were we to find him alone in the twilight, drinking his ancient port in his frescoed chamber in those fields where the shepherds play on Chancery pipes that have no stop. (Mr. Forster, by-the-way, omitted to point out to his readers, what the piety of American research has since put on record, that Mr. Tulkinghorn's house was a picture of the biographer's own residence.) The portrait of Mr. Vholes, who supports an unassailable but unenviable professional reputation for the sake of "the three dear girls at home," and a father whom he has to support "in the Vale of Taunton," is less attractive; but nothing could be more in its place in the story than the clammy tenacity of this legal ghoul and his "dead glove." Lower down in the great system of the law we come upon Mr. Guppy and his fellows, the very quintessence of cockney vulgarity, seasoned with a flavour of legal sharpness without which the rankness of the mixture would be incomplete. To the legal group Miss Flite, whose original, if I remember right, used to haunt the Temple as well as the precincts of the Chancery courts, may likewise be said to belong. She is quite legitimately introduced into the story — which cannot be said of all Dickens's madmen—because her madness associates itself with its main theme.

Much admiration has been bestowed upon the figures of an eccentric by or under plot in this story, in which the

family of the Jellybys and the august Mr. Turveydrop are, actively, or by passive endurance, engaged. The philanthropic section of *le monde où l'on s'ennuie* has never been satirised more tellingly, and, it must be added, more bitterly. Perhaps at the time of the publication of *Bleak House* the activity of our Mrs. Jellybys took a wider and more cosmopolitan sweep than in later days; for we read at the end of Esther's diary how Mrs. Jellyby "has been disappointed in Borrioboola Gha, which turned out a failure in consequence of the King of Borrioboola wanting to sell everybody—who survived the climate—for rum; but she has taken up with the rights of women to sit in Parliament, and Caddy tells me it is a mission involving more correspondence than the old one." But Mrs. Jellyby's interference in the affairs of other people is after all hurtful only because in busying herself with theirs she forgets her own. The truly offensive benefactress of her fellow-creatures is Mrs. Pardiggle, who, maxim in mouth and tract in hand, turns everything she approaches to stone. Among her victims are her own children, including Alfred, aged five, who has been induced to take an oath "never to use tobacco in any form."

The particular vein of feeling that led Dickens to the delineation of these satirical figures was one which never ran dry with him, and which suggested some forcible-feeble satire in his very last fiction. I call it a vein of feeling only; for he could hardly have argued in cold blood that the efforts which he ridicules were not misrepresented as a whole by his satire. When poor Jo on his death-bed is "asked whether he ever knew a prayer," and replies that he could never make anything out of those spoken by the gentlemen who "came down Tom-all-Alone's a-prayin'," but who "mostly sed as the t'other wuns prayed

wrong," the author brings a charge which he might not have found it easy to substantiate. Yet—with the exception of such isolated passages—the figure of Jo is in truth one of the most powerful protests that have been put forward on behalf of the friendless outcasts of our streets. Nor did the romantic element in the conception interfere with the effect of the realistic. If Jo, who seems at first to have been intended to be one of the main figures of the story, is in Dickens's best pathetic manner, the Bagnet family is in his happiest vein of quiet humour. Mr. Inspector Bucket, though not altogether free from mannerism, well deserves the popularity which he obtained. For this character, as the pages of *Household Words* testify, Dickens had made many studies in real life. The detective police-officer had at that time not yet become a standing figure of fiction and the drama, nor had the detective of real life begun to destroy the illusion.

Bleak House was least of all among the novels hitherto published by its author obnoxious to the charge persistently brought against him, that he was doomed to failure in his attempts to draw characters taken from any but the lower spheres of life—in his attempts, in short, to draw ladies and gentlemen. To begin with, one of the most interesting characters in the book—indeed, in its relation to the main idea of the story, the most interesting of all—is the youthful hero, if he is to be so called, Richard Carson. From the very nature of the conception the character is passive only; but the art and feeling are in their way unsurpassed with which the gradual collapse of a fine nature is here exhibited. Sir Leicester Dedlock, in some measure intended as a type of his class, has been condemned as wooden and unnatural; and no doubt the machinery of that part of the story in which he is con-

cerned creaks before it gets under way. On the other hand, after the catastrophe has overwhelmed him and his house, he becomes a really fine picture, unmarred by any Grandisonianisms in either thought or phrase, of a true gentleman, bowed but not warped by distress. Sir Leicester's relatives, both dead and living; Volumnia's sprightly ancestress on the wall, and that "fair Dedlock" herself; the whole cousinhood, debilitated and otherwise, but of one mind on such points as William Buffy's blameworthy neglect of his duty *when in office;* all these make up a very probable picture of a house great enough—or thinking itself great enough—to look at the affairs of the world from the family point of view. In Lady Dedlock alone a failure must be admitted; but she, with her wicked double, the uncanny French maid Hortense, exists only for the sake of the plot.

With all its merits, *Bleak House* has little of that charm which belongs to so many of Dickens's earlier stories, and to *David Copperfield* above all. In part, at least, this may be due to the excessive severity of the task which Dickens had set himself in *Bleak House;* for hardly any other of his works is constructed on so large a scale, or contains so many characters organically connected with the progress of its plot; and in part, again, to the half-didactic, half-satirical purport of the story, which weighs heavily on the writer. An overstrained tone announces itself on the very first page; an opening full of power—indeed, of genius—but pitched in a key which we feel at once will not, without effort, be maintained. On the second page the prose has actually become verse; or how else can one describe part of the following apostrophe?

"'This is the Court of Chancery, which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic

in every mad-house, and its dead in every church-yard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance; which gives to moneyed might the means abundantly of wearing out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart, that there is not an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, "Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!"'"

It was possibly with some thought of giving to *Bleak House* also, though in a different way, the close relation to his experiences of living men to which *David Copperfield* had owed so much, that Dickens introduced into it two *portraits*. Doubtless, at first, his intention had by no means gone so far as this. His constant counsellor always disliked his mixing up in his fictitious characters any personal reminiscences of particular men, experience having shown that in such cases the whole character came out *more like* than the author was aware. Nor can Dickens himself have failed to understand how such an experiment is always tempting, and always dangerous; how it is often irreconcilable with good feeling, and quite as often with good taste. In *Bleak House*, however, it occurred to him to introduce likenesses of two living men, both more or less well known to the public and to himself; and both of individualities too clearly marked for a portrait, or even a caricature, of either to be easily mistaken. Of that art of mystification which the authors of both English and French *romans à clef* have since practised with so much transient success, he was no master, and fortunately so; for what could be more ridiculous than that the reader's interest in a character should be stimulated, first, by its being evidently the late Lord P-lm-rst-n or the P—— of O——, and then by its being no less evidently somebody

else? It should be added that neither of the two portrait characters in *Bleak House* possesses the least importance for the conduct of the story, so that there is nothing to justify their introduction except whatever excellence may belong to them in themselves.

Lawrence Boythorn is described by Mr. Sydney Colvin as drawn from Walter Savage Landor with his intellectual greatness left out. It was, of course, unlikely that his intellectual greatness should be left in, the intention obviously being to reproduce what was eccentric in the ways and manner, with a suggestion of what was noble in the character, of Dickens's famous friend. Whether, had he attempted to do so, Dickens could have drawn a picture of the whole Landor, is another question. Landor, who could put into a classic dialogue that sense of the *naïf* to which Dickens is generally a stranger, yet passionately admired the most *sentimental* of all his young friend's poetic figures; and it might almost be said that the intellectual natures of the two men were drawn together by the force of contrast. They appear to have first become intimate with one another during Landor's residence at Bath—which began in 1837—and they frequently met at Gore House. At a celebration of the poet's birthday in his lodgings at Bath, so Forster tells us in his biography of Landor, "the fancy which took the form of Little Nell in the *Curiosity Shop* first dawned on the genius of its creator." In Landor's spacious mind there was room for cordial admiration of an author the bent of whose genius differed widely from that of his own; and he could thus afford to sympathise with his whole heart in a creation which men of much smaller intellectual build have pronounced mawkish and unreal. Dickens afterwards gave to one of his sons the names of Walter Landor; and when

the old man died at last, *after* his godson, paid him an eloquent tribute of respect in *All the Year Round.* In this paper the personal intention of the character of Boythorn is avowed by implication; but though Landor esteemed and loved Dickens, it might seem matter for wonder, did not eccentrics after all sometimes cherish their own eccentricity, that his irascible nature failed to resent a rather doubtful compliment. For the character of Boythorn is whimsical rather than, in any but the earlier sense of the word, humorous. But the portrait, however imperfect, was in this instance, beyond all doubt, both kindly meant and kindly taken; though it cannot be said to have added to the attractions of the book into which it is introduced.

While no doubt ever existed as to this likeness, the case may not seem so clear with regard to the original of Harold Skimpole. It would be far more pleasant to pass by without notice the controversy—if controversy it can be called—which this character provoked; but a wrong done by one eminent man of letters to another, however unforeseen its extent may have been, and however genuine the endeavour to repair its effect, becomes part of literary history. That the original of Harold Skimpole was Leigh Hunt cannot reasonably be called into question. This assertion by no means precludes the possibility, or probability, that a second original suggested certain features in the portrait. Nor does it contradict the substantial truthfulness of Dickens's own statement, published in *All the Year Round* after Leigh Hunt's death, on the appearance of the new edition of the *Autobiography* with Thornton Hunt's admirable introduction. While, Dickens then wrote, "he yielded to the temptation of too often making the character speak like his old friend," yet "he no more thought, God forgive him! that the admired original would ever be

charged with the imaginary vices of the fictitious creature, than he had himself ever thought of charging the blood of Desdemona and Othello on the innocent Academy model who sat for Iago's leg in the picture. Even as to the mere occasional manner," he declared that he had "altered the whole of that part of the text, when two intimate friends of Leigh Hunt—both still living—discovered too strong a resemblance to his 'way.'" But, while accepting this statement, and suppressing a regret that after discovering the dangerous closeness of the resemblance Dickens should have, quite at the end of the story, introduced a satirical reference to Harold Skimpole's autobiography — Leigh Hunt's having been published only a year or two before —one must confess that the explanation only helps to prove the rashness of the offence. While intending the portrait to keep its own secret from the general public, Dickens at the same time must have wished to gratify a few keen-sighted friends. In March, 1852, he writes to Forster, evidently in reference to the apprehensions of his correspondent: "Browne has done Skimpole, and helped to make him singularly unlike the great original." The "great original" was a man for whom, both before and after this untoward incident in the relations between them, Dickens professed a warm regard, and who, to judge from the testimony of those who knew him well,[1] and from his unaffected narrative of his own life, abundantly deserved it. A perusal of Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography* suffices to show that he used to talk in Skimpole's manner, and even

[1] Among these is Mr. Alexander Ireland, the author of the *Bibliography of Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt*, who has kindly communicated to me part of his collections concerning the former. The tittle-tattle against Leigh Hunt repeated by Lord Macaulay is, on the face of it, unworthy of notice.

to write in it; that he was at one period of his life altogether ignorant of money matters, and that he cultivated cheerfulness on principle. But it likewise shows that his ignorance of business was acknowledged by him as a misfortune in which he was very far from exulting. "Do I boast of this ignorance?" he writes. "Alas! I have no such respect for the pedantry of absurdity as that. I blush for it, and I only record it out of a sheer painful movement of conscience, as a warning to those young authors who might be led to look upon such folly as a fine thing, which at all events is what I never thought it myself." On the other hand, as his son showed, his cheerfulness, which was not inconsistent with a natural proneness to intervals of melancholy, rested on grounds which were the result of a fine as well as healthy morality. "The value of cheerful opinions," he wrote, in words embodying a moral that Dickens himself was never weary of enforcing, "is inestimable; they will retain a sort of heaven round a man, when everything else might fail him, and consequently they ought to be religiously inculcated upon his children." At the same time, no quality was more conspicuous in his life than his readiness for hard work, even under the most depressing circumstances; and no feature was more marked in his moral character than his conscientiousness. "In the midst of the sorest temptations," Dickens wrote of him, "he maintained his honesty unblemished by a single stain; and in all public and private transactions he was the very soul of truth and honour." To mix up with the outward traits of such a man the detestable obliquities of Harold Skimpole was an experiment paradoxical even as a mere piece of character-drawing. The merely literary result is a failure, while a wound was needlessly inflicted, if not upon Leigh Hunt

himself, at least upon all who cherished his friendship or good name. Dickens seems honestly and deeply to have regretted what he had done, and the extremely tasteful little tribute to Leigh Hunt's poetic gifts which, some years before the death of the latter, Dickens wrote for *Household Words*,[1] must have partaken of the nature of an *amende honorable*. Neither his subsequent repudiation of unfriendly intentions, nor his earlier exertions on Leigh Hunt's behalf, are to be overlooked, but they cannot undo a mistake which forms an unfortunate incident in Dickens's literary life, singularly free though that life, as a whole, is from the miseries of personal quarrels, and all the pettinesses with which the world of letters is too familiar.

While Dickens was engaged upon a literary work such as would have absorbed the intellectual energies of most men, he not only wrote occasionally for his journal, but also dictated for publication in it, the successive portions of a book altogether outside his usual range of authorship. This was *A Child's History of England*, the only one of his works that was not written by his own hand. A history of England, written by Charles Dickens for his own or any one else's children, was sure to be a different work from one written under similar circumstances by Mr. Freeman or the late M. Guizot. The book, though it cannot be called a success, is, however, by no means devoid of interest. Just ten years earlier he had written, and printed, a history of England for the benefit of his eldest son, then a hopeful student of the age of five, which was composed, as he informed Douglas Jerrold at the time, "in the exact spirit" of that advanced politician's paper, "for I don't know what I should do if he were to get hold of any Conservative or High Church notions; and the best

[1] *By Rail to Parnassus*, June 16, 1855.

way of guarding against any such horrible result is, I take it, to wring the parrots' necks in his very cradle." The *Child's History of England* is written in the same spirit, and illustrates more directly, and, it must be added, more coarsely, than any of Dickens's other works his hatred of ecclesiasticism of all kinds. Thus, the account of Dunstan is pervaded by a prejudice which is the fruit of anything but knowledge; Edward the Confessor is "the dreary old" and "the maudlin Confessor;" and the Pope and what belongs to him are treated with a measure of contumely which would have satisfied the heart of Leigh Hunt himself. To be sure, if King John is dismissed as a "miserable brute," King Henry the Eighth is not more courteously designated as a "blot of blood and grease upon the history of England." On the other hand, it could hardly be but that certain passages of the national story should be well told by so great a master of narrative; and though the strain in which parts of the history of Charles the Second are recounted strikes one as hardly suitable to the young, to whom irony is in general *caviare* indeed, yet there are touches both in the story of "this merry gentleman"—a designation which almost recalls Fagin—and elsewhere in the book not unworthy of its author. Its patriotic spirit is quite as striking as its Radicalism; and vulgar as some of its expressions must be called, there is a pleasing glow in the passage on King Alfred, which declares the "English-Saxon" character to have been "the greatest character among the nations of the earth;" and there is a yet nobler enthusiasm, such as it would indeed be worth any writer's while to infuse into the young, in the passionate earnestness with which, by means of the story of Agincourt, the truth is enforced that "nothing can make war otherwise than horrible."

This book must have been dictated, and some at least of the latter portion of *Bleak House* written, at Boulogne, where, after a spring sojourn at Brighton, Dickens spent the summer of 1853, and where were also passed the summers of 1854 and 1856. Boulogne, where Le Sage's last years were spent, was *Our French Watering-place*, so graphically described in a paper in *Household Words* as a companion picture to the old familiar Broadstairs. The family were comfortably settled on a green hill-side close to the town, "in a charming garden in a very pleasant country," with "excellent light wines on the premises, French cookery, millions of roses, two cows—for milk-punch—vegetables cut for the pot, and handed in at the kitchen window; five summer-houses, fifteen fountains—with no water in 'em—and thirty-seven clocks—keeping, as I conceive, Australian time, having no reference whatever to the hours on this side of the globe." The energetic owner of the Villa des Moulineaux was the "M. Loyal Devasseur" of *Our French Watering-place*—jovial, convivial, genial, sentimental too as a Buonapartist and a patriot. In 1854 the same obliging personage housed the Dickens family in another abode, at the top of the hill, close to the famous Napoleonic column; but in 1856 they came back to the Moulineaux. The former year had been an exciting one for Englishmen in France, with royal visits to and fro to testify to the *entente cordiale* between the governments. Dickens, notwithstanding his humorous assertions, was only moderately touched by the Sebastopol fever; but when a concrete problem came before him in the shape of a festive demonstration, he addressed himself to it with the irrepressible ardour of the born stage-manager. "In our own proper illumination," he writes, on the occasion of the Prince Consort's visit to the camp at Boulogne, "I

laid on all the servants, all the children now at home, all the visitors, one to every window, with everything ready to light up on the ringing of a big dinner-bell by your humble correspondent. St. Peter's on Easter Monday was the result."

Of course, at Boulogne, Dickens was cut off neither from his business nor from his private friends. His hospitable invitations were as urgent to his French villa in the summer as to his London house in the winter, and on both sides of the water the *Household Words* familiars were as sure of a welcome from their chief. During his absences from London he could have had no trustier lieutenant than Mr. W. H. Wills, with whom, being always ready to throw himself into a part, he corresponded in an amusing paragraphed, semi-official style. And neither in his working nor in his leisure hours had he by this time any more cherished companion than Mr. Wilkie Collins, whose progress towards brilliant success he was watching with the keenest and kindliest interest. With him and his old friend Augustus Egg, Dickens, in October, 1853, started on a tour to Switzerland and Italy, in the course of which he saw more than one old friend, and revisited more than one known scene—ascending Vesuvius with Mr. Layard and drinking punch at Rome with David Roberts. It would be absurd to make any lofty demands upon the brief records of a holiday journey; and, for my part, I would rather think of Dickens assiduous over his Christmas number at Rome and at Venice, than weigh his moralisings about the electric telegraph running through the Coliseum. His letters written to his wife during this trip are bright and gay, and it was certainly no roving bachelor who "kissed almost all the children he encountered in remembrance of the sweet faces" of his own, and

"talked to all the mothers who carried them." By the middle of December the travellers were home again, and before the year was out he had read to large audiences at Birmingham, on behalf of a public institution, his favourite Christmas stories of *The Christmas Carol* and *The Cricket on the Hearth.* As yet, however, his mind was not seriously intent upon any labours but those proper to his career as an author, and the year 1854 saw, between the months of April and August, the publication in his journal of a new story, which is among the most characteristic, though not among the most successful, of his works of fiction.

In comparison with most of Dickens's novels, *Hard Times* is contained within a narrow compass; and this, with the further necessity of securing to each successive small portion of the story a certain immediate degree of effectiveness, accounts, in some measure, for the peculiarity of the impression left by this story upon many of its readers. Short as the story relatively is, few of Dickens's fictions were elaborated with so much care. He had not intended to write a new story for a twelvemonth, when, as he says, "the idea laid hold of him by the throat in a very violent manner," and the labour, carried on under conditions of peculiar irksomeness, "used him up" after a quite unaccustomed fashion. The book thus acquired a precision of form and manner which commends it to the French school of criticism rather than to lovers of English humour in its ampler forms and more flowing moods. At the same time the work has its purpose so visibly imprinted on its front, as almost to forbid our regarding it in the first instance apart from the moral which avowedly it is intended to inculcate. This moral, by no means new with Dickens, has both a negative and a positive side.

"Do not harden your hearts," is the negative injunction, more especially do not harden them against the promptings of that human kindness which should draw together man and man, old and young, rich and poor; and keep your sympathies fresh by bringing nourishment to them through channels which prejudice or short-sightedness would fain narrow or stop up. This hortatory purpose assumes the form of invective and even of angry menace; and "utilitarian economists, skeletons of school-masters, commissioners of facts, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's-eared creeds," are warned: "The poor you have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives, so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you."

No authority, however eminent, not even Mr. Ruskin's, is required to teach reflecting minds the infinite importance of the principles which *Hard Times* was intended to illustrate. Nor is it of much moment whether the illustrations are always exact; whether the "commissioners of facts" have reason to protest that the unimaginative character of their processes does not necessarily imply an unimaginative purpose in their ends; whether there is any actual Coketown in existence within a hundred miles of Manchester; or whether it suffices that "everybody knew what was meant, but every cotton-spinning town said it was the other cotton-spinning town." The chief personal grievance of Stephen Blackpool has been removed or abated, but the "muddle" is not yet altogether cleared up which prevents the nation and the "national dustmen,"

its law-givers, from impartially and sympathetically furthering the interest of all classes. In a word, the moral of *Hard Times* has not yet lost its force, however imperfect or unfair the method may have been in which it is urged in the book.

Unfortunately, however, a work of art with a didactic purpose is only too often prone to exaggerate what seems of special importance for the purpose in question, and to heighten contrasts which seem likely to put it in the clearest light. "Thomas Gradgrind, sir"—who announces himself with something of the genuine Lancashire roll—and his system are a sound and a laughable piece of satire, to begin with, only here and there marred by the satirist's imperfect knowledge of the details which he caricatures. The "Manchester School," which the novel strives to expose, is in itself to a great extent a figment of the imagination, which to this day serves to round many a hollow period in oratory and journalism. Who, it may fairly be asked, were the parliamentary politicians satirized in the member for Coketown, deaf and blind to any consideration but the multiplication-table? But in any case the cause hardly warrants one of its consequences as depicted in the novel—the utter brutalization of a stolid nature like "the Whelp's." When Gradgrind's son is about to be shipped abroad out of reach of the penalties of his crime, he reminds his father that he merely exemplifies the statistical law that "so many people out of so many will be dishonest." When the virtuous Bitzer is indignantly asked whether he has a heart, he replies that he is physiologically assured of the fact; and to the further inquiry whether this heart of his is accessible to compassion, makes answer that "it is accessible to reason, and to nothing else." These returnings of Mr. Gradgrind's philoso-

phy upon himself savour of the moral justice represented by Gratiano in the fourth act. So, again, Coketown, with its tall chimneys and black river, and its thirteen religious denominations, to which whoever else belonged the working-men did *not*, is no perverse contradiction of fact. But the influence of Coketown, or of a whole wilderness of Coketowns, cannot justly be charged with a tendency to ripen such a product as Josiah Bounderby, who is not only the "bully of humanity," but proves to be a mean-spirited impostor in his pretensions to the glory of self-help. In short, *Hard Times* errs by its attempt to prove too much.

Apart, however, from the didactic purposes which overburden it, the pathos and humour of particular portions of this tale appear to me to have been in no wise overrated. The domestic tragedy of Stephen and Rachael has a subdued intensity of tenderness and melancholy of a kind rare with Dickens, upon whom the example of Mrs. Gaskell in this instance may not have been without its influence. Nor is there anything more delicately and at the same time more appropriately conceived in any of his works than poor Rachael's dominion over the imagination as well as over the affections of her noble-minded and unfortunate lover: "As the shining stars were to the heavy candle in the window, so was Rachael, in the rugged fancy of this man, to the common experiences of his life." The love-story of poor Louisa is of a different kind, and more wordy in the telling; yet here also the feelings painted are natural and true. The humorous interest is almost entirely concentrated upon the company of horse-riders: and never has Dickens's extraordinary power of humorous observation more genially asserted itself. From Mr. Sleary —"thtout man, game-eye"—and his protagonist, Mr. E.

W. B. Childers, who, when he shook his long hair, caused it to "shake all at once," down to Master Kidderminster, who used to form the apex of the human pyramids, and "in whose young nature there was an original flavour of the misanthrope," these honest equestrians are more than worthy to stand by the side of Mr. Vincent Crummles and his company of actors; and the fun has here, in addition to the grotesqueness of the earlier picture, a mellowness of its own. Dickens's comic genius was never so much at its ease and so inexhaustible in ludicrous fancies as in the depiction of such groups as this; and the horse-riders, skilfully introduced to illustrate a truth, wholesome if not novel, would have insured popularity to a far less interesting and to a far less powerful fiction.

The year after that which saw the publication of *Hard Times* was one in which the thoughts of most Englishmen were turned away from the problems approached in that story. But if the military glories of 1854 had not aroused in him any very exuberant enthusiasm, the reports from the Crimea in the ensuing winter were more likely to appeal to his patriotism as well as to his innate impatience of disorder and incompetence. In the first instance, however, he contented himself with those grumblings to which, as a sworn foe of red tape and a declared disbeliever in our parliamentary system, he might claim to have a special right; and he seems to have been too restless in and about himself to have entered very closely into the progress of public affairs. The Christmas had been a merry one at Tavistock House; and the amateur theatricals of its juvenile company had passed through a most successful season. Their history has been written by one of the performers — himself not the least distinguished of the company, since it was he who, in Dickens's house, caused

Thackeray to roll off his seat in a fit of laughter. Dickens, who with Mark Lemon disported himself among these precocious minnows, was, as our chronicler relates, like Triplet, "author, manager, and actor too," organiser, deviser, and harmoniser of all the incongruous assembled elements; it was he "who improvised costumes, painted and corked our innocent cheeks, and suggested all the most effective business of the scene." But, as was usual with him, the transition was rapid from play to something very like earnest; and already, in June, 1855, the Tavistock House theatre produced Mr. Wilkie Collins's melodrama of *The Light-house*, which afterwards found its way to the public stage. To Dickens, who performed in it with the author, it afforded "scope for a piece of acting of great power," the old sailor Aaron Gurnock, which by its savage picturesqueness earned a tribute of recognition from Carlyle. No less a hand than Stanfield painted the scenery, and Dickens himself, besides writing the prologue, introduced into the piece a ballad called *The Story of the Wreck*, a not unsuccessful effort in Cowper's manner. At Christmas, 1856–'57, there followed *The Frozen Deep*, another melodrama by the same author; and by this time the management of his private theatricals had become to Dickens a serious business, to be carried on seriously for its own sake. "It was to him," he wrote, "like writing a book in company;" and his young people might learn from it "that kind of humility which is got from the earned knowledge that whatever the right hand finds to do must be done with the heart in it, and in a desperate earnest." *The Frozen Deep* was several times repeated, on one occasion for the benefit of the daughter of the recently deceased Douglas Jerrold; but by the end of January the little theatre was finally broken up; and

though Dickens spent one more winter season at Tavistock House, the shadow was then already falling upon his cheerful home.

In the midst of his children's Christmas gaieties of the year 1855 Dickens had given two or three public readings to "wonderful audiences" in various parts of the country. A trip to Paris with Mr. Wilkie Collins had followed, during which, as he wrote home, he was wandering about Paris all day, dining at all manner of places, and frequenting the theatres at the rate of two or three a night. "I suppose," he adds, with pleasant self-irony, "as an old farmer said of Scott, I am 'makin' mysel'' all the time; but I seem to be rather a free-and-easy sort of superior vagabond." And in truth a roving, restless spirit was strong upon him in these years. Already, in April, he speaks of himself as "going off; I don't know where or how far, to ponder about I don't know what." France, Switzerland, Spain, Constantinople, in Mr. Layard's company, had been successively in his thoughts, and, for aught he knew, Greenland and the North Pole might occur to him next. At the same time he foresaw that the end of it all would be his shutting himself up in some out-of-the-way place of which he had not yet thought, and going desperately to work there.

Before, however, these phantasmagoric schemes had subsided into the quiet plan of an autumn visit to Folkestone, followed during the winter and spring by a residence at Paris, he had at least found a subject to ponder on, which was to suggest an altogether novel element in his next work of fiction. I have said that though, like the majority of his fellow-countrymen, Dickens regarded our war with Russia as inevitable, yet his hatred of all war, and his impatience of the exaggerations of passion and sentiment

which all war produces, had preserved him from himself falling a victim to their contagion. On the other hand, when in the winter of 1854–'55 the note of exultation in the bravery of our soldiers in the Crimea began to be intermingled with complaints against the grievously defective arrangements for their comfort and health, and when these complaints, stimulated by the loud-voiced energy of the press, and extending into censures upon the whole antiquated and perverse system of our army administration, speedily swelled into a roar of popular indignation, sincere conviction ranged him on the side of the most uncompromising malcontents. He was at all times ready to give vent to that antipathy against officialism which is shared by so large a number of Englishmen. Though the son of a dock-yard official, he is found roundly asserting that "more obstruction of good things and patronage of bad things has been committed in the dock-yards—as in everything connected with the misdirection of the navy—than in every other branch of the public service put together, including"—the particularisation is hard—"even the Woods and Forests." He had listened, we may be sure, to the scornful denunciations launched by the prophet of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* against Downing Street and all its works, and to the proclamation of the great though rather vague truth that "reform in that Downing Street department of affairs is precisely the reform which were worth all others." And now the heart-rending sufferings of multitudes of brave men had brought to light, in one department of the public administration, a series of complications and perversities which in the end became so patent to the Government itself that they had to be roughly remedied in the very midst of the struggle. The cry for administrative reform, which arose in the year 1855,

however crude the form it frequently took, was in itself a logical enough result of the situation; and there is no doubt that the angriness of the complaint was intensified by the attitude taken up in the House of Commons by the head of the Government towards the pertinacious politician who made himself the mouthpiece of the extreme demands of the feeling outside. Mr. Layard was Dickens's valued friend; and the share is thus easily explained which—against his otherwise uniform practice of abstaining from public meetings—the most popular writer of the day took in the Administrative Reform meetings, held in Drury Lane Theatre, on June 27, 1855. The speech which he delivered on this occasion, and which was intended to aid in forcing the "whole question" of Administrative Reform upon the attention of an unwilling Government, possesses no value whatever in connexion with its theme, though of course it is not devoid of some smart and telling hits. Not on the platform, but at his desk as an author, was Dickens to do real service to the cause of administrative efficiency. For whilst invective of a general kind runs off like water from the rock of usage, even Circumlocution Offices are not insensible to the acetous force of satire.

Dickens's caricature of British officialism formed the most generally attractive element in the story of *Little Dorrit*—originally intended to be called *Nobody's Fault*—which he published in monthly numbers, from December, 1855, that year, to June, 1857. He was solemnly taken to task for his audacity by the *Edinburgh Review*, which reproached him for his persistent ridicule of "the institutions of the country, the laws, the administration, in a word, the government under which we live." His "charges" were treated as hardly seriously meant, but as worthy of severe reprobation, because likely to be serious-

ly taken by the poor, the uneducated, and the young. And the caricaturist, besides being reminded of the names of several eminent public servants, was specially requested to look, as upon a picture contrasting with his imaginary Circumlocution Office, upon the Post Office, or—for the the choice offered was not more extensive—upon the London police, so liberally praised by himself in his own journal. The delighted author of *Little Dorrit* replied to this not very skilful diatribe in a short and spirited rejoinder in *Household Words*. In this he judiciously confined himself to refuting an unfounded incidental accusation in the Edinburgh article, and to dwelling, as upon a "Curious Misprint," upon the indignant query: "How does he account for the career of *Mr. Rowland Hill?*" whose name, as an example of the ready intelligence of the Circumlocution Office, was certainly an odd *erratum*. Had he, however, cared to make a more general reply to the main article of the indictment, he might have pointed out that, as a matter of fact, our official administrative machinery *had* recently broken down in one of its most important branches, and that circumlocution in the literal sense of the word—circumlocution between department and department, or office and office—had been one of the principal causes of the collapse. The general drift of the satire was, therefore, in accordance with fact, and the satire itself salutary in its character. To quarrel with it for not taking into consideration what might be said on the other side, was to quarrel with the method of treatment which satire has at all times considered itself entitled to adopt; while to stigmatise a popular book as likely to mislead the ill-informed, was to suggest a restraint which would have deprived wit and humour of most of their opportunities of rendering service to either a good or an evil cause.

A far more legitimate exception has been taken to these Circumlocution Office episodes as defective in art by the very reason of their being exaggerations. Those best acquainted with the interiors of our government offices may be right in denying that the Barnacles can be regarded as an existing type. Indeed, it would at no time have been easy to point to any office quite as labyrinthine, or quite as bottomless, as that permanently presided over by Mr. Tite Barnacle; to any chief secretary or commissioner so absolutely wooden of fibre as he; or to any private secretary so completely absorbed in his eye-glass as Barnacle junior. But as satirical figures they one and all fulfil their purpose as thoroughly as the picture of the official sanctum itself, with its furniture "in the higher official manner," and its "general bamboozling air of how not to do it." The only question is, whether satire which, if it is to be effective, must be of a piece and in its way exaggerated, is not out of place in a pathetic and humorous fiction, where, like a patch of too diverse a thread, it interferes with the texture into which it is introduced. In themselves these passages of *Little Dorrit* deserve to remain unforgotten amongst the masterpieces of literary caricature; and there is, I do not hesitate to say, something of Swiftian force in their grotesque embodiment of a popular current of indignation. The mere name of the Circumlocution Office was a stroke of genius, one of those phrases of Dickens which Professor Masson justly describes as, whether exaggerated or not, "efficacious for social reform." As usual, Dickens had made himself well acquainted with the formal or outside part of his subject; the very air of Whitehall seems to gather round us as Mr. Tite Barnacle, in answer to a persistent enquirer who "wants to know" the position of a particular matter,

concedes that it "may have been, in the course of official business, referred to the Circumlocution Office for its consideration," and that "the department may have either originated, or confirmed, a minute on the subject." In the *Household Words* paper called *A Poor Man's Tale of a Patent* (1850) will be found a sufficiently elaborate study for Mr. Doyce's experiences of the government of his country, as wrathfully narrated by Mr. Meagles.

With the exception of the Circumlocution Office passages—adventitious as they are to the progress of the action—*Little Dorrit* exhibits a palpable falling-off in inventive power. Forster illustrates by a striking fac-simile the difference between the "labour and pains" of the author's short notes for *Little Dorrit* and the "lightness and confidence of handling" in what hints he had jotted down for *David Copperfield*. Indeed, his "tablets" had about this time begun to be an essential part of his literary equipment. But in *Little Dorrit* there are enough internal signs of, possibly unconscious, lassitude. The earlier, no doubt, is, in every respect, the better part of the book; or, rather, the later part shows the author wearily at work upon a canvas too wide for him, and filling it up with a crowd of personages in whom it is difficult to take much interest. Even Mr. Merdle and his catastrophe produce the effect rather of a ghastly allegory than of an "extravagant conception," as the author ironically called it in his preface, derived only too directly from real life. In the earlier part of the book, in so far as it is not once again concerned with enforcing the moral of *Hard Times* in a different way, by means of Mrs. Clennam and her son's early history, the humour of Dickens plays freely over the figure of the Father of the Marshalsea. It is a psychological masterpiece in its way; but the revolting selfishness

of Little Dorrit's father is not redeemed artistically by her own long-suffering; for her pathos lacks the old irresistible ring. Doubtless much in this part of the story—the whole episode, for instance, of the honest turnkey—is in the author's best manner. But, admirable as it is, this new picture of prison-life and prison-sentiment has an undercurrent of bitterness, indeed, almost of contemptuousness, foreign to the best part of Dickens's genius. This is still more perceptible in a figure not less true to life than the Father of the Marshalsea himself — Flora, the overblown flower of Arthur Clennam's boyish love. The humour of the conception is undeniable, but the whole effect is cruel; and, though greatly amused, the reader feels almost as if he were abetting a profanation. Dickens could not have become what he is to the great multitude of his readers had he, as a humourist, often indulged in this cynical mood.

There is in general little in the characters of this fiction to compensate for the sense of oppression from which, as he follows the slow course of its far from striking plot, the reader finds it difficult to free himself. A vein of genuine humour shows itself in Mr. Plornish, obviously a favourite of the author's, and one of those genuine working-men, as rare in fiction as on the stage, where Mr. Toole has reproduced the species; but the relation between Mr. and Mrs. Plornish is only a fainter revival of that between Mr. and Mrs. Bagney. Nor is there anything fresh or novel in the characters belonging to another social sphere. Henry Gowan, apparently intended as an elaborate study in psychology, is only a very tedious one; and his mother at Hampton Court, whatever phase of a dilapidated aristocracy she may be intended to caricature, is merely ill-bred. As for Mrs. General, she is so sorry a burlesque that she

could not be reproduced without extreme caution even on the stage—to the reckless conventionalities of which, indeed, the whole picture of the Dorrit family as *nouveaux riches* bears a striking resemblance. There is, on the contrary, some good caricature, which, in one instance at least, was thought transparent by the knowing, in the *silhouettes* of the great Mr. Merdle's professional guests; but these are, like the Circumlocution Office puppets, satiric sketches, not the living figures of creative humour.

I have spoken of this story with a censure which may be regarded as exaggerated in its turn. But I well remember, at the time of its publication in numbers, the general consciousness that *Little Dorrit* was proving unequal to the high-strung expectations which a new work by Dickens then excited in his admirers, both young and old. There were new and striking features in it, with abundant comic and serious effect, but there was no power in the whole story to seize and hold, and the feeling could not be escaped that the author was not at his best. And Dickens was not at his best when he wrote *Little Dorrit*. Yet while nothing is more remarkable in the literary career of Dickens than this apparently speedy decline of his power, nothing is more wonderful in it than the degree to which he righted himself again, not, indeed, with his public, for the public never deserted its favourite, but with his genius.

A considerable part of *Little Dorrit* must have been written in Paris, where, in October, after a quiet autumn at Folkestone, Dickens had taken a family apartment in the Avenue des Champs Élysées, "about half a quarter of a mile above Franconi's." Here, after his fashion, he lived much to himself, his family, and his guests, only occasionally finding his way into a literary or artistic *salon;* but he sat for his portrait to both Ary and Henri Scheffer,

and was easily persuaded to read his *Cricket on the Hearth* to an audience in the atelier. Macready and Mr. Wilkie Collins were in turn the companions of many "theatrical and lounging" evenings. Intent as Dickens now had become upon the technicalities of his own form of composition, this interest must have been greatly stimulated by the frequent comparison of modern French plays, in most of which nicety of construction and effectiveness of situation have so paramount a significance. At Boulogne, too, Mr. Wilkie Collins was a welcome summer visitor. And in the autumn the two friends started on the *Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*. It came to an untimely end as a pedestrian excursion, but the record of it is one of the pleasantest memorials of a friendship which brightened much of Dickens's life and intensified his activity in work as well as in pleasure.

"Mr. Thomas Idle" had indeed a busy time of it in this year 1857. The publication of *Little Dorrit* was not finished till June, and in August we find him, between a reading and a performance of *The Frozen Deep* at Manchester —then in the exciting days of the great Art Exhibition— thus describing to Macready his way of filling up his time: "I hope you have seen my tussle with the *Edinburgh*. I saw the chance last Friday week, as I was going down to read the *Carol* in St. Martin's Hall. Instantly turned to, then and there, and wrote half the article, flew out of bed early next morning, and finished it by noon. Went down to Gallery of Illustration (we acted that night), did the day's business, corrected the proofs in Polar costume in dressing-room, broke up two numbers of *Household Words* to get it out directly, played in *Frozen Deep* and *Uncle John*, presided at supper of company, made no end of speeches, went home and gave in completely for four hours,

then got sound asleep, and next day was as fresh as you used to be in the far-off days of your lusty youth." It was on the occasion of the readings at St. Martin's Hall, for the benefit of Douglas Jerrold's family, that the thought of giving readings for his own benefit first suggested itself to Dickens; and, as will be seen, by April, 1858, the idea had been carried into execution, and a new phase of life had begun for him. And yet at this very time, when his home was about to cease being in the fullest sense a home to Dickens, by a strange irony of fortune, he had been enabled to carry out a long-cherished fancy and to take possession, in the first instance as a summer residence, of the house on Gad's Hill, of which a lucky chance had made him the owner rather more than a twelvemonth before.

"My little place," he wrote in 1858, to his Swiss friend Cerjat, "is a grave red-brick house (time of George the First, I suppose), which I have added to and stuck bits upon in all manner of ways, so that it is as pleasantly irregular, and as violently opposed to all architectural ideas, as the most hopeful man could possibly desire. It is on the summit of Gad's Hill. The robbery was committed before the door, on the man with the treasure, and Falstaff ran away from the identical spot of ground now covered by the room in which I write. A little rustic ale-house, called 'The Sir John Falstaff,' is over the way—has been over the way ever since, in honour of the event. . . . The whole stupendous property is on the old Dover road. . . ."

Among "the blessed woods and fields" which, as he says, had done him "a world of good," in a season of unceasing bodily and mental unrest, the great English writer had indeed found a habitation fitted to become inseparable from his name and fame. It was not till rather later, in 1860, that, after the sale of Tavistock House, Gad's Hill

Place became his regular abode, a London house being only now and then taken for the season, while furnished rooms were kept at the office in Wellington Street for occasional use. And it was only gradually that he enlarged and improved his Kentish place so as to make it the pretty and comfortable country-house which at the present day it appears to be; constructing, in course of time, the passage under the high-road to the shrubbery, where the Swiss châlet given to him by Mr. Fechter was set up, and building the pretty little conservatory, which, when completed, he was not to live many days to enjoy. But an old-fashioned, homely look, free from the slightest affectation of quietness, belonged to Gad's Hill Place, even after all these alterations, and belongs to it even at this day, when Dickens's solid old-fashioned furniture has been changed. In the pretty little front hall still hangs the illuminated tablet recalling the legend of Gad's Hill; and on the inside panels of the library door remain the facetious sham book-titles: "Hudson's *Complete Failure*," and "*Ten Minutes in China*," and "Cats' *Lives*," and, on a long series of leather backs, "Hansard's *Guide to Refreshing Sleep*." The rooms are all of a modest size, and the bedrooms—amongst them Dickens's own—very low; but the whole house looks thoroughly habitable, while the views across the cornfields at the back are such as in their undulation of soft outline are nowhere more pleasant than in Kent. Rochester and the Medway are near, even for those who do not—like Dickens and his dogs—count a stretch past three or four "milestones on the Dover road" as the mere beginning of an afternoon's walk. At a distance little greater there are in one direction the green glades of Cobham Park, with Chalk and Gravesend beyond; and in another the flat country towards the Thames, with its abundance of market-gardens.

There, too, are the marshes on the border of which lie the massive ruin of Cooling Castle, the refuge of the Lollard martyr who was *not* concerned in the affair on Gad's Hill, and Cooling Church and church-yard, with the quaint little gravestones in the grass. London and the office were within easy reach, and Paris itself was, for practical purposes, not much farther away, so that, in later days at all events, Dickens found himself "crossing the Channel perpetually."

The name of Dickens still has a good sound in and about Gad's Hill. He was on very friendly terms with some families whose houses stand near to his own; and though nothing was farther from his nature, as he says, than to "wear topboots" and play the squire, yet he had in him not a little of what endears so many a resident country gentleman to his neighbourhood. He was head organiser rather than chief patron of village sports, of cricket matches and foot races; and his house was a dispensary for the poor of the parish. He established confidential relations between his house and the Falstaff Inn over the way, regulating his servants' consumption of beer on a strict but liberal plan of his own devising; but it is not for this reason only that the successor of Mr. Edwin Trood—for such was the veritable name of mine host of the "Falstaff" in Dickens's time—declares that it was a bad day for the neighbourhood when Dickens was taken away from it. In return, nothing could exceed the enthusiasm which surrounded him in his own country, and Forster has described his astonishment at the manifestation of it on the occasion of the wedding of the youngest daughter of the house in 1860. And, indeed, he was born to be popular, and specially among those by whom he was beloved as a friend or honoured as a benefactor.

But it was not for long intervals of either work or rest

that Dickens was to settle down in his pleasant country house, nor was he ever, except quite at the last, to sit down under his own roof in peace and quiet, a wanderer no more. Less than a year after he had taken up his residence for the summer on Gad's Hill his home, and that of his younger children, was his wife's home no longer. The separation, which appears to have been preparing itself for some, but no very long, time, took place in May, 1858, when, after an amicable arrangement, Mrs. Dickens left her husband, who henceforth allowed her an ample separate maintenance, and occasionally corresponded with her, but never saw her again. The younger children remained in their father's house under the self-sacrificing and devoted care of Mrs. Dickens's surviving sister, Miss Hogarth. Shortly afterwards, Dickens thought it well, in printed words which may be left forgotten, to rebut some slanderous gossip which, as the way of the world is, had misrepresented the circumstances of this separation. The causes of the event were an open secret to his friends and acquaintances. If he had ever loved his wife with that affection before which so-called incompatibilities of habits, temper, or disposition fade into nothingness, there is no indication of it in any of his numerous letters addressed to her. Neither has it ever been pretended that he strove in the direction of that resignation which love and duty together made possible to David Copperfield, or even that he remained in every way master of himself, as many men have known how to remain, the story of whose wedded life and its disappointments has never been written in history or figured in fiction. It was not incumbent upon his faithful friend and biographer, and much less can it be upon one whom nothing but a sincere admiration of Dickens's genius entitles to speak of him at all, to declare the

standard by which the most painful transaction in his life is to be judged. I say the most painful, for it is with a feeling akin to satisfaction that one reads, in a letter three years afterwards to a lady in reference to her daughter's wedding: "I want to thank you also for thinking of me on the occasion, but I feel that I am better away from it. I should really have a misgiving that I was a sort of a shadow on a young marriage, and you will understand me when I say so, and no more." A shadow, too—who would deny it?—falls on every one of the pictures in which the tenderest of modern humourists has painted the simple joys and the sacred sorrows of that home life of which to his generation he had become almost the poet and the prophet, when we remember how he was himself neither blessed with its full happiness nor capable of accepting with resignation the imperfection inherent in it, as in all things human.

CHAPTER VI.

LAST YEARS.

[1858–1870.]

THE last twelve years of Dickens's life were busy years, like the others; but his activity was no longer merely the expression of exuberant force, and long before the collapse came he had been repeatedly warned of the risks he continued to defy. When, however, he first entered upon those public readings, by persisting in which he indisputably hastened his end, neither he nor his friends took into account the fear of bodily ill-effects resulting from his exertions. Their misgivings had other grounds. Of course, had there been any pressure of pecuniary difficulty or need upon Dickens when he began, or when on successive occasions he resumed, his public readings, there would be nothing further to be said. But I see no suggestion of any such pressure. "My worldly circumstances," he wrote before he had finally made up his mind to read in America, "are very good. I don't want money. All my possessions are free and in the best order. Still," he added, "at fifty-five or fifty-six, the likelihood of making a very great addition to one's capital in half a year is an immense consideration." Moreover, with all his love of doing as he chose, and his sense of the value of such freedom to him as a writer, he was a man of simple though liberal habits of life, with no taste for the gorgeous or capricious ex-

travagances of a Balzac or a Dumas, nor can he have been at a loss how to make due provision for those whom in the course of nature he would leave behind him. Love of money for its own sake, or for that of the futilities it can purchase, was altogether foreign to his nature. At the same time, the rapid making of large sums has potent attractions for most men; and these attractions are perhaps strongest for those who engage in the pursuit for the sake of the race as well as of the prize. Dickens's readings were virtually something new; their success was not only all his own, but unique and unprecedented—what nobody but himself ever had achieved or ever could have achieved. Yet the determining motive—if I read his nature rightly—was, after all, of another kind. "Two souls dwelt in his breast;" and when their aspirations united in one appeal it was irresistible. The author who craved for the visible signs of a sympathy responding to that which he felt for his multitudes of readers, and the actor who longed to impersonate creations already beings of flesh and blood to himself, were both astir in him, and in both capacities he felt himself drawn into the very publicity deprecated by his friends. He liked, as one who knew him thoroughly said to me, to be face to face with his public; and against this liking, which he had already indulged as fully as he could without passing the boundaries between private and professional life, arguments were in vain. It has been declared sheer pedantry to speak of such boundaries; and to suggest that there is anything degrading in paid readings such as those of Dickens would, on the face of it, be absurd. On the other hand, the author who, on or off the stage, becomes the interpreter of his writings to large audiences, more especially if he does his best to stereotype his interpretation by constantly repeating it, limits his own

prerogative of being many things to many men; and where the author of a work, more particularly of a work of fiction, adjusts it to circumstances differing from those of its production, he allows the requirements of the lesser art to prejudice the claims of the greater.

Dickens cannot have been blind to these considerations; but to others his eyes were never opened. He found much that was inspiriting in his success as a reader, and this not only in the large sums he gained, or even in the "roaring sea of response," to use his own fine metaphor, of which he had become accustomed to "stand upon the beach." His truest sentiment as an author was touched to the quick; and he was, as he says himself, "brought very near to what he had sometimes dreamed might be his fame," when, at York, a lady, whose face he had never seen, stopped him in the street, and said to him, "Mr. Dickens, will you let me touch the hand that has filled my house with many friends?" or when, at Belfast, he was almost overwhelmed with entreaties "to shake hands, Misther Dickens, and God bless you, sir; not ounly for the light you've been in mee house, sir—and God love your face!—this many a year." On the other hand—and this, perhaps, a nature like his would not be the quickest to perceive—there was something vulgarising in the constant striving after immediate success in the shape of large audiences, loud applause, and satisfactory receipts. The conditions of the actor's art cannot forego these stimulants; and this is precisely his disadvantage in comparison with artists who are able to possess themselves in quiet. To me, at least, it is painful to find Dickens jubilantly recording how at Dublin "eleven bank-notes were thrust into the pay-box—Arthur saw them—at one time for eleven stalls;" how at Edinburgh "neither Grisi, nor Jenny Lind,

nor anything, nor anybody, seems to make the least effect on the draw of the readings;" while, every allowance being made, there is something almost ludicrous in the double assertion, that "the most delicate audience I had ever seen in any provincial place is Canterbury; but the audience with the greatest sense of humour certainly is Dover." What subjects for parody Dickens would have found in these innocent ecstasies if uttered by any other man! Undoubtedly, this enthusiasm was closely connected with the very thoroughness with which he entered into the work of his readings. "You have no idea," he tells Forster, in 1867, "how I have worked at them. Finding it necessary, as their reputation widened, that they should be better than at first, *I have learnt them all*, so as to have no mechanical drawback in looking after the words. I have tested all the serious passion in them by everything I know; made the humorous points much more humorous; corrected my utterance of certain words; cultivated a self-possession not to be disturbed; and made myself master of the situation." "From ten years ago to last night," he writes to his son from Baltimore in 1868, "I have never read to an audience but I have watched for an opportunity of striking out something better somewhere." The freshness with which he returned night after night and season after season to the sphere of his previous successes, was itself a genuine actor's gift. "So real," he declares, "are my fictions to myself, that, after hundreds of nights, I come with a feeling of perfect freshness to that little red table, and laugh and cry with my hearers as if I had never stood there before."

Dickens's first public readings were given at Birmingham, during the Christmas week of 1853–'54, in support of the new Midland Institute; but a record—for the

authenticity of which I cannot vouch—remains, that with true theatrical instinct he, before the Christmas in question, gave a trial reading of the *Christmas Carol* to a smaller public audience at Peterborough. He had since been repeatedly found willing to read for benevolent purposes; and the very fact that it had become necessary to decline some of these frequent invitations had again suggested the possibility—which had occurred to him eleven years before—of meeting the demand in a different way. Yet it may, after all, be doubted whether the idea of undertaking an entire series of paid public readings would have been carried out, had it not been for the general restlessness which had seized upon Dickens early in 1858, when, moreover, he had no special task either of labour or of leisure to absorb him, and when he craved for excitement more than ever. To go home—in this springtime of 1858—was not to find there the peace of contentment. "I must do *something*," he wrote in March to his faithful counsellor, "or I shall wear my heart away. I can see no better thing to do that is half so hopeful in itself, or half so well suited to my restless state."

