5. What work of this period had the greatest effect on the English language? Explain why.

6. What was the chief literary influence exerted by Wyatt and Surrey? Do you know any later poets who made use of the verse forms which they introduced?

7. Which of Malory's stories do you like best? Where did these stories originate? Have they any historical foundation? What two great elements did Malory combine in his work? What is the importance of his book to later English literature? Compare Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" and Malory's stories with regard to material, expression, and interest. Note the marked resemblances and differences between the *Morte d'Arthur* and the *Nibelungen Lied.*

CHRONOLOGY

History	Literature
1413. Henry V	
1415. Battle of Agincourt	
1422. Henry VI	1470. Malory's Morte d'Arthur
1428. Siege of Orleans. Joan of Arc	1474(*c.*). Caxton, at Bruges, prints the first book in English, the Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye
1453. End of Hundred Years' War	
1455–1485. Wars of Roses	
1461. Edward IV	
1483. Richard III	1477. First book printed in England
1485. Henry VII	1485. Morte d'Arthur printed by Caxton
1492. Columbus discovers America	1499. Colet, Erasmus, and More bring the New Learning to Oxford
1509. Henry VIII	
	1509. Erasmus's Praise of Folly
	1516. More's Utopia
	1525. Tyndale's New Testament
1534. Act of Supremacy. The Reformation accomplished	1530(*c.*). Introduction of the sonnet and blank verse by Wyatt and Surrey
	1539. The Great Bible
1547. Edward VI	
1553. Mary	1557. Tottel's Miscellany
1558. Elizabeth	

CHAPTER VI

THE AGE OF ELIZABETH

I. HISTORY OF THE PERIOD

Political Summary. In the Age of Elizabeth all doubt seems to vanish from English history. After the reigns of Edward and Mary, with defeat and humiliation abroad and persecutions and rebellion at home, the accession of a popular sovereign was like the sunrise after a long night, and, in Milton's words, we suddenly see England, "a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks." With the queen's character, a strange mingling of frivolity and strength which reminds one of that iron image with feet of clay, we have nothing whatever to do. It is the national life that concerns the literary student, since even a beginner must notice that any great development of the national life is invariably associated with a development of the national literature. It is enough for our purpose, therefore, to point out two facts: that Elizabeth, with all her vanity and inconsistency, steadily loved England and England's greatness; and that she inspired all her people with the unbounded patriotism which exults in Shakespeare, and with the personal devotion which finds a voice in the *Faery Queen.* Under her administration the English national life progressed by gigantic leaps rather than by slow historical process, and English literature reached the very highest point of its development. It is possible to indicate only a few general characteristics of this great age which had a direct bearing upon its literature.

Religious Toleration

Characteristics of the Elizabethan Age. The most characteristic feature of the age was the comparative religious tolerance, which was due largely to the queen's influence. The frightful excesses of the religious war known as the Thirty Years' War on the Continent found no parallel in England. Upon her accession Elizabeth found the whole kingdom divided against itself; the North was largely Catholic, while the southern counties were as strongly Protestant. Scotland had followed the Reformation in its own intense way, while Ireland remained true to its old religious traditions, and both countries were openly rebellious. The court, made up of both parties, witnessed the rival intrigues of those who sought to gain the royal favor. It was due partly to the intense absorption of men's minds in religious questions that the preceding century, though an age of advancing learning, produced scarcely any literature worthy of the name. Elizabeth favored both religious parties, and presently the world saw with amazement Catholics and Protestants acting together as trusted counselors of a great sovereign. The defeat of the Spanish Armada established the Reformation as a fact in England, and at the same time united all Englishmen in a magnificent national enthusiasm. For the first time since the Reformation began, the fundamental question of religious toleration seemed to be settled, and the mind of man, freed from religious fears and persecutions, turned with a great creative impulse to other forms of activity. It is partly from this new freedom of the mind that the Age of Elizabeth received its great literary stimulus.

