

masterpiece of sympathetic divination into the feminine mind. *Clarissa* is, as has been well said, the "Eve of fiction, the prototype of the modern heroine"; feminine psychology as good as unknown before (Shakespeare's women being the "Fridays" of a highly intelligent Crusoe) has hardly been brought further since. But *Clarissa* is more than mere psychology; whether she represents a contemporary tendency or whether Richardson made her so, she starts a new epoch. "This," says Henley, "is perhaps her finest virtue as it is certainly her greatest charm; that until she set the example, woman in literature as a self-suffering individuality, as an existence endowed with equal rights to independence—of choice, volition, action—with man had not begun to be." She had not begun to be it in life either.

What Richardson did for the subtlest part of a novelist's business, his dealings with psychology, Fielding did for the most necessary part of it, the telling of the story. Before him hardly any story had been told well; even if it had been plain and clear as in Bunyan and Defoe it had lacked the emphasis, the light and shade of skilful grouping. On the "picaresque" (so the autobiographical form was called abroad) convention of a journey he grafted a structure based in its outline on the form of the ancient epic. It proved extraordinarily suitable for his purpose. Not only did it make it easy for him to lighten his narrative with excursions in a heightened style, burlesquing his origins, but it gave him

at once the right attitude to his material. He told his story as one who knew everything ; could tell conversations and incidents as he conceived them happening, with no violation of credibility, nor any strain on his reader's imagination ; and without any impropriety could interpose in his own person, pointing things to the reader which might have escaped his attention, pointing at parallels he might have missed, laying bare the irony or humour beneath a situation. He allowed himself digressions and episodes, told separate tales in the middle of the action, introduced, as in Partridge's visit to the theatre, the added piquancy of topical allusion ; in fact he did anything he chose. And he laid down that free form of the novel which is characteristically English, and from which, in its essence, no one till the modern realists has made a serious departure.

In the matter of his novels, he excels by reason of a Shakespearean sense of character and by the richness and rightness of his faculty of humour. He had a quick eye for contemporary types, and an amazing power of building out of them men and women whose individuality is full and rounded. You do not feel as you do with Richardson that his fabric is spun silk-worm-wise out of himself ; on the contrary you know it to be the fruit of a gentle and observant nature, and a stock of fundamental human sympathy. His gallery of portraits, Joseph Andrews, Parson Adams, Parson Trulliber, Jones, Blifil, Partridge, Sophia and her father and all the rest

are each of them minute studies of separate people ; they live and move according to their proper natures ; they are conceived not from without but from within. Both Richardson and Fielding were conscious of a moral intention ; but where Richardson is sentimental, vulgar, and moral only so far as it is moral (as in *Pamela*), to inculcate selling at the highest price or (as in *Grandison*) to avoid temptations which never come in your way, Fielding's morality is fresh and healthy, and (though not quite free from the sentimentality of scoundrelism) at bottom sane and true. His knowledge of the world kept him right. His acquaintance with life is wide, and his insight is keen and deep. His taste is almost as catholic as Shakespeare's own, and the life he knew, and which other men knew, he handles for the first time with the freedom and imagination of an artist.

Each of the two—Fielding and Richardson—had his host of followers. Abroad Richardson won immediate recognition ; in France Diderot went so far as to compare him with Homer and Moses ! He gave the first impulse to modern French fiction. At home, less happily, he set going the sentimental school, and it was only when that had passed away that—in the delicate and subtle character-study of Miss Austen—his influence comes to its own. Miss Austen carried a step further, and with an observation which was first hand and seconded by intuitive knowledge, Richardson's analysis of the feminine mind, adding to it a delicate and finely humorous

feeling for character in both sexes which was all her own. Fielding's imitators (they number each in his own way, and with his own graces or talent added, his rival Smollett, Sterne, and Goldsmith) kept the way which leads to Thackeray and Dickens—the main road of the English Novel.

That road was widened two ways by Sir Walter Scott. The historical novel; which had been before his day either an essay in anachronism with nothing historical in it but the date, or a laborious and uninspired compilation of antiquarian research, took form and life under his hands. His wide reading, stored as it was in a marvellously retentive memory, gave him all the background he needed to achieve a historical setting, and allowed him to concentrate his attention on the actual telling of his story; to which his genial and sympathetic humanity and his quick eye for character gave a humorous depth and richness that was all his own. It is not surprising that he made the historical novel a literary vogue all over Europe. In the second place, he began in his novels of Scottish character a sympathetic study of nationality. He is not, perhaps, a fair guide to contemporary conditions; his interests were too romantic and too much in the past to catch the rattle of the looms that caught the ear of Galt, and if we want a picture of the great fact of modern Scotland, its industrialisation, it is to Galt we must go. But in his comprehension of the essential character of the people he has no rival; in it his historical sense seconded his

observation, and the two mingling gave us the pictures whose depth of colour and truth make his Scottish novels, *Old Mortality*, *The Antiquary*, *Redgauntlet*, the greatest things of their kind in literature.

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The peculiarly national style of fiction founded by Fielding and carried on by his followers reached its culminating point in *Vanity Fair*. In it the reader does not seem to be simply present at the unfolding of a plot the end of which is constantly present to the mind of the author and to which he is always consciously working, every incident having a bearing on the course of the action; rather he feels himself to be the spectator of a piece of life which is too large and complex to be under the control of a creator, which moves to its close not under the impulsion of a directing hand, but independently impelled by causes evolved in the course of its happening. With this added complexity goes a more frequent interposition of the author in his own person—one of the conventions as we have seen of this national style. Thackeray is present to his readers, indeed, not as the manager who pulls the strings and sets the puppets in motion, but as an interpreter who directs the reader's attention to the events on which he lays stress, and makes them a starting-point for his own moralising. This persistent moralizing—sham cynical, real sentimental—this thumping of death-bed

pillows as in the dreadful case of Miss Crawley, makes Thackeray's use of the personal interposition almost less effective than that of any other novelist. Already while he was doing it, Dickens had conquered the public; and the English novel was making its second fresh start.

