BOOK II.

THE RENAISSANCE

CHAPTER I.

The Pagan Renaissance.

§ 1. MANNERS OF THE TIME.

I.

For seventeen centuries a deep and sad thought had weighed upon the spirit of man, first to overwhelm it, then to exalt and to weaken it, never loosing its hold throughout this long space of time. It was the idea of the weakness and decay of the human race. Greek corruption, Roman oppression, and the dissolution of the ancient world, had given rise to it; it, in its turn, had produced a stoical resignation, an epicurean indifference, Alexandrian mysticism, and the Christian hope in the kingdom of God. "The world is evil and lost, let us escape by insensibility, amazement, ecstasy." Thus spoke the philosophers; and religion, coming after, announced that the end was near: "Prepare, for the kingdom of God is at hand." For a thousand years universal ruin incessantly drove still deeper into their hearts this gloomy thought; and when man in the
feudal state raised himself, by sheer force of courage and muscles, from the depths of final imbecility and general misery, he discovered his thought and his work fettered by the crushing idea, which, forbidding a life of nature and worldly hopes, erected into ideals the obedience of the monk and the dreams of fanatics.

It grew ever worse and worse. For the natural result of such a conception, a, of the miseries which engender it, and the discouragement which it gives rise to, is to do away with personal action, and to replace originality by submission. From the fourth century, gradually the dead letter was substituted for the living faith. Christians resigned themselves into the hands of the clergy, they into the hands of the Pope. Christian opinions were subordinated to theologians, and theologians to the Fathers. Christian faith was reduced to the accomplishment of works, and works to the accomplishment of ceremonies. Religion, fluid during the first centuries, was now congealed into a hard crystal, and the coarse contact of the barbarians had deposited upon its surface a layer of idolatry: theocracy and the Inquisition, the monopoly of the clergy and the prohibition of the Scriptures, the worship of relics and the sale of indulgences began to appear. In place of Christianity, the church; in place of a free creed, enforced orthodoxy; in place of moral fervour, fixed religious practices; in place of the heart and stirring thought, outward and mechanical discipline: such are the characteristics of the middle ages. Under this constraint thinking society had ceased to think; philosophy was turned into a text-book, and poetry into dotage; and mankind, slothful and paunching, delivering up their conscience and their conduct into the hands of their priests, seemed but as puppets,
fit only for reciting a catechism and mumbling over beads.  

At last invention makes another start; and it makes it by the efforts of the lay society, which rejected theocracy, kept the State free, and which presently discovered, or re-discovered, one after another, the industries, sciences, and arts. All was renewed; America and the Indies were added to the map of the world; the shape of the earth was ascertained, the system of the universe propounded, modern philology was inaugurated, the experimental sciences set on foot, art and literature shot forth like a harvest, religion was transformed: there was no province of human intelligence and action which was not refreshed and fertilised by this universal effort. It was so great, that it passed from the innovators to the laggards, and reformed Catholicism in the face of Protestantism which it formed. It seems as though men had suddenly opened their eyes and seen. In fact, they attain a new and superior kind of intelligence. It is the proper feature of this age, that men no longer make themselves masters of objects by bits, or isolated, or through scholastic or mechanical classifications, but as a whole, in general and complete views, with the eager grasp of a sympathetic spirit, which being placed before a vast object, penetrates it in all its parts, tries it in all its relations, appropriates and assimilates it, impresses upon itself its living and potent image, so lifelike and so powerful, that it is fain to translate it into externals through a work of art or an action. An extraordinary warmth of soul, a superabundant and

1 See at Bruges, the pictures of Hemling (fifteenth century). No paintings enable us to understand so well the ecclesiastical piety of the middle ages, which was altogether like that of the Buddhists.
splendid imagination, reveries, visions, artists, believers, founders, creators,—that is what such a form of intellect produces; for to create we must have, as had Luther and Loyola, Michel Angelo and Shakspeare, an idea, not abstract, partial, and dry, but well defined, finished, sensible,—a true creation, which acts inwardly, and struggles to appear in the light. This was Europe's grand age, and the most notable epoch of human growth. To this day we live from its sap, we only carry on its pressure and efforts.

II.

When human power is manifested so clearly and in such great works, it is no wonder if the ideal changes, and the old pagan idea reappears. It recurs, bringing with it the worship of beauty and vigour, first in Italy; for this, of all countries in Europe, is the most pagan, and the nearest to the ancient civilisation; thence in France and Spain, and Flanders, and even in Germany; and finally in England. How is it propagated? What revolution of manners reunited mankind at this time, everywhere, under a sentiment which they had forgotten for fifteen hundred years? Merely that their condition had improved, and they felt it. The idea ever expresses the actual situation, and the creatures of the imagination, like the conceptions of the mind, only manifest the state of society and the degree of its welfare; there is a fixed connection between what man admires and what he is. While misery overwhelms him, while the decadence is visible, and hope shut out, he is inclined to curse his life on earth, and seek consolation in another sphere.

1 Van Orley, Michel Coxcie, Franz Floris, the de Vos', the Sodiers, Crispin de Pass, and the artists of Nuremberg.
As soon as his sufferings are alleviated, his power made manifest, his prospects brightened, he begins once more to love the present life, to be self-confident, to love and praise energy, genius, all the effective faculties which labour to procure him happiness. About the twentieth year of Elizabeth’s reign, the nobles gave up shield and two-handed sword for the rapier; a little, almost imperceptible fact, yet vast, for it is like the change which sixty years ago, made us give up the sword at court, to leave us with our arms swinging about in our black coats. In fact, it was the close of feudal life, and the beginning of court-life, just as to-day court-life is at an end, and the democratic reign has begun. With the two-handed swords, heavy coats of mail, feudal keeps, private warfare, permanent disorder, all the scourges of the middle-age retired, and faded into the past. The English had done with the Wars of the Roses. They no longer ran the risk of being pillaged to-morrow for being rich, and hung the next day for being traitors; they have no further need to furbish up their armour, make alliances with powerful nations, lay in stores for the winter, gather together men-at-arms, scour the country to plunder and hang others. The monarchy, in England as throughout Europe, establishes peace in the community, and with peace appear the useful arts. Domestic comfort follows civil security; and man, better furnished in his home, better protected in his hamlet,

1 The first carriage was in 1564. It caused much astonishment. Some said that it was “a great sea-shell brought from China;” others, “that it was a temple in which cannibals worshipped the devil.”

2 For a picture of this state of things, see Fenn’s Paston Letters.

3 Louis XI. in France, Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain, Henry VII. in England. In Italy the feudal regime ended earlier, by the establishment of republics and principalities.
takes pleasure in his life on earth, which he has changed and means to change.

Toward the close of the fifteenth century the impetus was given; commerce and the woollen trade made a sudden advance, and such an enormous one that cornfields were changed into pasture-lands, "whereby the inhabitants of the said town (Manchester) have gotten and come into riches and wealthy livings," so that in 1553, 40,000 pieces of cloth were exported in English ships. It was already the England which we see to day, a land of green meadows, intersected by hedgerows, crowded with cattle, and abounding in ships—a manufacturing opulent land, with a people of beef-eating toilers, who enrich it while they enrich themselves. They improved agriculture to such an extent, that in half-a-century the produce of an acre was doubled. They grew so rich, that at the beginning of the reign of Charles I. the Commons represented three times the wealth of the Upper House. The ruin of Antwerp by the Duke of Parma sent to England "the third part of the merchants and manufacturers, who made silk, damask, stockings, taffetas, and serges." The defeat of the Armada and the decadence of Spain opened the seas to English merchants. The toiling hive, who would dare, attempt, explore, act in unison, and always with profit, was

1 1488, Act of Parliament on Enclosures.
3 Between 1577 and 1588 the increase was from two and a half to five millions.
4 In 1585; Ludovic Gueciardini.
5 Henry VIII., at the beginning of his reign had but one ship of war. Elizabeth sent out one hundred and fifty against the Armada. In 1553 was founded a company to trade with Russia. In 1578 Drake circumnavigated the globe. In 1600 the East India Company was founded.
about to reap its advantages and set out on its voyages, buzzing over the universe.

At the base and on the summit of society, in all ranks of life, in all grades of human condition, this new welfare became visible. In 1534, considering that the streets of London were “very noyous and foul, and in many places thereof very jeopardous to all people passing and repassing, as well on horseback as on foot,” Henry VIII. began the paving of the city. New streets covered the open spaces where the young men used to run races and to wrestle. Every year the number of taverns, theatres, gambling rooms, bear-gardens, increased. Before the time of Elizabeth the country-houses of gentlemen were little more than straw-thatched cottages, plastered with the coarsest clay, lighted only by trellises. “Howbeit,” says Harrison (1580), “such as be latelie builded are commonlie either of bricke or hard stone, or both; their roomes large and comelie, and houses of office further distant from their lodgings.” The old wooden houses were covered with plaster, “which, beside the delectable whitenesse of the stuffe itselfe, is laied on so even and smoothlie, as nothing in my judgment can be done with more exactnesse.” 1 This open admiration shows from what hovels they had escaped. Glass was at last employed for windows, and the bare walls were covered with hangings, on which visitors might see, with delight and astonishment, plants, animals, figures. They began to use stoves, and experienced the unwonted pleasure of being warm. Harrison notes three important changes which had taken place in the farm-houses of his time:

“One is, the multitude of chimneys lately erected, whereas in

1 Nathan Drake, Shakespeare and his Times, 1817, i. v. 72 et passim
their young daies there were not above two or three, if so many, in most uplandishe townes of the realme. . . . The second is the great (although not generall), amendment of lodging, for our fathers (yea and we ourselves also) have lien full oft upon straw pallets, on rough mats covered onelie with a sheet, under coverlets made of dagswain, or hop-harlots, and a good round log under their heads, instead of a bolster or pillow. If it were so that the good man of the house, had within seven yeares after his marriage purchased a matteres or flockebed, and thoreto a sacke of chaffe to rest his head upon, he thought himselfe to be as well lodged as the lord of the towne. . . . Pillowes (said they) were thought meet onelie for women in childbirth. . . . The third thing is the exchange of vessell, as of treene platters into pewter, and wodden spoones into silver or tin; for so common was all sorts of treene stuff in old time, that a man should hardly find four peeces of pewter (of which one was peradventure a salt) in a good farmers house."

It is not possession, but acquisition, which gives men pleasure and sense of power; they observe sooner a small happiness, new to them, than a great happiness which is old. It is not when all is good, but when all is better, that they see the bright side of life, and are tempted to make a holiday of it. This is why at this period they did make a holiday of it, a splendid show, so like a picture that it fostered painting in Italy, so like a piece of acting, that it produced the drama in England. Now that the axe and sword of the civil wars had beaten down the independent nobility, and the abolition of the law of maintenance had destroyed the petty royalty of each great feudal baron, the lords quitted their sombre castles, battlemented fortresses, surrounded by stagnant water, pierced with narrow windows, a sort of stone breastplates of no use but to

1 Nathan Drake, *Shakespeare and his Times*, i. v. 102.
preserve the life of their master. They flock into new palaces, with vaulted roofs and turrets, covered with fantastic and manifold ornaments, adorned with terraces and vast staircases, with gardens, fountains, statues, such as were the palaces of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, half Gothic and half Italian,\(^1\) whose convenience, splendour, and symmetry announced already habits of society and the taste for pleasure. They came to court and abandoned their old manners; the four meals which scarcely sufficed their former voracity were reduced to two; gentlemen soon became refined, placing their glory in the elegance and singularity of their amusements and their clothes. They dressed magnificently in splendid materials, with the luxury of men who rustle silk and make gold sparkle for the first time: doublets of scarlet satin; cloaks of sable, costing a thousand ducats; velvet shoes, embroidered with gold and silver, covered with rosettes and ribbons; boots with falling tops, from whence hung a cloud of lace, embroidered with figures of birds, animals, constellations, flowers in silver, gold, or precious stones; ornamented shirts costing ten pounds a piece. “It is a common thing to put a thousand goats and a hundred oxen on a coat, and to carry a whole manor on one’s back.”\(^2\) The costumes of the time were like shrines. When Elizabeth died, they found three thousand dresses in her wardrobe. Need we speak of the monstrous ruffs of the ladies, their puffed out dresses, their stomachers stiff with diamonds? As a singular sign of the times, the men were more

\(^1\) This was called the Tudor style. Under James I., in the hands of Inigo Jones, it became entirely Italian, approaching the antique.

changeable and more bedecked than they. " Harrison

"Such is our mutabilitie, that to daie there is none to the Spanish guise, to morrow the French toies are most fine and delectable, yer long no such apparell as that which is after the high Alaman fashion, by and by the Turkish maner is generallie best liked of, otherwise the Morisco gowns, the Barbarian sleeves... and the short French breeches... And as these fashions are diverse, so likewise it is a world to see the costilenesse and the curiositie; the excesse and the vanitie; the pompe and the braverie; the change and the varietie; and finallie, the ficklenesse and the follie that is in all degrees."¹

Folly, it may have been, but poetry likewise. There was something more than puppyism in this masquerade of splendid costume. The overflow of inner sentiment found this issue, as also in drama and poetry. It was an artistic spirit which induced it. There was an incredible outgrowth of living forms from their brains. They acted like their engravers, who give us in their frontispieces a prodigality of fruits, flowers, active figures, animals, gods, and pour out and confuse the whole treasure of nature in every corner of their paper. They must enjoy the beautiful; they would be happy through their eyes; they perceive in consequence naturally the relief and energy of forms. From the accession of Henry VIII. to the death of James I. we find nothing but tournaments, processions, public entries, masquerades. First come the royal banquets, coronation displays, large and noisy pleasures of Henry VIII. Wolsey entertains him

"In so gorgeous a sort and costlie maner, that it was an heauen to behold. There wanted no dames or damosels meet or apt to

¹ Nathan Drake, Shakespeare and His Times, ii. 6, 27.
danse with the maskers, or to garnish the place for the time: then was there all kind of musike and harmonie, with fine voices both of men and children. On a time the king came suddenlie thither in a maske with a dozen maskers all in garments like sheepeheardes, made of fine cloth of gold, and eremosin sattin paneled, ... having sixteene torch-bearers. ... In came a new banket before the king wherein were served two hundred diverse dishes, of costlie devises and subtilities. Thus passed they forth the night with banketting, dancing, and other triumphs, to the great comfort of the king, and pleasant regard of the nobilitie thare assembled.”