So by April the die was cast, and on the 29th of that month he had entered into his new relation with the public. One of the strongest and most genuine impulses of his nature had victoriously asserted itself, and according to his wont he addressed himself to his task with a relentless vigour which flinched from no exertion. He began with a brief series at St. Martin's Hall, and then, his invaluable friend Arthur Smith continuing to act as his manager, he contrived to cram not less than eighty-seven readings into three months and a half of travelling in the "provinces," including Scotland and Ireland. A few winter readings in London, and a short supplementary course

in the country during October, 1859, completed this first series. Already, in 1858, we find him, in a letter from Ireland, complaining of the "tremendous strain," and declaring, "I seem to be always either in a railway carriage, or reading, or going to bed. I get so knocked up, whenever I have a minute to remember it, that then I go to bed as a matter of course." But the enthusiasm which everywhere welcomed him—I can testify to the thrill of excitement produced by his visit to Cambridge, in October, 1859—repaid him for his fatigues. Scotland thawed to him, and with Dublin—where his success was extraordinary—he was so smitten as to think it at first sight "pretty nigh as big as Paris." In return, the Boots at Morrison's expressed the general feeling in a patriotic point of view: "'Whaat sart of a hoose, sur?' he asked me. 'Capital.' 'The Lard be praised, for the 'onor o' Dooblin.'"

The books, or portions of books, to which he confined himself during this first series of readings were few in number. They comprised the *Carol* and the *Chimes*, and two stories from earlier Christmas numbers of *Household Words*—may the exclamation of the soft-hearted chambermaid at the Holly Tree Inn, "It's a shame to part 'em!" never vanish from my memory!—together with the episodic readings of the *Trial* in *Pickwick*, *Mrs. Gamp*, and *Paul Dombey*. Of these the *Pickwick*, which I heard more than once, is still vividly present to me. The only drawback to the complete enjoyment of it was the lurking fear that there had been some tampering with the text, not to be condoned even in its author. But in the way of assumption Charles Mathews the elder himself could have accomplished no more Protean effort. The lack-lustre eye of Mr. Justice Stareleigh, the forensic hitch of

Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, and the hopeless impotence of Mr. Nathaniel Winkle were alike incomparable. And if the success of the impersonation of Mr. Samuel Weller was less complete—although Dickens had formerly acted the character on an amateur stage—the reason probably was that, by reason of his endless store of ancient and modern instances, Sam had himself become a quasi-mythical being, whom it was almost painful to find reproduced in flesh and blood.

I have not hesitated to treat these readings by Dickens as if they had been the performances of an actor; and the description would apply even more strongly to his later readings, in which he seemed to make his points in a more accentuated fashion than before. "His readings," says Mr. C. Kent, in an interesting little book about them, "were, in the fullest meaning of the words, singularly ingenious and highly-elaborated histrionic performances." As such they had been prepared with a care such as few actors bestow upon their parts, and—for the book was prepared not less than the reading—not all authors bestow upon their plays. Now, the art of reading, even in the case of dramatic works, has its own laws, which even the most brilliant readers cannot neglect except at their peril. A proper pitch has to be found, in the first instance, before the exceptional passages can be, as it were, marked off from it; and the absence of this ground-tone sometimes interfered with the total effect of a reading by Dickens. On the other hand, the exceptional passages were, if not uniformly, at least generally excellent; nor am I at all disposed to agree with Forster in preferring, as a rule, the humorous to the pathetic. At the same time, there was noticeable in these readings a certain hardness which competent critics likewise discerned in Dickens's acting, and

which could not, at least in the former case, be regarded as an ordinary characteristic of dilettanteism. The truth is that he isolated his parts too sharply — a frequent fault of English acting, and one more detrimental to the total effect of a reading than even to that of an acted play.

No sooner had the heaviest stress of the first series of readings ceased than Dickens was once more at work upon a new fiction. The more immediate purpose was to insure a prosperous launch to the journal which, in the spring of 1859, took the place of *Household Words*. A dispute, painful in its origin, but ending in an amicable issue, had resulted in the purchase of that journal by Dickens; but already a little earlier he had—as he was entitled to do—begun the new venture of *All the Year Round*, with which *Household Words* was afterwards incorporated. The first number, published on April 30, contained the earliest instalment of *A Tale of Two Cities*, which was completed by November 20 following.

This story holds a unique place amongst the fictions of its author. Perhaps the most striking difference between it and his other novels may seem to lie in the all but entire absence from it of any humour or attempt at humour; for neither the brutalities of that "honest tradesman," Jerry, nor the laconisms of Miss Pross, can well be called by that name. Not that his sources of humour were drying up, even though, about this time, he contributed to an American journal a short "romance of the real world," *Hunted Down*, from which the same relief is again conspicuously absent. For the humour of Dickens was to assert itself with unmistakable force in his next longer fiction, and was even before that, in some of his occasional papers, to give delightful proofs of its continued vigour. In the case of

the *Tale of Two Cities*, he had a new and distinct design in his mind which did not, indeed, exclude humour, but with which a liberal indulgence in it must have seriously interfered. "I set myself," he writes, "the little task of writing a picturesque story, rising in every chapter with characters true to nature, but whom the story itself should express more than they should express themselves by dialogue. I mean, in other words, that I fancied a story of incident might be written, in place of the bestiality that is written under that pretence, pounding the characters out in its own mortar, and beating their own interests out of them." He therefore renounced his more usual method in favour of one probably less congenial to him. Yet, in his own opinion at least, he succeeded so well in the undertaking, that when the story was near its end he could venture to express a hope that it was "the best story he had written." So much praise will hardly be given to this novel even by admirers of the French art of telling a story succinctly, or by those who can never resist a rather hysterical treatment of the French Revolution.

In my own opinion *A Tale of Two Cities* is a skilfully though not perfectly constructed novel, which needed but little substantial alteration in order to be converted into a not less effective stage-play. And with such a design Dickens actually sent the proof-sheets of the book to his friend Regnier, in the fearful hope that he might approve of the project of its dramatisation for a French theatre. Cleverly or clumsily adapted, the tale of the Revolution and its sanguinary vengeance was unlikely to commend itself to the Imperial censorship; but an English version was, I believe, afterwards very fairly successful on the boards of the Adelphi, where Madame Celeste was certainly in her right place as Madame Defarge, an excellent

character for a melodrama, though rather wearisome as she lies in wait through half a novel.

The construction of this story is, as I have said, skilful but not perfect. Dickens himself successfully defended his use of accident in bringing about the death of Madame Defarge. The real objection to the conduct of this episode, however, lies in the inadequacy of the contrivance for leaving Miss Pross behind in Paris. Too much is also, I think, made to turn upon the three words "and their descendants"—non-essential in the original connexion—by which Dr. Manette's written denunciation becomes fatal to those he loves. Still, the general edifice of the plot is solid; its interest is, notwithstanding the crowded background, concentrated with much skill upon a small group of personages; and Carton's self-sacrifice, admirably prepared from the very first, produces a legitimate tragic effect. At the same time the novelist's art vindicates its own claims. Not only does this story contain several narrative episodes of remarkable power—such as the flight from Paris at the close, and the touching little incident of the seamstress, told in Dickens's sweetest pathetic manner—but it is likewise enriched by some descriptive pictures of unusual excellence: for instance, the sketch of Dover in the good old smuggling times, and the mezzo-tint of the stormy evening in Soho. Doubtless the increased mannerism of the style is disturbing, and this not only in the high-strung French scenes. As to the historical element in this novel, Dickens modestly avowed his wish that he might by his story have been able "to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book." But if Dickens desired to depict the noble of the *ancien régime*, either according to Carlyle or

according to intrinsic probability, he should not have offered, in his Marquis, a type historically questionable, and unnatural besides. The description of the Saint Antoine, before and during the bursting of the storm, has in it more of truthfulness, or of the semblance of truthfulness; and Dickens's perception of the physiognomy of the French workman is, I think, remarkably accurate. Altogether, the book is an extraordinary *tour de force*, which Dickens never repeated.

The opening of a new story by Dickens gave the necessary *impetus* to his new journal at its earliest stage; nor was the ground thus gained ever lost. Mr. W. H. Wills stood by his chief's side as of old, taking, more especially in later years, no small share of responsibility upon him. The prospectus of *All the Year Round* had not in vain promised an identity of principle in its conduct with that of its predecessor; in energy and spirit it showed no falling off; and, though not in all respects, the personality of Dickens made itself felt as distinctly as ever. Besides the *Tale of Two Cities* he contributed to it his story of *Great Expectations*. Amongst his contributors Mr. Wilkie Collins took away the breath of multitudes of readers; Mr. Charles Reade disported himself amongst the facts which gave stamina to his fiction; and Lord Lytton made a daring voyage into a mysterious country. Thither Dickens followed him, for once, in his *Four Stories*, not otherwise noteworthy, and written in a manner already difficult to discriminate from that of Mr. Wilkie Collins. For the rest, the advice with which Dickens aided Lord Lytton's progress in his *Strange Story* was neither more ready nor more painstaking than that which he bestowed upon his younger contributors, to more than one of whom he generously gave the opportunity of publishing in his

journal a long work of fiction. Some of these younger writers were at this period amongst his most frequent guests and associates; for nothing more naturally commended itself to him than the encouragement of the younger generation.

But though longer imaginative works played at least as conspicuous a part in the new journal as they had in the old, the conductor likewise continued to make manifest his intention that the lesser contributions should not be treated by readers or by writers as harmless necessary "padding." For this purpose it was requisite not only that the choice of subjects should be made with the utmost care, but also that the master's hand should itself be occasionally visible. Dickens's occasional contributions had been few and unimportant, till in a happy hour he began a series of papers, including many of the pleasantest, as well as of the mellowest, amongst the lighter productions of his pen. As usual, he had taken care to find for this series a name which of itself went far to make its fortune.

"I am both a town and a country traveller, and am always on the road. Figuratively speaking, I travel for the great house of Human Interest Brothers, and have rather a large connexion in the fancy goods way. Literally speaking, I am always wandering here and there from my rooms in Covent Garden, London—now about the city streets, now about the country by-roads, seeing many little things, and some great things, which, because they interest me, I think may interest others."

The whole collection of these *Uncommercial Traveller* papers, together with the *Uncommercial Samples* which succeeded them after Dickens's return from America, and which begin with a graphic account of his homeward voyage *Aboard Ship*, where the voice of conscience spoke in

the motion of the screw, amounts to thirty-seven articles, and spreads over a period of nine years. They are necessarily of varying merit, but amongst them are some which deserve a permanent place in our lighter literature. Such are the description of the church-yards on a quiet evening in *The City of the Absent*, the grotesque picture of loneliness in *Chambers*—a favourite theme with Dickens—and the admirable papers on *Shy Neighbourhoods* and on *Tramps*. Others have a biographical interest, though delightfully objective in treatment; yet others are mere fugitive pieces; but there are few without some of the most attractive qualities of Dickens's easiest style.

Dickens contributed other occasional papers to his journal, some of which may be forgotten without injury to his fame. Amongst these may be reckoned the rather dreary *George Silverman's Explanation* (1868), in which there is nothing characteristic but a vivid picture of a set of ranters, led by a clique of scoundrels; on the other hand, there will always be admirers of the pretty *Holiday Romance*, published nearly simultaneously in America and England, a nosegay of tales told by children, the only fault of which is that, as with other children's nosegays, there is perhaps a little too much of it. I have no room for helping to rescue from partial oblivion an old friend, whose portrait has not, I think, found a home amongst his master's collected sketches. Pincher's counterfeit has gone astray, like *Pincher* himself. Meanwhile, the special institution of the Christmas number flourished in connexion with *All the Year Round* down to the year 1867, as it had during the last five years of *Household Words*. It consisted, with the exception of the very last number, of a series of short stories, in a framework of the editor's own devising. To the authors of the stories, of which he invariably himself

wrote one or more, he left the utmost liberty, at times stipulating for nothing but that tone of cheerful philanthropy which he had domesticated in his journal. In the Christmas numbers, which gradually attained to such a popularity that of one of the last something like a quarter of a million copies were sold, Dickens himself shone most conspicuously in the introductory sections; and some of these are to be reckoned amongst his very best descriptive character-sketches. Already in *Household Words* Christmas numbers the introductory sketch of the *Seven Poor Travellers* from Watt's Charity at supper in the Rochester hostelry, and the excellent description of a winter journey and sojourn at the *Holly Tree Inn*, with an excursus on inns in general, had become widely popular. The *All the Year Round* numbers, however, largely augmented this success. After *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, with the adventures of Miss Kitty Kimmeens, a pretty little morality in miniature, teaching the same lesson as the vagaries of Mr. Mopes the hermit, came *Somebody's Luggage*, with its exhaustive disquisition on waiters; and then the memorable chirpings of *Mrs. Lirriper*, in both *Lodgings* and *Legacy*, admirable in the delicacy of their pathos, and including an inimitable picture of London lodging-house life. Then followed the *Prescriptions* of *Dr. Marigold*, the eloquent and sarcastic but tender-hearted Cheap Jack; and *Mugby Junction*, which gave words to the cry of a whole nation of hungry and thirsty travellers. In the tales and sketches contributed by him to the Christmas numbers, in addition to these introductions, he at times gave the rein to his love for the fanciful and the grotesque, which there was here no reason to keep under. On the whole, written, as in a sense these compositions were, to order, nothing is more astonishing in them than his continued freshness, against

which his mannerism is here of vanishing importance; and, inasmuch as after issuing a last Christmas number of a different kind, Dickens abandoned the custom when it had reached the height of popular favour, and when manifold imitations had offered him the homage of their flattery, he may be said to have withdrawn from this campaign in his literary life with banners flying.

In the year 1859 Dickens's readings had been comparatively few; and they had ceased altogether in the following year, when the *Uncommercial Traveller* began his wanderings. The winter from 1859 to 1860 was his last winter at Tavistock House; and, with the exception of his rooms in Wellington Street, he had now no settled residence but Gad's Hill Place. He sought its pleasant retreat about the beginning of June, after the new experience of an attack of rheumatism had made him recognise "the necessity of country training all through the summer." Yet such was the recuperative power, or the indomitable self-confidence, of his nature, that after he had in these summer months contributed some of the most delightful *Uncommercial Traveller* papers to his journal, we find him already in August "prowling about, meditating a new book."

It is refreshing to think of Dickens in this pleasant interval of country life, before he had rushed once more into the excitement of his labours as a public reader. We may picture him to ourselves, accompanied by his dogs, striding along the country roads and lanes, exploring the haunts of the country tramps, "a piece of Kentish road," for instance, "bordered on either side by a wood, and having on one hand, between the road-dust and the trees, a skirting patch of grass. Wild flowers grow in abundance on this spot, and it lies high and airy, with a distant river

stealing steadily away to the ocean like a man's life. To gain the mile-stone here, which the moss, primroses, violets, bluebells, and wild roses would soon render illegible but for peering travellers pushing them aside with their sticks, you must come up a steep hill, come which way you may." At the foot of that hill, I fancy, lay Dullborough town half asleep in the summer afternoon; and the river in the distance was that which bounded the horizon of a little boy's vision "whose father's family name was Pirrip, and whose Christian name was Philip, but whose infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip."

The story of Pip's adventures, the novel of *Great Expectations*, was thought over in these Kentish perambulations between Thames and Medway along the road which runs, apparently with the intention of running out to sea, from Higham towards the marshes; in the lonely churchyard of Cooling village by the thirteen little stone-lozenges, of which Pip counted only five, now nearly buried in their turn by the rank grass; and in quiet saunters through the familiar streets of Rochester, past the "queer" Townhall; and through the "Vines" past the fine old Restoration House, called in the book (by the name of an altogether different edifice) Satis House. And the climax of the narrative was elaborated on a unique steamboat excursion from London to the mouth of the Thames, broken by a night at the "Ship and Lobster," an old riverside inn called "The Ship" in the story. No wonder that Dickens's descriptive genius should become refreshed by these studies of his subject, and that thus *Great Expectations* should have indisputably become one of the most picturesque of his books. But it is something very much more at the same time. The *Tale of Two Cities* had as a story strongly

seized upon the attention of the reader. But in the earlier chapters of *Great Expectations* every one felt that Dickens was himself again. Since the Yarmouth scenes in *David Copperfield* he had written nothing in which description married itself to sentiment so humorously and so tenderly. Uncouth, and slow, and straightforward, and gentle of heart, like Mr. Peggotty, Joe Gargery is as new a conception as he is a genuinely true one; nor is it easy to know under what aspect to relish him most—whether disconsolate in his Sunday clothes, "like some extraordinary bird, standing, as he did, speechless, with his tuft of feathers ruffled, and his mouth open as if he wanted a worm," or at home by his own fireside, winking at his little comrade, and, when caught in the act by his wife, "drawing the back of his hand across his nose with his usual conciliatory air on such occasions." Nor since *David Copperfield* had Dickens again shown such an insight as he showed here into the world of a child's mind. "To be quite sure," he wrote to Forster, "I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe." His fears were unnecessary; for with all its charm the history of Pip lacks the personal element which insures our sympathy to the earlier story and to its hero. In delicacy of feeling, however, as well as in humour of description, nothing in Dickens surpasses the earlier chapters of *Great Expectations;* and equally excellent is the narrative of Pip's disloyalty of heart toward his early friends, down to his departure from the forge, a picture of pitiable selfishness almost Rousseau-like in its fidelity to poor human nature; down to his comic humiliation, when in the pride of his new position and his new clothes, before "that unlimited miscreant, Trabb's boy." The

later and especially the concluding portions of this novel contain much that is equal in power to its opening; but it must be allowed that, before many chapters have ended, a false tone finds its way into the story. The whole history of Miss Havisham, and the crew of relations round the unfortunate creature, is strained and unnatural, and Estella's hardness is as repulsive as that of Edith Dombey herself. Mr. Jaggers and his house-keeper, and even Mr. Wemmick, have an element of artificiality in them, whilst about the Pocket family there is little, if anything at all, that is real. The story, however, seems to recover itself as the main thread in its deftly-woven texture is brought forward again: when on a dark, gusty night, ominous of coming trouble, the catastrophe of Pip's expectations announces itself in the return from abroad of his unknown benefactor, the convict whom he had as a child fed on the marshes. The remainder of the narrative is successful in conveying to the reader the sense of sickening anxiety which fills the hero; the interest is skilfully sustained by the introduction of a very strong situation—Pip's narrow escape out of the clutches of "Old Orlick" in the lime-kiln on the marshes; and the climax is reached in the admirably-executed narrative of the convict's attempt, with the aid of Pip, to escape by the river. The actual winding-up of *Great Expectations* is not altogether satisfactory; but on the whole the book must be ranked among the very best of Dickens's later novels, as combining, with the closer construction and intenser narrative force common to several of these, not a little of the delightfully genial humour of his earlier works.

Already, before *Great Expectations* was completely published, Dickens had given a few readings at the St. James's Hall, and by the end of October in the same year, 1861,

he was once more engaged in a full course of country readings. They occupied him till the following January, only ten days being left for his Christmas number, and a brief holiday for Christmas itself; so close was the adjustment of time and work by this favourite of fortune. The death of his faithful Arthur Smith befell most untowardly before the country readings were begun, but their success was unbroken, from Scotland to South Devon. The long-contemplated extract from *Copperfield* had at last been added to the list—a self-sacrifice *coram publico*, hallowed by success—and another from *Nicholas Nickleby*, which "went in the wildest manner." He was, however, nearly worn out with fatigue before these winter readings were over, and was glad to snatch a moment of repose before a short spring course in town began. Scarcely was this finished, when he was coquetting in his mind with an offer from Australia, and had already proposed to himself to throw in, as a piece of work by the way, a series of papers to be called *The Uncommercial Traveller Upside Down*. Meanwhile, a few readings for a charitable purpose in Paris, and a short summer course at St. James's Hall, completed this second series in the year 1863.

Whatever passing thoughts overwork by day or sleeplessness at night may have occasionally brought with them, Dickens himself would have been strangely surprised, as no doubt would have been the great body of a public to which he was by this time about the best known man in England, had he been warned that weakness and weariness were not to be avoided even by a nature endowed with faculties so splendid and with an energy so conquering as his. He seemed to stand erect in the strength of his matured powers, equal as of old to any task which he set himself, and exulting, though with less

buoyancy of spirit than of old, in the wreaths which continued to strew his path. Yet already the ranks of his contemporaries were growing thinner, while close to himself death was taking away members of the generation before, and of that after, his own. Amongst them was his mother—of whom his biography and his works have little to say or to suggest—and his second son. Happy events, too, had in the due course of things contracted the family circle at Gad's Hill. Of his intimates, he lost, in 1863, Augustus Egg; and in 1864 John Leech, to whose genius he had himself formerly rendered eloquent homage.

A still older associate, the great painter Stanfield, survived till 1867. "No one of your father's friends," Dickens then wrote to Stanfield's son, "can ever have loved him more dearly than I always did, or can have better known the worth of his noble character." Yet another friend, who, however, so far as I can gather, had not at any time belonged to Dickens's most familiar circle, had died on Christmas Eve, 1863—Thackeray, whom it had for some time become customary to compare or contrast with him as his natural rival. Yet in point of fact, save for the tenderness which, as with all humourists of the highest order, was an important element in their writings, and save for the influences of time and country to which they were both subject, there are hardly two other amongst our great humourists who have less in common. Their unlikeness shows itself, among other things, in the use made by Thackeray of suggestions which it is difficult to believe he did not in the first instance owe to Dickens. Who would venture to call Captain Costigan a plagiarism from Mr. Snevellici, or to affect that Wenham and Wagg were copied from Pyke and Pluck, or that Major Pendennis—whose pardon one feels inclined to beg for the juxtaposition—

was founded upon Major Bagstock, or the Old Campaigner in the *Newcomes* on the Old Soldier in *Copperfield?* But that suggestions were in these and perhaps in a few other instances derived from Dickens by Thackeray for some of his most masterly characters, it would, I think, be idle to deny. In any case, the style of these two great writers differed as profoundly as their way of looking at men and things. Yet neither of them lacked a thorough appreciation of the other's genius; and it is pleasant to remember that, after paying in *Pendennis* a tribute to the purity of Dickens's books, Thackeray in a public lecture referred to his supposed rival in a way which elicited from the latter the warmest of acknowledgments. It cannot be said that the memorial words which, after Thackeray's death, Dickens was prevailed upon to contribute to the *Cornhill Magazine* did more than justice to the great writer whom England had just lost; but it is well that the kindly and unstinting tribute of admiration should remain on record, to contradict any supposition that a disagreement which had some years previously disturbed the harmony of their intercourse, and of which the world had, according to its wont, made the most, had really estranged two generous minds from one another. The effort which on this occasion Dickens made is in itself a proof of his kindly feeling towards Thackeray. Of Talfourd and Landor and Stanfield he could write readily after their deaths, but he frankly told Mr. Wilkie Collins that, "had he felt he could," he would most gladly have excused himself from writing the "couple of pages" about Thackeray.

Dickens, it should be remembered, was at no time a man of many friends. The mere dalliance of friendship was foreign to one who worked so indefatigably in his hours of recreation as well as of labour; and fellowship

in work of one kind or another seems to have been, in later years at all events, the surest support to his intimacy. Yet he was most easily drawn, not only to those who could help him, but to those whom he could help in congenial pursuits and undertakings. Such was, no doubt, the origin of his friendship in these later years with an accomplished French actor on the English boards, whom, in a rather barren period of our theatrical history, Dickens may have been justified in describing as "far beyond any one on our stage," and who certainly was an "admirable artist." In 1864 Mr. Fechter had taken the Lyceum, the management of which he was to identify with a more elegant kind of melodrama than that long domesticated lower down the Strand; and Dickens was delighted to bestow on him counsel frankly sought and frankly given. As an author, too, he directly associated himself with the art of his friend.[1] For I may mention here by anticipation that the last of the *All the Year Round* Christmas numbers, the continuous story of *No Thoroughfare*, was written by Dickens and Mr. Wilkie Collins in 1867, with a direct eye to its subsequent adaptation to the stage, for which it actually was fitted by Mr. Wilkie Collins in the following year. The place of its production, the Adelphi, suited the broad effects and the rather conventional comic humour of the story and piece. From America, Dickens

[1] One of the last things ever written by Dickens was a criticism of M. Fechter's acting, intended to introduce him to the American public. A false report, by the-way, declared Dickens to have been the author of the dramatic version of Scott's novel, which at Christmas, 1865–'66, was produced at the Lyceum, under the title of *The Master of Ravenswood;* but he allowed that he had done "a great deal towards and about the piece, having an earnest desire to put Scott, for once, on the stage in his own gallant manner."

watched the preparation of the piece with unflagging interest; and his innate and irrepressible genius for stage-management reveals itself in the following passage from a letter written by him to an American friend soon after his return to England: "*No Thoroughfare* is very shortly coming out in Paris, where it is now in active rehearsal. It is still playing here, but without Fechter, who has been very ill. He and Wilkie raised so many pieces of stage-effect here, that, unless I am quite satisfied with the report, I shall go over and try my stage-managerial hand at the Vaudeville Theatre. I particularly want the drugging and attempted robbery in the bedroom-scene at the Swiss Inn to be done to the sound of a water-fall rising and falling with the wind. Although in the very opening of that scene they speak of the water-fall, and listen to it, nobody thought of its mysterious music. I could make it, with a good stage-carpenter, in an hour."

Great Expectations had been finished in 1860, and already in the latter part of 1861, the year which comprised the main portion of his second series of readings, he had been thinking of a new story. He had even found a title —the unlucky title which he afterwards adopted—but in 1862 the tempting Australian invitation had been a serious obstacle in his way. "I can force myself to go aboard a ship, and I can force myself to do at that reading-desk what I have done a hundred times; but whether, with all this unsettled, fluctuating distress in my mind, I could force an original book out of it is another question." Nor was it the "unsettled, fluctuating distress" which made it a serious effort for him to attempt another longer fiction. Dickens shared with most writers the experience that both the inventive power and the elasticity of memory decline with advancing years. Already since the time when he

was thinking of writing *Little Dorrit* it had become his habit to enter in a book kept for the purpose memoranda for possible future use, hints for subjects of stories,[1] scenes, situations, and characters; thoughts and fancies of all kinds; titles for possible books. Of these *Somebody's Luggage*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *No Thoroughfare*—the last an old fancy revived—came to honourable use; as did many names, both Christian and surnames, and combinations of both. Thus, Bradley Headstone's *prænomen* was derived directly from the lists of the Education Department, and the Lammles and the Stiltstalkings, with Mr. Merdle and the Dorrits, existed as names before the characters were fitted to them. All this, though no doubt in part attributable to the playful readiness of an observation never to be caught asleep, points in the direction of a desire to be securely provided with an armoury of which, in earlier days, he would have taken slight thought.

Gradually—indeed, so far as I know, more gradually than in the case of any other of his stories—he had built up the tale for which he had determined on the title of *Our Mutual Friend*, and slowly, and without his old self-confidence, he had, in the latter part of 1863, set to work upon it. "I want to prepare it for the spring, but I am determined not to begin to publish with less than four numbers done. I see my opening perfectly, with the one main line on which the story is to turn, and if I don't strike while the iron (meaning myself) is hot, I shall drift off again, and have to go through all this uneasiness once more." For, unfortunately, he had resolved on returning to the old twenty-number measure for his new story. Begun with an effort,

[1] Dickens undoubtedly had a genius for titles. Amongst some which he suggested for the use of a friend and contributor to his journal are, "*What will he do with it?*" and "*Can he forgive her?*"

Our Mutual Friend—the publication of which extended from May, 1864, to November, 1865—was completed under difficulties, and difficulties of a kind hitherto unknown to Dickens. In February, 1865, as an immediate consequence, perhaps, of exposure at a time when depression of spirits rendered him less able than usual to bear it, he had a severe attack of illness, of which Forster says that it "put a broad mark between his past life and what remained to him of the future." From this time forward he felt a lameness in his left foot, which continued to trouble him at intervals during the remainder of his life, and which finally communicated itself to the left hand. A comparison of times, however, convinced Forster that the real origin of this ailment was to be sought in general causes.

In 1865, as the year wore on, and the pressure of the novel still continued, he felt that he was "working himself into a damaged state," and was near to that which has greater terrors for natures like his than for more placid temperaments—breaking down. So, in May, he went first to the sea-side and then to France. On his return (it was the 9th of June, the date of his death five years afterwards) he was in the railway train which met with a fearful accident at Staplehurst, in Kent. His carriage was the only passenger-carriage in the train which, when the bridge gave way, was not thrown over into the stream. He was able to escape out of the window, to make his way in again for his brandy-flask and the MS. of a number of *Our Mutual Friend* which he had left behind him, to clamber down the brickwork of the bridge for water, to do what he could towards rescuing his unfortunate fellow-travellers, and to aid the wounded and the dying. "I have," he wrote, in describing the scene, "a—I don't know what to call it: constitutional, I suppose—presence of mind, and was not

in the least fluttered at the time. . . . But in writing these scanty words of recollection I feel the shake, and am obliged to stop." Nineteen months afterwards, when on a hurried reading tour in the North, he complains to Miss Hogarth of the effect of the railway shaking which since the Staplehurst accident "tells more and more." It is clear how serious a shock the accident had caused. He never, Miss Hogarth thinks, quite recovered it. Yet it might have acted less disastrously upon a system not already nervously weakened. As evidence of the decline of Dickens's nervous power, I hardly know whether it is safe to refer to the gradual change in his handwriting, which in his last years is a melancholy study.

All these circumstances should be taken into account in judging of Dickens's last completed novel. The author would not have been himself had he, when once fairly engaged upon his work, failed to feel something of his old self-confidence. Nor was this feeling, which he frankly confessed to Mr. Wilkie Collins, altogether unwarranted. *Our Mutual Friend*[1] is, like the rest of Dickens's later writings, carefully and skilfully put together as a story. No exception is to be taken to it on the ground that the identity on which much of the plot hinges is long foreseen by the reader; for this, as Dickens told his critics in his postscript, had been part of his design, and was, in fact, considering the general nature of the story, almost indispensable. The defect rather lies in the absence of that element of uncertainty which is needed in order to

[1] This title has helped to extinguish the phrase of which it consists. Few would now be found to agree with the last clause of Flora's parenthesis in *Little Dorrit:* "Our mutual friend—too cold a word for me; at least I don't mean that very proper expression, mutual friend."

sustain the interest. The story is, no doubt, ingeniously enough constructed, but admiration of an ingenious construction is insufficient to occupy the mind of a reader through an inevitable disentanglement. Moreover, some of the machinery, though cleverly contrived, cannot be said to work easily. Thus, the *ruse* of the excellent Boffin in playing the part of a skinflint might pass as a momentary device, but its inherent improbability, together with the likelihood of its leading to an untoward result, makes its protraction undeniably tedious. It is not, however, in my opinion at least, in the matter of construction that *Our Mutual Friend* presents a painful contrast with earlier works produced, like it, "on a large canvas." The conduct of the story as a whole is fully vigorous enough to enchain the attention; and in portions of it the hand of the master displays its unique power. He is at his best in the whole of the water-side scenes, both where "The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters" (identified by zealous discoverers with a tavern called "The Two Brewers") lies like an oasis in the midst of a desert of ill-favoured tidal deposits, and where Rogue Riderhood has his lair at the lock higher up the river. A marvellous union of observation and imagination was needed for the picturing of a world in which this amphibious monster has his being; and never did Dickens's inexhaustible knowledge of the physiognomy of the Thames and its banks stand him in better stead than in these powerful episodes. It is unfortunate, though in accordance with the common fate of heroes and heroines, that Lizzie Hexham should, from the outset, have to discard the colouring of her surroundings, and to talk the conventional dialect as well as express the conventional sentiments of the heroic world. Only at the height of the action she ceases to be commonplace, and becomes entitled

to be remembered amongst the true heroines of fiction. A more unusual figure, of the half-pathetic, half-grotesque kind for which Dickens had a peculiar liking, is Lizzie's friend, the doll's dressmaker, into whom he has certainly infused an element of genuine sentiment; her protector, Riah, on the contrary, is a mere stage-saint, though by this character Dickens appears to have actually hoped to redeem the aspersions he was supposed to have cast upon the Jews, as if Riah could have redeemed Fagin, any more than Sheva redeemed Shylock.

But in this book whole episodes and parts of the plot through which the mystery of John Harmon winds its length along are ill-adapted for giving pleasure to any reader. The whole Boffin, Wegg, and Venus business—if the term may pass—is extremely wearisome; the character of Mr. Venus, in particular, seems altogether unconnected or unarticulated with the general plot, on which, indeed, it is but an accidental excrescence. In the Wilfer family there are the outlines of some figures of genuine humour, but the outlines only; nor is Bella raised into the sphere of the charming out of that of the pert and skittish. A more ambitious attempt, and a more noteworthy failure, was the endeavour to give to the main plot of this novel such a satiric foil as the Circumlocution Office had furnished to the chief action of *Little Dorrit*, in a caricature of society at large, its surface varnish and its internal rottenness. The Barnacles, and those who deemed it their duty to rally round the Barnacles, had, we saw, felt themselves hard hit; but what sphere or section of society could feel itself specially caricatured in the Veneerings, or in their associates—the odious Lady Tippins, the impossibly brutal Podsnap, Fascination Fledgeby, and the Lammles, a couple which suggests nothing but antimony and the

Chamber of Horrors? Caricature such as this, representing no society that has ever in any part of the world pretended to be "good," corresponds to the wild rhetoric of the superfluous Betty Higden episode against the "gospel according to Podsnappery;" but it is, in truth, satire from which both wit and humour have gone out. An angry, often almost spasmodic, mannerism has to supply their place. Amongst the personages moving in "society" are two which, as playing serious parts in the progress of the plot, the author is necessarily obliged to seek to endow with the flesh and blood of real human beings. Yet it is precisely in these—the friends Eugene and Mortimer—that, in the earlier part of the novel at all events, the constraint of the author's style seems least relieved; the dialogues between these two Templars have an unnaturalness about them as intolerable as euphuism or the effeminacies of the Augustan age. It is true that, when the story reaches its tragic height, the character of Eugene is borne along with it, and his affectations are forgotten. But in previous parts of the book, where he poses as a wit, and is evidently meant for a gentleman, he fails to make good his claims to either character. Even the skilfully contrived contrast between the rivals Eugene Wrayburn and the school-master, Bradley Headstone—through whom and through whose pupil, Dickens, by-the-way, dealt another blow against a system of mental training founded upon facts alone—fails to bring out the conception of Eugene which the author manifestly had in his mind. Lastly, the old way of reconciling dissonances—a marriage which "society" calls a *mésalliance*—has rarely furnished a lamer ending than here; and, had the unwritten laws of English popular fiction permitted, a tragic close would have better accorded with the sombre hue of

the most powerful portions of this curiously unequal romance.

The effort—for such it was—of *Our Mutual Friend* had not been over for more than a few months, when Dickens accepted a proposal for thirty nights' readings from the Messrs. Chappell; and by April, 1866, he was again hard at work, flying across the country into Lancashire and Scotland, and back to his temporary London residence in Southwick Place, Hyde Park. In any man more capable than Dickens of controlling the restlessness which consumed him the acceptance of this offer would have been incomprehensible; for his heart had been declared out of order by his physician, and the patient had shown himself in some degree awake to the significance of this opinion. But the readings were begun and accomplished notwithstanding, though not without warnings, on which he insisted on putting his own interpretation. Sleeplessness aggravated fatigue, and stimulants were already necessary to enable him to do the work of his readings without discomfort. Meanwhile, some weeks before they were finished, he had been induced to enter into negotiations about a further engagement to begin at the end of the year. Time was to be left for the Christmas number, which this year could hardly find its scene anywhere else than at a railway junction; and the readings were not to extend over forty nights, which seem ultimately to have been increased to fifty. This second series, which included a campaign in Ireland, brilliantly successful despite snow and rain, and Fenians, was over in May. Then came the climax, for America now claimed her share of the great author for her public halls and chapels and lecture-theatres; and the question of the summer and autumn was whether or not to follow the sound of the distant

dollar. It was closely debated between Dickens and his friend Forster and Wills, and he describes himself as "tempest-tossed" with doubts; but his mind had inclined in one direction from the first, and the matter was virtually decided when it resolved to send a confidential agent to make enquiries on the spot. Little imported another and grave attack in his foot; the trusty Mr. Dolby's report was irresistible. Eighty readings within half a year was the estimated number, with profits amounting to over fifteen thousand pounds. The gains actually made were nearly five thousand pounds in excess of this calculation.

A farewell banquet, under the presidency of Lord Lytton, gave the favourite author Godspeed on his journey to the larger half of his public; on the 9th of November he sailed from Liverpool, and on the 19th landed at Boston. The voyage, on which, with his old buoyancy, he had contrived to make himself master of the modest revels of the saloon, seems to have done him good, or at least to have made him, as usual, impatient to be at his task. Barely arrived, he is found reporting himself "so well, that I am constantly chafing at not having begun to-night, instead of this night week." By December, however, he was at his reading-desk, first at Boston, where he met with the warmest of welcomes, and then at New York, where there was a run upon the tickets, which he described with his usual excited delight. The enthusiasm of his reception by the American public must have been heightened by the thought that it was now or never for them to see him face to face, and, by-gones being by-gones, to testify to him their admiration. But there may have been some foundation for his discovery that some signs of agitation on his part were expected in return, and "that it would have been taken as a suitable compliment if I would

stagger on the platform, and instantly drop, overpowered by the spectacle before me." It was but a sad Christmas which he spent with his faithful Dolby at their New York inn, tired, and with a "genuine American catarrh upon him," of which he never freed himself during his stay in the country. Hardly had he left the doctor's hands than he was about again, reading in Boston and New York and their more immediate neighbourhood—that is, within six or seven hours by railway—till February; and then, in order to stimulate his public, beginning a series of appearances at more distant places before returning to his starting-points. His whole tour included, besides a number of New England towns, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, and in the north Cleveland and Buffalo. Canada and the West were struck out of the programme, the latter chiefly because exciting political matters were beginning to absorb public attention.

During these journeyings Dickens gave himself up altogether to the business of his readings, only occasionally allowing himself to accept the hospitality proffered him on every side. Thus only could he breast the difficulties of his enterprise; for, as I have said, his health was never good during the whole of his visit, and his exertions were severe, though eased by the self-devotion of his attendants, of which, as of his constant kindness, both serious and sportive, towards them it is touching to read. Already in January he describes himself as not seldom "so dead beat" at the close of a reading "that they lay me down on a sofa, after I have been washed and dressed, and I lie there, extremely faint, for a quarter of an hour," and as suffering from intolerable sleeplessness at night. His appetite was equally disordered, and he lived mainly on stimulants. Why had he condemned himself to such a life?

When at last he could declare the stress of his work over he described himself as "nearly used up. Climate, distance, catarrh, travelling, and hard work have begun—I may say so, now they are nearly all over—to tell heavily upon me. Sleeplessness besets me; and if I had engaged to go on into May, I think I must have broken down." Indeed, but for his wonderful energy and the feeling of exultation which is derived from a heavy task nearly accomplished, he would have had to follow the advice of "Longfellow and all the Cambridge men," and give in nearly at the last. But he persevered through the farewell readings, both at Boston and at New York, though on the night before the last reading in America he told Dolby that if he "had to read but twice more, instead of once, he couldn't do it." This last reading of all was given at New York on April 20, two days after a farewell banquet at Delmonico's. It was when speaking on this occasion that, very naturally moved by the unalloyed welcome which had greeted him in whatever part of the States he had visited, he made the declaration already mentioned, promising to perpetuate his grateful sense of his recent American experiences. This apology, which was no apology, at least remains one amongst many proofs of the fact that with Dickens kindness never fell on a thankless soil.

The merry month of May was still young in the Kentish fields and lanes when the master of Gad's Hill Place was home again at last. "I had not been at sea three days on the passage home," he wrote to his friend Mrs. Watson, "when I became myself again." It was, however, too much when "a 'deputation'—two in number, of whom only one could get into my cabin, while the other looked in at my window—came to ask me to read to

the passengers that evening in the saloon. I respectfully replied that sooner than do it I would assault the captain and be put in irons." Alas! he was already fast bound, by an engagement concluded soon after he had arrived in Boston, to a final series of readings at home. "Farewell" is a difficult word to say for any one who has grown accustomed to the stimulating excitement of a public stage, and it is not wonderful that Dickens should have wished to see the faces of his familiar friends—the English public—once more. But the engagement to which he had set his hand was for a farewell of a hundred readings, at the recompense of eight thousand pounds, in addition to expenses and percentage. It is true that he had done this before he had fully realized the effect of his American exertions; but even so there was a terrible unwisdom in the promise. These last readings—and he alone is, in common fairness, to be held responsible for the fact—cut short a life from which much noble fruit might still have been expected for our literature, and which in any case might have been prolonged as a blessing beyond all that gold can buy to those who loved him.

Meanwhile he had allowed himself a short respite before resuming his labours in October. It was not more, his friends thought, than he needed, for much of his old buoyancy seemed to them to be wanting in him, except when hospitality or the intercourse of friendship called it forth. What a charm there still was in his genial humour his letters would suffice to show. It does one good to read his description to his kind American friends Mr. and Mrs. Fields of his tranquillity at Gad's Hill: "Divers birds sing here all day, and the nightingales all night. The place is lovely, and in perfect order. I have put five mirrors in the Swiss châlet where I write, and they reflect and

refract in all kinds of ways the leaves that are quivering at the windows, and the great fields of waving corn, and the sail-dotted river. My room is up amongst the branches of the trees, and the birds and the butterflies fly in and out, and the green branches shoot in at the open windows, and the lights and shadows of the clouds come and go with the rest of the company. The scent of the flowers, and indeed of everything that is growing for miles and miles, is most delicious."

Part of this rare leisure he generously devoted to the preparation for the press of a volume of literary remains from the pen of an old friend. The *Religious Opinions of Chauncey Hare Townshend* should not be altogether overlooked by those interested in Dickens, to whom the loose undogmatic theology of his friend commended itself as readily as the sincere religious feeling underlying it. I cannot say what answer Dickens would have returned to an enquiry as to his creed, but the nature of his religious opinions is obvious enough. Born in the Church of England, he had so strong an aversion from what seemed to him dogmatism of any kind, that he for a time—in 1843—connected himself with a Unitarian congregation; and to Unitarian views his own probably continued during his life most nearly to approach. He described himself as "morally wide asunder from Rome," but the religious conceptions of her community cannot have been a matter of anxious enquiry with him, while he was too liberal-minded to be, unless occasionally, aggressive in his Protestantism. For the rest, his mind, though imaginative, was without mystical tendencies, while for the transitory superstitions of the day it was impossible but that he should entertain the contempt which they deserved. "Although," he writes—

"I regard with a hushed and solemn fear the mysteries between which, and this state of existence, is interposed the barrier of the great trial and change that fall on all the things that live; and, although I have not the audacity to pretend that I know anything of them, I cannot reconcile the mere banging of doors, ringing of bells, creaking of boards, and such like insignificances, with the majestic beauty and pervading analogy of all the Divine rules that I am permitted to understand."

His piety was undemonstrative and sincere, as his books alone would suffice to prove; and he seems to have sought to impress upon his children those religious truths with the acceptance and practice of which he remained himself content. He loved the New Testament, and had, after some fashion of his own, paraphrased the Gospel narrative for the use of his children; but he thought that "half the misery and hypocrisy of the Christian world arises from a stubborn determination to refuse the New Testament as a sufficient guide in itself, and to force the Old Testament into alliance with it—whereof comes all manner of camel-swallowing and of gnat-straining." Of Puritanism in its modern forms he was an uncompromising, and no doubt a conscientious, opponent; and though, with perfect sincerity, he repelled the charge that his attacks upon cant were attacks upon religion, yet their *animus* is such as to make the misinterpretation intelligible. His Dissenting ministers are of the *Bartholomew Fair* species; and though, in his later books, a good clergyman here and there makes his modest appearance, the balance can hardly be said to be satisfactorily redressed.

The performance of this pious office was not the only kind act he did after his return from America. Of course, however, his own family was nearest to his heart. No kinder or more judicious words were ever addressed by a

father to his children than those which, about this time, he wrote to one of his sons, then beginning a successful career at Cambridge, and to another—the youngest—who was setting forth for Australia, to join an elder brother already established in that country. "Poor Plorn," he afterward wrote, "is gone to Australia. It was a hard parting at the last. He seemed to me to become once more my youngest and favourite child as the day drew near, and I did not think I could have been so shaken."

In October his "farewell" readings began. He had never had his heart more in the work than now. Curiously enough, not less than two proposals had reached him during this autumn—one from Birmingham and the other from Edinburgh—that he should allow himself to be put forward as a candidate for Parliament; but he declined to entertain either, though in at least one of the two cases the prospects of success would not have been small. His views of political and parliamentary life had not changed since he had written to Bulwer Lytton in 1865: "Would there not seem to be something horribly rotten in the system of political life, when one stands amazed how any man, not forced into it by his position, as you are, can bear to live it?" Indeed, they had hardly changed since the days when he had come into personal contact with them as a reporter. In public and in private he had never ceased to ridicule our English system of party, and to express his contempt for the Legislature and all its works. He had, however, continued to take a lively interest in public affairs, and his letters contain not a few shrewd remarks on both home and foreign questions. Like most liberal minds of his age, he felt a warm sympathy for the cause of Italy; and the English statesman whom he appears to have most warmly admired was Lord Russell, in

whose good intentions neither friends nor adversaries were wont to lose faith. Meanwhile his Radicalism gradually became of the most thoroughly independent type, though it interfered neither with his approval of the proceedings in Jamaica as an example of strong government, nor with his scorn of "the meeting of jawbones and asses" held against Governor Eyre at Manchester. The political questions, however, which really moved him deeply were those social problems to which his sympathy for the poor had always directed his attention—the Poor-law, temperance, Sunday observance, punishment and prisons, labour and strikes. On all these heads sentiment guided his judgment, but he spared no pains to convince himself that he was in the right; and he was always generous, as when, notwithstanding his interest in *Household Words*, he declared himself unable to advocate the repeal of the paper duty for a moment, "as against the soap duty, or any other pressing on the mass of the poor."

Thus he found no difficulty in adhering to the course he had marked out for himself. The subject which now occupied him before all others was a scheme for a new reading, with which it was his wish to vary and to intensify the success of the series on which he was engaged. This was no other than a selection of scenes from *Oliver Twist*, culminating in the scene of the murder of Nancy by Sikes, which, before producing it in public, he resolved to "try" upon a select private audience. The trial was a brilliant success. "The public," exclaimed a famous actress who was present, "have been looking out for a sensation these last fifty years or so, and, by Heaven, they have got it!" Accordingly, from January, 1869, it formed one of the most frequent of his readings, and the effort which it involved counted for much in the collapse which was to

follow. Never were the limits between reading and acting more thoroughly effaced by Dickens, and never was the production of an extraordinary effect more equally shared by author and actor. But few who witnessed this extraordinary performance can have guessed the elaborate preparation bestowed upon it, which is evident from the following notes (by Mr. C. Kent) on the book used in it by the reader:

"What is as striking as anything in all this reading, however—that is, in the reading copy of it now lying before us as we write—is the mass of hints as to the by-play in the stage directions for himself, so to speak, scattered up and down the margin. 'Fagin raised his right hand, and shook his trembling forefinger in the air,' is there on page 101 in print. Beside it, on the margin in MS., is the word '*Action.*' Not a word of it was said. It was simply *done.* Again, immediately below that, on the same page—Sikes *loquitur:* 'Oh! you haven't, haven't you?' passing a pistol into a more convenient pocket ('*Action*' again in MS. on the margin.) Not a word was said about the pistol. . . . So again, afterwards, as a rousing self-direction, one sees notified in MS. on page 107 the grim stage direction, '*Murder coming!*'"

The "Murder" was frequently read by Dickens not less than four times a week during the early months of 1869, in which year, after beginning in Ireland, he had been continually travelling to and fro between various parts of Great Britain and town. Already in February the old trouble in his foot had made itself felt, but, as usual, it had long been disregarded. On the 10th of April he had been entertained at Liverpool, in St. George's Hall, at a banquet presided over by Lord Dufferin, and in a genial speech had tossed back the ball to Lord Houghton, who had pleasantly bantered him for his unconsciousness of the merits of the House of Lords. Ten days afterwards

he was to read at Preston, but, feeling uneasy about himself, had reported his symptoms to his doctor in London. The latter hastened down to Preston, and persuaded Dickens to accompany him back to town, where, after a consultation, it was determined that the readings must be stopped for the current year, and that reading combined with travelling must never be resumed. What his sister-in-law and daughter feel themselves justified in calling "the beginning of the end" had come at last.

With his usual presence of mind Dickens at once perceived the imperative necessity of interposing, "as it were, a fly-leaf in the book of my life, in which nothing should be written from without for a brief season of a few weeks." But he insisted that the combination of the reading and the travelling was alone to be held accountable for his having found himself feeling, "for the first time in my life, giddy, jarred, shaken, faint, uncertain of voice and sight and tread and touch, and dull of spirit." Meanwhile, he for once kept quiet, first in London, and then at Gad's Hill. "This last summer," say those who did most to make it bright for him, "was a very happy one," and gladdened by the visits of many friends. On the retirement, also on account of ill-health, from *All the Year Round* of his second self, Mr. W. H. Wills, he was fortunately able at once to supply the vacant place by the appointment to it of his eldest son, who seems to have inherited that sense of lucid order which was amongst his father's most distinctive characteristics. He travelled very little this year, though in September he made a speech at Birmingham on behalf of his favourite Midland Institute, delivering himself, at its conclusion, of an antithetical Radical commonplace, which, being misreported or misunderstood, was commented upon with much unnecessary won-

derment. With a view to avoiding the danger of excessive fatigue, the latter part of the year was chiefly devoted to writing in advance part of his new book, which, like *Great Expectations*, was to grow up, and to be better for growing up, in his own Kentish home, and almost within sound of the bells of "Cloisterham" Cathedral. But the new book was never to be finished.

The first number of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was not published till one more short series of twelve readings, given in London during a period extending from January to March, was at an end. He had obtained Sir Thomas Watson's consent to his carrying out this wish, largely caused by the desire to compensate the Messrs. Chappell in some measure for the disappointment to which he had been obliged to subject them by the interruption of his longer engagement. Thus, though the Christmas of 1869 had brought with it another warning of trouble in the foot, the year 1870 opened busily, and early in January Dickens established himself for the season at 5 Hyde Park Place. Early in the month he made another speech at Birmingham; but the readings were strictly confined to London. On the other hand, it was not to be expected that the "Murder" would be excluded from the list. It was read in January to an audience of actors and actresses; and it is pleasant to think that he was able to testify to his kindly feeling towards their profession on one of the last occasions when he appeared on his own stage. "I set myself," he wrote, "to carrying out of themselves and their observation those who were bent on watching how the effects were got; and, I believe, I succeeded. Coming back to it again, however, I feel it was madness ever to do it so continuously. My ordinary pulse is seventy-two, and it runs up under this effort to one hundred

and twelve." Yet this fatal reading was repeated thrice more before the series closed, and with even more startling results upon the reader. The careful observations made by the physician, however, show that the excitement of his last readings was altogether too great for any man to have endured much longer. At last, on March 16, the night came which closed fifteen years of personal relations between the English public and its favourite author, such as are, after all, unparalleled in the history of our literature. His farewell words were few and simple, and referred with dignity to his resolution to devote himself henceforth exclusively to his calling as an author, and to his hope that in but two short weeks' time his audience "might enter, in their own homes, on a new series of readings at which his assistance would be indispensable."