He is an innovator in more ways than one. In the first place he is the earliest novelist to practise a conscious artistry of plot. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* remains mysterious, but those who essay to conjecture the end of that unfinished story have at last the surety that its end, full worked out in all its details, had been in its author's mind before he set pen to paper. His imagination was as diligent and as disciplined as his pen. Dickens' practice in this matter could not be better put than in his own words, when he describes himself as "in the first stage of a new book, which consists in going round and round the idea, as you see a bird in his cage go about and about his sugar before he touches it." That his plots are always highly elaborated is the fruit of this preliminary disciplined exercise of thought. The method is familiar to many novelists now; Dickens was the first to put it into practice. In the second place he made a new departure by his frankly admitted didacticism and by the skill with which in all but two or three of his books—*Bleak House*, perhaps, and *Little Dorrit*—he squared his purpose with his art. Lastly he made the discovery which has made him immortal. In him for the first time the English

novel produced an author who dug down into the masses of the people for his subjects; apprehended them in all their inexhaustible character and humour and pathos, and reproduced them with a lively and loving artistic skill.

Dickens has, of course, serious faults. In particular, readers emancipated by lapse of time from the enslavement of the first enthusiasm, have quarrelled with the mawkishness and sentimentality of his pathos, and with the exaggeration of his studies of character. It has been said of him, as it has of Thackeray, that he could not draw a "good woman" and that Agnes Copperfield, like Amelia Sedley, is a very doll-like type of person. To critics of this kind it may be retorted that though "good" and "bad" are categories relevant to melodrama, they apply very ill to serious fiction, and that indeed to the characters of any of the novelists—the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell or the like—who lay bare character with fullness and intimacy, they could not well be applied at all. The faultiness of them in Dickens is less than in Thackeray, for in Dickens they are only incident to the scheme, which lies in the hero (his heroes are excellent) and in the grotesque characters, whereas in his rival they are in the theme itself. For his pathos, not even his warmest admirer could perhaps offer a satisfactory case. The charge of exaggeration however is another matter. To the person who complains that he has never met Dick Swiveller or Micawber or Mrs. Gamp the answer is simply Turner's to

the sceptical critic of his sunset, "Don't you wish you could?" To the other, who objects more plausibly to Dickens's habit of attaching to each of his characters some label which is either so much flaunted all through that you cannot see the character at all or else mysteriously and unaccountably disappears when the story begins to grip the author, Dickens has himself offered an amusing and convincing defence. In the preface to *Pickwick* he answers those who criticised the novel on the ground that *Pickwick* began by being purely ludicrous and developed into a serious and sympathetic individuality, by pointing to the analogous process which commonly takes place in actual human relationships. You begin a new acquaintanceship with perhaps not very charitable prepossessions; these later a deeper and better knowledge removes, and where you have before seen an idiosyncrasy you come to love a character. It is ingenious and it helps to explain Mrs. Nickleby, the Pecksniff daughters, and many another. Whether it is true or not (and it does not explain the faultiness of such pictures as Carker and his kind) there can be no doubt that this trick in Dickens of beginning with a salient impression and working outward to a fuller conception of character is part at least of the reason of his enormous hold upon his readers. No man leads you into the mazes of his invention so easily and with such a persuasive hand

The great novelists who were writing contemporarily with him—the Brontës, Mrs.

Gaskell, George Eliot—it is impossible to deal with here, except to say that the last is indisputably, because of her inability to fuse completely art and ethics, inferior to Mrs. Gaskell or to either of the Brontë sisters. Nor of the later Victorians who added fresh variety to the national style can the greatest, Meredith, be more than mentioned for the exquisiteness of his comic spirit and the brave gallery of English men and women he has given us in what is, perhaps, fundamentally the most English thing in fiction since Fielding wrote. For our purpose Mr. Hardy, though he is a less brilliant artist, is more to the point. His novels brought into England the contemporary pessimism of Schopenhaur and the Russians, and found a home for it among the English peasantry. Convinced that in the upper classes character could be studied and portrayed only subjectively because of the artificiality of a society which prevented its outlet in action, he turned to the peasantry because with them conduct is the direct expression of the inner life. Character could be shown working, therefore, not subjectively but in the act, if you chose a peasant subject. His philosophy, expressed in this medium, is sombre. In his novels you can trace a gradual realization of the defects of natural laws and the quandary men are put to by their operation. Chance, an irritating and trifling series of coincidences, plays the part of fate. Nature seems to enter with the hopelessness of man's mood. Finally the novelist turns against life itself. "Birth," he says, speaking

of Tess, "seemed to her an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify and at best could only palliate." It is strange to find pessimism in a romantic setting; strange, too, to find a paganism which is so little capable of light or joy.

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The characteristic form of English fiction, that in which the requisite illusion of the complexity and variety of life is rendered by discursiveness, by an author's licence to digress, to double back on himself, to start may be in the middle of a story and work subsequently to the beginning and the end; in short by his power to do whatever is most expressive of his individuality, found a rival in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century in the French Naturalistic or Realist school, in which the illusion of life is got by a studied and sober veracity of statement, and by the minute accumulation of detail. To the French Naturalists a novel approached in importance the work of a man of science, and they believed it ought to be based on documentary evidence, as a scientific work would be. Above all it ought not to allow itself to be coloured by the least gloss of imagination or idealism; it ought never to shrink from a confrontation of the naked fact. On the contrary it was its business to carry it to the dissecting table and there minutely examine everything that lay beneath its surface.