Social Contentment

2. It was an age of comparative social contentment, in strong contrast with the days of Langland. The rapid increase of manufacturing towns gave employment to thousands who had before been idle and discontented. Increasing trade brought enormous wealth to England, and this wealth was shared to this extent, at least, that for the first time some systematic care for the needy was attempted. Parishes were made responsible for their own poor, and the wealthy were taxed to support them or give them employment. The increase of wealth, the improvement in living, the opportunities for labor, the new social content, — these also are factors which help to account for the new literary activity.

Enthusiasm

3. It is an age of dreams, of adventure, of unbounded enthusiasm springing from the new lands of fabulous riches revealed by English explorers. Drake sails around the world, shaping the mighty course which English colonizers shall follow through the centuries; and presently the young philosopher Bacon is saying confidently, "I have taken all knowledge for my province." The mind must search farther than the eye; with new, rich lands opened to the sight, the imagination must create new forms to people the new worlds. Hakluyt's famous *Collection of Voyages*, and *Purchas, His Pilgrimage*, were even more stimulating to the English imagination than to the English acquisitiveness. While her explorers search the new world for the Fountain of Youth, her poets are creating literary works that are young forever. Marston writes[1]: "Why, man, all their dripping pans are pure gold. The prisoners they take are fettered in gold; and as for rubies and diamonds, they goe forth on holydayes and gather 'hem by the seashore to hang on their children's coates." This comes nearer to being a description of Shakespeare's poetry than of the Indians in Virginia. Prospero, in *The Tempest*, with his control over the mighty powers and harmonies of nature, is only the literary dream of that science which had just begun to grapple with the forces of the universe. Cabot, Drake, Frobisher, Gilbert, Raleigh, Willoughby, Hawkins, — a score of explorers reveal a new earth to men's eyes, and instantly literature creates a new heaven to match it. So dreams and deeds increase side by side, and the dream is ever greater than the deed. That is the meaning of literature.

The Drama

4. To sum up, the Age of Elizabeth was a time of intellectual liberty, of growing intelligence and comfort among all classes, of unbounded patriotism, and of peace at home and abroad. For a parallel we must go back to the Age of Pericles in Athens, or of Augustus in Rome, or go forward a little to the magnificent court of Louis XIV, when Corneille, Racine, and Molière brought the drama in France to the point where Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson had left it in England half a century earlier. Such an age of great thought and great action, appealing to the eyes as well as to the imagination and intellect, finds but one adequate literary expression; neither poetry nor the story can express the whole man, — his thought, feeling, action, and the resulting character; hence in the Age of Elizabeth literature turned instinctively to the drama and brought it rapidly to the highest stage of its development.

II. THE NON-DRAMATIC POETS OF THE ELIZABETHAN AGE

EDMUND SPENSER (1552–1599)

(*Cuddie*)

"Piers, I have pipéd erst so long with pain
That all mine oaten reeds been rent and wore,
And my poor Muse hath spent her sparéd store,
Yet little good hath got, and much less gain.
Such pleasaunce makes the grasshopper so poor,
And ligge so layd[2] when winter doth her strain.

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[1] *Eastward Ho!* a play given in Blackfriars Theater about 1603. The play was written by Marston and two collaborators.

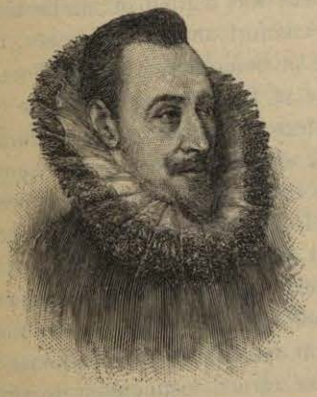
[2] Lie so faint.

The dapper ditties that I wont devise,
To feed youth's fancy, and the flocking fry
Delighten much — what I the bet forthy?
They han the pleasure, I a slender prize:
I beat the bush, the birds to them do fly:
What good thereof to Cuddie can arise?

