

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

CHAUCER died in the year 1400; and his death may be said to mark the beginning of another era in literature as well as in literary history. But as the primers declare, the 100 years that followed the death of Chaucer were years of barrenness: Mr. Brooke says that the period was “the most barren” in all English literature. Other equally competent scholars do not agree with him at all. It seems to me that both Mr. Brooke and his critics are right;—the difference is due only to difference in point of view. Mr. Brooke thinks of the number of great books produced from 1400 to 1500; Mr. Saintsbury and others think rather of the great new movements in literature during that period—movements not indicated by the production of great books so much as by a new tendency in literary history. The latter point of view is certainly the best for the following reason.

No period in English literature is more important than this, if we consider the great happenings of the time. Here are facts to think of:

- I. The invention of printing.
- II. The beginning of the great Renaissance movement in Italy and the revival of Greek study.
- III. The ending of the mediæval romance — a glorious ending in England; for it closed with the very greatest of all romances ever written — the book of Sir Thomas Malory.
- IV. The production and the collection of ballads.
- V. The beginning of English drama through the religious plays.

You see at a glance from these five heads what the 15th century really meant to English literature. We need not trouble

ourselves about the fact that few great books were then produced. Other things produced were so important that we can very easily overlook the dearth in original production, for the purpose of considering changes that influenced literature throughout the whole of Europe, not only for that time, but for all centuries following.

First of all let us talk about the invention of printing—about its signification. Never did any event occur at a more opportune time than this event, the date of which is 1454. Why? Because Mahomet II. captured Constantinople in 1453. All the Greek literature and Greek scholarship might then have been lost to us, had not printing been invented in the very next year. Then the Greek scholars driven out of their own country and scattered all over Europe were enabled to conserve their learning and their precious manuscripts by the art of typography.

I must here say something about the condition of literary production before the invention of printing in Western countries. You must understand that although it is loosely said that “printing was invented in 1454,” there were printed books before that date;—and the common saying, to be quite correct, should be worded in this way: “Printing with movable type was invented in 1454.”

These earlier printed books were made like many of the old Buddhist books were made in Japan—each page being printed from a single block of wood,—for which reason such books were called “block-books.” Now block-books could be very beautiful: some Japanese block-books which I have seen are wonderful examples of art and more beautiful than anything made with movable type. But this way of making a book was very costly and very slow, because it took a long time to cut all the blocks. The value of movable type lay in the advantage which was offered of rapid production. But I think you know that the actual principle of block-printing has come back again; and that now nearly all of our books are printed from blocks—metal blocks—each page being represented by a single stereotype or electrotyped plate. However, the book is always first composed in type; then a cast is made

from the type; then a metal block or plate is made from the cast. The only great advantage which we now have over the early printers is in our improved machinery. For example, instead of composing type with the fingers, it is now composed with what are called type-setting machines.

Well, I have spoken of the early block-books. They were not, however, very early. Moreover there were very few of them; and they were only made when something cheap was wanted. No fine books were printed from blocks in Europe during the Middle Ages;—the art of block-printing was not developed as in China and Japan. But the art of caligraphy was very highly developed. Books were beautifully copied in writing of the most exquisite kind at a comparatively small cost. However, paper was very little used—it came into use only about the middle of the 14th century, and it was then rather dear. You see that the world of the Middle Ages had fallen back very greatly as regards industrial production from the time of the Greeks and the Romans. The Greeks and the Romans used both paper and parchment for books; but parchment was used chiefly for record and law books, while the paper, or *charta*, as the Romans called it, was used for books of literature. The Romans and Greeks also had two forms of books. The literary form was almost exactly that of the Japanese *Makimono*; the other form, used for record and law books, was much like that of a book of to-day,—only that, as in Japanese books of a certain class, the sheet was written on one side only and folded like a Japanese sheet. Afterwards there were changes; but this was the general rule for centuries. Now with the destruction of Roman civilization, the art of making paper books and paper would seem to have been for a long time forgotten. Books were made of parchment of different quality. That, of course, caused quite an expense, in spite of cheapness of copying. But some of these books were often of extraordinary beauty. Occasionally all the leaves of the book would be sky-blue, and on that azure surface all the text would be written in raised letters of gold. Again the initial letters and heads of chapters used to be decorated with miniature

paintings of great beauty and the border of pages were also decorated. The art of making such decorated books was called "illumination." Some of these books to-day are worth enormous sums of money. Bindings were also of the costliest and the most beautiful kind,—our modern binders could scarcely equal them. So there were libraries full of beautiful books; but they were not accessible to the ordinary reader. And, nevertheless, when printing had been invented, the great book collectors were prejudiced against it. They thought that the printed books were vulgar and cheap; and one of the greatest of Italian librarians would not allow a single printed book to enter his library.

The first printing from movable type was executed, as you know, at the city of Mainz on the Rhine, in Germany, and the credit belongs to three German printers, two of whom are spoken of as Gutenberg and Fust, or Faust. But we do not really know which of the three first got the idea into practical shape; and we are not able to say exactly who invented printing. But it does not matter;—it is enough to know that the first printing was done by three German printers at Mainz. Within a few years afterwards, however, the city of Mainz was sacked during a year of war; and the printers were scattered in all directions. Some of them went to Italy; some of them went to Flanders. So the first countries to adopt printing were Germany, Italy and Belgium. The invention spread so rapidly that by the year 1500 nearly 5,000 different books had been printed in Italy alone. I need scarcely tell you that the Italians became the greatest of all printers: indeed the early Italian work can scarcely be equalled to-day. And the name of the great house of Aldus Manutius at Venice, called the Aldine Press, produced the most beautiful books that have ever been made in Europe.

Now the first English printer, William Caxton,¹ happened to be a merchant by profession, and not a scholar. This was a very lucky thing for English literature. If Caxton had been a great scholar, he would have tried to do what the Italian printers

¹ William Caxton (1422 ?-1491).

were doing and he never could have done half so well. The Italian printers were printing the whole of the old Greek and old Latin literature, — more especially the Greek literature. They were reviving scholarship—doing an inestimable service to mankind. But these Italians were themselves scholars; and in their printing offices they had Greek professors to help them — Greek men of learning who had been driven out of Constantinople by Mahomet II. Caxton could not have attempted such a work with equal success, and if he had attempted it probably many great English books would have been lost for us. But Caxton, with extraordinary good sense, turned his attention only to English literature; and he began to print the old romances and new romances and Chaucer, and the books of history and old poetry. He printed a very great number of good books; and it is probable that he saved a great number from being lost—either by fire or by some other accident.

He seems to have been born in 1422, and to have lived until about 1491—though we are not sure about the second date. He began life as a merchant's apprentice; gradually rose to high position in the house and then was sent to the city of Bruges, in Flanders, where there was a great English company of merchants. He finally became governor of that company; and he learned the printing business abroad. Indeed his first books were not printed in England; and he only established his English printing house in 1476. That is the date from which the history proper of English printed literature begins. One more fact about Caxton. He was a very good translator from French—as he knew the language well; and his services to English literature as a translator were almost as great as his services in the publishing business! But his books were not beautiful books, like the Italians. They were printed rather in the German fashion, with heavy black-letter type—good, plain, readable, but rather ugly books—still to-day very great prices are paid for them.

