

III. THE FIRST ENGLISH DRAMATISTS¹

Table of Contents

THE ORIGIN OF THE DRAMA.	1
PERIODS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DRAMA	2
1. THE RELIGIOUS PERIOD.	2
MIRACLE AND MYSTERY PLAYS.	2
2. THE MORAL PERIOD OF THE DRAMA	4
THE INTERLUDES.	5
3. THE ARTISTIC PERIOD OF THE DRAMA.	6
CLASSICAL INFLUENCE UPON THE DRAMA.	8
SHAKESPEARE'S PREDECESSORS IN THE DRAMA.	11
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE (1564-1593)	12
Life.	12
MARLOWE'S WORKS.	12
VARIETY OF THE EARLY DRAMA.	13

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 closing hymn. Gradually a ritual was established, which grew more elaborate and impressive as the centuries went by. Scenes from the Master's life began to be represented in the churches, especially at Christmas time, when the story of Christ's birth was made more effective, to the eyes of a people who could not read, by a babe in a manger surrounded by magi and shepherds, with a choir of angels chanting the _Gloria in Excelsis_. [126] Other impressive scenes from the Gospel followed; then the Old Testament was

¹ To read full chapter, refer to W.J. Long's 'English Literature'

called upon, until a complete cycle of plays from the Creation to the Final Judgment was established, and we have the Mysteries and Miracle plays of the Middle Ages. Out of these came directly the drama of the Elizabethan Age.

PERIODS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DRAMA

1. THE RELIGIOUS PERIOD.

In Europe, as in Greece, the drama had a distinctly religious origin.[127] The first characters were drawn from the New Testament, and the object of the first plays was to make the church service more impressive, or to emphasize moral lessons by showing the reward of the good and the punishment of the evil doer. In the latter days of the Roman Empire the Church found the stage possessed by frightful plays, which debased the morals of a people already fallen too low. Reform seemed impossible; the corrupt drama was driven from the stage, and plays of every kind were forbidden. But mankind loves a spectacle, and soon the Church itself provided a substitute for the forbidden plays in the famous Mysteries and Miracles.

MIRACLE AND MYSTERY PLAYS.

In France the name *_miracle_* was given to any play representing the lives of the saints, while the *_mystère_* represented scenes from the life of Christ or stories from the Old Testament associated with the coming of Messiah. In England this distinction was almost unknown; the name Miracle was used indiscriminately for all plays having their origin in the Bible or in the lives of the saints; and the name Mystery, to distinguish a certain class of plays, was not used until long after the religious drama had passed away. The earliest Miracle of which we have any record in England is the *_Ludus de Sancta Katharina_*, which was performed in Dunstable about the year 1110.[128] It is not known who wrote the original play of St. Catherine, but our first version was prepared by Geoffrey of St. Albans, a French school-teacher of Dunstable. Whether or not the play was given in English is not known, but it was customary in the earliest plays for the chief actors to speak in Latin or French, to show their importance, while minor and comic parts of the same play were given in English. For four centuries after this first recorded play the Miracles increased steadily in number and popularity in England. They were given first very simply and impressively in the churches; then, as the actors increased in number and the plays in liveliness, they overflowed to the churchyards; but when fun and hilarity began to predominate even in the most sacred representations, the scandalized priests forbade plays altogether on church grounds. By the year 1300 the Miracles were out of ecclesiastical hands and adopted eagerly by the town guilds; and in the following two centuries we find the Church preaching against the abuse of the religious drama which it had itself introduced, and which at first had served a purely religious purpose.[129] But by this time the Miracles had taken strong hold upon the English people, and they continued to be immensely popular until, in the sixteenth century, they were replaced by the Elizabethan drama. The early Miracle plays of England were divided into two classes: the first, given at Christmas, included all plays connected with the birth of Christ; the second, at Easter, included the plays relating to his death and triumph. By the beginning of the fourteenth century all these plays were, in various localities, united in single cycles beginning with the Creation and ending with the Final Judgment. The complete cycle was presented every spring, beginning on Corpus Christi day; and as the presentation of so many plays meant a continuous outdoor festival of a week or more, this day was looked forward to as the happiest of the whole year. Probably every important town in England had its own cycle of plays for its own guilds to perform, but nearly all have been lost. At the present day only four cycles exist (except in the most fragmentary condition), and