(*Piers*) Cuddie, the praise is better than the price,
The glory eke much greater than the gain: . . ."

Shepherd's Calendar, October

In these words, with their sorrowful suggestion of Deor, Spenser reveals his own heart, unconsciously perhaps, as no biographer could possibly do. His life and work seem to center about three great influences, summed up in three names: Cambridge, where he grew acquainted with the classics and the Italian poets; London, where he experienced the glamour and the disappointment of court life; and Ireland, which steeped him in the beauty and imagery of old Celtic poetry and first gave him leisure to write his masterpiece.



EDMUND SPENSER

Life. Of Spenser's early life and parentage we know little, except that he was born in East Smithfield, near the Tower of London, and was poor. His education began at the Merchant Tailors' School in London and was continued in Cambridge, where as a poor sizar and fag for wealthy students he earned a scant living. Here in the glorious world that only a poor scholar knows how to create for himself he read the classics, made acquaintance with the great Italian poets, and wrote numberless little poems of his own. Though Chaucer was his beloved master, his ambition was not to rival the *Canterbury Tales*, but rather to express the dream of English chivalry, much as Ariosto had done for Italy in *Orlando Furioso*.

After leaving Cambridge (1576) Spenser went to the north of England, on some unknown work or quest. Here his chief occupation was to fall in love and to record his melancholy over the lost Rosalind in the *Shepherd's Calendar*. Upon his friend Harvey's advice he came to London, bringing his poems; and here he met Leicester, then at the height of royal favor, and the latter took him to live at Leicester House. Here he finished the *Shepherd's Calendar*, and here he met Sidney and all the queen's favorites. The court was full of intrigues, lying and flattery, and Spenser's opinion of his own uncomfortable position is best expressed in a few lines from "Mother Hubbard's Tale":

Full little knowest thou, that has not tried,
What hell it is, in suing long to bide:
To lose good days, that might be better spent;
To waste long nights in pensive discontent;
. . . .
To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares;
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs;
To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone.

In 1580, through Leicester's influence, Spenser, who was utterly weary of his dependent position, was made secretary to Lord Grey, the queen's deputy in Ireland, and the third period of his life began. He accompanied his chief through one campaign of savage brutality in putting down an Irish rebellion, and was given an immense estate with the castle of Kilcolman, in Munster, which had been confiscated from Earl Desmond, one of the Irish leaders. His life here, where according to the terms of his grant he must reside as an English settler, he regarded as lonely exile:

My luckless lot,
That banished had myself, like wight forlore,
Into that waste, where I was quite forgot.

It is interesting to note here a gentle poet's view of the "unhappy island." After nearly sixteen years' residence he wrote his *View of the State of Ireland* (1596),[1] his only prose work, in which he submits a plan for "pacifying the oppressed and rebellious people." This was to bring a huge force of cavalry and infantry into the country, give the Irish a brief time to submit, and after that to hunt them down like wild beasts. He calculated that cold, famine, and sickness would help the work of the sword, and that after the rebels had been well hounded for two winters the following summer would find the country peaceful. This plan, from the poet of harmony and beauty, was somewhat milder than the usual treatment of a brave people whose offense was that they loved liberty and religion. Strange as it may seem, the *View* was considered most statesmanlike, and was excellently well received in England.

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[1] The *View* was not published till 1633.

In Kilcolman, surrounded by great natural beauty, Spenser finished the first three books of the *Faery Queen*. In 1589 Raleigh visited him, heard the poem with enthusiasm, hurried the poet off to London, and presented him to Elizabeth. The first three books met with instant success when published and were acclaimed as the greatest work in the English language. A yearly pension of fifty pounds was conferred by Elizabeth, but rarely paid, and the poet turned back to exile, that is, to Ireland again.