Of what inestimable worth the invention of printing has been to intellectual progress, I need not speak; and this invention, remember, belongs to the 15th century. There were three

other great events in the same century—at least three events which had their beginning in that century—of vast importance not only to literature directly or indirectly, but also to politics, to history and to civilization at large. There were the Renaissance, the Discovery of America (in 1492), and the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation—Luther, remember, was born in 1483; and his great struggle had been preparing even before his birth.

Of these three events, the Renaissance has the most direct influence upon English literature. The Discovery of America signifying the expansion of the world to mankind, the enlargement of civilization, and many other things affected literature seriously only at a considerably later time. As for the Reformation—that too had a less direct influence than the Renaissance. It did not, indeed, show its best proofs before the period of Elizabeth. It signified, for literature, larger freedom of thought and feeling; but the change was not sudden. The first Protestants were quite as intolerant as the old Catholics in spirit and it required some time to soften that intolerance. Eventually literature gained much; but the progress was slow. I have already told you about Wyclif's work: he was really the first great English Protestant. But he was born too soon, and there was a reaction after him. So we may say that, out of the three great events above mentioned, it is the Renaissance with which we have principally to do in connection with the 15th century literature.

Perhaps the first great event of the Renaissance—a word meaning “Rebirth”—was the conveyance to Italy, in 1423, of 400 Greek manuscripts. Greek had been previously taught in the universities; but a vast number of the ancient authors were still inaccessible. That first importation of a Greek library might be called the first large event of the new movement. Presently, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Greek scholars flocked to Italy by hundreds; the universities were filled with Greek teachers; and the newly discovered art of printing came to help their labours.

I suppose you know the meaning of the term “rebirth” in

speaking of the great Italian revival of learning. Old Greece, as well as old Rome, had been practically buried and forgotten under the ruins of the ancient empire. Ages of barbarism, followed by ages of semi-barbarism, succeeded. But when men became civilized enough and intelligent enough to study and to understand the great works of antiquity—then, so to speak, ancient Greece was born again; her ancient Gods came back; her ancient learning was re-incarnated. That is the meaning of the word “Renaissance.” It was not a thing that happens suddenly like an earthquake or an eruption;—it was produced by gradual processes accompanying the growth of intelligence and taste. And I need scarcely say that it was chiefly rendered possible by the weakening of the ecclesiastical tyranny in Italy. Once the taste of Greek literature, and the comprehension of Greek art, had been developed, search was everywhere made for Greek manuscripts, bronzes, marbles, gems,—for anything and everything relating to the buried past. The great glory of the Renaissance movement in Italy was under the reign of Lorenzo de’Medici, prince of Florence—great patron of arts and of letters. This period lasted from 1469 to 1492—the same year in which Columbus discovered America. Later came what is called the Catholic Reaction.

During the Renaissance the development of study, the cultivation of Greek learning, the evolution of art in every direction, could scarcely be exaggerated. Then came the time of the great painters and sculptors and jewel-smiths and architects—all of whom drew more or less from the inexhaustible sources of antique knowledge. And to all this, at first the Church offered little opposition; on the contrary it patronized the new artist and the new sculptor and the new learning. There were indeed fierce reformers who perceived the danger in the distance, like Savonarola, who preached against the new luxury and the new art with unexampled vehemence. For the time being, this attempted reaction failed. Savonarola, a sincere man, was a little too sincere for his time and his time was that of Pope Alexander VI.—certainly one of the wickedest men that ever lived. Alexander burned him—not for art’s sake, but

for policy's sake. And the Renaissance went on, anticipating perhaps a conflict between the classical and the ecclesiastical conception of things, when one grand Italian conceived the idea of harmonizing Greek art and philosophy with Catholic doctrine. This man was one of the most delightful figures in Italian history. He is said to have been so handsome that he appeared in the eyes of women a veritable angel, and he was such a scholar that he could issue a challenge to all the universities to dispute with him in Latin upon 800 different subjects. The challenge, I believe, was never fully accepted. This scholar's name was Pico della Mirandola. He was as modest as he was learned; and if he issued that extraordinary challenge of which I have spoken it was only in obedience to university customs of the age which demanded of scholars some public exhibition of his power through the medium of Latin disputation. But Mirandola's theory and hopes were only delightful dreams; he desired to reconcile the impossible—impossible at least in that age—and he died without accomplishing anything. But he has left behind him a delightful memory, and some strange, beautiful and mystical books.

Now there are many stories, belonging to this age, of statues found so beautiful that mischief resulted to those who found them. Even to-day stories are still written about the fascination of Greek statues discovered during the Renaissance. The general type of all the stories is this: an image of Aphrodite, or Venus, is disinterred; and its loveliness bewitches those who look upon it. That superhuman beauty fills young men with bewilderment and sadness,—and they sickened and died. Finally some monk discovers that a statue is animated by an evil spirit—that is to say, by the goddess herself, who to monkish imagination was, of course, a devil. The statue is buried again; and the affliction of the youth passes away. This romantic idea is really an emblem of what actually took place in the history of the Renaissance. The unearthing of Greek statues and of Greek gems, the recovery of Greek literature, the archæological researches of scholars, did not result altogether in immediate fruit.

For a while some men turned only to the best things of Greek life and of Roman life—the things which are eternally beautiful and eternally grand—many others turned rather to the worst side of Greek life and Roman life—the things which are contrary to the sum of human model experience. A strange revival of Greek vices and of Roman cruelty made itself manifest;—and although this manifestation was partly a natural result of Italian social condition, not a result merely of classical study, the Church naturally looked on, and cried out, “Lo! all that Christianity was established to destroy, has come back amongst us!” The Renaissance was indeed the age of art; but it was also an age of moral monsters, the age of Borgias, the age of Malatestas. The reaction provoked by the Church, zealous to reform itself and to reform everything else after the horrible period of Alexander VI,—at last checked the Renaissance movement. As the mode of checking was in itself intolerant, stupid and often wicked, the result was not happy. Morals, instead of improving, would seem to have become even worse for a time. But the silencing of scholarship, and the temporary demoralization of the university could not last. The Renaissance movement once fairly started, could not be altogether killed even in Italy. Throughout Europe it spread; and all our great modern art and modern literature may be said to date from it. It was the awakening of the human mind to the sense of beauty after the long black dream of the Middle Ages.

That is the history of the Renaissance in epitome. The influence of Greek studies in England during the 15th century was not inconsiderable; and English students leaving Oxford or Cambridge used to go after that to Italian universities to finish up. Not a few English poets and scholars of the 15th century were graduates of Padua. Of course the effect upon English literature did not at first show themselves strongly;—the full force of the Renaissance did not show itself until the time of Elizabeth. But the study of Greek and of Greek art was preparing the nation for that grand era.

It was also during the 15th century especially that the English ballads appear to have come into existence. They

were not printed until long after, but our manuscripts of them date from this century. These narrative poems—usually in the form of the quatrain, though sometimes in other forms, and written in the common speech of the peasantry—may be said to represent the romance of the people. Great scholars have not yet determined whether epics originally grew out of ballads, or whether ballads do not represent the detritus or disintegration of romance. Probably there is truth in both theories. According to the evolutionary law, it is certainly probable that the earliest epics were gradually built up with ballad matter for the material. But it is also very probable that a large number of ballads were composed upon the subject of already existing epics and romances—and the reason that it is very probable is that we possess many ballads upon subjects represented in romances of a much earlier time. However, it is not necessary to discuss the matter here. The importance of the popular ballad to English literature is the main consideration. In other lectures I have spoken at length about that.¹ The influence of ballads in English literature did not begin until the close of the 18th century;—then it lasted into the 19th, constantly growing, and was never stronger than it is today. So it is worth while remembering that the ballads date from the 15th century.