Of the short time which remained to him his last book was the chief occupation; and an association thus clings to the *Mystery of Edwin Drood* which would, in any case, incline us to treat this fragment — for it was to be no more — with tenderness. One would, indeed, hardly be justified in asserting that this story, like that which Thackeray left behind him in the same unfinished state, bade fair to become a masterpiece in its author's later manner; there is much that is forced in its humour, while as to the working out of the chief characters our means of judgment are, of course, incomplete. The outline of the design, on the other hand, presents itself with tolerable clearness to the minds of most readers of insight or experience, though the story deserves its name of a mystery, instead of, like *Our Mutual Friend*, seeming merely to withhold a necessary explanation. And it must be allowed few plots have ever been more effectively laid than this, of which the untying will never be known. Three such per-

tonages in relation to a deed of darkness as Jasper for its contriver, Durden for its unconscious accomplice, and Deputy for its self-invited witness, and all so naturally connecting themselves with the locality of the perpetration of the crime, assuredly could not have been brought together except by one who had gradually attained to mastership in the adaptation of characters to the purposes of a plot. Still, the strongest impression left upon the reader of this fragment is the evidence it furnishes of Dickens having retained to the last powers which were most peculiarly and distinctively his own. Having skilfully brought into connexion, for the purposes of his plot, two such strangely-contrasted spheres of life and death as the cathedral close at "Cloisterham" and an opium-smoking den in one of the obscurest corners of London, he is enabled, by his imaginative and observing powers, not only to *realise* the picturesque elements in both scenes, but also to convert them into a twofold background, accommodating itself to the most vivid hues of human passion. This is to bring out what he was wont to call "the romantic aspect of familiar things." With the physiognomy of Cloisterham — otherwise Rochester — with its cathedral, and its "monastery" ruin, and its "Minor Canon Corner," and its "Nuns' House"—otherwise "Eastgate House," in the High Street—he was, of course, closely acquainted; but he had never reproduced its features with so artistic a cunning, and the Mystery of Edwin Drood will always haunt Bishop Gundulph's venerable building and its tranquil precincts. As for the opium-smoking, we have his own statement that what he described he saw—"exactly as he had described it, penny ink-bottle and all—down in Shadwell" in the autumn of 1869. "A couple of the Inspectors of Lodging-houses knew the woman, and took me to her as

I was making a round with them to see for myself the working of Lord Shaftesbury's Bill." Between these scenes John Jasper — a figure conceived with singular force — moves to and fro, preparing his mysterious design. No story of the kind ever began more finely; and we may be excused from enquiring whether signs of diminished vigour of invention and freshness of execution are to be found in other and less prominent portions of the great novelist's last work.

Before, in this year 1870, Dickens withdrew from London to Gad's Hill, with the hope of there in quiet carrying his all but half-finished task to its close, his health had not been satisfactory; he had suffered from time to time in his foot, and his weary and aged look was observed by many of his friends. He was able to go occasionally into society; though at the last dinner-party which he attended — it was at Lord Houghton's, to meet the Prince of Wales and the King of the Belgians — he had been unable to mount above the dining-room floor. Already in March the Queen had found a suitable opportunity for inviting him to wait upon her at Buckingham Palace, when she had much gratified him by her kindly manner; and a few days later he made his appearance at the levee. These acknowledgments of his position as an English author were as they should be; no others were offered, nor is it a matter of regret that there should have been no titles to inscribe on his tomb. He was also twice seen on one of those public occasions which no eloquence graced so readily and so pleasantly as his: once in April, at the dinner for the Newsvenders' Charity, when he spoke of the existence among his humble clients of that "feeling of brotherhood and sympathy which is worth much to all men, or they would herd with wolves;" and once in May — only a

day or two before he went home into the country—when, at the Royal Academy dinner, he paid a touching tribute to the eminent painter, Daniel Maclise, who in the good old days had been much like a brother to himself. Another friend and companion, Mark Lemon, passed away a day or two afterwards; and with the most intimate of all, his future biographer, he lamented the familiar faces of their companions—not one of whom had passed his sixtieth year—upon which they were not to look again. On the 30th of May he was once more at Gad's Hill.

Here he forthwith set to work on his book, taking walks as usual, though of no very great length. On Thursday, the 9th of June, he had intended to pay his usual weekly visit to the office of his journal, and accordingly, on the 8th, devoted the afternoon as well as the morning to finishing the sixth number of the story. When he came across to the house from the châlet before dinner he seemed to his sister-in-law, who alone of the family was at home, tired and silent, and no sooner had they sat down to dinner than she noticed how seriously ill he looked. It speedily became evident that a fit was upon him. "Come and lie down," she entreated. "Yes, on the ground," he said, very distinctly—these were the last words he spoke—and he slid from her arm and fell upon the floor. He was laid on a couch in the room, and there he remained unconscious almost to the last. He died at ten minutes past six on the evening of the 9th—by which time his daughters and his eldest son had been able to join the faithful watcher by his side; his sister and his son Henry arrived when all was over.

His own desire had been to be buried near Gad's Hill; though at one time he is said to have expressed a wish to lie in a disused graveyard, which is still pointed out, in a

secluded corner in the moat of Rochester Castle. Preparations had been made accordingly, when the Dean and Chapter of Rochester urged a request that his remains might be placed in their Cathedral. This was assented to; but at the last moment the Dean of Westminster gave expression to a widespread wish that the great national writer might lie in the national Abbey. There he was buried on June 14, without the slightest attempt at the pomp which he had deprecated in his will, and which he almost fiercely condemned in more than one of his writings. "The funeral," writes Dean Stanley, whose own dust now mingles with that of so many illustrious dead, "was strictly private. It took place at an early hour in the summer morning, the grave having been dug in secret the night before, and the vast solitary space of the Abbey was occupied only by the small band of the mourners, and the Abbey clergy, who, without any music except the occasional peal of the organ, read the funeral service. For days the spot was visited by thousands. Many were the tears shed by the poorer visitors. He rests beside Sheridan, Garrick, and Henderson"—the first actor ever buried in the Abbey. Associations of another kind cluster near; but his generous spirit would not have disdained the thought that he would seem even in death the players' friend.

A plain memorial brass on the walls of Rochester Cathedral vindicates the share which the ancient city and its neighbourhood will always have in his fame. But most touching of all it is to think of him under the trees of his own garden on the hill, in the pleasant home where, after so many labours and so many wanderings, he died in peace, and as one who had earned his rest.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FUTURE OF DICKENS'S FAME.

THERE is no reason whatever to believe that in the few years which have gone by since Dickens's death the delight taken in his works throughout England and North America, as well as elsewhere, has diminished, or that he is not still one of our few most popular writers. The mere fact that his popularity has remained such since, nearly half a century ago, he, like a beam of spring sunshine, first made the world gay, is a sufficient indication of the influence which he must have exercised upon his age. In our world of letters his followers have been many, though naturally enough those whose original genius impelled them to follow their own course soonest ceased to be his imitators. Amongst these I know no more signal instance than the great novelist whose surpassing merits he had very swiftly recognised in her earliest work. For though in the *Scenes of Clerical Life* George Eliot seems to be, as it were, hesitating between Dickens and Thackeray as the models of her humorous writing, reminiscences of the former are unmistakable in the opening of *Amos Barton*, in *Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story*, in *Janet's Repentance;* and though it would be hazardous to trace his influence in the domestic scenes in *Adam Bede*, neither a Christmas exordium in one of the books of *The Mill on the Floss*, nor the Sam

Weller-like freshness of Bob Wakem in the same powerful story, is altogether the author's own. Two of the most successful Continental novelists of the present day have gone to school with Dickens: the one the truly national writer whose *Debit and Credit*, a work largely in the manner of his English model, has, as a picture of modern life, remained unexcelled in German literature;[1] the other, the brilliant Southerner, who may write as much of the *History of his Books* as his public may desire to learn, but who cannot write the pathos of Dickens altogether out of *Jack*, or his farcical fun out of *Le Nabab*. And again—for I am merely illustrating, not attempting to describe, the literary influence of Dickens—who could fail to trace in the Californian studies and sketches of Bret Harte elements of humour and of pathos, to which that genuinely original author would be the last to deny that his great English "master" was no stranger?

Yet popularity and literary influence, however wide and however strong, often pass away as they have come; and in no field of literature are there many reputations which the sea of time fails before very long to submerge. In prose fiction—a comparatively young literary growth—they are certainly not the most numerous, perhaps because on works of this species the manners and style of an age most readily impress themselves, rendering them proportionately strange to the ages that come after. In the works of even the lesser playwrights who pleased the liberal times of Elizabeth, and in lyrics of even secondary merit that were admired by fantastic Caroline cavaliers,

[1] In the last volume of his *magnum opus* of historical fiction Gustav Freytag describes "Boz" as, about the year 1846, filling with boundless enthusiasm the hearts of young men and maidens in a small Silesian country town.

we can still take pleasure. But who can read many of the "standard" novels published as lately even as the days of George the Fourth? The speculation is, therefore, not altogether idle, whether Dickens saw truly when labouring, as most great men do labour, in the belief that his work was not only for a day. Literary eminence was the only eminence he desired, while it was one of the very healthiest elements in his character, that whatever he was, he was thoroughly. He would not have told any one, as Fielding's author told Mr. Booth at the sponging-house, that romance-writing "is certainly the easiest work in the world;" nor, being what he was, could he ever have found it such in his own case. "Whoever," he declared, "is devoted to an art must be content to give himself wholly up to it, and to find his recompense in it." And not only did he obey his own labour-laws, but in the details of his work as a man of letters he spared no pains and no exercise of self-control. "I am," he generously told a beginner, to whom he was counselling patient endeavour, "an impatient and impulsive person myself, but it has been for many years the constant effort of my life to practise at my desk what I preach to you." Never, therefore has a man of letters had a better claim to be judged by his works. As he expressly said in his will, he wished for no other monument than his writings; and with their aid we, who already belong to a new generation, and whose children will care nothing for the gossip and the scandal of which he, like most popular celebrities, was in his lifetime privileged or doomed to become the theme, may seek to form some definite conception of his future place among illustrious Englishmen.

It would, of course, be against all experience to suppose that to future generations Dickens, as a writer, will be all

that he was to his own. Much that constitutes the subject, or at least furnishes the background, of his pictures of English life, like the Fleet Prison and the Marshalsea, has vanished, or is being improved off the face of the land. The form, again, of Dickens's principal works may become obsolete, as it was in a sense accidental. He was the most popular novelist of his day; but should prose fiction, or even the full and florid species of it which has enjoyed so long-lived a favour ever be out of season, the popularity of Dickens's books must experience an inevitable diminution. And even before that day arrives not all the works in a particular species of literature that may to a particular age have seemed destined to live, will have been preserved. Nothing is more surely tested by time than that originality which is the secret of a writer's continuing to be famous, and continuing to be read.

Dickens was not—and to whom in these latter ages of literature could such a term be applied?—a self-made writer, in the sense that he owed nothing to those who had gone before him. He was most assuredly no classical scholar—how could he have been? But I should hesitate to call him an ill-read man, though he certainly was neither a great nor a catholic reader, and though he could not help thinking about *Nicholas Nickleby* while he was reading the *Curse of Kehama*. In his own branch of literature his judgment was sound and sure-footed. It was, of course, a happy accident that as a boy he imbibed that taste for good fiction which is a thing inconceivable to the illiterate. Sneers have been directed against the poverty of his book-shelves in his earlier days of authorship; but I fancy there were not many popular novelists in 1839 who would have taken down with them into the country for a summer sojourn, as Dickens did to Peter-

sham, not only a couple of Scott's novels, but Goldsmith, Swift, Fielding, Smollett, and the British Essayists; nor is there one of these national classics—unless it be Swift—with whom Dickens's books or letters fail to show him to have been familiar. Of Goldsmith's books, he told Forster, in a letter which the biographer of Goldsmith modestly suppressed, he "had no indifferent perception—to the best of his remembrance—when little more than a child." He discusses with understanding the relative literary merits of the serious and humorous papers in *The Spectator;* and, with regard to another work of unique significance in the history of English fiction, *Robinson Crusoe*, he acutely observed that "one of the most popular books on earth has nothing in it to make any one laugh or cry." "It is a book," he added, which he "read very much." It may be noted, by-the-way, that he was an attentive and judicious student of Hogarth; and that thus his criticisms of humorous pictorial art rested upon as broad a basis of comparison as did his judgment of his great predecessors in English humorous fiction.

Amongst these predecessors it has become usual to assert that Smollett exercised the greatest influence upon Dickens. It is no doubt true that in David Copperfield's library Smollett's books are mentioned first, and in the greatest number, that a vision of Roderick Random and Strap haunted the very wicket-gate at Blunderstone, that the poor little hero's first thought on entering the King's Bench prison was the strange company whom Roderick met in the Marshalsea; and that the references to Smollett and his books are frequent in Dickens's other books and in his letters. Leghorn seemed to him "made illustrious" by Smollett's grave, and in a late period of his life he criticises his chief fictions with admirable justice. "*Humphry*

Clinker," he writes, "is certainly Smollett's best. I am rather divided between *Peregrine Pickle* and *Roderick Random*, both extraordinarily good in their way, which is a way without tenderness; but you will have to read them both, and I send the first volume of *Peregrine* as the richer of the two." An odd volume of *Peregrine* was one of the books with which the waiter at the *Holly Tree Inn* endeavoured to beguile the lonely Christmas of the snowed-up traveller, but the latter "knew every word of it already." In the *Lazy Tour*, "Thomas, now just able to grope his way along, in a doubled-up condition, was no bad embodiment of Commodore Trunnion." I have noted, moreover, coincidences of detail which bear witness to Dickens's familiarity with Smollett's works. To Lieutenant Bowling and Commodore Trunnion, as to Captain Cuttle, every man was a "brother," and to the Commodore, as to Mr. Smallweed, the most abusive substantive addressed to a woman admitted of intensification by the epithet "brimstone." I think Dickens had not forgotten the opening of the *Adventures of an Atom* when he wrote a passage in the opening of his own *Christmas Carol;* and that the characters of Tom Pinch and Tommy Traddles—the former more especially—were not conceived without some thought of honest Strap. Furthermore, it was Smollett's example that probably suggested to Dickens the attractive jingle in the title of his *Nicholas Nickleby*. But these are for the most part mere details. The manner of Dickens as a whole resembles Fielding's more strikingly than Smollett's, as it was only natural that it should. The irony of Smollett is drier than was reconcilable with Dickens's nature; it is only in the occasional extravagances of his humour that the former anticipates anything in the latter, and it is only the coarsest scenes of Dickens's earlier books—such as that

between Noah, Charlotte, and Mrs. Sowerbery in *Oliver Twist*—which recall the whole manner of his predecessor. They resemble one another in their descriptive accuracy, and in the accumulation of detail by which they produce instead of obscuring vividness of impression; but it was impossible that Dickens should prefer the general method of the novel of adventure pure and simple, such as Smollett produced after the example of *Gil Blas*, to the less crude form adopted by Fielding, who adhered to earlier and nobler models. With Fielding's, moreover, Dickens's whole nature was congenial; they both had that tenderness which Smollett lacked; and the circumstance that, of all English writers of the past, Fielding's name alone was given by Dickens to one of his sons, shows how, like so many of Fielding's readers, he had learnt to love him with an almost personal affection. The very spirit of the author of *Tom Jones*—that gaiety which, to borrow the saying of a recent historian concerning Cervantes, renders even brutality agreeable, and that charm of sympathetic feeling which makes us love those of his characters which he loves himself—seem astir in some of the most delightful passages of Dickens's most delightful books. So in *Pickwick*, to begin with, in which, by the way, Fielding is cited with a twinkle of the eye all his own, and in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, where a chapter opens with a passage which is pure Fielding:

> "It was morning, and the beautiful Aurora, of whom so much hath been written, said, and sung, did, with her rosy fingers, nip and tweak Miss Pecksniff's nose. It was the frolicsome custom of the goddess, in her intercourse with the fair Cherry, to do so; or, in more prosaic phrase, the tip of that feature in the sweet girl's countenance was always very red at breakfast-time."

Amongst the writers of Dickens's own age there were

only two, or perhaps three, who in very different degrees and ways exercised a noticeable influence upon his writings. He once declared to Washington Irving that he kept everything written by that delightful author upon "his shelves, and in his thoughts, and in his heart of hearts." And, doubtless, in Dickens's early days as an author the influence of the American classic may have aided to stimulate the imaginative element in his English admirer's genius, and to preserve him from a grossness of humour into which, after the *Sketches by Boz*, he very rarely allowed himself to lapse. The two other writers were Carlyle, and, as I have frequently noted in previous chapters, the friend and fellow-labourer of Dickens's later manhood, Mr. Wilkie Collins. It is no unique experience that the disciple should influence the master; and in this instance, perhaps with the co-operation of the examples of the modern French theatre, which the two friends had studied in common, Mr. Wilkie Collins's manner had, I think, no small share in bringing about a transformation in that of Dickens. His stories thus gradually lost all traces of the older masters both in general method and in detail; whilst he came to condense and concentrate his effects in successions of skilfully-arranged scenes. Dickens's debt to Carlyle was, of course, of another nature; and in his works the proofs are not few of his readiness to accept the teachings of one whom he declared he would "go at all times farther to see than any man alive." There was something singular in the admiration these two men felt for one another; for Carlyle, after an acquaintance of almost thirty years, spoke of Dickens as "a most cordial, sincere, clear-sighted, quietly decisive, just, and loving man;" and there is not one of these epithets but seems well considered and well chosen. But neither Carlyle nor Dickens possessed a

moral quality omitted in this list, the quality of patience, which abhors either "quietly" or loudly "deciding" a question before considering it under all its aspects, and in a spirit of fairness to all sides. The *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, to confine myself to them,[1] like so much of the political philosophy, if it is to be dignified by that name, which in part Dickens derived from them, were at the time effective strokes of satirical invective; now, their edge seems blunt and their energy inflation. Take the pamphlet on Model Prisons, with its summary of a theory which Dickens sought in every way to enforce upon his readers; or again, that entitled *Downing Street*, which settles the question of party government as a question of the choice between Buffy and Boodle, or, according to Carlyle, the Honourable Felix Parvulus and the Right Honourable Felicissimus Zero. The corrosive power of such sarcasms may be unquestionable; but the angry rhetoric pointed by them becomes part of the nature of those who habitually employ its utterance in lieu of argument; and not a little of the declamatory element in Dickens, which no doubt at first exercised its effect upon a large number of readers, must be ascribed to his reading of a great writer who was often very much more stimulative than nutritious.

Something, then, he owed to other writers, but it was little indeed in comparison with what he owed to his natural gifts. First amongst these, I think, must be placed what may, in a word, be called his sensibility—that quality of which humour, in the more limited sense of the word, and pathos

[1] The passage in *Oliver Twist* (chapter xxxvii.) which illustrates the maxim that "dignity, and even holiness too, sometimes are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some people imagine," may, or may not, be a reminiscence of *Sartor Resartus*, then (1838) first published in a volume.

are the twin products. And in Dickens both these were paramount powers, almost equally various in their forms and effective in their operation. According to M. Taine, Dickens, whilst he excels in irony of a particular sort, being an Englishman, is incapable of being gay. Such profundities are unfathomable to the readers of *Pickwick;* though the French critic may have generalised from Dickens's later writings only. His pathos is not less true than various, for the gradations are marked between the stern, tragic pathos of *Hard Times*, the melting pathos of the *Old Curiosity Shop*, *Dombey and Son*, and *David Copperfield*, and the pathos of helplessness which appeals to us in Smike and Jo. But this sensibility would not have given us Dickens's gallery of living pictures had it not been for the powers of imagination and observation which enabled him spontaneously to exercise it in countless directions. To the way in which his imagination enabled him to identify himself with the figments of his own brain he frequently testified; Dante was not more certain in his celestial and infernal topography than was Dickens as to "every stair in the little midshipman's house," and as to "every young gentleman's bedstead in Dr. Blimber's establishment." One particular class of phenomena may be instanced instead of many, in the observation and poetic reproduction of which his singular natural endowment continually manifested itself—I mean those of the weather. It is not, indeed, often that he rises to a fine image like that in the description of the night in which Ralph Nickleby, ruined and crushed, slinks home to his death:

"The night was dark, and a cold wind blew, driving the clouds furiously and fast before it. There was one black, gloomy mass that seemed to follow him: not hurrying in the wild chase with the

others, but lingering sullenly behind, and gliding darkly and stealthily on. He often looked back at this, and more than once stopped to let it pass over; but, somehow, when he went forward again it was still behind him, coming mournfully and slowly up, like a shadowy funeral train."

But he again and again enables us to feel as if the Christmas morning on which Mr. Pickwick ran gaily down the slide, or as if the "very quiet" moonlit night in the midst of which a sudden sound, like the firing of a gun or a pistol, startled the repose of Lincoln's Inn Fields, were not only what we have often precisely experienced in country villages or in London squares, but as if they were the very morning and the very night which we *must* experience, if we were feeling the glow of wintry merriment, or the awful chill of the presentiment of evil in a dead hour. In its lower form this combination of the powers of imagination and observation has the rapidity of wit, and, indeed, sometimes *is* wit. The gift of suddenly finding out what a man, a thing, a combination of man and thing, is like—this, too, comes by nature; and there is something electrifying in its sudden exercise, even on the most trivial occasions, as when Flora, delighted with Little Dorrit's sudden rise to fortune, requests to know all

"about the good, dear, quiet little thing, and all the changes of her fortunes, carriage people now, no doubt, and horses without number most romantic, a coat of arms, of course, and wild beasts on their hind legs, showing it as if it was a copy they had done with mouths from ear to ear, good gracious!"

But Nature, when she gifted Dickens with sensibility, observation, and imagination, had bestowed upon him yet another boon in the quality which seems more prominent than any other in his whole being. The vigour of Dickens—a mental and moral vigour supported by a splendid physical organism—was the parent of some of his foibles;

amongst the rest, of his tendency to exaggeration. No fault has been more frequently found with his workmanship than this; nor can he be said to have defended himself very successfully on this head when he declared that he did "not recollect ever to have heard or seen the charge of exaggeration made against a feeble performance, though, in its feebleness, it may have been most untrue." But without this vigour he could not have been creative as he was; and in him there were accordingly united with rare completeness a swift responsiveness to the impulses of humour and pathos, an inexhaustible fertility in discovering and inventing materials for their exercise, and the constant creative desire to give to these newly-created materials a vivid plastic form.

And the mention of this last-named gift in Dickens suggests the query whether, finally, there is anything in his *manner* as a writer which may prevent the continuance of his extraordinary popularity. No writer can be great without a manner of his own; and that Dickens had such a manner his most supercilious censurer will readily allow. His terse narrative power, often intensely humorous in its unblushing and unwinking gravity, and often deeply pathetic in its simplicity, is as characteristic of his manner as is the supreme felicity of phrase, in which he has no equal. As to the latter, I should hardly know where to begin and where to leave off were I to attempt to illustrate it. But, to take two instances of different kinds of wit, I may cite a passage in Guster's narrative of her interview with Lady Dedlock: "And so I took the letter from her, and she said she had nothing to give me; and *I said I was poor myself, and consequently wanted nothing;*" and, of a different kind, the account in one of his letters of a conversation with Macready, in which the great tragedian, after a sol-

emn but impassioned commendation of his friend's reading, "put his hand upon my breast and pulled out his pocket-handkerchief, and *I felt as if I were doing somebody to his Werner.*" These, I think, were amongst the most characteristic merits of his style. It also, and more especially in his later years, had its characteristic faults. The danger of degenerating into mannerism is incident to every original manner. There is mannerism in most of the great English prose-writers of Dickens's age—in Carlyle, in Macaulay, in Thackeray—but in none of them is there more mannerism than in Dickens himself. In his earlier writings, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, for instance (I do not, of course, refer to the Portsmouth boards), and even in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, there is much staginess; but in his later works his own mannerism had swallowed up that of the stage, and, more especially in serious passages, his style had become what M. Taine happily characterises as *le style tourmenté.* His choice of words remained throughout excellent, and his construction of sentences clear. He told Mr. Wilkie Collins that "underlining was not his nature;" and in truth he had no need to emphasise his expressions, or to bid the reader "go back upon their meaning." He recognised his responsibility, as a popular writer, in keeping the vocabulary of the language pure; and in *Little Dorrit* he even solemnly declines to use the French word *trousseau.* In his orthography, on the other hand, he was not free from Americanisms; and his interpunctuation was consistently odd. But these are trifles; his more important mannerisms were, like many really dangerous faults of style, only the excess of characteristic excellences. Thus it was he who elaborated with unprecedented effect that humorous species of paraphrase which, as one of the most imitable devices of his style, has also been the most per-

sistently imitated. We are all tickled when Grip, the raven, "issues orders for the instant preparation of innumerable kettles for purposes of tea;" or when Mr. Pecksniff's eye is "piously upraised, with something of that expression which the poetry of ages has attributed to a domestic bird, when breathing its last amid the ravages of an electric storm;" but in the end the device becomes a mere trick of circumlocution. Another mannerism which grew upon Dickens, and was faithfully imitated by several of his disciples, was primarily due to his habit of turning a fact, fancy, or situation round on every side. This consisted in the reiteration of a construction, or of part of a construction, in the strained rhetorical fashion to which he at last accustomed us in spite of ourselves, but to which we were loath to submit in his imitators. These and certain other peculiarities, which it would be difficult to indicate without incurring the charge of hypercriticism, hardened as the style of Dickens hardened; and, for instance, in the *Tale of Two Cities* his mannerisms may be seen side by side in glittering array. By way of compensation, the occasional solecisms and vulgarisms of his earlier style (he only very gradually ridded himself of the cockney habit of punning) no longer marred his pages; and he ceased to break or lapse occasionally, in highly-impassioned passages, into blank verse.

From first to last Dickens's mannerism, like everything which he made part of himself, was not merely assumed on occasion, but was, so to speak, absorbed into his nature. It shows itself in almost everything that he wrote in his later years, from the most carefully-elaborated chapters of his books down to the most deeply-felt passages of his most familiar correspondence, in the midst of the most genuine pathos and most exuberant humour of his books,

and in the midst of the sound sense and unaffected piety of his private letters. Future generations may, for this very reason, be perplexed and irritated by what we merely stumbled at, and may wish that what is an element hardly separable from many of Dickens's compositions were away from them, as one wishes away from his signature that horrible flourish which in his letters he sometimes represents himself as too tired to append.

But no distaste for his mannerisms is likely to obscure the sense of his achievements in the branch of literature to which he devoted the full powers of his genius and the best energies of his nature. He introduced, indeed, no new species of prose fiction into our literature. In the historical novel he made two far from unsuccessful essays, in the earlier of which in particular—*Barnaby Rudge*—he showed a laudable desire to enter into the spirit of a past age; but he was without the reading or the patience of either the author of *Waverley* or the author of *The Virginians*, and without the fine historic enthusiasm which animates the broader workmanship of *Westward Ho.* For the purely imaginative romance, on the other hand, of which in some of his works Lord Lytton was the most prominent representative in contemporary English literature, Dickens's genius was not without certain affinities; but, to feel his full strength, he needed to touch the earth with his feet. Thus it is no mere phrase to say of him that he found the ideal in the real, and drew his inspirations from the world around him. Perhaps the strongest temptation which ever seemed likely to divert him from the sounder forms in which his masterpieces were cast lay in the direction of the *novel with a purpose*, the fiction intended primarily and above all things to promote the correction of some social abuse, or the achievement of

some social reform. But in spite of himself, to whom the often voiceless cause of the suffering and the oppressed was at all times dearer than any mere literary success, he was preserved from binding his muse, as his friend Cruikshank bound his art, handmaid in a service with which freedom was irreconcilable. His artistic instinct helped him in this, and perhaps also the consciousness that where, as in *The Chimes* or in *Hard Times*, he had gone furthest in this direction, there had been something jarring in the result. Thus, under the influences described above, he carried on the English novel mainly in the directions which it had taken under its early masters, and more especially in those in which the essential attributes of his own genius prompted him to excel.

Amongst the elements on which the effect alike of the novelist's and of the dramatist's work must, apart from style and diction, essentially depend, that of construction is obviously one of the most significant. In this Dickens was, in the earlier period of his authorship, very far from strong. This was due in part to the accident that he began his literary career as a writer of *Sketches*, and that his first continuous book, *Pickwick*, was originally designed as little more than a string of such. It was due in a still greater measure to the influence of those masters of English fiction with whom he had been familiar from boyhood, above all to Smollett. And though, by dint of his usual energy, he came to be able to invent a plot so generally effective as that of *A Tale of Two Cities*, or, I was about to say, of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, yet on this head he had had to contend against a special difficulty; I mean, of course, the publication of most of his books in monthly or even weekly numbers. In the case of a writer both pathetic and humorous the serial method of publica-

tion leads the public to expect its due allowance of both pathos and humour every month or week, even if each number, to borrow a homely simile applied in *Oliver Twist* to books in general, need not contain "the tragic and the comic scenes in as regular alternation as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon." And again, as in a melodrama of the old school, each serial division has, if possible, to close emphatically, effectively, with a promise of yet stranger, more touching, more laughable things to come. On the other hand, with this form of publication repetition is frequently necessary by way of "reminder" to indolent readers, whose memory needs refreshing after the long pauses between the acts. Fortunately, Dickens abhorred living, as it were, from hand to mouth, and thus diminished the dangers to which, I cannot help thinking, Thackeray at times almost succumbed. Yet, notwithstanding, in the arrangement of his incidents and the contrivance of his plots it is often impossible to avoid noting the imperfection of the machinery, or at least the traces of effort. I have already said under what influences, in my opinion, Dickens acquired a constructive skill which would have been conspicuous in most other novelists.

If in the combination of parts the workmanship of Dickens was not invariably of the best, on the other hand in the invention of those parts themselves he excelled, his imaginative power and dramatic instinct combining to produce an endless succession of effective scenes and situations, ranging through almost every variety of the pathetic and the humorous. In no direction was nature a more powerful aid to art with him than in this. From his very boyhood he appears to have possessed in a developed form what many others may possess in its germ, the faculty of converting into a scene—putting, as it were,

into a frame—personages that came under his notice, and the background on which he saw them. Who can forget the scene in *David Copperfield* in which the friendless little boy attracts the wonderment of the good people of the public-house where—it being a special occasion—he has demanded a glass of their "very best ale, with a head to it?" In the autobiographical fragment already cited, where the story appears in almost the same words, Dickens exclaims:

> "Here we stand, all three, before me now, in my study in Devonshire Terrace. The landlord, in his shirt-sleeves, leaning against the bar window-frame; his wife, looking over the little half-door; and I, in some confusion, looking up at them from outside the partition."

He saw the scene while he was an actor in it. Already the *Sketches by Boz* showed the exuberance of this power, and in his last years more than one paper in the delightful *Uncommercial Traveller* series proved it to be as inexhaustible as ever, while the art with which it was exercised had become more refined. Who has better described (for who was more sensitive to it?) the mysterious influence of crowds, and who the pitiful pathos of solitude? Who has ever surpassed Dickens in his representations, varied a thousandfold, but still appealing to the same emotions, common to us all, of the crises or turning-points of human life? Who has dwelt with a more potent effect on that catastrophe which the drama of every human life must reach; whose scenes of death in its pathetic, pitiful, reverend, terrible, ghastly forms speak more to the imagination and more to the heart? There is, however, one species of scenes in which the genius of Dickens seems to me to exercise a still stronger spell — those which *precede* a catastrophe, which are charged like thunder-clouds with

the coming storm. And here the constructive art is at work; for it is the arrangement of the incidents, past and to come, combined by anticipation in the mind of the reader, which gives their extraordinary force to such scenes as the nocturnal watching of Nancy by Noah, or Carker's early walk to the railway station, where he is to meet his doom. Extremely powerful, too, in a rather different way, is the scene in *Little Dorrit*, described in a word or two, of the parting of Bar and Physician at dawn, after they have "found out Mr. Merdle's complaint:"

"Before parting, at Physician's door, they both looked up at the sunny morning sky, into which the smoke of a few early fires, and the breath and voices of a few early stirrers, were peacefully rising, and then looked round upon the immense city and said: 'If all those hundreds and thousands of beggared people who were yet asleep could only know, as they two spoke, the ruin that impended over them, what a fearful cry against one miserable soul would go up to Heaven!'"

Nor is it awe only, but pity also, which he is able thus to move beforehand, as in *Dombey and Son*, in the incomparable scenes leading up to little Paul's death.

More diverse opinions have been expressed as to Dickens's mastery of that highest part of the novelist's art, which we call characterisation. Undoubtedly, the characters which he draws are included in a limited range. Yet I question whether their range can be justly termed narrow as compared with that commanded by any other great English novelist except Scott, or with those of many novelists of other literatures except Balzac. But within his own range Dickens is unapproached. His novels do not altogether avoid the common danger of uninteresting heroes and insipid heroines; but only a very few of his heroes are conventionally declamatory like Nicholas Nick-

leby, and few of his heroines simper sentimentally like Rose Maylie. Nor can I for a moment assent to the condemnation which has been pronounced upon all the female characters in Dickens's books, as more or less feeble or artificial. At the same time it is true that from women of a mightier mould Dickens's imagination turns aside; he could not have drawn a Dorothea Casaubon any more than he could have drawn Romola herself. Similarly, heroes of the chivalrous or magnanimous type, representatives of generous effort in a great cause, will not easily be met with in his writings: he never even essayed the picture of an artist devoted to Art for her own sake.

It suited the genius, and in later years perhaps the temper, of Dickens as an author to leave out of sight those "public virtues" to which no man was in truth less blind than himself, and to remain content with the illustration of types of the private or domestic kind. We may cheerfully take to us the censure that our great humourist was in nothing more English than in this—that his sympathy with the affections of the hearth and the home knew almost no bounds. A symbolisation of this may be found in the honour which, from the *Sketches* and *Pickwick* onwards, through a long series of Christmas books and Christmas numbers, Dickens, doubtless very consciously, paid to the one great festival of English family life. Yet so far am I from agreeing with those critics who think that he is hereby lowered to the level of the poets of the teapot and the plum-pudding, that I am at a loss how to express my admiration for this side of his genius—tender with the tenderness of Cowper, playful with the playfulness of Goldsmith, natural with the naturalness of the author of *Amelia*. Who was ever more at home with children than he, and, for that matter, with

babies to begin with? Mr. Horne relates how he once heard a lady exclaim: "Oh, do read to us about the baby; Dickens is capital at a baby!" Even when most playful, most farcical concerning children, his fun is rarely without something of true tenderness, for he knew the meaning of that dreariest solitude which he has so often pictured, but nowhere, of course, with a truthfulness going so straight to the heart as in *David Copperfield*—the solitude of a child left to itself. Another wonderfully true child-character is that of Pip, in *Great Expectations*, who is also, as his years progress, an admirable study of boy-nature. For Dickens thoroughly understood what that mysterious variety of humankind really is, and was always, if one may so say, on the lookout for him. He knew him in the brightness and freshness which makes true *ingénus* of such delightful characters (rare enough in fiction) as Walter Gay and Mrs. Lirriper's grandson. He knew him in his festive mood—witness the amusing letter in which he describes a water-expedition at Eton with his son and two of his irrepressible school-fellows. He knew him in his precocity—the boy of about three feet high, at the "George and Vulture," "in a hairy cap and fustian overalls, whose garb bespoke a laudable ambition to attain in time the elevation of an hostler;" and the thing on the roof of the Harrisburg coach, which, when the rain was over, slowly upreared itself, and patronisingly piped out the enquiry: "Well, now, stranger, I guess you find this a'most like an English arternoon, hey?" He knew the Gavroche who danced attendance on Mr. Quilp at his wharf, and those strangest, but by no means least true, types of all, the pupil-teachers in Mr. Fagin's academy.

But these, with the exception of the last-named, which show much shrewd and kindly insight into the paradoxes

of human nature, are, of course, the mere *croquis* of the great humourist's pencil. His men and women, and the passions, the desires, the loves, and hatreds that agitate them, he has usually chosen to depict on that background of domestic life which is in a greater or less degree common to us all. And it is thus also that he has secured to himself the vast public which vibrates very differently from a mere class or section of society to the touch of a popular speaker or writer. "The more," he writes, "we see of life and its brevity, and the world and its varieties, the more we know that no exercise of our abilities in any art, but the addressing of it to the great ocean of humanity in which we are drops, and not to by-ponds (very stagnant) here and there, ever can or ever will lay the foundations of an endurable retrospect." The types of character which in his fictions he chiefly delights in reproducing are accordingly those which most of us have opportunities enough of comparing with the realities around us; and this test, a sound one within reasonable limits, was the test he demanded. To no other author were his own characters ever more real; and Forster observes that "what he had most to notice in Dickens at the very outset of his career was his indifference to any praise of his performances on the merely literary side, compared with the higher recognition of them as bits of actual life, with the meaning and purpose, on their part, and the responsibility on his, of realities, rather than creations of fancy." It is, then, the favourite growths of our own age and country for which we shall most readily look in his works, and not look in vain: avarice and prodigality; pride in all its phases; hypocrisy in its endless varieties, unctuous and plausible, fawning and self-satisfied, formal and moral; and, on the other side, faithfulness, simplicity, long-suffering patience, and indomitable heroic

good-humour. Do we not daily make room on the pavement for Mr. Dombey, erect, solemn, and icy, along-side of whom in the road Mr. Carker deferentially walks his sleek horse? Do we not know more than one Anthony Chuzzlewit laying up money for himself and his son, and a curse for both along with it; and many a Richard Carston, sinking, sinking, as the hope grows feebler that Justice or Fortune will at last help one who has not learnt how to help himself? And will not prodigals of a more buoyant kind, like the immortal Mr. Micawber (though, maybe, with an eloquence less ornate than his), when *their* boat is on the shore and *their* bark is on the sea, become "perfectly business-like and perfectly practical," and propose, in acknowledgment of a parting gift we had neither hoped nor desired to see again, "bills" or, if we should prefer it, "a bond, or any other description of security?" All this will happen to us, as surely as we shall be buttonholed by Pecksniffs in a state of philanthropic exultation; and watched round corners by 'umble but observant Uriah Heeps; and affronted in what is best in us by the worst hypocrite of all, the hypocrite of religion, who flaunts in our eyes his greasy substitute for what he calls the "light of terewth." To be sure, unless it be Mr. Chadband and those of his tribe, we shall find the hypocrite and the man-out-at-elbows in real life less endurable than their representatives in fiction; for Dickens well understood "that if you do not administer a disagreeable character carefully, the public have a decided tendency to think that the *story* is disagreeable, and not merely the fictitious form." His economy is less strict with characters of the opposite class, true copies of Nature's own handiwork—the Tom Pinches and Trotty Vecks and Clara Peggottys, who reconcile us with our kind, and Mr. Pickwick himself, "a human being

replete with benevolence," to borrow a phrase from a noble passage in Dickens's most congenial predecessor. These characters in Dickens have a warmth which only the creations of Fielding and Smollett had possessed before, and which, like these old masters, he occasionally carries to excess. At the other extreme stand those characters in which the art of Dickens, always in union with the promptings of his moral nature, illustrates the mitigating or redeeming qualities observable even in the outcasts of our civilisation. To me his figures of this kind, when they are not too intensely elaborated, are not the least touching; and there is something as pathetic in the uncouth convict Magwitch as in the consumptive crossing-sweeper Jo.

As a matter of course it is possible to take exceptions of one kind or another to some of the characters created by Dickens in so extraordinary a profusion. I hardly know of any other novelist less obnoxious to the charge of repeating himself; though, of course, many characters in his earlier or shorter works contained in themselves the germs of later and fuller developments. But Bob Sawyer and Dick Swiveller, Noah Claypole and Uriah Heep are at least sufficiently independent variations on the same themes. On the other hand, Filer and Cute in *The Chimes* were the first sketches of Gradgrind and Bounderby in *Hard Times;* and Clemency in *The Battle of Life* prefigures Peggotty in *David Copperfield.* No one could seriously quarrel with such repetitions as these, and there are remarkably few of them; for the fertile genius of Dickens took delight in the variety of its creativeness, and, as if to exemplify this, there was no relation upon the contrasted humours of which he better loved to dwell than that of partnership. It has been seen how rarely his inventive

power condescended to supplement itself by what in the novel corresponds to the mimicry of the stage, and what in truth is as degrading to the one as it is to the other—the reproduction of originals *from real life*. On the other hand, he carries his habit too far of making a particular phrase do duty as an index of a character. This trick also is a trick of the stage, where it often enough makes the judicious grieve. Many may be inclined to censure it in Dickens as one of several forms of the exaggeration which is so frequently condemned in him. There was no charge to which he was more sensitive; and in the preface to *Martin Chuzzlewit* he accordingly (not for the first time) turned round upon the objectors, declaring roundly that "what is exaggeration to one class of minds and perceptions is plain truth to another;" and hinting a doubt "whether it is *always* the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull." I certainly do not think that the term "exaggerated" is correctly applied to such conventional characters of sensational romance as Rosa Dartle, who has, as it were, lost her way into *David Copperfield*, while Hortense and Madame Defarge seem to be in their proper places in *Bleak House* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. In his earlier writings, and in the fresher and less overcharged serious parts of his later books, he rarely if ever paints black in black; even the Jew Fagin has a moment of relenting against the sleeping Oliver; he is not that unreal thing, a "demon," whereas Sikes is that real thing, a brute. On the other hand, certainly he at times makes his characters more laughable than nature; few great humourists have so persistently sought to efface the line which separates the barely possible from the morally probable. This was, no doubt, largely due to his inclination towards

the grotesque, which a severer literary training might have taught him to restrain. Thus he liked to introduce insane or imbecile personages into fiction, where, as in real life, they are often dangerous to handle. It is to his sense of the grotesque, rather than to any deep-seated satirical intention, and certainly not to any want of reverence or piety in his very simple and very earnest nature, that I would likewise ascribe the exaggeration and unfairness of which he is guilty against Little Bethel and all its works. But in this, as in other instances, no form of humour requires more delicate handling than the grotesque, and none is more liable to cause fatigue. Latterly, Dickens was always adding to his gallery of eccentric portraits, and if inner currents may be traced by outward signs, it may be worth while to apply the test of his *names*, which become more and more odd as their owners deviate more and more from the path of nature. Who more simply and yet more happily named than the leading members of the Pickwick Club—from the poet, Mr. Snodgrass, to the sportsman, Mr. Winkle—Nathaniel, not Daniel; but with Veneering and Lammle, and Boffin and Venus, and Crisparkle and Grewgious—be they actual names or not—we feel instinctively that we are in the region of the transnormal.

Lastly, in their descriptive power and the faithfulness with which they portray the life and ways of particular periods or countries, of special classes, professions, or other divisions of mankind, the books of Dickens are, again of course within their range, unequalled. He sought his materials chiefly at home, though his letters from Italy and Switzerland and America, and his French pictures in sketch and story, show how much wider a field his descriptive powers might have covered. The *Sketches by Boz* and the *Pickwick Papers* showed a mastery, unsurpassed before

or since, in the description of the life of English society in its middle and lower classes, and in *Oliver Twist* he lifted the curtain from some of the rotten parts of our civilisation. This history of a work-house child also sounded the note of that sympathy with the poor which gave to Dickens's descriptions of their sufferings and their struggles a veracity beyond mere accuracy of detail. He was still happier in describing their household virtues, their helpfulness to one another, their compassion for those who are the poorest of all—the friendless and the outcast—as he did in his *Old Curiosity Shop*, and in most of his Christmas books. His pictures of middle-class life abounded in kindly humour; but the humour and pathos of poverty—more especially the poverty which has not yet lost its self-respect—commended themselves most of all to his descriptive power. Where, as in *Nicholas Nickleby* and later works, he essayed to describe the manners of the higher classes, he was, as a rule, far less successful; partly because there was in his nature a vein of rebellion against the existing system of society, so that, except in his latest books, he usually approached a description of members of its dominant orders with a satirical intention, or at least an undertone of bitterness. At the same time I demur to the common assertion that Dickens could not draw a real gentleman. All that can be said is that it very rarely suited his purpose to do so, supposing the term to include manners as well as feelings and actions; though Mr. Twemlow, in *Our Mutual Friend*, might be instanced as a (perhaps rather conscious) exception of one kind, and Sir Leicester Dedlock, in the latter part of *Bleak House*, as another. Moreover, a closer examination of Lord Frederick Verisopht and Cousin Feenix will show that, gull as the one and ninny as the other is, neither has anything

that can be called ungentlemanly about him; on the contrary, the characters, on the whole, rather plead in favour of the advantage than of the valuelessness of blue blood. As for Dickens's other noblemen, whom I find enumerated in an American dictionary of his characters, they are nearly all mere passing embodiments of satirical fancies, which pretend to be nothing more.

Another ingenious enthusiast has catalogued the numerous callings, professions, and trades of the personages appearing in Dickens's works. I cannot agree with the criticism that in his personages the man is apt to become forgotten in the externals of his calling—the barrister's wig and gown, as it were, standing for the barrister, and the beadle's cocked hat and staff for the beadle. But he must have possessed in its perfection the curious detective faculty of deducing a man's occupation from his manners. To him nothing wore a neutral tint, and no man or woman was featureless. He was, it should be remembered, always observing; half his life he was afoot. When he undertook to describe any novel or unfamiliar kind of manners, he spared no time or trouble in making a special study of his subject. He was not content to know the haunts of the London thieves by hearsay, or to read the history of opium-smoking and its effects in Blue-books. From the office of his journal in London we find him starting on these self-imposed commissions, and from his hotel in New York. The whole art of descriptive reporting, which has no doubt produced a large quantity of trashy writing, but has also been of real service in arousing a public interest in neglected corners of our social life, was, if not actually set on foot, at any rate re-invigorated and vitalised by him. No one was so delighted to notice the oddities which habit and tradition stereotype in particular classes of men.

A complete natural history of the country actor, the London landlady, and the British waiter might be compiled from his pages. This power of observation and description extended from human life to that of animals. His habits of life could not but make him the friend of dogs, and there is some reason for a title which was bestowed on him in a paper in a London magazine concerning his own dogs—the Landseer of Fiction. His letters are full of delightful details concerning these friends and companions, Turk, Linda, and the rest of them; nor is the family of their fictitious counterparts, culminating (intellectually) in Merrylegs, less numerous and delightful. Cats were less congenial to Dickens, perhaps because he had no objection to changing house; and they appear in his works in no more attractive form than as the attendant spirits of Mrs. Pipchin and of Mr. Krook. But for the humours of animals in general he had a wonderfully quick eye. Of his ravens I have already spoken. The pony Whisker is the type of kind old gentlemen's ponies. In one of his letters occurs an admirably droll description of the pig-market at Boulogne; and the best unscientific description ever given of a spider was imagined by Dickens at Broadstairs, when in his solitude he thought

> "of taming spiders, as Baron Trenck did. There is one in my cell (with a speckled body and twenty-two very decided knees) who seems to know me."

In everything, whether animate or inanimate, he found out at once the characteristic feature, and reproduced it in words of faultless precision. This is the real secret of his descriptive power, the exercise of which it would be easy to pursue through many other classes of subjects. Scenery, for its own sake, he rarely cared to describe; but no

one better understood how to reproduce the combined effect of scenery and weather on the predisposed mind. Thus London and its river in especial are, as I have said, haunted by the memory of Dickens's books. To me it was for years impossible to pass near London Bridge at night, or to idle in the Temple on summer days, or to frequent a hundred other localities on or near the Thames, without instinctively recalling pictures scattered through the works of Dickens — in this respect, also, a real *liber veritatis.*

Thus, and in many ways which it would be labour lost to attempt to describe, and by many a stroke or touch of genius which it would be idle to seek to reproduce in paraphrase, the most observing and the most imaginative of our English humourists revealed to us that infinite multitude of associations which binds men together, and makes us members one of another. But though observation and imagination might discern and discover these associations, sympathy—the sympathy of a generous human heart with humanity—alone could breathe into them the warmth of life. Happily, to most men, there is one place consecrated above others to the feelings of love and good-will; "that great altar where the worst among us sometimes perform the worship of the heart, and where the best have offered up such sacrifices and done such deeds of heroism as, chronicled, would put the proudest temples of old time, with all their vaunting annals, to the blush." It was thus that Dickens spoke of the sanctity of *home;* and, English in many things, he was most English in that love of home to which he was never weary of testifying. But, though the "pathway of the sublime" may have been closed to him, he knew well enough that the interests of a people and the interests of humanity are mightier than the domestic

loves and cares of any man; and he conscientiously addressed himself, as to the task of his life, to the endeavour to knit humanity together. The method which he, by instinct and by choice, more especially pursued was that of seeking to show the "good in everything." This it is that made him, unreasonably sometimes, ignobly never, the champion of the poor, the helpless, the outcast. He was often tempted into a rhetoric too loud and too shrill, into a satire neither fine nor fair; for he was impatient, but not impatient of what he thought true and good. His purpose, however, was worthy of his powers; nor is there recorded among the lives of English men of letters any more single-minded in its aim, and more successful in the pursuit of it, than his. He was much criticised in his lifetime; and he will, I am well aware, be often criticised in the future by keener and more capable judges than myself. They may miss much in his writings that I find in them; but, unless they find one thing there, it were better that they never opened one of his books. He has indicated it himself when criticising a literary performance by a clever writer:

"In this little MS. everything is too much patronised and condescended to, whereas the slightest touch of feeling for the rustic who is of the earth earthy, or of sisterhood with the homely servant who has made her face shine in her desire to please, would make a difference that the writer can generally imagine without trying it. You don't want any sentiment laboriously made out in such a thing. You don't want any maudlin show of it. But you do want a pervading suggestion that it is there."

The sentiment which Dickens means is the salt which will give a fresh savour of their own to his works so long as our language endures.

THE END.

SPENSER

BY

R. W. CHURCH

DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S

NOTICE.

As the plan of these volumes does not encourage foot-notes, I wish to say that, besides the biographies prefixed to the various editions of Spenser, there are two series of publications which have been very useful to me. One is the series of Calendars of State Papers, especially those on Ireland and the Carew MSS. at Lambeth, with the prefaces of Mr. Hans Claude Hamilton and the late Professor Brewer. The other is Mr. E. Arber's series of reprints of old English books, and his Transcript of the Stationers' Registers—a work, I suppose, without parallel in its information about the early literature of a country, and edited by him with admirable care and public spirit. I wish also to say that I am much indebted to Mr. Craik's excellent little book on *Spenser and his Poetry*.

March, 1879.

SPEN

THE

SPEN

THE

THE

SECON
LAS

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

SPENSER'S EARLY LIFE 1

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW POET—THE SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR 29

CHAPTER III.

SPENSER IN IRELAND 51

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAERIE QUEENE—THE FIRST PART 80

CHAPTER V.

THE FAERIE QUEENE 117

CHAPTER VI.

SECOND PART OF THE FAERIE QUEENE — SPENSER'S LAST YEARS (1590–1599) 165

SPENSER
the first
history w
achieved
the same
that even
ended wit
ern write
great mo
literature,
been arre
Roses, an
tion, these
lishmen t
ideas vag
shown the
them in a
been acco

SPENSER.

CHAPTER I.