Soon after his return, Spenser fell in love with his beautiful Elizabeth, an Irish girl; wrote his *Amoretti*, or sonnets, in her honor; and afterwards represented her, in the *Faery Queen*, as the beautiful woman dancing among the Graces. In 1594 he married Elizabeth, celebrating his wedding with his "Epithalamion," one of the most beautiful wedding hymns in any language.

Spenser's next visit to London was in 1595, when he published "Astrophel," an elegy on the death of his friend Sidney, and three more books of the *Faery Queen*. On this visit he lived again at Leicester House, now occupied by the new favorite Essex, where he probably met Shakespeare and the other literary lights of the Elizabethan Age. Soon after his return to Ireland, Spenser was appointed Sheriff of Cork, a queer office for a poet, which probably brought about his undoing. The same year Tyrone's Rebellion broke out in Munster. Kilcolman, the ancient house of Desmond, was one of the first places attacked by the rebels, and Spenser barely escaped with his wife and two children. It is supposed that some unfinished parts of the *Faery Queen* were burned in the castle.

From the shock of this frightful experience Spenser never recovered. He returned to England heartbroken, and in the following year (1599) he died in an inn at Westminster. According to Ben Jonson he died "for want of bread"; but whether that is a poetic way of saying that he had lost his property or that he actually died of destitution, will probably never be known. He was buried beside his master Chaucer in Westminster Abbey, the poets of that age thronging to his funeral and, according to Camden, "casting their elegies and the pens that had written them into his tomb."

Spenser's Works. *The Faery Queen* is the great work upon which the poet's fame chiefly rests. The original plan of the poem included twenty-four books, each of which was to recount the adventure and triumph of a knight who represented a moral virtue. Spenser's purpose, as indicated in a letter to Raleigh which introduces the poem, is as follows:

> To pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave Knight, perfected in the twelve private Morall Vertues, as Aristotle hath devised; which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged to frame the other part of Polliticke Vertues in his person, after that hee came to be king.

Each of the Virtues appears as a knight, fighting his opposing Vice, and the poem tells the story of the conflicts. It is therefore purely allegorical, not only in its personified virtues but also in its representation of life as a struggle between good and evil. In its strong moral element the poem differs radically from *Orlando Furioso*, upon which it was modeled. Spenser completed only six books, celebrating Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy. We have also a fragment of the seventh, treating of Constancy; but the rest of this book was not written, or else was lost in the fire at Kilcolman. The first three books are by far the best; and judging by the way the interest lags and the allegory grows incomprehensible, it is perhaps as well for Spenser's reputation that the other eighteen books remained a dream.

Argument of the Faery Queen. From the introductory letter we learn that the hero visits the queen's court in Fairy Land, while she is holding a twelve-days festival. On each day some distressed person appears unexpectedly, tells a woful story of dragons, of enchantresses, or of distressed beauty or virtue, and asks for a champion to right the wrong and to let the oppressed go free. Sometimes a knight volunteers or begs for the dangerous mission; again the duty is assigned by the queen; and the journeys and adventures of these knights are the subjects of the several books. The first recounts the adventures of the Redcross Knight, representing Holiness, and the lady Una, representing Religion. Their contests are symbolical of the world-wide struggle between virtue and faith on the one hand, and sin and heresy on the other. The second book tells the story of Sir Guyon, or Temperance; the third, of Britomartis, representing Chastity; the fourth, fifth, and sixth, of Cambel and Triamond (Friendship), Artegall (Justice), and Sir Calidore (Courtesy). Spenser's plan was a very elastic one and he filled up the measure of his narrative with everything that caught his fancy, — historical events and personages under allegorical masks, beautiful ladies, chivalrous knights, giants, monsters, dragons, sirens, enchanters, and adventures enough to stock a library of fiction. If you read Homer or Virgil, you know his subject in the first strong line; if you read Cædmon's *Paraphrase* or Milton's epic, the introduction gives you the theme; but Spenser's great poem — with the exception of a single line in the prologue, "Fierce warres and faithfull loves shall moralize my song" — gives hardly a hint of what is coming.