The next great event which I spoke of at the outset of this lecture was the ending of romance. It has been said that romance ended with the use of gun-powder in warfare;—I think you remember how the perfect knight Bayard, as he lay dying, with his back shattered by a cannon-ball, exclaimed: “There will be no more chivalry.” But really neither gun-powder nor any other exterior matter ended romance; and in spite of Bayard’s prediction, chivalry will always live in the character of any true gentleman. Romance died only after having exhausted itself. It died a natural and very happy death; and its last production in England—its last great production in the mediæval spirit (I am speaking of only mediæval romance) has been justly termed the greatest of all romances,

¹ See the author’s *Lectures On Poetry*, Ch. II. & III.

of any age or country. It was written in prose and its title is *Morte d' Arthur*,¹ by Sir Thomas Malory.

We do not know anything about Sir Thomas Malory²—in spite of all that has been written on the subject by Sir Edward Strachey and others. He is, so far as personality goes, a mere ghost. But whoever the gentleman was who wrote the book in 1470, we may be sure that he was a gentleman and a scholar and a master of exquisite English prose. I told you that the first great prose romance was the *Travels* of that other shadowy gentleman Sir John Mandeville. To some degree the style of Malory will remind you of the style of Mandeville; but Malory is far stronger, much more musical, much more poetical, and, above all, much more modern than Sir John Mandeville. There is no book in English prose more delightful to read than this 15th century text; and we do not need any glossary or dictionary of Middle English to help us in reading. Even such unfamiliar words as “truller” are easily understood from the context. Nor is the charm of the book merely a charm of fine-sounding and beautiful English. The immense charm of the book is in the idea which it expresses—the idea of perfect knighthood, in the conduct of the warrior, the conduct of the retainer, the conduct of the leader, the conduct of the friend. There is not very much about the conduct of lover and husband; but it is sufficiently implied. And all those ideas of the West and the East—of Mediæval Europe and Old Japan—are in some respects very different indeed; nevertheless I cannot imagine that any Japanese student could read this book without pleasure. All that the old *Samurai* idea implied in this country, was expressed in England by the idea figured in this wonderful book. The English knight and the Japanese knight had not the same idea of duty as to detail; but the fundamental idea was certainly the same;—and if you read the volume, you will feel that the two were, after a fashion, ghostly brothers. The best cheap edition is in the Macmillan Globe Library—the edition of Strachey. It is one of the books that ought to be a

¹ *Le morte Darthur* tr. 1470-85 (Copland 1557; 1634; Southey 1817; Sommer 1889).

² Sir Thomas Malory (fl. 1470).

part of everybody's library; but I shall not occupy more time in speaking of it, except to say that we owe the book in its present state to the good sense of Caxton, the first English printer. His edition appeared in 1485—fifteen years after the production of the manuscript. With the apparition of this extraordinary book, English mediæval romance came to an end. It was something better than any romance which had preceded it; and it was hopeless to attempt to surpass it, or even to equal it. Whenever one form of literary production has developed in its utmost, has produced its very best, its superlative expression—nothing more in the same direction can be done.

The other great event which remains to be noticed was the beginning of the drama. But this subject requires a special lecture and I am going to put it off until next term, when our study of 16th century literature properly begins. Indeed that is the most appropriate place in which to treat of the matter; for it was then that the foundations of the Elizabethan drama were laid—in the 16th century. Therefore, by attaching the history of dramatic beginning to the period immediately preceding the Elizabethan age, the student can obtain a better general notion of the whole subject, than he could by considering it piecemeal. Instead, therefore, of talking here about the drama, I shall speak only of the principal English men of letters of the 15th century.

There were, in England proper, the immediate successors of Chaucer in poetry, together with about four prose writers, of whom only one, Malory, is really of first importance and we have already talked about him. The poetical successors of Chaucer were Lydgate, Occleve (or as the name is sometimes spelled Hoccleve), Hawes, Bokenham and Skelton. None of them were great; some of them were quite unimportant from a purely literary point of view. But they were the chief poets of their time and they did something rhetorically toward the further development of standard English, even though they did not do anything great in the direction of improving the poetry. Perhaps Lydgate¹ is the chief figure of the period in question.

¹ John Lydgate (1370 ?-1451 ?)

He was an ecclesiastic and is commonly known as the “Monk of Bury.” Scarcely any English poet wrote so much poetry as Lydgate; his work was so prodigious that only a very little of it was ever published. Most of it still remains in manuscript;—if we had it all in print it would make a considerable library. Nor would the library be of a merely monotonous kind;—it would represent much variety, for Lydgate wrote romances, and history, and masques and religious poems, political poems and all kinds of poems—besides translating quantities of things into English verse. The reason that so little of his has been published is not only that he wrote too much, but that he lacked original genius—that he did nothing either very good or very bad, but a vast deal of middling work. In literature, as everywhere else, we have the struggle for survival of the fittest; and a middling work is doomed to oblivion in competition with higher works. Probably Lydgate will never be fully printed. His best book is little more than a translation, after Boccaccio—not directly from the Italian, but through a French medium. It is called *The Fall of Princes*;¹ and it is a kind of romance, in which the ghosts of famous princes who were unfortunate came to the poet, one by one, to tell their story,—very much as in Tennyson’s *Dream of Fair Women* the ghosts of famous beauties relate their sorrows. But Lydgate was a good scholar, even if not a good poet; and he did a great deal to maintain the taste for the things which Chaucer loved.

Occleve² was nothing but a very weak imitator of Chaucer. He tried to write stories like the *Canterbury Tales*, and he wrote them very badly—so far as verse goes. His best known book is a volume of wearisome verse about the history of Troy. He had no passion, no depth of feeling, no emotional power at any time, but one must remember him because of his great affection and reverence for the memory of Chaucer. In his book just mentioned, he had a picture of Chaucer which is supposed to be a real portrait, and we know some few things about Chaucer on the authority of Occleve—things not to be found

¹ *Bochas' Fall of princes* tr. 1430-40 (Caxton, W. de Worde; Roxb. Cl. 1818).

² Thomas Occleve or Hoccleve (1370?-1450?).

elsewhere. What has been said of Lydgate can also be said of Occleve; he was a scholar, but he was not a poet.

Bokenham¹ deserves only a slight mention: he represents the religious romance of the time. He tried to apply the poetical method of Chaucer to hagiographical subjects; and he wrote in verse many lives of saints² which are neither very bad nor very good. All these Chaucerians, as they were called, helped to keep up the tradition of Chaucer; but they could not improve upon him. However, they did help to continue that crystallizing process through which the literary language was passing. The case of Hawes³ is a little different. He is very well known by a book entitled *The Pastime of Pleasure*,⁴—a dreamy volume of allegorical romance, or rather romances linked together after the Chaucerian manner. What is worth remembering about him, however, is not that he continued the tradition of Chaucer, but that he revived the method of Langland. You remember that Langland wrote *The Vision of Piers Plowman*—an allegorical poem so obscure that nobody now understands it. Hawes imitated Langland by using an allegorical figure in his poems, but he was not a great poet like Langland, and though not obscure, he is very dull indeed; still he is worth remembering; for it is very possible that he inspired the great Elizabethan poet, Edmund Spenser. Spenser's grand allegorical poem, *The Faerie Queene*, contains many things which suggest that he found the patience to study Hawes and the genius to improve upon him.