these, though they furnish an interesting commentary on the times, add very little to our literature. The four cycles are the Chester and York plays, so called from the towns in which they were given; the Towneley or Wakefield plays, named for the Towneley family, which for a long time owned the manuscript; and the Coventry plays, which on doubtful evidence have been associated with the Grey Friars (Franciscans) of Coventry. The Chester cycle has 25 plays, the Wakefield 30, the Coventry 42, and the York 48. It is impossible to fix either the date or the authorship of any of these plays; we only know certainly that they were in great favor from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. The York plays are generally considered to be the best; but those of Wakefield show more humor and variety, and better workmanship. The former cycle especially shows a certain unity resulting from its aim to represent the whole of man's life from birth to death. The same thing is noticeable in *_Cursor Mundi_*, which, with the York and Wakefield cycles, belongs to the fourteenth century. At first the actors as well as the authors of the Miracles were the priests and their chosen assistants. Later, when the town guilds took up the plays and each guild became responsible for one or more of the series, the actors were carefully selected and trained. By four o'clock on the morning of Corpus Christi all the players had to be in their places in the movable theaters, which were scattered throughout the town in the squares and open places. Each of these theaters consisted of a two-story platform, set on wheels. The lower story was a dressing room for the actors; the upper story was the stage proper, and was reached by a trapdoor from below. When the play was over the platform was dragged away, and the next play in the cycle took its place. So in a single square several plays would be presented in rapid sequence to the same audience. Meanwhile the first play moved on to another square, where another audience was waiting to hear it. Though the plays were distinctly religious in character, there is hardly one without its humorous element. In the play of Noah, for instance, Noah's shrewish wife makes fun for the audience by wrangling with her husband. In the Crucifixion play Herod is a prankish kind of tyrant who leaves the stage to rant among the audience; so that to "out-herod Herod" became a common proverb. In all the plays the devil is a favorite character and the butt of every joke. He also leaves the stage to play pranks or frighten the wondering children. On the side of the stage was often seen a huge dragon's head with gaping red jaws, belching forth fire and smoke, out of which poured a tumultuous troop of devils with clubs and pitchforks and gridirons to punish the wicked characters and to drag them away at last, howling and shrieking, into hell-mouth, as the dragon's head was called. So the fear of hell was ingrained into an ignorant people for four centuries. Alternating with these horrors were bits of rough horse-play and domestic scenes of peace and kindness, representing the life of the English fields and homes.

Such songs were taken home by the audience and sung for a season, as a popular tune is now caught from the stage and sung on the streets; and at times the whole audience would very likely join in the chorus.

After these plays were written according to the general outline of the Bible stories, no change was tolerated, the audience insisting, like children at "Punch and Judy," upon seeing the same things year after year. No originality in plot or treatment was possible, therefore; the only variety was in new songs and jokes, and in the pranks of the devil. Childish as such plays seem to us, they are part of the religious development of all uneducated people. Even now the Persian play of the "Martyrdom of Ali" is celebrated yearly, and the famous "Passion Play," a true Miracle, is given every ten years at Oberammergau.

2. THE MORAL PERIOD OF THE DRAMA

The second or moral period of the drama is shown by the increasing prevalence of the Morality plays. In these the characters were allegorical personages,--Life, Death, Repentance, Goodness, Love, Greed, and other virtues and vices. The Moralities may be regarded, therefore, as the dramatic counterpart of the once popular

allegorical poetry exemplified by the *Romance of the Rose*. It did not occur to our first, unknown dramatists to portray men and women as they are until they had first made characters of abstract human qualities.

Nevertheless, the Morality marks a distinct advance over the Miracle in that it gave free scope to the imagination for new plots and incidents. In Spain and Portugal these plays, under the name *auto*, were wonderfully developed by the genius of Calderon and Gil Vicente; but in England the Morality was a dreary kind of performance, like the allegorical poetry which preceded it.

