

CHAPTER VII

THE PURITAN AGE

I. HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The Puritan Movement. In its broadest sense the Puritan movement may be regarded as a second and greater Renaissance, a rebirth of the moral nature of man following the intellectual awakening of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In Italy, whose influence had been uppermost in Elizabethan literature, the Renaissance had been essentially pagan and sensuous. It had hardly touched the moral nature of man, and it brought little relief from the despotism of rulers. One can hardly read the horrible records of the Medici or the Borgias, or the political observations of Machiavelli, without marveling at the moral and political degradation of a cultured nation. In the North, especially among the German and English peoples, the Renaissance was accompanied by a moral awakening, and it is precisely that awakening in England, "that greatest moral and political reform which ever swept over a nation in the short space of half a century," which is meant by the Puritan movement. We shall understand it better if we remember that it had two chief objects: the first was personal righteousness; the second was civil and religious liberty. In other words, it aimed to make men honest and to make them free.

Such a movement should be cleared of all the misconceptions which have clung to it since the Restoration, when the very name of Puritan was made ridiculous by the jeers of the gay courtiers of Charles II. Though the spirit of the movement was profoundly religious, the Puritans were not a religious sect; neither was the Puritan a narrow-minded and gloomy dogmatist, as he is still pictured even in the histories. Pym and Hampden and Eliot and Milton were Puritans; and in the long struggle for human liberty there are few names more honored by freemen everywhere. Cromwell and Thomas Hooker were Puritans; yet Cromwell stood like a rock for religious tolerance; and Thomas Hooker, in Connecticut, gave to the world the first written constitution,

in which freemen, before electing their officers, laid down the strict limits of the offices to which they were elected. That is a Puritan document, and it marks one of the greatest achievements in the history of government.

From a religious view point Puritanism included all shades of belief. The name was first given to those who advocated certain changes in the form of worship of the reformed English Church under Elizabeth; but as the ideal of liberty rose in men's minds, and opposed to it were the king and his evil counselors and the band of intolerant churchmen of whom Laud is the great example, then Puritanism became a great national movement. It included English churchmen as well as extreme Separatists, Calvinists, Covenanters, Catholic noblemen, — all bound together in resistance to despotism in Church and State, and with a passion for liberty and righteousness such as the world has never since seen. Naturally such a movement had its extremes and excesses, and it is from a few zealots and fanatics that most of our misconceptions about the Puritans arise. Life was stern in those days, too stern perhaps, and the intensity of the struggle against despotism made men narrow and hard. In the triumph of Puritanism under Cromwell severe laws were passed, many simple pleasures were forbidden, and an austere standard of living was forced upon an unwilling people. So the criticism is made that the wild outbreak of immorality which followed the restoration of Charles was partly due to the unnatural restrictions of the Puritan era. The criticism is just; but we must not forget the whole spirit of the movement. That the Puritan prohibited Maypole dancing and horse racing is of small consequence beside the fact that he fought for liberty and justice, that he overthrew despotism and made a man's life and property safe from the tyranny of rulers. A great river is not judged by the foam on its surface, and certain austere laws and doctrines which we have ridiculed are but froth on the surface of the mighty Puritan current that has flowed steadily, like a river of life, through English and American history since the Age of Elizabeth.

Changing Ideals. The political upheaval of the period is summed up in the terrible struggle between the king and Parliament, which resulted in the death of Charles at the block and the establishment of the Commonwealth under Cromwell. For centuries the English people had been wonderfully loyal to their sovereigns; but deeper than their loyalty to kings was the old Saxon love for personal liberty. At times, as in the days of Alfred and Elizabeth, the two ideals went

hand in hand; but more often they were in open strife, and a final struggle for supremacy was inevitable. The crisis came when James I, who had received the right of royalty from an act of Parliament, began, by the assumption of "divine right," to ignore the Parliament which had created him. Of the civil war which followed in the reign of Charles I, and of the triumph of English freedom, it is unnecessary to write here. The blasphemy of a man's divine right to rule his fellow-men was ended. Modern England began with the charge of Cromwell's brigade of Puritans at Naseby.