Lastly, Skelton⁵ deserves mention. Skelton, at one time a married man, later on an ecclesiastic, had talent enough to become the favourite of Henry VIII. He lived beyond the 15th century by many years—indeed he appeared to have been a very old man when he died. There was not much romance about him; but he could write volume after volume of ringing, stinging, octosyllabic verse—the short sharp sort of verse in

¹ Osbern Bokenham or Bokenam (1393-1447?).

² *Lyvys of seyntyys* 1447 (Roxb. Club 1835; 1883).

³ Stephen Hawes (1475-1523?).

⁴ *The pastime of pleasure* 1509 (1517) —Another ed. entitled *The historie of graunde Amoure and la bell Pucel, called The pastime of pleasure* 1554 (1555; Percy Soc. 1845).

⁵ John Skelton (1460?-1529).

which Swift was so successful in an after century. He wrote not only satires, but diatribes—furious attacks upon State corruptions, upon political adversaries and even upon ministers. He incurred especially the wrath of the powerful Cardinal Wolsey, and had to take refuge in a monastery where he lived for many years. However, he had good friends and protectors; and he seems to have deserved them; for he was a sincere and brave man. Also, though he had no romance in him, he had a considerable amount of honest tenderness which sometimes appears in little verse which he wrote to please ladies or personal friends. We might call him one of the first, if not the first, English satirists. And he wrote, as to form, better verse than any of the others—moreover, verse which is brimful of life. To appreciate Skelton, however, one should study the history of the time, and that is too large a topic for inclusion in the present lecture.

So much for the 15th century poets of England proper. But there were greater, much greater poets in Scotland at the same time. The development of English literature in Scotland was slow, but when it came it was sudden and brilliant. And the first of the great Scotch poets was King James the First of Scotland.¹ His story is a very romantic one. Early in the 15th century, when James was a mere boy and was being sent to school in France, he was captured by English seamen and taken to England as a State prisoner—for there was war between the kingdoms at that time. In prison he was treated kindly, allowed books to read, musical instruments to play, a yard for gymnastic exercises, and a large garden in which he could walk about and dream as much as he pleased. For 17 years he so remained a prisoner. One morning, he saw in the garden, separated from him only by a fence, a young girl walking about, with whom he immediately fell in love. This young girl was Jane Beaufort, niece of Henry IV. But the prisoner did not know who she was—he only knew that he loved her very much. But he did not know how to find a chance to tell her so; and after a long time, he thought he would write her

¹ James I, King of Scotland (1394-1437).

a poem, suggesting his affection, and send it to her. He had read Chaucer; and he wrote the poem, an allegorical poem, after Chaucer's style—only in a particular form of verse, which is still called "Rhyme Royal," because he wrote in it. This poem which is really very beautiful and may be well compared with the best of Chaucer's work, he sent to the young lady, and his plan succeeded. James was able to ask her to become his wife, which she did; and then the pair were set free and went to Scotland. James was a good lover, a good poet, an excellent husband—but not a good king. He was too harsh with his subjects, and they murdered him at last. But his poem *The Kingis Quair*,¹ (Quhair), that is to say, "The King's Book," shows the beautiful side of his nature and can be ranked only second to the work of Chaucer, if not actually equal to it. A king is of course a little outside of the natural competition between poets; and though James ranks thus high, we group him only among the four great Scotch poets because of the fact that his work was done before he became king. Next to James in order, though not in merit, is good "Master Robert Henryson." Henryson² is a very ghostly person as to his life; by tradition we only know that he was a schoolmaster, and that he must have died before 1506. But his poetry is very remarkable as 15th or even 16th century work. I need mention only the three things by which he is best remembered—*The Testament of Cresseid*,³ the ballad of *Robene and Makyne*, and the *Fables*. The first poem, which is all written in regular 9-lined stanzas, is founded upon the story out of which Shakespeare made the great drama *Troilus and Cressida*. But a great deal of the composition is Henryson's own invention. If we have read Shakespeare's drama we may remember that Cressida was a type of the fickle wanton—a pretty frail woman who tries to please everybody, but who has not enough strength of character to be faithful to anybody. She really loves Troilus, and wants to be faithful to him; but when the two are separated

¹ *The kingis quair: together with a ballad of good counsel* 1423 (S.T.S. 1884, revised 1911).

² Robert Henryson (1425?-1506?).

³ *The testament of Cresseid* c 1480.

by the chances of war, she yields to the flattery of her captors, and gives herself to Diomedes. Henryson imagined this ending to the story:—Diomedes gets tired of Cresseid and abandons her. In her anger, she abuses the gods; and they punish her by afflicting her with leprosy. Like a leper of the Middle Ages, she goes out to beg with her bell and “clapper,” and she sees Troilus on the road. He does not know her—because her face is all destroyed by disease. But afterwards, when by means of a ring, he learns who she is, his grief is desperate. And he dies of sorrow. This story is very pathetically told; and the poem is much more easy to read than Chaucer. You can find it in *The Dunbar Anthology*. The ballad of *Robene and Makyne* is one of the earliest examples in English of what is called pastoral poetry,—that is to say, poetry written about peasant life in the country, or more strictly speaking, the life of shepherds, such as Theocritus and the Greek idyllists excelled in composing. It is also worth mentioning for the reason that the conception of the subject is quite different from that of the ordinary English pastoral. Robene is a shepherd. Makyne is a peasant girl, who loves him. But the love-making in this poem is done by the woman, not by the man. Makyne offers herself to Robene, and Robene refuses to accept her. So she goes away. But later on, Robene becomes sorry and goes after the girl to apologize and to give the affection before refused. Makyne ironically answers that the man “who would not when he could” thereafter cannot when he would. There is a great truth to life and a charming humour all through the competition. The element of humour and of truth to life may be found also in Henryson’s *Fables*.¹ These fables are the old beast fables of the Middle Ages, or rather of Æsop as remodelled by mediæval fancy, to which Henryson gave entirely new life. Nothing more is known of Henryson’s work which is quite equal to the three compositions above named.

Greatest of all the Scotch poets (if we consider the quantity as well as the quality of the work) was William Dunbar.²

¹ *The morall fabillis of Esope* c 1480 (1570; Maitland Cl. 1832).

² William Dunbar. (b. 1463?).

Something of Dunbar's life we know. He had a university education and a romantic life. After leaving the university, he became a wandering monk. Not for religious reasons, it would seem, but for purposes of travel. And he travelled all over England and France, begging his way. Then, rich in experience, he threw off the monk's dress, became a poet, a diplomat, a soldier. As a diplomat he became a friend and confidant of James IV. of Scotland, and a friend of his Queen—Margaret of England, whose wedding song he composed. At the great battle of Flodden, he seems to have been one of the brave men who died in the fighting circle round the King—the circle which all the power of the English knighthood could not break and which has been grandly described by Walter Scott in verse. That was in the year 1513. Before his death Dunbar had written about a hundred poems on a great variety of subjects; and these poems show him as a very great genius. He had the humour of Burns, as well as the humour of Chaucer, a great and cynical knowledge of life, and a wonderful command both of literary English and of dialect. Perhaps his most famous piece is that entitled *The Two Married Women and the Widow*¹—a savage satire upon women of a certain class. Satire he enjoyed and he sometimes descended very low for an opportunity to display his power of it. One of his poems entitled *Flyting*² (“to flyte” in northern dialect means to abuse with foul language and scorn) is little more than a repetition in verse of a word quarrel between persons who display extraordinary knowledge of bad language in abusing each other. But all his work is not like this;—there are very tender and beautiful things in it; and the bulk of it is lyrical. Had Dunbar lived longer, instead of dying a glorious death in defence of his King at Flodden, he might have proved himself a greater poet than those commonly called the first really modern English poets—Wyatt and Surrey. Certainly he had a better ear, greater cleverness and greater knowledge of life than either of them.