SPENSER'S EARLY LIFE.

[1552–1579.]

SPENSER marks a beginning in English literature. He was the first Englishman who, in that great division of our history which dates from the Reformation, attempted and achieved a poetical work of the highest order. Born about the same time as Hooker (1552–1554), in the middle of that eventful century which began with Henry VIII., and ended with Elizabeth, he was the earliest of our great modern writers in poetry, as Hooker was the earliest of the great modern writers in prose. In that reviving English literature, which, after Chaucer's wonderful promise, had been arrested in its progress, first by the Wars of the Roses, and then by the religious troubles of the Reformation, these two were the writers who first realized to Englishmen the ideas of a high literary perfection. These ideas vaguely filled many minds; but no one had yet shown the genius and the strength to grasp and exhibit them in a way to challenge comparison with what had been accomplished by the poetry and prose of Greece,

Rome, and Italy. There had been poets in England since Chaucer, and prose-writers since Wycliffe had translated the Bible. Surrey and Wyatt had deserved to live, while a crowd of poets, as ambitious as they, and not incapable of occasional force and sweetness, have been forgotten. Sir Thomas More, Roger Ascham, Tyndale, the translator of the New Testament, Bishop Latimer, the writers of many state documents, and the framers, either by translation or composition, of the offices of the English Prayer-Book, showed that they understood the power of the English language over many of the subtleties and difficulties of thought, and were alive to the music of its cadences. Some of these works, consecrated by the highest of all possible associations, have remained, permanent monuments and standards of the most majestic and most affecting English speech. But the verse of Surrey, Wyatt, and Sackville, and the prose of More and Ascham, were but noble and promising efforts. Perhaps the language was not ripe for their success; perhaps the craftsmen's strength and experience were not equal to the novelty of their attempt. But no one can compare the English styles of the first half of the sixteenth century with the contemporary styles of Italy, with Ariosto, Machiavelli, Guicciardini, without feeling the immense gap in point of culture, practice, and skill—the immense distance at which the Italians were ahead, in the finish and reach of their instruments, in their power to handle them, in command over their resources, and facility and ease in using them. The Italians were more than a century older; the English could not yet, like the Italians, say what they would; the strength of English was, doubtless, there in germ, but it had still to reach its full growth and development. Even the French prose of Rabelais and Montaigne was more mature. But in Spen-

ser, as in Hooker, all these tentative essays of vigorous but unpractised minds have led up to great and lasting works. We have forgotten all these preliminary attempts, crude and imperfect, to speak with force and truth, or to sing with measure and grace. There is no reason why they should be remembered, except by professed inquirers into the antiquities of our literature; they were usually clumsy and awkward, sometimes grotesque, often affected, always hopelessly wanting in the finish, breadth, moderation, and order which alone can give permanence to writing. They were the necessary exercises by which Englishmen were recovering the suspended art of Chaucer, and learning to write; and exercises, though indispensably necessary, are not ordinarily in themselves interesting and admirable. But when the exercises had been duly gone through, then arose the original and powerful minds, to take full advantage of what had been gained by all the practising, and to concentrate and bring to a focus all the hints and lessons of art which had been gradually accumulating. Then the sustained strength and richness of the *Faerie Queene* became possible; contemporary with it, the grandeur and force of English prose began in Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity;* and then, in the splendid Elizabethan Drama, that form of art which has nowhere a rival, the highest powers of poetic imagination became wedded, as they had never been before in England or in the world, to the real facts of human life, and to its deepest thoughts and passions.

More is known about the circumstances of Spenser's life than about the lives of many men of letters of that time; yet our knowledge is often imperfect and inaccurate. The year 1552 is now generally accepted as the year of his birth. The date is inferred from a passage in one of his

Sonnets,[1] and this probably is near the truth. That is to say, that Spenser was born in one of the last two years of Edward VI.; that his infancy was passed during the dark days of Mary; and that he was about six years old when Elizabeth came to the throne. About the same time were born Ralegh, and, a year or two later (1554), Hooker and Philip Sidney. Bacon (1561), and Shakespere (1564), belong to the next decade of the century.

He was certainly a Londoner by birth and early training. This also we learn from himself, in the latest poem published in his life-time. It is a bridal ode (*Prothalamion*), to celebrate the marriage of two daughters of the Earl of Worcester, written late in 1596. It was a time in his life of disappointment and trouble, when he was only a rare visitor to London. In the poem he imagines himself on the banks of London's great river, and the bridal procession arriving at Lord Essex's house; and he takes occasion to record the affection with which he still regarded "the most kindly nurse" of his boyhood.

"Calm was the day, and through the trembling air
Sweet-breathing Zephyrus did softly play,
A gentle spirit, that lightly did delay
Hot Titan's beams, which then did glister fair:
When I, (whom sullen care,
Through discontent of my long fruitless stay
In Princes Court, and expectation vain
Of idle hopes, which still do fly away,
Like empty shadows, did afflict my brain,)
Walkt forth to ease my pain

——"Since the winged god his planet clear
Began in me to move, one year is spent:
The which doth longer unto me appear
Than *all those forty* which my life outwent."
Sonnet LX., probably written in 1593 or 1594.

Along the shore of silver-streaming Thames;
Whose rutty bank, the which his river hems,
Was painted all with variable flowers,
And all the meads adorned with dainty gems
Fit to deck maidens' bowers,
And crown their paramours
Against the bridal day, which is not long:
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song.

* * * * * * *

At length they all *to merry London came,*
To merry London, my most kindly nurse,
That to me gave this life's first native source,
Though from another place I take my name,
A house of ancient fame.
There, when they came, whereas those bricky towers
The which on Thames broad aged back do ride,
Where now the studious lawyers have their bowers,
There whilome wont the Templar Knights to bide,
Till they decayed through pride:
Next whereunto there stands a stately place,
Where oft I gained gifts and goodly grace[1]
Of that great Lord, which therein wont to dwell;
Whose want too well now feels my friendless case;
But ah! here fits not well
Old woes, but joys, to tell
Against the bridal day, which is not long:
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song:
Yet therein now doth lodge a noble peer,[2]
Great England's glory and the wide world's wonder,
Whose dreadful name late through all Spain did thunder,
And Hercules two pillars, standing near,
Did make to quake and fear.
Fair branch of honour, flower of chivalry!
That fillest England with thy triumph's fame,
Joy have thou of thy noble victory,[3]

---

[1] Leicester House, then Essex House, in the Strand.

[2] Earl of Essex. [3] At Cadiz, June 21, 1596.

And endless happiness of thine own name
That promiseth the same.
That through thy prowess, and victorious arms,
Thy country may be freed from foreign harms;
And great Elisa's glorious name may ring
Through all the world, filled with thy wide alarms."

Who his father was, and what was his employment, we know not. From one of the poems of his later years we learn that his mother bore the famous name of Elizabeth, which was also the cherished one of Spenser's wife.

"My love, my life's best ornament,
By whom my spirit out of dust was raised."[1]

But his family, whatever was his father's condition, certainly claimed kindred, though there was a difference in the spelling of the name, with a house then rising into fame and importance, the Spencers of Althorpe, the ancestors of the Spencers and Churchills of modern days. Sir John Spencer had several daughters, three of whom made great marriages. Elizabeth was the wife of Sir George Carey, afterwards the second Lord Hunsdon, the son of Elizabeth's cousin and Counsellor. Anne, first, Lady Compton, afterwards married Thomas Sackville, the son of the poet, Lord Buckhurst, and then Earl of Dorset. Alice, the youngest, whose first husband, Lord Strange, became Earl of Derby, after his death married Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper, Baron Ellesmere, and then Viscount Brackley. These three sisters are celebrated by him in a gallery of the noble ladies of the Court,[2] under poetical names—"Phyllis, the flower of rare perfection;" "Charillis, the

[1] *Sonnet* LXXIV.

[2] *Colin Clout's come Home again*, l. 536. Craik, *Spenser*, i. 9, 10.

pride and primrose of the rest;" and "Sweet Amaryllis, the youngest but the highest in degree." Alice, Lady Strange, Lady Derby, Lady Ellesmere and Brackley, and then again Dowager Lady Derby, the "Sweet Amaryllis" of the poet, had the rare fortune to be a personal link between Spenser and Milton. She was among the last whom Spenser honoured with his homage: and she was the first whom Milton honoured; for he composed his Arcades to be acted before her by her grandchildren, and the *Masque of Comus* for her son-in-law, Lord Bridgewater, and his daughter, another Lady Alice. With these illustrious sisters Spenser claimed kindred. To each of these he dedicated one of his minor poems; to Lady Strange, the *Tears of the Muses;* to Lady Compton, the Apologue of the Fox and the Ape, *Mother Hubberd's Tale;* to Lady Carey, the Fable of the Butterfly and the Spider, *Muïopotmos.* And in each dedication he assumed on their part the recognition of his claim.

> "The sisters three,
> The honour of the noble family,
> Of which I meanest boast myself to be."

Whatever his degree of relationship to them, he could hardly, even in the days of his fame, have ventured thus publicly to challenge it, unless there had been some acknowledged ground for it. There are obscure indications, which antiquarian diligence may perhaps make clear, which point to East Lancashire as the home of the particular family of Spensers to which Edmund Spenser's father belonged. Probably he was, however, in humble circumstances.

Edmund Spenser was a Londoner by education as well as birth. A recent discovery by Mr. R. B. Knowles, fur-

ther illustrated by Dr. Grosart,[1] has made us acquainted with Spenser's school. He was a pupil, probably one of the earliest ones, of the grammar school, then recently (1560) established by the Merchant Taylors' Company, under a famous teacher, Dr. Mulcaster. Among the manuscripts at Townley Hall are preserved the account books of the executors of a bountiful London citizen, Robert Nowell, the brother of Dr. Alexander Nowell, who was Dean of St. Paul's during Elizabeth's reign, and was a leading person in the ecclesiastical affairs of the time. In these books, in a crowd of unknown names of needy relations and dependents, distressed foreigners, and parish paupers, who shared from time to time the liberality of Mr. Robert Nowell's representatives, there appear among the numerous "poor scholars" whom his wealth assisted, the names of Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes. And there, also, in the roll of the expenditure at Mr. Nowell's pompous funeral at St. Paul's in February, $156\frac{8}{9}$, among long lists of unknown men and women, high and low, who had mourning given them, among bills for fees to officials, for undertakers' charges, for heraldic pageantry and ornamentation, for abundant supplies for the sumptuous funeral banquet, are put down lists of boys, from the chief London schools, St. Paul's, Westminster, and others, to whom two yards of cloth were to be given to make their gowns: and at the head of the six scholars named from Merchant Taylors' is the name of Edmund Spenser.

He was then, probably, the senior boy of the school, and in the following May he went to Cambridge. The Nowells still helped him: we read in their account books

[1] See *The Spending of the Money of Robert Nowell*, 1568–1580: from the MSS. at Townley Hall. Edited by Rev. A. B. Grosart. 1877.

under April 28, 1569, "to Edmond Spensore, scholler of the m'chante tayler scholl, at his gowinge to penbrocke hall in chambridge, x^{s}." On the 20th of May, he was admitted sizar, or serving clerk at Pembroke Hall; and on more than one occasion afterwards, like Hooker and like Lancelot Andrewes, also a Merchant Taylors' boy, two or three years Spenser's junior, and a member of the same college, Spenser had a share in the benefactions, small in themselves, but very numerous, with which the Nowells, after the fine fashion of the time, were accustomed to assist poor scholars at the Universities. In the visitations of Merchant Taylors' School, at which Grindal, Bishop of London, was frequently present,[1] it is not unlikely that his interest was attracted, in the appositions or examinations, to the promising senior boy of the school. At any rate, Spenser, who afterwards celebrated Grindal's qualities as a bishop, was admitted to a place, one which befitted a scholar in humble circumstances, in Grindal's old college. It is perhaps worth noticing that all Spenser's early friends, Grindal, the Nowells, Dr. Mulcaster, his master, were north country men.

Spenser was sixteen or seventeen when he left school for the university, and he entered Cambridge at the time when the struggle which was to occupy the reign of Elizabeth was just opening. At the end of the year 1569, the first distinct blow was struck against the queen and the new settlement of religion, by the Rising of the North. In the first ten years of Elizabeth's reign, Spenser's school-time at Merchant Taylors', the great quarrel had slumbered. Events abroad occupied men's minds; the religious wars in France, the death of the Duke of Guise (1563), the loss

[1] H. B. Wilson, *Hist. of Merchant Taylors' School*, p. 23.

of Havre, and expulsion of the English garrisons, the close of the Council of Trent (1563), the French peace, the accession of Pius V. ($156\frac{5}{6}$). Nearer home, there was the marriage of Mary of Scotland with Henry Darnley (1565), and all the tragedy which followed, Kirk of Field (1567), Lochleven, Langside, Carlisle, the imprisonment of the pretender to the English Crown (1568). In England, the authority of Elizabeth had established itself, and the internal organization of the Reformed Church was going on, in an uncertain and tentative way, but steadily. There was a struggle between Genevan exiles, who were for going too fast, and bishops and politicians, who were for going too slow; between authority and individual judgment, between home-born state traditions and foreign revolutionary zeal. But outwardly, at least, England had been peaceful. Now, however, a great change was at hand. In 1566, the Dominican Inquisitor, Michael Ghislieri, was elected Pope, under the title of Pius V.

In Pius (1566–72) were embodied the new spirit and policy of the Roman Church, as they had been created and moulded by the great Jesuit order, and by reforming bishops like Ghiberti of Verona, and Carlo Borromeo of Milan. Devout and self-denying as a saint, fierce and inflexible against abuses as a puritan, resolute and uncompromising as a Jacobin idealist or an Asiatic despot, ruthless and inexorable as an executioner, his soul was bent on re-establishing, not only by preaching and martyrdom, but by the sword and by the stake, the unity of Christendom and of its belief. Eastwards and westwards, he beheld two formidable foes and two serious dangers; and he saw before him the task of his life in the heroic work of crushing English heresy and beating back Turkish misbelief. He broke through the temporizing caution of his predeces-

sors by the Bull of Deposition against Elizabeth in 1570. He was the soul of the confederacy which won the day of Lepanto against the Ottomans in 1571. And though dead, his spirit was paramount in the slaughter of St. Bartholomew in 1572.

In the year 1569, while Spenser was passing from school to college, his emissaries were already in England, spreading abroad that Elizabeth was a bastard and an apostate, incapable of filling a Christian throne, which belonged by right to the captive Mary. The seed they sowed bore fruit. In the end of the year, southern England was alarmed by the news of the rebellion of the two great Earls in the north, Percy of Northumberland and Neville of Westmoreland. Durham was sacked, and the mass restored by an insurgent host, before which an "aged gentleman," Richard Norton with his sons, bore the banner of the Five Wounds of Christ. The rebellion was easily put down, and the revenge was stern. To the men who had risen at the instigation of the Pope and in the cause of Mary, Elizabeth gave, as she had sworn, "such a breakfast as never was in the North before." The hangman finished the work on those who had escaped the sword. Poetry, early and late, has recorded the dreary fate of those brave victims of a mistaken cause, in the ballad of the *Rising of the North*, and in the *White Doe of Rylstone*. It was the signal given for the internecine war which was to follow between Rome and Elizabeth. And it was the first great public event which Spenser would hear of in all men's mouths, as he entered on manhood, the prelude and augury of fierce and dangerous years to come. The nation awoke to the certainty—one which so profoundly affects sentiment and character both in a nation and in an individual—that among the habitual and fixed conditions of

life is that of having a serious and implacable enemy ever to reckon with.

And in this year, apparently in the transition-time between school and college, Spenser's literary ventures began. The evidence is curious, but it seems to be clear. In 1569, a refugee Flemish physician from Antwerp, who had fled to England from the "abominations of the Roman Antichrist" and the persecutions of the Duke of Alva, John Vander Noodt, published one of those odd miscellanies, fashionable at the time, half moral and poetical, half fiercely polemical, which he called a "*Theatre*, wherein be represented as well the Miseries and Calamities which follow the voluptuous Worldlings, as also the great Joys and Pleasures which the Faithful do enjoy—an argument both profitable and delectable to all that sincerely love the word of God." This "little treatise" was a mixture of verse and prose, setting forth, in general, the vanity of the world, and, in particular, predictions of the ruin of Rome and Antichrist: and it enforced its lessons by illustrative woodcuts. In this strange jumble are preserved, we can scarcely doubt, the first compositions which we know of Spenser's. Among the pieces are some Sonnets of Petrarch, and some Visions of the French poet Joachim du Bellay, whose poems were published in 1568. In the collection itself, these pieces are said by the compiler to have been translated by him "out of the Brabants speech," and "out of Dutch into English." But in a volume of "poems of the world's vanity," and published years afterwards in 1591, ascribed to Spenser, and put together, apparently with his consent, by his publisher, are found these very pieces from Petrarch and Du Bellay. The translations from Petrarch are almost literally the same, and are said to have been "formerly translated." In the Visions of Du Bellay there

is this difference, that the earlier translations are in blank verse, and the later ones are rimed as sonnets; but the change does not destroy the manifest identity of the two translations. So that unless Spenser's publisher, to whom the poet had certainly given some of his genuine pieces for the volume, is not to be trusted—which, of course, is possible, but not probable—or unless—what is in the last degree inconceivable—Spenser had afterwards been willing to take the trouble of turning the blank verse of Du Bellay's unknown translator into rime, the Dutchman who dates his *Theatre of Worldlings* on the 25th May, 1569, must have employed the promising and fluent school-boy, to furnish him with an English versified form, of which he himself took the credit, for compositions which he professes to have known only in the Brabants or Dutch translations. The sonnets from Petrarch are translated with much command of language; there occurs in them, what was afterwards a favourite thought of Spenser's:

> —"The Nymphs,
> That sweetly in accord did *tune their voice*
> *To the soft sounding of the waters' fall.*"[1]

It is scarcely credible that the translator of the sonnets could have caught so much as he has done of the spirit of Petrarch without having been able to read the Italian original; and if Spenser was the translator, it is a curious illustration of the fashionableness of Italian literature in the days of Elizabeth, that a school-boy just leaving Merchant Taylors' should have been so much interested in it. Dr. Mulcaster, his master, is said by Warton to have given special attention to the teaching of the English language.

[1] Comp. *Sheph. Cal.* April l. 36. June l. 8. F. Q. 6. 10. 7.

If these translations were Spenser's, he must have gone to Cambridge with a faculty of verse, which for his time may be compared to that with which winners of prize poems go to the universities now. But there was this difference, that the school-boy versifiers of our days are rich with the accumulated experience and practice of the most varied and magnificent poetical literature in the world; while Spenser had but one really great English model behind him; and Chaucer, honoured as he was, had become in Elizabeth's time, if not obsolete, yet in his diction, very far removed from the living language of the day. Even Milton, in his boyish compositions, wrote after Spenser and Shakespere, with their contemporaries, had created modern English poetry. Whatever there was in Spenser's early verses of grace and music was of his own finding: no one of his own time, except in occasional and fitful snatches, like stanzas of Sackville's, had shown him the way. Thus equipped, he entered the student world, then full of pedantic and ill-applied learning, of the disputations of Calvinistic theology, and of the beginnings of those highly speculative puritanical controversies, which were the echo at the University of the great political struggles of the day, and were soon to become so seriously practical. The University was represented to the authorities in London as being in a state of dangerous excitement, troublesome and mutinous. Whitgift, afterwards Elizabeth's favourite archbishop, Master, first of Pembroke, and then of Trinity, was Vice-Chancellor of the University; but, as the guardian of established order, he found it difficult to keep in check the violent and revolutionary spirit of the theological schools. Calvin was beginning to be set up there as the infallible doctor of Protestant theology. Cartwright from the Margaret Professor's chair

was teaching the exclusive and divine claims of the Geneva platform of discipline, and in defiance of the bishops and the government was denouncing the received Church polity and ritual as Popish and anti-Christian. Cartwright, an extreme and uncompromising man, was deprived in 1570; but the course which things were taking under the influence of Rome and Spain gave force to his lessons and warnings, and strengthened his party. In this turmoil of opinions, amid these hard and technical debates, these fierce conflicts between the highest authorities, and this unsparing violence and bitterness of party recriminations, Spenser, with the tastes and faculties of a poet, and the love not only of what was beautiful, but of what was meditative and dreamy, began his university life.

It was not a favourable atmosphere for the nurture of a great poet. But it suited one side of Spenser's mind, as it suited that of all but the most independent Englishmen of the time—Shakespere, Bacon, Ralegh. Little is known of Spenser's Cambridge career. It is probable, from the persons with whom he was connected, that he would not be indifferent to the debates around him, and that his religious prepossessions were then, as afterwards, in favour of the conforming puritanism in the Church, as opposed to the extreme and thorough-going puritanism of Cartwright. Of the conforming puritans, who would have been glad of a greater approximation to the Swiss model, but who, whatever their private wishes or dislikes, thought it best, for good reasons or bad, to submit to the strong determination of the government against it, and to accept what the government approved and imposed, Grindal, who held successively the great sees of London, York, and Canterbury, and Nowell, Dean of St. Paul's, Spenser's benefactor, were representative types. Grindal, a waverer like many

others in opinion, had also a noble and manly side to his character, in his hatred of practical abuses, and in the courageous and obstinate resistance which he could offer to power, when his sense of right was outraged. Grindal, as has been said, was perhaps instrumental in getting Spenser into his own old college, Pembroke Hall, with the intention, it may be, as was the fashion of bishops of that time, of becoming his patron. But certainly after his disgrace in 1577, and when it was not quite safe to praise a great man under the displeasure of the Court, Grindal is the person whom Spenser first singled out for his warmest and heartiest praise. He is introduced under a thin disguise, "Algrind," in Spenser's earliest work after he left Cambridge, the *Shepherd's Calendar*, as the pattern of the true and faithful Christian pastor. And if Pembroke Hall retained at all the tone and tendencies of such masters as Ridley, Grindal, and Whitgift, the school in which Spenser grew up was one of their mitigated puritanism. But his puritanism was political and national, rather than religious. He went heartily with the puritan party in their intense hatred of Rome and Roman partisans; he went with them also in their denunciations of the scandals and abuses of the ecclesiastical government at home. But in temper of mind and intellectual bias he had little in common with the puritans. For the stern austerities of Calvinism, its fierce and eager scholasticism, its isolation from human history, human enjoyment, and all the manifold play and variety of human character, there could not be much sympathy in a man like Spenser, with his easy and flexible nature, keenly alive to all beauty, an admirer even when he was not a lover of the alluring pleasures of which the world is full, with a perpetual struggle going on in him, between his strong instincts of purity and

right, and his passionate appreciation of every charm and grace. He shows no signs of agreement with the internal characteristics of the puritans, their distinguishing theology, their peculiarities of thought and habits, their protests, right or wrong, against the fashions and amusements of the world. If not a man of pleasure, he yet threw himself without scruple into the tastes, the language, the pursuits, of the gay and gallant society in which they saw so much evil: and from their narrow view of life, and the contempt, dislike, and fear with which they regarded the whole field of human interest, he certainly was parted by the widest gulf. Indeed, he had not the sternness and concentration of purpose, which made Milton the great puritan poet.

Spenser took his Master's degree in 1576, and then left Cambridge. He gained no Fellowship, and there is nothing to show how he employed himself. His classical learning, whether acquired there or elsewhere, was copious, but curiously inaccurate; and the only specimen remaining of his Latin composition in verse is contemptible in its mediæval clumsiness. We know nothing of his Cambridge life except the friendships which he formed there. An intimacy began at Cambridge of the closest and most affectionate kind, which lasted long into after-life, between him and two men of his college, one older in standing than himself, the other younger; Gabriel Harvey, first a fellow of Pembroke, and then a student or teacher of civil law at Trinity Hall, and Edward Kirke, like Spenser, a sizar at Pembroke, recently identified with the E. K. who was the editor and commentator of Spenser's earliest work, the anonymous *Shepherd's Calendar*. Of the younger friend this is the most that is known. That he was deeply in Spenser's confidence as a literary coadjutor, and possibly in other ways, is shown in the work which he did. But

Gabriel Harvey was a man who had influence on Spenser's ideas and purposes, and on the direction of his efforts. He was a classical scholar of much distinction in his day, well read in the Italian authors then so fashionable, and regarded as a high authority on questions of criticism and taste. Except to students of Elizabethan literary history, he has become an utterly obscure personage; and he has not usually been spoken of with much respect. He had the misfortune, later in life, to plunge violently into the scurrilous quarrels of the day, and as he was matched with wittier and more popular antagonists, he has come down to us as a foolish pretender, or at least as a dull and stupid scholar who knew little of the real value of the books he was always ready to quote, like the pedant of the comedies, or Shakespere's schoolmaster Holofernes. Further, he was one who, with his classical learning, had little belief in the resources of his mother-tongue, and he was one of the earliest and most confident supporters of a plan then fashionable, for reforming English verse, by casting away its natural habits and rhythms, and imposing on it the laws of the classical metres. In this he was not singular. The professed treatises of this time on poetry, of which there were several, assume the same theory, as the mode of "reforming" and duly elevating English verse. It was eagerly accepted by Philip Sidney and his Areopagus of wits at court, who busied themselves in devising rules of their own —improvements as they thought on those of the university men—for English hexameters and sapphics, or, as they called it, artificial versifying. They regarded the comparative value of the native English rhythms and the classical metres, much as our ancestors of Addison's day regarded the comparison between Gothic and Palladian architecture. One, even if it sometimes had a certain romantic interest,

was rude and coarse; the other was the perfection of polite art and good taste. Certainly in what remains of Gabriel Harvey's writing, there is much that seems to us vain and ridiculous enough; and it has been naturally surmised that he must have been a dangerous friend and counsellor to Spenser. But probably we are hard upon him. His writings, after all, are not much more affected and absurd in their outward fashion than most of the literary composition of the time; his verses are no worse than those of most of his neighbours; he was not above, but he was not below, the false taste and clumsiness of his age; and the rage for "artificial versifying" was for the moment in the air. And it must be said, that though his enthusiasm for English hexameters is of a piece with the puritan use of Scripture texts in divinity and morals, yet there is no want of hard-headed shrewdness in his remarks; indeed, in his rules for the adaptation of English words and accents to classical metres, he shows clearness and good sense in apprehending the conditions of the problem, while Sidney and Spenser still appear confused and uncertain. But in spite of his pedantry, and though he had not, as we shall see, the eye to discern at first the genius of the *Faerie Queene*, he has to us the interest of having been Spenser's first, and as far as we can see, to the last, dearest friend. By both of his younger fellow-students at Cambridge he was looked up to with the deepest reverence and the most confiding affection. Their language is extravagant, but there is no reason to think that it was not genuine. E. Kirke, the editor of Spenser's first venture, the *Shepherd's Calendar*, commends the "new poet" to his patronage, and to the protection of his "mighty rhetoric," and exhorts Harvey himself to seize the poetical "garland which to him alone is due." Spenser speaks in the same terms:

"*veruntamen te sequor solum; nunquam vero assequar.*" Portions of the early correspondence between Harvey and Spenser have been preserved to us, possibly by Gabriel Harvey's self-satisfaction in regard to his own compositions. But with the pedagogue's jocoseness, and a playfulness which is like that of an elephant, it shows on both sides easy frankness, sincerity, and warmth, and not a little of the early character of the younger man. In Spenser's earliest poetry, his pastorals, Harvey appears among the imaginary rustics, as the poet's "special and most familiar friend," under the name of Hobbinol—

"Good Hobbinol, that was so true."

To him Spenser addresses his confidences, under the name of Colin Clout, a name borrowed from Skelton, a satirical poet of Henry VIII.'s time, which Spenser kept throughout his poetical career. Harvey reappears in one of Spenser's latest writings, a return to the early pastoral, *Colin Clout's come home again*, a picture drawn in distant Ireland, of the brilliant but disappointing court of Elizabeth. And from Ireland, in 1586, was addressed to Harvey by his "devoted friend during life," the following fine sonnet, which, whatever may have been the merit of Harvey's criticisms and his literary quarrels with Greene and Nash, shows at least Spenser's unabated honour for him.

"To the Right Worshipful, my singular good Friend, M. Gabriel Harvey, Doctor of the Laws.

"Harvey, the happy above happiest men
I read; that, sitting like a looker on
Of this world's stage, dost note with critic pen
The sharp dislikes of each condition;
And, as one careless of suspicion,
Ne fawnest for the favour of the great;

Ne fearest foolish reprehension
Of faulty men, which danger to thee threat;
But freely dost, of what thee list, entreat,
Like a great lord of peerless liberty;
Lifting the good up to high honour's seat,
And the evil damning ever more to die;
For life and death is in thy doomful writing;
So thy renown lives ever by enditing.

"Dublin, this xviii. of July, 1586. Your devoted friend, during life,
"EDMUND SPENSER."

Between Cambridge and Spenser's appearance in London, there is a short but obscure interval. What is certain is, that he spent part of it in the North of England; that he was busy with various poetical works, one of which was soon to make him known as a new star in the poetical heaven; and lastly, that in the effect on him of a deep but unrequited passion, he then received what seems to have been a strong and determining influence on his character and life. It seems likely that his sojourn in the north, which perhaps first introduced the London-bred scholar, the "Southern Shepherd's Boy," to the novel and rougher country life of distant Lancashire, also gave form and local character to his first considerable work. But we do not know for certain where his abode was in the north; of his literary activity, which must have been considerable, we only partially know the fruit; and of the lady whom he made so famous, that her name became a consecrated word in the poetry of the time, of Rosalind, the "Widow's Daughter of the Glen," whose refusal of his suit, and preference for another, he lamented so bitterly, yet would allow no one else to blame, we know absolutely nothing. She would not be his wife; but apparently, he never ceased to love her through all the chances and temptations, and possibly errors of his life, even apparently in

the midst of his passionate admiration of the lady whom, long afterwards, he did marry. To her kindred and condition, various clues have been suggested, only to provoke and disappoint us. Whatever her condition, she was able to measure Spenser's powers: Gabriel Harvey has preserved one of her compliments—"Gentle Mistress Rosalind once reported him to have all the intelligences at commandment; and at another, christened him her *Signior Pegaso.*" But the unknown Rosalind had given an impulse to the young poet's powers, and a colour to his thoughts, and had enrolled Spenser in that band and order of poets—with one exception, not the greatest order—to whom the wonderful passion of love, in its heights and its depths, is the element on which their imagination works, and out of which it moulds its most beautiful and characteristic creations.

But in October, 1579, he emerges from obscurity. If we may trust the correspondence between Gabriel Harvey and Spenser, which was published at the time, Spenser was then in London.[1] It was the time of the crisis of the Alençon courtship, while the queen was playing fast and loose with her Valois lover, whom she playfully called her frog; when all about her, Burghley, Leicester, Sidney, and Walsingham, were dismayed, both at the plan itself, and at her vacillations; and just when the Puritan pamphleteer, who had given expression to the popular disgust at a French marriage, especially at a connexion with the family which had on its hands the blood of St. Bartholomew, was sentenced to lose his right hand as a seditious libeller.

[1] Published in June, 1580. Reprinted incompletely in Haslewood, *Ancient Critical Essays* (1815), ii. 255. Extracts given in editions of Spenser by Hughes, Todd, and Morris. The letters are of April, 1579, and October, 1580.

Spenser had become acquainted with Philip Sidney, and Sidney's literary and courtly friends. He had been received into the household of Sidney's uncle, Lord Leicester, and dates one of his letters from Leicester House. Among his employments he had written "*Stemmata Dudleiana.*" He is doubting whether or not to publish, "to utter," some of his poetical compositions: he is doubting, and asks Harvey's advice, whether or not to dedicate them to His Excellent Lordship, "lest by our much cloying their noble ears he should gather contempt of myself, or else seem rather for gain and commodity to do it, and some sweetness that I have already tasted." Yet, he thinks, that when occasion is so fairly offered of estimation and preferment, it may be well to use it: "while the iron is hot, it is good striking; and minds of nobles vary, as their estates." And he was on the eve of starting across the sea to be employed in Leicester's service, on some permanent mission in France, perhaps in connexion with the Alençon intrigues. He was thus launched into what was looked upon as the road to preferment; in his case, as it turned out, a very subordinate form of public employment, which was to continue almost for his lifetime. Sidney had recognized his unusual power, if not yet his genius. He brought him forward; perhaps he accepted him as a friend. Tradition makes him Sidney's companion at Penshurst; in his early poems, Kent is the county with which he seems most familiar. But Sidney certainly made him known to the queen; he probably recommended him as a promising servant to Leicester: and he impressed his own noble and beautiful character deeply on Spenser's mind. Spenser saw and learned in him what was then the highest type of the finished gentleman. He led Spenser astray. Sidney was not

without his full share of that affectation, which was then thought refinement. Like Gabriel Harvey, he induced Spenser to waste his time on the artificial versifying which was in vogue. But such faults and mistakes of fashion, and in one shape or another they are inevitable in all ages, were as nothing, compared to the influence on a highly receptive nature, of a character so elevated and pure, so genial, so brave and true. It was not in vain that Spenser was thus brought so near to his "Astrophel."

These letters tell us all that we know of Spenser's life at this time. During these anxious eighteen months, and connected with persons like Sidney and Leicester, Spenser only writes to Harvey on literary subjects. He is discreet, and will not indulge Harvey's "desire to hear of my late being with her Majesty." According to a literary fashion of the time, he writes and is addressed as *M. Immerito*, and the great business which occupies him and fills the letters is the scheme devised in Sidney's *Areopagus* for the "general surceasing and silence of bald Rymers, and also of the very best of them too; and for prescribing certain laws and rules of quantities of English syllables for English verse." Spenser "is more in love with his English versifying than with ryming"—"which," he says to Harvey, "I should have done long since, if I would then have followed your counsel." Harvey, of course, is delighted; he thanks the good angel which puts it into the heads of Sidney and Edward Dyer, "the two very diamonds of her Majesty's court," "our very Castor and Pollux," to "help forward our new famous enterprise for the exchanging of barbarous rymes for artificial verses;" and the whole subject is discussed at great length between the two friends; "Mr. Drant's" rules are compared with those of "Mr. Sidney," revised by "Mr. Immerito;" and exam-

ples, highly illustrative of the character of the "famous enterprise," are copiously given. In one of Harvey's letters we have a curious account of changes of fashion in studies and ideas at Cambridge. They seem to have changed since Spenser's time.

"I beseech you all this while, what news at *Cambridge? Tully* and *Demosthenes* nothing so much studied as they were wont: *Livy* and *Sallust* perhaps more, rather than less: *Lucian* never so much: *Aristotle* much named but little read: *Xenophon* and *Plato* reckoned amongst discoursers, and conceited superficial fellows; much verbal and sophistical jangling; little subtle and effectual disputing. *Machiavel* a great man: *Castilio* of no small repute. *Petrarch* and *Boccace* in every man's mouth: *Galateo* and *Guazzo* never so happy: but some acquainted with *Unico Aretino:* the *French* and *Italian* highly regarded: the *Latin* and *Greek* but lightly. The *Queen Mother* at the beginning or end of every conference: all inquisitive after news: new *books*, new fashions, new laws, new officers, and some after new elements, some after new heavens and hells too. *Turkish* affairs familiarly known: castles built in the air. much ado, and little help: in no age so little so much made of; every one highly in his own favour. Something made of nothing, in spight of Nature: numbers made of cyphers, in spight of Art. Oxen and asses, notwithstanding the absurdity it seemed to *Plautus*, drawing in the same yoke: the Gospel taught, not learnt; Charity cold; nothing good but by imputation; the Ceremonial Law in word abrogated, the Judicial in effect disannull'd, the Moral abandon'd; *the Light, the Light* in every man's lips, but mark their eyes, and you will say they are rather like owls than eagles. As of old books, so of ancient virtue, honesty, fidelity, equity, new abridgments; every day spawns new opinions: heresy in divinity, in philosophy, in humanity, in manners, grounded upon hearsay; doctors contemn'd; the *devil* not so hated as the *pope;* many invectives, but no amendment. No more ado about caps and surplices; Mr. *Cartwright* quite forgotten.

* * * * * * *

David, Ulysses, and *Solon* feign'd themselves fools and madmen; our fools and madmen feign themselves *Davids, Ulysses's*, and *Solons*.

It is pity fair weather should do any hurt; but I know what peace and quietness hath done with some melancholy pickstraws."

The letters preserve a good many touches of character which are interesting. This, for instance, which shows Spenser's feeling about Sidney. "New books," writes Spenser, "I hear of none, but only of one, that writing a certain book called *The School of Abuse* [Stephen Gosson's *Invective against poets, pipers, players, &c.*], and dedicating to M. Sidney, was for his labour scorned: *if at least it be in the goodness of that nature to scorn.*" As regards Spenser himself, it is clear from the letters that Harvey was not without uneasiness lest his friend, from his gay and pleasure-loving nature, and the temptations round him, should be carried away into the vices of an age which, though very brilliant and high-tempered, was also a very dissolute one. He couches his counsels mainly in Latin; but they point to real danger; and he adds in English—"Credit me, I will never lin [=cease] baiting at you, till I have rid you quite of this yonkerly and womanly humour." But in the second pair of letters of April, 1580, a lady appears. Whether Spenser was her husband or her lover, we know not; but she is his "sweetheart." The two friends write of her in Latin. Spenser sends in Latin the saucy messages of his sweetheart, "meum corculum," to Harvey; Harvey, with academic gallantry, sends her in Latin as many thanks for her charming letter as she has hairs, "half golden, half silver, half jewelled, in her little head;"—she is a second little Rosalind—"altera Rosalindula," whom he salutes as "Domina Immerito, mea bellissima Colina Clouta." But whether wife or mistress, we hear of her no more. Further, the letters contain notices of various early works of Spenser. The "new" *Shepherd's Calendar*, of which more will be said, had just

been published. And in this correspondence of April, 1580, we have the first mention of the *Faerie Queene.* The compositions here mentioned have been either lost, or worked into his later poetry; his *Dreams, Epithalamion Thamesis,* apparently in the "reformed verse," his *Dying Pelican,* his *Slumber,* his *Stemmata Dudleiana,* his *Comedies.* They show at least the activity and eagerness of the writer in his absorbing pursuit. But he was still in bondage to the belief that English poetry ought to try to put on a classical dress. It is strange that the man who had written some of the poetry in the *Shepherd's Calendar* should have found either satisfaction or promise in the following attempt at Trimeter Iambics.

"And nowe requite I you with the like, not with the verye beste, but with the verye shortest, namely, with a few Iambickes: I dare warrant they be precisely perfect for the feete (as you can easily judge), and varie not one inch from the Rule. I will imparte yours to Maister *Sidney* and Maister *Dyer* at my nexte going to the Courte. I praye you, keepe mine close to yourself, or your verie entire friends, Maister *Preston*, Maister *Still*, and the reste.

"*Iambicum Trimetrum.*

"Unhappie Verse, the witnesse of my unhappie state,
Make thy selfe fluttring wings of thy fast flying
Thought, and fly forth unto my Love wheresoever she be:

"Whether lying reastlesse in heavy bedde, or else
Sitting so cheerlesse at the cheerfull boorde, or else
Playing alone carelesse on hir heavenlie Virginals.

"If in Bed, tell hir, that my eyes can take no reste:
If at Boorde, tell hir that my mouth can eate no meate:
If at hir Virginals, tell hir I can heare no mirth.

"Asked why? say: Waking Love suffereth no sleepe:
Say, that raging Love dothe appall the weake stomacke:
Say, that lamenting Love marreth the Musicall.

"Tell hir, that hir pleasures were wonte to lull me asleepe:
Tell hir, that hir beautie was wonte to feede mine eyes:
Tell hir, that hir sweete Tongue was wonte to make me mirth

"Nowe doe I nightly waste, wanting my kindely reste:
Nowe doe I dayly starve, wanting my lively foode:
Nowe doe I alwayes dye, wanting thy timely mirth.

"And if I waste, who will bewaile my heavy chaunce?
And if I starve, who will record my cursed end?
And if I dye, who will saye: *this was Immerito!*"

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW POET—THE SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR.

[1579.]

It is clear that when Spenser appeared in London, he had found out his powers and vocation as a poet. He came from Cambridge, fully conscious of the powerful attraction of the imaginative faculties, conscious of an extraordinary command over the resources of language, and with a singular gift of sensitiveness to the grace and majesty and suggestiveness of sound and rhythm, such as makes a musician. And whether he knew it or not, his mind was in reality made up, as to what his English poetry was to be. In spite of opinions and fashions round him, in spite of university pedantry and the affectations of the court, in spite of Harvey's classical enthusiasm and Sidney's Areopagus, and in spite of half-fancying himself converted to their views, his own powers and impulses showed him the truth, and made him understand better than his theories what a poet could and ought to do with English speech in its free play and genuine melodies. When we first come upon him, we find that at the age of twenty-seven, he had not only realized an idea of English poetry far in advance of anything which his age had yet conceived or seen; but that, besides what he had executed or planned, he had already in his mind the outlines of

the *Faerie Queene*, and, in some form or other, though perhaps not yet as we have it, had written some portion of it.

In attempting to revive for his own age Chaucer's suspended art, Spenser had the tendencies of the time with him. The age was looking out for some one to do for England what had been grandly done for Italy. The time, in truth, was full of poetry. The nation was just in that condition which is most favourable to an outburst of poetical life or art. It was highly excited; but it was also in a state of comparative peace and freedom from external disturbance. "An over-faint quietness," writes Sidney in 1581, lamenting that there were so few good poets, "should seem to strew the house for poets." After the first ten years of Elizabeth's reign, and the establishment of her authority, the country had begun to breathe freely, and fall into natural and regular ways. During the first half of the century, it had had before it the most astonishing changes which the world had seen for centuries. These changes seemed definitely to have run their course; with the convulsions which accompanied them, their uprootings and terrors, they were gone; and the world had become accustomed to their results. The nation still had before it great events, great issues, great perils, great and indefinite prospects of adventure and achievement. The old quarrels and animosities of Europe had altered in character: from being wars between princes, and disputes of personal ambition, they had attracted into them all that interests and divides mankind, from high to low. Their animating principle was a high and a sacred cause: they had become wars of liberty, and wars of religion. The world had settled down to the fixed antipathies and steady rivalries of centuries to come. But the mere shock of transition was over. Yet the remembrance of the great

break-up was still fresh. For fifty years the English people had had before its eyes the great vicissitudes which make tragedy. They had seen the most unforeseen and most unexpected revolutions in what had for ages been held certain and immovable; the overthrow of the strongest institutions, and most venerable authorities; the violent shifting of feelings from faith to passionate rejection, from reverence to scorn and a hate which could not be satisfied. They had seen the strangest turns of fortune, the most wonderful elevations to power, the most terrible visitations of disgrace. They had seen the mightiest ruined, the brightest and most admired brought down to shame and death, men struck down with all the forms of law, whom the age honoured as its noblest ornaments. They had seen the flames of martyr or heretic, heads which had worn a crown laid one after another on the block, controversies, not merely between rivals for power, but between the deepest principles and the most rooted creeds, settled on the scaffold. Such a time of surprise—of hope and anxiety, of horror and anguish to-day, of relief and exultation to-morrow—had hardly been to England as the first half of the sixteenth century. All that could stir men's souls, all that could inflame their hearts, or that could wring them, had happened.

And yet, compared with previous centuries, and with what was going on abroad, the time now was a time of peace, and men lived securely. Wealth was increasing. The Wars of the Roses had left the crown powerful to enforce order, and protect industry and trade. The nation was beginning to grow rich. When the day's work was done, men's leisure was not disturbed by the events of neighbouring war. They had time to open their imaginations to the great spectacle which had been unrolled

before them, to reflect upon it, to put into shape their thoughts about it. The intellectual movement of the time had reached England, and its strong impulse to mental efforts in new and untried directions was acting powerfully upon Englishmen. But though there was order and present peace at home, there was much to keep men's minds on the stretch. There was quite enough danger and uncertainty to wind up their feelings to a high pitch. But danger was not so pressing as to prevent them from giving full place to the impressions of the strange and eventful scene round them, with its grandeur, its sadness, its promises. In such a state of things there is everything to tempt poetry. There are its materials and its stimulus, and there is the leisure to use its materials.

But the poet had not yet been found; and everything connected with poetry was in the disorder of ignorance and uncertainty. Between the counsels of a pedantic scholarship, and the rude and hesitating, but true instincts of the natural English ear, every one was at sea. Yet it seemed as if every one was trying his hand at verse. Popular writing took that shape. The curious and unique record of literature preserved in the registers of the Stationers' Company, shows that the greater proportion of what was published, or at least entered for publication, was in the shape of ballads. The ballad vied with the sermon in doing what the modern newspaper does, in satisfying the public craving for information, amusement, or guidance. It related the last great novelty, the last great battle or crime, a storm or monstrous birth. It told some pathetic or burlesque story, or it moralized on the humours or follies of classes and professions, of young and old, of men and of women. It sang the lover's hopes or sorrows, or the adventures of some hero of history or ro-

mance. It might be a fable, a satire, a libel, a squib, a sacred song or paraphrase, a homily. But about all that it treated it sought to throw more or less the colour of imagination. It appealed to the reader's feelings, or sympathy, or passion. It attempted to raise its subject above the level of mere matter of fact. It sought for choice and expressive words; it called in the help of measure and rhythm. It aimed at a rude form of art. Presently the critical faculty came into play. Scholars, acquainted with classical models and classical rules, began to exercise their judgment on their own poetry, to construct theories, to review the performances before them, to suggest plans for the improvement of the poetic art. Their essays are curious, as the beginnings of that great critical literature, which in England, in spite of much infelicity, has only been second to the poetry which it judged. But in themselves they are crude, meagre, and helpless; interesting mainly as showing how much craving there was for poetry, and how little good poetry to satisfy it, and what inconceivable doggerel could be recommended by reasonable men, as fit to be admired and imitated. There is fire and eloquence in Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (1581); but his ideas about poetry were floating, loose, and ill-defined, and he had not much to point to as of first-rate excellence in recent writers. Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), and the more elaborate work ascribed to George Puttenham (1589), works of tame and artificial learning without Sidney's fire, reveal equally the poverty, as a whole, of what had been as yet produced in England as poetry, in spite of the wide-spread passion for poetry. The specimens which they quote and praise are mostly grotesque to the last degree. Webbe improves some gracefully flowing lines of Spenser's into the most portentous Sapphics; and

Puttenham squeezes compositions into the shapes of triangles, eggs, and pilasters. Gabriel Harvey is accused by his tormentor, Nash, of doing the same, "of having writ verse in all kinds, as in form of a pair of gloves, a dozen of points, a pair of spectacles, a two-hand sword, a poynado, a colossus, a pyramid, a painter's easel, a market cross, a trumpet, an anchor, a pair of pot-hooks." Puttenham's Art of Poetry, with its books, one on Proportion, the other on Ornament, might be compared to an Art of War, of which one book treated of barrack drill, and the other of busbies, sabretasches, and different forms of epaulettes and feathers. These writers do not want good sense or the power to make a good remark. But the stuff and material for good criticism, the strong and deep poetry, which makes such criticisms as theirs seem so absurd, had not yet appeared.

A change was at hand; and the suddenness of it is one of the most astonishing things in literary history. The ten years from 1580 to 1590 present a set of critical essays, giving a picture of English poetry of which, though there are gleams of a better hope, and praise is specially bestowed on a "new poet," the general character is feebleness, fantastic absurdity, affectation, and bad taste. Force, and passion, and simple truth, and powerful thoughts of the world and man, are rare; and poetical reformers appear maundering about miserable attempts at English hexameters and sapphics. What was to be looked for from all that? Who could suppose what was preparing under it all? But the dawn was come. The next ten years, from 1590 to 1600, not only saw the *Faerie Queene*, but they were the years of the birth of the English Drama. Compare the idea which we get of English poetry from Philip Sidney's Defense in 1581, and Puttenham's treatise

in 1589, I do not say with Shakespere, but with Lamb's selections from the Dramatic Poets, many of them unknown names to the majority of modern readers; and we see at once what a bound English poetry has made; we see that a new spring-time of power and purpose in poetical thought has opened; new and original forms have sprung to life of poetical grandeur, seriousness, and magnificence. From the poor and rude play-houses, with their troops of actors, most of them profligate and disreputable, their coarse excitements, their buffoonery, license, and taste for the monstrous and horrible — denounced not without reason as corrupters of public morals, preached against at Paul's Cross, expelled the city by the Corporation, classed by the law with rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars, and patronized by the great and unscrupulous nobles in defiance of it—there burst forth suddenly a new poetry, which with its reality, depth, sweetness and nobleness took the world captive. The poetical ideas and aspirations of the Englishmen of the time had found at last adequate interpreters, and their own national and unrivalled expression.

And in this great movement Spenser was the harbinger and announcing sign. But he was only the harbinger. What he did was to reveal to English ears as it never had been revealed before, at least, since the days of Chaucer, the sweet music, the refined grace, the inexhaustible versatility of the English tongue. But his own efforts were in a different direction from that profound and insatiable seeking after the real, in thought and character, in representation and expression, which made Shakespere so great, and his brethren great in proportion as they approached him. Spenser's genius continued to the end under the influences which were so powerful when it first unfolded itself. To the last it allied itself, in form at least, with the

artificial. To the last it moved in a world which was not real, which never had existed, which, any how, was only a world of memory and sentiment. He never threw himself frankly on human life as it is; he always viewed it through a veil of mist which greatly altered its true colours, and often distorted its proportions. And thus while more than any one he prepared the instruments and the path for the great triumph, he himself missed the true field for the highest exercise of poetic power; he missed the highest honours of that in which he led the way.

Yet, curiously enough, it seems as if, early in his career, he was affected by the strong stream which drew Shakespere. Among the compositions of his first period, besides *The Shepherd's Calendar*, are *Nine Comedies*—clearly real plays, which his friend Gabriel Harvey praised with enthusiasm. As early as 1579 Spenser had laid before Gabriel Harvey, for his judgment and advice, a portion of the *Faerie Queene* in some shape or another, and these nine comedies. He was standing at the parting of the ways. The allegory, with all its tempting associations and machinery, with its ingenuities and pictures, and boundless license to vagueness and to fancy, was on one side; and on the other, the drama, with its *prima facie* and superficially prosaic aspects, and its kinship to what was customary and commonplace and unromantic in human life. Of the nine comedies composed on the model of those of Ariosto and Machiavelli and other Italians, every trace has perished. But this was Gabriel Harvey's opinion of the respective value of the two specimens of work submitted to him, and this was his counsel to their author. In April, 1580, he thus writes to Spenser:

"In good faith I had once again nigh forgotten your *Faerie Queene*; howbeit, by good chance, I have now sent her home at the

last neither in better or worse case than I found her. And must you of necessity have my judgment of her indeed? To be plain, I am void of all judgment, if your *Nine Comedies*, whereunto in imitation of Herodotus, you give the names of the Nine Muses (and in one man's fancy not unworthily), come not nearer Ariosto's comedies, either for the fineness of plausible elocution, or the rareness of poetical invention, than that *Elvish Queen* doth to his *Orlando Furioso*, which notwithstanding you will needs seem to emulate and hope to overgo, as you flatly professed yourself in one of your last letters.