Count, if you can, the mythological entertainments, the theatrical receptions, the open-air operas played before Elizabeth, James, and their great lords. At Kenilworth the pageants lasted ten days. There was everything; learned recreations, novelties, popular plays, sanguinary spectacles, coarse farces, juggling and feats of skill, allegories, mythologies, chivalric exhibitions, rustic and national commemorations. At the same time, in this universal outburst and sudden expanse, men become interested in themselves, find their life desirable, worthy of being represented and put on the stage complete; they play with it, delight in looking upon it, love its ups and downs, and make of it a work of art. The queen is received by a sibyl, then by giants of the time of Arthur, then by the Lady of the Lake, Sylvanus, Pomona, Ceres, and Bacchus, every divinity in turn presents her with the first fruits of his empire. Next day, a savage, dressed in moss and ivy, discourses before her with Echo in her praise. Thirteen bears are set fighting against

1 Holinshed (1586), 1608, 6 vols. iii. 763 et passim.
2 Holinshed, iii., Reign of Henry VIII. Elizabeth and James Progresses, by Nichols.
dogs. An Italian acrobat performs wonderful feats before the whole assembly. A rustic marriage takes place before the queen, then a sort of comic fight amongst the peasants of Coventry, who represent the defeat of the Danes. As she is returning from the chase, Triton, rising from the lake, prays her, in the name of Neptune, to deliver the enchanted lady, pursued by a cruel knight, *Syr Bruse sauns Pitee*. Presently the lady appears, surrounded by nymphs, followed close by Protesus, who is borne by an enormous dolphin. Concealed in the dolphin, a band of musicians with a chorus of ocean-deities, sing the praise of the powerful, beautiful, chaste queen of England. You perceive that comedy is not confined to the theatre; the great of the realm and the queen herself become actors. The cravings of the imagination are so keen, that the court becomes a stage. Under James I., every year, on Twelfth-day, the queen, the chief ladies and nobles, played a piece called a Masque, a sort of allegory combined with dances, heightened in effect by decorations and costumes of great splendour, of which the mythological paintings of Rubens can alone give an idea:

"The attire of the lords was from the antique Greek statues. On their heads they wore Persic crowns, that were with scrolls of gold plate turned outward, and wreathed about with a carnation and silver net-lawn. Their bodies were of carnation cloth of silver; to express the naked, in manner of the Greek thorax, girt under the breasts with a broad belt of cloth of gold, fastened with jewels; the mantles were of coloured silke; the first, sky-colour; the second, pearl-colour; the third, flame colour; the fourth, tawny. The ladies attire was of white cloth of silver, wrought with Juno's birds and fruits; a loose under garment,

full gathered, of carination, striped with silver, and parted with a golden zone; beneath that, another flowing garment, of watchet cloth of silver, laced with gold; their hair carelessly bound under the circle of a rare and rich coronet, adorned with all variety, and choice of jewels; from the top of which flowed a transparent veil, down to the ground. Their shoes were azure and gold, set with rubies and diamonds.”

I abridge the description, which is like a fairy tale. Fancy that all these costumes, this glitter of materials, this sparkling of diamonds, this splendour of nudities, was displayed daily at the marriage of the great, to the bold sounds of a pagan epithalamium. Think of the feasts which the Earl of Carlisle introduced, where was served first of all a table loaded with sumptuous viands, as high as a man could reach, in order to remove it presently, and replace it by another similar table. This prodigality of magnificence, these costly follies, this unbridling of the imagination, this intoxication of eye and ear, this comedy played by the lords of the realm, showed, like the pictures of Rubens, Jordaens, and their Flemish contemporaries, so open an appeal to the senses, so complete a return to nature, that our chilled and gloomy age is scarcely able to imagine it.

III.

To vent the feelings, to satisfy the heart and eyes, to set free boldly on all the roads of existence the pack of appetites and instincts, this was the craving which the manners of the time betrayed. It was “merry England,”


2 Certain private letters also describe the court of Elizabeth as a place where there was little piety or practice of religion, and where all enormities reigned in the highest degree.
as they called it then. It was not yet stern and con-
strained. It expanded widely, freely, and rejoiced to
find itself so expanded. No longer at court only was
the drama found, but in the village. Strolling com-
panies betook themselves thither, and the country folk
supplied any deficiencies, when necessary. Shakspeare
saw, before he depicted them, stupid fellows, carpenters,
joiners, bellows-menders, play Pyramus and Thisbe, re-
present the lion roaring as gently as any sucking dove,
and the wall, by stretching out their hands. Every holi-
day was a pageant, in which townspeople, workmen, and
children bore their parts. They were actors by nature.
When the soul is full and fresh, it does not express its
ideas by reasonings; it plays and figures them; it
minces them; that is the true and original language,
the children's tongue, the speech of artists, of invention,
and of joy. It is in this manner they please them-
selves with songs and feasting, on all the symbolic holi-
days with which tradition has filled the year.\footnote{Nathan Drake, \textit{Shakspeare and his Times,} chap. v. and vi.} On the
Sunday after Twelfth-night the labourers parade the
streets, with their shirts over their coats, decked with
ribbons, dragging a plough to the sound of music, and
dancing a sword-dance; on another day they draw in
a cart a figure made of ears of corn, with songs, flutes,
and drums; on another, Father Christmas and his com-
pany; or else they enact the history of Robin Hood,
the bold archer, around the May-pole, or the legend of
Saint George and the Dragon. We might occupy half
a volume in describing all these holidays, such as
Harvest Home, All Saints, Martinmas, Sheepshearing,
above all Christmas, which lasted twelve days, and
sometimes six weeks. They eat and drink, junket,
tumble about, kiss the girls, ring the bells, satiate themselves with noise: coarse drunken revels, in which man is an unbridled animal, and which are the incarnation of natural life. The Puritans made no mistake about that. Stubbes says:

"First, all the wilde heads of the parishes, conventing together, choose them a ground capitaine of mischief, when they innoble with the title of my Lord of Misrule, and hym they crown with great solemnitie, and adopt for their kyng. This kyng anointed, chuseth for the twentieth, fourtie, three score, or a hundred lustie guttes like to hymselfe to waite uppon his lordely maestie. . . . Then have they their hobbie horses, dragons, and other antiques, together with their bauddie pipers and thunderyng drommers, to strike up the devilles daunce withall: then marche these heathen companie towards the churche and churche-yarde, their pipers pipying, their drommers thonderyng, their stumppes dauncyng, their belles rynglyng, their handkercheffes swyngyng about their heads like madmen, their hobbie horses and other monsters skir mishyng amongst the throng; and in this sorte they goe to the churche (though the minister bee at prayer or preychyng), dauncyng, and swyngyng their handkercheffes over their heades, in the churche, like devilles incarnate, with such a confused noise, that no man can hear his owne voice. Then the foolish people they looke, they stare, they laugh, they fleere, and mount upon formes and pewes, to see these goodly pageauntes, solemnized in this sort. Then after this, aboute the churche they goe againe and againe, and so forthe into the churche-yarde, where they have commonly their sommer haules, their bowers, arbours, and banquettynge houses set up, wherein they feaste, banquet, and daunce all that daie, and peradventure all that night too. And thus these terrestrial furies spend the Sabbaoth daie! . . . An other sorte of fantastical fools bringe to these helhoundes (the Lorde of Misrule and his complices) some bread, some good ale, some newe cheese, some olde cheese, some custardes, some cakes, some flanmes, some tarts, some creame, some meate, some one thing, some an other."
He continues thus:

"Against Maie, every parishe, towne and village assemble themselves together, bothe men, women, and children, olde and yong, even all indifferently; they goe to the woodes where they spende all the night in pleasant pastymes, and in the morning they returne, bringing with them birch, bowes, and branches of trees, to deck their assemblies withall. But their cheefest iewell they bringe from thence is their Maie poole, whiche they bring home with great veneration, as thus: They have twenty or fourtie yoke of oxen, every ox havyng a sweete nosegaie of flowers tyed on the tippe of his horns, and these oxen, drawe home this Maie poole (this stinekyng idoll rather) . . . and thus beyng reared up, they strawe the grounde aboute, binde greene boughes about it, sett up sommer haules, bowers, and arbours hard by it; and then fall they to banquet and feast, to leape and daunce aboute it, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idolles. . . . Of a hundred maides goyng to the woode over night, there have scarcely the third parte returned home againe undefiled."  

"On Shrove Tuesday," says another, "at the sound of a bell, the folk become insane, thousands at a time, and forget all decency and common sense. . . . It is to Satan and the devil that they pay homage and do sacrifice to in these abominable pleasures." It is in fact to nature, to the ancient Pan, to Freya, to Hertha, her sisters, to the old Teutonic deities who survived the middle-age. At this period, in the temporary decay of Christianity, and the sudden advance of corporal well-being, man adored himself, and there endured no life within him but that of paganism.


* Hentzner's *Travels in England* (Bentley's translation). He thought that the figure carried about in the Harvest Home represented Ceres.
IV.

To sum up, observe the process of ideas at this time. A few sectarians, chiefly in the towns and of the people, clung gloomily to the Bible. But the court and the men of the world sought their teachers and their heroes from pagan Greece and Rome. About 1490\(^1\) they began to read the classics; one after the other they translated them; it was soon the fashion to read them in the original. Queen Elizabeth, Jane Grey, the Duchess of Norfolk, the Countess of Arundel, and many other ladies, were conversant with Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero in the original, and appreciated them. Gradually, by an insensible change, men were raised to the level of the great and healthy minds who had freely handled ideas of all kinds fifteen centuries before. They comprehended not only their language, but their thought; they did not repeat lessons from, but held conversations with them; they were their equals, and found in them intellects as manly as their own. For they were not scholastic cavillers, miserable compilers, repulsive pedants, like the professors of jargon whom the middle-age had set over them, like gloomy Duns Scotus, whose leaves Henry VIII.'s Visitors scattered to the winds. They were gentlemen, statesmen, the most polished and best educated men in the world, who knew how to speak, and drew their ideas not from books, but from things, living ideas, and which entered of themselves into living souls. Across the train of hooded schoolmen and sordid cavillers the two adult and thinking ages were united, and the moderns, silencing the infan-

\(^1\) Warton, vol. ii. sect. 35. Before 1600 all the great poets were translated into English, and between 1550 and 1616 all the great historians of Greece and Rome. Lyly in 1500 first taught Greek in public.
tine or snuffling voices of the middle-age, condescended only to converse with the noble ancients. They accepted their gods, at least they understand them, and keep them by their side. In poems, festivals, on hangings, almost in all ceremonies, they appear, not restored by pedantry merely, but kept alive by sympathy, and endowed by the arts with a life as flourishing and almost as profound as that of their earliest birth. After the terrible night of the middle-age, and the dolorous legends of spirits and the damned, it was a delight to see again Olympus shining upon us from Greece; its heroic and beautiful deities once more ravishing the heart of men; they raised and instructed this young world by speaking to it the language of passion and genius; and this age of strong deeds, free sensuality, bold invention, had only to follow its own bent, in order to discover in them its masters and the eternal promoters of liberty and beauty.

Nearer still was another paganism, that of Italy; the more seductive because more modern, and because it circulates fresh sap in an ancient stock; the more attractive, because more sensuous and present, with its worship of force and genius, of pleasure and voluptuousness. The rigorists knew this well, and were shocked at it. Ascham writes:

"These bee the enchantementes of Circes, brought out of Italie to marre mens maners in England; much, by example of ill life, but more by precepts of fonde bookes, of late translated out of Italian into English, sold in every shop in London. . . . There bee moe of these ungratious bookes set out in Printe wythin these fewe monethes, than have bene sene in England many score yeares before. . . . Than they have in more reverence the triumphes of Petrarche: than the Genesis of Moses: They
make more account of Tullies offices, than S. Paules epistles; of a tale in Boccace than a storie of the Bible.”