The school first became an English possession in the early translations of the work of Zola; its methods were transplanted into English fiction by Mr. George Moore. From his novels, both in passages of direct statement and in the light of his practice, it is possible to gather together the materials of a manifesto of the English Naturalistic school. The naturalists complained that English fiction lacked construction in the strictest sense; they found in the English novel a remarkable absence of organic wholeness; it did not fulfil their first and broadest canon of subject-matter—by which a novel has to deal in the first place with a single and rhythmical series of events; it was too discursive. They made this charge against English fiction; they also retorted the charge brought by native writers and their readers against the French of foulness, sordidness and pessimism in their view of life. "We do not," says a novelist in one of Mr. Moore's books, "we do not always choose what you call unpleasant subjects, but we do try to get to the roots of things; and the basis of life being material and not spiritual, the analyst sooner or later finds himself invariably handling what this sentimental age calls coarse." "The novel," says the same character, "if it be anything is contemporary history, an exact and complete reproduction of the social surroundings of the age we live in." That succinctly is the naturalistic theory of the novel as a work of science—that as the history of a nation lies hidden often in social wrongs and in domestic grief

as much as in the movements of parties or dynasties, the novelist must do for the former what the historian does for the latter. It is his business in the scheme of knowledge of his time.

But the naturalists believed quite as profoundly in the novel as a work of art. They claimed for their careful pictures of the grey and sad and sordid an artistic worth, varying in proportion to the intensity of the emotion in which the picture was composed and according to the picture's truth, but in its essence just as real and permanent as the artistic worth of romance. "Seen from afar," writes Mr. Moore, "all things in nature are of equal worth; and the meanest things, when viewed with the eyes of God, are raised to heights of tragic awe which conventionality would limit to the deaths of kings and patriots." On such a lofty theory they built their treatment and their style. It is a mistake to suppose that the realist school deliberately cultivates the sordid or shocking. Examine in this connection Mr. Moore's *Mummer's Wife*, our greatest English realist novel, and for the matter of that one of the supreme things in English fiction, and you will see that the scrupulous fidelity of the author's method, though it denies him those concessions to a sentimentalist or romantic view of life which are the common implements of fiction, denies him no less the extremities of horror or loathsomeness. The heroine sinks into the miserable squalor of a dipsomaniac and dies from a drunkard's disease, but her

end is shown as the ineluctable consequence of her life, its early greyness and monotony, the sudden shock of a new and strange environment and the resultant weakness of will which a morbid excitability inevitably brought about. The novel, that is to say, deals with a "rhythmical series of events and follows them to their conclusion"; it gets at the roots of things; it tells us of something which we know to be true in life whether we care to read it in fiction or not. There is nothing in it of sordidness for sordidness' sake nor have the realists any philosophy of an unhappy ending. In this case the ending is unhappy because the sequence of events admitted of no other solution; in others the ending is happy or merely neutral as the preceding story decides. If what one may call neutral endings predominate, it is because they also—notoriously—predominate in life. But the question of unhappiness or its opposite has nothing whatever to do with the larger matter of beauty; it is the triumph of the realists that at their best they discovered a new beauty in things, the loveliness that lies in obscure places, the splendour of sordidness, humility, and pain. They have taught us that beauty, like the Spirit, blows where it lists and we know from them that the antithesis between realism and idealism is only on their lower levels; at their summits they unite and are one. No true realist but is an idealist too.

Most of what is best in English fiction since has been directly occasioned by their work;

Gissing and Mr. Arnold Bennett may be mentioned as two authors who are fundamentally realist in their conception of the art of the novel, and the realist ideal partakes in a greater or less degree in the work of nearly all our eminent novelists to-day. But realism is not and cannot be interesting to the great public ; it portrays people as they are, not as they would like to be, and where they are, not where they would like to be. It gives no background for day-dreaming. Now literature (to repeat what has been than more once stated earlier in this book) is a way of escape from life as well as an echo or mirror of it, and the novel as the form of literature which more than any other men read for pleasure, is the main avenue for this escape. So that alongside this invasion of realism it is not strange that there grew a revival in romance.

The main agent of it, Robert Louis Stevenson, had the romantic strain in him intensified by the conditions under which he worked ; a weak and anæmic man, he loved bloodshed as a cripple loves athletics—passionately and with the intimate enthusiasm of make-believe which an imaginative man can bring to bear on the contemplation of what can never be his. His natural attraction for “redness and juice” in life was seconded by a delightful and fantastic sense of the boundless possibilities of romance in every-day things. To a realist a hansom-cab driver is a man who makes twenty-five shillings a week, lives in a back street in Pimlico, has a wife

who drinks and children who grow up with an alcoholic taint; the realist will compare his lot with other cab-drivers, and find what part of his life is the product of the cab-driving environment, and on that basis he will write his book. To Stevenson and to the romanticist generally, a hansom cab-driver is a mystery behind whose apparent commonplaceness lie magic possibilities beyond all telling; not one but may be the agent of the Prince of Bohemia, ready to drive you off to some mad and magic adventure in a street which is just as commonplace to the outward eye as the cab-driver himself, but which implicates by its very deceitful commonness whole volumes of romance. The novel-reader to whom *Demos* was the repetition of what he had seen and known, and what had planted sickness in his soul, found the *New Arabian Nights* a refreshing miracle. Stevenson had discovered that modern London had its possibilities of romance. To these two elements of his romantic equipment must be added a third—travel. Defoe never left England, and other early romanticists less gifted with invention than he wrote from the mind's eye and from books. To Stevenson, and to his successor Mr. Kipling, whose "discovery" of India is one of the salient facts of modern English letters, and to Mr. Conrad belongs the credit of teaching novelists to draw on experience for the scenes they seek to present. A fourth element in the equipment of modern romanticism—that which draws its effects from the "miracles" of modern

science, has been added since by Mr. H. G. Wells, in whose latest work the realistic and romantic schools seem to have united.

CHAPTER X

THE PRESENT AGE

WE have carried our study down to the death of Ruskin and included in it authors like Swinburne and Meredith who survived till recently; and in discussing the novel we have included men like Kipling and Hardy—living authors. It would be possible and perhaps safer to stop there and make no attempt to bring writers later than these into our survey. To do so is to court an easily and quickly stated objection. One is anticipating the verdict of posterity. How can we who are contemporaries tell whether an author's work is permanent or no?