¹ *The tua mariit wemen and the wedo* 1508.

² *The flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie* 1508.

One more Scotch poet remains to be noticed, called Gawin Douglas or Bishop Douglas,¹ the first translator in English (at least the first good translator) of Virgil's *Æneid*.² Douglas belonged to the noble, and kingly family of Douglas, so much admired by Sir Walter Scott. A curious fact about him is that his life was ruined by this relationship. His nephew married the widow of King James; and this marriage, a love marriage, gave the greatest possible offence to the politicians of the time. They persecuted Douglas simply to spite the Queen and her husband—annoyed him in every way, slandered him, threatened to kill him, put him into prison upon totally false charges; and the Queen tried to protect him in vain. He passed his life in trouble and died at the age of 48—completely broken down by his struggle against malice. Also in his poetry there is not anything quite so good as the work of Henryson and Dunbar—with the exceptions of the prologues in verse which he introduced into his translation of the *Æneid*. Nevertheless, compared with English poetry of the same period—the poetry written in England—even Douglas ranks higher than Occleve, Hawes, and that school of Chaucerian poetasters. It is curious that just at this time when poetry was failing in England proper, it should have taken new and splendid life in Scotland.

¹ Gawin or Gavin Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld (1475?-1572).

² *The xiii bukes of Enzados of the famos poetie Virgill* tr. 1513 (1553, 1710, 1874).

THE LITERATURE OF THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY BEFORE ELIZABETH (1500-1559)

ENGLISH DRAMA

INTRODUCTION OF NEW FORMS OF POETRY

THE two greatest events of literary importance immediately preceding the accession of Elizabeth in 1559 were the full development of the drama and the development of modern lyrical poetry—the poetry of Tudor English, which is really but another name for modern English, the differences being very slight indeed. Before the middle of the 16th century, English had fairly assumed its present form. We shall speak of that later. At present let us consider the history of the drama.

The history of drama in England is very important to know; for it is identical with the history of modern drama throughout all Europe. We have here a curious evolutionary process to study; and the study is very interesting, because it reveals the working of a general law. The law is the development of the drama out of religious rites and customs.

Social philosophy recognizes this law as the same in every country. You know, I suppose, that the grand Greek drama was developed out of religious ceremonies. But perhaps you have not thought about the fact that this was also the case with Indian drama, with Persian drama, with the drama in all countries possessing an original civilization. Coming to Japan, I suppose it is safe to say that the beginning of drama in this country also appears to have been shaped under the same circumstances.

Now after the antique civilization had perished in Europe, the drama for a very considerable time ceased to exist. All knowledge of the Greek art of drama ceased to exist. That drama should begin again, it was necessary that it should

evolve again; and it did so very slowly, just as it had done before out of religion.

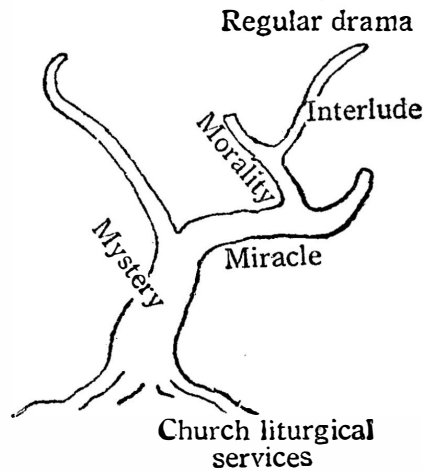
From the more modern forms of Christian church worship, you would scarcely find the source of dramatic beginnings. But if you give any attention to the older forms of church worship—those of the Oriental and Occidental or Greek Catholic or Roman Catholic churches—you will be struck at once by the dramatic character of certain liturgies. There are liturgies, for example, which are operatic in character—that is to say, dialogues representing an incident or song. In one curious service of the Roman Church, questions are sung in Latin and answered in Greek. But there are many other things to notice. In the churches of the East, older forms of Christianity, at a certain season, life-size representations of saints and other personages are arranged in groups, so as to illustrate some event in biblical history or the history of holy persons. Yet again there are processions in which costumed personages represent persons in the Scriptures. You find these especially in Italy and in Spain. Now in all this, you can see that there was material for the beginning of a religious drama.

Having the material, the Church began to work at religious drama in the early Middle Ages, gradually. Why? Simply because that was found to be the best way of teaching religion to people who could neither read nor write. Much had been taught by pictures or statues, but this was not enough. The pictures and statues could not move and act and explain themselves. So in order to teach the more difficult parts of doctrine—those parts treating of what are called mystery or miracle—acting was attempted. The actors at first were all priests; and the acting was done upon a stage attached to the outside of the church. Later on the stage was removed to the cemetery for the sake of affording more room to the spectators. You must not suppose that these performances of religious drama were very frequent at first. At first, they were only given upon particular holy festival days,—and then only for the sake of teaching the people the legend of the day—the particular sacred event being celebrated. There was then no thought of making

money by the performance. But later on these performances became so popular that they were taken part in by laymen and lay society as a business speculation. Still later great commercial companies took hold of this drama and produced it with magnificence. So it gradually passed out of the hands of the church people altogether; and of course it greatly changed character in the process. Instead of being acted at the side of the church or in the cemetery, the religious drama was acted upon great movable cars, which were pulled along the streets of the towns, just as in Japan on festival days, the pageants are drawn through the public ways—stopping here and there for a performance of music, dancing, or even occasionally a little acting.

The changes which took place were natural and greatly interesting to consider. The earliest religious dramas of the Church in which only priests acted, were called *Mysteries*—because they dealt with only the mysteries of religion; and the subjects were all taken from the Bible. But after a time the people wanted something more interesting to them than Bible stories: they wanted dramatic performances representing the lives of the saints, in whose history they had been interested from childhood. The dramas were composed illustrating the histories of saints and martyrs; and these were called *Miracle plays*. After a time, because the *Miracle plays* had allowed of representations from real life, a desire grew up for plays still more human and less religious—something more secular in character. The Church was still prejudiced against memories of Greek and Roman drama and every additional step made in that direction probably aroused clerical oppositions. Innovators had to proceed very cautiously. But they compromised with church feeling at last by producing a kind of play with a moral subject in which the characters, though representing facts of real life, represented also *Virtues* and *Vices*. They were not called by proper names of men and women but by the names of *Vices* and *Virtues*. This was the *Morality play*. Yet another advance was possible, but perhaps it would not have been soon made if the aristocracy and the court had not

taken it up. There were no theatres in that time, and the lords and the nobles who cared about acting preferred to have the acting done in their own houses than to go out into the street to look at Morality plays. So in the course of time there sprang up yet another kind of drama, much more free and almost altogether secular. This was called the Interlude; and the name still belongs to a class of short modern dramas of a comedy kind, which are played at theatres between the intervals of longer plays. But the original Interlude very much resembled the lighter *Nô* dramas of Japan. Indeed the resemblance is so strong in some cases that a mediæval Interlude, with slight modifications and change of name, might almost pass for a Japanese play. Another thing is good to remember that the patrons of the Interlude in England and of the *Nô* in Japan were the court and the nobility. From the Interlude to the drama pure and simple there was only a step to be made; and it was made about the middle of the 16th century, or a little later.