In fact, at that time Italy clearly led in everything, and civilisation was to be drawn thence, as from its spring. What is this civilisation which is thus imposed on the whole of Europe, whence every science and every elegance comes, whose laws are obeyed in every court, in which Surrey, Sidney, Spenser, Shakspeare sought their models and their materials? It was pagan in its elements and its birth; in its language, which is but Latin, hardly changed; in its Latin traditions and recollections, which no gap has interrupted; in its constitution, whose old municipal life first led and absorbed the feudal life; in the genius of its race, in which energy and joy always abounded. More than a century before other nations,—from the time of Petrarch, Rienzi, Boccaccio,—the Italians began to recover the lost antiquity, to set free the manuscripts buried in the dungeons of France and Germany, to restore, interpret, comment upon, study the ancients, to make themselves Latin in heart and mind, to compose in prose and verse with the polish of Cicero and Virgil, to hold sprightly converse and intellectual pleasures as the ornament and the fairest flower of life. They adopt not merely the externals of the life of the ancients, but its very essence, that is, preoccupation with the present life, forgetfulness of the future, the appeal to the senses, the


2 Ma il vero e principal ornamento dell’ animo in ciascuno pensa io che siano le lettere, benché i Franchesi solamente conoscano la nobilità dell’arme . . . et tutti i litterati tengon per vilissimi huomini. Castiglione, il Cortegiano, cd. 1585, p. 112.
renunciation of Christianity. "We must enjoy," sang their first poet, Lorenzo de Medici, in his pastorals and triumphal songs: "there is no certainty of to-morrow." In Pulci the mocking incredulity breaks out, the bold and sensual gaiety, all the audacity of the free-thinkers, who kicked aside in disgust the worn-out monkish flock of the middle age. It was he who, in a jesting poem, puts at the beginning of each canto a Hosanna, an In principio, or a sacred text from the mass-book.¹ When he had been inquiring what the soul was, and how it entered the body, he compared it to jam covered up in white bread quite hot. What would become of it in the other world? "Some people think they will there discover becacos, plucked ortolans, excellent wine, good beds, and therefore they follow the monks, walking behind them. "As for us, dear friend, we shall go into the black valley, where we shall hear no more Alleluias." If you wish for a more serious thinker, listen to the great patriot, the Thucydides of the age, Machiavelli, who, contrasting Christianity and paganism, says that the first places "supreme happiness in humility, abjection, contempt for human things, while the other makes the sovereign good consist in greatness of soul, force of body, and all the qualities which make men to be feared." Whereon he boldly concludes that Christianity teaches men "to support evils, and not to do great deeds;" he discovers in that inner weakness the cause of all oppressions; declares that "the wicked saw that they could tyrannise without fear over men, who, in order to get to paradise, were more disposed to suffer than to avenge injuries." Through such sayings, in spite of his con-

¹ See Burchard (the Pope's Steward), account of the festival at which Lucretia Borgia was present. Letters of Aretinus. Life of Colonna, etc.
strained genuflexions, we can see which religion he prefers. The ideal to which all efforts were turning, on which all thoughts depended, and which completely raised this civilisation, was the strong and happy man, possessing all the powers to accomplish his wishes, and disposed to use them in pursuit of his happiness.

If you would see this idea in its grandest operation, you must seek it in the arts, such as Italy made them and carried throughout Europe, raising or transforming the national schools with such originality and vigour, that all art likely to survive is derived from hence, and the population of living figures with which they have covered our walls, denotes, like Gothic architecture or French tragedy, a unique epoch of human intelligence. The attenuated mediæval Christ—a miserable, distorted, and bleeding earth-worm; the pale and ugly Virgin—a poor old peasant woman, fainting beside the cross of her Son; ghastly martyrs, dried up with fasts, with entranced eyes; knotty-fingered saints with sunken chests,—all the touching or lamentable visions of the middle-age have vanished: the train of godheads which are now developed show nothing but flourishing frames, noble, regular features, and fine easy gestures; the names, the names only, are Christian. The new Jesus is a “crucified Jupiter,” as Pulci called him; the Virgins which Raphael sketched naked, before covering them with garments,¹ are beautiful girls, quite earthly, related to the Fornarina. The saints which Michel Angelo arranges and contorts in heaven in his picture of the Last Judgment are an assembly of athletes, capable of fighting well and daring much. A martyr-

¹ See his sketches at Oxford, and those of Fra Bartolomeo at Florence. See also the Martyrdom of St. Laurence, by Baccio Bandinelli.
dom, like that of Saint Laurence; is a fine ceremony in which a beautiful young man, without clothing, lies amidst fifty men dressed and grouped as in an ancient gymnasium. Is there one of them who had macerated himself? Is there one who had thought with anguish and tears of the judgment of God, who had worn down and subdued his flesh, who had filled his heart with the sadness and sweetness of the gospel? They are too vigorous for that, they are in too robust health; their clothes fit them too well; they are too ready for prompt and energetic action. We might make of them strong soldiers or superb courtesans, admirable in a pageant or at a ball. So, all that the spectator accords to their halo of glory, is a bow or a sign of the cross; after which his eyes find pleasure in them; they are there simply for the enjoyment of the eyes. What the spectator feels at the sight of a Florentine Madonna, is the splendid creature, whose powerful body and fine growth bespeak her race and her vigour; the artist did not paint moral expression as nowadays, the depth of a soul tortured and refined by three centuries of culture. They confine themselves to the body, to the extent even of speaking enthusiastically of the spinal column itself, "which is magnificent;" of the shoulder-blades, which in the movements of the arm "produce an admirable effect." "You will next draw the bone which is situated between the hips. It is very fine, and is called the sacrum."  

The important point with them is to represent the nude well. Beauty with them is that of the complete skeleton, sinews which are linked together and tightened, the thighs which support the trunk, the strong chest breathing freely, the pliant neck. What *

* Benvenuto Cellini, *Principles of the Art of Design.*
a pleasure to be naked! How good it is in the full light to rejoice in a strong body, well-formed muscles, a spirited and bold soul! The splendid goddesses reappear in their primitive nudity, not dreaming that they are nude; you see from the tranquillity of their look, the simplicity of their expression, that they have always been thus, and that shame has not yet reached them. The soul’s life is not here contrasted, as amongst us, with the body’s life; the one is not so lowered and degraded, that we dare not show its actions and functions; they do not hide them; man does not dream of being all spirit. They rise, as of old, from the luminous sea, with their rearing steeds tossing up their manes, champing the bit, inhaling the briny savour, whilst their companions wind the sounding-shell; and the spectators, accustomed to handle the sword, to combat naked with the dagger or double-handled blade, to ride on perilous roads, sympathise with the proud shape of the bended back, the effort of the arm about to strike, the long quiver of the muscles which, from neck to heel, swell out, to brace a man, or to throw him.

1 Life of Cellini. Compare also these exercises which Castiglione prescribes for a well-educated man, in his Cortegiano. ed. 1585, p. 55:—

‘Però voglio che il nostro cortegianno sia perfetto cavaliere d’ogni sella.
... Et perché degli Italiani è peculiare laude il cavalcare bene alla brida, il maneggiar con ragione massimamente cavalli aspri, il corre lance, il giastare, sia in questo de miglior Italiani. ... Nel tornare, tener un passo, combattere una sbarra, sia buono tra il miglior francési. ... Nel giocare a canne, correr torri, lanciar haste e dardi, sia tra Spagnuoli eccellente. ... Conveniente è ancor sapere saltare, e correre; ... ancor nobile esercitare il gioco di palla. ... Non di minor laude estimo il valle giar a cavallo.’
§ 2. Poetry.

I.

Transplanted into different races and climates, this paganism receives from each, distinct features and a distinct character. In England it becomes English; the English Renaissance is the Renaissance of the Saxon genius. Invention recommences; and to invent is to express one's genius. A Latin race can only invent by expressing Latin ideas; a Saxon race by expressing Saxon ideas; and we shall find in the new civilisation and poetry, descendants of Cædmon and Adhelm, of Piers Plowman, and Robin Hood.

II.

Old Puttenham says:

"In the latter end of the same king (Henry the eighth) reigns, sprong up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir Thomas Wyat th' elder and Henry Earle of Surrey were the two chieftaines, who having travailed into Italic, and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie, as novices newly crept out of the scholes of Dante, Arioste, and Petrarch, they greatly polished our rude and homely maner of vulgar Poesie, from that it had bene before, and for that cause may justly be sayd the first reformers of our English mestre and stile." ¹

Not that their style was very original, or openly exhibits the new spirit: the middle-age is nearly ended, but not quite. By their side: Andrew Borde, John Bale, John Heywood, Skelton himself, repeat the platiitudes of the old poetry and the coarseness of the old style. Their manners, hardly refined, were still half

feudal; on the field, before Landrecies, the English commander wrote a friendly letter to the French governor of Térouanne, to ask him "if he had not some gentlemen disposed to break a lance in honour of the ladies," and promised to send six champions to meet them. Parades, combats, wounds, challenges, love, appeals to the judgment of God, penances,—all these are found in the life of Surrey as in a chivalric romance. A great lord, an earl, a relative of the king, who had figured in processions and ceremonies, had made war, commanded fortresses, ravaged countries, mounted to the assault, fallen in the breach, had been saved by his servant, magnificent, sumptuous, irritable, ambitious, four times imprisoned, finally beheaded. At the coronation of Anne Boleyn he wore the fourth sword; at the marriage of Anne of Cleves he was one of the challengers at the jousts. Denounced and placed in durance, he offered to fight in his shirt against an armed adversary. Another time he was put in prison for having eaten flesh in Lent. No wonder if this prolongation of chivalric manners brought with it a prolongation of chivalric poetry; if in an age which had known Petrarch, poets displayed the sentiments of Petrarch. Lord Berners, Sackville, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Surrey in the first rank, were like Petrarch, plaintive and platonic lovers. It was pure love to which Surrey gave expression; for his lady, the beautiful Geraldine, like Beatrice and Laura, was an ideal personage, and a child of thirteen years.

And yet, amid this languor of mystical tradition, a personal feeling had sway. In this spirit which imitated, and that badly at times, which still groped for an outlet and now and then admitted into its polished stanzas the old, simple expressions and stale metaphors of
heralds of arms and trouvères, there was already visible the Northern melancholy, the inner and gloomy emotion. This feature, which presently, at the finest moment of its richest blossom, in the splendid expansiveness of natural life, spreads a sombre tint over the poetry of Sidney, Spenser, Shakspeare, already in the first poet separates this pagan yet Teutonic world from the other, wholly voluptuous, which in Italy, with lively and refined irony, had no taste, except for art and pleasure. Surrey translated the Ecclesiastes into verse. Is it not singular, at this early hour, in this rising dawn, to find such a book in his hand? A disenchantment, a sad or bitter dreaminess, an innate consciousness of the vanity of human things, are never lacking in this country and in this race; the inhabitants support life with difficulty, and know how to speak of death. Surrey's finest verses bear witness thus soon to his serious bent, this instinctive and grave philosophy. He records his griefs, regretting his beloved Wyatt, his friend Clère, his companion the young Duke of Richmond, all dead in their prime. Alone, a prisoner at Windsor, he recalls the happy days they have passed together:

"So cruel prison how could betide, alas,
   As proud Windsor, where I in lust and joy,
   With a Kinges son, my childish years did pass,
   In greater feast than Priam's son of Troy.

Where each sweet place returns a taste full sour,
   The large green courts, where we were wont to hove,
   With eyes cast up into the Maiden's tower,
   And easy sighs, such as folk draw in love.

The stately seats, the ladies bright of hue.
   The dances short, long tales of great delight,
With words and looks, that tigers could but rue;
Where each of us did plead the other’s right.
The palme-play, where, despoiled for the game,
With dazed eyes oft we by gleams of love
Have miss’d the ball, and got sight of our dame,
To bait her eyes, which kept the leads above.

The secret thoughts, imparted with such trust;
The wanton talk, the divers change of play;
The friendship sworn, each promise kept so just,
Wherewith we past the winter night away.

And with his thought the blood forsakes the face;
The tears bereave my checks of deadly hue:
The which, as soon as sobbing sighs, alas!
Up-supped have, thus I my plaint renew:

O place of bliss! renewer of my woes!
Give me account, where is my noble fere?
Whom in thy walls thou dost each night enclose;
To other lief; but unto me most dear.

Echo, alas! that doth my sorrow rue,
Returns thereto a hollow sound ofplaint.”

So in love, it is the sinking of a weary soul, to which he gives vent:

“For all things having life, sometime hath quiet rest;
The bearing ass, the drawing ox, and every other beast;
The peasant, and the post, that serves a’ all assays;
The ship-boy, and the galley-slave, have time to take their ease,
Save I, alas! whom care of force doth so constrain,
To wail the day, and wake the night, continually in pain,
From pensiveness to plaint, from plaint to bitter tears,
From tears to painful plaint again; and thus my life it wears.”

1 Surrey’s Poems, Pickering, 1831, p. 17.
2 Ibid. “The faithful lover declareth his pains and his uncertain joys, and with only hope recomforteth his woful heart,” p. 58.
That which brings joy to others brings him grief:

"The soote season, that bud and bloom forth brings,
With green hath clad the hill, and oke the vale.
The nightingale with feathers new she sings;
The turtle to her mate hath told her tale.
Summer is come, for every spray now springs;
The hart has hung his old head on the pale;
The buck in brake his winter coat he slings;
The fishes flote with new repaired scale;
The adder all her slough away she slings;
The swift swallow pursueth the flies smale;
The busy bee her honey now she mings;
Winter is worn that was the flowers' bale.
And thus I see among these pleasant things
Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs!"¹

For all that, he will love on to his last sigh.

"Yea, rather die a thousand times, than once to false my faith
And if my feeble corpse, through weight of woeful smart
Do fail, or faint, my will it is that still she keep my heart.
And when this carcass here to earth shall be refer'd,
I do bequeath my wearied ghost to serve her afterward."²

An infinite love, and pure as Petrarch's; and she is worthy of it. In the midst of all these studied or imitated verses, an admirable portrait stands out, the simplest and truest we can imagine, a work of the heart now, and not of the memory, which behind the Madonna of chivalry shows the English wife, and beyond feudal gallantry domestic bliss. Surrey alone, restless, hears within him the firm tones of a good friend, a sincere counsellor, Hope, who speaks to him thus:

¹ Surrey's Poems. "Description of Spring, wherein every thing renewes, save only the lover," p. 3.
² Ibid. p. 56.
"For I assure thee, even by oath,
And thereon take my hand and troth,
That she is one the worthiest,
The truest, and the faithfullest;
The gentlest and the meekest of mind
That here on earth a man may find:
And if that love and truth were gone,
In her it might be found alone.
For in her mind no thought there is,
But how she may be true, I wis;
And tenders thee and all thy heale,
And wishes both thy health and weal;
And loves thee even as far forth than
As any woman may a man;
And is thine own, and so she says;
And cares for thee ten thousand ways.
Of thee she speaks, on thee she thinks;
With thee she eats, with thee she drinks;
With thee she talks, with thee she moans;
With thee she sighs, with thee she groans;
With thee she says 'Farewell mine own!'
When thou, God knows, full far art gone.
And even, to tell thee all aright,
To thee she says full oft 'Good night!'
And names thee oft her own most dear,
Her comfort, weal, and all her cheer,
And tells her pillow all the tale
How thou hast done her woe and bale;
And how she longs, and plains for thee,
And says, 'Why art thou so from me?'
Art I not she that loves thee best?
Do I not wish thine ease and rest?
Seek I not how I may thee please?
Thou then so from thine ease?
If I be she for whom thou carest,
For whom in torments so thouarest,
Alas! thou knowest to find me here,
Where I remain thine own most dear,
Thine own most true, thine own most just,
Thine own that loves thee still, and must;
Thine own that cares alone for thee,
As thou, I think, dost care for me;
And even the woman, she alone,
That is full bent to be thine own."