Of course, in a sense the point of view expressed by these questions is true enough. It is always idle to anticipate the verdict of posterity. Remember Matthew Arnold's prophecy that at the end of the nineteenth century Wordsworth and Byron would be the two great names in Romantic poetry. We are ten years and more past that date now, and so far as Byron is concerned, at any rate, there is no sign that Arnold's prediction has come true. But the obvious fact that we cannot do our grandchildren's thinking for

them, is no reason why we should refuse to think for ourselves. No notion is so destructive to the formation of a sound literary taste as the notion that books become literature only when their authors are dead. Round us men and women are putting into plays and poetry and novels the best that they can or know. They are writing not for a dim and uncertain future but for us, and on our recognition and welcome they depend, sometimes for their livelihood, always for the courage which carries them on to fresh endeavour. Literature is an ever-living and continuous thing, and we do it less than its due service if we are so occupied reading Shakespeare and Milton and Scott that we have no time to read Mr. Yeats, Mr. Shaw or Mr. Wells. Students of literature must remember that classics are being manufactured daily under their eyes, and that on their sympathy and comprehension depends whether an author receives the success he merits when he is alive to enjoy it.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to draw a rough picture of some of the lines or schools of contemporary writing—of the writing mainly, though not altogether, of living authors. It is intended to indicate some characteristics of the general trend or drift of literary effort as a whole. The most remarkable feature of the age, as far as writing is concerned, is without doubt its inattention to poetry. Tennyson was a popular author; his books sold in thousands; his lines passed into that common conversational currency of unconscious quotation which

is the surest testimony to the permeation of a poet's influence. Even Browning, though his popularity came late, found himself carried into all the nooks and corners of the reading public. His robust and masculine morality, understood at last, or expounded by a semi-priestly class of interpreters, made him popular with those readers—and they are the majority—who love their reading to convey a moral lesson, just as Tennyson's reflection of his time's distraction between science and religion endeared them to those who found in him an answer or at least an echo to their own perplexities. A work widely different from either of these, Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, shared and has probably exceeded their popularity for similar reasons. Its easy pessimism and cult of pleasure, its delightful freedom from any demand for continuous thought from its readers, its appeal to the indolence and moral flaccidity which is implicit in all men, all contributed to its immense vogue; and among people who perhaps did not fully understand it but were merely lulled by its sonorousness, a knowledge of it has passed for the insignia of a love of literature and the possession of literary taste. But after Fitzgerald—who? What poet has commanded the ear of the reading public or even a fraction of it? Not Swinburne certainly, partly because of his undoubted difficulty, partly because of a suspicion held of his moral and religious tenets, largely from material reasons quite unconnected with the quality of his work;

not Morris, nor his followers; none of the so-called minor poets whom we shall notice presently—poets who have drawn the moods that have nourished their work from the decadents of France. Probably the only writer of verse who is at the same time a poet and has acquired a large popularity and public influence is Mr. Kipling. His work as a novelist we mentioned in the last chapter. It remains to say something of his achievements in verse.

Let us grant at once his faults. He can be violent, and over-rhetorical; he belabours you with sense impressions, and with the polysyllabic rhetoric he learned from Swinburne—and (though this is not the place for a discussion of political ideas) he can offend by the sentimental brutalism which too often passes for patriotism in his poetry. Not that this last represents the total impression of his attitude as an Englishman. His later work in poetry and prose, devoted to the reconstruction of English history, is remarkable for the justness and saneness of its temper. There are other faults—a lack of sureness in taste is one—that could be mentioned but they do not affect the main greatness of his work. He is great because he discovered a new subject-matter, and because of the white heat of imagination which in his best things he brought to bear on it and by which he transposed it into poetry. It is Mr. Kipling's special distinction that the apparatus of modern civilization—steam engines, and steamships, and telegraph lines, and the art of

flight—take on in his hands a poetic quality as authentic and inspiring as any that ever was cast over the implements of other and what the mass of men believe to have been more picturesque days. Romance is in the present, so he teaches us, not in the past, and we do it wrong to leave it only the territory we have ourselves discarded in the advance of the race. That and the great discovery of India—an India misunderstood for his own purposes no doubt, but still the first presentiment of an essential fact in our modern history as a people—give him the hold that he has, and rightly, over the minds of his readers.

It is in a territory poles apart from Mr. Kipling's that the main stream of romantic poetry flows. Apart from the gravely delicate and scholarly work of Mr. Bridges, and the poetry of some others who work separately away from their fellows, English romantic poetry has concentrated itself into one chief school—the school of the "Celtic Revival" of which the leader is Mr. W. B. Yeats. Two sources went to its making. In its inception, it arose out of a group of young poets who worked in a conscious imitation of the methods of the French decadents; chiefly of Baudelaire and Verlaine. As a whole their work was merely imitative and not very profound, but each of them—Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson, who are both now dead, and others who are still living—produced enough to show that they had at their command a vein of poetry that might have deepened and proved

more rich had they gone on working it. One of them, Mr. W. B. Yeats, by his birth and his reading in Irish legend and folklore, became possessed of a subject-matter denied to his fellows, and it is from the combination of the mood of the decadents with the dreaminess and mystery of Celtic tradition and romance—a combination which came to pass in his poetry—that the Celtic school has sprung. In a sense it has added to the territory explored by Coleridge and Scott and Morris a new province. Only nothing could be further from the objectivity of these men, than the way in which the Celtic school approaches its material. Its stories are clear to itself, it may be, but not to its readers. Deirdre and Conchubar, and Angus and Maeve and Dectora and all the shadowy figures in them scarcely become embodied. Their lives and deaths and loves and hates are only a scheme on which they weave a delicate and dim embroidery of pure poetry—of love and death and old age and the passing of beauty and all the sorrows that have been since the world began and will be till the world ends. If Mr. Kipling is of the earth earthy, if the clangour and rush of the world is in everything he writes, Mr. Yeats and his school live consciously sequestered and withdrawn, and the world never breaks in on their ghostly troubles or their peace. Poetry never fails to relate itself to its age; if it is not with it, it is against it; it is never merely indifferent. The poetry of these men is the denial, passionately made, of everything the world prizes. While such

a denial is sincere, as in the best of them, then the verses they make are true and fine. But when it is assumed, as in some of their imitators, then the work they did is not true poetry.