As to the meaning of the allegorical figures, one is generally in doubt. In the first three books the shadowy Faery Queen sometimes represents the glory of God and sometimes Elizabeth, who was naturally flattered by the parallel. Britomartis is also Elizabeth. The Redcross Knight is Sidney, the model Englishman. Arthur, who always appears to rescue the oppressed, is Leicester, which is another outrageous flattery. Una is sometimes religion and sometimes the Protestant Church; while Duessa represents Mary Queen of Scots, or general Catholicism. In the last three books Elizabeth appears again as Mercilla; Henry IV of France as Bourbon; the war in the Netherlands as the story of Lady Belge; Raleigh as Timias; the earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland (lovers of Mary or Duessa) as Blandamour and Paridell; and so on through the wide range of contemporary characters and events, till the allegory becomes as difficult to follow as the second part of Goethe's *Faust*.

Poetical Form. For the *Faery Queen* Spenser invented a new verse form, which has been called since his day the Spenserian stanza. Because of its rare beauty it has been much used by nearly all our poets in their best work. The new stanza was an improved form of Ariosto's *ottava rima* (i.e. eight-line stanza) and bears a close resemblance to one of Chaucer's most musical verse forms in the "Monk's Tale." Spenser's stanza is in nine lines, eight of five feet each and the last of six feet, riming *ababbcbcc*. A few selections from the first book, which is best worth reading, are reproduced here to show the style and melody of the verse.

A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine,
Ycladd [1] in mightie armes and silver shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe woundes did remaine
The cruell markes of many a bloody fielde;
Yet armes till that time did he never wield:
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:
Full iolly [2] knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,
As one for knightly giusts [3] and fierce encounters fitt.

And on his brest a bloodie crosse he bore,
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,
For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,
And dead, as living ever, him ador'd:
Upon his shield the like was also scor'd,
For soveraine hope, which in his helpe he had,
Right faithfull true he was in deede and word;
But of his cheere [4] did seeme too solemne sad;
Yet nothing did he dread, but ever was ydrad.[5]

This sleepy bit, from the dwelling of Morpheus, invites us to linger:

And, more to lulle him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
And ever-drizling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne.

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[1] clad. [2] handsome. [3] jousts, tournaments. [4] countenance. [5] dreaded.

No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,
As still are wont t'annoy the walled towne,
Might there be heard: but carelesse Quiet lyes,
Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enimyes.

The description of Una shows the poet's sense of ideal beauty:

One day, nigh wearie of the yrkesome way,
From her unhastie beast she did alight;
And on the grasse her dainty limbs did lay
In secrete shadow, far from all mens sight;
From her fayre head her fillet she undight,[1]
And layd her stole aside. Her angels face,
As the great eye of heaven, shynéd bright,
And made a sunshine in the shady place;
Did never mortall eye behold such heavenly grace.

It fortunéd, out of the thickest wood
A ramping lyon rushéd suddeinly,
Hunting full greedy after salvage blood:
Soone as the royall Virgin he did spy,
With gaping mouth at her ran greedily,
To have attonce devourd her tender corse:
But to the pray whenas he drew more ny,
His bloody rage aswaged with remorse,[2]
And, with the sight amazd, forgat his furious forse.

Instead thereof he kist her wearie feet,
And lickt her lilly hands with fawning tong;
As he her wrongéd innocence did weet.[3]
O how can beautie maister the most strong,
And simple truth subdue avenging wrong!