Certainly it is of his wife that he is thinking here, not of an imaginary Laura. The poetic dream of Petrarch has become the exact picture of deep and perfect conjugal affection, such as yet survives in England; such as all the poets, from the authoress of the Nut-brown Maid to Dickens, have never failed to represent.

III.

An English Petrarch: no juster title could be given to Surrey, for it expresses his talent as well as his disposition. In fact, like Petrarch, the oldest of the humanists, and the earliest exact writer of the modern tongue, Surrey introduces a new style, the manly style, which marks a great change of the mind; for this new form of writing is the result of superior reflection, which, governing the primitive impulse, calculates and selects with an end in view. At last the intellect has grown capable of self-criticism, and actually criticises itself. It corrects its unconsidered works, infantine and incoherent, at once incomplete and superabundant;

1 Surrey's Poems. "A description of the restless state of the lover when absent from the mistress of his heart," p. 78.
2 In another piece, Complaint on the Absence of her Lover being upon the Sea, he speaks in direct terms of his wife, almost as affectionately.
3 Greene, Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, Shakspeare, Ford, Otway, Richardson, De Foe, Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, etc.
it strengthens and binds them together; it prunes and perfects them; it takes from them the master idea, to set it free and to show it clearly. This is what Surrey does, and his education had prepared him for it; for he had studied Virgil as well as Petrarch, and translated two books of the Aeneid, almost verse for verse. In such company a man cannot but select his ideas and connect his phrases. After their example, Surrey gauges the means of striking the attention, assisting the intelligence, avoiding fatigue and weariness. He looks forward to the last line whilst writing the first. He keeps the strongest word for the last, and shows the symmetry of ideas by the symmetry of phrases. Sometimes he guides the intelligence by a continuous series of contrasts to the final image; a kind of sparkling casket, in which he means to deposit the idea which he carries, and to which he directs our attention from the first.\(^1\) Sometimes he leads his reader to the close of a long flowery description, and then suddenly checks him with a sorrowful phrase.\(^2\) He arranges his process, and knows how to produce effects; he uses even classical expressions, in which two substantives, each supported by its adjective, are balanced on either side of the verb.\(^3\) He collects his phrases in harmonious periods, and does not neglect the delight of the ears any more than of the mind. By his inversions he adds force to his ideas, and weight to his argument. He selects elegant or noble terms, rejects idle words and redundant phrases. Every epithet contains an idea, every metaphor a sentiment. There is eloquence in

\(^1\) The Fruity and Hurtfulness of Beauty.

\(^2\) Description of Spring. A Vow to love faithfully.

\(^3\) Complaint of the Lover disdained.
the regular development of his thought; music in the sustained accent of his verse.

Such is the new-born art. Those who have ideas, now possess an instrument capable of expressing them. Like the Italian painters, who in fifty years had introduced or discovered all the technical tricks of the brush, English writers, in half-a-century, introduce or discover all the artifices of language, period, elevated style, heroic verse, soon the grand stanza, so effectually, that a little later the most perfect versifiers, Dryden, and Pope himself, says Dr. Nott, will add scarce anything to the rules, invented or applied, which were employed in the earliest efforts.¹ Even Surrey is too near to these authors, too constrained in his models, not sufficiently free; he has not yet felt the fiery blast of the age; we do not find in him a bold genius, an impassioned writer capable of wide expansion, but a courtier, a lover of elegance, who, penetrated by the beauties of two finished literatures, imitates Horace and the chosen masters of Italy, corrects and polishes little morsels, aims at speaking perfectly fine language. Amongst semi-barbarians he wears a full dress becomingly. Yet he does not wear it completely at his ease: he keeps his eyes too exclusively on his models, and does not venture on frank and free gestures. He is sometimes as a school-boy, makes too great use of ‘hot’ and ‘cold,’ wounds and martyrdom. Although a lover, and a genuine one, he thinks too much that he must be so in Petrarch’s manner, that his phrase must be balanced and his image kept up. I had almost said that, in his sonnets of disappointed love, he thinks less often of the strength of love than of the beauty of his

¹ Surrey, ed. Nott.
writing. He has conceits, ill-chosen words; he uses trite expressions; he relates how Nature, having formed his lady, broke the mould; he assigns parts to Cupid and Venus; he employs the old machinery of the troubadours and the ancients, like a clever man who wishes to pass for a gallant. At first scarce any mind dares be quite itself: when a new art arises, the first artist listens not to his heart, but to his masters, and asks himself at every step whether he be setting foot on solid ground, or whether he is not stumbling.

IV.

Insensibly the growth became complete, and at the end of the century all was changed. A new, strange, overloaded style had been formed, destined to remain in force until the Restoration, not only in poetry, but also in prose, even in ceremonial speech and theological discourse, so suitable to the spirit of the age, that we meet with it at the same time throughout the whole of Europe, in Ronsard and d’Aubigné, in Calderon, Gongora, and Marini. In 1580 appeared Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit, by Lyly, which was its text-book, its masterpiece, its caricature, and was received with universal admiration. "Our nation," says Edward Blount, "are in his debt for a new English which hee taught them. All our ladies were then his scollers; and that beautie in court who could not parley Euphuesme was as little regarded as shee which now there speakes not French." The ladies knew the phrases

1 The Speaker’s address to Charles II. on his restoration. Compare it with the speech of M. de Fontanes under the Empire. In each case it was the close of a literary epoch. Read for illustration the speech before the University of Oxford, Athenae Oxonienses, i. 193.

2 His second work, Euphues and his England, appeared in 1681.
of Euphues by heart: strange, studied, and refined phrases, 
enigmatical; whose author seems of set purpose to seek 
the least natural expressions and the most far-fetched, 
full of exaggeration and antithesis, in which mytholo-
gical allusions, reminiscences from alchemy, botanical 
and astronomical metaphors, all the rubbish and medley 
of learning, travels, mannerism, roll in a flood of conceits 
and comparisons. Do not judge it by the grotesque 
picture that Walter Scott drew of it. Sir Piercie 
Shafton is but a pedant, a cold and dull copyist; it is 
its warmth and originality which give this style a true 
force and an accent of its own. You must conceive it, 
not as dead and inert, such as we have it to-day in old 
books, but springing from the lips of ladies and young 
lords in pearl-bedecked doublet, quickened by their 
vibrating voices, their laughter, the flash of their eyes, 
the motion of their hands as they played with the hilt 
of their swords or with their satin cloaks. They were 
full of life, their heads filled to overflowing; and they 
amused themselves, as our sensitive and eager artists do, 
at their ease in the studio. They did not speak to con-
vince or be understood, but to satisfy their excited 
imagination, to expend their overflowing wit. They 
played with words, twisted, put them out of shape, 
enjoyed sudden views, strong contrasts, which they pro-
duced one after another, ever and anon, and in great 
quantities. They cast flower on flower, tinsel on tinsel: 
everything sparkling delighted them; they gilded and 
embroidered and plumed their language like their gar-
mants. They cared nothing for clearness, order, common 
sense; it was a festival and a madness; absurdity 
pleased them. They knew nothing more tempting than

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1 See Shakespeare's young men. Metentio especially.
a carnival of splendidours and oddities; all was huddled together: a coarse gaiety, a tender and sad word, a pastoral, a sounding flourish of unmeasured boasting, a gambol of a Jack-pudding. Eyes, ears, all the senses, eager and excited, are satisfied by this jingle of syllables, the display of fine high-coloured words, the unexpected clash of droll or familiar images, the majestic roll of well-poised periods. Every one had his own oaths, his elegances, his style. “One would say,” remarks Heylyn, “that they are ashamed of their mother-tongue, and do not find it sufficiently varied to express the whims of their mind.” We no longer imagine this inventiveness, this boldness of fancy, this ceaseless fertility of nervous sensibility: there was no genuine prose at that time; the poetic flood swallowed it up. A word was not an exact symbol, as with us; a document which from cabinet to cabinet carried a precise thought. It was part of a complete action, a little drama; when they read it, they did not take it by itself, but imagined it with the intonation of a hissing and shrill voice, with the puckering of the lips, the knitting of the brows, and the succession of pictures which crowd behind it, and which it calls forth in a flash of lightning. Each one mimics and pronounces it in his own style, and impresses his own soul upon it. It was a song, which, like the poet’s verse, contains a thousand things besides the literal sense, and manifests the depth, warmth, and sparkling of the source whence it flowed. For in that time, even when the man was feeble, his work lived; there is some pulse in the least productions of this age; force and creative fire signalise it; they penetrate through bombast and affectation. Lyly himself, so fantastic that he seems to write purposely in defiance of common sense, is at times a
genuine poet; a singer, a man capable of rapture: akin to Spenser and Shakspeare; one of those introspective dreamers, who see dancing fairies, the purpled cheeks of goddesses, drunken, amorous woods, as he says:

"Adorned with the presence of my love,
The woods I fear such secret power shall prove,
As they'll shut up each path, hide every way,
Because they still would have her go astray." ¹

The reader must assist me, and assist himself. I cannot otherwise give him to understand what the men of this age had the felicity to experience.

Luxuriance and irregularity were the two features of this spirit and this literature,—features common to all the literatures of the Renaissance, but more marked here than elsewhere, because the German race is not confined, like the Latin, by the taste for harmonious forms, and prefers strong impression to fine expression. We must select amidst this crowd of poets; and here is one amongst the first, who exhibits, by his writings as well as by his life, the greatness and the folly of the prevailing manners and the public taste: Sir Philip Sidney, nephew of the Earl of Leicester, a great lord and a man of action, accomplished in every kind of culture; who, after a good training in classical literature, travelled in France, Germany, and Italy; read Plato and Aristotle, studied astronomy and geometry at Venice; pondered over the Greek tragedies, the Italian sonnets, the pastorals of Montemayor, the poems of Ronsard; displaying an interest in science, keeping up an exchange of letters with the learned Hubert Languet; and withal a man of the world, a favourite of Elizabeth, having had enacted in her honour a flattering and comic pastoral; a genuine "jewel of the court;" a judge, like

¹ The Maid her Metamorphosis.
d’Urfé, of lofty gallantry and fine language; above all, chivalrous in heart and deed, who wished to follow maritime adventure with Drake, and, to crown all, fated to die an early and heroic death. He was a cavalry officer, and had saved the English army at Gravelines. Shortly after, mortally wounded, and dying of thirst, as some water was brought to him, he saw by his side a soldier still more desperately hurt, who was looking at the water with anguish in his face: “Give it to this man,” said he; “his necessity is still greater than mine.” Do not forget the vehemence and impetuosity of the middle-age;—one hand ready for action, and kept incessantly on the hilt of the sword or poniard. “Mr. Molineux,” wrote he to his father’s secretary, “if ever I know you to do so much as read any letter I write to my father, without his commandment or my consent, I will thrust my dagger into you. And trust to it, for I speak it in earnest.” It was the same man who said to his uncle’s adversaries that they “lied in their throat;” and to support his words, promised them a meeting in three months in any place in Europe. The savage energy of the preceding age remains intact, and it is for this reason that poetry took so firm a hold on these virgin souls. The human harvest is never so fine as when cultivation opens up a new soil. Impassioned, moreover, melancholy and solitary, he naturally turned to noble and ardent fantasy; and he was so much the poet, that he had no need of verse.

Shall I describe his pastoral epic, the Arcadia? It is but a recreation, a sort of poetical romance, written in the country for the amusement of his sister; a work of fashion, which, like Cyrus and Clélise, is not a monu-

1 Two French novels of the age of Louis XIV., each in ten volumes, and written by Mademoiselle de Scudéry.—Tr.
ment, but a document. This kind of books shows only the externals, the current elegance and politeness, the jargon of the fashionable world,—in short, that which should be spoken before ladies; and yet we perceive from it the bent of the public opinion. In Clélie, oratorical development, delicate and collected analysis, the flow- ing converse of men seated quietly in elegant arm-chairs; in the Arcadia, fantastic imagination, excessive sentiment, a medley of events which suited men scarcely recovered from barbarism. Indeed, in London they still used to fire pistols at each other in the streets; and under Henry VIII. and his children, Queens, a Protector, the highest nobles, knelt under the axe of the executioner. Armed and perilous existence long resisted in Europe the establishment of peaceful and quiet life. It was necessary to change society and the soil, in order to transform men of the sword into citizens. The high roads of Louis XIV. and his regular administration, and more recently the railroads and the sergents de ville, freed the French from habits of violence and a taste for dangerous adventure. Remember that at this period men's heads were full of tragical images. Sidney's Arcadia contains enough of them to supply half-a-dozen epics. "It is a trifle," says the author; "my young head must be delivered." In the first twenty-five pages you meet with a shipwreck, an account of pirates, a half-drowned prince rescued by shepherds, a journey in Arcadia, various disguises, the retreat of a king withdrawn into solitude with his wife and children, the deliverance of a young imprisoned lord, a war against the Helots, the conclusion of peace, and many other things. Read on, and you will find princesses shut up by a wicked fairy, who beats them, and threatens them with
death if they refuse to marry her son; a beautiful queen
condemned to perish by fire if certain knights do not
come to her succour; a treacherous prince tortured for his
wicked deeds, then cast from the top of a pyramid; fights,
surprises, abductions, travels: in short, the whole pro-
gramme of the most romantic tales. That is the serious
element: the agreeable is of a like nature; the fantastic
predominates. Improbable pastoral serves, as in Shakes-
peare or Lope de Vega, for an intermezzo to improbabe
tragedy. You are always coming upon dancing shep-
herds. They are very courteous, good poets, and subtle
metaphysicians. Several of them are disguised princes
who pay their court to the princesses. They sing
continually, and get up allegorical dances; two bands
approach, servants of Reason and Passion; their hats,
ribbons, and dress are described in full. They quarrel
in verse, and their retorts, which follow close on one
another, over-refined, keep up a tournament of wit.
Who cared for what was natural or possible in this age?
There were such festivals at Elizabeth’s ‘progresses’;
and you have only to look at the engravings of Sadeler,
Martin de Vos, and Goltzius, to find this mixture of
sensitive beauties and philosophical enigmas. The
Countess of Pembroke and her ladies were delighted to
picture this profusion of costumes and verses, this play
beneath the trees. They had eyes in the sixteenth
century, senses which sought satisfaction in poetry—the
same satisfaction as in masquerading and painting.
Man was not yet a pure reasoner; abstract truth was not
enough for him. Rich stuffs, twisted about and folded;
the sun to shine upon them, a large meadow studded
with white daisies; ladies in brocaded dresses, with
bare arms, crowns on their heads, instruments of music
behind the trees,—this is what the reader expects; he cares nothing for contrasts; he will readily accept a drawing-room in the midst of the fields.