But the literary characteristic of the present age—the one which is most likely to differentiate it from its predecessor, is the revival of the drama. When we left it before the Commonwealth the great English literary school of playwriting—the romantic drama—was already dead. It has had since no second birth. There followed after it the heroic tragedy of Dryden and Shadwell—a turgid, declamatory form of art without importance—and two brilliant comic periods, the earlier and greater that of Congreve and Wycherley, the later more sentimental with less art and vivacity, that of Goldsmith and Sheridan. With Sheridan the drama as a literary force died a second time. It has been born again only in our own day. It is, of course, unnecessary to point out that the writing of plays did not cease in the interval; it never does cease. The production of dramatic journey-work has been continuous since the re-opening of the theatres in 1660, and it is carried on as plentifully as ever at this present time. Only side by side with it there has grown up a new literary drama, and gradually the main stream of artistic endeavour which for nearly a century has preoccupied itself with the novel almost to the exclusion of other forms of art, has turned back to the stage as its channel to articulation and an audience. An influence from abroad set it in motion. The plays of

Ibsen—produced, the best of them, in the eighties of last century—came to England in the nineties. In a way, perhaps, they were misunderstood by their worshippers hardly less than by their enemies, but all excrescences of enthusiasm apart they taught men a new and freer approach to moral questions, and a new and freer dramatic technique. Where plays had been constructed on a journeyman plan evolved by Labiche and Sardou—mid-nineteenth century writers in France—a plan delighting in symmetry, close-jointedness, false correspondences, an impossible use of coincidence, and a quite unreal complexity and elaboration, they become bolder and less artificial, more close to the likelihoods of real life. The gravity of the problems with which they set themselves to deal heightened their influence. In England men began to ask themselves whether the theatre here too could not be made an avenue towards the discussion of living difficulties, and then arose the new school of dramatists—of whom the first and most remarkable is Mr. George Bernard Shaw. In his earlier plays he set himself boldly to attack established conventions, and to ask his audiences to think for themselves. *Arms and the Man* dealt a blow at the cheap romanticism with which a peace-loving public invests the profession of arms; *The Devil's Disciple* was a shrewd criticism of the preposterous self-sacrifice on which melodrama, which is the most popular non-literary form of play-writing, is commonly based; *Mrs. Warren's Profession* made a brave and

plain-spoken attempt to drag the public face to face with the nauseous realities of prostitution; *Widowers' Houses* laid bare the sordidness of a Society which bases itself on the exploitation of the poor for the luxuries of the rich. It took Mr. Shaw close on ten years to persuade even the moderate number of men and women who make up a theatre audience that his plays were worth listening to. But before his final success came he had attained a substantial popularity with the public which reads. Possibly his early failure on the stage—mainly due to the obstinacy of playgoers immersed in a stock tradition—was partly due also to his failure in constructive power. He is an adept at tying knots and impatient of unravelling them; his third acts are apt either to evaporate in talk or to find some unreal and unsatisfactory solution for the complexity he has created. But constructive weakness apart, his amazing brilliance and fecundity of dialogue ought to have given him an immediate and lasting grip of the stage. There has probably never been a dramatist who could invest conversation with the same vivacity and point, the same combination of surprise and inevitableness that distinguishes his best work.

Alongside of Mr. Shaw more immediately successful, and not traceable to any obvious influence, English or foreign, came the comedies of Oscar Wilde. For a parallel to their pure delight and high spirits, and to the exquisite wit and artifice with which they were constructed, one would have to go back to the

dramatists of the Restoration. To Congreve and his school, indeed, Wilde belongs rather than to any later period. With his own age he had little in common; he was without interest in its social and moral problems; when he approved of socialism it was because in a socialist state the artist might be absolved from the necessity of carrying a living, and be free to follow his art undisturbed. He loved to think of himself as symbolic, but all he symbolized was a fantasy of his own creating; his attitude to his age was decorative and withdrawn rather than representative. He was the licensed jester to society, and in that capacity he gave us his plays. Mr. Shaw may be said to have founded a school; at any rate he gave the start to Mr. Galsworthy and some lesser dramatists. Wilde founded nothing, and his works remain as complete and separate as those of the earlier artificial dramatists of two centuries before.

Another school of drama, homogeneous and quite apart from the rest, remains. We have seen how the "Celtic Revival," as the Irish literary movement has been called by its admirers, gave us a new kind of romantic poetry. As an offshoot from it there came into being some ten years ago an Irish school of drama, drawing its inspiration from two sources—the body of the old Irish legends and the highly individualized and richly-coloured life of the Irish peasants in the mountains of Wicklow and of the West, a life, so the dramatists believed, still unspoiled by the deepening influences of a false system of education and

the wear and tear of a civilization whose values are commercial and not spiritual or artistic. The school founded its own theatre, trained its own actors, fashioned its own modes of speech (the chief of which was a frank restoration of rhythm in the speaking of verse and of cadence in prose), and having all these things it produced a series of plays all directed to its special ends, and all composed and written with a special fidelity to country life as it has been preserved, or to what it conceived to be the spirit of Irish folk-legend. It reached its zenith quickly, and as far as the production of plays is concerned, it would seem to be already in its decline. That is to say, what in the beginning was a fresh and vivid inspiration caught direct from life has become a pattern whose colours and shape can be repeated or varied by lesser writers who take their teaching from the original discoverers. But in the course of its brief and striking course it produced one great dramatist—a writer whom already not three years after his death, men instinctively class with the masters of his art.