"Besides that you know, it hath been the usual practice of the most exquisite and odd wits in all nations, and specially in Italy, rather to show, and advance themselves that way than any other: as, namely, those three notorious discoursing heads Bibiena, Machiavel, and Aretino did (to let Bembo and Ariosto pass) with the great admiration and wonderment of the whole country: being indeed reputed matchable in all points, both for conceit of wit and eloquent deciphering of matters, either with Aristophanes and Menander in Greek, or with Plautus and Terence in Latin, or with any other in any other tongue. But I will not stand greatly with you in your own matters. If so be the *Faerie Queene* be fairer in your eye than the Nine Muses, and Hobgoblin run away with the garland from Apollo: mark what I say, and yet I will not say that I thought, but there is an end for this once, and fare you well, till God or some good angel put you in a better mind."

It is plain on which side Spenser's own judgment inclined. He had probably written the comedies, as he had written English hexameters, out of deference to others, or to try his hand. But the current of his own secret thoughts, those thoughts, with their ideals and aims, which tell a man what he is made for, and where his power lies, set another way. The *Faerie Queene was* "fairer in his eye than the Nine Muses, and Hobgoblin did run away with the garland from Apollo." What Gabriel Harvey prayed for as the "better mind" did not come. And we cannot repine at a decision which gave us, in the shape which it took at last, the allegory of the *Faerie Queene*.

But the *Faerie Queene*, though already planned and perhaps begun, belongs to the last ten years of the century, to the season of fulfilment, not of promise, to the blossoming, not to the opening bud. The new hopes for poetry which Spenser brought were given in a work, which the *Faerie Queene* has eclipsed and almost obscured, as the sun puts out the morning star. Yet that which marked a turning-point in the history of our poetry, was the book which came out, timidly and anonymously, in the end of 1579, or the beginning of 1580, under the borrowed title of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, a name familiar in those days as that of an early medley of astrology and homely receipts from time to time reprinted, which was the Moore's or Zadkiel's almanac of the time. It was not published ostensibly by Spenser himself, though it is inscribed to Philip Sidney in a copy of verses signed with Spenser's masking name of *Immerito*. The avowed responsibility for it might have been inconvenient for a young man pushing his fortune among the cross currents of Elizabeth's court. But it was given to the world by a friend of the author's, signing himself E. K., now identified with Spenser's fellow-student at Pembroke, Edward Kirke, who dedicates it in a long, critical epistle of some interest to the author's friend, Gabriel Harvey, and, after the fashion of some of the Italian books of poetry, accompanies it with a gloss, explaining words, and to a certain extent, allusions. Two things are remarkable in Kirke's epistle. One is the confidence with which he announces the yet unrecognized excellence of "this one new poet," whom he is not afraid to put side by side with "that good old poet," Chaucer, the "loadstar of our language." The other point is the absolute reliance which he places on the powers of the English language, handled by one who has discerned its

genius, and is not afraid to use its wealth. "In my opinion, it is one praise of many that are due to this poet, that he hath laboured to restore, as to their rightful heritage, such good and natural English words as have been long time out of use, or almost clean disherited, which is the only cause, that our mother-tongue, which truly of itself is both full enough for prose, and stately enough for verse, hath long time been counted most bare and barren of both." The friends, Kirke and Harvey, were not wrong in their estimate of the importance of Spenser's work. The "new poet," as he came to be customarily called, had really made one of those distinct steps in his art, which answer to discoveries and inventions in other spheres of human interest—steps which make all behind them seem obsolete and mistaken. There was much in the new poetry which was immature and imperfect, not a little that was fantastic and affected. But it was the first adequate effort of reviving English poetry.

The *Shepherd's Calendar* consists of twelve compositions, with no other internal connexion than that they are assigned respectively to the twelve months of the year. They are all different in subject, metre, character, and excellence. They are called *Æglogues*, according to the whimsical derivation adopted from the Italians of the word which the classical writers call Eclogues: "*Æglogai*, as it were αἰγῶν or αἰγονόμων λόγοι; that is, Goatherd's Tales." The book is in its form an imitation of that highly artificial kind of poetry which the later Italians of the Renaissance had copied from Virgil, as Virgil had copied it from the Sicilian and Alexandrian Greeks, and to which had been given the name of Bucolic or Pastoral. Petrarch, in imitation of Virgil, had written Latin Bucolics, as he had written a Latin Epic, his *Africa*. He was followed in

the next century by Baptista Mantuanus (1448–1516), the "old Mantuan," of Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost*, whose Latin "Eglogues" became a favourite school-book in England, and who was imitated by a writer who passed for a poet in the time of Henry VIII., Alexander Barclay. In the hands of the Sicilians, pastoral poetry may have been an attempt at idealizing country life almost as genuine as some of Wordsworth's poems; but it soon ceased to be that, and in Alexandrian hands it took its place among the recognized departments of classic and literary copying, in which Virgil found and used it. But a further step had been made since Virgil had adopted it as an instrument of his genius. In the hands of Mantuan and Barclay it was a vehicle for general moralizing, and in particular for severe satire on women and the clergy. And Virgil, though he may himself speak under the names of Tityrus and Menalcas, and lament Julius Cæsar as Daphnis, did not conceive of the Roman world as peopled by flocks and sheep-cotes, or its emperors and chiefs, its poets, senators and ladies, as shepherds and shepherdesses, of higher or lower degree. But in Spenser's time, partly through undue reference to what was supposed to be Italian taste, partly owing to the tardiness of national culture, and because the poetic impulses had not yet gained power to force their way through the embarrassment and awkwardness which accompany reviving art—the world was turned, for the purposes of the poetry of civil life, into a pastoral scene. Poetical invention was held to consist in imagining an environment, a set of outward circumstances, as unlike as possible to the familiar realities of actual life and employment, in which the primary affections and passions had their play. A fantastic basis, varying according to the conventions of the fashion, was held essential for the representation of the ideal.

Masquerade and hyperbole were the stage and scenery on which the poet's sweetness, or tenderness, or strength was to be put forth. The masquerade, when his subject belonged to peace, was one of shepherds: when it was one of war and adventure, it was a masquerade of knight-errantry. But a masquerade was necessary, if he was to raise his composition above the vulgarities and trivialities of the street, the fireside, the camp, or even the court; if he was to give it the dignity, the ornament, the unexpected results, the brightness and colour which belong to poetry. The fashion had the sanction of the brilliant author of the *Arcadia*, the "Courtier, Soldier, Scholar," who was the "mould of form," and whose judgment was law to all men of letters in the middle years of Elizabeth, the all-accomplished Philip Sidney. Spenser submitted to this fashion from first to last. When he ventured on a considerable poetical enterprise, he spoke his thoughts, not in his own name, nor as his contemporaries ten years later did, through the mouth of characters in a tragic or comic drama, but through imaginary rustics, to whom every one else in the world was a rustic, and lived among the sheep-folds, with a background of downs or vales or fields, and the open sky above. His shepherds and goatherds bear the homely names of native English clowns, Diggon Davie, Willye, and Piers; Colin Clout, adopted from Skelton, stands for Spenser himself; Hobbinol, for Gabriel Harvey; Cuddie, perhaps for Edward Kirke; names revived by Ambrose Phillips, and laughed at by Pope, when pastorals again came into vogue with the wits of Queen Anne.[1] With them are mingled classical ones like Menalcas, French ones from Marot, anagrams like Algrind for Grindal, significant ones

[1] In the *Guardian*, No. 40. Compare Johnson's *Life of Ambrose Phillips*.

like Palinode, plain ones like Lettice, and romantic ones like Rosalind; and no incongruity seems to be found in matching a beautiful shepherdess named Dido with a Great Shepherd called Lobbin, or, when the verse requires it, Lobb. And not merely the speakers in the dialogue are shepherds; every one is in their view a shepherd. Chaucer is the "god of shepherds," and Orpheus is a—

> "Shepherd that did fetch his dame
> From Plutoe's baleful bower withouten leave."

The "fair Elisa" is the Queen of shepherds all; her great father is Pan, the shepherds' god; and Anne Boleyn is Syrinx. It is not unnatural that when the clergy are spoken of, as they are in three of the poems, the figure should be kept up. But it is curious to find that the shepherds' god, the great Pan, who stands in one connexion for Henry VIII., should in another represent in sober earnest the Redeemer and Judge of the world.[1]

The poems framed in this grotesque setting are on many themes, and of various merit, and probably of different dates. Some are simply amatory effusions of an ordinary character, full of a lover's despair and complaint. Three or four are translations or imitations; translations from Marot, imitations from Theocritus, Bion, or Virgil. Two of them contain fables told with great force and humour. The story of the Oak and the Briar, related, as his friendly commentator Kirke says, "so lively and so feelingly, as if the thing were set forth in some picture before our eyes," for the warning of "disdainful younkers," is a first-fruit, and promise of Spenser's skill in vivid narrative. The fable of the Fox and the Kid, a curious illustration of the popular discontent at the negligence of the clergy, and the

[1] *Shepherd's Calendar*, May, July, and September.

popular suspicions about the arts of Roman intriguers, is told with great spirit, and with mingled humour and pathos. There is, of course, a poem in honour of the great queen, who was the goddess of their idolatry to all the wits and all the learned of England, the "faire Eliza," and a compliment is paid to Leicester,

> "The worthy whom she loveth best,—
> That first the White Bear to the stake did bring."

Two of them are avowedly burlesque imitations of rustic dialect and banter, carried on with much spirit. One composition is a funeral tribute to some unknown lady; another is a complaint of the neglect of poets by the great. In three of the Æglogues he comes on a more serious theme; they are vigorous satires on the loose living and greediness of clergy forgetful of their charge, with strong invectives against foreign corruption and against the wiles of the wolves and foxes of Rome, with frequent allusions to passing incidents in the guerilla war with the seminary priests, and with a warm eulogy on the faithfulness and wisdom of Archbishop Grindal; whose name is disguised as old Algrind, and with whom in his disgrace the poet is not afraid to confess deep sympathy. They are, in a poetical form, part of that manifold and varied system of Puritan aggression on the established ecclesiastical order of England; which went through the whole scale from the "Admonition to Parliament," and the lectures of Cartwright and Travers, to the libels of Martin Mar-prelate: a system of attack which, with all its injustice and violence, and with all its mischievous purposes, found but too much justification in the inefficiency and corruption of many both of the bishops and clergy, and in the rapacious and selfish policy of the government, forced to starve and crip-

ple the public service, while great men and favourites built up their fortunes out of the prodigal indulgence of the Queen.

The collection of poems is thus a very miscellaneous one, and cannot be said to be in its subjects inviting. The poet's system of composition, also, has the disadvantage of being to a great degree unreal, forced, and unnatural. Departing from the precedent of Virgil and the Italians, but perhaps copying the artificial Doric of the Alexandrians, he professes to make his language and style suitable to the "ragged and rustical" rudeness of the shepherds whom he brings on the scene, by making it both archaic and provincial. He found in Chaucer a store of forms and words sufficiently well known to be with a little help intelligible, and sufficiently out of common use to give the character of antiquity to a poetry which employed them. And from his sojourn in the North he is said to have imported a certain number of local peculiarities which would seem unfamiliar and harsh in the South. His editor's apology for this use of "ancient solemn words," as both proper and as ornamental, is worth quoting; it is an early instance of what is supposed to be not yet common, a sense of pleasure in that wildness which we call picturesque.

"And first for the words to speak: I grant they be something hard, and of most men unused: yet English, and also used of most excellent Authors and most famous Poets. In whom, when as this our Poet hath been much travelled and throughly read, how could it be (as that worthy Orator said), but that 'walking in the sun, although for other cause he walked, yet needs he mought be sunburnt;' and having the sound of those ancient poets still ringing in his ears, he mought needs, in singing, hit out some of their tunes. But whether he useth them by such casualty and custom, or of set purpose and choice, as thinking them fittest for such rustical rudeness of shepherds, either for that their rough sound would make his

rymes more ragged and rustical, or else because such old and obsolete words are most used of country folks, sure I think, and I think not amiss, that they bring great grace, and, as one would say, authority, to the verse. . . . Yet neither everywhere must old words be stuffed in, nor the common Dialect and manner of speaking so corrupted thereby, that, as in old buildings, it seem disorderly and ruinous. But as in most exquisite pictures they use to blaze and portrait not only the dainty lineaments of beauty, but also round about it to shadow the rude thickets and craggy cliffs, that by the baseness of such parts, more excellency may accrue to the principal—for ofttimes we find ourselves I know not how, singularly delighted with the show of such natural rudeness, and take great pleasure in that disorderly order:—even so do these rough and harsh terms enlumine, and make more clearly to appear, the brightness of brave and glorious words. So oftentimes a discord in music maketh a comely concordance."

But when allowance is made for an eclectic and sometimes pedantic phraseology, and for mannerisms to which the fashion of the age tempted him, such as the extravagant use of alliteration, or, as they called it, "hunting the letter," the *Shepherd's Calendar* is, for its time, of great interest.

Spenser's force, and sustained poetical power, and singularly musical ear are conspicuous in this first essay of his genius. In the poets before him of this century, fragments and stanzas, and perhaps single pieces might be found, which might be compared with his work. Fugitive pieces, chiefly amatory, meet us of real sprightliness, or grace, or tenderness. The stanzas which Sackville, afterwards Lord Buckhurst, contributed to the collection called the *Mirror of Magistrates*,[1] are marked with a pathetic majesty, a genuine sympathy for the precariousness of greatness, which seem a prelude to the Elizabethan drama. But these frag-

[1] First published in 1559. It was a popular book, and was often re-edited.

ments were mostly felicitous efforts, which soon passed on into the ungainly, the uncouth, the obscure, or the grotesque. But in the *Shepherd's Calendar* we have for the first time in the century, the swing, the command, the varied resources of the real poet, who is not driven by failing language or thought into frigid or tumid absurdities. Spenser is master over himself and his instrument even when he uses it in a way which offends our taste. There are passages in the *Shepherd's Calendar* of poetical eloquence, of refined vigour, and of musical and imaginative sweetness, such as the English language had never attained to since the days of him who was to the age of Spenser what Shakespere and Milton are to ours, the pattern and fount of poetry, Chaucer. Dryden is not afraid to class Spenser with Theocritus and Virgil, and to write that the *Shepherd's Calendar* is not to be matched in any language.[1] And this was at once recognized. The authorship of it, as has been said, was not formally acknowledged. Indeed, Mr. Collier remarks that seven years after its publication, and after it had gone through three or four separate editions, it was praised by a contemporary poet, George Whetstone, himself a friend of Spenser's, as the "reputed work of Sir Philip Sidney." But if it was officially a secret, it was an open secret, known to every one who cared to be well informed. It is possible that the free language used in it about ecclesiastical abuses was too much in sympathy with the growing fierceness and insolence of Puritan invective to be safely used by a poet who gave his name: and one of the reasons assigned for Burghley's dislike to Spenser is the praise bestowed in the *Shepherd's Calendar* on Archbishop Grindal, then in deep disgrace for resisting the suppression of the puritan prophesyings.

[1] Dedication to Virgil.

But anonymous as it was, it had been placed under Sidney's protection; and it was at once warmly welcomed. It is not often that in those remote days we get evidence of the immediate effect of a book; but we have this evidence in Spenser's case. In this year, probably, after it was published, we find it spoken of by Philip Sidney, not without discriminating criticism, but as one of the few recent examples of poetry worthy to be named after Chaucer.

"I account the *Mirror of Magistrates* meetly furnished of beautiful parts; and in the Earl of Surrey's *Lyrics* many things tasting of birth, and worthy of a noble mind. The *Shepherd's Calendar* hath much poetry in his Eglogues: indeed worthy the reading if I be not deceived. That same framing of his style in an old rustic language I dare not allow, sith neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin, nor Sanazar in Italian, did affect it. Besides these do I not remember to have seen but few (to speak boldly) printed that have poetical sinews in them."

Sidney's patronage of the writer and general approval of the work doubtless had something to do with making Spenser's name known: but he at once takes a place in contemporary judgment which no one else takes, till the next decade of the century. In 1586, Webbe published his *Discouse of English Poetrie*. In this, the author of the *Shepherd's Calendar* is spoken of by the name given him by its Editor, E. K——, as the "new poet," just as, earlier in the century, the *Orlando Furioso* was styled the "nuova poesia;" and his work is copiously used to supply examples and illustrations of the critic's rules and observations. Webbe's review of existing poetry was the most comprehensive yet attempted: but the place which he gives to the new poet, whose name was in men's mouths, though, like the author of *In Memoriam*, he had not placed it on the title-page, was one quite apart.

"This place [to wear the Laurel] have I purposely reserved for one, who, if not only, yet in my judgment principally, deserveth the title of the rightest English poet that ever I read: that is, the author of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, intituled to the worthy Gentleman Master Philip Sidney, whether it was Master Sp. or what rare scholar in Pembroke Hall soever, because himself and his friends, for what respect I know not, would not reveal it, I force not greatly to set down. Sorry I am that I cannot find none other with whom I might couple him in this catalogue in his rare gift of poetry: although one there is, though now long since seriously occupied in graver studies, Master Gabriel Harvey, yet as he was once his most special friend and fellow poet, so because he hath taken such pains not only in his Latin poetry . . . but also to reform our English verse . . . therefore will I adventure to set them together as two of the rarest wits and learnedest masters of poetry in England."

He even ventured to compare him favourably with Virgil.

"But now yet at the last hath England hatched up one poet of this sort, in my conscience comparable with the best in any respect: even Master Sp., author of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, whose travail in that piece of English poetry I think verily is so commendable, as none of equal judgment can yield him less praise for his excellent skill and skilful excellency showed forth in the same than they would to either Theocritus or Virgil, whom in mine opinion, if the coarseness of our speech (I mean the course of custom which he would not infringe), had been no more let unto him than their pure native tongues were unto them, he would have, if it might be, surpassed them."

The courtly author of the *Arte of English Poesie*, 1589, commonly cited as G. Puttenham, classes him with Sidney. And from this time his name occurs in every enumeration of English poetical writers, till he appears, more than justifying this early appreciation of his genius, as Chaucer's not unworthy successor, in the *Faerie Queene*. Afterwards, as other successful poetry was written, and the standards

of taste were multiplied, this first enthusiastic reception cooled down. In James the First's time, Spenser's use of "old outworn words" is criticised as being no more "practical English" than Chaucer or Skelton: it is not "courtly" enough.[1] The success of the *Shepherd's Calendar* had also, apparently, substantial results, which some of his friends thought of with envy. They believed that it secured him high patronage, and opened to him a way to fortune. Poor Gabriel Harvey, writing in the year in which the *Shepherd's Calendar* came out, contrasts his own less favoured lot, and his ill-repaid poetical efforts, with Colin Clout's good luck.

"But ever and ever, methinks, your great Catoes, *Ecquid erit pretii*, and our little Catoes, *Rès age quæ prosunt*, make such a buzzing and ringing in my head, that I have little joy to animate and encourage either you or him to go forward, unless ye might make account of some certain ordinary wages, or at the least wise have your meat and drink for your day's works. As for myself, howsoever I have toyed and trifled heretofore, I am now taught, and I trust I shall shortly learn (no remedy, I must of mere necessity give you over in the plain field), to employ my travail and time wholly or chiefly on those studies and practices that carry, as they say, meat in their mouth, having evermore their eye upon the Title, *De pane lucrando*, and their hand upon their halfpenny. For I pray now what saith Mr. Cuddie, alias you know who, in the tenth Æglogue of the aforesaid famous new Calendar.

* * * * * * *

"'The dapper ditties, that I wont devise
To feed youths' fancy and the flocking fry,
Delighten much: what I the best for thy?
They han the pleasure, I a sclender prize,
I beat the bush, the birds to them do fly.
What good thereof to Cuddie can arise?'

"But Master Colin Clout is not everybody, and albeit his old com-

[1] Bolton in Haslewood, ii. 249.

panions, Master Cuddie and Master Hobinoll, be as little beholding to their mistress poetry as ever you wist: yet he, peradventure, by the means of her special favour, and some personal privilege, may haply live by *Dying Pelicans*, and purchase great lands and lordships with the money which his *Calendar* and *Dreams* have, and will afford him."

CHAPTER III.

SPENSER IN IRELAND.

[1580.]

In the first week of October, 1579, Spenser was at Leicester House, expecting "next week" to be despatched on Leicester's service to France. Whether he was sent or not, we do not know. Gabriel Harvey, writing at the end of the month, wagers that "for all his saying, he will not be gone over sea, neither this week nor the next." In one of the Æglogues (September) there are some lines which suggest, but do not necessarily imply, the experience of an eye-witness of the state of religion in a Roman Catholic country. But we can have nothing but conjecure whether at this time or any other Spenser was on the Continent. The *Shepherd's Calendar* was entered at Stationers' Hall, December 5, 1579. In April, 1580, as we know from one of his letters to Harvey, he was at Westminster. He speaks of the *Shepherd's Calendar* as published; he is contemplating the publication of other pieces, and then "he will in hand forthwith with his *Faerie Queene*," of which he had sent Harvey a specimen. He speaks especially of his *Dreams* as a considerable work.

"I take best my *Dreams* should come forth alone, being grown by means of the Gloss (running continually in manner of a Paraphrase) full as great as my *Calendar*. Therein be some things ex-

cellently, and many things wittily discoursed of E. K., and the pictures so singularly set forth and portrayed, as if Michael Angelo were there, he could (I think) nor amend the best, nor reprehend the worst. I know you would like them passing well."

It is remarkable that of a book so spoken of, as of the *Nine Comedies*, not a trace, as far as appears, is to be found. He goes on to speak with much satisfaction of another composition, which was probably incorporated, like the *Epithalamion Thamesis*, in his later work.

"Of my *Stemmata Dudleiana*, and specially of the sundry Apostrophes therein, addressed you know to whom, much more advisement he had, than so lightly to send them abroad: now list, trust me (though I do never very well) yet, in mine own fancy, I never did better. *Veruntamen te sequor solum, nunquam vero assequar.*"

He is plainly not dissatisfied with his success, and is looking forward to more. But no one in those days could live by poetry. Even scholars, in spite of university endowments, did not hope to live by their scholarship; and the poet or man of letters only trusted that his work, by attracting the favour of the great, might open to him the door of advancement. Spenser was probably expecting to push his fortunes in some public employment under the patronage of two such powerful favourites as Sidney and his uncle Leicester. Spenser's heart was set on poetry: but what leisure he might have for it would depend on the course his life might take. To have hung on Sidney's protection, or gone with him as his secretary to the wars, to have been employed at home or abroad in Leicester's intrigues, to have stayed in London filling by Leicester's favour some government office, to have had his habits moulded and his thoughts affected by the brilliant and unscrupulous society of the court, or by the powerful and

daring minds which were fast thronging the political and literary scene — any of these contingencies might have given his poetical faculty a different direction; nay, might have even abridged its exercise or suppressed it. But his life was otherwise ordered. A new opening presented itself. He had, and he accepted, the chance of making his fortune another way. And to his new manner of life, with its peculiar conditions, may be ascribed, not, indeed, the original idea of that which was to be his great work, but the circumstances under which the work was carried out, and which not merely coloured it, but gave it some of its special and characteristic features.

That which turned the course of his career, and exercised a decisive influence, certainly on its events and fate, probably also on the turn of his thoughts and the shape and moulding of his work, was his migration to Ireland, and his settlement there for the greater part of the remaining eighteen years of his life. We know little more than the main facts of this change from the court and the growing intellectual activity of England, to the fierce and narrow interests of a cruel and unsuccessful struggle for colonization, in a country which was to England much what Algeria was to France some thirty years ago. Ireland, always unquiet, had become a serious danger to Elizabeth's Government. It was its "bleeding ulcer." Lord Essex's great colonizing scheme, with his unscrupulous severity, had failed. Sir Henry Sidney, wise, firm, and wishing to be just, had tried his hand as Deputy for the third time in the thankless charge of keeping order; he, too, after a short gleam of peace, had failed also. For two years Ireland had been left to the local administration, totally unable to heal its wounds, or cope with its disorders. And now, the kingdom threatened to become

a vantage-ground to the foreign enemy. In November, 1579, the Government turned their eyes on Arthur, Lord Grey of Wilton, a man of high character, and a soldier of distinction. He, or they, seem to have hesitated; or, rather, the hesitation was on both sides. He was not satisfied with many things in the policy of the Queen in England: his discontent had led him, strong Protestant as he was, to coquet with Norfolk and the partisans of Mary Queen of Scots, when England was threatened with a French marriage ten years before. His name stands among the forty nobles on whom Mary's friends counted.[1] And on the other hand, Elizabeth did not like him or trust him. For some time she refused to employ him. At length, in the summer of 1580, he was appointed to fill that great place which had wrecked the reputation and broken the hearts of a succession of able and high-spirited servants of the English Crown, the place of Lord-Deputy in Ireland. He was a man who was interested in the literary enterprise of the time. In the midst of his public employment in Holland, he had been the friend and patron of George Gascoigne, who left a high reputation, for those days, as poet, wit, satirist, and critic. Lord Grey now took Spenser, the "new poet," the friend of Philip Sidney, to Ireland as his Secretary.

Spenser was not the only scholar and poet who about this time found public employment in Ireland. Names which appear in literary records, such as Warton's *History of English Poetry*, poets like Barnaby Googe and Ludovic Bryskett, reappear as despatch-writers or agents in the Irish State Papers. But one man came over to Ireland about the same time as Spenser, whose fortunes were a contrast to his. Geoffrey Fenton was one of the numer-

[1] Froude, x. 158.

ous translators of the time. He had dedicated Tragical Tales from the French and Italian to Lady Mary Sidney, Guevara's Epistles from the Spanish to Lady Oxford, and a translation of Guicciardini to the Queen. About this time, he was recommended by his brother to Walsingham for foreign service; he was soon after in Ireland: and in the summer of 1580 he was made Secretary to the Government. He shortly became one of the most important persons in the Irish administration. He corresponded confidentially and continually with Burghley and Walsingham. He had his eye on the proceedings of Deputies and Presidents, and reported freely their misdoings or their unpopularity. His letters form a considerable part of the Irish Papers. He became a powerful and successful public servant. He became Sir Geoffrey Fenton; he kept his high place for his life; he obtained grants and lands; and he was commemorated as a great personage in a pompous monument in St. Patrick's Cathedral. This kind of success was not to be Spenser's.

Lord Grey of Wilton was a man in whom his friends saw a high and heroic spirit. He was a statesman in whose motives and actions his religion had a dominant influence: and his religion — he is called by the vague name of Puritan—was one which combined a strong and doubtless genuine zeal for the truth of Christian doctrine and for purity of morals, with the deepest and deadliest hatred of what he held to be their natural enemy, the Antichrist of Rome. The "good Lord Grey," he was, if we believe his secretary, writing many years after this time, and when he was dead, "most gentle, affable, loving, and temperate; always known to be a most just, sincere, godly, and right noble man, far from sternness, far from unrighteousness." But the infelicity of his times bore

hardly upon him, and Spenser admits, what is known otherwise, that he left a terrible name behind him. He was certainly a man of severe and unshrinking sense of duty, and like many great Englishmen of the time, so resolute in carrying it out to the end, that it reached, when he thought in necessary, to the point of ferocity. Naturally, he had enemies, who did not spare his fame; and Spenser, who came to admire and reverence him, had to lament deeply that "that good lord was blotted with the name of a bloody man," one who "regarded not the life of the queen's subjects no more than dogs, and had wasted and consumed all, so as now she had nothing almost left, but to reign in their ashes."

Lord Grey was sent over at a moment of the utmost confusion and danger. In July, 1579, Drury wrote to Burghley to stand firmly to the helm, for "that a great storm was at hand." The South of Ireland was in fierce rebellion, under the Earl of Desmond and Dr. Nicolas Sanders, who was acting under the commission of the Pope, and promising the assistance of the King of Spain; and a band of Spanish and Italian adventurers, unauthorized, but not uncountenanced by their Government, like Drake in the Indies, had landed with arms and stores, and had fortified a port at Smerwick, on the south-western coast of Kerry. The North was deep in treason, restless, and threatening to strike. Round Dublin itself, the great Irish Lords of the Pale, under Lord Baltinglass, in the summer of 1580, had broken into open insurrection, and were holding out a hand to the rebels of the South. The English garrison, indeed, small as they were, could not only hold their own against the ill-armed and undisciplined Irish bands, but could inflict terrible chastisement on the insurgents. The native feuds were turned to ac-

count; Butlers were set to destroy their natural enemies, the Geraldines; and the Earl of Ormond, their head, was appointed General in Munster, to execute English vengeance and his own on the lands and people of his rival Desmond. But the English chiefs were not strong enough to put down the revolt. "The conspiracy throughout Ireland," wrote Lord Grey, "is so general, that without a main force it will not be appeased. There are cold service and unsound dealing generally." On the 12th of August, 1580, Lord Grey landed, amid a universal wreck of order, of law, of mercy, of industry; and among his counsellors and subordinates, the only remedy thought of was that of remorseless and increasing severity.

It can hardly be doubted that Spenser must have come over with him. It is likely that where he went his Secretary would accompany him. And if so, Spenser must soon have become acquainted with some of the scenes and necessities of Irish life. Within three weeks after Lord Grey's landing, he and those with him were present at the disaster of Glenmalure, a rocky defile near Wicklow, where the rebels enticed the English captains into a position in which an ambuscade had been prepared, after the manner of Red Indians in the last century, and of South African savages now, and where, in spite of Lord Grey's courage, "which could not have been bettered by Hercules," a bloody defeat was inflicted on his troops, and a number of distinguished officers were cut off. But Spenser was soon to see a still more terrible example of this ruthless warfare. It was necessary, above all things, to destroy the Spanish fort at Smerwick, in order to prevent the rebellion being fed from abroad: and in November, 1580, Lord Grey in person undertook the work. The incidents of this tragedy have been fully recorded, and they formed at the time a

heavy charge against Lord Grey's humanity, and even his honour. In this instance Spenser must almost certainly have been on the spot. Years afterwards, in his *View of the State of Ireland*, he describes and vindicates Lord Grey's proceedings; and he does so, "being," as he writes, "as near them as any." And we have Lord Grey's own despatch to Queen Elizabeth, containing a full report of the tragical business. We have no means of knowing how Lord Grey employed Spenser, or whether he composed his own despatches. But from Spenser's position, the Secretary, if he had not some hand in the following vivid and forcible account of the taking of Smerwick,[1] must probably have been cognizant of it; though there are some slight differences in the despatch, and in the account which Spenser himself wrote afterwards in his pamphlet on Irish Affairs.

After describing the proposal of the garrison for a parley, Lord Grey proceeds—

"There was presently sent unto me one Alexandro, their camp master; he told me that certain Spaniards and Italians were there arrived upon fair speeches and great promises, which altogether vain and false they found; and that it was no part of their intent to molest or take any government from your Majesty; for proof, that they were ready to depart as they came and deliver into my hands the fort. Mine answer was, that for that I perceived their people to stand of two nations, Italian and Spanish, I would give no answer unless a Spaniard was likewise by. He presently went and returned with a Spanish captain. I then told the Spaniard that I knew their nation to have an absolute prince, one that was in good league and amity with your Majesty, which made me to marvell that any of his people should be found associate with them that went about to main-

[1] Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1574—1585. Mr. H. C. Hamilton's Pref. p. lxxi.–lxxiii. Nov. 12, 1580.

tain rebels against you. . . . And taking it that it could not be his king's will, I was to know by whom and for what cause they were sent. His reply was that the king had not sent them, but that one John Martinez de Ricaldi, Governor for the king at Bilboa, had willed him to levy a band and repair with it to St. Andrews (Santander), and there to be directed by this their colonel here, whom he followed as a blind man, not knowing whither. The other avouched that they were all sent by the Pope for the defence of the *Catholica fede*. My answer was, that I would not greatly have marvelled if men being commanded by natural and absolute princes did sometimes take in hand wrong actions; but that men, and that of account as some of them made show of, should be carried into unjust, desperate, and wicked actions, by one that neither from God or man could claim any princely power or empire, but (was) indeed a detestable shaveling, the right Antichrist and general ambitious tyrant over all right principalities, and patron of the *Diabolica fede*—this I could not but greatly rest in wonder. Their fault therefore far to be aggravated by the vileness of their commander; and that at my hands no condition or composition they were to expect, other than they should render me the fort, and yield their selves to my will for life or death. With this answer he departed; after which there was one or two courses to and fro more, to have gotten a certainty for some of their lives: but finding that it would not be, the colonel himself about sunsetting came forth and requested respite with surcease of arms till the next morning, and then he would give a resolute answer.

"Finding that to be but a gain of time to them, and a loss of the same for myself, I definitely answered I would not grant it, and therefore presently either that he took my offer or else return and I would fall to my business. He then embraced my knees simply putting himself to my mercy, only he prayed that for that night he might abide in the fort, and that in the morning all should be put into my hands. I asked hostages for the performance; they were given. Morning came; I presented my companies in battle before the fort, the colonel comes forth with ten or twelve of his chief gentlemen, trailing their ensigns rolled up, and presented them unto me with their lives and the fort. I sent straight certain gentlemen in, to see their weapons and armour laid down, and to guard the munition and victual there left for spoil. Then I put in certain bands,

who straight fell to execution. There were six hundred slain. Munition and victual great store: though much wasted through the disorder of the soldier, which in that fury could not be helped. Those that I gave life unto, I have bestowed upon the captains and gentlemen whose service hath well deserved. . . . Of the six hundred slain, four hundred were as gallant and goodly personages as of any (soldiers) I ever beheld. So hath it pleased the Lord of Hosts to deliver your enemies into your Highnesses' hand, and so too as one only excepted, not one of yours is either lost or hurt."

Another account adds to this that "the Irish men and women were hanged, with an Englishman who had served Dr. Sanders, and two others whose arms and legs were broken for torture."

Such scenes as those of Glenmalure and Smerwick, terrible as they were, it might have been any one's lot to witness who lived himself in presence of the atrocious warfare of those cruel days, in which the ordinary exasperation of combatants was made more savage and unforgiving by religious hatred, and by the license which religious hatred gave to irregular adventure and the sanguinary repression of it. They were not confined to Ireland. Two years later the Marquis de Santa Cruz treated in exactly the same fashion a band of French adventurers, some eighty noblemen and gentlemen and two hundred soldiers, who were taken in an attempt on the Azores during a time of nominal peace between the crowns of France and Spain. In the Low Countries, and in the religious wars of France, it need not be said that even the "execution" at Smerwick was continually outdone; and it is what the Spaniards would of course have done to Drake if they had caught him. Nor did the Spanish Government complain of this treatment of its subjects, who had no legal commission.

But the change of scene and life to Spenser was much more than merely the sight of a disastrous skirmish and a capitulation without quarter. He had passed to an entirely altered condition of social life; he had passed from pleasant and merry England, with its comparative order and peace, its thriving homesteads and wealthy cities, its industry and magnificence—

> "Eliza's blessed field,
> That still with people, peace, and plenty flows—"

to a land, beautiful indeed, and alluring, but of which the only law was disorder, and the only rule failure. The Cambridge student, the follower of country life in Lancashire or Kent, the scholar discussing with Philip Sidney and corresponding with Gabriel Harvey about classical metres and English rimes; the shepherd poet, Colin Clout, delicately fashioning his innocent pastorals, his love complaints, or his dexterous panegyrics or satires; the courtier, aspiring to shine in the train of Leicester before the eyes of the great queen—found himself transplanted into a wild and turbulent savagery, where the elements of civil society hardly existed, and which had the fatal power of drawing into its own evil and lawless ways the English who came into contact with it. Ireland had the name and the framework of a Christian realm. It had its hierarchy of officers in Church and State, its Parliament, its representative of the Crown. It had its great earls and lords, with noble and romantic titles, its courts and councils and administration; the Queen's laws were there, and where they were acknowledged, which was not, however, everywhere, the English speech was current. But underneath this name and outside, all was coarse, and obstinately set against civilized order. There was nothing but the wreck and

clashing of disintegrated customs, the lawlessness of fierce and ignorant barbarians, whose own laws had been destroyed, and who would recognize no other; the blood-feuds of rival septs; the ambitious and deadly treacheries of rival nobles, oppressing all weaker than themselves, and maintaining in waste and idleness their crowds of brutal retainers. In one thing only was there agreement, though not even in this was there union; and that was in deep, implacable hatred of their English masters. And with these English masters, too, amid their own jealousies and backbitings and mischief-making, their own bitter antipathies and chronic despair, there was only one point of agreement, and that was their deep scorn and loathing of the Irish.

This is Irish dealing with Irish, in Munster, at this time:

"The Lord Roche kept a freeholder, who had eight plowlands, prisoner, and hand-locked him till he had surrendered seven plowlands and a half, on agreement to keep the remaining plowland free; but when this was done, the Lord Roche extorted as many exactions from that half-plowland, as from any other half-plowland in his country. . . . And even the great men were under the same oppression from the greater: for the Earl of Desmond forcibly took away the Seneschal of Imokilly's corn from his own land, though he was one of the most considerable gentlemen in Munster."[1]

And this is English dealing with Irish:

"Mr. Henry Sheffield asks Lord Burghley's interest with Sir George Carew, to be made his deputy at Leighlin, in place of Mr. Bagenall, who met his death under the following circumstances:

"Mr. Bagenall, after he had bought the barony of Odrone of Sir George Carew, could not be contented to let the Kavanaghs enjoy such lands as old Sir Peter Carew, young Sir Peter, and last, Sir

[1] Cox, Hist. of Ireland, 354.

George were content that they should have, but threatened to kill them wherever he could meet them. As it is now fallen out, about the last of November, one Henry Heron, Mr. Bagenall's brother-in-law, having lost four kine, making that his quarrel, he being accompanied with divers others to the number of twenty or thereabouts, by the procurement of his brother-in-law, went to the house of Mortagh Oge, a man seventy years old, the chief of the Kavanaghs, with their swords drawn: which the old man seeing, for fear of his life, sought to go into the woods, but was taken and brought before Mr. Heron, who charged him that his son had taken the cows. The old man answered that he could pay for them. Mr. Heron would not be contented, but bade his men kill him, he desiring to be brought for trial at the sessions. Further, the morrow after they went again into the woods, and there they found another old man, a servant of Mortagh Oge, and likewise killed him, Mr. Heron saying that it was because he would not confess the cows.

"On these murders, the sons of the old man laid an ambush for Mr. Bagenall; who, following them more upon will than with discretion, fell into their hands, and was slain with thirteen more. He had sixteen wounds above his girdle, and one of his legs cut off, and his tongue drawn out of his mouth and slit. There is not one man dwelling in all this country that was Sir George Carew's, but every man fled, and left the whole country waste; and so I fear me it will continue, now the deadly feud is so great between them."[1]

Something like this has been occasionally seen in our colonies towards the native races; but there it never reached the same height of unrestrained and frankly justified indulgence. The English officials and settlers knew well enough that the only thought of the native Irish was to restore their abolished customs, to recover their confiscated lands, to re-establish the crippled power of their chiefs; they knew that for this insurrection was ever ready, and that treachery would shrink from nothing. And to meet it, the English on the spot — all but a few who were denounced as unpractical sentimentalists for favouring an ir-

[1] Irish Papers, March 29, 1587.

reconcilable foe—could think of no way of enforcing order except by a wholesale use of the sword and the gallows. They could find no means of restoring peace except turning the rich land into a wilderness, and rooting out by famine those whom the soldier or the hangman had not overtaken. "No governor shall do any good here," wrote an English observer in 1581, "except he show himself a Tamerlane."

In a general account, even contemporary, such statements might suggest a violent suspicion of exaggeration. We possess the means of testing it. The Irish State Papers of the time contain the ample reports and letters, from day to day, of the energetic and resolute Englishmen employed in council or in the field—men of business like Sir William Pelham, Sir Henry Wallop, Edward Waterhouse, and Geoffrey Fenton;—daring and brilliant officers like Sir William Drury, Sir Nicolas Malby, Sir Warham St. Leger, Sir John Norreys, and John Zouch. These papers are the basis of Mr. Froude's terrible chapters on the Desmond rebellion, and their substance in abstract or abridgment is easily accessible in the printed calendars of the Record Office. They show that from first to last, in principle and practice, in council and in act, the Tamerlane system was believed in, and carried out without a trace of remorse or question as to its morality. "If hell were open, and all the evil spirits were abroad," writes Walsingham's correspondent, Andrew Trollope, who talked about Tamerlane, "they could never be worse than these Irish rogues—rather dogs, and worse than dogs, for dogs do but after their kind, and they degenerate from all humanity." There is but one way of dealing with wild dogs or wolves; and accordingly the English chiefs insisted that this was the way to deal with the Irish. The state of Ireland, writes one, "is like an old

cloak often before patched, wherein is now made so great a gash that all the world doth know that there is no remedy but to make a new." This means, in the language of another, "that there is no way to daunt these people but by the edge of the sword, and to plant better in their place, or rather, let them cut one another's throats." These were no idle words. Every page of these papers contains some memorandum of execution and destruction. The progress of a Deputy, or the President of a province, through the country is always accompanied with its tale of hangings. There is sometimes a touch of the grotesque. "At Kilkenny," writes Sir W. Drury, "the jail being full, we caused sessions immediately to begin. Thirty-six persons were executed, among which some good ones—two for treason, a blackamoor, and two witches by natural law, for that we found no law to try them by in this realm." It is like the account of some unusual kind of game in a successful bag. "If taking of cows, and killing of kerne and churles had been worth advertizing," writes Lord Grey to the Queen, "I would have had every day to have troubled your Highness." Yet Lord Grey protests in the same letter that he has never taken the life of any, however evil, who submitted. At the end of the Desmond outbreak, the chiefs in the different provinces send in their tale of death. Ormond complains of the false reports of his "slackness in but killing three men," whereas the number was more than 3000; and he sends in his "brief note" of his contribution to the slaughter, "598 persons of quality, besides 3000 or 4000 others, and 158 slain since his discharge." The end was that, as one of the chief actors writes, Sir Warham St. Leger, "Munster is nearly unpeopled by the murders done by the rebels, and the killings by the soldiers; 30,000 dead of famine

in half a year, besides numbers that are hanged and killed. The realm," he adds, "was never in greater danger, or in like misery." But in the murderous work itself there was not much danger. "Our wars," writes Sir Henry Wallop, in the height of the struggle, "are but like fox-hunting." And when the English Government remonstrates against this system of massacre, the Lord-Deputy writes back that "he sorrows that pity for the wicked and evil should be enchanted into her Majesty."

And of this dreadful policy, involving, as the price of the extinction of Desmond's rebellion, the absolute desolation of the South and West of Ireland, Lord Grey came to be the deliberate and unfaltering champion. His administration lasted only two years, and in spite of his natural kindness of temper, which we need not doubt, it was, from the supposed necessities of his position, and the unwavering consent of all English opinions round him, a rule of extermination. No scruple ever crossed his mind, except that he had not been sufficiently uncompromising in putting first the religious aspect of the quarrel. "If Elizabeth had allowed him," writes Mr. Froude, "he would have now made a Mahommedan conquest of the whole island, and offered the Irish the alternative of the Gospel or the sword." With the terrible sincerity of a Puritan, he reproached himself that he had allowed even the Queen's commands to come before the "one article of looking to God's dear service." "I confess my sin," he wrote to Walsingham, "I have followed man too much," and he saw why his efforts had been in vain. "Baal's prophets and councillors shall prevail. I see it is so. I see it is just. I see it past help. I rest despaired." His policy of blood and devastation, breaking the neck of Desmond's rebellion, but failing to put an end to it, became at length

more than the home Government could bear; and with mutual dissatisfaction he was recalled before his work was done. Among the documents relating to his explanations with the English Government, is one of which this is the abstract: "Declaration (Dec. 1583), by Arthur, Lord Grey of Wilton, to the Queen, showing the state of Ireland when he was appointed Deputy, with the services of his government, and the plight he left it in. 1485 chief men and gentlemen slain, not accounting those of meaner sort, nor yet executions by law, and killing of churles, which were innumerable."

This was the world into which Spenser was abruptly thrown, and in which he was henceforward to have his home. He first became acquainted with it as Lord Grey's Secretary in the Munster war. He himself in later days, with ample experience and knowledge, reviewed the whole of this dreadful history, its policy, its necessities, its results: and no more instructive document has come down to us from those times. But his description of the way in which the plan of extermination was carried out in Munster before his eyes may fittingly form a supplement to the language on the spot of those responsible for it.

"*Eudox.* But what, then, shall be the conclusion of this war? . . .

"*Iren.* The end will I assure me be very short and much sooner than can be, in so great a trouble, as it seemeth, hoped for, although there should none of them fall by the sword nor be slain by the soldier: yet thus being kept from manurance and their cattle from running abroad, by this hard restraint they would quickly consume themselves, and devour one another. The proof whereof I saw sufficiently exampled in these late wars of Munster; for notwithstanding that the same was a most rich and plentiful country, full of corn and cattle that you would have thought they should have been able to stand long, yet ere one year and a half they were brought to such wretchedness as that any stony heart would have rued the same. Out of

every corner of the woods and glynnes they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not bear them; they looked like anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eat the dead carrions, happy where they could find them, yea and one another soon after, insomuch that the very carcases they spared not to scrape out of their graves; and if they found a plot of watercresses or shamrocks, there they flocked, as to a feast for a time, yet not able long to continue there withal; that in a short space there were none almost left, and a most populous and plentiful country suddenly left void of man and beast; yet sure in all that war there perished not many by the sword, but all by the extremity of famine which they themselves had wrought."

It is hardly surprising that Lord Grey's Secretary should share the opinions and the feelings of his master and patron. Certainly in his company and service, Spenser learned to look upon Ireland and the Irish with the impatience and loathing which filled most Englishmen; and it must be added with the same greedy eyes. In this new atmosphere, in which his life was henceforth spent, amid the daily talk of ravage and death, the daily scramble for the spoils of rebels and traitors, the daily alarms of treachery and insurrection, a man naturally learns hardness. Under Spenser's imaginative richness, and poetic delicacy of feeling, there appeared two features. There was a shrewd sense of the practical side of things: and there was a full share of that sternness of temper which belonged to the time. He came to Ireland for no romantic purpose; he came to make his fortune as well as he could: and he accepted the conditions of the place and scene, and entered at once into the game of adventure and gain which was the natural one for all English comers, and of which the prizes were lucrative offices and forfeited manors and abbeys. And in the native population and native interests, he saw nothing but what called forth not merely antipa-

thy, but deep moral condemnation. It was not merely that the Irish were ignorant, thriftless, filthy, debased, and loathsome in their pitiable misery and despair: it was that in his view, justice, truth, honesty had utterly perished among them, and therefore were not due to them. Of any other side to the picture he, like other good Englishmen, was entirely unconscious: he saw only on all sides of him the empire of barbarism and misrule which valiant and godly Englishmen were fighting to vanquish and destroy —fighting against apparent but not real odds. And all this was aggravated by the stiff adherence of the Irish to their old religion. Spenser came over with the common opinion of Protestant Englishmen, that they had at least in England the pure and undoubted religion of the Bible: and in Ireland, he found himself face to face with the very superstition in its lowest forms which he had so hated in England. He left it plotting in England; he found it in armed rebellion in Ireland. Like Lord Grey, he saw in Popery the root of all the mischiefs of Ireland; and his sense of true religion, as well as his convictions of right, conspired to recommend to him Lord Grey's pitiless government. The opinion was everywhere—it was undisputed and unexamined—that a policy of force, direct or indirect, was the natural and right way of reducing diverging religions to submission and uniformity: that religious disagreement ought as a matter of principle to be subdued by violence of one degree or another. All wise and good men thought so; all statesmen and rulers acted so. Spenser found in Ireland a state of things which seemed to make this doctrine the simplest dictate of common sense.

In August, 1582, Lord Grey left Ireland. He had accepted his office with the utmost reluctance, from the known want of agreement between the Queen and himself

as to policy. He had executed it in a way which greatly displeased the home Government. And he gave it up, with his special work, the extinction of Desmond's rebellion, still unaccomplished. In spite of the thousands slain, and a province made a desert, Desmond was still at large and dangerous. Lord Grey had been ruthlessly severe, and yet not successful. For months there had been an interchange of angry letters between him and the Government. Burghley, he complains to Walsingham, was "so heavy against him." The Queen and Burghley wanted order restored, but did not like either the expense of war, or the responsibility before other governments for the severity which their agents on the spot judged necessary. Knowing that he did not please, he had begun to solicit his recall before he had been a year in Ireland; and at length he was recalled, not to receive thanks, but to meet a strict, if not hostile, inquiry into his administration. Besides what had been on the surface of his proceedings to dissatisfy the Queen, there had been, as in the case of every Deputy, a continued underground stream of backbiting and insinuation going home against him. Spenser did not forget this, when in the *Faerie Queene* he shadowed forth Lord Grey's career in the adventures of Arthegal, the great Knight of Justice, met on his return home from his triumphs by the hags, Envy and Detraction, and the braying of the hundred tongues of the Blatant Beast. Irish lords and partisans, calling themselves loyal, when they could not get what they wanted, or when he threatened them for their insincerity or insolence, at once wrote to England. His English colleagues, civil and military, were his natural rivals or enemies, ever on the watch to spy out and report, if necessary, to misrepresent, what was questionable or unfortunate in his proceedings. Permanent

officials like Archbishop Adam Loftus the Chancellor, or Treasurer Wallop, or Secretary Fenton, knew more than he did; they corresponded directly with the ministers; they knew that they were expected to keep a strict watch on his expenditure; and they had no scruple to send home complaints against him behind his back, as they did against one another. A secretary in Dublin like Geoffrey Fenton is described as a moth in the garment of every Deputy. Grey himself complains of the underhand work; he cannot prevent "backbiters' report:" he has found of late "very suspicious dealing amongst all his best esteemed associates;" he "dislikes not to be informed of the charges against him." In fact, they were accusing him of one of the gravest sins of which a Deputy could be guilty; they were writing home that he was lavishing the forfeited estates among his favourites, under pretence of rewarding service, to the great loss and permanent damage of her Majesty's revenue; and they were forwarding plans for commissions to distribute these estates, of which the Deputy should not be a member.

He had the common fate of those who accepted great responsibilities under the Queen. He was expected to do very hard tasks with insufficient means, and to receive more blame where he failed than thanks where he succeeded. He had every one, English and Irish, against him in Ireland, and no one for him in England. He was driven to violence because he wanted strength; he took liberties with forfeitures belonging to the Queen because he had no other means of rewarding public services. It is not easy to feel much sympathy for a man who, brave and public-spirited as he was, could think of no remedy for the miseries of Ireland but wholesale bloodshed. Yet, compared with the resident officials who caballed against him, and

who got rich on these miseries, the Wallops and Fentons of the Irish Council, this stern Puritan, so remorseless in what he believed to be his duty to his Queen and his faith, stands out as an honest and faithful public servant of a Government which seemed hardly to know its own mind, which vacillated between indulgence and severity, and which hampered its officers by contradictory policies, ignorant of their difficulties, and incapable of controlling the supplies for a costly and wasteful war. Lord Grey's strong hand, though incapable of reaching the real causes of Irish evils, undoubtedly saved the country at a moment of serious peril, and once more taught lawless Geraldines, and Eustaces, and Burkes the terrible lesson of English power. The work which he had half done in crushing Desmond was soon finished by Desmond's hereditary rival, Ormond; and under the milder, but not more popular, rule of his successor, the proud and irritable Sir John Perrot, Ireland had for a few years the peace which consisted in the absence of a definite rebellion, till Tyrone began to stir in 1595, and Perrot went back a disgraced man, to die a prisoner in the Tower.