So much for the evolution of the drama. Now let us say something about the dramas themselves. We have seen that the first religious dramas consisted of Mystery plays; that the Miracle plays grew out of the Mystery plays; that the Morality plays grew out of the Miracle plays; finally that the Interlude grew out of the Morality play indirectly under the patronage of kings and aristocracy. What of the history of these different stages of the drama in England?

The first religious drama was brought to England by the Normans and was acted in the school about 1100. But the

school took fire on the very next night;—so the people imagined that Heaven was displeased, and some time elapsed before another effort was made. The next attempt in 1150 was more successful; and by the end of another century, in 1250, the religious drama had become very popular.

Yet another half century; and the production of religious drama had become an enormous business, carried on by vast corporations, and involving immense expenditure. In every part of the country Miracle plays and Morality plays were acted; but three cities especially became famous for producing them, and for manufacturing those splendid dresses and theatrical accessories required for the pageants. These three cities were York, Chester and Coventry. The plays produced in each of those three cities, or under the influence of the great guilds of those cities, came to be called after the name of their place of production. We have thus what is called the York Cycle, the Chester Cycle and the Coventry Cycle of plays. About 150 English Miracle plays have survived (the term Miracle plays is here used to include Interlude and Mystery plays as well); and if you like to read them you will do well to begin by reading Pollard's admirable little book *English Miracle Plays* published by the Oxford Press. Another interesting thing to tell you about the old production of these plays is the intimate relation which they came to have with the trade-guild. For instance, in the course of time, the carpenters came especially to monopolize the play of the Deluge—because they had to make Noah's Ark on the stage in the sight of the people. The blacksmiths in like manner got the monopoly of the play of the Crucifixion—because originally blacksmiths were selected to drive the nails at the Crucifixion scene. The great companies of goldsmiths made especially their own the Miracle play of *The Three Wise Men of the East*—because of the crowns of gold and splendid caskets that had to be produced upon the stage. So again the weavers produced certain plays; the butchers certain other plays; the masons other plays—they had been originally asked to build the tower of Babel. So at last the whole manufacturing and business world became in-

terested in these plays, and you may well wonder why they disappeared from existence so suddenly. Their annual production must have represented sums of millions, and they lasted up to the very day of Shakespeare. Shakespeare himself, as a boy, took part in a Morality play, but after Shakespeare and regular drama of his time, the religious drama vanished. How did it vanish so suddenly? Well, it had done its work and there was no more use for it. It could not compete against the regular drama. The first theatre in England was built for Shakespeare; and after, all the principal towns had their own theatres, where wonderful tragedies and comedies were being acted so as to stir the emotions of the people in a new and wonderful and terrible way. Popular interest in the Morality play died out. The religious drama ceased to be a fashion, because a new fashion and a larger fashion had come in.

But there was one exception worthy of notice — not in England, however,—to the disappearance of the old religious drama. The old Mystery play, which never changed its character and remained throughout centuries exactly the same according to the rules of hieratic conservatism, still actually exists. It exists in Switzerland, and is acted at Ober-Ammergau, where thousands of people go every year from all parts of Europe to see it. The village of Ober-Ammergau exists entirely by producing this play. The little children are brought up actors; and from their earliest years they are taught how to help in producing “the Passion Play” as it is generally called. Of course the great interest of looking at such a thing is the knowledge that we are really looking at the Middle Ages and that everything is done according to the traditions that have remained unchanged for centuries. I ought also to tell you that Mystery plays are not confined to Europe proper. There are Mystery plays acted in Persia also, and it is curious to know that they are produced to-day exactly as they were produced thousands of years ago. Everywhere religious conservatism acts in the same way, and we have to thank it for occasionally preserving such interesting relics of past time and custom.

Now you will understand why in the little diagram of the tree I have drawn I made the part representing the Mystery play reach well up into the region touching regular drama.

I have not yet said much about the subjects of these plays. It would take too much time to enumerate them all; and references are easy to make. However, I shall attempt a little summary:—

I. Mystery plays were taken both from the Old and the New Testaments; and the favourite subjects were the history of the life of Christ, the history of the Patriarchs (Noah, Abraham, etc.).

II. Miracle plays treated chiefly of the lives of the Saints—especially the Saints of the English calendar;—but this name was not distinctive in England. Both Mystery and Miracle plays were called Miracle plays. It was otherwise in France where the literature of religious drama was produced on a far larger scale.

III. In the Morality plays, the subjects were always didactic: we might say that these plays were parables dramatized. But in these the language was often very rough, very rude. At first all religious dramas had been written and acted in Latin, but after the plays had become popular, and English was used, the colloquial came into strange use occasionally. One play of this class,—and one of the very best,—has a very curious history. For it is a Buddhist story, which travelled from India westwards in some extraordinary way to England, and became naturalized there. The name of this play is *Everyman*,¹ and the story is a parable of life. Everyman surrounded by happiness, wealth, honour, friends and flatterers, is suddenly called by Death. He asks in turn Love, Friendship, Riches, etc., to accompany him upon the black journey—but they all flee away and leave him. Only Truth and Virtue will go with him. The end of the English play has been modified a little to admit of Christian doctrinal ideas; but the substance of the play remains the same as that of the parable or rather birth story told

¹ *Everyman* c 1520 (in Eng. miracle plays, ed. Pollard 1890).

in India by the Buddha thousands of years ago. You can find the Indian story in the new translation of the *Jatakas*, and now published by the Oxford Press.

IV. Of the Interludes there is little to say, except that they are to a great extent comical,—and the best of them, as I said before, strangely resemble some of the old Japanese plays. English Interludes are not many in number. They contain comical representations of various forms of human weakness occasionally—such as cowardice, boasting, avarice, etc., but they have the great merit of being drawn from life in all cases.

The first English real drama is of a comical character that proves it to have been suggested if not developed by the Interlude. Yet there was one notable difference in imagination, and another notable difference in construction. The Interlude differed from the Morality play in having characters drawn from real life; but even in the Interlude there had been one abstraction—a Vice or a Virtue. Now in the first true English drama the Vice entirely disappeared;—there are no abstractions at all; but instead of the abstractions of comical characters, real characters are introduced. Instead of an abstraction of Mischief, for example, we have a man called Matthewe Merygreeke, who represents the quality of mischievousness in his actions and words. In short the abstraction has been transformed into reality. So much for the difference in imagination. As for differences in construction, we have a play regularly divided in scenes and acts—much longer, much more elaborate than the Interlude. The name of this first play was *Ralph Roister Doister*.¹ It is what you would call to-day “a roaring farce”—a noisy rough comedy such as would please a rough audience. But the man who wrote it was a scholar and it was witty. The writer’s name was Nicolas Udall²—a schoolmaster and a university graduate. The question is whether he invented his plan. If he invented it, he must have been a wonderful person; but the probability is that he did not invent it. He got it from reading the Latin comedies of Plautus which are constructed

¹ *Ralph Roister Doister, a comedy* a 1553 (Arber 1868).