To enliven the audience the devil of the Miracle plays was introduced; and another lively personage called the Vice was the predecessor of our modern clown and jester. His business was to torment the "virtues" by mischievous pranks, and especially to make the devil's life a burden by beating him with a bladder or a wooden sword at every opportunity. The Morality generally ended in the triumph of virtue, the devil leaping into hell-mouth with Vice on his back.

The best known of the Moralities is "Everyman," which has recently been revived in England and America. The subject of the play is the summoning of every man by Death; and the moral is that nothing can take away the terror of the inevitable summons but an honest life and the comforts of religion. In its dramatic unity it suggests the pure Greek drama; there is no change of time or scene, and the stage is never empty from the beginning to the end of the performance. Other well-known Moralities are the "Pride of Life," "Hyckescorner," and "Castell of Perseverance." In the latter, man is represented as shut up in a castle garrisoned by the virtues and besieged by the vices.

Like the Miracle plays, most of the old Moralities are of unknown date and origin. Of the known authors of Moralities, two of the best are John Skelton, who wrote "Magnificence," and probably also "The Necromancer"; and Sir David Lindsay (1490-1555), "the poet of the Scotch Reformation," whose religious business it was to make rulers uncomfortable by telling them unpleasant truths in the form of poetry. With these men a new element enters into the Moralities. They satirize or denounce abuses of Church and State, and introduce living personages thinly disguised as allegories; so that the stage first becomes a power in shaping events and correcting abuses.

THE INTERLUDES.

It is impossible to draw any accurate line of distinction between the Moralities and Interludes. In general we may think of the latter as dramatic scenes, sometimes given by themselves (usually with music and singing) at banquets and entertainments where a little fun was wanted; and again slipped into a Miracle play to enliven the audience after a solemn scene. Thus on the margin of a page of one of the old Chester plays we read, "The boye and pigge when the kinges are gone." Certainly this was no part of the original scene between Herod and the three kings. So also the quarrel between Noah and his wife is probably a late addition

to an old play. The Interludes originated, undoubtedly, in a sense of humor; and to John Heywood (1497?-1580?), a favorite retainer and jester at the court of Mary, is due the credit for raising the Interlude to the distinct dramatic form known as comedy.

Heywood's Interludes were written between 1520 and 1540. His most famous is "The Four P's," a contest of wit between a "Pardoner, a Palmer, a Pedlar and a Poticary." The characters here strongly suggest those of Chaucer.[131] Another interesting Interlude is called "The Play of the

Weather." In this Jupiter and the gods assemble to listen to complaints about the weather and to reform abuses. Naturally everybody wants his own kind of weather. The climax is reached by a boy who announces that a boy's pleasure consists in two things, catching birds and throwing snowballs, and begs for the weather to be such that he can always do both. Jupiter decides that he will do just as he pleases about the weather, and everybody goes home satisfied.

All these early plays were written, for the most part, in a mingling of prose and wretched doggerel, and add nothing to our literature. Their great work was to train actors, to keep alive the dramatic spirit, and to prepare the way for the true drama.

3. THE ARTISTIC PERIOD OF THE DRAMA.

The artistic is the final stage in the development of the English drama. It differs radically from the other two in that its chief purpose is not to point a moral but to represent human life as it is. The artistic drama may have purpose, no less than the Miracle play, but the motive is always subordinate to the chief end of representing life itself.

The first true play in English, with a regular plot, divided into acts and scenes, is probably the comedy, "Ralph Royster Doyster." It was written by Nicholas Udall, master of Eton, and later of Westminster school, and was first acted by his schoolboys some time before 1556. The story is that of a conceited fop in love with a widow, who is already engaged to another man. The play is an adaptation of the *Miles Gloriosus*, a classic comedy by Plautus, and the English characters are more or less artificial; but as furnishing a model of a clear plot and natural dialogue, the influence of this first comedy, with its mixture of classic and English elements, can hardly be overestimated.