Religiously the age was one of even greater ferment than that which marked the beginning of the Reformation. A great ideal, the ideal of a national church, was pounding to pieces, like a ship in the breakers, and in the confusion of such an hour the action of the various sects was like that of frantic passengers, each striving to save his possessions from the wreck. The Catholic church, as its name implies, has always held true to the ideal of a united church, a church which, like the great Roman government of the early centuries, can bring the splendor and authority of Rome to bear upon the humblest village church to the farthest ends of the earth. For a time that mighty ideal dazzled the German and English reformers; but the possibility of a united Protestant church perished with Elizabeth. Then, instead of the world-wide church which was the ideal of Catholicism, came the ideal of a purely national Protestantism. This was the ideal of Laud and the reactionary bishops, no less than of the scholarly Richard Hooker, of the rugged Scotch Covenanters, and of the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay. It is intensely interesting to note that Charles called Irish rebels and Scotch Highlanders to his aid by promising to restore their national religions; and that the English Puritans, turning to Scotland for help, entered into the solemn Covenant of 1643, establishing a national Presbyterianism, whose object was:

To bring the churches of God in the three kingdoms to uniformity in religion and government, to preserve the rights of Parliament and the liberties of the Kingdom; . . . that we and our posterity may as brethren live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to live in the midst of us.

In this famous Covenant we see the national, the ecclesiastical, and the personal dream of Puritanism, side by side, in all their grandeur and simplicity.

Years passed, years of bitter struggle and heartache, before the impossibility of uniting the various Protestant sects was generally recognized. The ideal of a national church died hard, and to its death is due all the religious unrest of the period. Only as we remember the national ideal, and the struggle which it caused, can we understand the amazing life and work of Bunyan, or appreciate the heroic spirit of the American colonists who left home for a wilderness in order to give the new ideal of a free church in a free state its practical demonstration.

Literary Characteristics. In literature also the Puritan Age was one of confusion, due to the breaking up of old ideals. Mediæval standards of chivalry, the impossible loves and romances of which Spenser furnished the types, perished no less surely than the ideal of a national church; and in the absence of any fixed standard of literary criticism there was nothing to prevent the exaggeration of the "metaphysical" poets, who are the literary parallels to religious sects like the Anabaptists. Poetry took new and startling forms in Donne and Herbert, and prose became as somber as Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. The spiritual gloom which sooner or later fastens upon all the writers of this age, and which is unjustly attributed to Puritan influence, is due to the breaking up of accepted standards in government and religion. No people, from the Greeks to those of our own day, have suffered the loss of old ideals without causing its writers to cry, "Ichabod! the glory has departed." That is the unconscious tendency of literary men in all times, who look backward for their golden age; and it need not concern the student of literature, who, even in the break-up of cherished institutions, looks for some foregleams of a better light which is to break upon the world. This so-called gloomy age produced some minor poems of exquisite workmanship, and one great master of verse whose work would glorify any age or people,—John Milton, in whom the indomitable Puritan spirit finds its noblest expression.

There are three main characteristics in which Puritan literature differs from that of the preceding age: (1) Elizabethan literature, with all its diversity, had a marked unity in spirit, resulting from the patriotism of all classes and their devotion to a queen who, with all her faults, sought first the nation's welfare. Under the Stuarts all this was changed. The kings were the open enemies of the people; the country was divided by the struggle for political and religious liberty; and the literature was as divided in spirit as were the struggling parties. (2) Elizabethan literature is generally inspiring; it throbs with youth and hope and vitality. That which follows speaks of age and sadness; even its brightest hours are followed by gloom, and by the pessimism inseparable from the passing of old standards. (3) Elizabethan literature is intensely romantic; the romance springs from the heart of youth, and believes all things, even the impossible. The great schoolman's *credo*, "I believe because it is impossible," is a better expression of Elizabethan literature than of mediæval theology. In the literature of the Puritan period one looks in vain for romantic ardor. Even in the lyrics and love poems a critical, intellectual spirit takes its place, and whatever romance asserts itself is in form rather than in feeling, a fantastic and artificial adornment of speech rather than the natural utterance of a heart in which sentiment is so strong and true that poetry is its only expression.