² Nicolas Udall (1505-1556).

upon almost exactly the same lines. And Plautus seems to have been again followed by the writers of the next English play *Gammer Gurton's Needle*.¹ (I suppose you know that in old colloquial English "gaffer" means grandfather and "gammer" means grandmother—terms used in the country much as the Japanese terms *Ojiisan* and *Obaasan* are used in referring to old people). The comedy is about an old woman who lost her needle while trying to mend a pair of breeches,—that is to say, short trousers reaching to the knees. This also was a rough play, a boisterous farce; but it was written by John Still, Bishop of Bath and Wells;² and it was acted at Cambridge University. But Still did not write when he was a bishop—he probably wrote it when he was a student; and there was a very funny story about the matter. Becoming a bishop he found himself forced by religious reasons to deliver an address against the performance of comedies in universities—notwithstanding the fact that he had himself been the first to introduce comedies into universities. So we see that a man's opinions may come to be very much changed by time and position. So far, please observe that we are only speaking of comedy. The first English drama—real drama—was comedy. Tragedy came a little later; and when it came it was modelled after Latin tragedy, just as the comedy was modelled after Latin comedy. The time of Greek study in this direction had not yet come and the grandeur of the Greek work was unknown. But we shall speak of that later on. For the present we can dismiss the subject of the drama before Elizabeth's time with one more reference to *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. *Gammer Gurton's Needle* contains one thing in the second act which is much more famous than the play. I mean the best drinking song in the English language. Although commonly attributed to John Still—even by the Oxford Anthology—it is probable that the song is much older. And it is so very famous that I had better quote it entirely; for you will not find it in the more handy anthologies.

¹ *Gammer Gurton. A ryght pithy, pleasaunt and merrie comedie: intytuled Gammer Gurtons nedle . . . made by Mr. S. Mr of Art 1575* (Dodsley, *Old plays*, 1744).

² John Still, Bishop of Bath and Wells (1543?-1608).

I cannot eat but little meat,
 My stomach is not good;
 But sure I think that I can drink
 With him that wears a hood.
 Though I go bare, take ye no care,
 I nothing am a-cold;
 I stuff my skin so full within
 Of jolly good ale and old.

(Chorus) Back and side go bare, go bare;
 Both foot and hand go cold;
 But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,
 Whether it be new or old.

I love no roast but a nut-brown toast,
 And a crab laid in the fire;
 A little bread shall do me stead;
 Much bread I not desire.
 No frost nor snow, no wind, I trow,
 Can hurt me if I wold;
 I am so wrapp'd and thoroughly lapp'd
 Of jolly good ale and old.

(Chorus) Back and side go bare, go bare, &c.

And Tib, my wife, that as her life
 Loveth well good ale to seek,
 Full oft drinks she till ye may see
 The tears run down her cheek:
 Then doth she trowl to me the bowl
 Even as a maltworm should,
 And saith, "Sweetheart, I took my part
 Of this jolly good ale and old."

(Chorus) Back and side go bare, go bare, &c.

Now let them drink till they nod and wink,
 Even as good fellows should do;
 They shall not miss to have the bliss
 Good ale doth bring men to;
 And all poor souls that have scour'd bowls
 Or have them lustily troll'd,
 God save the lives of them and their wives,
 Whether they be young or old.

(*Chorus*) Back and side go bare, go bare;
Both foot and hand go cold;
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or old.

This is the text in *Gammer Gurton's Needle*; but there is an older text—longer and still more vigorous. Notice the fine effect of the double rhyme. Merely to read this song can give you no idea of its strong quality:—one should hear it sung to appreciate it. It is still sung to-day and there are certain beer-halls in London at which you can hear that very song thundered out by a company of perhaps several hundred persons—all chanting the chorus together. So we have an example of a song that has lived, scarcely changed, through three or four hundred years.

The other great event of the time just before Elizabeth was, as I told you, the introduction of new forms of poetry—the poetry of modern English cast in new moulds. But I might as well call this event the great beginning of the Italian influence, the true Renaissance influence upon English literature. There are several names connected with this event, but you need only remember the names of the greatest—the pioneers. These were two noble friends: Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. Very romantic and sad is the history of both. But their influence upon English literature was very great. They laid the foundations for the whole vast fabric of Elizabethan lyrical poetry.

Sir Thomas Wyatt¹ was the son of a country gentleman of distinction. He was sent to Cambridge to be educated at the age of only 12 years. It was the fashion in that time to send people to universities when they were mere boys; and of course university education was not then what it is now;—for no modern boy could do anything in the university at the age of twelve. But Wyatt seems to have done very well at the University; and he was still a boy when he graduated with credit. His family then got him into the court of Henry VIII, to whom he became first the page, then the friend, then the trusty states-

¹ Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542).

man—all in rapid succession. But the friendship of Henry VIII. was dangerous. As he advanced in life the King's originally generous character became greatly changed; he grew suspicious, and from suspiciousness he became cruel, and from cruelty he became tyrannical. If he had lived ten years longer, he would probably have exterminated the English nobility. As it was, the favourites of the King quickly lost their heads. You might become a minister to-day, be put in prison tomorrow and have your head cut off on the following day. And in that time the unscrupulous, the treacherous, the insincere and self-seeking men, of whom numbers always swarmed in the shadow of the court, were able to do very much harm;—by a word, by a whisper, even by a wicked smile, they might destroy the future of the most gifted person in England. Wyatt was constantly getting into prison, where his enemies managed to put him upon frivolous charges. But every time he managed to exculpate himself; and then the King would send him away upon a diplomatic mission. While he was away another plot would be contrived and he would come back only to be thrown into prison again. That was the life which one of the cleverest men of the age was obliged to live. He died in 1542, while returning from a mission; and it was commonly supposed that his early death alone saved him from worse things. He was not yet forty years old. In view of what I have just told you, this little poem which he wrote ought to interest you: it is a kind of complaint, in which he expresses all the bitterness of his position.

PATIENCE

Patience! Though I have not
The thing that I require,
I must, of force, God wot!
Forbear my most desire!
For no ways can I find
To sail against the wind!

Patience! Do what they will
To work me woe or spite;

I shall content me still
To think, both day and night!
To think and hold my peace;
Since there is no redress!

Patience, withouten blame!
For I offended nought!
I know, they know the same;
Though they have changed their thought,
Was ever thought so moved,
To hate that it hath loved!

Patience of all my harm!
For Fortune is my foe!
Patience must be the charm
To heal me of my woe!
Patience without offence
Is a painful Patience!

We may suppose that the third stanza especially refers to the sudden and unexplained anger of the King, who after treating him almost as a brother, began to consider him an enemy. There are several other suggestions of his sorrow scattered through his lyrics. A great deal of the poetry appears to have been written as a medicine or discipline against sorrow. But we shall return to this subject again. I must first tell you about Wyatt's friend Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey.¹ Howard was a much younger man than Wyatt; and he seems to have been to Wyatt very much in the relation of pupil to master—I should almost say, younger brother to elder brother. But they were too far removed from each other in rank to be thus spoken of. Wyatt was a knight and a gentleman, but Howard was of the very noblest blood in England—in fact he ranked close to the King. He was a cousin, moreover, of Anne Boleyn, the unfortunate Queen; and he was the bosom friend of Henry's illegitimate son, the Earl of Richmond, a young man of about his own age, who seems to have been very amiable and generous. All these relationships were not sources of strength, however; they were sources of extreme danger. Young Howard

¹ Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517?-1547).

had enemies, and many a time found himself in serious danger. At such times the young son of Henry VIII. would go to his father and plead for his friend,—and as Henry loved and trusted his son, the pleading was always successful. Unfortunately the Earl of Richmond fell sick and died in the flower of his youth. Howard was then lost. The discovery of the Queen's adultery filled the King's mind with hatred and suspicion of all her relations. Henry Howard was her cousin. He was arrested, charged with treason and executed without any proof against him. He was not yet 30 years old. Perhaps you have seen the famous portrait of him in court costume—a splendid youth, with a thoughtful, frank, and very handsome face fringed by a golden beard.