J. M. Synge, in the earlier years of his manhood, lived entirely abroad, leading the life of a wandering scholar from city to city and country to country till he was persuaded to give up the Continent and the criticism and imitation of French literature, to return to England, and to go and live on the Aran Islands. From that time till his death—some ten years—he spent a large part of each year amongst the peasantry of the desolate

Atlantic coast and wrote the plays by which his name is known. His literary output was not large, but he supplied the Irish dramatic movement with exactly what it needed—a vivid contact with the realities of life. Not that he was a mere student or transcriber of manners. His wandering life among many peoples and his study of classical French and German literature had equipped him as perhaps no other modern dramatist has been equipped with an imaginative insight and a reach of perception which enabled him to give universality and depth to his portrayal of the peasant types around him. He got down to the great elemental forces which throb and pulse beneath the common crises of everyday life and laid them bare, not as ugly and horrible, but with a sense of their terror, their beauty and their strength. His earliest play, *The Well of the Saints*, treats of a sorrow that is as old as Helen of the vanishing of beauty and the irony of fulfilled desire. The great realities of death pass through the *Riders to the Sea*, till the language takes on a kind of simplicity as of written words shrivelling up in a flame. *The Playboy of the Western World* is a study of character, terrible in its clarity, but never losing the savour of imagination and of the astringency and saltiness that was characteristic of his temper. He had at his command an instrument of incomparable fineness and range in the language which he fashioned out the speech of the common people amongst whom he lived. In his dramatic writings this language took on a

kind of rhythm which had the effect of producing a certain remoteness of the highest possible artistic value. The people of his imagination appear a little disembodied. They talk with that straightforward and simple kind of innocence which makes strange and impressive the dialogue of Maeterlinck's earlier plays. Through it, as Mr. Yeats has said, he saw the subject-matter of his art "with wise, clear-seeing, unreflecting eyes—and he preserved the innocence of good art in an age of reasons and purposes." He had no theory except of his art; no "ideas" and no "problems"; he did not wish to change anything or to reform anything; but he saw all his people pass by as before a window, and he heard their words. This resolute refusal to be interested in or to take account of current modes of thought has been considered by some to detract from his eminence. Certainly if by "ideas" we mean current views on society or morality, he is deficient in them; only his very deficiency brings him nearer to the great masters of drama—to Ben Johnson, to Cervantes, to Molière—even to Shakespeare himself. Probably in no single case amongst our contemporaries could a high and permanent place in literature be prophesied with more confidence than in his.

In the past it has seemed impossible for fiction and the drama, i.e. serious drama of high literary quality, to flourish, side by side. It seems as though the best creative minds in any age could find strength for any one of

these two great outlets for the activity of the creative imagination. In the reign of Elizabeth the drama outshone fiction; in the reign of Victoria the novel crowded out the drama. There are signs that a literary era is commencing, in which the drama will again regain to the full its position as a literature. More and more the bigger creative artists will turn to a form which by its economy of means to ends, and the chance it gives not merely of observing but of creating and displaying character in action, has a more vigorous principle of life in it than its rival.

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It is best to study English literature one period, or, even in the case of the greatest, one author at a time. In every case the student should see to it that he knows the *text* of his authors; a knowledge of what critics have said about our poets is a poor substitute for a knowledge of what they have said themselves. Poetry ought to be read slowly and carefully, and the reader ought to pay his author the compliment of crediting him with ideas as important and, on occasion, as abstruse as any in a work of philosophy or abstract science. When the meaning is mastered, the poem ought to be read a second time aloud to catch the magic of the language and the verse. The reading of prose presents less difficulty, but there again the rule is, never allow yourself to be lulled by sound. Reading is an intellectual and not an hypnotic exercise.

The following short bibliography is divided to correspond with the chapters in this book. Prices and publishers are mentioned only when there is no more than one cheap edition of a book known to the author. For the subject as a whole, Chambers's *Cyclopædia of English Literature* (3 vols., 10s. 6d. net each), which contains biographical and critical articles on all authors, arranged chronologically and furnished very copiously with specimen passages, may be consulted at any library.

* The books with an asterisk are suggested as those on which reading should be begun. The reader can then proceed to the others and after them to the many authors—great authors—who are not included in this short list.

Chapter I.—*More's *Utopia*; Hakluyt's *Voyages* (Ed. J. Masfield, Everyman's Library, 8 vols., 1s. net each). North's *Translation of Plutarch's Lives* (Temple Classics).

Chapter II.—Surrey's and Wyatt's Poems (Aldine Edition. G. Bells & Sons); *Spenser's Works, Sidney's Poems. A good idea of the atmosphere in which poetry was written is to be obtained from Scott's *Kenilworth*. It is full of inaccuracy in detail.

- Chapter III.—*The dramatists in the Mermaid Series (T. Fisher Unwin); **Everyman and other Plays*; ed. by A. W. Pollard (Everyman's Library).
- Chapter IV.—*Bacon's Essays; Sir Thomas Browne's Works; *Milton's Works; *Poems of John Donne (Muses Library, Routledge); *Poems of Robert Herrick.
- Chapter V.—*Poems of Dryden; *Poems of Pope; Poems of Thomson; **The Spectator* (Routledge's Universal Library or Everyman's); *Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*; Defoe's Novels.
- Chapter VI.—*Boswell's *Life of Johnson*; *Burke (in selections); Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* (Temple Classics); *Burns' Poetical Works; *Poems of Blake (Clarendon Press).
- Chapter VII.—*Wordsworth (Golden Treasury Series); *Wordsworth's Prelude (Temple Classics); Coleridge's Poems; *Keats's Poems; *Shelley's Poems; *Byron (Golden Treasury Series); *Lamb, *Essays of Elia*; Hazlitt (volumes of Essays in World's Classics Series).
- Chapter VIII.—*Tennyson's Works; *Browning's Works; Rossetti's Works; *Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, *Past and Present*, and *French Revolution*; Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*; Arnold's Poems; Swinburne (Selections).
- Chapter IX.—*Fielding's *Tom Jones*; Smollett, *Roderick Random*; *Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Northanger Abbey* (as a parody of the Radcliffe School); *Scott's *Waverley*, *Antiquary*, *Ivanhoe*, *Old Mortality*, *Bride of Lammermoor*. It seems hardly necessary to give a selection of later novels.
- Chapter X.—W. B. Yeats' Poems; Wilde, *Importance of Being Earnest*; *Synge, Dramatic Works.
- And every new work of the best contemporary authors.