Minor Poems. Next to his masterpiece, the *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) is the best known of Spenser's poems; though, as his first work, it is below many others in melody. It consists of twelve pastoral poems, or eclogues, one for each month of the year. The themes are generally rural life, nature, love in the fields; and the speakers are shepherds and shepherdesses. To increase the rustic effect Spenser uses strange forms of speech and obsolete words, to such an extent that Jonson complained his works are not English or any other

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[1] took off. [2] pity. [3] know.

language. Some are melancholy poems on his lost Rosalind; some are satires on the clergy; one, "The Briar and the Oak," is an allegory; one flatters Elizabeth, and others are pure fables touched with the Puritan spirit. They are written in various styles and meters, and show plainly that Spenser was practicing and preparing himself for greater work.

Other noteworthy poems are "Mother Hubbard's Tale," a satire on society; "Astrophel," an elegy on the death of Sidney; *Amoretti*, or sonnets, to his Elizabeth; the marriage hymn, "Epithalamion," and four "Hymns," on Love, Beauty, Heavenly Love, and Heavenly Beauty. There are numerous other poems and collections of poems, but these show the scope of his work and are best worth reading.

Importance of the Shepherd's Calendar. The publication of this work, in 1579, by an unknown writer who signed himself modestly "Immerito," marks an important epoch in our literature. We shall appreciate this better if we remember the long years during which England had been without a great poet. Chaucer and Spenser are often studied together as poets of the Renaissance period, and the idea prevails that they were almost contemporary. In fact, nearly two centuries passed after Chaucer's death,—years of enormous political and intellectual development,—and not only did Chaucer have no successor but our language had changed so rapidly that Englishmen had lost the ability to read his lines correctly.[1]

This first published work of Spenser is noteworthy in at least four respects: first, it marks the appearance of the first national poet in two centuries; second, it shows again the variety and melody of English verse, which had been largely a tradition since Chaucer; third, it was our first pastoral, the beginning of a long series of English pastoral compositions modeled on Spenser, and as such exerted a strong influence on subsequent literature; and fourth, it marks the real beginning of the outburst of great Elizabethan poetry.

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[1] In the nineteenth century men learned again to appreciate Chaucer.

Characteristics of Spenser's Poetry. The five main qualities of Spenser's poetry are (1) a perfect melody; (2) a rare sense of beauty; (3) a splendid imagination, which could gather into one poem heroes, knights, ladies, dwarfs, demons and dragons, classic mythology, stories of chivalry, and the thronging ideals of the Renaissance, — all passing in gorgeous procession across an ever-changing and ever-beautiful landscape; (4) a lofty moral purity and seriousness; (5) a delicate idealism, which could make all nature and every common thing beautiful. In contrast with these excellent qualities the reader will probably note the strange appearance of his lines due to his fondness for obsolete words, like *eyne* (eyes) and *shend* (shame), and his tendency to coin others, like *mercify*, to suit his own purposes.

It is Spenser's idealism, his love of beauty, and his exquisite melody which have caused him to be known as "the poets' poet." Nearly all our subsequent singers acknowledge their delight in him and their indebtedness. Macaulay alone among critics voices a fault which all who are not poets quickly feel, namely that, with all Spenser's excellences, he is difficult to read. The modern man loses himself in the confused allegory of the *Faery Queen*, skips all but the marked passages, and softly closes the book in gentle weariness. Even the best of his longer poems, while of exquisite workmanship and delightfully melodious, generally fail to hold the reader's attention. The movement is languid; there is little dramatic interest, and an utter absence of humor. The very melody of his verses sometimes grows monotonous, like a Strauss waltz too long continued. We shall best appreciate Spenser by reading at first only a few well-chosen selections from the *Faery Queen* and the *Shepherd's Calendar*, and a few of the minor poems which exemplify his wonderful melody.

Comparison between Chaucer and Spenser. At the outset it is well to remember that, though Spenser regarded Chaucer as his master, two centuries intervene between them, and that their writings have almost nothing in common. We shall appreciate this better by a brief comparison between our first two modern poets.