The next play, "Gammer Gurton's Needle" (cir. 1562), is a domestic comedy, a true bit of English realism, representing the life of the peasant class.

Gammer Gurton is patching the leather breeches of her man Hodge, when Gib, the cat, gets into the milk pan. While Gammer chases the cat the family needle is lost, a veritable calamity in those days. The whole household is turned upside down, and the neighbors are dragged into the affair. Various comical situations are brought about by Diccon, a thieving vagabond, who tells Gammer that her neighbor, Dame Chatte, has taken her needle, and who then hurries to tell Dame Chatte that she is accused by Gammer of stealing

a favorite rooster. Naturally there is a terrible row when the two irate old women meet and misunderstand each other. Diccon also drags Doctor Rat, the curate, into the quarrel by telling him that, if he will but creep into Dame Chatte's cottage by a hidden way, he will find her using the stolen needle. Then Diccon secretly warns Dame Chatte that Gammer Gurton's man Hodge is coming to steal her chickens; and the old woman hides in the dark passage and cudgels the curate soundly with the door bar. All the parties are finally brought before the justice, when Hodge suddenly and painfully finds the lost needle--which is all the while stuck in his leather breeches--and the scene ends uproariously for both audience and actors. This first wholly English comedy is full of fun and coarse humor, and is wonderfully true to the life it represents. It was long attributed to John Still, afterwards bishop of Bath; but the authorship is now definitely assigned to William Stevenson.[132] Our earliest edition of the play was printed in 1575; but a similar play called "Dycecon of Bedlam" was licensed in 1552, twelve years before Shakespeare's birth. To show the spirit and the metrical form of the play we give a fragment of the boy's description of the dullard Hodge trying to light a fire on the hearth from the cat's eyes, and another fragment of the old drinking song at the beginning of the second act.

At last in a dark corner two sparkes he thought he sees
Which were, indede, nought els but Gyb our cat's two eyes.
"Puffe!" quod Hodge, thinking therby to have fyre without doubt;
With that Gyb shut her two eyes, and so the fyre was out.
And by-and-by them opened, even as they were before;
With that the sparkes appeared, even as they had done of yore.
And, even as Hodge blew the fire, as he did thincke,
Gyb, as she felt the blast, strayght-way began to wyncke,
Tyll Hodge fell of swering, as came best to his turne,
The fier was sure bewicht, and therfore wold not burne.
At last Gyb up the stayers, among the old postes and pinnes,
And Hodge he hied him after till broke were both his shinnes,
Cursynge and swering othes, were never of his makynge,
That Gyb wold fyre the house if that shee were not taken.

Fyrste a Songe:

_Backe and syde, go bare, go bare;

Booth foote and hande, go colde;

But, bellye, God sende thee good ale ynoughe,

Whether it be newe or olde_!

I can not eate but lytle meate,

My stomacke is not good;

But sure I thinke that I can dryncke

With him that weares a hood.

Thoughe I go bare, take ye no care,

I am nothinge a-colde,

I stuffe my skyn so full within

Of ioly good ale and olde.

Backe and syde, go bare, etc.

Our first tragedy, "Gorboduc," was written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, and was acted in 1562, only two years before the birth of Shakespeare. It is remarkable not only as our first tragedy, but as the first play to be written in blank verse, the latter being most significant, since it started the drama into the style of verse best suited to the genius of English playwrights.

The story of "Gorboduc" is taken from the early annals of Britain and recalls the story used by Shakespeare in *King Lear*. Gorboduc, king of Britain, divides his kingdom between his sons Ferrex and Porrex. The sons quarrel, and Porrex, the younger, slays his brother, who is the queen's favorite. Videna, the queen, slays Porrex in revenge; the people rebel and slay Videna and Gorboduc; then the nobles kill the rebels, and in turn fall to fighting each other. The line of Brutus being extinct with the death of Gorboduc, the country falls into anarchy, with rebels, nobles, and a Scottish invader all fighting for the right of succession. The curtain falls upon a scene of bloodshed and utter confusion. The artistic finish of this first tragedy is marred by the authors' evident purpose to persuade Elizabeth to marry. It aims to show the danger to which England is exposed by the uncertainty of succession. Otherwise the plan of the play follows the classical rule of Seneca. There is very little action on the stage; bloodshed and battle are announced by a messenger; and the chorus, of four old men of Britain, sums up the situation with a few moral observations at the end of each of the first four acts.