Lord Grey left behind him unappeasable animosities, and returned to meet jealous rivals and an ill-satisfied mistress. But he had left behind one whose admiration and reverence he had won, and who was not afraid to take care of his reputation. Whether Spenser went back with his patron or not in 1582, he was from henceforth mainly resident in Ireland. Lord Grey's administration, and the principles on which it had been carried on, had made a deep impression on Spenser's mind. His first ideal had been Philip Sidney, the attractive and all-accomplished gentleman—

"The President
Of noblesse and of chevalrie,"—

and to the end the pastoral Colin Clout, for he ever retained his first poetic name, was faithful to his ideal. But in the stern Proconsul, under whom he had become hardened into a keen and resolute colonist, he had come in contact with a new type of character; a governor, under the sense of duty, doing the roughest of work in the roughest of ways. In Lord Grey, he had this character, not as he might read of it in books, but acting out its qualities in present life, amid the unexpected emergencies, the desperate alternatives, the calls for instant decision, the pressing necessities and the anxious hazards, of a course full of uncertainty and peril. He had before his eyes, day by day, fearless, unshrinking determination, in a hateful and most unpromising task. He believed that he saw a living example of strength, manliness, and nobleness; of unsparing and unswerving zeal for order and religion, and good government; of single-hearted devotion to truth and right, and to the Queen. Lord Grey grew at last, in the poet's imagination, into the image and representative of perfect and masculine justice. When Spenser began to enshrine in a great allegory his ideas of human life and character, Lord Grey supplied the moral features, and almost the name, of one of its chief heroes. Spenser did more than embody his memory in poetical allegories. In Spenser's *View of the present State of Ireland*, written some years after Lord Grey's death, he gives his mature, and then, at any rate, disinterested approbation of Lord Grey's administration, and his opinion of the causes of its failure. He kindles into indignation when "most untruely and maliciously, those evil tongues backbite and slander the sacred ashes of that most just and honourable personage, whose least virtue, of many most excellent, which abounded in his heroical spirit, they were never able to aspire unto."

Lord Grey's patronage had brought Spenser into the public service; perhaps that patronage, the patronage of a man who had powerful enemies, was the cause that Spenser's preferments, after Lord Grey's recall, were on so moderate a scale. The notices which we glean from indirect sources about Spenser's employment in Ireland are meagre enough, but they are distinct. They show him as a subordinate public servant, of no great account, but yet, like other public servants in Ireland, profiting, in his degree, by the opportunities of the time. In the spring following Lord Grey's arrival (March 22, 1581), Spenser was appointed Clerk of Decrees and Recognizances in the Irish Court of Chancery, retaining his place as Secretary to the Lord-Deputy, in which character his signature sometimes appears in the Irish Records, certifying State documents sent to England. This office is said by Fuller to have been a "lucrative" one. In the same year he received a lease of the Abbey and Manor of Enniscorthy, in the County of Wexford. Enniscorthy was an important post in the network of English garrisons, on one of the roads from Dublin to the South. He held it but for a short time. It was transferred by him to a citizen of Wexford, Richard Synot, an agent, apparently, of the powerful Sir Henry Wallop, the Treasurer; and it was soon after transferred by Synot to his patron, an official who secured to himself a large share of the spoils of Desmond's rebellion. Further, Spenser's name appears, in a list of persons (January, 1582), among whom Lord Grey had distributed some of the forfeited property of the rebels—a list sent home by him in answer to charges of waste and damage to the Queen's revenue, busily urged against him in Ireland by men like Wallop and Fenton, and readily listened to by English ministers like Burghley, who complained that Ire-

land was a "gulf of consuming treasure." The grant was mostly to persons active in service, among others one to Wallop himself; and a certain number of smaller value to persons of Lord Grey's own household. There, among yeomen ushers, gentlemen ushers, gentlemen serving the Lord-Deputy, and Welshmen and Irishmen with uncouth names, to whom small gratifications had been allotted out of the spoil, we read—"the lease of a house in Dublin belonging to [Lord] Baltinglas for six years to come to Edmund Spenser, one of the Lord-Deputy's Secretaries, valued at 5*l.*" . . . "of a 'custodiam' of John Eustace's [one of Baltinglas' family] land of the Newland to Edmund Spenser, one of the Lord-Deputy's Secretaries." In July, 1586, when every one was full of the project for "planting" Munster, he was still in Dublin, for he addresses from thence a sonnet to Gabriel Harvey. In March, $158\frac{8}{9}$, we find the following, in a list of officers on the establishment of the province of Munster, which the government was endeavouring to colonize from the west of England: "Lodovick Briskett, clerk to the council (at 20*l.* per annum), 13*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* (this is exercised by one Spenser, as deputy for the said Briskett, to whom (*i. e.*, Briskett) it was granted by patent 6 Nov. 25 Eliz. (1583)." (*Carew MSS.*) Bryskett was a man much employed in Irish business. He had been Clerk to the Irish Council, had been a correspondent of Burghley and Walsingham, and had aspired to be Secretary of State when Fenton obtained the poet: possibly in disappointment, he had retired, with an office which he exercised by deputy, to his lands in Wexford. He was a poet, and a friend of Spenser's: and it may have been by his interest with the dispensers of patronage, that "one Spenser," who had been his deputy, succeeded to his office.

In this position Spenser was brought into communica-

tion with the powerful English chiefs on the Council of Munster, and also with the leading men among the Undertakers, as they were called, among whom more than half a million of acres of the escheated and desolate lands of the fallen Desmond were to be divided, on condition of each Undertaker settling on his estate a proportionate number of English gentlemen, yeomen, artisans and labourers with their families, who were to bring the ruined province into order and cultivation. The President and Vice-President of the Council were the two Norreys, John and Thomas, two of the most gallant of a gallant family. The project for the planting of Munster had been originally started before the rebellion, in 1568. It had been one of the causes of the rebellion; but now that Desmond was fallen, it was revived. It had been received in England with favour and hope. Men of influence and enterprise, Sir Christopher Hatton, Walsingham, Walter Ralegh, had embarked in it; and the government had made an appeal to the English country gentlemen to take advantage of this new opening for their younger sons, and to send them over at the head of colonies from the families of their tenants and dependants, to occupy a rich and beautiful land on easy terms of rent. In the Western Counties, north and south, the appeal had awakened interest. In the list of Undertakers are found Cheshire and Lancashire names—Stanley, Fleetwood, Molyneux: and a still larger number for Somerset, Devon, and Dorset—Popham, Rogers, Coles, Ralegh, Chudleigh, Champernown. The plan of settlement was carefully and methodically traced out. The province was surveyed as well as it could be under great difficulties. Maps were made which Lord Burghley annotated. "Seigniories" were created of varying size, 12,000, 8000, 6000, 4000 acres, with corresponding obligations as to the number

and class of farms and inhabitants in each. Legal science in England was to protect titles by lengthy patents and leases; administrative watchfulness and firmness were to secure them in Ireland. Privileges of trade were granted to the Undertakers: they were even allowed to transport coin out of England to Ireland: and a long respite was granted them before the Crown was to claim its rents. Strict rules were laid down to keep the native Irish out of the English lands and from intermarrying with the English families. In this partition, Seigniories were distributed by the Undertakers among themselves with the free carelessness of men dividing the spoil. The great people, like Hatton and Ralegh, were to have their two or three Seigniories: the County of Cork, with its nineteen Seigniories, is assigned to the gentlemen undertakers from Somersetshire. The plan was an ambitious and tempting one. But difficulties soon arose. The gentlemen undertakers were not in a hurry to leave England, even on a visit to their desolate and dangerous seigniories in Munster. The "planting" did not thrive. The Irish were inexhaustible in raising legal obstacles and in giving practical annoyance. Claims and titles were hard to discover or to extinguish. Even the very attainted and escheated lands were challenged by virtue of settlements made before the attainders. The result was that a certain number of Irish estates were added to the possessions of a certain number of English families. But Munster was not planted. Burghley's policy, and Walsingham's resolution, and Ralegh's daring inventiveness were alike baffled by the conditions of a problem harder than the peopling of America or the conquest of India. Munster could not be made English. After all its desolation, it reverted in the main to its Irish possessors.

Of all the schemes and efforts which accompanied the

attempt, and the records of which fill the Irish State papers of those years, Spenser was the near and close spectator. He was in Dublin and on the spot, as Clerk of the Council of Munster. And he had become acquainted, perhaps, by this time, had formed a friendship, with Walter Ralegh, one of the most active men in Irish business, whose influence was rising wherever he was becoming known. Most of the knowledge which Spenser thus gathered, and of the impressions which a practical handling of Irish affairs had left on him, was embodied in his interesting work, written several years later—*A View of the present State of Ireland.* But his connexion with Munster not unnaturally brought him also an accession of fortune. When Ralegh and the "Somersetshire men" were dividing among them the County of Cork, the Clerk of the Council was remembered by some of his friends. He was admitted among the Undertakers. His name appears in the list, among great statesmen and captains with their seignories of 12,000 acres, as holding a grant of some 3000. It was the manor and castle of Kilcolman, a ruined house of the Desmonds, under the Galtee Hills. It appears to have been first assigned to another person.[1] But it came at last into Spenser's hands, probably in 1586; and henceforward this was his abode and his home.

Kilcolman Castle was near the high-road between Mallow and Limerick, about three miles from Buttevant and Doneraile, in a plain at the foot of the last western falls of the Galtee range, watered by a stream now called the Awbeg, but which he celebrates under the name of the Mulla. In Spenser's time it was probably surrounded with woods. The earlier writers describe it as a pleasant abode

[1] Carew MSS. Calendar, 1587, p. 449. Cf. Irish Papers; Calendar. 1587, p. 309, 450.

with fine views, and so Spenser celebrated its natural beauties. The more recent accounts are not so favourable. "Kilcolman," says the writer in Murray's Handbook, "is a small peel tower, with cramped and dark rooms, a form which every gentleman's house assumed in turbulent times. It is situated on the margin of a small lake, and, it must be confessed, overlooking an extremely dreary tract of country." It was in the immediate neighbourhood of the wild country to the north, half forest, half bog, the wood and hill of Aharlo, or Arlo, as Spenser writes it, which was the refuge and the "great fastness" of the Desmond rebellion. It was amid such scenes, amid such occupations, in such society and companionship, that the poet of the *Faerie Queene* accomplished as much of his work as was given him to do. In one of his later poems, he thus contrasts the peace of England with his own home:

"No wayling there nor wretchednesse is heard,
No bloodie issues nor no leprosies,
No griesly famine, nor no raging sweard,
No nightly bordrags [= border ravage], nor no hue and cries;
The shepheards there abroad may safely lie,
On hills and downes, withouten dread or daunger:
No ravenous wolves the good mans hope destroy,
Nor outlawes fell affray the forest raunger."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAERIE QUEENE—THE FIRST PART.

[1580–1590.]

THE *Faerie Queene* is heard of very early in Spenser's literary course. We know that in the beginning of 1580, the year in which Spenser went to Ireland, something under that title had been already begun and submitted to Gabriel Harvey's judgment; and that, among other literary projects, Spenser was intending to proceed with it. But beyond the mere name, we know nothing, at this time, of Spenser's proposed *Faerie Queene*. Harvey's criticisms on it tell us nothing of its general plan or its numbers. Whether the first sketch had been decided upon, whether the new stanza, Spenser's original creation, and its peculiar beauty and instrument, had yet been invented by him, while he had been trying experiments in metre in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, we have no means of determining. But he took the idea with him to Ireland; and in Ireland he pursued it and carried it out.

The first authentic account which we have of the composition of the *Faerie Queene* is in a pamphlet written by Spenser's friend and predecessor in the service of the Council of Munster, Ludowick Bryskett, and inscribed to Lord Grey of Wilton: a *Discourse of Civil Life*, published in 1606. He describes a meeting of friends at his cot-

tage near Dublin, and a conversation that took place on the "ethical" part of moral philosophy. The company consisted of some of the principal Englishmen employed in Irish affairs, men whose names occur continually in the copious correspondence in the Rolls and at Lambeth. There was Long, the Primate of Armagh; there were Sir Robert Dillon, the Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and Dormer, the Queen's Solicitor; and there were soldiers, like Thomas Norreys, then Vice-President of Munster, under his brother, John Norreys; Sir Warham Sentleger, on whom had fallen so much of the work in the South of Ireland, and who at last, like Thomas Norreys, fell in Tyrone's rebellion; Captain Christopher Carleil, Walsingham's son-in-law, a man who had gained great distinction on land and sea, not only in Ireland, but in the Low Countries, in France, and at Carthagena and San Domingo; and Captain Nicholas Dawtry, the Seneschal of Clandeboy, in the troublesome Ulster country, afterwards "Captain" of Hampshire at the time of the Armada. It was a remarkable party. The date of this meeting must have been after the summer of 1584, at which time Long was made Primate, and before the beginning of 1588, when Dawtry was in Hampshire. The extract is so curious, as a picture of the intellectual and literary wants and efforts of the times, especially amid the disorders of Ireland, and as a statement of Spenser's purpose in his poem, that an extract from it deserves to be inserted, as it is given in Mr. Todd's *Life of Spenser*, and repeated in that by Mr. Hales.

"Herein do I greatly envie," writes Bryskett, "the happiness of the Italians, who have in their mother-tongue late writers that have, with a singular easie method taught all that Plato and Aristotle have

confusedly or obscurely left written. Of which, some I have begun to reade with no small delight; as Alexander Piccolomini, Gio. Baptista Giraldi, and Guazzo; all three having written upon the Ethick part of Morall Philosophie both exactly and perspicuously. And would God that some of our countrimen would shew themselves so wel affected to the good of their countrie (whereof one principall and most important part consisteth in the instructing men to vertue), as to set downe in English the precepts of those parts of Morall Philosophie, whereby our youth might, without spending so much time as the learning of those other languages require, speedily enter into the right course of vertuous life.

"In the meane while I must struggle with those bookes which I vnderstand and content myselfe to plod upon them, in hope that God (who knoweth the sincerenesse of my desire) will be pleased to open my vnderstanding, so as I may reape that profit of my reading, which I trauell for. Yet is there *a gentleman in this company*, whom I have had often a purpose to intreate, that as his liesure might serue him, he would vouchsafe to spend some time with me to instruct me in some hard points which I cannot of myselfe vnderstand; *knowing him to be not onely perfect in the Greek tongue, but also very well read in Philosophie, both morall and naturall.* Neuertheless such is my bashfulness, as I neuer yet durst open my mouth to disclose this my desire unto him, though I have not wanted some hartning thereunto from himselfe. For of loue and kindnes to me, *he encouraged me long sithens to follow the reading of the Greeke tongue, and offered me his helpe to make me vnderstand it.* But now that so good an opportunitie is offered vnto me, to satisfie in some sort my desire; I thinke I should commit a great fault, not to myselfe alone, but to all this company, if I should not enter my request thus farre, as to moue him to spend this time which we have now destined to familiar discourse and conuersation, in declaring unto us the great benefits which men obtaine by the knowledge of Morall Philosophie, and in making us to know what the same is, what be the parts thereof, whereby vertues are to be distinguished from vices; and finally, that he will be pleased to run ouer in such order as he shall thinke good, such and so many principles and rules thereof, as shall serue not only for my better instruction, but also for the contentment and satisfaction of you al. For I nothing doubt, but that euery one of you will be glad to heare

so profitable a discourse and thinke the time very wel spent wherin so excellent a knowledge shal be reuealed unto you, from which euery one may be assured to gather some fruit as wel as myselfe.

"Therefore (said I), turning myselfe to *M. Spenser*, It is you, sir, to whom it pertaineth to shew yourselfe courteous now unto vs all and to make vs all beholding unto you for the pleasure and profit which we shall gather from your speeches, if you shall vouchsafe to open unto vs the goodly cabinet, in which this excellent treasure of vertues lieth locked up from the vulgar sort. And thereof in the behalfe of all as for myselfe, I do most earnestly intreate you not to say vs nay. Vnto which wordes of mine euery man applauding most with like words of request, and the rest with gesture and countenances expressing as much, *M. Spenser* answered in this maner:

"'Though it may seeme hard for me, to refuse the request made by you all, whom euery one alone, I should for many respects be willing to gratifie; yet as the case standeth, I doubt not but with the consent of the most part of you, I shall be excused at this time of this taske which would be laid vpon me; for sure I am, that it is not vnknowne vnto you, that I haue alreedy vndertaken a work tending to the same effect, which is in *heroical verse* under the title of a *Faerie Queene* to represent all the moral vertues, assigning to euery vertue a Knight to be the patron and defender of the same, in whose actions and feates of arms and chiualry the operations of that vertue, whereof he is the protector, are to be expressed, and the vices and unruly appetites that oppose themselves against the same, to be beaten down and ouercome. Which work, *as I have already well entred into*, if God shall please to spare me life that I may finish it according to my mind, your wish (*M. Bryskett*) will be in some sort accomplished, though perhaps not so effectually as you could desire. And the same may very well serue for my excuse, if at this time I craue to be forborne in this your request, since any discourse, that I might make thus on the sudden in such a subject would be but simple, and little to your satisfactions. For it would require good aduisement and premeditation for any man to vndertake the declaration of these points that you have proposed, containing in effect the Ethicke part of Morall Philosophie. Whereof since I haue taken in hand to discourse at large in my poeme before spoken, I hope the expectation of that work may serue to free me at this time from speaking in that

matter, notwithstanding your motion and all your intreaties. But I will tell you how I thinke by himselfe he may very well excuse my speech, and yet satisfie all you in this matter. I haue seene (as he knoweth) a translation made by himselfe out of the Italian tongue of a dialogue comprehending all the Ethick part of Moral Philosophy written by one of those three he formerly mentioned, and that is by *Giraldi* vnder the title of a Dialogue of Ciuil life. If it please him to bring us forth that translation to be here read among vs, or otherwise to deliuer to us, as his memory may serue him, the contents of the same; he shal (I warrant you) satisfie you all at the ful, and himselfe wil haue no cause but to thinke the time well spent in reuiewing his labors, especially in the company of so many his friends, who may thereby reape much profit, and the translation happily fare the better by some mending it may receiue in the perusing, as all writings else may do by the often examination of the same. Neither let it trouble him that I so turne ouer to him againe the taske he wold haue put me to; for it falleth out fit for him to verifie the principall of all this Apologie, euen now made for himselfe; because thereby it will appeare that he hath not withdrawne himselfe from seruice of the state to liue idle or wholly priuate to himselfe, but hath spent some time in doing that which may greatly benefit others, and hath serued not a little to the bettering of his owne mind, and increasing of his knowledge; though he for modesty pretend much ignorance, and pleade want in wealth, much like some rich beggars, who either of custom, or for couetousnes, go to begge of others those things whereof they haue no want at home.'

"With this answer of *M. Spensers* it seemed that all the company were wel satisfied, for after some few speeches whereby they had shewed an extreme longing after his worke of the *Fairie Queene*, *whereof some parcels had been by some of them seene*, they all began to presse me to produce my translation mentioned by *M. Spenser* that it might be perused among them; or else that I should (as near as I could) deliuer unto them the contents of the same, supposing that my memory would not much faile me in a thing so studied and advisedly set downe in writing as a translation must be."

A poet at this time still had to justify his employment by presenting himself in the character of a professed

teacher of morality, with a purpose as definite and formal. though with a different method, as the preacher in the pulpit. Even with this profession, he had to encounter many prejudices, and men of gravity and wisdom shook their heads at what they thought his idle trifling. But if he wished to be counted respectable, and to separate himself from the crowd of foolish or licentious rimers, he must intend distinctly, not merely to interest, but to instruct, by his new and deep conceits. It was under the influence of this persuasion that Spenser laid down the plan of the *Faerie Queene*. It was, so he proposed to himself, to be a work on moral, and, if time were given him, political philosophy, composed with as serious a didactic aim, as any treatise or sermon in prose. He deems it necessary to explain and excuse his work by claiming for it this design. He did not venture to send the *Faerie Queene* into the world without also telling the world its moral meaning and bearing. He cannot trust it to tell its own story or suggest its real drift. In the letter to Sir W. Ralegh, accompanying the first portion of it, he unfolds elaborately the sense of his allegory, as he expounded it to his friends in Dublin. "To some," he says, "I know this method will seem displeasant, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly by way of precept, or sermoned at large, as they use, than thus cloudily enwrapped in allegorical devises." He thought that Homer and Virgil and Ariosto had thus written poetry, to teach the world moral virtue and political wisdom. He attempted to propitiate Lord Burghley, who hated him and his verses, by setting before him in a dedication sonnet, the true intent of his—

"Idle rimes;
The labour of lost time and wit unstaid;

> Yet if their deeper sense he inly weighed,
> And the dim veil, with which from common view
> Their fairer parts are hid, aside be laid,
> Perhaps not vain they may appear to you."

In earlier and in later times, men do not apologize for being poets; and Spenser himself was deceived in giving himself credit for this direct purpose to instruct, when he was really following the course marked out by his genius. But he only conformed to the curious utilitarian spirit which pervaded the literature of the time. Readers were supposed to look everywhere for a moral to be drawn, or a lesson to be inculcated, or some practical rules to be avowedly and definitely deduced; and they could not yet take in the idea that the exercise of the speculative and imaginative faculties may be its own end, and may have indirect influences and utilities even greater than if it was guided by a conscious intention to be edifying and instructive.

The first great English poem of modern times, the first creation of English imaginative power since Chaucer, and like Chaucer so thoroughly and characteristically English, was not written in England. Whatever Spenser may have done to it before he left England with Lord Grey, and whatever portions of earlier composition may have been used and worked up into the poem as it went on, the bulk of the *Faerie Queene*, as we have it, was composed in what to Spenser and his friends was almost a foreign land—in the conquered and desolated wastes of wild and barbarous Ireland. It is a feature of his work on which Spenser himself dwells. In the verses which usher in his poem, addressed to the great men of Elizabeth's court, he presents his work to the Earl of Ormond, as

> "The wild fruit which salvage soil hath bred;
> Which being through long wars left almost waste,
> With brutish barbarism is overspread;"—

and in the same strain to Lord Grey, he speaks of his "rude rimes, the which a rustic muse did weave, in salvage soil." It is idle to speculate what difference of form the *Faerie Queene* might have received, if the design had been carried out in the peace of England and in the society of London. But it is certain that the scene of trouble and danger in which it grew up greatly affected it. This may possibly account, though it is questionable, for the looseness of texture, and the want of accuracy and finish which is sometimes to be seen in it. Spenser was a learned poet; and his poem has the character of the work of a man of wide reading, but without books to verify or correct. It cannot be doubted that his life in Ireland added to the force and vividness with which Spenser wrote. In Ireland, he had before his eyes continually the dreary world which the poet of knight-errantry imagines. There men might in good truth travel long through wildernesses and "great woods" given over to the outlaw and the ruffian. There the avenger of wrong need seldom want for perilous adventure and the occasion for quelling the oppressor. There the armed and unrelenting hand of right was but too truly the only substitute for law. There might be found in most certain and prosaic reality, the ambushes, the disguises, the treacheries, the deceits and temptations, even the supposed witchcrafts and enchantments, against which the fairy champions of the virtues have to be on their guard. In Ireland, Englishmen saw, or at any rate thought they saw, a universal conspiracy of fraud against righteousness, a universal battle going on between error and religion, between justice and the most in-

solent selfishness. They found there every type of what was cruel, brutal, loathsome. They saw everywhere men whose business it was to betray and destroy, women whose business it was to tempt and ensnare and corrrupt. They thought that they saw too, in those who waged the Queen's wars, all forms of manly and devoted gallantry, of noble generosity, of gentle strength, of knightly sweetness and courtesy. There were those, too, who failed in the hour of trial; who were the victims of temptation or of the victorious strength of evil. Besides the open or concealed traitors — the Desmonds, and Kildares, and O'Neales — there were the men who were entrapped and overcome, and the men who disappointed hopes, and became recreants to their faith and loyalty; like Sir William Stanley, who, after a brilliant career in Ireland, turned traitor and apostate, and gave up Deventer and his Irish bands to the King of Spain.

The realities of the Irish wars and of Irish social and political life gave a real subject, gave body and form to the allegory. There in actual flesh and blood were enemies to be fought with by the good and true. There in visible fact were the vices and falsehoods, which Arthur and his companions were to quell and punish. There in living truth were *Sansfoy*, and *Sansloy*, and *Sansjoy;* there were *Orgoglio* and *Grantorto*, the witcheries of *Acrasia* and *Phædria*, the insolence of *Briana* and *Crudor*. And there, too, were real Knights of goodness and the Gospel—Grey, and Ormond, and Ralegh, the Norreyses, St. Leger, and Maltby—on a real mission from Gloriana's noble realm to destroy the enemies of truth and virtue.

The allegory bodies forth the trials which beset the life of man in all conditions and at all times. But Spenser could never have seen in England such a strong and per-

fect image of the allegory itself—with the wild wanderings of its personages, its daily chances of battle and danger, its hairbreadth escapes, its strange encounters, its prevailing anarchy and violence, its normal absence of order and law — as he had continually and customarily before him in Ireland. "The curse of God was so great," writes John Hooker, a contemporary, "and the land so barren both of man and beast, that whosoever did travel from one end to the other of all Munster, even from Waterford to Smerwick, about six-score miles, he should not meet man, woman, or child, saving in cities or towns, nor yet see any beast, save foxes, wolves, or other ravening beasts." It is the desolation through which Spenser's knights pursue their solitary way, or join company as they can. Indeed, to read the same writer's account, for instance, of Ralegh's adventures with the Irish chieftains, his challenges and single combats, his escapes at fords and woods, is like reading bits of the *Faerie Queene* in prose. As Spenser chose to write of knight-errantry, his picture of it has doubtless gained in truth and strength by his very practical experience of what such life as he describes must be. The *Faerie Queene* might almost be called the Epic of the English wars in Ireland under Elizabeth, as much as the Epic of English virtue and valour at the same period.

At the Dublin meeting described by Bryskett, some time later than 1584, Spenser had already "well entered into" his work. In 1589, he came to England, bringing with him the first three books; and early in 1590, they were published. Spenser himself has told us the story of this first appearance of the *Faerie Queene*. The person who discovered the extraordinary work of genius which was growing up amid the turbulence and misery and despair of Ireland, and who once more brought its author

into the centre of English life, was Walter Ralegh. Ralegh had served through much of the Munster war. He had shown in Ireland some of the characteristic points of his nature, which made him at once the glory and shame of English manhood. He had begun to take a prominent place in any business in which he engaged. He had shown his audacity, his self-reliance, his resource, and some signs of that boundless but prudent ambition which marked his career. He had shown that freedom of tongue, that restless and high-reaching inventiveness, and that tenacity of opinion, which made him a difficult person for others to work with. Like so many of the English captains, he hated Ormond, and saw in his feud with the Desmonds the real cause of the hopeless disorder of Munster. But also he incurred the displeasure and suspicion of Lord Grey, who equally disliked the great Irish Chief, but who saw in the "plot" which Ralegh sent to Burghley for the pacification of Munster, an adventurer's impracticable and self-seeking scheme. "I must be plain," he writes, "I like neither his carriage nor his company." Ralegh had been at Smerwick: he had been in command of one of the bands put in by Lord Grey to do the execution. On Lord Grey's departure he had become one of the leading persons among the undertakers for the planting of Munster. He had secured for himself a large share of the Desmond lands. In 1587, an agreement among the undertakers assigned to Sir Walter Ralegh, his associates and tenants, three seigniories of 12,000 acres apiece, and one of 6000, in Cork and Waterford. But before Lord Grey's departure Ralegh had left Ireland, and had found the true field for his ambition in the English court. From 1582 to 1589 he had shared with Leicester and Hatton, and afterwards with Essex, the special favour of the Queen.

He had become Warden of the Stannaries and Captain of the Guard. He had undertaken the adventure of founding a new realm in America under the name of Virginia. He had obtained grants of monopolies, farms of wines, Babington's forfeited estates. His own great ship, which he had built, the Ark Ralegh, had carried the flag of the High Admiral of England in the glorious but terrible summer of 1588. He joined in that tremendous sea-chase from Plymouth to the North Sea, when, as Spenser wrote to Lord Howard of Effingham—

> "Those huge castles of Castilian King,
> That vainly threatened kingdoms to displace,
> Like flying doves, ye did before you chase."

In the summer of 1589, Ralegh had been busy, as men of the sea were then, half Queen's servants, half buccaneers, in gathering the abundant spoils to be found on the high seas; and he had been with Sir John Norreys and Sir Francis Drake in a bootless but not unprofitable expedition to Lisbon. On his return from the Portugal voyage his court fortunes underwent a change. Essex, who had long scorned "that knave Ralegh," was in the ascendant. Ralegh found the Queen, for some reason or another, and reasons were not hard to find, offended and dangerous. He bent before the storm. In the end of the summer of 1589, he was in Ireland, looking after his large seigniories, his lawsuits with the old proprietors, his castle at Lismore, and his schemes for turning to account his woods for the manufacture of pipe staves for the French and Spanish wine trade.

He visited Spenser, who was his neighbour, at Kilcolman, and the visit led to important consequences. The record of it and of the events which followed is preserved

in a curious poem of Spenser's written two or three years later, and of much interest in regard to Spenser's personal history. Taking up the old pastoral form of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, with the familiar rustic names of the swains who figured in its dialogues — Hobbinol, Cuddie, Rosalind, and his own Colin Clout — he described, under the usual poetical disguise, the circumstances which once more took him back from Ireland to the court. The court was the place to which all persons wishing to push their way in the world were attracted. It was not only the centre of all power, the source of favours and honours, the seat of all that swayed the destiny of the nation. It was the home of refinement, and wit, and cultivation; the place where eminence of all kinds was supposed to be collected, and to which all ambitions, literary as much as political, aspired. It was not only a royal court; it was also a great club. Spenser's poem shows us how he had sped there, and the impressions made on his mind by a closer view of the persons and the ways of that awful and dazzling scene, which exercised such a spell upon Englishmen, and which seemed to combine or concentrate in itself the glory and the goodness of heaven, and all the baseness and malignity of earth. The occasion deserved a full celebration; it was indeed a turning-point in his life, for it led to the publication of the *Faerie Queene*, and to the immediate and enthusiastic recognition by the Englishmen of the time of his unrivalled pre-eminence as a poet. In this poetical record, *Colin Clout's come home again*, containing in it history, criticism, satire, personal recollections, love passages, we have the picture of his recollections of the flush and excitement of those months which saw the first appearance of the *Faerie Queene*. He describes the interruption of his retired and, as he paints it, peaceful and

pastoral life in his Irish home, by the appearance of Ralegh, the "Shepherd of the Ocean," from "the main sea deep." They may have been thrown together before. Both had been patronized by Leicester. Both had been together at Smerwick, and probably in other passages of the Munster war; both had served under Lord Grey, Spenser's master, though he had been no lover of Ralegh. In their different degrees, Ralegh with his two or three seigniories of half a county, and Spenser with his more modest estate, they were embarked in the same enterprise, the plantation of Munster. But Ralegh now appeared before Spenser in all the glory of a brilliant favourite—the soldier, the explorer, the daring sea-captain, the founder of plantations across the ocean, and withal, the poet, the ready and eloquent discourser, the true judge and measurer of what was great or beautiful.

The time, too, was one at once of excitement and repose. Men felt as they feel after a great peril, a great effort, a great relief; as the Greeks did after Salamis and Platæa, as our fathers did after Waterloo. In the struggle in the Channel with the might of Spain, England had recognized its force and its prospects. One of those solemn moments had just passed when men see before them the course of the world turned one way, when it might have been turned another. All the world had been looking out to see what would come to pass; and nowhere more eagerly than in Ireland. Every one, English and Irish alike, stood agaze to "see how the game would be played." The great fleet, as it drew near, "worked wonderfully uncertain yet calm humours in the people, not daring to disclose their real intention." When all was decided, and the distressed ships were cast away on the western coast, the Irish showed as much zeal as the English in fulfilling the orders of the

Irish council, to "apprehend and execute all Spaniards found there of what quality soever." These were the impressions under which the two men met. Ralegh, at the moment, was under a cloud. In the poetical fancy picture set before us—

> "His song was all a lamentable lay
> Of great unkindnesse, and of usage hard,
> Of Cynthia the Ladie of the Sea,
> Which from her presence faultlesse him debard.
> And ever and anon, with singults rife,
> He cryed out, to make his undersong;
> Ah! my loves queene, and goddesse of my life,
> Who shall me pittie, when thou doest me wrong?"

At Kilcolman, Ralegh became acquainted with what Spenser had done of the *Faerie Queene*. His rapid and clear judgment showed him how immeasurably it rose above all that had yet been produced under the name of poetry in England. That alone is sufficient to account for his eager desire that it should be known in England. But Ralegh always had an eye to his own affairs, marred as they so often were by ill-fortune and his own mistakes; and he may have thought of making his peace with Cynthia by reintroducing at Court the friend of Philip Sidney, now ripened into a poet not unworthy of Gloriana's greatness. This is Colin Clout's account:

> "When thus our pipes we both had wearied well,
> (Quoth he) and each an end of singing made,
> He gan to cast great lyking to my lore,
> And great dislyking to my lucklesse lot,
> That banisht had my selfe, like wight forlore,
> Into that waste, where I was quite forgot.
> The which to leave, thenceforth he counseld mee,
> Unmeet for man, in whom was aught regardfull,

And wend with him, his Cynthia to see:
Whose grace was great, and bounty most rewardfull;
Besides her peerlesse skill in making well,
And all the ornaments of wondrous wit,
Such as all womankynd did far excell,
Such as the world admyr'd, and praised it.
So what with hope of good, and hate of ill,
He me perswaded forth with him to fare.
Nought tooke I with me, but mine oaten quill:
Small needments else need shepheard to prepare.
So to the sea we came; the sea, that is
A world of waters heaped up on hie,
Rolling like mountaines in wide wildernesse,
Horrible, hideous, roaring with hoarse crie."

This is followed by a spirited description of a sea-voyage, and of that empire of the seas in which, since the overthrow of the Armada, England and England's mistress were now claiming to be supreme, and of which Ralegh was one of the most active and distinguished officers:

"And yet as ghastly dreadfull, as it seemes,
Bold men, presuming life for gaine to sell,
Dare tempt that gulf, and in those wandring stremes
Seek waies unknowne, waies leading down to hell.
For, as we stood there waiting on the strond,
Behold! an huge great vessell to us came,
Dauncing upon the waters back to lond,
As if it scornd the daunger of the same;
Yet was it but a wooden frame and fraile,
Glewed togither with some subtile matter.
Yet had it armes and wings, and head and taile,
And life to move it selfe upon the water.
Strange thing! how bold and swift the monster was,
That neither car'd for wind, nor haile, nor raine,
Nor swelling waves, but thorough them did passe
So proudly, that she made them roare againe.

The same aboord us gently did receave,
And without harme us farre away did beare,
So farre that land, our mother, us did leave,
And nought but sea and heaven to us appeare.
Then hartlesse quite, and full of inward feare,
That shepheard I besought to me to tell,
Under what skie, or in what world we were,
In which I saw no living people dwell.
Who, me recomforting all that he might,
Told me that that same was the Regiment
Of a great Shepheardesse, that Cynthia hight,
His liege, his Ladie, and his lifes Regent."

This is the poetical version of Ralegh's appreciation of the treasure which he had lighted on in Ireland, and of what he did to make it known to the admiration and delight of England. He returned to the Court, and Spenser with him. Again, for what reason we know not, he was received into favour. The poet, who accompanied him, was brought to the presence of the lady, who saw herself in "various mirrors"—Cynthia, Gloriana, Belphœbe, as she heard him read portions of the great poem which was to add a new glory to her reign.

"The Shepheard of the Ocean (quoth he)
Unto that Goddesse grace me first enhanced,
And to mine oaten pipe enclin'd her eare,
That she thenceforth therein gan take delight;
And it desir'd at timely houres to heare,
All were my notes but rude and roughly dight;
For not by measure of her owne great mynde,
And wondrous worth, she mott my simple song,
But joyd that country shepheard ought could fynd
Worth harkening to, emongst the learned throng."

He had already too well caught the trick of flattery—flattery in a degree almost inconceivable to us—which the

fashions of the time, and the Queen's strange self-deceit, exacted from the loyalty and enthusiasm of Englishmen. In that art Ralegh was only too apt a teacher. Colin Clout, in his story of his recollections of the Court, lets us see how he was taught to think and to speak there:

"But if I her like ought on earth might read,
I would her lyken to a crowne of lillies,
Upon a virgin brydes adorned head,
With Roses dight and Goolds and Daffadillies;
Or like the circlet of a Turtle true,
In which all colours of the rainbow bee;
Or like faire Phebes garlond shining new,
In which all pure perfection one may see.
But vaine it is to thinke, by paragone
Of earthly things, to judge of things divine:
Her power, her mercy, her wisdome, none
Can deeme, but who the Godhead can define.
Why then do I, base shepheard, bold and blind,
Presume the things so sacred to prophane?
More fit it is t' adore, with humble mind,
The image of the heavens in shape humane."

The Queen, who heard herself thus celebrated, celebrated not only as a semi-divine person, but as herself unrivalled in the art of "making" or poetry—"her peerless skill in making well"—granted Spenser a pension of 50*l.* a year, which, it is said, the prosaic and frugal Lord Treasurer, always hard-driven for money and not caring much for poets, made difficulties about paying. But the new poem was not for the Queen's ear only. In the registers of the Stationers' Company occurs the following entry:

"Primo die Decembris [1589].

"Mr. Ponsonbye — Entered for his Copye, a book intytuled the *fayrye Queene* dysposed into xij bookes &c., authorysed under thandes of the Archbishop of Canterbery and bothe the Wardens. vj^d."

Thus, between pamphlets of the hour—an account of the Arms of the City Companies on one side, and the last news from France on the other—the first of our great modern English poems was licensed to make its appearance. It appeared soon after, with the date of 1590. It was not the twelve books, but only the first three. It was accompanied and introduced, as usual, by a great host of commendatory and laudatory sonnets and poems. All the leading personages at Elizabeth's court were appealed to; according to their several tastes or their relations to the poet, they are humbly asked to befriend, or excuse, or welcome his poetical venture. The list itself is worth quoting:—Sir Christopher Hatton, then Lord Chancellor, the Earls of Essex, Oxford, Northumberland, Ormond, Lord Howard of Effingham, Lord Grey of Wilton, Sir Walter Ralegh, Lord Burghley, the Earl of Cumberland, Lord Hunsdon, Lord Buckhurst, Walsingham, Sir John Norris, President of Munster. He addresses Lady Pembroke, in remembrance of her brother, that "heroic spirit," "the glory of our days,"

> "Who first my Muse did lift out of the floor,
> To sing his sweet delights in lowly lays."

And he finishes with a sonnet to Lady Carew, one of Sir John Spencer's daughters, and another to "all the gracious and beautiful ladies of the Court," in which "the world's pride seems to be gathered." There come also congratulations and praises for himself. Ralegh addressed to him a fine but extravagant sonnet, in which he imagined Petrarch weeping for envy at the approval of the *Faerie Queene*, while "Oblivion laid him down on Laura's hearse," and even Homer trembled for his fame. Gabriel Harvey revoked his judgment on the *Elvish Queen*, and, not with-

out some regret for less ambitious days in the past, cheered on his friend in his noble enterprise. Gabriel Harvey has been so much, and not without reason, laughed at, and yet his verses welcoming the *Faerie Queene* are so full of true and warm friendship, and of unexpected refinement and grace, that it is but just to cite them. In the eyes of the world he was an absurd personage: but Spenser saw in him perhaps his worthiest and trustiest friend. A generous and simple affection has almost got the better in them of pedantry and false taste.

"Collyn, I see, by thy new taken taske,
Some sacred fury hath enricht thy braynes,
That leades thy muse in haughty verse to maske,
And loath the layes that longs to lowly swaynes;
That lifts thy notes from Shepheardes unto kinges:
So like the lively Larke that mounting singes.

"Thy lovely Rosolinde seemes now forlorne,
And all thy gentle flockes forgotten quight:
Thy chaunged hart now holdes thy pypes in scorne,
Those prety pypes that did thy mates delight;
Those trusty mates, that loved thee so well;
Whom thou gav'st mirth, as they gave thee the bell.

"Yet, as thou earst with thy sweete roundelayes
Didst stirre to glee our laddes in homely bowers;
So moughtst thou now in these refyned layes
Delight the daintie eares of higher powers:
And so mought they, in their deepe skanning skill,
Alow and grace our Collyns flowing quyll.

"And faire befall that *Faerie Queene* of thine,
In whose faire eyes love linckt with vertue sittes;
Enfusing, by those bewties fyers devyne,
Such high conceites into thy humble wittes,
As raised hath poore pastors oaten reedes
From rustick tunes, to chaunt heroique deedes.

"So mought thy *Redcrosse Knight* with happy hand
Victorious be in that faire Ilands right,
Which thou dost vayle in Type of Faery land,
Elizas blessed field, that *Albion* hight:
That shieldes her friendes, and warres her mightie foes,
Yet still with people, peace, and plentie flowes.

"But (jolly shepheard) though with pleasing style
Thou feast the humour of the Courtly trayne,
Let not conceipt thy setled sence beguile,
Ne daunted be through envy or disdaine.
Subject thy dome to her Empyring spright,
From whence thy Muse, and all the world, takes light.
"HOBYNOLL."

And to the Queen herself Spenser presented his work, in one of the boldest dedications perhaps ever penned:

"To
The Most High, Mightie, and Magnificent
Empresse,
Renowmed for piety, vertve, and all gratiovs government,
ELIZABETH,
By the Grace of God,
Qveene of England, Fravnce, and Ireland, and of Virginia,
Defendovr of the Faith, &c.
Her most hvmble Servavnt
EDMVND SPENSER,
Doth, in all hvmilitie,
Dedicate, present, and consecrate
These his labovrs,
To live with the eternitie of her fame."

"To live with the eternity of her fame"—the claim was a proud one, but it has proved a prophecy. The publication of the *Faerie Queene* placed him at once and for his life-time at the head of all living English poets. The world of his day immediately acknowledged the charm and per-

fection of the new work of art which had taken it by surprise. As far as appears, it was welcomed heartily and generously. Spenser speaks in places of envy and detraction, and he, like others, had no doubt his rivals and enemies. But little trace of censure appears, except in the stories about Burghley's dislike of him, as an idle rimer, and perhaps as a friend of his opponents. But his brother poets, men like Lodge and Drayton, paid honour, though in quaint phrases, to the learned Colin, the reverend Colin, the excellent and cunning Colin. A greater than they, if we may trust his editors, takes him as the representative of poetry, which is so dear to him.

> "If music and sweet poetry agree,
> As they must needs, the sister and the brother,
> Then must the love be great 'twixt thee and me,
> Because thou lov'st the one, and I the other.
> *Dowland* to thee is dear, whose heavenly touch
> Upon the lute doth ravish human sense;
> *Spenser* to me, whose deep conceit is such
> As passing all conceit, needs no defence.
> Thou lov'st to hear the sweet melodious sound
> That Phœbus' lute, the queen of music, makes;
> And I in deep delight am chiefly drown'd
> Whenas himself to singing he betakes.
> One god is god of both, as poets feign;
> One knight loves both, and both in thee remain."
>
> (*Shakespere*, in the "*Passionate Pilgrim*," 1599.)

Even the fierce pamphleteer, Thomas Nash, the scourge and torment of poor Gabriel Harvey, addresses Harvey's friend as heavenly Spenser, and extols "the Faerie Singers' stately tuned verse." Spenser's title to be the "Poet of poets" was at once acknowledged as by acclamation. And he himself has no difficulty in accepting his position. In some lines on the death of a friend's wife, whom he la-

ments and praises, the idea presents itself that the great queen may not approve of her Shepherd wasting his lays on meaner persons, and he puts into his friend's mouth a deprecation of her possible jealousy. The lines are characteristic, both in their beauty and music, and in the strangeness, in our eyes, of the excuse made for the poet.

"Ne let Eliza, royall Shepheardesse,
The praises of my parted love envy,
For she hath praises in all plenteousnesse
Powr'd upon her, like showers of Castaly,
By her own Shepheard, Colin, her owne Shepheard,
That her with heavenly hymnes doth deifie,
Of rustick muse full hardly to be betterd.

"She is the Rose, the glorie of the day,
And mine the Primrose in the lowly shade:
Mine, ah! not mine; amisse I mine did say:
Not mine, but His, which mine awhile her made;
Mine to be His, with him to live for ay.
O that so faire a flower so soone should fade,
And through untimely tempest fall away!

"She fell away in her first ages spring,
Whil'st yet her leafe was greene, and fresh her rinde,
And whilst her braunch faire blossomes foorth did bring,
She fell away against all course of kinde.
For age to dye is right, but youth is wrong;
She fel away like fruit blowne downe with winde.
Weepe, Shepheard! weepe, to make my undersong."

Thus in both his literary enterprises Spenser had been signally successful. The *Shepherd's Calendar*, in 1580, had immediately raised high hopes of his powers. The *Faerie Queene*, in 1590, had more than fulfilled them. In the interval a considerable change had happened in English cultivation. Shakespere had come to London, though the world did not yet know all that he was. Sidney had pub-

lished his *Defense of Poesie*, and had written the *Arcadia*, though it was not yet published. Marlowe had begun to write, and others beside him were preparing the change which was to come on the English Drama. Two scholars who had shared with Spenser in the bounty of Robert Nowell were beginning, in different lines, to raise the level of thought and style. Hooker was beginning to give dignity to controversy, and to show what English prose might rise to. Lancelot Andrewes, Spenser's junior at school and college, was training himself at St. Paul's to lead the way to a larger and higher kind of preaching than the English clergy had yet reached. The change of scene from Ireland to the centre of English interests must have been, as Spenser describes it, very impressive. England was alive with aspiration and effort: imaginations were inflamed and hearts stirred by the deeds of men who described with the same energy with which they acted. Amid such influences and with such a friend as Ralegh, Spenser may naturally have been tempted by some of the dreams of advancement of which Ralegh's soul was full. There is strong probability, from the language of his later poems, that he indulged such hopes, and that they were disappointed. A year after the entry in the Stationers' Register of the *Faerie Queene* (29 Dec., 1590), Ponsonby, his publisher, entered a volume of *Complaints, containing sundry small poems of the World's Vanity*," to which he prefixed the following notice:

"THE PRINTER TO THE GENTLE READER.

"SINCE my late setting foorth of the *Faerie Queene*, finding that it hath found a favourable passage amongst you, I have sithence endevoured by all good meanes (for the better encrease and accomplishment of your delights), to get into my handes such smale Poëmes of the same Authors, as I heard were disperst abroad in sundrie hands, and

not easie to bee come by, by himselfe; some of them having bene diverslie imbeziled and purloyned from him since his departure over Sea. Of the which I have, by good meanes, gathered togeather these fewe parcels present, which I have caused to bee imprinted altogeather, for that they al seeme to containe like matter of argument in them; being all complaints and meditations of the worlds vanitie, verie grave and profitable. To which effect I understand that he besides wrote sundrie others, namelie *Ecclesiastes* and *Canticum canticorum*, translated *A senights slumber*, *The hell of lovers*, *his Purgatorie*, being all dedicated to Ladies; so as it may seeme he ment them all to one volume. Besides some other Pamphlets looselie scattered abroad: as *The dying Pellican*, *The howers of the Lord*, *The sacrifice of a sinner*, *The seven Psalmes*, &c., which, when I can, either by himselfe or otherwise, attaine too, I meane likewise for your favour sake to set foorth. In the meane time, praying you gentlie to accept of these, and graciouslie to entertaine the new Poet, *I take leave*."

The collection is a miscellaneous one, both as to subjects and date: it contains, among other things, the translations from Petrarch and Du Bellay, which had appeared in Vander Noodt's *Theatre of Worldlings*, in 1569. But there are also some pieces of later date; and they disclose not only personal sorrows and griefs, but also an experience which had ended in disgust and disappointment. In spite of Ralegh's friendship, he had found that in the Court he was not likely to thrive. The two powerful men who had been his earliest friends had disappeared. Philip Sidney had died in 1586; Leicester, soon after the destruction of the Armada, in 1588. And they had been followed (April, 1590) by Sidney's powerful father-in-law, Francis Walsingham. The death of Leicester, untended, unlamented, powerfully impressed Spenser, always keenly alive to the pathetic vicissitudes of human greatness. In one of these pieces, *The Ruins of Time*, addressed to Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke, Spenser thus imagines the death of Leicester—

"It is not long, since these two eyes beheld
A mightie Prince, of most renowmed race,
Whom England high in count of honour held,
And greatest ones did sue to gaine his grace;
Of greatest ones he, greatest in his place,
Sate in the bosome of his Soveraine,
And *Right and loyall* did his word maintaine.

"I saw him die, I saw him die, as one
Of the meane people, and brought foorth on beare:
I saw him die, and no man left to mone
His dolefull fate, that late him loved deare:
Scarse anie left to close his eyelids neare;
Scarse anie left upon his lips to laie
The sacred sod, or Requiem to saie.

"O! trustless state of miserable men,
That builde your blis on hope of earthly thing,
And vainlie thinke your selves halfe happie then,
When painted faces with smooth flattering
Doo fawne on you, and your wide praises sing;
And, when the courting masker louteth lowe,
Him true in heart and trustie to you trow."

For Sidney, the darling of the time, who had been to him not merely a cordial friend, but the realized type of all that was glorious in manhood, and beautiful in character and gifts, his mourning was more than that of a looker-on at a moving instance of the frailty of greatness. It was the poet's sorrow for the poet, who had almost been to him what the elder brother is to the younger. Both now, and in later years, his affection for one who was become to him a glorified saint, showed itself in deep and genuine expression, through the affectations which crowned the "herse" of Astrophel and Philisides. He was persuaded that Sidney's death had been a grave blow to literature and learning. *The Ruins of Time*, and still more the

Tears of the Muses, are full of lamentations over returning barbarism and ignorance, and the slight account made by those in power of the gifts and the arts of the writer, the poet, and the dramatist. Under what was popularly thought the crabbed and parsimonious administration of Burghley, and with the churlishness of the Puritans, whom he was supposed to foster, it seemed as if the poetry of the time was passing away in chill discouragement. The effect is described in lines which, as we now naturally suppose, and Dryden also thought, can refer to no one but Shakespere. But it seems doubtful whether all this could have been said of Shakespere in 1590. It seems more likely that this also is an extravagant compliment to Philip Sidney, and his masking performances. He was lamented elsewhere under the poetical name of *Willy*. If it refers to him, it was probably written before his death, though not published till after it; for the lines imply, not that he is literally dead, but that he is in retirement. The expression that he is "dead of late," is explained in four lines below, as "choosing to sit in idle cell," and is one of Spenser's common figures for inactivity or sorrow.[1]

The verses are the lamentations of the Muse of Comedy.

"THALIA.

"Where be the sweete delights of learning's treasure
That wont with Comick sock to beautefie
The painted Theaters, and fill with pleasure
The listners eyes and eares with melodie;
In which I late was wont to raine as Queene,
And maske in mirth with Graces well beseene?

"O! all is gone; and all that goodly glee,
Which wont to be the glorie of gay wits,

[1] *v. Colin Clout*, l. 31. *Astrophel*, l. 175.

Is layed abed, and no where now to see;
And in her roome unseemly Sorrow sits,
With hollow browes and greisly countenaunce,
Marring my joyous gentle dalliaunce.