Chaucer was a combined poet and man of affairs, with the latter predominating. Though dealing largely with ancient or mediæval material, he has a curiously modern way of looking at life. Indeed, he is our only author preceding Shakespeare with whom we feel thoroughly at home. He threw aside the outgrown metrical romance, which was practically the only form of narrative in his day, invented the art of story-telling in verse, and brought it to a degree of perfection which has probably never since been equaled. Though a student of the classics, he lived wholly in the present, studied the men and women of his own time, painted them as they were, but added always a touch of kindly humor or romance to make them more interesting. So his mission appears to be simply to amuse himself and his readers. His mastery of various and melodious verse was marvelous and has never been surpassed in our language; but the English of his day was changing rapidly, and in a very few years men were unable to appreciate his art, so that even to Spenser and Dryden, for example, he seemed deficient in metrical skill. On this account his influence on our literature has been much less than we should expect from the quality of his work and from his position as one of the greatest of English poets.

Like Chaucer, Spenser was a busy man of affairs, but in him the poet and the scholar always predominates. He writes as the idealist, describing men not as they are but as he thinks they should be; he has no humor, and his mission is not to amuse but to reform. Like Chaucer he studies the classics and contemporary French and Italian writers; but instead of adapting his material to present-day conditions, he makes poetry, as in his Eclogues for instance, more artificial even than his foreign models. Where Chaucer looks about him and describes life as he sees it, Spenser always looks backward for his inspiration; he lives dreamily in the past, in a realm of purely imaginary emotions and adventures. His first quality is imagination, not observation, and he is the first of our poets to create a world of dreams, fancies, and illusions. His second quality is a wonderful sensitiveness to beauty, which shows itself not only in his subject-matter but also in the manner of his poetry. Like Chaucer, he is an almost perfect workman; but in reading Chaucer we think chiefly of his natural characters or his ideas, while in reading Spenser we think of the beauty of expression. The exquisite Spenserian stanza and the rich melody of Spenser's verse has made him the model of all our modern poets.

MINOR POETS

Though Spenser is the one great non-dramatic poet of the Elizabethan Age, a multitude of minor poets demand attention of the student who would understand the tremendous literary activity of the period. One needs only to read *The Paradyse of Daynty Devises* (1576), or *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (1578), or any other of the miscellaneous collections to find hundreds of songs, many of them of exquisite workmanship, by poets whose names now awaken no response. A glance is enough to assure one that over all England "the sweet spirit of song had arisen, like the first chirping of birds after a storm." Nearly two hundred poets are recorded in the short period from 1558 to 1625, and many of them were prolific writers. In a work like this, we can hardly do more than mention a few of the best known writers, and spend a moment at least with the works that suggest Marlowe's description of "infinite riches in a little room." The reader will note for himself the interesting union of action and thought in these men, so characteristic of the Elizabethan Age; for most of them were engaged chiefly in business or war or politics, and literature was to them a pleasant recreation rather than an absorbing profession.

Thomas Sackville (1536–1608). Sir Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset and Lord High Treasurer of England, is generally classed with Wyatt and Surrey among the predecessors of the Elizabethan Age. In imitation of Dante's *Inferno*, Sackville formed the design of a great poem called *The Mirror for Magistrates*. Under guidance of an allegorical personage called Sorrow, he meets the spirits of all the important actors in English history. The idea was to follow Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* and let each character tell his own story; so that the poem would be a mirror in which present rulers might see themselves and read this warning: "Who reckless rules right soon may hope to rue." Sackville finished only the "Induction" and the "Complaint of the Duke of Buckingham." These are written in the rime royal, and are marked by strong poetic feeling and expression. Unfortunately Sackville turned from poetry to politics, and the poem was carried on by two inferior poets, William Baldwin and George Ferrers.

Sackville wrote also, in connection with Thomas Norton, the first English tragedy, *Ferrex and Porrex*, called also *Gorboduc*, which will be considered in the following section[1] on the Rise of the Drama.