II. LITERATURE OF THE PURITAN PERIOD

The Transition Poets. When one attempts to classify the literature of the first half of the seventeenth century, from the death of Elizabeth (1603) to the Restoration (1660), he realizes the impossibility of grouping poets by any accurate standard. The classifications attempted here have small dependence upon dates or sovereigns, and are suggestive rather than accurate. Thus Shakespeare and Bacon wrote

largely in the reign of James I, but their work is Elizabethan in spirit; and Bunyan is no less a Puritan because he happened to write after the Restoration. The name Metaphysical poets, given by Dr. Johnson, is somewhat suggestive but not descriptive of the followers of Donne; the name Caroline or Cavalier poets brings to mind the careless temper of the Royalists who followed King Charles with a devotion of which he was unworthy; and the name Spenserian poets recalls the little band of dreamers who clung to Spenser's ideal, even while his romantic mediæval castle was battered down by Science at the one gate and Puritanism at the other. At the beginning of this bewildering confusion of ideals expressed in literature, we note a few writers who are generally known as Jacobean poets, but whom we have called the Transition poets because, with the later dramatists, they show clearly the changing standards of the age.

Samuel Daniel (1562-1619). Daniel, who is often classed with the first Metaphysical poets, is interesting to us for two reasons,—for his use of the artificial sonnet, and for his literary desertion of Spenser as a model for poets. His *Delia*, a cycle of sonnets modeled, perhaps, after Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, helped to fix the custom of celebrating love or friendship by a series of sonnets, to which some pastoral pseudonym was affixed. In his sonnets, many of which rank with Shakespeare's, and in his later poetry, especially the beautiful "Complaint of Rosamond" and his "Civil Wars," he aimed solely at grace of expression, and became influential in giving to English poetry a greater individuality and independence than it had ever known. In matter he set himself squarely against the mediæval tendency:

Let others sing of kings and paladines
In aged accents and untimely words,
Paint shadows in imaginary lines.

This fling at Spenser and his followers marks the beginning of the modern and realistic school, which sees in life as it is

enough poetic material, without the invention of allegories and impossible heroines. Daniel's poetry, which was forgotten soon after his death, has received probably more homage than it deserves in the praises of Wordsworth, Southey, Lamb, and Coleridge. The latter says: "Read Daniel, the admirable Daniel. The style and language are just such as any pure and manly writer of the present day would use. It seems quite modern in comparison with the style of Shakespeare."

The Song Writers. In strong contrast with the above are two distinct groups, the Song Writers and the Spenserian poets. The close of the reign of Elizabeth was marked by an outburst of English songs, as remarkable in its sudden development as the rise of the drama. Two causes contributed to this result,—the increasing influence of French instead of Italian verse, and the rapid development of music as an art at the close of the sixteenth century. The two song writers and best worth studying are Thomas Campion (1567?–1619) and Nicholas Breton (1545?–1626?). Like all the lyric poets of the age, they are a curious mixture of the Elizabethan and the Puritan standards. They sing of sacred and profane love with the same zest, and a careless love song is often found on the same page with a plea for divine grace.

The Spenserian Poets. Of the Spenserian poets Giles Fletcher and Wither are best worth studying. Giles Fletcher (1588?–1623) has at times a strong suggestion of Milton (who was also a follower of Spenser in his early years) in the noble simplicity and majesty of his lines. His best known work, "Christ's Victory and Triumph" (1610), was the greatest religious poem that had appeared in England since "Piers Plowman," and is not an unworthy predecessor of *Paradise Lost*.

The life of George Wither (1588–1667) covers the whole period of English history from Elizabeth to the Restoration, and the enormous volume of his work covers every phase of the literature of two great ages. His life was a varied one; now as a Royalist leader against the Covenanters, and again

announcing his Puritan convictions, and suffering in prison for his faith. At his best Wither is a lyric poet of great originality, rising at times to positive genius; but the bulk of his poetry is intolerably dull. Students of this period find him interesting as an epitome of the whole age in which he lived; but the average reader is more inclined to note with interest that he published in 1623 *Hymns and Songs of the Church*, the first hymn book that ever appeared in the English language.