What are they going to say there? Here comes out that nervous exaltation, in all its folly, which is characteristic of the spirit of the age; love rises to the thirty-sixth heaven. Musidorus is the brother of Céladon; Pamela is closely related to the severe heroines of Astrée;¹ all the Spanish exaggerations abound and all the Spanish falsehoods. For in these works of fashion or of the Court, primitive sentiment never retains its sincerity: wit, the necessity to please, the desire for effect, of speaking better than others, alter it, influence it, heap up embellishments and refinements, so that nothing is left but twaddle. Musidorus wished to give Pamela a kiss. She repels him. He would have died on the spot; but luckily remembers that his mistress commanded him to leave her, and finds himself still able to obey her command. He complains to the trees, weeps in verse: there are dialogues where Echo, repeating the last word, replies; duets in rhyme, balances! stanzas, in which the theory of love is minutely detailed; in short, all the grand airs of ornamental poetry. If they send a letter to their mistress, they speak to it, tell the ink: "Therefore mourne boldly, my inke; for while shee lookes upon you, your blacknesse will shine: cry out boldly my lamentation; for while shee reades you, your cries will be musicke."²

Again, two young princesses are going to bed: "They impoverished their clothes to enrich their bed,

¹ Céladon, a rustic lover in Astrée, a French novel in five volumes, named after the heroine, and written by d'Urfé (d. 1625).—Ts.
² Arcadia, ed. fol. 1629, p. 117.
which for that night might well scorne the shrine of
Venus; and there cherishing one another with deare,
though chaste embracements; with sweete, though cold
kisses; it might seeme that love was come to play him
there without dart; or that wearie of his owne fires, he
was there to refresh himselfe between their sweete
breathing lippes.”

In excuse of these follies, remember that they have
their parallels in Shakspeare. Try rather to comprehend
them, to imagine them in their place, with their sur-
roundings, such as they are; that is, as the excess of
singularity and inventive fire. Even though they mar
now and then the finest ideas, yet a natural freshness
pierces through the disguise. Take another example:
“In the time that the morning did strewe roses and
violets in the heavenly floore against the coming of the
sun, the nightingales (striving one with the other which
could in most dainty varietie recount their wronge-
caused sorrow) made them put off their sleep.”

In Sidney’s second work, The Defence of Poesie, we
meet with genuine imagination, a sincere and serious
tone, a grand, commanding style, all the passion and
elevation which he carries in his heart and puts into his
verse. He is a muser, a Platonist, who is penetrated
by the doctrines of the ancients, who takes things from
a lofty point of view, who places the excellence of poetry
not in pleasing effect, imitation, or rhyme, but in that
creative and superior conception by which the artist
creates anew and embellishes nature. At the same time,
he is an ardent man, trusting in the nobleness of his
aspirations and in the width of his ideas, who puts down
the brawling of the shoppy, narrow, vulgar Puritanism

1 Arcadia, ed. fol. 1629, book ii. p. 114.
and glows with the lofty irony, the proud freedom, of a poet and a lord.

In his eyes, if there is any art or science capable of augmenting and cultivating our generosity, it is poetry. He draws comparison after comparison between it and philosophy or history, whose pretensions he laughs at and dismisses. He fights for poetry as a knight for his lady, and in what heroic and splendid style! He says: "I never heard the old Song of Percie and Douglas, that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet: and yet it is sung but by some blinde Crowder, with no rougher voyce, than rude stile; which seeing so evill appareled in the dust and Cobweb of that uncivill age, what would it work, trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindare?"

The philosopher repels, the poet attracts: "Nay hee doth as if your journey should lye through a faire vineyard, at the very first, give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste, you may long to passo further."

What description of poetry can displease you? Not pastoral so easy and genial? "Is it the bitter but wholesome Iambick, who rubbes the galled minde, making shame the Trumpet of villanie, with bold and open cryinge out against naughtinessse?"

At the close he reviews his arguments, and the vibrating martial accent of his poetical period is like a trump of victory: "So that since the excellencies of it (poetry) may bee so easily and so justly confirmed, and

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1 *The Defence of Poesie*, vol. fol. 1629, p. 558: "I dare undertake, that Orlando Furioso, or honest King Arthur, will never displease a soldier: but the quidditie of Ens and prima malaria, will hardly agree with a Corselet." See also, in the same book, the very lively and spirited personification of History and Philosophy, full of genuine talent.


the low-creeping objections so soone trodden downe, it not being an Art of lyes, but of true doctrine; not of effeminatenesse, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man's wit, but of strengthening man's wit; not banished, but honoured by Plato; let us rather plant more Laurels for to ingarland the Poets heads than suffer the ill-savoured breath of such wrong speakers, once to blow upon the cleare springs of Poesie."¹

From such vehemence and gravity you may anticipate what his verses will be.

Often, after reading the poets of this age, I have looked for some time at the contemporary prints, telling myself that man, in mind and body, was not then such as we see him to-day. We also have our passions, but we are no longer strong enough to bear them. They unsettle us; we are no longer poets without suffering for it. Alfred de Musset, Heine, Edgar Poe, Burns, Byron, Shelley, Cowper, how many shall I instance? Disgust, mental and bodily degradation, disease, impotence, madness, suicide, at best a permanent hallucination or feverish raving,—these are nowadays the ordinary issues of the poetic temperament. The passion of the brain gnaws our vitals, dries up the blood, eats into the marrow, shakes us like a tempest, and the human frame, such as civilisation has made us, is not substantial enough long to resist it. They, who have been more roughly trained, who are more injured to the inclemencies of climate, more hardened by bodily exercise, more firm against danger, endure and live. Is

¹ The Defence of Poesie, p. 560. Here and there we find also verse as spirited as this:

"Or Pindar's Ape, flaunt they in phrases fine,
Enam'ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold.' --1'. 568.
there a man living who could withstand the storm of passions and visions which swept over Shakspeare, and end, like him, as a sensible citizen and landed proprietor in his small county? The muscles were firmer, despair less prompt. The rage of concentrated attention, the half hallucinations, the anguish and heaving of the breast, the quivering of the limbs bracing themselves involuntarily and blindly for action, all the painful yearnings which accompany grand desires, exhausted them less; this is why they desired longer, and dared more. D'Aubigné, wounded with many sword-thrusts, conceiving death at hand, had himself bound on his horse that he might see his mistress once more, and rode thus several leagues, losing blood all the way, and arriving in a swoon. Such feelings we glean still from their portraits, in the straight looks which pierce like a sword; in that strength of back, bent or twisted; in the sensuality, energy, enthusiasm, which breathe from their attitude or look. Such feelings we still discover in their poetry, in Greene, Lodge, Jonson, Spenser, Shakspeare, in Sidney, as in all the rest. We quickly forget the faults of taste which accompany them, the affectation, the uncouth jargon. Is it really so uncouth? Imagine a man who with closed eyes distinctly sees the adored countenance of his mistress, who keeps it before him all the day; who is troubled and shaken as he imagines ever and anon her brow, her lips, her eyes; who cannot and will not be separated from his vision; who sinks daily deeper in this passionate contemplation; who is every instant crushed by mortal anxieties, or transported by the raptures of bliss: he will lose the exact conception of objects. A fixed idea becomes a false idea. By dint of regarding an object under all its forms, turning it
over, piercing through it, we at last deform it. When we cannot think of a thing without being dazed and without tears, we magnify it, and give it a character which it has not. Hence strange comparisons, over-refined ideas, excessive images, become natural. However far Sidney goes, whatever object he touches, he sees throughout the universe only the name and features of Stella. All ideas bring him back to her. He is drawn ever and invincibly by the same thought: and comparisons which seem far-fetched, only express the unfailing presence and sovereign power of the besetting image. Stella is ill; it seems to Sidney that “Joy, which is inseparable from those eyes, Stella, now learns (strange case) to weep in thee.”\(^1\) To us, the expression is absurd. Is it so for Sidney, who for hours together had dwelt on the expression of those eyes, seeing in them at last all the beauties of heaven and earth, who, compared to them, finds all light dull and all happiness stale? Consider that in every extreme passion ordinary laws are reversed, that our logic cannot pass judgment on it, that we find in it affectation, childishness, witticisms, crudity, folly, and that to us violent conditions of the nervous machine are like an unknown and marvellous land, where common sense and good language cannot penetrate. On the return of spring, when May spreads over the fields her dappled dress of new flowers, Astrophel and Stella sit in the shade of a retired grove, in the warm air, full of birds’ voices and pleasent exhalations. Heaven smiles, the wind kisses the trembling leaves, the inclining trees interlace their sappy branches, amorous earth swallows greedily the rippling water:

\(^1\) *Astrophel and Stella*, ed. fol. 1629, 101st sonnet, p. 618
"In a grove most rich of shade,
Where birds wanton musicke made,
May, then yong, his py'd weeds showing,
New perfum'd with flowers fresh growing,

"Astrophel with Stella sweet,
Did for mutuall comfort meet,
Both within themselves oppressed,
But each in the other blessed. . . .

"Their eares hungry of each word,
Which the deere tongue would afford,
But their tongues restrain'd from walking,
Till their hearts had ended talking.

"But when their tongues could not speake,
Love it selfe did silence breake;
Love did set his lips asunder,
Thus to speake in love and wonder. . . .

"This small winde which so sweet is,
See how it the leaves doth kisse,
Each tree in his best attyring,
Sense of love to love inspiring." 1

On his knees, with beating heart, oppressed, it seems to him that his mistress becomes transformed;

"Stella, soveraigne of my joy, . . .
Stella, starre of heavenly fire,
Stella, load-starre of desire,
Stella, in whose shining eyes
Are the lights of Cupid's skies. . . .
Stella, whose voice when it speakes
Senses all asunder breakes;
Stella, whose voice when it singeth,
Angels to acquaintance bringeth." 2

1 Astrophel and Stella (1629), 8th song, p. 608.  
2 Ibid. 604
These cries of adoration are like a hymn. Every day he writes thoughts of love which agitate him, and in this long journal of a hundred pages we feel the heated breath swell each moment. A smile from his mistress, a curl lifted by the wind, a gesture,—all are events. He paints her in every attitude; he cannot see her too constantly. He talks to the birds, plants, winds, all nature. He brings the whole world to Stella’s feet. At the notion of a kiss he swoons:

“Thinke of that most gratefull time
When thy leaping heart will climbe,
In my lips to have his biding.
There those roses for to kisse,
Which doe breath a sugred blisse,
Opening rubies, pearsles dividing.” ¹

“O joy, too high for my low stile to show:
O blisse, fit for a nobler state then me:
Envie, put out thine eyes, lest thou do see
What Oceans of delight in me do flow.
My friend, that oft saw through all masks my wo,
Come, come, and let me powre my selfe on thee;
Gone is the winter of my miserie,
My spring appeares, O see what here doth grow,
For Stella hath with words where faith doth shine,
Of her high heart giv’n me the monarchie:
I, I, O I may say that she is mine.” ²

There are Oriental splendours in the dazzling sonnet in which he asks why Stella’s cheeks have grown pale:

“Where be those Roses gone, which sweeted so our eyes?
Where those red cheekes, which oft with faire encrease doth frame

¹ Astraphel and Stella, 10th song, p. 610. ² Ibid. sonnet 69, p. 555.
The height of honour in the kindly badge of shame?
Who hath the crimson weeds stolne from my morning skies? 1

As he says, his “life melts with too much thinking.” Exhausted by ecstasy, he pauses; then he flies from thought to thought, seeking relief for his wound, like the Satyr whom he describes:

“Prometheus, when first from heaven he
He brought downe fire, ere then on earth not seen,
Fond of delight, a Satyr standing by
Gave it a kisse, as it like sweet had beene.

“Feeling forthwith the other burning power,
Wood with the smart with showts and shryking shrill,
He sought his case in river, field, and bower,
But for the time his griece went with him still.” 2

At last calm returned; and whilst this calm lasts, the lively, glowing spirit plays like a flickering flame on the surface of the deep brooding fire. His love-songs and word-portraits, delightful pagan and chivalric fancies, seem to be inspired by Petrarch or Plato. We feel the charm and sportiveness under the seeming affectation:

“Faire eyes, sweete lips, deare heart, that foolish I
Could hope by Cupids helpe on you to pray;
Since to himselfe he doth your gifts apply,
As his maine force, choise sport, and easefull stray.