Philip Sidney (1554–1586). Sidney, the ideal gentleman, the Sir Calidore of Spenser's "Legend of Courtesy," is vastly more interesting as a man than as a writer, and the student is recommended to read his biography rather than his books. His life expresses, better than any single literary work, the two ideals of the age, — personal honor and national greatness.

As a writer he is known by three principal works, all published after his death, showing how little importance he attached to his own writing, even while he was encouraging Spenser. The *Arcadia* is a pastoral romance, interspersed with eclogues, in which shepherds and shepherdesses sing of the delights of rural life. Though the work was taken up idly as a summer's pastime, it became immensely popular and was imitated by a hundred poets. The *Apologie for Poetrie* (1595), generally called the *Defense of Poesie,* appeared in answer to a pamphlet by Stephen Gosson called *The School of Abuse* (1579), in which the poetry of the age and its unbridled pleasure were denounced with Puritan thoroughness and conviction. The *Apologie* is one of the first critical essays in English; and though its style now seems labored and unnatural, — the pernicious result of Euphues and his school, — it is still one of the best expressions of the place and meaning of poetry in any language. *Astrophel and Stella* is a collection of songs and sonnets addressed to Lady Penelope Devereux, to whom Sidney had once been betrothed. They abound in exquisite lines and passages, containing more poetic feeling and expression than the songs of any other minor writer of the age.

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[1] See p. 125.

George Chapman (1559?–1634). Chapman spent his long, quiet life among the dramatists, and wrote chiefly for the stage. His plays, which were for the most part merely poems in dialogue, fell far below the high dramatic standard of his time and are now almost unread. His most famous work is the metrical translation of the *Iliad* (1611) and of the *Odyssey* (1614). Chapman's *Homer,* though lacking the simplicity and dignity of the original, has a force and rapidity of movement which makes it superior in many respects to Pope's more familiar translation. Chapman is remembered also as the finisher of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander,* in which, apart from the drama, the Renaissance movement is seen at perhaps its highest point in English poetry. Out of scores of long poems of the period, *Hero and Leander* and the *Faery Queen* are the only two which are even slightly known to modern readers.

Michael Drayton (1563–1631). Drayton is the most voluminous and, to antiquarians at least, the most interesting of the minor poets. He is the Layamon of the Elizabethan Age, and vastly more scholarly than his predecessor. His chief work is *Polyolbion,* an enormous poem of many thousand couplets, describing the towns, mountains, and rivers of Britain, with the interesting legends connected with each. It is an extremely valuable work and represents a lifetime of study and research. Two other long works are the *Barons' Wars* and the *Heroic Epistle of England;* and besides these were many minor poems. One of the best of these is the "Battle of Agincourt," a ballad written in the lively meter which Tennyson used with some variations in the "Charge of the Light Brigade," and which shows the old English love of brave deeds and of the songs that stir a people's heart in memory of noble ancestors.

III. THE FIRST ENGLISH DRAMATISTS

The Origin of the Drama. First the deed, then the story, then the play; that seems to be the natural development of the drama in its simplest form. The great deeds of a people are treasured in its literature, and later generations represent in play or pantomime certain parts of the story which appeal most powerfully to the imagination. Among primitive races the deeds of their gods and heroes are often represented at the yearly festivals; and among children, whose instincts are not yet blunted by artificial habits, one sees the story that was heard at bedtime repeated next day in vigorous action, when our boys turn scouts and our girls princesses, precisely as our first dramatists turned to the old legends and heroes of Britain for their first stage productions. To act a part seems as natural to humanity as to tell a story; and originally the drama is but an old story retold to the eye, a story put into action by living performers, who for the moment "make believe" or imagine themselves to be the old heroes.

To illustrate the matter simply, there was a great life lived by him who was called the Christ. Inevitably the life found its way into literature, and we have the Gospels. Around the life and literature sprang up a great religion. Its worship was at first simple, — the common prayer, the evening meal together, the remembered words of the Master, and the