CLASSICAL INFLUENCE UPON THE DRAMA.

The revival of Latin literature had a decided influence upon the English drama as it developed from the Miracle plays. In the fifteenth century English teachers, in order to increase the interest in Latin, began to let their boys act the plays which they had read as literature, precisely as our colleges now present Greek or German plays at the yearly festivals. Seneca was the favorite Latin author, and all his tragedies were translated into English between 1559 and 1581. This was the exact period in which the first English playwrights were shaping their own ideas; but the severe simplicity of the classical drama seemed at first only to hamper the exuberant English spirit. To understand this, one has only to compare a tragedy of Seneca or of Euripides with one of Shakespeare, and see how widely the two masters differ in methods. In the classic play the so-called dramatic unities of time, place, and action were strictly observed. Time and place must remain the same; the play could represent a period of only a few hours, and whatever action was introduced must take place at the spot where the play began. The characters, therefore, must remain unchanged throughout; there was no possibility of the child becoming a man, or of the man's growth with changing circumstances. As the play was within doors, all vigorous action was deemed out of place on the stage, and battles and important events were

simply announced by a messenger. The classic drama also drew a sharp line between tragedy and comedy, all fun being rigorously excluded from serious representations.

The English drama, on the other hand, strove to represent the whole sweep of life in a single play. The scene changed rapidly; the same actors appeared now at home, now at court, now on the battlefield; and vigorous action filled the stage before the eyes of the spectators. The child of one act appeared as the man of the next, and the imagination of the spectator was called upon to bridge the gaps from place to place and from year to year. So the dramatist had free scope to present all life in a single place and a single hour. Moreover, since the world is always laughing and always crying at the same moment, tragedy and comedy were presented side by side, as they are in life itself. As Hamlet sings, after the play that amused the court but struck the king with deadly fear:

Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalled play;
For some must watch, while some must sleep:
So runs the world away.

Naturally, with these two ideals struggling to master the English drama, two schools of writers arose. **The University Two Schools Wits**, as men of learning were called, generally of Drama upheld the classical ideal, and ridiculed the crude-ness of the new English plays. Sackville and Norton were of this class, and "Gorboduc" was classic in its construction. In the "Defense of Poesie" Sidney upholds the classics and ridicules the too ambitious scope of the English drama. Against these were the popular playwrights, Lyly, Peele, Greene, Marlowe, and many others, who recognized the English love of action and disregarded the dramatic unities in their endeavor to present life as it is. In the end the native drama prevailed, aided by the popular taste which had been trained by four centuries of Miracles. Our first plays, especially of the romantic type, were extremely crude and often led to ridiculously extravagant scenes; and here is where the classic drama exercised an immense influence for good, by insisting upon beauty of form and definiteness of structure at a time when the tendency was to satisfy a taste for stage spectacles without regard to either.

In the year 1574 a royal permit to Lord Leicester's actors allowed them "to give plays anywhere throughout our realm of England," and this must be regarded as the beginning of the regular drama. Two years later the first playhouse, known as "The Theater," was built for these actors by James Burbage in Finsbury Fields, just north of London. It was in this theater that Shakespeare probably found employment when he first came to the city. The success of this venture was immediate, and the next thirty years saw a score of theatrical companies, at least seven regular theaters, and a dozen or more inn yards permanently fitted for the giving of plays,--all established in the city and its immediate suburbs. The growth seems all the more remarkable when we remember that the London of those days would now be

considered a small city, having (in 1600) only about a hundred thousand inhabitants.