The Metaphysical Poets. This name—which was given by Dr. Johnson in derision, because of the fantastic form of Donne's poetry—is often applied to all minor poets of the Puritan Age. We use the term here in a narrower sense, excluding the followers of Daniel and that later group known as the Cavalier poets. It includes Donne, Herbert, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Vaughan, Davenant, Marvell, and Crashaw. The advanced student finds them all worthy of study, not only for their occasional excellent poetry, but because of their influence on later literature. Thus Richard Crashaw (1613?–1649), the Catholic mystic, is interesting because his troubled life is singularly like Donne's, and his poetry is at times like Herbert's set on fire.¹ Abraham Cowley (1618–1667), who blossomed young and who, at twenty-five, was proclaimed the greatest poet in England, is now scarcely known even by name, but his "Pindaric Odes"² set an example which influenced English poetry throughout the eighteenth century. Henry Vaughan (1622–1695) is worthy of study because he is in some respects the forerunner of Wordsworth;³ and Andrew Marvell (1621–1678), because of his loyal friendship with Milton, and because his poetry shows the conflict between the two schools of Spenser and Donne. Edmund Waller (1606–1687) stands between the Puritan Age and the Restoration. He was the first to use consistently the "closed"

¹ See, for instance, the "Hymn to St. Theresa" and "The Flaming Heart."

² So called from Pindar, the greatest lyric poet of Greece.

³ See, for instance, "Childhood," "The Retreat," "Corruption," "The Bird," "The Hidden Flower," for Vaughan's mystic interpretation of childhood and nature.

couplet which dominated our poetry for the next century. By this, and especially by his influence over Dryden, the greatest figure of the Restoration, he occupies a larger place in our literature than a reading of his rather tiresome poetry would seem to warrant.

Of all these poets, each of whom has his special claim, we can consider here only Donne and Herbert, who in different ways are the types of revolt against earlier forms and standards of poetry. In feeling and imagery both are poets of a high order, but in style and expression they are the leaders of the fantastic school whose influence largely dominated poetry during the half century of the Puritan period.

JOHN DONNE (1573-1631)

Life. The briefest outline of Donne's life shows its intense human interest. He was born in London, the son of a rich iron merchant, at the time when the merchants of England were creating a new and higher kind of princes. On his father's side he came from an old Welsh family, and on his mother's side from the Heywoods and Sir Thomas More's family. Both families were Catholic, and in his early life persecution was brought near; for his brother died in prison for harboring a proscribed priest, and his own education could not be continued in Oxford and Cambridge because of his religion. Such an experience generally sets a man's religious standards for life; but presently Donne, as he studied law at Lincoln's Inn, was investigating the philosophic grounds of all faith. Gradually he left the church in which he was born, renounced all denominations, and called himself simply Christian. Meanwhile he wrote poetry and shared his wealth with needy Catholic relatives. He joined the expedition of Essex for Cadiz in 1596, and for the Azores in 1597, and on sea and in camp found time to write poetry. Two of his best poems, "The Storm" and "The Calm," belong to this period. Next he traveled in Europe for three years, but occupied himself with study and poetry. Returning home, he became secretary to Lord Egerton, fell in love with the latter's young niece, Anne More, and married her; for which cause Donne was cast into prison. Strangely enough his poetical work at this time is not a song of youthful romance, but

"The Progress of the Soul," a study of transmigration. Years of wandering and poverty followed, until Sir George More forgave the young lovers and made an allowance to his daughter. Instead of enjoying his new comforts, Donne grew more ascetic and intellectual in his tastes. He refused also the flattering offer of entering the Church of England and of receiving a comfortable "living." By his "Pseudo Martyr" he attracted the favor of James I, who persuaded him to be ordained, yet left him without any place or employment. When his wife died her allowance ceased, and Donne was left with seven children in extreme poverty. Then he became a preacher, rose rapidly by sheer intellectual force and genius, and in four years was the greatest of English preachers and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. There he "carried some to heaven in holy raptures and led others to amend their lives," and as he leans over the pulpit with intense earnestness is likened by Izaak Walton to "an angel leaning from a cloud."