G. H. M.

LIST OF THE CHIEF WORKS AND AUTHORS MENTIONED

The dates attached to the authors are those of birth and death ; those with the books, of publication.

CHAPTER I

- Sir Thomas More, 1480-1535.
Utopia, 1516 (in Latin).
 William Tindall, 1484-1536.
Translation of the New Testament, 1526.
 Sir John Cheke, 1514-1557.
 Roger Ascham, 1515-1568.
Toxophilus, 1545.
Schoolmaster, 1570.
 Richard Hakluyt, 1553-1616.
His Voyages, 1598.

CHAPTER II

- Sir Thomas Wyatt, 1503-1542.
 The Earl of Surrey, 1517-1547.
Tottel's Miscellany (containing their poems), 1557.
 Sir Philip Sidney, 1554-1586.
Arcadia, 1590.
Astrophel and Stella, 1591.
 Edmund Spenser, 1552-1599.
Shepherd's Calendar, 1579.
Fairy Queen, 1589, 1596.
 John Lyly, 1554-1606.
Euphues, 1579.
Euphues and his England, 1580.
 Richard Hooker, 1553-1600.
Ecclesiastical Polity, 1594.

CHAPTER III

- Christopher Marlowe, 1564-1593.
Tamburlaine, 1587 (date of performance).
Dr. Faustus, 1588 (date of performance).
Edward II., 1593.
 Thomas Kyd, 1557 (?) - 1595 (?).
The Spanish Tragedy, 1594 (published).
 John Webster, 1580 (?) - 1625 (?).
The White Devil, 1608 (date of performance).
Duchess of Malfi, 1616 (date of performance).

- Ben Jonson, 1573-1637.
Every Man in his Humour, 1598.
Volpone, 1605.
Poems, 1616.

CHAPTER IV

- John Donne, 1573-1631.
Poems, 1633 (first published, but known, like those of all Elizabethan poets, in manuscript long before).
 William Browne, 1591-1643.
 George Herbert, 1593-1633.
 Robert Herrick, 1593-1674.
 Richard Crashaw, 1613-1649.
 Francis Bacon, 1561-1626.
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Essays, 1625.
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 John Bunyan, 1628-1688.
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 John Milton, 1608-1674.
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- John Dryden, 1631-1700.
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Rape of the Lock, 1714.
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The Seasons, 1730.
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 Jonathan Swift, 1667-1745.
The Tale of a Tub, 1704.
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The Tatler, 1709-1711.
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CHAPTER VI

Samuel Johnson, 1709-1784.
 Edmund Burke, 1728-1797.
 Oliver Goldsmith, 1728-1774.
 Thomas Gray, 1716-1771.
 William Collins, 1721-1759.
 Robert Burns, 1759-1796.
Poems, 1786.
 William Blake, 1757-1827.
Songs of Innocence, 1789.

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William Wordsworth, 1770-1850.
Lyrical Ballads, 1798.
 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1772-1834.
 Sir Walter Scott, 1771-1832.
 Lord Byron, 1788-1824.
Child Harold's Pilgrimage, 1812-1817.
 Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1792-1822.
 John Keats, 1795-1821.
 Charles Lamb, 1775-1834.
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Pamela, 1740.
Clarissa Harlowe, 1750.
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Tom Jones, 1749.
 Jane Austen, 1775-1817.
 William Makepeace Thackeray, 1811-1863.
 Charles Dickens, 1812-1870.
 George Meredith, 1832-1909.

INDEX

- ADDISON, JOSEPH, 127, 135-137,
186, 187, 215
Advancement of Learning, The, 101,
102
Anatomy of Melancholy, The, 102,
103
Antonio and Melinda, 69
Arcadia, the Countess of Pem-
broke's, 39, 41, 54-56
Arnold, Matthew, 152, 205, 237
Ascham, Roger, 15, 22, 23
Astrophel and Stella, 40, 41
Atheist's Tragedy, The, 67, 71
Augustan Age, 110, 111
Austen, Jane, 224, 225
Autobiography, 83
- Bacon, Francis, 97, 99-102
Ballad, the, 167, 168
Beaumont and Fletcher, 73-75
Bennett, Arnold, 235
Bible, the, 97-99
Biography, 82, 83
Blake, William, 159-161
Blank Verse, 36, 74
Boswell, James, 140, 142, 143, 150
Brontës, the, 230
Browne, Sir Thomas, 103, 104, 187
Browne, William, 90
Browning, Robert, 92-94, 192, 193,
201-204
Bunyan, John, 99, 216
Burke, Edmund, 99, 146-149, 170
Burns, Robert, 153-158
Burton, Robert, 102, 103, 187
Byron, Lord, 167, 184, 185
- Carew, Thomas, 96
Carlyle, Thomas, 190, 207-211
Celtic Revival, 241-243, 246-249
Character-writing, 83, 214
Chatterton, Thomas, 168
Cheke, Sir John, 15, 18-20
Christ's Victory and Death, 90
Classicism, 79, 110-119
Clough, Thomas, 205
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 164,
168, 180, 181
Collins, William, 151, 152
Conrad, Joseph, 236
Cowley, Abraham, 96
Cowper, William, 151
Crabbe, George, 151
Crashaw, Richard, 96
Criticism, 82, 172-174
- Decadence, 73, 74
Defoe, Daniel, 29, 129-132, 216,
217
De Quincey, Thomas, 187-189
Dekker, Thomas, 70
- Dickens, Charles, 227-229
Discovery, Voyages of, 23-29, 31,
70
Disraeli, Benjamin, 194
Dr. Faustus, 27, 66
Donne, John, 84, 92-95, 96, 114,
115
Drama, the, 56-79, 83, 217, 218,
243-250
Dryden, John, 115, 119-123, 128-
129, 163
Duchess of Malfi, The, 72
- Earle, John, 214
Edward II., 67
Elia, Essays of, 188, 189
Elizabethan Poetry, 30-48
Elizabethan Prose, 48-56
Essays, Civil and Moral, 100, 101
Euphues, 51-54, 55, 213
Everyman, 60
- Fairy Queen, The*, 44-47, 87, 105
Fantastics, the, 96
Fielding, Henry, 222-224
Fitzgerald, Edward, 239
Fletcher, Giles, 90
Fletcher, Phineas, 85, 89
Ford, John, 75
French Revolution, the, 146, 157-
158, 170, 176, 177, 181
Gaskell, Mrs., 230
George Eliot, 230
Gibbon, Edward, 151
Gissing, George, 234
Goldsmith, Oliver, 150, 151, 225
Garboduc, 64
Gray, Thomas, 151, 152, 167
Greene, Robert, 65
Greville, Sir Fulke, 82
Gulliver's Travels, 133
- Hakluyt's Voyages*, 25
Hardy, Thomas, 230, 231
Hazlitt, William, 187-189
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 87
Henry VII., History of, 101
Herbert, George, 84, 96
Herrick, Robert, 96
Hobbes, Thomas, 28
Hooper, Richard, 50
- Italy, influence of, 22, 23
- Jew of Malta*, 66
Johnson, Samuel, 96, 137-145, 151,
163, 165
Jonson, Ben, 31, 70, 75, 79, 91,
92, 96, 99, 115
- Keats, John, 90, 183, 184