A Dutch traveler, Johannes de Witt, who visited London in 1596, has given us the only contemporary drawing we possess of the interior of one of these theaters. They were built of stone and wood, round or octagonal in shape, and without a roof, being simply an inclosed courtyard. At one side was the stage, and before it on the bare ground, or pit, stood that large part of the audience who could afford to pay only an admission fee. The players and these groundlings were exposed to the weather; those that paid for seats were in galleries sheltered by a narrow porch-roof projecting inwards from the encircling walls; while the young nobles and gallants, who came to be seen and who could afford the extra fee, took seats on the stage itself, and smoked and chaffed the actors and threw nuts at the groundlings.[133] The whole idea of these first theaters, according to De Witt, was like that of the Roman amphitheater; and the resemblance was heightened by the fact that, when no play was on the boards, the stage might be taken away and the pit given over to bull and bear baiting.

In all these theaters, probably, the stage consisted of a bare platform, with a curtain or "traverse" across the middle, separating the front from the rear stage. On the latter unexpected scenes or characters were "discovered" by simply drawing the curtain aside. At first little or no scenery was used, a gilded sign being the only announcement of a change of scene; and this very lack of scenery led to better acting, since the actors must be realistic enough to make the audience forget its shabby surroundings.[134] By Shakespeare's day, however, painted scenery had appeared, first at university plays, and then in the regular theaters.[135] In all our first plays female parts were taken by boy actors, who evidently were more distressing than the crude scenery, for contemporary literature has many satirical references to their acting,[136] and even the tolerant Shakespeare writes:

Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness.

However that may be, the stage was deemed unfit for women, and actresses were unknown in England until after the Restoration.

SHAKESPEARE'S PREDECESSORS IN THE DRAMA.

The English drama as it developed from the Miracle plays has an interesting history. It began with schoolmasters, like Udall, who translated and adapted Latin plays for their boys to act, and who were naturally governed by classic ideals. It was continued by the choir masters of St. Paul and the Royal and the Queen's Chapel, whose companies of choir-boy actors were famous in London and rivaled the players of the regular theaters.[137] These choir masters were our first stage managers. They began with masques and interludes and the dramatic presentation of classic myths modeled after the Italians; but some of them, like Richard Edwards (choir master of the Queen's Chapel in 1561), soon added farces from English country life and dramatized some of Chaucer's stories. Finally, the regular playwrights, Kyd, Nash, Lyly, Peele, Greene, and Marlowe, brought the English drama to the point where Shakespeare began to experiment upon it. Each of these playwrights added or emphasized some essential element in the drama, which appeared later in the work of Shakespeare. Thus John Lyly (1554?-1606), who is now known chiefly as having developed the pernicious literary style called euphuism,[138] is one of the most influential of the early dramatists. His court comedies are remarkable for their witty dialogue and for being our first plays to aim definitely at unity and artistic finish. Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1585) first gives us the drama, or rather the melodrama, of passion, copied by Marlowe and Shakespeare. This was the most popular of the early Elizabethan plays; it was revised again and again, and Ben Jonson is said to have written one version and to have acted the chief part of Hieronimo.[139] And Robert Greene (1558?-1592) plays the chief part in the early development of romantic comedy, and gives us some excellent scenes of English country life in plays like *Friar Bacon* and *Friar Bungay*.

Even a brief glance at the life and work of these first playwrights shows three noteworthy things which have a bearing on Shakespeare's career: (1) These men were usually actors as well as dramatists. They knew the stage and the audience, and in writing their plays they remembered not only the actor's part but also the audience's love for stories and brave spectacles. "Will it act well, and will it please our audience," were the questions of chief concern to our early dramatists. (2) Their training began as actors; then they revised old plays, and finally became independent writers. In this their work shows an exact parallel with that of Shakespeare. (3) They often worked together, probably as Shakespeare worked with Marlowe and Fletcher, either in revising old plays or in creating new ones. They had a common store of material from which they derived their stories and characters, hence their frequent repetition of names; and they often produced two or more plays on the same subject. Much of Shakespeare's work depends, as we shall see, on previous plays; and even his *Hamlet* uses the material of an earlier play of the same name, probably by Kyd, which was well known to the London stage in 1589, some twelve years before Shakespeare's great work was written. All these things are significant, if we are to understand the Elizabethan drama and the man who brought it to perfection. Shakespeare was not simply a great genius; he was also a great worker, and he developed in exactly the same way as did all his fellow craftsmen. And, contrary to the prevalent opinion, the Elizabethan drama is not a Minerva-like creation, springing full grown from the head of one man; it is rather an orderly though rapid development, in which many men bore a part. All our early dramatists are worthy of study for the part they played in the development of the drama;

but we can here consider only one, the most typical of all, whose best work is often ranked with that of Shakespeare.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE (1564-1593)