Here is variety enough to epitomize his age, and yet in all his life, stronger than any impression of outward weal or woe, is the sense of mystery that surrounds Donne. In all his work one finds a mystery, a hiding of some deep thing which the world would gladly know and share, and which is suggested in his haunting little poem, "The Undertaking":

I have done one braver thing
Than all the worthies did;
And yet a braver thence doth spring,
Which is, to keep that hid.

Donne's Poetry. Donne's poetry is so uneven, at times so startling and fantastic, that few critics would care to recommend it to others. Only a few will read his works, and they must be left to their own browsing, to find what pleases them, like deer which, in the midst of plenty, take a bite here and there and wander on, tasting twenty varieties of food in an hour's feeding. One who reads much will probably bewail Donne's lack of any consistent style or literary standard. For instance, Chaucer and Milton are as different as two poets could well be; yet the work of each is marked by a distinct and consistent style, and it is the style as much as the matter which makes the *Tales* or the *Paradise Lost* a work for all time.

Donne threw style and all literary standards to the winds; and precisely for this reason he is forgotten, though his great intellect and his genius had marked him as one of those who should do things "worthy to be remembered." While the tendency of literature is to exalt style at the expense of thought, the world has many men and women who exalt feeling and thought above expression; and to these Donne is good reading. Browning is of the same school, and compels attention. While Donne played havoc with Elizabethan style, he nevertheless influenced our literature in the way of boldness and originality; and the present tendency is to give him a larger place, nearer to the few great poets, than he has occupied since Ben Jonson declared that he was "the first poet of the world in some things," but likely to perish "for not being understood." For to much of his poetry we must apply his own satiric verses on another's crudities:

Infinite work! which doth so far extend
That none can study it to any end.

GEORGE HERBERT (1593-1633)

"O day most calm, most bright," sang George Herbert, and we may safely take that single line as expressive of the whole spirit of his writings. Professor Palmer, whose scholarly edition of this poet's works is a model for critics and editors, calls Herbert the first in English poetry who spoke face to face with God. That may be true; but it is interesting to note that not a poet of the first half of the seventeenth century, not even the gayest of the Cavaliers, but has written some noble verse of prayer or aspiration, which expresses the underlying Puritan spirit of his age. Herbert is the greatest, the most consistent of them all. In all the others the Puritan struggles against the Cavalier, or the Cavalier breaks loose from the restraining Puritan; but in Herbert the struggle is past and peace has come. That his life was not all calm, that the Puritan in him had struggled desperately before it

subdued the pride and idleness of the Cavalier, is evident to one who reads between his lines:

I struck the board and cry'd, No more!
I will abroad.
What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free, free as the road,
Loose as the wind.

There speaks the Cavalier of the university and the court; and as one reads to the end of the little poem, which he calls by the suggestive name of "The Collar," he may know that he is reading condensed biography.

Those who seek for faults, for strained imagery and fantastic verse forms in Herbert's poetry, will find them in abundance; but it will better repay the reader to look for the deep thought and fine feeling that are hidden in these wonderful religious lyrics, even in those that appear most artificial. The fact that Herbert's reputation was greater, at times, than Milton's, and that his poems when published after his death had a large sale and influence, shows certainly that he appealed to the men of his age; and his poems will probably be read and appreciated, if only by the few, just so long as men are strong enough to understand the Puritan's spiritual convictions.

Life. Herbert's life is so quiet and uneventful that to relate a few biographical facts can be of little advantage. Only as one reads the whole story by Izaak Walton can he share the gentle spirit of Herbert's poetry. He was born at Montgomery Castle,¹ Wales, 1593, of a noble Welsh family. His university course was brilliant, and after graduation he waited long years in the vain hope of preferment at court. All his life he had to battle against disease, and this is undoubtedly the cause of the long delay before each new step in his course. Not till he was thirty-seven was he ordained and placed over the little church of Bemerton. How he lived here among plain people, in "this happy corner of the Lord's field, hoping all things and blessing all people, asking his own way to Sion and showing others

¹ There is some doubt as to whether he was born at the Castle, or at Black Hall. Recent opinion inclines to the latter view.

the way," should be read in Walton. It is a brief life, less than three years of work before being cut off by consumption, but remarkable for the single great purpose and the glorious spiritual strength that shine through physical weakness. Just before his death he gave some manuscripts to a friend, and his message is worthy of John Bunyan:

Deliver this little book to my dear brother Ferrar, and tell him he shall find in it a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my master, in whose service I have now found perfect freedom. Desire him to read it; and then, if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made public; if not, let him burn it, for I and it are less than the least of God's mercies.