"And him beside sits ugly Barbarisme,
And brutish Ignorance, ycrept of late
Out of dredd darknes of the deepe Abysme,
Where being bredd, he light and heaven does hate:
They in the mindes of men now tyrannize,
And the faire Scene with rudenes foule disguize.

"All places they with follie have possest,
And with vaine toyes the vulgare entertaine;
But me have banished, with all the rest
That whilome wont to wait upon my traine,
Fine Counterfesaunce, and unhurtfull Sport,
Delight, and Laughter, deckt in seemly sort.

"All these, and all that els the Comick Stage
With seasoned wit and goodly pleasance graced,
By which mans life in his likest image
Was limned forth, are wholly now defaced;
And those sweete wits, which wont the like to frame,
Are now despizd, and made a laughing game.

And he, the man whom Nature selfe had made
To mock her selfe, and truth to imitate,
With kindly counter under Mimick shade,
Our pleasant Willy, ah! *is dead of late;*
With whom all joy and jolly merriment
Is also dreaded, and in dolour drent.

* * * * * *

"But that same gentle Spirit, from whose pen
Large streames of honnie and sweete Nectar flowe,
Scorning the boldnes of such base-borne men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashlie throwe,
Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell,
Than so himselfe to mockerie to sell."

But the most remarkable of these pieces is a satirical fable, *Mother Hubberd's Tale of the Ape and Fox*, which may take rank with the satirical writings of Chaucer and Dryden for keenness of touch, for breadth of treatment, for swing and fiery scorn, and sustained strength of sarcasm. By his visit to the Court, Spenser had increased his knowledge of the realities of life. That brilliant Court, with a goddess at its head, and full of charming swains and divine nymphs, had also another side. It was still his poetical heaven. But with that odd insensibility to anomaly and glaring contrasts, which is seen in his time, and perhaps exists at all times, he passed from the celebration of the dazzling glories of Cynthia's Court into a fierce vein of invective against its treacheries, its vain shows, its unceasing and mean intrigues, its savage jealousies, its fatal rivalries, the scramble there for preferment in Church and State. When it is considered what great persons might easily and naturally have been identified at the time with the *Ape and the Fox*, the confederate impostors, charlatans, and bullying swindlers, who had stolen the lion's skin, and by it mounted to the high places of the State, it seems to be a proof of the indifference of the Court to the power of mere literature, that it should have been safe to write and publish so freely and so cleverly. Dull Catholic lampoons and Puritan scurrilities did not pass thus unnoticed. They were viewed as dangerous to the State, and dealt with accordingly. The fable contains what we can scarcely doubt to be some of that wisdom which Spenser learnt by his experience of the Court.

"So pitifull a thing is Suters state!
Most miserable man, whom wicked fate
Hath brought to Court, to sue for *had-ywist*,
That few have found, and manie one hath mist!

Full little knowest thou, that hast not tride,
What hell it is in suing long to bide:
To loose good dayes, that might be better spent;
To wast long nights in pensive discontent;
To speed to day, to be put back to-morrow;
To feed on hope, to pine with feare and sorrow;
To have thy Princes grace, yet want her Peeres;
To have thy asking, yet waite manie yeeres;
To fret thy soule with crosses and with cares;
To eate thy heart through comfortlesse dispaires;
To fawne, to crowche, to waite, to ride, to ronne,
To spend, to give, to want, to be undonne.
Unhappie wight, borne to disastrous end,
That doth his life in so long tendance spend!
"Who ever leaves sweete home, where meane estate
In safe assurance, without strife or hate,
Findes all things needfull for contentment meeke,
And will to Court for shadowes vaine to seeke,
Or hope to gaine, himselfe will a daw trie:
That curse God send unto mine enemie!"

Spenser probably did not mean his characters to fit too closely to living persons. That might have been dangerous. But it is difficult to believe that he had not distinctly in his eye a very great personage, the greatest in England next to the Queen, in the following picture of the doings of the Fox installed at Court.

"But the false Foxe most kindly plaid his part;
For whatsoever mother-wit or arte
Could worke, he put in proofe: no practise slie,
No counterpoint of cunning policie,
No reach, no breach, that might him profit bring,
But he the same did to his purpose wring.
Nought suffered he the Ape to give or graunt,
But through his hand must passe the Fiaunt.
* * * * * *
He chaffred Chayres in which Churchmen were set,
And breach of lawes to privie ferme did let:

No statute so established might bee,
Nor ordinaunce so needfull, but that hee
Would violate, though not with violence,
Yet under colour of the confidence
The which the Ape repos'd in him alone,
And reckned him the kingdomes corner-stone.
And ever, when he ought would bring to pas,
His long experience the platforme was:
And, when he ought not pleasing would put by
The cloke was care of thrift, and husbandry,
For to encrease the common treasures store;
But his owne treasure he encreased more,
And lifted up his loftie towres thereby,
That they began to threat the neighbour sky;
The whiles the Princes pallaces fell fast
To ruine (for what thing can ever last?)
And whilest the other Peeres, for povertie,
Were forst their auncient houses to let lie,
And their olde Castles to the ground to fall,
Which their forefathers, famous over-all,
Had founded for the Kingdome's ornament,
And for their memories long moniment:
But he no count made of Nobilitie,
Nor the wilde beasts whom armes did glorifie,
The Realmes chiefe strength and girlond of the crowne
All these through fained crimes he thrust adowne,
Or made them dwell in darknes of disgrace;
For none, but whom he list, might come in place.
"Of men of armes he had but small regard,
But kept them lowe, and streigned verie hard.
For men of learning little he esteemed;
His wisdome he above their learning deemed.
As for the rascall Commons, least he cared,
For not so common was his bountie shared.
Let God, (said he) if please, care for the manie,
I for my selfe must care before els anie.
So did he good to none, to manie ill,
So did he all the kingdome rob and pill;

Yet none durst speake, ne none durst of him plaine,
So great he was in grace, and rich through gaine.
Ne would he anie let to have accesse
Unto the Prince, but by his owne addresse,
For all that els did come were sure to faile."

Even at Court, however, the poet finds a contrast to all this: he had known Philip Sidney, and Ralegh was his friend.

"Yet the brave Courtier, in whose beauteous thought
Regard of honour harbours more than ought,
Doth loath such base condition, to backbite
Anies good name for envie or despite:
He stands on tearmes of honourable minde,
Ne will be carried with the common winde
Of Courts inconstant mutabilitie,
Ne after everie tattling fable flie;
But heares and sees the follies of the rest,
And thereof gathers for himselfe the best.
He will not creepe, nor crouche with fained face,
But walkes upright with comely stedfast pace,
And unto all doth yeeld due courtesie;
But not with kissed hand belowe the knee,
As that same Apish crue is wont to doo:
For he disdaines himselfe t' embase theretoo.
He hates fowle leasings, and vile flatterie,
Two filthie blots in noble gentrie;
And lothefull idlenes he doth detest,
The canker worme of everie gentle brest.

"Or lastly, when the bodie list to pause,
His minde unto the Muses he withdrawes:
Sweete Ladie Muses, Ladies of delight,
Delights of life, and ornaments of light!
With whom he close confers with wise discourse,
Of Natures workes, of heavens continuall course,
Of forreine lands, of people different,
Of kingdomes change, of divers gouvernment,

Of dreadfull battailes of renowned Knights;
With which he kindleth his ambitious sprights
To like desire and praise of noble fame,
The onely upshot whereto he doth ayme:
For all his minde on honour fixed is,
To which he levels all his purposis,
And in his Princes service spends his dayes,
Not so much for to gaine, or for to raise
Himselfe to high degree, as for his grace,
And in his liking to winne worthie place,
Through due deserts and comely carriage."

The fable also throws light on the way in which Spenser regarded the religious parties, whose strife was becoming loud and threatening. Spenser is often spoken of as a Puritan. He certainly had the Puritan hatred of Rome; and in the Church system as it existed in England he saw many instances of ignorance, laziness, and corruption; and he agreed with the Puritans in denouncing them. His pictures of the "formal priest," with his excuses for doing nothing, his new-fashioned and improved substitutes for the ornate and also too lengthy ancient service, and his general ideas of self-complacent comfort, has in it an odd mixture of Roman Catholic irony with Puritan censure. Indeed, though Spenser hated with an Englishman's hatred all that he considered Roman superstition and tyranny, he had a sense of the poetical impressiveness of the old ceremonial, and the ideas which clung to it—its pomp, its beauty, its suggestiveness—very far removed from the iconoclastic temper of the Puritans. In his *View of the State of Ireland*, he notes as a sign of its evil condition the state of the churches, "most of them ruined and even with the ground," and the rest "so unhandsomely patched and thatched, that men do even shun the places, for the uncomeliness thereof." "The outward form (assure your-

self)," he adds, "doth greatly draw the rude people to the reverencing and frequenting thereof, *whatever some of our late too nice fools may say*, that there is nothing in the seemly form and comely order of the church."

"'Ah! but (said th' Ape) the charge is wondrous great,
To feede mens soules, and hath an heavie threat.'
'To feed mens soules (quoth he) is not in man;
For they must feed themselves, doo what we can.
We are but charged to lay the meate before:
Eate they that list, we need to doo no more.
But God it is that feeds them with his grace,
The bread of life powr'd downe from heavenly place.
Therefore said he, that with the budding rod
Did rule the Jewes, *All shalbe taught of God.*
That same hath Jesus Christ now to him raught,
By whom the flock is rightly fed, and taught:
He is the Shepheard, and the Priest is hee;
We but his shepheard swaines ordain'd to bee.
Therefore herewith doo not your selfe dismay;
Ne is the paines so great, but beare ye may,
For not so great, as it was wont of yore,
It's now a dayes, ne halfe so streight and sore.
They whilome used duly everie day
Their service and their holie things to say,
At morne and even, besides their Anthemes sweete,
Their penie Masses, and their Complynes meete,
Their Diriges, their Trentals, and their shrifts.
Their memories, their singings, and their gifts.
Now all those needlesse works are laid away;
Now once a weeke, upon the Sabbath day,
It is enough to doo our small devotion,
And then to follow any merrie motion.
Ne are we tyde to fast, but when we list;
Ne to weare garments base of Wollen twist,
But with the finest silkes us to aray,
That before God we may appeare more gay,

Resembling Aarons glorie in his place:
For farre unfit it is, that person bace
Should with vile cloaths approach Gods majestie,
Whom no uncleannes may approachen nie;
Or that all men, which anie master serve,
Good garments for their service should deserve;
But he that serves the Lord of hoasts most high,
And that in highest place, t' approach him nigh,
And all the peoples prayers to present
Before his throne, as on ambassage sent
Both too and fro, should not deserve to weare
A garment better than of wooll or heare.
Beside, we may have lying by our sides
Our lovely Lasses, or bright shining Brides:
We be not tyde to wilfull chastitie,
But have the Gospell of free libertie."

But his weapon is double-edged, and he had not much more love for

"That ungracious crew which feigns demurest grace."

The first prescription which the Priest gives to the Fox who desires to rise to preferment in the Church is to win the favour of some great Puritan noble.

"First, therefore, when ye have in handsome wise
Your selfe attyred, as you can devise,
Then to some Noble-man your selfe applye,
Or other great one in the worldës eye,
That hath a zealous disposition
To God, and so to his religion.
There must thou fashion eke a godly zeale,
Such as no carpers may contrayre reveale;
For each thing fained ought more warie bee.
There thou must walke in sober gravitee,
And seeme as Saintlike as Sainte Radegund:
Fast much, pray oft, looke lowly on the ground,

> And unto everie one doo curtesie meeke:
> These lookes (nought saying) doo a benefice seeke,
> And be thou sure one not to lack or long."

But he is impartial, and points out that there are other ways of rising—by adopting the fashions of the Court, "facing, and forging, and scoffing, and crouching to please," and so to "mock out a benefice;" or else, by compounding with a patron to give him half the profits, and in the case of a bishopric, to submit to the alienation of its manors to some powerful favourite, as the Bishop of Salisbury had to surrender Sherborn to Sir Walter Ralegh. Spenser, in his dedication of *Mother Hubberd's Tale* to one of the daughters of Sir John Spencer, Lady Compton and Monteagle, speaks of it as "long sithence composed in the raw conceit of youth." But, whatever this may mean, and it was his way thus to deprecate severe judgments, his allowing the publication of it at this time, shows, if the work itself did not show it, that he was in very serious earnest in his bitter sarcasms on the base and evil arts which brought success at the Court.

He stayed in England about a year and a half [1590–91], long enough, apparently, to make up his mind that he had not much to hope for from his great friends, Ralegh and perhaps Essex, who were busy on their own schemes. Ralegh, from whom Spenser might hope most, was just beginning to plunge into that extraordinary career, in the thread of which glory and disgrace, far-sighted and princely public spirit and insatiate private greed, were to be so strangely intertwined. In 1592 he planned the great adventure which astonished London by the fabulous plunder of the Spanish treasure-ships; in the same year he was in the Tower, under the Queen's displeasure for his secret marriage, affecting the most ridiculous despair at her go-

ing away from the neighbourhood, and pouring forth his flatteries on this old woman of sixty as if he had no bride of his own to love:—"I that was wont to behold her riding like Alexander, hunting like Diana, walking like Venus; the gentle wind blowing her fair hair about her pure cheeks like a nymph; sometimes, sitting in the shade like a goddess; sometimes, singing like an angel; sometimes, playing like Orpheus—behold the sorrow of this world—once amiss, hath bereaved me of all." Then came the exploration of Guiana, the expedition to Cadiz, the Island voyage [1595–1597]. Ralegh had something else to do than to think of Spenser's fortunes.

Spenser turned back once more to Ireland, to his clerkship of the Council of Munster, which he soon resigned; to be worried with lawsuits about "lands in Shanballymore and Ballingrath," by his time-serving and oppressive Irish neighbour, Maurice Roche, Lord Fermoy; to brood still over his lost ideal and hero, Sidney; to write the story of his visit in the pastoral supplement to the *Shepherd's Calendar*, *Colin Clout's come home again;* to pursue the story of Gloriana's knights; and to find among the Irish maidens another Elizabeth, a wife instead of a queen, whose wooing and winning were to give new themes to his imagination.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAERIE QUEENE.

"*Uncouth* [=unknown], *unkist*," are the words from Chaucer,[1] with which the friend, who introduced Spenser's earliest poetry to the world, bespeaks forbearance, and promises matter for admiration and delight in the *Shepherd's Calendar*. "You have to know my new poet," he says in effect: "and when you have learned his ways, you will find how much you have to honour and love him." "I doubt not," he says, with a boldness of prediction, manifestly sincere, which is remarkable about an unknown man, "that so soon as his name shall come into the knowledge of men, and his worthiness be sounded in the trump of fame, but that he shall be not only kissed, but also beloved of all, embraced of the most, and wondered at of the best." Never was prophecy more rapidly and more signally verified, probably beyond the prophet's largest expectation. But he goes on to explain and indeed apologize for certain features of the new poet's work, which even to readers of that day might seem open to exception. And to readers of to-day, the phrase, *uncouth, unkist*, certainly expresses what many have to confess, if they are honest, as to their first acquaintance with the *Faerie Queene*. Its place in literature is established beyond con-

[1] "Unknow, unkyst; and lost, that is unsoght."
Troylus and Cryseide, lib. i.

troversy. Yet its first and unfamiliar aspect inspires respect, perhaps interest, rather than attracts and satisfies. It is not the remoteness of the subject alone, nor the distance of three centuries which raises a bar between it and those to whom it is new. Shakespere becomes familiar to us from the first moment. The impossible legends of Arthur have been made in the language of to-day once more to touch our sympathies, and have lent themselves to express our thoughts. But at first acquaintance the *Faerie Queene* to many of us has been disappointing. It has seemed not only antique, but artificial. It has seemed fantastic. It has seemed, we cannot help avowing, tiresome. It is not till the early appearances have worn off, and we have learned to make many allowances and to surrender ourselves to the feelings and the standards by which it claims to affect and govern us, that we really find under what noble guidance we are proceeding, and what subtle and varied spells are ever round us.

1. The *Faerie Queene* is the work of an unformed literature, the product of an unperfected art. English poetry, English language, in Spenser's, nay in Shakespere's day, had much to learn, much to unlearn. They never, perhaps, have been stronger or richer, than in that marvellous burst of youth, with all its freedom of invention, of observation, of reflection. But they had not that which only the experience and practice of eventful centuries could give them. Even genius must wait for the gifts of time. It cannot forerun the limitations of its day, nor anticipate the conquests and common possessions of the future. Things are impossible to the first great masters of art which are easy to their second-rate successors. The possibility, or the necessity of breaking through some convention, of attempting some unattempted effort, had not,

among other great enterprises, occurred to them. They were laying the steps in a magnificent fashion on which those after them were to rise. But we ought not to shut our eyes to mistakes or faults to which attention had not yet been awakened, or for avoiding which no reasonable means had been found. To learn from genius, we must try to recognize both what is still imperfect and what is grandly and unwontedly successful. There is no great work of art, not excepting even the Iliad or the Parthenon, which is not open, especially in point of ornament, to the scoff of the scoffer, or to the injustice of those who do not mind being unjust. But all art belongs to man; and man, even when he is greatest, is always limited and imperfect.

The *Faerie Queene*, as a whole, bears on its face a great fault of construction. It carries with it no adequate account of its own story; it does not explain itself, or contain in its own structure what would enable a reader to understand how it arose. It has to be accounted for by a prose explanation and key outside of itself. The poet intended to reserve the central event, which was the occasion of all the adventures of the poem, till they had all been related, leaving them as it were in the air, till at the end of twelve long books the reader should at last be told how the whole thing had originated, and what it was all about. He made the mistake of confounding the answer to a riddle with the crisis which unties the tangle of a plot and satisfies the suspended interest of a tale. None of the great model poems before him, however full of digression and episode, had failed to arrange their story with clearness. They needed no commentary outside themselves to say why they began as they did, and out of what antecedents they arose. If they started at once from the middle of things, they made their story, as it unfolded itself, ex-

plain, by more or less skilful devices, all that needed to be known about their beginnings. They did not think of rules of art. They did of themselves naturally what a good story-teller does, to make himself intelligible and interesting; and it is not easy to be interesting, unless the parts of the story are in their place.

The defect seems to have come upon Spenser when it was too late to remedy it in the construction of his poem; and he adopted the somewhat clumsy expedient of telling us what the poem itself ought to have told us of its general story, in a letter to Sir Walter Ralegh. Ralegh himself, indeed, suggested the letter: apparently (from the date, Jan. 23, 1590), after the first part had gone through the press. And without this after-thought, as the twelfth book was never reached, we should have been left to gather the outline and plan of the story, from imperfect glimpses and allusions, as we have to fill up from hints and assumptions the gaps of an unskilful narrator, who leaves out what is essential to the understanding of his tale.

Incidentally, however, this letter is an advantage: for we have in it the poet's own statement of his purpose in writing, as well as a necessary sketch of his story. His allegory, as he had explained to Bryskett and his friends, had a moral purpose. He meant to shadow forth, under the figures of twelve knights, and in their various exploits, the characteristics of "a gentleman or noble person," "fashioned in virtuous and gentle discipline." He took his machinery from the popular legends about King Arthur, and his heads of moral philosophy from the current Aristotelian catalogue of the Schools.

"Sir, knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled the Faerie Queene, being a continued Allegory, or darke conceit, I haue thought good,

as well for avoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions, as also for your better light in reading thereof (being so by you commanded), to discover unto you the general intention and meaning, which in the whole course thereof I have fashioned, without expressing of any particular purposes, or by accidents, therein occasioned. The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: Which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter then for profite of the ensample, I chose the historye of King Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person, being made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the daunger of envy, and suspition of present time. In which I have followed all the antique Poets historicall; first Homere, who in the Persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good governour and a vertuous man, the one in his Ilias, the other in his Odysseis: then Virgil, whose like intention was to doe in the person of Aeneas: after him Ariosto comprised them both in his Orlando: and lately Tasso dissevered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons, namely that part which they in Philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a private man, coloured in his Rinaldo; the other named Politice in his Godfredo. By ensample of which excellente Poets, I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised; the which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged to frame the other part of polliticke vertues in his person, after that hee came to be king."

Then, after explaining that he meant the *Faerie Queene* "for glory in general intention, but in particular" for Elizabeth, and his Faerie Land for her kingdom, he proceeds to explain, what the first three books hardly explain, what the Faerie Queene had to do with the structure of the poem.

"But, because the beginning of the whole worke seemeth abrupte, and as depending upon other antecedents, it needs that ye know the occasion of these three knights seuerall adventures. For the Meth-

ode of a Poet historical is not such, as of an Historiographer. For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions; but a Poet thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the thinges forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all.

"The beginning therefore of my history, if it were to be told by an Historiographer should be the twelfth booke, which is the last; where I devise that the Faerie Queene kept her Annuall feaste xii. dayes; uppon which xii. severall dayes, the occasions of the xii. severall adventures hapned, which, being undertaken by xii. severall knights, are in these xii. books severally handled and discoursed. The first was this. In the beginning of the feast, there presented him selfe a tall clownishe younge man, who falling before the Queene of Faries desired a boone (as the manner then was) which during that feast she might not refuse; which was that hee might have the atchievement of any adventure, which during that feaste should happen: that being graunted, he rested him on the floore, unfitte through his rusticity for a better place. Soone after entred a faire Ladye in mourning weedes, riding on a white Asse, with a dwarfe behinde her leading a warlike steed, that bore the Armes of a knight, and his speare in the dwarfes hand. Shee, falling before the Queene of Faeries, complayned that her father and mother, an ancient King and Queene, had beene by an huge dragon many years shut up in a brasen Castle, who thence suffred them not to yssew; and therefore besought the Faerie Queene to assygne her some one of her knights to take on him that exployt. Presently that clownish person, upstarting, desired that adventure: whereat the Queene much wondering, and the Lady much gainesaying, yet he earnestly importuned his desire. In the end the Lady told him, that unlesse that armour which she brought would serve him (that is, the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul, vi. Ephes.) that he could not succeed in that enterprise; which being forthwith put upon him, with dewe furnitures thereunto, he seemed the goodliest man in al that company, and was well liked of the Lady. And eftesoones taking on him knighthood, and mounting on that straunge courser, he went forth with her on that adventure: where beginneth the first booke, viz.

"A gentle knight was pricking on the playne, &c."

That it was not without reason that this explanatory key was prefixed to the work, and that either Spenser or Ralegh felt it to be almost indispensable, appears from the concluding paragraph.

"Thus much, Sir, I have briefly overronne to direct your understanding to the wel-head of the History; that from thence gathering the whole intention of the conceit, ye may as in a handfull gripe al the discourse, which otherwise may happily seeme tedious and confused."

According to the plan thus sketched out, we have but a fragment of the work. It was published in two parcels, each of three books, in 1590 and 1596; and after his death two cantos, with two stray stanzas, of a seventh book were found and printed. Each perfect book consists of twelve cantos of from thirty-five to sixty of his nine-line stanzas. The books published in 1590 contain, as he states in his prefatory letter, the legends of *Holiness*, of *Temperance*, and of *Chastity*. Those published in 1596 contain the legends of *Friendship*, of *Justice*, and of *Courtesy*. The posthumous cantos are entitled, *Of Mutability*, and are said to be apparently parcel of a legend of *Constancy*. The poem which was to treat of the "politic" virtues was never approached. Thus we have but a fourth part of the whole of the projected work. It is very doubtful whether the remaining six books were completed. But it is probable that a portion of them was written, which, except the cantos *On Mutability*, has perished. And the intended titles or legends of the later books have not been preserved.

Thus the poem was to be an allegorical story; a story branching out into twelve separate stories, which themselves would branch out again and involve endless other stories. It is a complex scheme to keep well in hand, and

Spenser's art in doing so has been praised by some of his critics. But the art, if there is any, is so subtle that it fails to save the reader from perplexity. The truth is that the power of ordering and connecting a long and complicated plan was not one of Spenser's gifts. In the first two books, the allegorical story proceeds from point to point with fair coherence and consecutiveness. After them the attempt to hold the scheme together, except in the loosest and most general way, is given up as too troublesome or too confined. The poet prefixes, indeed, the name of a particular virtue to each book, but, with slender reference to it, he surrenders himself freely to his abundant flow of ideas, and to whatever fancy or invention tempts him, and ranges unrestrained over the whole field of knowledge and imagination. In the first two books, the allegory is transparent, and the story connected. The allegory is of the nature of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. It starts from the belief that religion, purified from falsehood, superstition, and sin, is the foundation of all nobleness in man; and it portrays, under images and with names, for the most part easily understood, and easily applied to real counterparts, the struggle which every one at that time supposed to be going on, between absolute truth and righteousness on one side, and fatal error and bottomless wickedness on the other. Una, the Truth, the one and only Bride of man's spirit, marked out by the tokens of humility and innocence, and by her power over wild and untamed natures —the single Truth, in contrast to the counterfeit Duessa, false religion, and its actual embodiment in the false rival Queen of Scots—Truth, the object of passionate homage, real with many, professed with all, which after the impostures and scandals of the preceding age, had now become characteristic of that of Elizabeth—Truth, its claims, its

dangers, and its champions, are the subject of the first book: and it is represented as leading the manhood of England, in spite not only of terrible conflict, but of defeat and falls, through the discipline of repentance, to holiness and the blessedness which comes with it. The Red Cross Knight, St. George of England, whose name Georgos, the Ploughman, is dwelt upon, apparently to suggest that from the commonalty, the "tall clownish young men," were raised up the great champions of the Truth—though sorely troubled by the wiles of Duessa, by the craft of the arch-sorcerer, by the force and pride of the great powers of the Apocalyptic Beast and Dragon, finally overcomes them, and wins the deliverance of Una and her love.

The second book, *Of Temperance*, pursues the subject, and represents the internal conquests of self-mastery, the conquests of a man over his passions, his violence, his covetousness, his ambition, his despair, his sensuality. Sir Guyon, after conquering many foes of goodness, is the destroyer of the most perilous of them all, Acrasia, licentiousness, and her ensnaring Bower of Bliss. But after this, the thread at once of story and allegory, slender henceforth at the best, is neglected and often entirely lost. The third book, the *Legend of Chastity*, is a repetition of the ideas of the latter part of the second, with a heroine, Britomart, in place of the Knight of the previous book, Sir Guyon, and with a special glorification of the high-flown and romantic sentiments about purity, which were the poetic creed of the courtiers of Elizabeth, in flagrant and sometimes in tragic contrast to their practical conduct of life. The loose and ill-compacted nature of the plan becomes still more evident in the second instalment of the work. Even the special note of each particular virtue becomes more faint and indistinct. The one law to which

the poet feels bound is to have twelve cantos in each book; and to do this he is sometimes driven to what in later times has been called padding. One of the cantos of the third book is a genealogy of British kings from Geoffrey of Monmouth; one of the cantos of the *Legend of Friendship* is made up of an episode describing the marriage of the Thames and the Medway, with an elaborate catalogue of the English and Irish rivers, and the names of the sea-nymphs. In truth, he had exhausted his proper allegory, or he got tired of it. His poem became an elastic framework, into which he could fit whatever interested him and tempted him to composition. The gravity of the first books disappears. He passes into satire and caricature. We meet with Braggadochio and Trompart, with the discomfiture of Malecasta, with the conjugal troubles of Malbecco and Helenore, with the imitation from Ariosto of the Squire of Dames. He puts into verse a poetical physiology of the human body; he translates Lucretius, and speculates on the origin of human souls; he speculates, too, on social justice, and composes an argumentative refutation of the Anabaptist theories of right and equality among men. As the poem proceeds, he seems to feel himself more free to introduce what he pleases. Allusions to real men and events are sometimes clear, at other times evident, though they have now ceased to be intelligible to us. His disgust and resentment breaks out at the ways of the Court in sarcastic moralizing, or in pictures of dark and repulsive imagery. The characters and pictures of his friends furnish material for his poem; he does not mind touching on the misadventures of Ralegh, and even of Lord Grey, with sly humour or a word of candid advice. He becomes bolder in the distinct introduction of contemporary history. The defeat of Dues-

sa was only figuratively shown in the first portion; in the second the subject is resumed. As Elizabeth is the "one form of many names," Gloriana, Belphœbe, Britomart, Mercilla, so, "under feigned colours shading a true case," he deals with her rival. Mary seems at one time the false Florimel, the creature of enchantment, stirring up strife, and fought for by the foolish knights whom she deceives, Blandamour and Paridell, the counterparts of Norfolk and the intriguers of 1571. At another, she is the fierce Amazonian queen, Radegund, by whom, for a moment, even Arthegal is brought into disgraceful thraldom, till Britomart, whom he has once fought against, delivers him. And, finally, the fate of the typical Duessa is that of the real Mary Queen of Scots described in great detail—a liberty in dealing with great affairs of State for which James of Scotland actually desired that he should be tried and punished.[1] So Philip II. is at one time the Soldan, at another the Spanish monster Geryoneo, at another the fosterer of Catholic intrigues in France and Ireland, Grantorto. But real names are also introduced with scarcely any disguise: Guizor, and Burbon, the Knight who throws away his shield, Henry IV., and his Lady Flourdelis, the Lady Belge, and her seventeen sons: the Lady Irena, whom Arthegal delivers. The overthrow of the Armada, the English war in the Low Countries, the apostasy of Henry IV., the deliverance of Ireland from the "great wrong" of Desmond's rebellion, the giant Grantorto, form, under more or less transparent allegory, great part of the *Legend of Justice*. Nay, Spenser's long-fostered revenge on the lady who had once scorned him, the *Rosalind* of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, the *Mirabella* of the *Faerie Queene*, and his own late and happy marriage in

[1] Hales' *Life*, Globe Edition.

Ireland, are also brought in to supply materials for the *Legend of Courtesy*. So multifarious is the poem, full of all that he thought, or observed, or felt; a receptacle, without much care to avoid repetition, or to prune, correct, and condense, for all the abundance of his ideas, as they welled forth in his mind day by day. It is really a collection of separate tales and allegories, as much as the *Arabian Nights*, or as its counterpart and rival of our own century, the *Idylls of the King*. As a whole, it is confusing: but we need not treat it as a whole. Its continued interest soon breaks down. But it is probably best that Spenser gave his mind the vague freedom which suited it, and that he did not make efforts to tie himself down to his pre-arranged but too ambitious plan. We can hardly lose our way in it, for there is no way to lose. It is a wilderness in which we are left to wander. But there may be interest and pleasure in a wilderness, if we are prepared for the wandering.

Still, the complexity, or, rather, the uncared-for and clumsy arrangement of the poem is matter which disturbs a reader's satisfaction, till he gets accustomed to the poet's way, and resigns himself to it. It is a heroic poem, in which the heroine, who gives her name to it, never appears: a story, of which the basis and starting-point is whimsically withheld for disclosure in the last book, which was never written. If Ariosto's jumps and transitions are more audacious, Spenser's intricacy is more puzzling. Adventures begin which have no finish. Actors in them drop from the clouds, claim an interest, and we ask in vain what has become of them. A vein of what are manifestly contemporary allusions breaks across the moral drift of the allegory, with an apparently distinct yet obscured meaning, and one of which it is the work of dissertations

to find the key. The passion of the age was for ingenious riddling in morality as in love. And in Spenser's allegories we are not seldom at a loss to make out what and how much was really intended, amid a maze of over-strained analogies and over-subtle conceits, and attempts to hinder a too close and dangerous identification.

Indeed, Spenser's mode of allegory, which was historical as well as moral, and contains a good deal of history, if we knew it, often seems devised to throw curious readers off the scent. It was purposely baffling and hazy. A characteristic trait was singled out. A name was transposed in anagram, like Irena, or distorted, as if by imperfect pronunciation, like Burbon and Arthegal, or invented to express a quality, like Una, or Gloriana, or Corceca, or Fradubio, or adopted with no particular reason from the *Morte d'Arthur*, or any other old literature. The personage is introduced with some feature, or amid circumstances which seem for a moment to fix the meaning. But when we look to the sequence of history being kept up in the sequence of the story, we find ourselves thrown out. A character which fits one person puts on the marks of another: a likeness which we identify with one real person passes into the likeness of some one else. The real, in person, incident, institution, shades off in the ideal; after showing itself by plain tokens, it turns aside out of its actual path of fact, and ends, as the poet thinks it ought to end, in victory or defeat, glory or failure. Prince Arthur passes from Leicester to Sidney, and then back again to Leicester. There are double or treble allegories; Elizabeth is Gloriana, Belphœbe, Britomart, Mercilla, perhaps Amoret; her rival is Duessa, the false Florimel, probably the fierce temptress, the Amazon Radegund. Thus, what for a moment was clear and definite, fades like

the changing fringe of a dispersing cloud. The character which we identified disappears in other scenes and adventures, where we lose sight of all that identified it. A complete transformation destroys the likeness which was begun. There is an intentional dislocation of the parts of the story, when they might make it imprudently close in its reflection of facts or resemblance in portraiture. A feature is shown, a manifest allusion made, and then the poet starts off in other directions, to confuse and perplex all attempts at interpretation, which might be too particular and too certain. This was, no doubt, merely according to the fashion of the time, and the habits of mind into which the poet had grown. But there were often reasons for it, in an age so suspicious, and so dangerous to those who meddled with high matters of state.

2. Another feature which is on the surface of the *Faerie Queene*, and which will displease a reader who has been trained to value what is natural and genuine, is its affectation of the language and the customs of life belonging to an age which is not its own. It is, indeed, redolent of the present: but it is almost avowedly an imitation of what was current in the days of Chaucer: of what were supposed to be the words, and the social ideas and conditions, of the age of chivalry. He looked back to the fashions and ideas of the Middle Ages, as Pindar sought his materials in the legends and customs of the Homeric times, and created a revival of the spirit of the age of the Heroes in an age of tyrants and incipient democracies.[1] The age of chivalry, in Spenser's day far distant, had yet left two survivals, one real, the other formal. The real survival was the spirit of armed adventure, which was never stronger or more stirring than in the gallants and

[1] *Vid.* Keble, *Prælect. Acad.*, xxiv. p. 479, 480.

discoverers of Elizabeth's reign, the captains of the English companies in the Low Countries, the audacious sailors who explored unknown oceans and plundered the Spaniards, the scholars and gentlemen equally ready for work on sea and land, like Ralegh and Sir Richard Grenville, of the "Revenge." The formal survival was the fashion of keeping up the trappings of knightly times, as we keep up Judges' wigs, court dresses, and Lord Mayors' shows. In actual life it was seen in pageants and ceremonies, in the yet lingering parade of jousts and tournaments, in the knightly accoutrements still worn in the days of the bullet and the cannon-ball. In the apparatus of the poet, as all were shepherds when he wanted to represent the life of peace and letters, so all were knights, or the foes and victims of knights, when his theme was action and enterprise. It was the custom that the Muse masked, to use Spenser's word, under these disguises; and this conventional masquerade of pastoral poetry or knight-errantry was the form under which the poetical school that preceded the dramatists naturally expressed their ideas. It seems to us odd that peaceful sheepcots and love-sick swains should stand for the world of the Tudors and Guises, or that its cunning state-craft and relentless cruelty should be represented by the generous follies of an imaginary chivalry. But it was the fashion which Spenser found, and he accepted it. His genius was not of that sort which breaks out from trammels, but of that which makes the best of what it finds. And whatever we may think of the fashion, at least he gave it new interest and splendour by the spirit with which he threw himself into it.

The condition which he took as the groundwork of his poetical fabric suggested the character of his language.

Chaucer was then the "God of English poetry;" his was the one name which filled a place apart in the history of English verse. Spenser was a student of Chaucer, and borrowed as he judged fit, not only from his vocabulary, but from his grammatical precedents and analogies, with the object of giving an appropriate colouring to what was to be raised as far as possible above familiar life. Besides this, the language was still in such an unsettled state that, from a man with resources like Spenser's, it naturally invited attempts to enrich and colour it, to increase its flexibility and power. The liberty of reviving old forms, of adopting from the language of the street and market homely but expressive words or combinations, of following in the track of convenient constructions, of venturing on new and bold phrases, was rightly greater in his time than at a later stage of the language. Many of his words, either invented or preserved, are happy additions; some which have not taken root in the language, we may regret. But it was a liberty which he abused. He was extravagant and unrestrained in his experiments on language. And they were made not merely to preserve or to invent a good expression. On his own authority he cuts down, or he alters a word, or he adopts a mere corrupt pronunciation, to suit a place in his metre, or because he wants a rime. Precedents, as Mr. Guest has said, may no doubt be found for each one of these sacrifices to the necessities of metre or rime, in some one or other living dialectic usage, or even in printed books — "*blend*" for "*blind*," "*misleeke*" for "*mislike*," "*kest*" for "*cast*," "*cherry*" for "*cherish*," "*vilde*" for "*vile*," or even "*wawes*" for "*waves*," because it has to rime to "*jaws*." But when they are profusely used as they are in Spenser, they argue, as critics of his own age, such as Putten-

ham, remarked, either want of trouble, or want of resource. In his impatience he is reckless in making a word which he wants—"fortunize," "mercified," "unblindfold," "relive"—he is reckless in making one word do the duty of another, interchanging actives and passives, transferring epithets from their proper subjects. The "humbled grass," is the grass on which a man lies humbled: the "lamentable eye" is the eye which laments. "His treatment of words," says Mr. Craik, "on such occasions"—occasions of difficulty to his verse—"is like nothing that ever was seen, unless it might be Hercules breaking the back of the Nemean lion. He gives them any sense and any shape that the case may demand. Sometimes he merely alters a letter or two; sometimes he twists off the head or the tail of the unfortunate vocable altogether. But this fearless, lordly, truly royal style makes one only feel the more how easily, if he chose, he could avoid the necessity of having recourse to such outrages."

His own generation felt his license to be extreme. "In affecting the ancients," said Ben Jonson, "he writ no language." Daniel writes sarcastically, soon after the *Faerie Queene* appeared, of those who

> "Sing of knights and Palladines,
> In aged accents and untimely words."

And to us, though students of the language must always find interest in the storehouse of ancient or invented language to be found in Spenser, this mixture of what is obsolete or capriciously new is a bar, and not an unreasonable one, to a frank welcome at first acquaintance. Fuller remarks, with some slyness, that "the many Chaucerisms used (for I will not say, affected) by him are thought by the ignorant to be blemishes, known by the learned to be

beauties, in his book; which notwithstanding had been more saleable, if more conformed to our modern language." The grotesque, though it has its place as one of the instruments of poetical effect, is a dangerous element to handle. Spenser's age was very insensible to the presence and the dangers of the grotesque, and he was not before his time in feeling what was unpleasing in incongruous mixtures. Strong in the abundant but unsifted learning of his day, a style of learning which in his case was strangely inaccurate, he not only mixed the past with the present, fairyland with politics, mythology with the most serious Christian ideas, but he often mixed together the very features which are most discordant, in the colours, forms, and methods by which he sought to produce the effect of his pictures.

3. Another source of annoyance and disappointment is found in the imperfections and inconsistencies of the poet's standard of what is becoming to say and to write about. Exaggeration, diffuseness, prolixity, were the literary diseases of the age; an age of great excitement and hope, which had suddenly discovered its wealth and its powers, but not the rules of true economy in using them. With the classics open before it, and alive to much of the grandeur of their teaching, it was almost blind to the spirit of self-restraint, proportion, and simplicity which governed the great models. It was left to a later age to discern these and appreciate them. This unresisted proneness to exaggeration produced the extravagance and the horrors of the Elizabethan Drama, full, as it was, nevertheless, of insight and originality. It only too naturally led the earlier Spenser astray. What Dryden, in one of his interesting critical prefaces says of himself, is true of Spenser: "Thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast

upon me, that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject; to run them into verse, or to give them the other harmony of prose." There was in Spenser a facility for turning to account all material, original or borrowed, an incontinence of the descriptive faculty, which was ever ready to exercise itself on any object, the most unfitting and loathsome, as on the noblest, the purest, or the most beautiful. There are pictures in him which seem meant to turn our stomach. Worse than that, there are pictures which for a time rank the poet of *Holiness* or *Temperance* with the painters who used their great art to represent at once the most sacred and holiest forms, and also scenes which few people now like to look upon in company — scenes and descriptions which may, perhaps from the habits of the time, have been playfully and innocently produced, but which it is certainly not easy to dwell upon innocently now. And apart from these serious faults, there is continually haunting us, amid incontestable richness, vigour, and beauty, a sense that the work is overdone. Spenser certainly did not want for humour and an eye for the ridiculous. There is no want in him, either, of that power of epigrammatic terseness, which, in spite of its diffuseness, his age valued and cultivated. But when he gets on a story or a scene, he never knows where to stop. His duels go on stanza after stanza till there is no sound part left in either champion. His palaces, landscapes, pageants, feasts, are taken to pieces in all their parts, and all these parts are likened to some other things. "His abundance," says Mr. Craik, "is often oppressive; *it is like wading among unmown grass.*" And he drowns us in words. His abundant and incongruous adjectives may sometimes, perhaps, startle us unfairly, because their associations and suggestions have quite altered; but very often they are the

idle outpouring of an unrestrained affluence of language. The impression remains that he wants a due perception of the absurd, the unnatural, the unnecessary; that he does not care if he makes us smile, or does not know how to help it, when he tries to make us admire or sympathize.

Under this head comes a feature which the "charity of history" may lead us to treat as simple exaggeration, but which often suggests something less pardonable, in the great characters, political or literary, of Elizabeth's reign. This was the gross, shameless, lying flattery paid to the Queen. There is really nothing like it in history. It is unique as a phenomenon that proud, able, free-spoken men, with all their high instincts of what was noble and true, with all their admiration of the Queen's high qualities, should have offered it, even as an unmeaning custom; and that a proud and free-spoken people should not, in the very genuineness of their pride in her and their loyalty, have received it with shouts of derision and disgust. The flattery of Roman emperors and Roman Popes, if as extravagant, was not so personal. Even Louis XIV. was not celebrated in his dreary old age as a model of ideal beauty and a paragon of romantic perfection. It was no worship of a secluded and distant object of loyalty: the men who thus flattered knew perfectly well, often by painful experience, what Elizabeth was: able, indeed, high-spirited, successful, but ungrateful to her servants, capricious, vain, ill-tempered, unjust, and in her old age ugly. And yet the Gloriana of the *Faerie Queene*, the Empress of all nobleness—Belphœbe, the Princess of all sweetness and beauty—Britomart, the armed votaress of all purity—Mercilla, the lady of all compassion and grace—were but the reflections of the language in which it was then agreed upon by

some of the greatest of Englishmen to speak, and to be supposed to think, of the Queen.

II. But when all these faults have been admitted, faults of design and faults of execution—and when it is admitted, further, that there is a general want of reality, substance, distinctness, and strength in the personages of the poem—that, compared with the contemporary drama, Spenser's knights and ladies and villains are thin and ghost-like, and that, as Daniel says, he

"Paints shadows in imaginary lines—"

it yet remains that our greatest poets since his day have loved him and delighted in him. He had Shakespere's praise. Cowley was made a poet by reading him. Dryden calls Milton "the poetical son of Spenser:" "Milton," he writes, "has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original." Dryden's own homage to him is frequent and generous. Pope found as much pleasure in the *Faerie Queene* in his later years as he had found in reading it when he was twelve years old: and what Milton, Dryden, and Pope admired, Wordsworth too found full of nobleness, purity, and sweetness. What is it that gives the *Faerie Queene* its hold on those who appreciate the richness and music of English language, and who in temper and moral standard are quick to respond to English manliness and tenderness? The spell is to be found mainly in three things—(1) in the quaint stateliness of Spenser's imaginary world and its representatives; (2) in the beauty and melody of his numbers, the abundance and grace of his poetic ornaments, in the recurring and haunting rhythm of numberless passages, in which thought and imagery and language and melody are interwoven in one perfect and satisfying harmony; and (3) in the intrinsic nobleness of

his general aim, his conception of human life, at once so exacting and so indulgent, his high ethical principles and ideals, his unfeigned honour for all that is pure and brave and unselfish and tender, his generous estimate of what is due from man to man of service, affection, and fidelity. His fictions embodied truths of character which, with all their shadowy incompleteness, were too real and too beautiful to lose their charm with time.

1. Spenser accepted from his age the quaint stateliness which is characteristic of his poem. His poetry is not simple and direct like that of the Greeks. It has not the exquisite finish and felicity of the best of the Latins. It has not the massive grandeur, the depth, the freedom, the shades and subtle complexities of feeling and motive, which the English dramatists found by going straight to nature. It has the stateliness of highly artificial conditions of society, of the Court, the pageant, the tournament, as opposed to the majesty of the great events in human life and history, its real vicissitudes, its catastrophes, its tragedies, its revolutions, its sins. Throughout the prolonged crisis of Elizabeth's reign, her gay and dashing courtiers, and even her serious masters of affairs, persisted in pretending to look on the world in which they lived as if through the side-scenes of a masque, and relieved against the background of a stage-curtain. Human life, in those days, counted for little; fortune, honour, national existence hung in the balance; the game was one in which the heads of kings and queens and great statesmen were the stakes —yet the players could not get out of their stiff and constrained costume, out of their artificial and fantastic figments of thought, out of their conceits and affectations of language. They carried it, with all their sagacity, with all their intensity of purpose, to the council-board and the

judgment-seat. They carried it to the scaffold. The conventional supposition was that at the Court, though every one knew better, all was perpetual sunshine, perpetual holiday, perpetual triumph, perpetual love-making. It was the happy reign of the good and wise and lovely. It was the discomfiture of the base, the faithless, the wicked, the traitors. This is what is reflected in Spenser's poem; at once, its stateliness, for there was no want of grandeur and magnificence in the public scene ever before Spenser's imagination; and its quaintness, because the whole outward apparatus of representation was borrowed from what was past, or from what did not exist, and implied surrounding circumstances in ludicrous contrast with fact, and men taught themselves to speak in character, and prided themselves on keeping it up by substituting for the ordinary language of life and emotion a cumbrous and involved indirectness of speech.

And yet that quaint stateliness is not without its attractions. We have indeed to fit ourselves for it. But when we have submitted to its demands on our imagination, it carries us along as much as the fictions of the stage. The splendours of the artificial are not the splendours of the natural; yet the artificial has its splendours, which impress and captivate and repay. The grandeur of Spenser's poem is a grandeur like that of a great spectacle, a great array of the forces of a nation, a great series of military effects, a great ceremonial assemblage of all that is highest and most eminent in a country, a coronation, a royal marriage, a triumph, a funeral. So, though Spenser's knights and ladies do what no men ever could do, and speak what no man ever spoke, the procession rolls forward with a pomp which never forgets itself, and with an inexhaustible succession of circumstance, fantasy, and incident. Nor is

it always solemn and high-pitched. Its gravity is relieved from time to time with the ridiculous figure or character, the ludicrous incident, the jests and antics of the buffoon. It has been said that Spenser never smiles. He not only smiles, with amusement or sly irony; he wrote what he must have laughed at as he wrote, and meant us to laugh at. He did not describe with a grave face the terrors and misadventures of the boaster Braggadochio and his Squire, whether or not a caricature of the Duke of Alençon and his "gentleman," the "petit singe," Simier. He did not write with a grave face the Irish row about the false Florimel (IV. 5):

"Then unto Satyran she was adjudged,
Who was right glad to gaine so goodly meed:
But Blandamour thereat full greatly grudged,
And litle prays'd his labours evill speed,
That for to winne the saddle lost the steed.
Ne lesse thereat did Paridell complaine,
And thought t' appeale from that which was decreed
To single combat with Sir Satyrane:
Thereto him Atè stird, new discord to maintaine.

"And eke, with these, full many other Knights
She through her wicked working did incense
Her to demaund and chalenge as their rights,
Deserved for their porils recompense.
Amongst the rest, with boastfull vaine pretense,
Stept Braggadochio forth, and as his thrall
Her claym'd, by him in battell wonne long sens:
Whereto her selfe he did to witnesse call:
Who, being askt, accordingly confessed all.

"Thereat exceeding wroth was Satyran;
And wroth with Satyran was Blandamour;
And wroth with Blandamour was Erivan;
And at them both Sir Paridell did loure.

So all together stird up strifull stoure,
And readie were new battell to darraine.
Each one profest to be her paramoure,
And vow'd with speare and shield it to maintaine;
Ne Judges powre, ne reasons rule, mote them restraine."

Nor the behaviour of the "rascal many" at the sight of the dead Dragon (I. 12):

"And after all the raskall many ran,
Heaped together in rude rablement,
To see the face of that victorious man,
Whom all admired as from heaven sent,
And gazd upon with gaping wonderment;
But when they came where that dead Dragon lay,
Stretcht on the ground in monstrous large extent,
The sight with ydle feare did them dismay,
Ne durst approch him nigh to touch, or once assay.

"Some feard, and fledd; some feard, and well it fayned
One, that would wiser seeme then all the rest,
Warnd him not touch, for yet perhaps remaynd
Some lingring life within his hollow brest,
Or in his wombe might lurke some hidden nest
Of many Dragonettes, his fruitfull seede:
Another saide, that in his eyes did rest
Yet sparckling fyre, and badd thereof take heed;
Another said, he saw him move his eyes indeed.

"One mother, whenas her foolehardy chyld
Did come too neare, and with his talants play,
Halfe dead through feare, her litle babe revyld,
And to her gossibs gan in counsell say;
'How can I tell, but that his talants may
Yet scratch my sonne, or rend his tender hand?'
So diversly them selves in vaine they fray;
Whiles some more bold to measure him nigh stand,
To prove how many acres he did spred of land."

And his humour is not the less real that it affects serious argument, in the excuse which he urges for his fairy tales (II. 1):

"Right well I wote, most mighty Soveraine,
That all this famous antique history
Of some th' aboundance of an ydle braine
Will judged be, and painted forgery,
Rather then matter of just memory;
Sith none that breatheth living aire dees know
Where is that happy land of Faery,
Which I so much doe vaunt, yet no where show,
But vouch antiquities, which no body can know.

"But let that man with better sence advize,
That of the world least part to us is red;
And daily how through hardy enterprize
Many great Regions are discovered,
Which to late age were never mentioned.
Who ever heard of th' Indian Peru?
Or who in venturous vessell measured
The Amazon huge river, now found trew?
Or fruitfullest Virginia who did ever vew?

"Yet all these were, when no man did them know,
Yet have from wisest ages hidden beene;
And later times thinges more unknowne shall show.
Why then should witlesse man so much misweene,
That nothing is but that which he hath seene?
What if within the Moones fayre shining spheare,
What if in every other starre unseene
Of other worldes he happily should heare,
He wonder would much more; yet such to some appeare."

The general effect is almost always lively and rich: all is buoyant and full of movement. That it is also odd, that we see strange costumes and hear a language often formal and obsolete, that we are asked to take for granted

some very unaccustomed supposition and extravagant assumption, does not trouble us more than the usages and sights, so strange to ordinary civil life, of a camp, or a royal levée. All is in keeping, whatever may be the details of the pageant; they harmonize with the effect of the whole, like the gargoyles and quaint groups in a Gothic building harmonize with its general tone of majesty and subtle beauty;—nay, as ornaments, in themselves of bad taste, like much of the ornamentation of the Renaissance styles, yet find a not unpleasing place in compositions grandly and nobly designed:

"So discord oft in music makes the sweeter lay."