“For when he will see who dare him gainsay,
Then with those eyes he lookes, lo by and by
Each soule doth at Loves feet his weapons lay,
Glad if for her he give them leave to die.

1 Astrophel and Stella, sonnet 102, p. 614
2 Ibid. p. 525: this sonnet is headed E. D. Wood, in his Athen Oxon. 1., says it was written by Sir Edward Dyer, Chancellor of the Most noble Order of the Garter.—Th.
“When he will play, then in her lips he is,
Where blushing red, that Loves selfe them doth love,
With either lip he doth the other kisse:
But when he will for quiet sake remove
From all the world, her heart is then his rome,
Where well he knowes, no man to him can come.”

Both heart and sense are captive here. If he finds the eyes of Stella more beautiful than anything in the world, he finds her soul more lovely than her body. He is a Platonist when he recounts how Virtue, wishing to be loved of men, took Stella’s form to enchant their eyes, and make them see the heaven which the inner sense reveals to heroic souls. We recognise in him that entire submission of heart, love turned into a religion, perfect passion which asks only to grow, and which, like the piety of the mystics, finds itself always too insignificant when it compares itself with the object loved:

“My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toyes,
My wit doth strive those passions to defend,
Which for reward spoyle it with vaine annoyes,
I see my course to lose my selfe doth bend:
I see and yet no greater sorrow take,
Than that I lose no more for Stella’s sake.”

At last, like Socrates in the banquet, he turns his eyes to deathless beauty, heavenly brightness:

“Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust.
And thou my minde aspire to higher things:
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust:
Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings . . .
O take fast hold, let that light be thy guide,
In this small course which birth draws out to death.”

1 *Astrophel and Stella*, sonnet 43, p. 545.
3 Last sonnet, p. 539.
Divine love continues the earthly love; he was imprisoned in this, and frees himself. By this nobility, these lofty aspirations, recognise one of those serious souls of which there are so many in the same climate and race. Spiritual instincts pierce through the dominant paganism, and ere they make Christians, make Platonists.

V.

Sidney was only a soldier in an army; there is a multitude about him, a multitude of poets. In fifty-two years, without counting the drama, two hundred and thirty-three are enumerated,\(^1\) of whom forty have genius or talent: Breton, Donne, Drayton, Lodge, Greene, the two Fletchers, Beaumont, Spenser, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Wither, Warner, Davison, Carew, Suckling, Herrick;—we should grow tired in counting them. There is a crop of them, and so there is at the same time in Catholic and heroic Spain; and as in Spain it was a sign of the times, the mark of a public want, the index to an extraordinary and transient condition of the mind. What is this condition which gives rise to so universal a taste for poetry? What is it breathes life into their books? How happens it, that amongst the least, in spite of pedantries, awkwardnesses, in the rhyming chronicles or descriptive cyclopædas, we meet with brilliant pictures and genuine love-cries? How happens it, that when this generation was exhausted, true poetry ended in England, as true painting in Italy and Flanders? It was because an epoch of the mind came and passed away,—that, namely, of instinctive and

\(^1\) Nathan Drake, _Shakespeare and his Times_, i. Part 2, ch. 2, 3, 4. Among these 283 poets the authors of isolated pieces are not reckoned, but only those who published or collected their works.
creative conception. These men had new senses, and no theories in their heads. Thus, when they took a walk, their emotions were not the same as ours. What is sunrise to an ordinary man? A white smudge on the edge of the sky, between bosses of clouds, amid pieces of land, and bits of road, which he does not see because he has seen them a hundred times. But for them, all things have a soul; I mean that they feel within themselves, indirectly, the uprising and severance of the outlines, the power and contrast of tints, the sad or delicious sentiment, which breathes from this combination and union like a harmony or a cry. How sorrowful is the sun, as he rises in a mist above the sad sea-furrows; what an air of resignation in the old trees rustling in the night rain; what a feverish tumult in the mass of waves, whose dishevelled locks are twisted for ever on the surface of the abyss! But the great torch of heaven, the luminous god, emerges and shines; the tall, soft, pliant herbs, the evergreen meadows, the expanding roof of lofty oaks,—the whole English landscape, continually renewed and illumined by the flooding moisture, diffuses an inexhaustible freshness. These meadows, red and white with flowers, ever moist and ever young, slip off their veil of golden mist, and appear suddenly, timidly, like beautiful virgins. Here is the cuckoo-flower, which springs up before the coming of the swallow; there the hare-bell, blue as the veins of a woman; the marigold, which sets with the sun, and, weeping, rises with him. Drayton, in his Polyolbion, sings

"Then from her burnisht gate the goodly glittering East
Guilds every lofty top, which late the humorous Night
Bespangled had with pearle, to please the Mornings sight;"
On which the mirthfull Quires, with their cleere open throats, 
Unto the joyfull Morne so straine their warbling notes, 
That Hills and Valleys ring, and even the echoing Ayre 
Seemes all compos'd of sounds, about them everywhere. . . . 
Thus sing away the Morne, untill the mounting Sunne, 
Through thick exhaled fogs, his golden head hath runne, 
And through the twisted tops of our close Covert creeps, 
To kiss the gentle Slaue, this while that sweetly sleeps.”

A step further, and you will find the old gods reappear. 
They reappear, these living gods—these living gods 
mingled with things which you cannot help meeting as 
soon as you meet nature again. Shakspeare, in the 
Tempest, sings:

“Ceres, most bounteous lady thy rich leas
Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats, and pease;
Thy turfy mountains, where live nibbling sheep,
And flat meads thatch’d with stover, them to keep;
Thy banks with peon’d and lilies brims,
Which spongy April at thy hest betrims,
To make cold nymphs chaste crowns . . .
Hail, many-colour’d messenger (Iris.) . . .
Who; with thy saffron wings, upon my flowers
Diffusest honey-drops, refreshing showers,
And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown
My bosky acres and my unshrub’d down.”

In Cymbeline he says:

“They are as gentle as zephyrs, blowing below the violet,
Not wagging his sweet head.”

Greene writes:

“When Flora, proud in pomp of all her flowers,
Sat bright and gay,

1 M. Drayton’s Polyolbion, ed. 1622, 18th song, p. 214.
2 Act iv. 1.
3 Act iv. 2.
And gloried in the dew of Iris' showers,
And did display
Her mantle chequered all with gaudy green."

The same author also says:

"How oft have I descending Titan seen,
His burning locks couch in the sea-queen's lap;
And beauteous Thetis his red body wrap
In watery robes, as he her lord had been!"

So Spenser, in his *Faerie Queene*, sings:

"The joyous day gan early to appeare,
And faire Aurora from the dewy bed
Of aged Tithone gan herselfe to raise
With rosy cheeks, for shame as blushing red:
Her golden locks, for hast, were loosely shed
About her cares, when Una her did marke
Clymbe to her charret, all with flowers spred,
From heven high to chuse the chearelesse darke;
With mery note her lowd salutes the mounting larke."

All the splendour and sweetness of this moist and well-watered land; all the specialties, the opulence of its dissolving tints, of its variable sky, its luxuriant vegetation, assemble thus about the gods, who gave them their beautiful form.

In the life of every man there are moments when, in presence of objects, he experiences a shock. This mass of ideas, of mangled recollections, of mutilated images, which lie hidden in all corners of his mind, are set in motion, organised, suddenly developed like a flower. He is enraptured; he cannot help looking at and admir-

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ing the charming creature which has just appeared; he wishes to see it again, and others like it, and dreams of nothing else. There are such moments in the life of nations, and this is one of them. They are happy in contemplating beautiful things, and wish only that they should be the most beautiful possible. They are not preoccupied, as we are, with theories. They do not excite themselves to express moral or philosophical ideas. They wish to enjoy through the imagination, through the eyes, like those Italian nobles, who, at the same time, were so captivated by fine colours and forms, that they covered with paintings not only their rooms and their churches, but the lids of their chests and the saddles of their horses. The rich and green sunny country; young, gaily-attired ladies, blooming with health and love; half-draped gods and goddesses, masterpieces and models of strength and grace,—these are the most lovely objects which man can contemplate, the most capable of satisfying his senses and his heart—of giving rise to smiles and joy; and these are the objects which occur in all the poets in a most wonderful abundance of songs, pastorals, sonnets, little fugitive pieces, so lively, delicate, easily unfolded, that we have never since had their equals. What though Venus and Cupid have lost their altars? Like the contemporary painters of Italy, they willingly imagine a beautiful naked child, drawn on a chariot of gold through the limpid air; or a woman, redolent with youth, standing on the waves, which kiss her snowy feet. Harsh Ben Jonson is ravished with the scene. The disciplined battalion of his sturdy verses changes into a band of little graceful strophes, which trip as lightly as Raphael's children. He sees his lady approach, sitting on the chariot of Love, drawn
by swans and doves. Love leads the car; she passes calm and smiling, and all hearts, charmed by her divine looks, wish no other joy than to see and serve her for ever.

"See the chariot at hand here of Love,
Wherein my lady rideth!
Each that draws is a swan or a dove,
And well the car Love guideth.
As she goes, all hearts do duty
Unto her beauty,
And, enamoured, do wish, so they might
But enjoy such a sight,
That they still were to run by her side,
Through swords, through seas, whither she would ride.
Do but look on her eyes, they do light
All that Love's world compriseth!
Do but look on her hair, it is bright
As Love's star when it riseth!...
Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall o' the snow,
Before the soil hath smutched it?
Have you felt the wool of beaver?
Or swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier?
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bec?
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!"

What can be more lively, more unlike measured and artificial mythology? Like Theocritus and Moschus, they play with their smiling gods, and their belief becomes a festival. One day, in an alcove of a wood, Cupid meets a nymph asleep:

"Her golden hair o'erspread her face,
Her careless arms abroad were cast,
Her quiver had her pillow's placed,
Her breast lay bare to every blast." ¹

He approaches softly, steals her arrows, and puts his own in their place. She hears a noise at last, raises her reclining head, and sees a shepherd approaching. She flees; he pursues. She bends her bow, and shoots her arrows at him. He only becomes more ardent, and is on the point of seizing her. In despair, she takes an arrow, and buries it in her lovely body. Lo! she is changed, she stops, smiles, loves, draws near him.

"Though mountains meet not, lovers may,
What other lovers do, did they.
The god of Love sat on a tree,
And laught that pleasant sight to see." ²

A drop of archness falls into the medley of artlessness and voluptuous charm; it was so in Longus, and in all that delicious nosegay called the Anthology. Not the dry mocking of Voltaire, of folks who possessed only wit, and always lived in a drawing-room; but the raillery of artists, lovers whose brain is full of colour and form, who, when they recount a bit of rouguishness, imagine a stooping neck, lowered eyes, the blushing of vermilion cheeks. One of these fair ones says the following verses, simpering, and we can even see now the pouting of her lips:

"Love in my bosom like a bee
Doth suck his sweet.
Now with his wings he plays with me,
Now with his feet.

¹ Cupid's Pastime, unknown author, ab. 1821. ² Ibid.
Within my eyes he makes his rest,
His bed amid my tender breast,
My kisses are his daily feast.
And yet he robs me of my rest.
Ah! wanton, will ye!'

What relieves these sportive pieces is their splendour of imagination. There are effects and flashes which we hardly dare quote, dazzling and maddening, as in the Song of Songs:

"Her eyes, fair eyes, like to the purest lights
That animate the sun, or cheer the day;
In whom the shining sunbeams brightly play,
While fancy doth on them divine delights.

"Her cheeks like ripened lilies steeped in wine,
Or fair pomegranate kernels washed in milk,
Or snow-white threads in nets of crimson silk,
Or gorgeous clouds upon the sun's decline.

"Her lips are roses over-washed with dew,
Or like the purple of Narcissus' flower...

"Her crystal chin like to the purest mould,
Enchased with dainty daisies soft and white,
Where fancy's fair pavilion once is pight.
Whereas embraced his beauties he doth hold.

"Her neck like to an ivory shining tower,
Where through with azure veins sweet nectar runs,
Or like the down of swans where Senesce woons,
Or like delight that doth itself devour.

"Her paps are like fair apples in the prime,
As round as orient pearls, as soft as down;
They never vail their fair through winter's frown,
But from their sweets love sucked his summer time."

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1 Rosalind's Madrigal.
2 Greene's Poems, ed. R. Bell, Menaphon's Eclogue, p. 41.
"What need compare, where sweet exceeds compare?
Who draws his thoughts of love from senseless things,
Their pomp and greatest glories doth impair,
And mounts love's heaven with overladen wings." ¹

I can well believe that things had no more beauty then than now; but I am sure that men found them more beautiful.