Herbert's Poems. Herbert's chief work, *The Temple*, consists of over one hundred and fifty short poems suggested by the Church, her holidays and ceremonials, and the experiences of the Christian life. The first poem, "The Church Porch," is the longest and, though polished with a care that foreshadows the classic school, the least poetical. It is a wonderful collection of condensed sermons, wise precepts, and moral lessons, suggesting Chaucer's "Good Counsel," Pope's "Essay on Man," and Polonius's advice to Laertes, in *Hamlet*; only it is more packed with thought than any of these. Of truth-speaking he says:

Dare to be true. Nothing can need a lie;
A fault which needs it most grows two thereby.

and of calmness in argument:

Calmness is great advantage: he that lets
Another chafe may warm him at his fire.

Among the remaining poems of *The Temple* one of the most suggestive is "The Pilgrimage." Here in six short stanzas, every line close-packed with thought, we have the whole of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The poem was written probably before Bunyan was born, but remembering the wide influence of Herbert's poetry, it is an interesting question whether Bunyan received the idea of his immortal work from

this "Pilgrimage." Probably the best known of all his poems is the one called "The Pulley," which generally appears, however under the name "Rest," or "The Gifts of God."

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
Let us, said he, pour on him all we can:
Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed; then wisdom, honor, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

For, if I should, said he,
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness:
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.

Among the poems which may be read as curiosities of versification, and which arouse the wrath of the critics against the whole metaphysical school, are those like "Easter Wings" and "The Altar," which suggest in the printed form of the poem the thing of which the poet sings. More ingenious is the poem in which rime is made by cutting off the first letter of a preceding word, as in the five stanzas of "Paradise":

I bless thee, Lord, because I grow
Among thy trees, which in a row
To thee both fruit and order ow.

And more ingenious still are odd conceits like the poem "Heaven," in which Echo, by repeating the last syllable of each line, gives an answer to the poet's questions.

The Cavalier Poets. In the literature of any age there are generally found two distinct tendencies. The first expresses the dominant spirit of the times; the second, a secret or an open rebellion. So in this age, side by side with the serious and rational Puritan, lives the gallant and trivial Cavalier. The Puritan finds expression in the best poetry of the period, from Donne to Milton, and in the prose of Baxter and Bunyan; the Cavalier in a small group of poets, — Herrick, Lovelace, Suckling, and Carew, — who write songs generally in lighter vein, gay, trivial, often licentious, but who cannot altogether escape the tremendous seriousness of Puritanism.

Thomas Carew (1598?–1639?). Carew may be called the inventor of Cavalier love poetry, and to him, more than to any other, is due the peculiar combination of the sensual and the religious which marked most of the minor poets of the seventeenth century. His poetry is the Spenserian pastoral stripped of its refinement of feeling and made direct, coarse, vigorous. His poems, published in 1640, are generally, like his life, trivial or sensual; but here and there is found one, like the following, which indicates that with the Metaphysical and Cavalier poets a new and stimulating force had entered English literature:

Ask me no more where Jove bestows,
When June is past, the fading rose,
For in your beauty's orient deep
These flowers, as in their causes, sleep.

Ask me no more where those stars light
That downwards fall in dead of night,
For in your eyes they sit, and there
Fixèd become as in their sphere.

Ask me no more if east or west
The phoenix builds her spicy nest,
For unto you at last she flies,
And in your fragrant bosom dies.