These two unfortunate men will always be famous in English literature because of what they did for English poetry,—and did, as you have seen, under circumstances of great pain and distress. They introduced Italian forms of verse—many forms—into English poetry; but the facts by which you ought to remember them especially are these:—

Wyatt introduced the Sonnet into English literature.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, first introduced the ten-syllable blank verse, afterwards used for Shakespeare's plays. That is why they are such famous literary persons. They were not, either of them, very great poets; but they were great literary forces. Let us now say a word about the Sonnet, which Wyatt introduced.

I think you know that the Sonnet is the noblest form of the short poetry in Western literature, — it does not matter whether the literature be English, Italian, French or German. It is complicated, though not so complicated as some other forms and its value does not depend upon its complexity. Stating the matter as simply as possible I will say that more can be done in a great and serious way, within the framework of the Sonnet than within any other poetical form of equal length. The length, you know, is fourteen lines. All the greatest poets of all countries have used this form—Dante and Petrarch in Italy, Shakespeare and Milton in England; and the

names of the great French poets who have used this form are too many to quote. It was from Italy that Wyatt imported it into England.

As I have said, the Sonnet consists of 14 lines. The first eight lines represent two quatrains; and this division of the Sonnet is called the Octave—because of the number of the lines in it. The last six lines represent two triplets or tercets—that is to say, to join the stanzas of three lines each, and this part is called the Sestet. Now the arrangement of the rhymes ought to be about this:—

a b e a — a b e a — c d e — c d e.

There are a number of rules; but we need not consider them now. The form of which I have spoken is the old Italian form, considered the most perfect. The French form is somewhat differently arranged as to the lines. Now Wyatt, as I said, was not a great poet; and the English of the 16th century was not nearly so perfect an instrument for poetry as the Italian of even the 15th century. Wyatt found that he could not manage the Sonnet in English, keeping strictly to the Italian rules. He changed the rules a little, and made the form easier; and Shakespeare did the same thing. It was not until the time of Milton that the pure Italian form of the Sonnet was grandly managed in English verse. And even Milton sometimes made changes which would not be permitted to-day,—for example:—

a b b a — a b b a — c d — c d — c d.

The substitution of distichs for tercets, that is to say, of three couplets of two lines each, instead of two stanzas of three lines each, enabled Milton to do with fewer rhymes. To-day all conform to the Italian form. The Sonnets of Rossetti are of the pure kind.

Wyatt's Sonnets are really very bad: that makes no difference. He made the first attempt,—eventually followed by all the great English poets. In lyrics he did much better; and some of his forms are very pretty, and still in use. You will find in the Oxford Anthology, for example, the whole of his

beautiful lute poem—in which the lover tells his sorrow to the instrument ;

My lute, awake! perform the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste ;
And end that I have now begun :
For when this song is sung and past,
My lute! be still, for I have done.

The whole poem has a charm that is strangely modern—not at all like the ordinary production during the period from 1500 to 1542—the date of Wyatt's death. Where Wyatt's influence was not good was his attempt to introduce twelve-syllable and fourteen-syllable verse. Neither of these are suited to English poetry—because of the construction of the language. It is different in French;—the Alexandrine is a form particularly natural to French poetry, because of the construction of French. We have altogether nearly a hundred poems by Wyatt—I believe the exact number is 96. Most of them are love poems; but that was the fashion of the day. The stories about Wyatt's romantic loves are probably founded upon nothing. We are not so sure in the case of Surrey. There is a very curious story about Surrey's Geraldine. He travelled in the days when the great magician Cornelius Agrippa was alive; and it is said that Agrippa showed him the image of the girl in a magical glass. Of course the magical romance is only romance; but there is good reason to suppose that Surrey felt, even after his marriage, a chivalrous admiration for the young Irish girl to whom so many of his love poems were addressed. Surrey had a better ear for poetry than Wyatt; but, though his verse is not bad, it is not great. It was his influence as an innovator that was great; and this influence was exerted by his translation of the *Aeneid*¹ into blank verse—ten-syllable blank verse.

Of course he did not invent the blank verse;—he found it in Italy. Early in the 15th century the Italians had begun to write in blank verse. And the reason is interesting. When the great revival of Greek and Latin studies began, Italian

¹ *Certain books (II and IV) of Virgiles Aeneis tr. a 1547* (Apud Ricardum Tottel 1557; Roxb. Club 1814).

scholars were greatly impressed by the fact that Greek and Latin poetry was rhymeless, and nevertheless, much more perfect than modern poetry. Gradually Italian scholars came to think of rhyme as a vulgar thing,—a barbaric thing. Scholars at least ought not to use it. And blank verse came to be an Italian fashion. Surrey brought it from Italy; Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists adopted it for their plays;—then Milton gave it classical perfection;—then Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning—how many other I need not say. And all the blank verse glory of English literature may be said to date from Surrey.

I have nothing by Surrey which is striking enough to quote to you; but we have talked so much about Henry VIII. that I may quote a few of the King's stanzas. Henry liked poetry—though he was not very clever at it. He liked wrestling, shooting and throwing heavy weights much better—in fact all kinds of athletic exercises. And that is the subject of his poem. By the way Henry prided himself upon his skill at wrestling; and this pride once had serious political consequence. When he met King Francis I. of France, he first hugged him affectionately and then wanted to wrestle with him. Francis mildly observed that wrestling was not a pastime exactly suited to the dignity of kings. But one day Henry pushed the matter so far that Francis gave him a chance to wrestle and that wrestle did not last very long. Henry was a very powerful man, heavy and muscular;—Francis was very slender and lightly built; but he was also very active and skilful in bodily exercise,—and with the greatest ease he gave Henry such a fall that the ground shook. The English King never forgave that fall; the memory of it rankled even in his political plans. But let us read Henry's poem, because it adopted the Italian form introduced by his courtiers Wyatt and Surrey:—

Pastime with good company
 I love, and shall until I die!
 Grudge who lust; but none deny!
 So God be pleased, thus live will I!
 For my pastance,

Hunt, sing, and dance!
 My heart is set.
 All goodly sport
 For my comfort,
 Who shall me let?

Youth must have some dalliance!
 Of good, or ill, some pastance!
 Company, methinks, then best,
 All thoughts and fancies to digest!
 For Idleness
 Is chief mistress
 Of vices all!
 Then who can say,
 But mirth and play
 Is best of all!

Company with honesty
 Is virtue, vices to flee!
 Company is good, and ill;
 But every man hath his free will!
 The best ensue!
 The worst eschew!
 My mind shall be
 Virtue to use,
 Vice to refuse!
 Thus shall I use me!

Henry's poetry is not very fine; but it gives us some interesting glimpses of his character—his belief in the worth of physical exercise and his desire that men should be free to do as he pleased so long as they took care to do all that the King wills.

We have now seen the important events in literature before Elizabeth—the greatest at least. During the following reign,—Mary,—there was very little literature of importance. Though not exact, it is very serviceable and approximately correct to speak of Elizabethan literature as beginning from 1558—the date of Elizabeth's accession. A word now about Elizabethan literature in general,