When the power of embellishment is so great, it is natural that they should paint the sentiment which unites all joys, whither all dreams converge,—ideal love, and in particular, artless and happy love. Of all sentiments, there is none for which we have more sympathy. It is of all the most simple and sweet. It is the first motion of the heart, and the first word of nature. It is made up of innocence and self-abandonment. It is clear of reflection and effort. It extricates us from complicated passion, contempt, regret, hate, violent desires. It penetrates us, and we breathe it as the fresh breath of the morning wind, which has swept over flowery meads. The knights of this perilous court inhaled it, and were enraptured, and so rested in the contrast from their actions and their dangers. The most severe and tragic of their poets turned aside to meet it, Shakspeare among the evergreen oaks of the forest of Arden, ² Ben Jonson in the woods of Sherwood, ³ amid the wide shady glades, the shining leaves and moist flowers, trembling on the margin of lonely springs. Marlowe himself, the terrible painter of the agony of Edward II., the impressive and powerful poet, who wrote Faustus, Tamerlane, and the Jew of

¹ Greene’s Poems, Melicertus’ Eclogue, p. 48.  ² As you Like it.
³ The Sad Shepherd. See also Beaumont and Fletcher, The Faithful Shepherdess.
Malta, leaves his sanguinary dramas, his high-sounding
verse, his images of fury, and nothing can be more
musical and sweet than his song. A shepherd, to gain
his lady-love, says to her:

"Come live with me and be my Love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dale and field,
And all the craggy mountains yield.
There we will sit upon the rocks,
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.
There will I make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.
A gown made of the finest wool,
Which from our pretty lambs we pull,
Fair lin'd slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.
A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my Love...
The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my Love." ¹

¹ This poem was, and still is, frequently attributed to Shakspeare.
It appears as his in Knight's edition, published a few years ago. Isaac
Walton, however, writing about fifty years after Marlowe's death,
attributes it to him. In Palgrave's Golden Treasury it is also ascribed
to the same author. As a confirmation, let us state that Ithamore, in
Marlowe's Jew of Malta, says to the courtesan (Act iv. Sc. 4):
"Thou in those groves, by Dis above,
Shalt live with me, and be my love." — T2.
The unpolished gentlemen of the period, returning from hawking, were more than once arrested by such rustic pictures; such as they were, that is to say, imaginative and not very citizen-like, they had dreamed of figuring in them on their own account. But while entering into, they reconstructed them; they reconstructed them in their parks, prepared for Queen Elizabeth’s entrance, with a profusion of costumes and devices, not troubling themselves to copy rough nature exactly. Improbability did not disturb them; they were not minute imitators, students of manners: they created; the country for them was but a setting, and the complete picture came from their fancies and their hearts. Romantic it may have been, even impossible, but it was on this account the more charming. Is there a greater charm than putting on one side this actual world which fetters or oppresses us, to float vaguely and easily in the azure and the light, on the summit of the cloud-capped land of fairies, to arrange things according to the pleasure of the moment, no longer feeling the oppressive laws, the harsh and resisting framework of life, adorning and varying everything after the caprice and the refinements of fancy? That is what is done in these little poems. Usually the events are such as happen nowhere, or happen in the land where kings turn shepherds and marry shepherdesses. The beautiful Argentile\(^1\) is detained at the court of her uncle, who wishes to deprive her of her kingdom, and commands her to marry Curan, a boor in his service; she flees, and Curan in despair goes and lives two years among the shepherds. One day he meets a beautiful country-woman, and loves her;

gradually, while speaking to her, he thinks of Argentile, and weeps; he describes her sweet face, her lithe figure, her blue-veined delicate wrists, and suddenly sees that the peasant girl is weeping. She falls into his arms, and says, “I am Argentile.” Now Curan was a king’s son, who had disguised himself thus for love of Argentile. He resumes his armour, and defeats the wicked king. There never was a braver knight; and they both reigned long in Northumberland. From a hundred such tales, tales of the spring-time, the reader will perhaps bear with me while I pick out one more, gay and simple as a May morning. The Princess Dowsabel came down one morning into her father’s garden; she gathers honeysuckles, primroses, violets, and daisies; then, behind a hedge, she heard a shepherd singing, and that so finely that she loved him at once. He promises to be faithful, and asks for a kiss. Her cheeks became as crimson as a rose:

‘With that she bent her snow white knee,
   Down by the shepherd kneeled she,
   And him she sweetly kiss’d.
With that the shepherd whoop’d for joy;
Quoth he: ‘There’s never shepherd’s boy
   That ever was so blest.’”¹

Nothing more; is it not enough? It is but a moment’s fancy; but they had such fancies every moment. Think what poetry was likely to spring from them, how superior to common events, how free from literal imitation, how smitten with ideal beauty, how capable of creating a world beyond our sad world. In fact, among all these poems there is one truly divine, so

divine that the reasoners of succeeding ages have found it wearisome, that even now but few understand it—Spenser’s Faerie Queene.

One day Monsieur Jourdain, having turned Mamamouchi and learned orthography, sent for the most illustrious writers of the age. He settled himself in his arm-chair, pointed with his finger at several folding-stools for them to sit down, and said:

"I have read your little productions, gentlemen. They have afforded me much pleasure. I wish to give you some work to do. I have given some lately to little Lulli, your fellow-labourer. It was at my command that he introduced the seashell at his concerts,—a melodious instrument, which no one thought of before, and which has such a pleasing effect. I insist that you will work out my ideas as he has worked them out, and I give you an order for a poem in prose. What is not prose, you know, is verse; and what is not verse, is prose. When I say, ‘Nicolle, bring me my slippers and give me my nightcap,’ I speak prose. Take this sentence as your model. This style is much more pleasing than the jargon of unfinished lines which you call verse. As for the subject, let it be myself. You will describe my flowered dressing-gown which I have put on to receive you in, and this little green velvet undress which I wear underneath, to do my morning exercise in. You will set down that this chintz costs a louis an ell. The description, if well worked out will furnish some very pretty paragraphs, and will enlighten the public as to the cost of things. I desire also that you should speak of my mirrors, my carpets, my hangings. My tradesmen will let you have their bills; don’t fail to put them in. I shall be glad to read in your works, all fully and naturally set forth, about my father’s shop, who, like a real gentleman, sold cloth to

1 Mona. Jourdain is the hero of Molière’s comedy, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, the type of a vulgar and successful upstart; Mamamouchi is a mock title.—Tr.

2 Lulli, a celebrated Italian composer of the time of Molière.—Tr.
oblige his friends; my maid Nicolle’s kitchen, the genteel behaviour of Brusquet, the little dog of my neighbour M. Dimanche. You might also explain my domestic affairs; there is nothing more interesting to the public than to hear how a million may be scraped together. Tell them also that my daughter Lucile has not married that little rascal Cléonte, but M. Samuel Bernard, who made his fortune as a fermier-général, keeps his carriage and is going to be a minister of state. For this I will pay you liberally, half-a-louis for a yard of writing. Come back in a month, and let me see what my ideas have suggested to you."

We are the descendants of M. Jourdain, and this is how we have been talking to the men of genius from the beginning of the century, and the men of genius have listened to us. Hence arise our shopy and realistic novels. I pray the reader to forget them, to forget himself, to become for a while a poet, a gentleman, a man of the sixteenth century. Unless we bury the M. Jourdain who survives in us, we shall never understand Spenser.

VI.

Spenser belonged to an ancient family, allied to great houses; was a friend of Sidney and Raleigh, the two most accomplished knights of the age—a knight himself, at least in heart; who had found in his connections, his friendships, his studies, his life, everything calculated to lead him to ideal poetry. We find him at Cambridge, where he imbues himself with the noblest ancient philosophies; in a northern country, where he passes through a deep and unfortunate passion; at Penshurst, in the castle and in the society where the Arcadia was produced; with Sidney, in whom survived entire the romantic poetry and heroic generosity of the
feudal spirit; at court, where all the splendours of a disciplined and gorgeous chivalry were gathered about the throne; finally, at Kilcolman, on the borders of a beautiful lake, in a lonely castle, from which the view embraced an amphitheatre of mountains, and the half of Ireland. Poor on the other hand, not fit for court, and though favoured by the queen, unable to obtain from his patrons anything but inferior employment; in the end, wearied of solicitations, and banished to his dangerous property in Ireland, whence a rebellion expelled him, after his house and child had been burned; he died three months later, of misery and a broken heart. Expectations and rebuffs, many sorrows and many dreams, some few joys, and a sudden and frightful calamity, a small fortune and a premature end; this indeed was a poet's life. But the heart within was the true poet—from it all proceeded; circumstances furnished the subject only; he transformed them more than they him; he received less than he gave. Philosophy and landscapes, ceremonies and ornaments, splendours of the country and the court, on all which he painted or thought, he impressed his inward nobleness. Above all, his was a soul captivated by sublime and chaste beauty, eminently platonic; one of these lofty and refined souls most charming of all, who, born in the lap of nature, draw thence their sustenance, but soar higher, enter the regions of mysticism, and mount instinctively in order to expand on the confines of a loftier world. Spenser leads us to Milton,

1 It is very doubtful whether Spenser was so poor as he is generally believed to have been.—Tw.
2 "He died for want of bread, in King Street." Ben Jonson, quoted by Drummond.
and thence to Puritanism, as Plato to Virgil, and thence to Christianity. Sensuous beauty is perfect in both, but their main worship is for moral beauty. He appeals to the Muses:

"Revele to me the sacred noursery
   Of vertue, which with you doth there remaine,
   Where it in silver bowre does hidden ly
   From view of men and wicked worlds disdaine!"

He encourages his knight when he sees him droop. He is wroth when he sees him attacked. He rejoices in his justice, temperanc, courtesy. He introduces in the beginning of a song, long stanzas in honour of friendship and justice. He pauses, after relating a lovely instance of chastity, to exhort women to modesty. He pours out the wealth of his respect and tenderness at the feet of his heroines. If any coarse man insults them, he calls to their aid nature and the gods. Never does he bring them on his stage without adorning their name with splendid eulogy. He has an adoration for beauty worthy of Dante and Plotinus. And this, because he never considers it a mere harmony of colour and form, but an emanation of unique, heavenly, imperishable beauty, which no mortal eye can see, and which is the masterpiece of the great Author of the worlds.\(^1\) Bodies only render it visible; it does not live in them; charm and attraction are not in things, but in the immortal idea which shines through them:

"For that same goodly hew of white and red,
   With which the cheekes are sprinkleld, shall decay,
   And those sweete rosey leaves, so fairly spreid
   Upon the lips, shall fade and fall away
   To that they were, even to corrupted clay:

\(^1\) *Hymns of Love and Beauty; of heavenly Love and Beauty.*
That golden wyre, those sparckling stars so bright,
Shall turne to dust, and lose their goodly light.
But that faire lampe, from whose celestiall ray
That light proceedes, which kindleth lovers fire,
Shall never be extinguishd nor decay;
But, when the vitall spirits doe expyre,
Upon her native planet shall retyre;
For it is heav'ly borne, and cannot die,
Being a parcell of the purest skie.”

In presence of this ideal of beauty, love is transformed:

“For Love is lord of Truth and Loialtie,
Lifting himself out of the lowly dust,
On golden plumes up to the purest skie,
Above the reach of loathly sinfull lust,
Whose base affect through cowardly distrust
Of his weake wings dare not to heaven fly,
But like a moldwarpe in the earth doth ly.”

Love such as this contains all that is good, and fine,
and noble. It is the prime source of life, and the
eternal soul of things. It is this love which, pacifying
the primitive discord, has created the harmony of the
spheres, and maintains this glorious universe. It dwells
in God, and is God Himself, come down in bodily form
to regenerate the tottering world and save the human
race; around and within animated beings, when our
eyes can pierce outward appearances, we behold it as a
living light, penetrating and embracing every creature.
We touch here the sublime sharp summit where the
world of mind and the world of sense unite; where
man, gathering with both hands the loveliest flowers
of either, feels himself at the same time a pagan and a
Christian.

1 *A Hymne in Honour of Beautie*, l. 92-105.
2 *A Hymne in Honour of Love*, l. 176-182.
So much, as a testimony to his heart. But he was also a poet, that is, pre-eminently a creator and a dreamer, and that most naturally, instinctively, unceasingly. We might go on for ever describing this inward condition of all great artists; there would still remain much to be described. It is a sort of mental growth with them; at every instant a bud shoots forth, and on this another, and still another; each producing, increasing, blooming of itself, so that after a few moments we find first a green plant crop up, then a thicket, then a forest. A character appears to them, then an action, then a landscape, then a succession of actions, characters, landscapes, producing, completing, arranging themselves by instinctive development, as when in a dream we behold a train of figures which, without any outward compulsion, display and group themselves before our eyes. This fount of living and changing forms is inexhaustible in Spenser; he is always imaging; it is his specialty. He has but to close his eyes, and apparitions arise; they abound in him, crowd, overflow; in vain he pours them forth; they continually float up, more copious and more dense. Many times, following the inexhaustible stream, I have thought of the vapours which rise incessantly from the sea, ascend, sparkle, commingle their golden and snowy scrolls, while underneath them new mists arise, and others again beneath, and the splendid procession never grows dim or ceases.

But what distinguishes him from all others is the mode of his imagination. Generally with a poet his mind ferments vehemently and by fits and starts; his ideas gather, jostle each other, suddenly appear in masses and heaps, and burst forth in sharp, piercing, concentrative words; it seems that they need these
sudden accumulations to imitate the unity and life-like energy of the objects which they reproduce; at least almost all the poets of that time, Shakspere at their head, act thus. Spenser remains calm in the fervour of invention. The visions which would be fever to another, leave him at peace. They come and unfold themselves before him, easily, entire, uninterrupted, without starts. He is epic, that is, a narrator, not a singer like an ode-writer, nor a mimic like a play-writer. No modern is more like Homer. Like Homer and the great epic-writers, he only presents consecutive and noble, almost classical images, so nearly ideas, that the mind seizes them unaided and unawares. Like Homer, he is always simple and clear: he makes no leaps, he omits no argument, he robs no word of its primitive and ordinary meaning, he preserves the natural sequence of ideas. Like Homer again, he is redundant, ingenuous, even childish. He says everything, he puts down reflections which we have made beforehand; he repeats without limit his grand ornamental epithets. We can see that he beholds objects in a beautiful uniform light, with infinite detail; that he wishes to show all this detail, never fearing to see his happy dream change or disappear; that he traces its outline with a regular movement, never hurrying or slackening. He is even a little prolix, too unmindful of the public, too ready to lose himself and dream about the things he beholds. His thought expands in vast repeated comparisons, like those of the old Ionic poet. If a wounded giant falls, he finds him

"As an aged tree,
High growing on the top of rocky cliff,
Whose heart-strings with keene steele nigh hewen be,
The mightie trunck halfe rent with ragged rift,
Doth roll adowne the rocks, and fall with searefull drift.