Indeed, it is curious how much of real variety is got out of a limited number of elements and situations. The spectacle, though consisting only of knights, ladies, dwarfs, pagans, "salvage men," enchanters, and monsters, and other well-worn machinery of the books of chivalry, is ever new, full of vigour and fresh images, even if, as sometimes happens, it repeats itself. There is a majestic unconsciousness of all violations of probability, and of the strangeness of the combinations which it unrolls before us.

2. But there is not only stateliness: there is sweetness and beauty. Spenser's perception of beauty of all kinds was singularly and characteristically quick and sympathetic. It was one of his great gifts; perhaps the most special and unstinted. Except Shakespere, who had it with other and greater gifts, no one in that time approached to Spenser, in feeling the presence of that commanding and mysterious idea, compounded of so many things, yet of which the true secret escapes us still, to which we give the name of beauty. A beautiful scene, a beautiful person, a beautiful poem, a mind and character with that com-

bination of charms, which, for want of another word, we call by that half-spiritual, half-material word "beautiful," at once set his imagination at work to respond to it and reflect it. His means of reflecting it were as abundant as his sense of it was keen. They were only too abundant. They often betrayed him by their affluence and wonderful readiness to meet his call. Say what we will, and a great deal may be said, of his lavish profusion, his heady and uncontrolled excess, in the richness of picture and imagery in which he indulges—still, there it lies before us, like the most gorgeous of summer gardens, in the glory and brilliancy of its varied blooms, in the wonder of its strange forms of life, in the changefulness of its exquisite and delicious scents. No one who cares for poetic beauty can be insensible to it. He may criticise it. He may have too much of it. He may prefer something more severe and chastened. He may observe on the waste of wealth and power. He may blame the prodigal expense of language, and the long spaces which the poet takes up to produce his effect. He may often dislike or distrust the moral aspect of the poet's impartial sensitiveness to all outward beauty — the impartiality which makes him throw all his strength into his pictures of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss, the Garden of Adonis, and Busirane's Masque of Cupid. But there is no gainsaying the beauty which never fails and disappoints, open the poem where you will. There is no gainsaying its variety, often so unexpected and novel. Face to face with the Epicurean idea of beauty and pleasure is the counter-charm of purity, truth, and duty. Many poets have done justice to each one separately. Few have shown, with such equal power, why it is that both have their roots in man's divided nature, and struggle, as it were, for the mastery. Which can be said

to be the most exquisite in all beauty of imagination, of refined language, of faultless and matchless melody, of these two passages, in which the same image is used for the most opposite purposes;—first, in that song of temptation, the sweetest note in that description of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss, which, as a picture of the spells of pleasure, has never been surpassed; and next, to represent that stainless and glorious purity which is the professed object of his admiration and homage. In both the beauty of the rose furnishes the theme of the poet's treatment. In the first, it is the "lovely lay" which meets the knight of Temperance amid the voluptuousness which he is come to assail and punish:

"The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay:
Ah! see, whoso fayre thing doest faine to see,
In springing flowre the image of thy day.
Ah! see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee
Doth first peepe foorth with bashfull modestee,
That fairer seemes the lesse ye see her may.
Lo! see soone after how more bold and free
Her bared bosome she doth broad display;
Lo! see soone after how she fades and falls away.

"So passeth, in the passing of a day,
Of mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flowre;
Ne more doth florish after first decay,
That earst was sought to deck both bed and bowre
Of many a lady, and many a Paramowre.
Gather therefore the Rose whilest yet is prime,
For soone comes age that will her pride deflowre;
Gather the Rose of love whilest yet is time,
Whilest loving thou mayst loved be with equall crime."

In the other, it images the power of the will—that power over circumstance and the storms of passion, to com

mand obedience to reason and the moral law, which Milton sung so magnificently in *Comus:*

"That daintie Rose, the daughter of her Morne,
More deare then life she tendered, whose flowre
The girlond of her honour did adorne:
Ne suffred she the Middayes scorching powre,
Ne the sharp Northerne wind thereon to showre;
But lapped up her silken leaves most chayre,
When so the froward skye began to lowre;
But, soone as calmed was the christall ayre,
She did it fayre dispred and let to florish fayre.

"Eternall God, in his almightie powre,
To make ensample of his heavenly grace,
In Paradize whylome did plant this flowre;
Whence he it fetcht out of her native place,
And did in stocke of earthly flesh enrace,
That mortall men her glory should admyre.
In gentle Ladies breste, and bounteous race
Of woman kind, it fayrest Flowre doth spyre,
And beareth fruit of honour and all chast desyre.

"Fayre ympes of beautie, whose bright shining beames
Adorne the worlde with like to heavenly light,
And to your willes both royalties and Reames
Subdew, through conquest of your wondrous might,
With this fayre flowre your goodly girlonds dight
Of chastity and vertue virginall,
That shall embellish more your beautie bright,
And crowne your heades with heavenly coronall,
Such as the Angels weare before God's tribunall!"

This sense of beauty and command of beautiful expression is not seen only in the sweetness of which both these passages are examples. Its range is wide. Spenser had in his nature, besides sweetness, his full proportion of the stern and high manliness of his generation; indeed, he was not without its severity, its hardness, its unconsidering

and cruel harshness, its contemptuous indifference to suffering and misery when on the wrong side. Noble and heroic ideals captivate him by their attractions. He kindles naturally and genuinely at what proves and draws out men's courage, their self-command, their self-sacrifice. He sympathizes as profoundly with the strangeness of their condition, with the sad surprises in their history and fate, as he gives himself up with little restraint to what is charming and even intoxicating in it. He can moralize with the best in terse and deep-reaching apophthegms of melancholy or even despairing experience. He can appreciate the mysterious depths and awful outlines of theology —of what our own age can see nothing in, but a dry and scholastic dogmatism. His great contemporaries were—more, perhaps, than the men of any age—many-sided. He shared their nature; and he used all that he had of sensitiveness and of imaginative and creative power, in bringing out its manifold aspects, and sometimes contradictory feelings and aims. Not that beauty, even varied beauty, is the uninterrupted attribute of his work. It alternates with much that no indulgence can call beautiful. It passes but too easily into what is commonplace, or forced, or unnatural, or extravagant, or careless and poor, or really coarse and bad. He was a negligent corrector. He only at times gave himself the trouble to condense and concentrate. But for all this, the *Faerie Queene* glows and is ablaze with beauty; and that beauty is so rich, so real, and so uncommon, that for its sake the severest readers of Spenser have pardoned much that is discordant with it—much that in the reading has wasted their time and disappointed them.

There is one portion of the beauty of the *Faerie Queene* which in its perfection and fulness had never yet been

reached in English poetry. This was the music and melody of his verse. It was this wonderful, almost unfailing sweetness of numbers which probably as much as anything set the *Faerie Queene* at once above all contemporary poetry. The English language is really a musical one, and, say what people will, the English ear is very susceptible to the infinite delicacy and suggestiveness of musical rhythm and cadence. Spenser found the secret of it. The art has had many and consummate masters since, as different in their melody as in their thoughts from Spenser. And others at the time, Shakespere pre-eminently, heard, only a little later, the same grandeur and the same subtle beauty in the sounds of their mother-tongue, only waiting the artist's skill to be combined and harmonized into strains of mysterious fascination. But Spenser was the first to show that he had acquired a command over what had hitherto been heard only in exquisite fragments, passing too soon into roughness and confusion. It would be too much to say that his cunning never fails, that his ear is never dull or off its guard. But when the length and magnitude of the composition are considered, with the restraints imposed by the new nine-line stanza, however convenient it may have been, the vigour, the invention, the volume and rush of language, and the keenness and truth of ear amid its diversified tasks, are indeed admirable which could keep up so prolonged and so majestic a stream of original and varied poetical melody. If his stanzas are monotonous, it is with the grand monotony of the sea-shore, where billow follows billow, each swelling diversely, and broken into different curves and waves upon its mounting surface, till at last it falls over, and spreads and rushes up in a last long line of foam upon the beach.

3. But all this is but the outside shell and the fancy

framework in which the substance of the poem is enclosed. Its substance is the poet's philosophy of life. It shadows forth, in type and parable, his ideal of the perfection of the human character, with its special features, its trials, its achievements. There were two accepted forms in poetry in which this had been done by poets. One was under the image of warfare; the other was under the image of a journey or voyage. Spenser chose the former, as Dante and Bunyan chose the latter. Spenser looks on the scene of the world as a continual battle-field. It was such, in fact, to his experience in Ireland, testing the mettle of character, its loyalty, its sincerity, its endurance. His picture of character is by no means painted with sentimental tenderness. He portrays it in the rough work of the struggle and the toil, always hardly tested by trial, often overmatched, deceived, defeated, and even delivered by its own default to disgrace and captivity. He had full before his eyes what abounded in the society of his day, often in its noblest representatives—the strange perplexing mixture of the purer with the baser elements, in the high-tempered and aspiring activity of his time. But it was an ideal of character which had in it high aims and serious purposes, which was armed with fortitude and strength, which could recover itself after failure and defeat.

The unity of a story, or an allegory—that chain and backbone of continuous interest, implying a progress and leading up to a climax, which holds together the great poems of the world, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the *Æneid*, the *Commedia*, the *Paradise Lost*, the *Jerusalem Delivered*—this is wanting in the *Faerie Queene*. The unity is one of character and its ideal. That character of the completed man, raised above what is poor and low, and governed by noble tempers and pure principles, has in Spenser

two conspicuous elements. In the first place, it is based on manliness. In the personages which illustrate the different virtues—Holiness, Justice, Courtesy, and the rest—the distinction is not in nicely discriminated features or shades of expression, but in the trials and the occasions which call forth a particular action or effort: yet the manliness which is at the foundation of all that is good in them is a universal quality common to them all, rooted and imbedded in the governing idea or standard of moral character in the poem. It is not merely courage, it is not merely energy, it is not merely strength. It is the quality of soul which frankly accepts the conditions in human life, of labour, of obedience, of effort, of unequal success, which does not quarrel with them or evade them, but takes for granted with unquestioning alacrity that man is called —by his call to high aims and destiny—to a continual struggle with difficulty, with pain, with evil, and makes it the point of honour not to be dismayed or wearied out by them. It is a cheerful and serious willingness for hard work and endurance, as being inevitable and very bearable necessities, together with even a pleasure in encountering trials which put a man on his mettle, an enjoyment of the contest and the risk, even in play. It is the quality which seizes on the paramount idea of duty, as something which leaves a man no choice; which despises and breaks through the inferior considerations and motives — trouble, uncertainty, doubt, curiosity — which hang about and impede duty; which is impatient with the idleness and childishness of a life of mere amusement, or mere looking on, of continued and self-satisfied levity, of vacillation, of clever and ingenious trifling. Spenser's manliness is quite consistent with long pauses of rest, with intervals of change, with great craving for enjoyment—nay, with great lapses

from its ideal, with great mixtures of selfishness, with coarseness, with licentiousness, with injustice and inhumanity. It may be fatally diverted into bad channels; it may degenerate into a curse and scourge to the world. But it stands essentially distinct from the nature which shrinks from difficulty, which is appalled at effort, which has no thought of making an impression on things around it, which is content with passively receiving influences and distinguishing between emotions, which feels no call to exert itself, because it recognizes no aim valuable enough to rouse it, and no obligation strong enough to command it. In the character of his countrymen round him, in its highest and in its worst features, in its noble ambition, its daring enterprise, its self-devotion, as well as in its pride, its intolerance, its fierce self-will, its arrogant claims of superiority—moral, political, religious—Spenser saw the example of that strong and resolute manliness which, once set on great things, feared nothing—neither toil nor disaster nor danger—in their pursuit. Naturally and unconsciously, he laid it at the bottom of all his portraitures of noble and virtuous achievement in the *Faerie Queene*.

All Spenser's "virtues" spring from a root of manliness. Strength, simplicity of aim, elevation of spirit, courage are presupposed as their necessary conditions. But they have with him another condition as universal. They all grow and are nourished from the soil of love; the love of beauty, the love and service of fair women. This, of course, is a survival from the ages of chivalry, an inheritance bequeathed from the minstrels of France, Italy, and Germany to the rising poetry of Europe. Spenser's types of manhood are imperfect without the idea of an absorbing and overmastering passion of love; without a devotion, as to the principal and most worthy object of life, to

the service of a beautiful lady, and to winning her affection and grace. The influence of this view of life comes out in numberless ways. Love comes on the scene in shapes which are exquisitely beautiful, in all its purity, its tenderness, its unselfishness. But the claims of its all-ruling and irresistible might are also only too readily verified in the passions of men; in the follies of love, its entanglements, its mischiefs, its foulness. In one shape or another it meets us at every turn; it is never absent; it is the motive and stimulant of the whole activity of the poem. The picture of life held up before us is the literal rendering of Coleridge's lines:

> "All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
> Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
> Are all but ministers of Love,
> And feed his sacred flame."

We still think with Spenser about the paramount place of manliness, as the foundation of all worth in human character. We have ceased to think with him about the rightful supremacy of love, even in the imaginative conception of human life. We have ceased to recognize in it the public claims of almost a religion, which it has in Spenser. Love will ever play a great part in human life to the end of time. It will be an immense element in its happiness, perhaps a still greater one in its sorrows, its disasters, its tragedies. It is still an immense power in shaping and colouring it, both in fiction and reality; in the family, in the romance, in the fatalities and the prosaic ruin of vulgar fact. But the place given to it by Spenser is to our thoughts and feelings even ludicrously extravagant. An enormous change has taken place in the ideas of society on this point: it is one of the things which make a wide

chasm between centuries and generations which yet are of "the same passions," and have in temper, tradition, and language so much in common. The ages of the Courts of Love, whom Chaucer reflected, and whose ideas passed on through him to Spenser, are to us simply strange and abnormal states through which society has passed, to us beyond understanding and almost belief. The perpetual love-making, as one of the first duties and necessities of a noble life, the space which it must fill in the cares and thoughts of all gentle and high-reaching spirits, the unrestrained language of admiration and worship, the unrestrained yielding to the impulses, the anxieties, the pitiable despair and agonies of love, the subordination to it of all other pursuits and aims, the weeping and wailing and self-torturing which it involves, all this is so far apart from what we know of actual life, the life not merely of work and business, but the life of affection, and even of passion, that it makes the picture of which it is so necessary a part seem to us in the last degree unreal, unimaginable, grotesquely ridiculous. The quaint love sometimes found among children, so quickly kindled, so superficial, so violent in its language and absurd in its plans, is transferred with the utmost gravity to the serious proceedings of the wise and good. In the highest characters it is chastened, refined, purified: it appropriates, indeed, language due only to the divine, it almost simulates idolatry, yet it belongs to the best part of man's nature. But in the lower and average characters it is not so respectable; it is apt to pass into mere toying pastime and frivolous love of pleasure: it astonishes us often by the readiness with which it displays an affinity for the sensual and impure, the corrupting and debasing sides of the relations between the sexes. But however it appears, it is throughout a very

great affair, not merely with certain persons, or under certain circumstances, but with every one: it obtrudes itself in public, as the natural and recognized motive of plans of life and trials of strength; it is the great spur of enterprise, and its highest and most glorious reward. A world of which this is the law, is not even in fiction a world which we can conceive possible, or with which experience enables us to sympathize.

It is, of course, a purely artificial and conventional reading of the facts of human life and feeling. Such conventional readings and renderings belong in a measure to all art; but in its highest forms they are corrected, interpreted, supplemented by the presence of interspersed realities which every one recognizes. But it was one of Spenser's disadvantages, that two strong influences combined to entangle him in this fantastic and grotesque way of exhibiting the play and action of the emotions of love. This all-absorbing, all-embracing passion of love, at least this way of talking about it, was the fashion of the Court. Further, it was the fashion of poetry, which he inherited; and he was not the man to break through the strong bands of custom and authority. In very much he was an imitator. He took what he found; what was his own was his treatment of it. He did not trouble himself with inconsistencies, or see absurdities and incongruities. Habit and familiar language made it not strange that in the Court of Elizabeth the most high-flown sentiments should be in every one's mouth about the sublimities and refinements of love, while every one was busy with keen ambition and unscrupulous intrigue. The same blinding power kept him from seeing the monstrous contrast between the claims of the queen to be the ideal of womanly purity —claims recognized and echoed in ten thousand extrava-

gant compliments—and the real licentiousness common all round her among her favourites. All these strange contradictions, which surprise and shock us, Spenser assumed as natural. He built up his fictions on them, as the dramatist built on a basis which, though more nearly approaching to real life, yet differed widely from it in many of its preliminary and collateral suppositions; or as the novelist builds up his on a still closer adherence to facts and experience. In this matter Spenser appears with a kind of double self. At one time he speaks as one penetrated and inspired by the highest and purest ideas of love, and filled with aversion and scorn for the coarser forms of passion—for what is ensnaring and treacherous, as well as for what is odious and foul. At another, he puts forth all his power to bring out its most dangerous and even debasing aspects in highly coloured pictures, which none could paint without keen sympathy with what he takes such pains to make vivid and fascinating. The combination is not like anything modern, for both the elements are in Spenser so unquestionably and simply genuine. Our modern poets are, with all their variations in this respect, more homogeneous; and where one conception of love and beauty has taken hold of a man, the other does not easily come in. It is impossible to imagine Wordsworth dwelling with zest on visions and imagery, on which Spenser has lavished all his riches. There can be no doubt of Byron's real habits of thought and feeling on subjects of this kind, even when his language for the occasion is the chastest; we detect in it the mood of the moment, perhaps spontaneous, perhaps put on, but in contradiction to the whole movement of the man's true nature. But Spenser's words do not ring hollow. With a kind of unconsciousness and innocence, which we now find hard to understand, and which, perhaps, be-

longs to the early childhood or boyhood of a literature, he passes abruptly from one standard of thought and feeling to another; and is quite as much in earnest when he is singing the pure joys of chastened affections, as he is when he is writing with almost riotous luxuriance what we are at this day ashamed to read. Tardily, indeed, he appears to have acknowledged the contradiction. At the instance of two noble ladies of the Court, he composed two Hymns of Heavenly Love and Heavenly Beauty, to "retract" and "reform" two earlier ones composed in praise of earthly love and beauty. But, characteristically, he published the two pieces together, side by side in the same volume.

In the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser has brought out, not the image of the great Gloriana, but in its various aspects a form of character which was then just coming on the stage of the world, and which has played a great part in it since. As he has told us, he aimed at presenting before us, in the largest sense of the word, the English gentleman. It was, as a whole, a new character in the world. It had not really existed in the days of feudalism and chivalry, though features of it had appeared, and its descent was traced from those times: but they were too wild and coarse, too turbulent and disorderly, for a character which, however ready for adventure and battle, looked to peace, refinement, order, and law as the true conditions of its perfection. In the days of Elizabeth it was beginning to fill a large place in English life. It was formed amid the increasing cultivation of the nation, the increasing varieties of public service, the awakening responsibilities to duty and calls to self-command. Still making much of the prerogative of noble blood and family honours, it was something independent of nobility and beyond it. A no-

bleman might have in him the making of a gentleman: but it was the man himself of whom the gentleman was made. Great birth, even great capacity, were not enough; there must be added a new delicacy of conscience, a new appreciation of what is beautiful and worthy of honour, a new measure of the strength and nobleness of self-control, of devotion to unselfish interests. This idea of manhood, based not only on force and courage, but on truth, on refinement, on public spirit, on soberness and modesty, on consideration for others, was taking possession of the younger generation of Elizabeth's middle years. Of course the idea was very imperfectly apprehended, still more imperfectly realized. But it was something which on the same scale had not been yet, and which was to be the seed of something greater. It was to grow into those strong, simple, noble characters, pure in aim and devoted to duty, the Falklands, the Hampdens, who amid so much evil form such a remarkable feature in the Civil Wars, both on the Royalist and the Parliamentary sides. It was to grow into that high type of cultivated English nature, in the present and the last century, common both to its monarchical and its democratic embodiments, than which, with all its faults and defects, our western civilization has produced few things more admirable.

There were three distinguished men of that time, who one after another were Spenser's friends and patrons, and who were men in whom he saw realized his conceptions of human excellence and nobleness. They were Sir Philip Sidney, Lord Grey of Wilton, and Sir Walter Ralegh: and the *Faerie Queene* reflects, as in a variety of separate mirrors and spiritualized forms, the characteristics of these men and of such as they. It reflects their conflicts, their temptations, their weaknesses, the evils they fought with,

the superiority with which they towered over meaner and poorer natures. Sir Philip Sidney may be said to have been the first typical example in English society of the true gentleman. The charm which attracted men to him in life, the fame which he left behind him, are not to be accounted for simply by his accomplishments as a courtier, a poet, a lover of literature, a gallant soldier; above all this, there was something not found in the strong or brilliant men about him, a union and harmony of all high qualities differing from any of them separately, which gave a fire of its own to his literary enthusiasm, and a sweetness of its own to his courtesy. Spenser's admiration for that bright but short career was strong and lasting. Sidney was to him a verification of what he aspired to and imagined; a pledge that he was not dreaming, in portraying Prince Arthur's greatness of soul, the religious chivalry of the Red Cross Knight of Holiness, the manly purity and self-control of Sir Guyon. It is too much to say that in Prince Arthur, the hero of the poem, he always intended Sidney. In the first place, it is clear that under that character Spenser in places pays compliments to Leicester, in whose service he began life, and whose claims on his homage he ever recognized. Prince Arthur is certainly Leicester, in the historical passages in the Fifth Book relating to the war in the Low Countries in 1576: and no one can be meant but Leicester in the bold allusion in the First Book (ix. 17) to Elizabeth's supposed thoughts of marrying him. In the next place, allegory, like caricature, is not bound to make the same person and the same image always or perfectly coincide; and Spenser makes full use of this liberty. But when he was painting the picture of the Kingly Warrior, in whom was to be summed up in a magnificent unity the diversified graces of other men, and

who was to be ever ready to help and support his fellows in their hour of need, and in their conflict with evil, he certainly had before his mind the well-remembered lineaments of Sidney's high and generous nature. And he further dedicated a separate book, the last that he completed, to the celebration of Sidney's special "virtue" of Courtesy. The martial strain of the poem changes once more to the pastoral of the *Shepherd's Calendar* to describe Sidney's wooing of Frances Walsingham, the fair Pastorella; his conquests, by his sweetness and grace, over the churlishness of rivals; and his triumphant war against the monster spirit of ignorant and loud-tongued insolence, the "Blatant Beast" of religious, political, and social slander.

Again, in Lord Grey of Wilton, gentle by nature, but so stern in the hour of trial, called reluctantly to cope not only with anarchy, but with intrigue and disloyalty, finding selfishness and thanklessness everywhere, but facing all and doing his best with a heavy heart, and ending his days prematurely under detraction and disgrace, Spenser had before him a less complete character than Sidney, but yet one of grand and severe manliness, in which were conspicuous a religious hatred of disorder, and an unflinching sense of public duty. Spenser's admiration of him was sincere and earnest. In his case the allegory almost becomes history. Arthur, Lord Grey, is Sir Arthegal, the Knight of Justice. The story touches, apparently, on some passages of his career, when his dislike of the French marriage placed him in opposition to the Queen, and even for a time threw him with the supporters of Mary. But the adventures of Arthegal mainly preserve the memory of Lord Grey's terrible exploits against wrong and rebellion in Ireland. These exploits are represented in the doings

of the iron man Talus, his squire, with his destroying flail, swift, irresistible, inexorable; a figure, borrowed and altered, after Spenser's wont, from a Greek legend. His overthrow of insolent giants, his annihilation of swarming "rascal routs," idealize and glorify that unrelenting policy, of which, though condemned in England, Spenser continued to be the advocate. In the story of Arthegal, long separated by undeserved misfortunes from the favour of the armed lady, Britomart, the virgin champion of right, of whom he was so worthy, doomed in spite of his honours to an early death, and assailed on his return from his victorious service by the furious insults of envy and malice, Spenser portrays, almost without a veil, the hard fate of the unpopular patron whom he to the last defended and honoured.

Ralegh, his last protector, the Shepherd of the Ocean, to whose judgment he referred the work of his life, and under whose guidance he once more tried the quicksands of the Court, belonged to a different class from Sidney or Lord Grey; but of his own class he was the consummate and matchless example. He had not Sidney's fine enthusiasm and nobleness; he had not either Sidney's affectations. He had not Lord Grey's single-minded hatred of wrong. He was a man to whom his own interests were much; he was unscrupulous; he was ostentatious; he was not above stooping to mean, unmanly compliances with the humours of the Queen. But he was a man with a higher ideal than he attempted to follow. He saw, not without cynical scorn, through the shows and hollowness of the world. His intellect was of that clear and unembarrassed power which takes in as wholes things which other men take in part by part. And he was in its highest form a representative of that spirit of adventure into

the unknown and the wonderful of which Drake was the coarser and rougher example, realizing in serious earnest, on the sea and in the New World, the life of knight-errantry feigned in romances. With Ralegh, as with Lord Grey, Spenser comes to history; and he even seems to have been moved, as the poem went on, partly by pity, partly by amusement, to shadow forth in his imaginary world, not merely Ralegh's brilliant qualities, but also his frequent misadventures and mischances in his career at Court. Of all her favourites, Ralegh was the one whom his wayward mistress seemed to find most delight in tormenting. The offence which he gave by his secret marriage suggested the scenes describing the utter desolation of Prince Arthur's squire, Timias, at the jealous wrath of the Virgin Huntress, Belphœbe — scenes which, extravagant as they are, can hardly be called a caricature of Ralegh's real behaviour in the Tower in 1593. But Spenser is not satisfied with this one picture. In the last Book Timias appears again, the victim of slander and ill-usage, even after he had recovered Belphœbe's favour; he is baited like a wild bull, by mighty powers of malice, falsehood, and calumny; he is wounded by the tooth of the Blatant Beast; and after having been cured, not without difficulty, and not without significant indications on the part of the poet that his friend had need to restrain and chasten his unruly spirit, he is again delivered over to an ignominious captivity, and the insults of Disdain and Scorn.

"Then up he made him rise, and forward fare,
Led in a rope which both his hands did bynd;
Ne ought that foole for pity did him spare,
But with his whip, him following behynd,
Him often scourg'd, and forst his feete to fynd:

> And other-whiles with bitter mockes and mowes
> He would him scorne, that to his gentle mynd
> Was much more grievous then the others blowes:
> Words sharpely wound, but greatest griefe of scorning growes."

Spenser knew Ralegh only in the promise of his adventurous prime—so buoyant and fearless, so inexhaustible in project and resource, so unconquerable by checks and reverses. The gloomier portion of Ralegh's career was yet to come: its intrigues, its grand yet really gambling and unscrupulous enterprises, the long years of prison and authorship, and its not unfitting close, in the English statesman's death by the headsman—so tranquil though violent, so ceremoniously solemn, so composed, so dignified—such a contrast to all other forms of capital punishment, then or since.

Spenser has been compared to Pindar, and contrasted with Cervantes. The contrast, in point of humour, and the truth that humour implies, is favourable to the Spaniard: in point of moral earnestness and sense of poetic beauty, to the Englishman. What Cervantes only thought ridiculous, Spenser used, and not in vain, for a high purpose. The ideas of knight-errantry were really more absurd than Spenser allowed himself to see. But that idea of the gentleman which they suggested, that picture of human life as a scene of danger, trial, effort, defeat, recovery, which they lent themselves to image forth, was more worth insisting on, than the exposure of their folly and extravagance. There was nothing to be made of them, Cervantes thought; and nothing to be done, but to laugh off what they had left, among living Spaniards, of pompous imbecility or mistaken pretensions. Spenser, knowing that they must die, yet believed that out of them might be raised something nobler and more real—enterprise,

duty, resistance to evil, refinement, hatred of the mean and base. The energetic and high-reaching manhood which he saw in the remarkable personages round him he shadowed forth in the *Faerie Queene*. He idealized the excellences and the trials of this first generation of English gentlemen, as Bunyan afterwards idealized the piety, the conflicts, and the hopes of Puritan religion. Neither were universal types; neither were perfect. The manhood in which Spenser delights, with all that was admirable and attractive in it, had still much of boyish incompleteness and roughness: it had noble aims, it had generosity, it had loyalty, it had a very real reverence for purity and religion; but it was young in experience of a new world, it was wanting in self-mastery, it was often pedantic and self-conceited; it was an easier prey than it ought to have been to discreditable temptations. And there is a long interval between any of Spenser's superficial and thin conceptions of character, and such deep and subtle creations as Hamlet or Othello, just as Bunyan's strong but narrow ideals of religion, true as they are up to a certain point, fall short of the length and breadth and depth of what Christianity has made of man, and may yet make of him. But in the ways which Spenser chose, he will always delight and teach us. The spectacle of what is heroic and self-devoted, of honour for principle and truth, set before us with so much insight and sympathy, and combined with so much just and broad observation on those accidents and conditions of our mortal state which touch us all, will never appeal to English readers in vain, till we have learned a new language, and adopted new canons of art, of taste, and of morals. It is not merely that he has left imperishable images which have taken their place among the consecrated memorials of poetry and the house-

hold thoughts of all cultivated men. But he has permanently lifted the level of English poetry by a great and sustained effort of rich and varied art, in which one main purpose rules, loyalty to what is noble and pure, and in which this main purpose subordinates to itself every feature and every detail, and harmonizes some that by themselves seem least in keeping with it.

CHAPTER VI.

SECOND PART OF THE FAERIE QUEENE.—SPENSER'S LAST YEARS.

[1590–1599.]

THE publication of the *Faerie Queene* in 1590 had made the new poet of the *Shepherd's Calendar* a famous man. He was no longer merely the favourite of a knot of enthusiastic friends, and outside of them only recognized and valued at his true measure by such judges as Sidney and Ralegh. By the common voice of all the poets of his time he was now acknowledged as the first of living English poets. It is not easy for us, who live in these late times and are familiar with so many literary masterpieces, to realize the surprise of a first and novel achievement in literature; the effect on an age, long and eagerly seeking after poetical expression, of the appearance at last of a work of such power, richness, and finished art.

It can scarcely be doubted, I think, from the bitter sarcasms interspersed in his later poems, that Spenser expected more from his triumph than it brought him. It opened no way of advancement for him in England. He continued for a while in that most ungrateful and unsatisfactory employment, the service of the State in Ireland; and that he relinquished in 1593.[1] At the end of 1591 he was

[1] Who is *Edmondus Spenser, Prebendary of Effin* (Elphin)? in a list of arrears of first-fruits; Calendar of State Papers, *Ireland*, Dec.

again at Kilcolman. He had written and probably sent to Ralegh, though he did not publish it till 1595, the record already quoted of the last two years' events, *Colin Clout's come home again* — his visit, under Ralegh's guidance, to the Court, his thoughts and recollections of its great ladies, his generous criticisms on poets, the people and courtiers whom he had seen and heard of; how he had been dazzled, how he had been disenchanted, and how he was come home to his Irish mountains and streams and lakes, to enjoy their beauty, though in a "salvage" and "foreign" land; to find in this peaceful and tranquil retirement something far better than the heat of ambition and the intrigues of envious rivalries; and to contrast with the profanations of the name of love which had disgusted him in a dissolute society, the higher and purer ideal of it which he could honour and pursue in the simplicity of his country life.

And in Ireland the rejected adorer of the Rosalind of the *Shepherd's Calendar* found another and still more perfect Rosalind, who, though she was at first inclined to repeat the cruelty of the earlier one, in time relented, and received such a dower of poetic glory as few poets have bestowed upon their brides. It has always appeared strange that Spenser's passion for the first Rosalind should have been so lasting, that in his last pastoral, *Colin Clout's come home again*, written so late as 1591, and published after he was married, he should end his poem by reverting to this long-past love passage, defending her on the ground of her incomparable excellence and his own unworthiness, against the blame of friendly "shepherds,"

8, 1586, p. 222. Church preferments were under special circumstances allowed to be held by laymen. See the Queen's "Instructions," 1579; in Preface to Calendar of Carew MSS. 1589–1600, p. ci.

witnesses of the "languors of his too long dying," and angry with her hard-heartedness. It may be that, according to Spenser's way of making his masks and figures suggest but not fully express their antitypes,[1] Rosalind here bears the image of the real mistress of this time, the "country lass," the Elizabeth of the sonnets, who was, in fact, for a while as unkind as the earlier Rosalind. The history of this later wooing, its hopes and anguish, its varying currents, its final unexpected success, is the subject of a collection of Sonnets, which have the disadvantage of provoking comparison with the Sonnets of Shakespere. There is no want in them of grace and sweetness, and they ring true with genuine feeling and warm affection, though they have, of course, their share of the conceits then held proper for love poems. But they want the power and fire, as well as the perplexing mystery, of those of the greater master. His bride was also immortalized as a fourth among the three Graces, in a richly-painted passage in the last book of the *Faerie Queene*. But the most magnificent tribute to her is the great Wedding Ode, the *Epithalamion*, the finest composition of its kind, probably, in any language: so impetuous and unflagging, so orderly and yet so rapid in the onward march of its stately and varied stanzas; so passionate, so flashing with imaginative wealth, yet so refined and self-restrained. It was always easy for Spenser to open the floodgates of his inexhaustible fancy. With him,

> "The numbers flow as fast as spring doth rise."

But here he has thrown into his composition all his power

[1] "In these kind of historical allusions Spenser usually perplexes the subject: he leads you on, and then designedly misleads you."—Upton, quoted by Craik, iii. p. 92.

of concentration, of arrangement, of strong and harmonious government over thought and image, over language and measure and rhythm; and the result is unquestionably one of the grandest lyrics in English poetry. We have learned to think the subject unfit for such free poetical treatment; Spenser's age did not.

Of the lady of whom all this was said, and for whom all this was written, the family name has not been thought worth preserving. We know that by her Christian name she was a namesake of the great queen, and of Spenser's mother. She is called a country lass, which may mean anything; and the marriage appears to have been solemnized in Cork on what was then Midsummer Day, "Barnaby the Bright," the day when "the sun is in his cheerful height," June $\frac{11}{22}$, 1594. Except that she survived Spenser, that she married again, and had some legal quarrels with one of her own sons about his lands, we know nothing more about her. Of two of the children whom she brought him, the names have been preserved, and they indicate that in spite of love and poetry, and the charms of Kilcolman, Spenser felt as Englishmen feel in Australia or in India. To call one of them *Sylvanus*, and the other *Peregrine*, reveals to us that Ireland was still to him a "salvage land," and he a pilgrim and stranger in it; as Moses called his first-born Gershom, a stranger here—"for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land."

In a year after his marriage, he sent over these memorials of it to be published in London, and they were entered at Stationers' Hall in November, 1595. The same year he came over himself, bringing with him the second instalment of the *Faerie Queene*, which was entered for publication the following January, $159\frac{5}{6}$. Thus the half of the projected work was finished; and finished, as we

know from one of the Sonnets (80), before his marriage. After his long "race through Fairy land," he asks leave to rest, and solace himself with his "love's sweet praise;" and then "as a steed refreshed after toil," he will "stoutly that second worke assoyle." The first six books were published together in 1596. He remained most of the year in London, during which *The Four Hymns on Love and Beauty, Earthly and Heavenly*, were published; and also a Dirge (*Daphnaida*) on Douglas Howard, the wife of Arthur Gorges, the spirited narrator of the Island Voyage of Essex and Ralegh, written in 1591; and a "spousal verse" (*Prothalamion*), on the marriage of the two daughters of the Earl of Worcester, late in 1596. But he was only a visitor in London. The *Prothalamion* contains a final record of his disappointments in England.

> "I, (whom sullein care,
> Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay
> In Princes Court, and expectation vayne
> Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away,
> Like empty shaddowes, did afflict my brayne,)
> Walkt forth to ease my payne
> Along the shoare of silver streaming Themmes—"

His marriage ought to have made him happy. He professed to find the highest enjoyment in the quiet and retirement of country life. He was in the prime of life, successful beyond all his fellows in his special work, and apparently with unabated interest in what remained to be done of it. And though he could not but feel himself at a distance from the "sweet civility" of England, and socially at disadvantage compared to those whose lines had fallen to them in its pleasant places, yet nature, which he loved so well, was still friendly to him, if men were wild and dangerous. He is never weary of praising the

natural advantages of Ireland. Speaking of the North, he says—

"And sure it is yet a most beautifull and sweet countrey as any is under heaven, seamed throughout with many goodly rivers, replenished with all sortes of fish, most aboundantly sprinckled with many sweet Ilandes, and goodly lakes, like litle Inland Seas, that will carry even ships upon theyr waters, adorned with goodly woodes fitt for building of howses and shippes, soe comodiously, as that yf some princes in the world had them, they would soone hope to be lordes of all the seas, and ere long of all the world; also full of good portes and havens opening upon England and Scotland, as inviting us to come to them, to see what excellent comodityes that countrey can affoord, besides the soyle it self most fertile, fitt to yeeld all kind of fruite that shal be comitted therunto. And lastly, the heavens most milde and temperat, though somewhat more moyst then the part toward the West."

His own home at Kilcolman charmed and delighted him. It was not his fault that its trout streams, its Mulla and Fanchin, are not as famous as Walter Scott's Teviot and Tweed, or Wordsworth's Yarrow and Duddon, or that its hills, Old Mole, and Arlo Hill, have not kept a poetic name like Helvellyn and "Eildon's triple height." They have failed to become familiar names to us. But the beauties of his home inspired more than one sweet pastoral picture in the *Faerie Queene;* and in the last fragment remaining to us of it, he celebrates his mountains and woods and valleys as once the fabled resort of the Divine Huntress and her Nymphs, and the meeting-place of the Gods.

There was one drawback to the enjoyment of his Irish country life, and of the natural attractiveness of Kilcolman. "Who knows not Arlo Hill?" he exclaims, in the scene just referred to from the fragment on *Mutability.* "Arlo, the best and fairest hill in all the holy island's heights."

It was well known to all Englishmen who had to do with the South of Ireland. How well it was known in the Irish history of the time, may be seen in the numerous references to it, under various forms, such as Aharlo, Harlow, in the Index to the Irish Calendar of Papers of this troublesome date, and to continual encounters and ambushes in its notoriously dangerous woods. He means by it the highest part of the Galtee range, below which to the north, through a glen or defile, runs the "river Aherlow." Galtymore, the summit, rises, with precipice and gully, more than 3000 feet above the plains of Tipperary, and is seen far and wide. It was connected with the "great wood," the wild region of forest, mountain, and bog which stretched half across Munster from the Suir to the Shannon. It was the haunt and fastness of Irish outlawry and rebellion in the South, which so long sheltered Desmond and his followers. Arlo and its "fair forests," harbouring "thieves and wolves," was an uncomfortable neighbour to Kilcolman. The poet describes it as ruined by a curse pronounced on the lovely land by the offended goddess of the Chase—

"Which too too true that land's in-dwellers since have found."

He was not only living in an insecure part, on the very border of disaffection and disturbance, but like every Englishman living in Ireland, he was living amid ruins. An English home in Ireland, however fair, was a home on the sides of Ætna or Vesuvius: it stood where the lava flood had once passed, and upon not distant fires. Spenser has left us his thoughts on the condition of Ireland, in a paper written between the two rebellions, some time between 1595 and 1598, after the twelve or thirteen years of so-called peace which followed the overthrow of Desmond, and when Tyrone's rebellion was becoming serious. It

seems to have been much copied in manuscript, but, though entered for publication in 1598, it was not printed till long after his death, in 1633. A copy of it among the Irish papers of 1598 shows that it had come under the eyes of the English Government. It is full of curious observations, of shrewd political remarks, of odd and confused ethnography; but more than all this, it is a very vivid and impressive picture of what Sir Walter Ralegh called "the common woe of Ireland." It is a picture of a noble realm, which its inhabitants and its masters did not know what to do with; a picture of hopeless mistakes, misunderstandings, misrule; a picture of piteous misery and suffering on the part of a helpless and yet untameable and mischievous population — of unrelenting and scornful rigour on the part of their stronger rulers, which yet was absolutely ineffectual to reclaim or subdue them. "Men of great wisdom," Spenser writers, "have often wished that all that land were a sea-pool." Everything, people thought, had been tried, and tried in vain.

"Marry, soe there have beene divers good plottes and wise counsells cast alleready about reformation of that realme; but they say, it is the fatall desteny of that land, that noe purposes, whatsoever are meant for her good, will prosper or take good effect, which, whether it proceede from the very GENIUS of the soyle, or influence of the starres, or that Allmighty God hath not yet appoynted the time of her reformation, or that He reserveth her in this unquiett state still for some secrett scourdge, which shall by her come unto England, it is hard to be knowen, but yet much to be feared."

The unchanging fatalities of Ireland appear in Spenser's account in all their well-known forms; some of them, as if they were what we were reading of yesterday. Throughout the work there is an honest zeal for order, an honest hatred of falsehood, sloth, treachery, and disorder. But

there does not appear a trace of consideration for what the Irish might feel or desire or resent. He is sensible, indeed, of English mismanagement and vacillation, of the way in which money and force were wasted by not being boldly and intelligently employed; he enlarges on that power of malignity and detraction which he has figured in the Blatant Beast of the *Faerie Queene:* but of English cruelty, of English injustice, of English rapacity, of English prejudice, he is profoundly unconscious. He only sees that things are getting worse and more dangerous; and though he, like others, has his "plot" for the subjugation and pacification of the island, and shrinks from nothing in the way of severity, not even, if necessary, from extermination, his outlook is one of deep despair. He calculates the amount of force, of money, of time, necessary to break down all resistance; he is minute and perhaps skilful in building his forts and disposing his garrisons; he is very earnest about the necessity of cutting broad roads through the woods, and building bridges in place of fords; he contemplates restored churches, parish schools, a better order of clergy. But where the spirit was to come from of justice, of conciliation, of steady and firm resistance to corruption and selfishness, he gives us no light. What it comes to is, that with patience, temper, and public spirit, Ireland might be easily reformed and brought into order: but unless he hoped for patience, temper, and public spirit from Lord Essex, to whom he seems to allude as the person "on whom the eye of England is fixed, and our last hopes now rest," he too easily took for granted what was the real difficulty. His picture is exact and forcible, of one side of the truth; it seems beyond the thought of an honest, well-informed, and noble-minded Englishman that there was another side.

But he was right in his estimate of the danger, and of the immediate evils which produced it. He was right in thinking that want of method, want of control, want of confidence, and an untimely parsimony, prevented severity from having a fair chance of preparing a platform for reform and conciliation. He was right in his conviction of the inveterate treachery of the Irish Chiefs, partly the result of ages of mismanagement, but now incurable. While he was writing, Tyrone, a craftier and bolder man than Desmond, was taking up what Desmond had failed in. He was playing a game with the English authorities which, as things then were, is almost beyond belief. He was outwitting or cajoling the veterans of Irish government, who knew perfectly well what he was, and yet let him amuse them with false expectations—men like Sir John Norreys, who broke his heart when he found out how Tyrone had baffled and made a fool of him. Wishing to gain time for help from Spain, and to extend the rebellion, he revolted, submitted, sued for pardon, but did not care to take it when granted, fearlessly presented himself before the English officers while he was still beleaguering their posts, led the English forces a chase through mountains and bogs, inflicted heavy losses on them, and yet managed to keep negotiations open as long as it suited him. From 1594 to 1598 the rebellion had been gaining ground; it had crept round from Ulster to Connaught, from Connaught to Leinster, and now from Connaught to the borders of Munster. But Munster, with its English landlords and settlers, was still, on the whole, quiet. At the end of 1597, the Council at Dublin reported home that "Munster was the best tempered of all the rest at this present time; for that though not long since sundry loose persons" (among them the base sons of Lord Roche, Spen-

ser's adversary in land suits) "became Robin Hoods and slew some of the undertakers, dwelling scattered in thatched houses and remote places, near to woods and fastnesses, yet now they are cut off, and no known disturbers left who are like to make any dangerous alteration on the sudden." But they go on to add that they "have intelligence that many are practised withal from the North, to be of combination with the rest, and stir coals in Munster, whereby the whole realm might be in a general uproar." And they repeat their opinion that they must be prepared for a "universal Irish war, intended to shake off all English government."

In April, 1598, Tyrone received a new pardon; in the following August he surprised an English army near Armagh, and shattered it with a defeat the bloodiest and most complete ever received by the English in Ireland. Then the storm burst. Tyrone sent a force into Munster; and once more Munster rose. It was a rising of the dispossessed proprietors and the whole native population against the English undertakers; a "ragged number of vogues and boys," as the English Council describes them; rebel kernes, pouring out of the "great wood," and from Arlo, the "chief fastness of the rebels." Even the chiefs, usually on good terms with the English, could not resist the stream. Even Thomas Norreys, the President, was surprised, and retired to Cork, bringing down on himself a severe reprimand from the English Government. "You might better have resisted than you did, considering the many defensible houses and castles possessed by the undertakers, who, for aught we can hear, were by no means comforted nor supported by you, but either from lack of comfort from you, or out of mere cowardice, fled away from the rebels on the first alarm." "Whereupon," says Cox,

the Irish historian, "the Munsterians, generally, rebel in October, and kill, murder, ravish and spoil without mercy; and Tyrone made James Fitz-Thomas Earl of Desmond, on condition to be tributary to him; he was the handsomest man of his time, and is commonly called the *Sugan* Earl."

On the last day of the previous September (Sept. 30, 1598), the English Council had written to the Irish Government to appoint Edmund Spenser, Sheriff of the County of Cork, "a gentleman dwelling in the County of Cork, who is so well known unto you all for his good and commendable parts, being a man endowed with good knowledge in learning, and not unskilful or without experience in the wars." In October, Munster was in the hands of the insurgents, who were driving Norreys before them, and sweeping out of house and castle the panic-stricken English settlers. On December 9th, Norreys wrote home a despatch about the state of the province. This despatch was sent to England by Spenser, as we learn from a subsequent despatch of Norreys of December 21.[1] It was received at Whitehall, as appears from Robert Cecil's endorsement, on the 24th of December. The passage from Ireland seems to have been a long one. And this is the last original document which remains about Spenser.

What happened to him in the rebellion we learn generally from two sources, from Camden's *History*, and from Drummond of Hawthornden's Recollections of Ben Jonson's conversations with him in 1619. In the Munster insurrection of October, the new Earl of Desmond's followers did not forget that Kilcolman was an old possession of the Desmonds. It was sacked and burnt. Jonson related

[1] I am indebted for this reference to Mr. Hans Claude Hamilton. See also his Preface to Calendar of Irish Papers, 1574–85, p. lxxvi.

that a little new-born child of Spenser's perished in the flames. Spenser and his wife escaped, and he came over to England, a ruined and heart-broken man. He died Jan. 16, 159$\frac{8}{9}$; "he died," said Jonson, "for lack of bread, in King Street [Westminster], and refused twenty pieces sent to him by my Lord of Essex, saying that he had no time to spend them." He was buried in the Abbey, near the grave of Chaucer, and his funeral was at the charge of the Earl of Essex. Beyond this we know nothing; nothing about the details of his escape, nothing of the fate of his manuscripts, or the condition in which he left his work, nothing about the suffering he went through in England. All conjecture is idle waste of time. We only know that the first of English poets perished miserably and prematurely, one of the many heavy sacrifices which the evil fortune of Ireland has cost to England; one of many illustrious victims to the madness, the evil customs, the vengeance of an ill-treated and ill-governed people.

One Irish rebellion brought him to Ireland, another drove him out of it. Desmond's brought him to pass his life there, and to fill his mind with the images of what was then Irish life, with its scenery, its antipathies, its tempers, its chances, and necessities. Tyrone's swept him from Ireland, beggared and hopeless. Ten years after his death, a bookseller, reprinting the six books of the *Faerie Queene*, added two cantos and a fragment, *On Mutability*, supposed to be part of the *Legend of Constancy*. Where and how he got them he has not told us. It is a strange and solemn meditation on the universal subjection of all things to the inexorable conditions of change. It is strange, with its odd episode and fable which Spenser cannot resist about his neighbouring streams, its borrowings from Chaucer, and its quaint mixture of mythology with

sacred and with Irish scenery, Olympus and Tabor, and his own rivers and mountains. But it is full of his power over thought and imagery; and it is quite in a different key from anything in the first six books. It has an undertone of awe-struck and pathetic sadness.

> "What man that sees the ever whirling wheel
> Of Change, the which all mortal things doth sway,
> But that thereby doth find and plainly feel
> How Mutability in them doth play
> Her cruel sports to many men's decay."

He imagines a mighty Titaness, sister of Hecate and Bellona, most beautiful and most terrible, who challenges universal dominion over all things in earth and heaven, sun and moon, planets and stars, times and seasons, life and death; and finally over the wills and thoughts and natures of the gods, even of Jove himself; and who pleads her cause before the awful Mother of all things, figured as Chaucer had already imagined her:

> "Great Nature, ever young, yet full of eld;
> Still moving, yet unmoved from her stead;
> Unseen of any, yet of all beheld,
> Thus sitting on her throne."

He imagines all the powers of the upper and nether worlds assembled before her on his own familiar hills, instead of Olympus, where she shone like the Vision which "dazed" those "three sacred saints" on "Mount Thabor." Before her pass all things known of men, in rich and picturesque procession; the Seasons pass, and the Months, and the Hours, and Day and Night, Life, as "a fair young lusty boy," Death, grim and grisly—

> "Yet is he nought but parting of the breath,
> Ne ought to see, but like a shade to weene,
> Unbodied, unsoul'd, unheard, unseene—"

and on all of them the claims of the Titaness, Mutability, are acknowledged. Nothing escapes her sway in this present state, except Nature, which, while seeming to change, never really changes her ultimate constituent elements, or her universal laws. But when she seemed to have extorted the admission of her powers, Nature silences her. Change is apparent, and not real; and the time is coming when all change shall end in the final changeless change.

"'I well consider all that ye have said,
And find that all things stedfastnesse do hate
And changed be; yet, being rightly wayd,
They are not changed from their first estate;
But by their change their being do dilate,
And turning to themselves at length againe,
Do worke their owne perfection so by fate:
Then over them Change doth not rule and raigne,
But they raigne over Change, and do their states maintaine.

"'Cease therefore, daughter, further to aspire,
And thee content thus to be rul'd by mee,
For thy decay thou seekst by thy desire;
But time shall come that all shall changed bee,
And from thenceforth none no more change shal see.'
So was the Titanesse put downe and whist,
And Jove confirm'd in his imperiall see.
Then was that whole assembly quite dismist,
And Natur's selfe did vanish, whither no man wist."

What he meant—how far he was thinking of those daring arguments of religious and philosophical change of which the world was beginning to be full, we cannot now tell. The allegory was not finished: at least it is lost to us. We have but a fragment more, the last fragment of his poetry. It expresses the great commonplace which so impressed itself on the men of that time, and of which his

works are full. No words could be more appropriate to be the last words of one who was so soon to be in his own person such an instance of their truth. They are fit closing words to mark his tragic and pathetic disappearance from the high and animated scene in which his imagination worked. And they record, too, the yearning hope of rest not extinguished by terrible and fatal disaster:

"When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare
Of Mutabilitie, and well it way,
Me seemes, that though she all unworthy were
Of the Heav'ns Rule; yet, very sooth to say,
In all things else she beares the greatest sway:
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
And love of things so vaine to cast away;
Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

"Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
Of that same time when no more Change shall be,
But stedfast rest of all things, firmely stayd
Upon the pillours of Eternity,
That is contrayr to Mutabilitie;
For all that moveth doth in Change delight:
But thenceforth all shall rest eternally
With Him that is the God of Sabaoth hight:
O! that great Sabaoth God, grant me that Sabaoths sight.'

THE END.