- Kipling, Rudyard, 32, 236, 240, 241
 Kyd, Thomas, 65, 68
- Lamb, Charles, 103, 187-189
 Locke, John, 28
 Lodge, Thomas, 31
 Lyly, John, 17, 51-54
 Lyric, the, 37, 38
Lyrical Ballads, 164, 178
- Marlowe, Christopher, 26, 27, 36, 60, 63, 65-68
 Marston, John, 69, 70
 Massinger, Philip, 75
 Meredith, George, 205, 230
 Middleton, Thomas, 70
 Milton, John, 19, 27, 36, 85, 87, 104-109, 127
 Miracle Play, the, 57-60
 Moore, George, 232-234
 Morality, the, 60
 More, Sir Thomas, 20, 21
 Morris, William, 56, 166, 205
- New Atlantis, The*, 20, 102
 Novel, the, 212-237
- Obscurity in Poetry, 92-94
Omar Khayyam, 239
Ossian, 167
 Oxford Movement, the, 195
- Paradise Lost*, 88, 106-108
 Pastoral Prose and Poetry, 32, 54, 55, 88
 Peele, George, 65
 Percy, William, 166, 167, 168
Pilgrim's Progress, 216
 Platonism, 20, 21
 Poetic Diction, 118, 163, 164
 Pope, Alexander, 123-126, 151, 163
 Puritanism, 54, 59, 84, 86, 87, 89
Purple Island, The, 85, 89
- Raleigh, Sir Walter, 32
Rape of the Lock, 125, 126
 Realism, 231-236
Religio Medici, 104
 Renaissance, the, 9-14, 14-29, 81, 105
 Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 139
 Rhetoric, study of, 16, 17, 115
 Richardson, Samuel, 219-222
Robinson Crusoe, 28, 131, 216, 217
 Romanticism, 110-119, 165
 Romantic Revival, the, 112, 138, 158, 159, 161-174
 Rossetti, D. G., 194, 205
 Ruskin, John, 50, 99, 207
- Sackville, Thomas, 64
 Satire, 84
 Scott, Sir Walter, 168, 217, 221, 225, 226
 Senecan Tragedy, 63, 64
 Seventeenth Century, the, 80-87
 Shaw, G. Bernard, 150, 244, 245
 Shelley, P. B., 159, 182, 183
 Shenstone, Thomas, 127
 Sheridan, R. B., 243
 Shirley, John, 75
 Sidney, Sir Philip, 31, 39-41, 54-56, 84
 Smollett, T., 225
 Sonnet, the, 35, 87, 88
 Sonneteers, the, 37, 94
Spanish Tragedy, The, 68, 69
Spectator, The, 135, 137, 215
 Spenser, Edmund, 19, 41-48, 84, 89, 104, 126, 127
 Spenserians, the, 89-91
 Steele, Richard, 135-137, 186, 187, 215
 Sterne, Lawrence, 225
 Stevenson, R. L., 32, 103, 154, 235, 236
 Supernatural, the, 171
 Surrey, the Earl of, 33-36
 Swift, Jonathan, 132-135
 Swinburne, A. C., 152, 205, 239
 Synge, J. M., 32, 247-249
- Tale of a Tub, The*, 133, 134
Tamburlaine, 27, 66
Tatler, The, 135
Temple, Sir William, 132
 Tennyson, Alfred, 194-201
 Thackeray, W. M., 226, 227
 Theatre, the Elizabethan, 61-63
 Thomson, James, 127, 128, 151
Totter's Miscellany, 33-35
- Utopia*, 20, 21
- Vaughan, Henry*, 96
 Victorian Age, the, 190-195
View of the State of Ireland, 42
- Waller, Edmund, 96, 115
 Walton, Isaac, 83
 Webster, John, 72, 73
 Wells, H. G., 237
White Devil, The, 72
 Wilde, Oscar, 43, 245, 246
 Wilson, Thomas, 15, 19
 Wither, George, 90
 Wordsworth, William, 164, 167, 174-180, 190, 191, 192
 Wyatt, Thomas, 33-35
- Yeats, W. B., 241-243