Or as a castle, reared high and round,
By subtile engins and malitious slight
Is undermined from the lowest ground,
And her foundation forst, and feebled quight,
At last downe falleth; and with her heaped hight
Her hastie ruine does more heavie make,
And yeilds it selfe unto the victours might:
Such was this Gyaut's fall, that seemed to shake
The stedfast globe of earth, as it for feare did quake."

He develops all the ideas which he handles. All his phrases become periods. Instead of compressing, he expands. To bear this ample thought and its accompanying train, he requires a long stanza, ever renewed, long alternate verses, reiterated rhymes, whose uniformity and fulness recall the majestic sounds which undulate eternally through the woods and the fields. To unfold these epic faculties, and to display them in the sublime region where his soul is naturally borne, he requires an ideal stage, situated beyond the bounds of reality, with personages who could hardly exist, and in a world which could never be.

He made many miscellaneous attempts in sonnets, elegies, pastorals, hymns of love, little sparkling word pictures; they were but essays, incapable for the most part of supporting his genius. Yet already his magnificent imagination appeared in them; gods, men, landscapes, the world which he sets in motion is a

1 The Faerie Queen, i. c. 8, st. 22, 23.
2 The Shepherd's Calendar, Amoretti, Sonnets, Prothalamion, Epithalamion, Melpomene, Virgil's Gnat, The Ruines of Time, The Teares of the Muses, etc.
thousand miles from that in which we live. His *Shepherd's Calendar* is a thought-inspiring and tender pastoral, full of delicate loves, noble sorrows, lofty ideas, where no voice is heard but of thinkers and poets. His *Visions of Petrarch and Du Bellay* are admirable dreams, in which palaces, temples of gold, splendid landscapes, sparkling rivers, marvellous birds, appear in close succession as in an Oriental fairy-tale. If he sings a "Prothalamion," he sees two beautiful swans, white as snow, who come softly swimming down amidst the songs of nymphs and vermeil roses, while the transparent water kisses their silken feathers, and murmurs with joy:

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There, in a meadow, by the river's side,
A flocke of Nymphes I chaunced to espy,
All lovely daughters of the Flood thereby,
With goodly greenish locks, all loose untyde,
As each had bene a bryde;
And each one had a little wicker basket,
Made of fine twigs, entrayled curiously,
In which they gathered flowers to fill their flasket,
And with fine fingers cropt full feateously
The tender stalkes on hye.
Of every sort, which in that meadow grew,
They gathered some; the violet, pallid blew,

* The little dazie, that at evening closes,
* The virgin lillie, and the primrose trow,
* With store of vermeil roses,

To deck their bridegromes posies
Against the brydale-day, which was not long:
Sweet Themmes I runne softly, till I end my song.
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1 Published in 1589; dedicated to Philip Sidney.
With that I saw two Swannes of goodly hewe Comely swimming downe along the lee; Two fairer birds I yet did never see; The snow, which doth the top of Pindus strew, Did never whiter shew... So purely white they were, That even the gentle stream, the which them bare, Seem'd foule to them, and bad his billowes spare To wet their silken feathers, least they might Soyle their fayre plumes with water not so fayre, And marre their beauties bright, That shone as heaven's light, Against their brydale day, which was not long: Sweet Themmes! runne softly, tull I end my song!" ¹

If he bewails the death of Sidney, Sidney becomes a shepherd; he is slain like Adonis; around him gather weeping nymphs:

"The gods, which all things see, this same beheld, And, pittyng this paire of lovers trew, Transformed them there lying on the field, Into one floure that is both red and blew: It first growes red, and then to blew doth fade, Like Astrophel, which thereinto was made.

And in the midst thereof a star appeares, As fairly formd as any star in skyes: Resembling Stella in her freshest yeares, Forth dartsing beames of beautie from her eyes; And all the day it standeth full of deow, Which is the teares, that from her eyes did flow." ²

His most genuine sentiments become thus fairy-like. Magic is the mould of his mind, and impresses its shape

¹ Prothalamion, l. 19-54. ² Astrophel, l. 181-192
on all that he imagines or thinks. Involuntarily he robs objects of their ordinary form. If he looks at a landscape, after an instant he sees it quite differently. He carries it, unconsciously, into an enchanted land; the azure heaven sparkles like a canopy of diamonds, meadows are clothed with flowers, a biped population flutters in the balmy air, palaces of jasper shine among the trees, radiant ladies appear on carved balconies above galleries of emerald. This unconscious toil of mind is like the slow crystallisations of nature. A moist twig is cast into the bottom of a mine, and is brought out again a hoop of diamonds.

At last he finds a subject which suits him, the greatest joy permitted to an artist. He removes his epic, from the common ground which, in the hands of Homer and Dante, gave expression to a living creed, and depicted national heroes. He leads us to the summit of fairy-land, soaring above history, on that extreme verge where objects vanish and pure idealism begins: "I have undertaken a work," he says, "to represent all the moral virtues, assigning to every virtue a knight to be the patron and defender of the same; in whose actions and feats of armes and chivalry the operations of that virtue, whereof he is the protector, are to be expressed, and the vices and unruly appetites that oppose themselves against the same, to be beaten downe and overcome." ¹ In fact, he gives us an allegory as the foundation of his poem, not that he dreams of becoming a wit, a preacher of moralities, a propounder of riddles. He does not subordinate image to idea; he is a seer, not a philosopher. They are living men and

¹ Words attributed to him by Lodowick Bryskett, Discourses of Civil Life, ed. 1606, p. 26.
actions which he sets in motion; only from time to time, in his poem, enchanted palaces, a whole train of splendid visions trembles and divides like a mist, enabling us to catch a glimpse of the thought which raised and arranged it. When in his Garden of Adonis we see the countless forms of all living things arranged in due order, in close compass, awaiting life, we conceive with him the birth of universal love, the ceaseless fertility of the great mother, the mysterious swarm of creatures which rise in succession from her "wide wombe of the world." When we see his Knight of the Cross combating with a horrible woman-serpent in defence of his beloved lady Una, we dimly remember that, if we search beyond these two figures, we shall find behind one, Truth, behind the other, Falsehood. We perceive that his characters are not flesh and blood, and that all these brilliant phantoms are phantoms, and nothing more. We take pleasure in their brilliancy, without believing in their substantiality; we are interested in their doings, without troubling ourselves about their misfortunes. We know that their tears and cries are not real. Our emotion is purified and raised. We do not fall into gross illusion; we have that gentle feeling of knowing ourselves to be dreaming. We, like him, are a thousand leagues from actual life, beyond the pangs of painful pity, unmixed terror, violent and bitter hatred. We entertain only refined sentiments, partly formed, arrested at the very moment they were about to affect us with too sharp a stroke. They slightly touch us, and we find ourselves happy in being extricated from a belief which was beginning to be oppressive.
VII.

What world could furnish materials to so elevated a fancy? One only, that of chivalry; for none is so far from the actual. Alone and independent in his castle, freed from all the ties which society, family, toil, usually impose on the actions of men, the feudal hero had attempted every kind of adventure, but yet he had done less than he imagined; the boldness of his deeds had been exceeded by the madness of his dreams. For want of useful employment and an accepted rule, his brain had laboured on an unreasoning and impossible track, and the urgency of his wearisomeness had increased beyond measure his craving for excitement. Under this stimulus his poetry had become a world of imagery. Insensibly strange conceptions had grown and multiplied in his brains, one over the other, like ivy woven round a tree, and the original trunk had disappeared beneath their rank growth and their obstruction. The delicate fancies of the old Welsh poetry, the grand ruins of the German epics, the marvellous splendidours of the conquered East, all the recollections which four centuries of adventure had scattered among the minds of men, had become gathered into one great dream; and giants, dwarfs, monsters, the whole medley of imaginary creatures, of superhuman exploits and splendid follies, were grouped around a unique conception, exalted and sublime love, like courtiers prostrated at the feet of their king. It was an ample and buoyant subject-matter, from which the great artists of the age, Ariosto, Tasso, Cervantes, Rabelais, had hewn their poems. But they belonged too completely to their own time, to admit of their belonging to one
which had passed. They created a chivalry afresh, but it was not genuine. The ingenious Ariosto, an ironical epicurean, delights his gaze with it, and grows merry over it, like a man of pleasure, a sceptic who rejoices doubly in his pleasure, because it is sweet, and because it is forbidden. By his side poor Tasso, inspired by a fanatical, revived, factitious Catholicism, amid the tinsel of an old school of poetry, works on the same subject, in sickly fashion, with great effort and scant success. Cervantes, himself a knight, albeit he loves chivalry for its nobleness, perceives its folly, and crushes it to the ground, with heavy blows, in the mishaps of the wayside inns. More coarsely, more openly, Rabelais, a rude commoner, drowns it with a burst of laughter, in his merriment and vastiness. Spenser alone takes it seriously and naturally. He is on the level of so much nobleness, dignity, reverie. He is not yet settled and shut in by that species of exact common sense which was to found and cramp the whole modern civilisation. In his heart he inhabits the poetic and shadowy land from which men were daily drawing further and further away. He is enamoured of it, even to its very language; he revives the old words, the expressions of the middle-age, the style of Chaucer, especially in the Shepherd’s Calendar. He enters straightway upon the strangest dreams of the old story-tellers, without astonishment, like a man who has still stranger dreams of his own. Enchanted castles, monsters and giants, duels in the woods, wandering ladies, all spring up under his hands, the mediæval fancy with the mediæval generosity;

and it is just because this world is unreal that it so
suits his humour.

Is there in chivalry sufficient to furnish him with
matter? That is but one world, and he has another.
Beyond the valiant men, the glorified images of moral
virtues, he has the gods, finished models of sensible
beauty; beyond Christian chivalry he has the pagan
Olympus; beyond the idea of heroic will which can
only be satisfied by adventures and danger, there exists
calm energy, which, by its own impulse, is in harmony
with actual existence. For such a poet one ideal is
not enough; beside the beauty of effort he places the
beauty of happiness; he couples them, not deliberately
as a philosopher, nor with the design of a scholar like
Goethe, but because they are both lovely; and here
and there, amid armour and passages of arms, he
distributes satyrs, nympha, Diana, Venus, like Greek
statues amid the turrets and lofty trees of an English
park. There is nothing forced in the union; the ideal
epic, like a superior heaven, receives and harmonises
the two worlds; a beautiful pagan dream carries on a
beautiful dream of chivalry; the link consists in the
fact that they are both beautiful. At this elevation
the poet has ceased to observe the differences of races
and civilisations. He can introduce into his picture
whatever he will; his only reason is, "That suited;"
and there could be no better. Under the glossy-leaved
oaks, by the old trunk so deeply rooted in the ground,
he can see two knights cleaving each other, and the next
instant a company of Fauns who came there to dance.
The beams of light which have poured down upon the
velvet moss, the green turf of an English forest, can
reveal the dishevelled locks and white shoulders of
nympha. Do we not see it in Rubens? And what signify discrepancies in the happy and sublime illusion of fancy? Are there more discrepancies? Who perceives them, who feels them? Who does not feel, on the contrary, that to speak the truth, there is but one world, that of Plato and the poets; that actual phenomena are but outlines—mutilated, incomplete and blurred outlines—wretched abortions scattered here and there on Time's track, like fragments of clay, half moulded, then cast aside, lying in an artist's studio; that, after all, invisible forces and ideas, which for ever renew the actual existences, attain their fulfilment only in imaginary existences; and that the poet, in order to express nature in its entirety, is obliged to embrace in his sympathy all the ideal forms by which nature reveals itself? This is the greatness of his work; he has succeeded in seizing beauty in its fulness, because he cared for nothing but beauty.

The reader will feel that it is impossible to give in full the plot of such a poem. In fact, there are six poems, each of a dozen cantos, in which the action is ever diverging and converging again, becoming confused and starting again; and all the imaginings of antiquity and of the middle-age are, I believe, combined in it. The knight "pricks along the plaine," among the trees, and at a crossing of the paths meets other knights with whom he engages in combat; suddenly from within a cave appears a monster, half woman and half serpent, surrounded by a hideous offspring; further on a giant, with three bodies; then a dragon, great as a hill, with sharp talons and vast wings. For three days he fights him, and twice overthrown, he comes to himself only by aid of "a gracious ointment." After that there are savage
tribes to be conquered, castles surrounded by flames to be taken. Meanwhile ladies are wandering in the midst of forests, on white palfreys, exposed to the assaults of miscreants, now guarded by a lion which follows them, now delivered by a band of satyrs who adore them. Magicians work manifold charms; palaces display their festivities; tilt-yards provide endless tournaments; sea-gods, nymphs, fairies, kings, intermingle in these feasts, surprises, dangers.

You will say it is a phantasmagoria. What matter, if we see it? And we do see it, for Spenser does. His sincerity communicates itself to us. He is so much at home in this world, that we end by finding ourselves at home in it too. He shows no appearance of astonishment at astonishing events; he comes upon them so naturally, that he makes them natural; he defeats the miscreants, as if he had done nothing else all his life. Venus, Diana, and the old deities, dwell at his gate and enter his threshold without his taking any heed of them. His serenity becomes ours. We grow credulous and happy by contagion, and to the same extent a; he. How could it be otherwise? Is it possible to refuse credence to a man who paints things for us with such accurate details and in such lively colours? Here with a dash of his pen he describes a forest for you; and are you not instantly in it with him? Beech trees with their silvery stems, "loftie trees iald with sommers pride, did spred so broad, that heavens light did hide;" rays of light tremble on the bark and shine on the ground, on the reddening ferns and low bushes, which, suddenly smitten with the luminous track, glisten and glimmer. Footsteps are scarcely heard on the thick beds of heaped leaves; and at distant intervals, on the tall herbage,