Robert Herrick (1591–1674). Herrick is the true Cavalier, gay, devil-may-care in disposition, but by some freak of fate

a clergyman of Dean Prior, in South Devon, a county made famous by him and Blackmore. Here, in a country parish, he lived discontentedly, longing for the joys of London and the Mermaid Tavern, his bachelor establishment consisting of an old housekeeper, a cat, a dog, a goose, a tame lamb, one hen, — for which he thanked God in poetry because she laid an egg every day, — and a pet pig that drank beer with Herrick out of a tankard. With admirable good nature, Herrick made the best of these uncongenial surroundings. He watched with sympathy the country life about him and caught its spirit in many lyrics, a few of which, like "Corinna's Maying," "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," and "To Daffodils," are among the best known in our language. His poems cover a wide range, from trivial love songs, pagan in spirit, to hymns of deep religious feeling. Only the best of his poems should be read; and these are remarkable for their exquisite sentiment and their graceful, melodious expression. The rest, since they reflect something of the coarseness of his audience, may be passed over in silence.

Late in life Herrick published his one book, *Hesperides and Noble Numbers* (1648). The latter half contains his religious poems, and one has only to read there the remarkable "Litany" to see how the religious terror that finds expression in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* could master even the most careless of Cavalier singers.

Suckling and Lovelace. Sir John Suckling (1609–1642) was one of the most brilliant wits of the court of Charles I, who wrote poetry as he exercised a horse or fought a duel, because it was considered a gentleman's accomplishment in those days. His poems, "struck from his wild life like sparks from his rapier," are utterly trivial, and, even in his best known "Ballad Upon a Wedding," rarely rise above mere doggerel. It is only the romance of his life — his rich, brilliant, careless youth, and his poverty and suicide in Paris, whither he fled because of his devotion to the Stuarts — that keeps his name alive in our literature.

In his life and poetry Sir Richard Lovelace (1618-1658) offers a remarkable parallel to Suckling, and the two are often classed together as perfect representatives of the followers of King Charles. Lovelace's *Lucasta*, a volume of love lyrics, is generally on a higher plane than Suckling's work; and a few of the poems like "To Lucasta," and "To Althea, from Prison," deserve the secure place they have won. In the latter occur the oft-quoted lines:

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage.
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone that soar above
Enjoy such liberty.

JOHN MILTON (1608-1674)

Thy soul was like a star and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea—
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free;
So didst thou travel on life's common way
In cheerful godliness: and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

(From Wordsworth's "Sonnet on Milton")

Shakespeare and Milton are the two figures that tower conspicuously above the goodly fellowship of men who have made our literature famous. Each is representative of the age that produced him, and together they form a suggestive commentary upon the two forces that rule our humanity,—the force of impulse and the force of a fixed purpose. Shakespeare is the poet of impulse, of the loves, hates, fears, jealousies, and ambitions that swayed the men of his age. Milton is the poet of steadfast will and purpose, who moves like a god amid the fears and hopes and changing impulses of the world, regarding them as trivial and momentary things that can never swerve a great soul from its course.

It is well to have some such comparison in mind while studying the literature of the Elizabethan and the Puritan Age. While Shakespeare and Ben Jonson and their unequaled company of wits make merry at the Mermaid Tavern, there is already growing up on the same London street a poet who shall bring a new force into literature, who shall add to the Renaissance culture and love of beauty the tremendous moral earnestness of the Puritan. Such a poet must begin, as the Puritan always began, with his own soul, to discipline and enlighten it, before expressing its beauty in literature. "He that would hope to write well hereafter in laudable things," says Milton, "ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and most honorable things." Here is a new proposition in art which suggests the lofty ideal of Fra Angelico, that before one can write literature, which is the expression of the ideal, he must first develop in himself the ideal man. Because Milton is human he must know the best in humanity; therefore he studies, giving his days to music, art, and literature, his nights to profound research and meditation. But because he knows that man is more than mortal he also prays, depending, as he tells us, on "devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge." Such a poet is already in spirit far beyond the Renaissance, though he lives in the autumn of its glory and associates with its literary masters. "There is a spirit in man," says the old Hebrew poet, "and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." Here, in a word, is the secret of Milton's life and writing. Hence his long silences, years passing without a word; and when he speaks it is like the voice of a prophet who begins with the sublime announcement, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Hence his style, producing an impression of sublimity, which has been marked for wonder by every historian of our literature. His style was unconsciously sublime because he lived and thought consciously in a sublime atmosphere.