Marlowe is one of the most suggestive figures of the English Renaissance, and the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors. The glory of the Elizabethan drama dates from his *Tamburlaine* (1587), wherein the whole restless temper of the age finds expression: Nature, that framed us of four elements Warring within our breasts for regiment, Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds: Our souls--whose faculties can comprehend The wondrous architecture of the world, And measure every wandering planet's course, Still climbing after knowledge infinite, And always moving as the restless spheres-- Will us to wear ourselves and never rest.

Tamburlaine, Pt. I, II, vii.

Life.

Marlowe was born in Canterbury, only a few months before Shakespeare. He was the son of a poor shoemaker, but through the kindness of a patron was educated at the town grammar school and then at Cambridge. When he came to London (c. 1584), his soul was surging with the ideals of the Renaissance, which later found expression in *Faustus*, the scholar longing for unlimited knowledge and for power to grasp the universe. Unfortunately, Marlowe had also the unbridled passions which mark the early, or Pagan Renaissance, as Taine calls it, and the conceit of a young man just entering the realms of knowledge. He became an actor and lived in a low-tavern atmosphere of excess and wretchedness. In 1587, when but twenty-three years old, he produced *Tamburlaine*, which brought him instant recognition. Thereafter, notwithstanding his wretched life, he holds steadily to a high literary purpose. Though all his plays abound in violence, no doubt reflecting many of the violent scenes in which he lived, he develops his "mighty line" and depicts great scenes in magnificent bursts of poetry, such as the stage had never heard before. In five years, while Shakespeare was serving his apprenticeship, Marlowe produced all his great work. Then he was stabbed in a drunken brawl and died wretchedly, as he had lived. The Epilogue of *Faustus* might be written across his tombstone:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight, And burned is Apollo's laurel bough That sometime grew within this learned man.

MARLOWE'S WORKS.

In addition to the poem "Hero and Leander," to which we have referred,[140] Marlowe is famous for four dramas, now known as the Marlowesque or one-man type of tragedy, each revolving about one central personality who is consumed by the lust of power. The first of these is *Tamburlaine*, the story of Timur the Tartar. Timur begins as a shepherd chief, who first rebels and then triumphs over the Persian king. Intoxicated by his success, Timur rushes like a tempest over the whole East. Seated on his chariot drawn by captive kings, with a caged emperor before him, he boasts of his power which overrides all things. Then, afflicted with disease, he raves against the gods and would overthrow them as he has overthrown earthly rulers.

Tamburlaine is an epic rather than a drama; but one can understand its instant success with a people only half civilized, fond of military glory, and the instant adoption of its "mighty line" as the instrument of all dramatic expression. *Faustus*, the second play, is one of the best of Marlowe's works.[141] The story is that of a scholar who longs for infinite knowledge, and who turns from Theology, Philosophy, Medicine, and Law, the four sciences of the time, to the study of magic, much as a child might turn from jewels to tinsel and colored paper. In order to

learn magic he sells himself to the devil, on condition that he shall have twenty-four years of absolute power and knowledge. The play is the story of those twenty-four years. Like *Tamburlaine*, it is lacking in dramatic construction,[142] but has an unusual number of passages of rare poetic beauty. Milton's Satan suggests strongly that the author of *Paradise Lost* had access to *Faustus* and used it, as he may also have used *Tamburlaine*, for the magnificent panorama displayed by Satan in *Paradise Regained*. For instance, more than fifty years before Milton's hero says, "Which way I turn is hell, myself am hell," Marlowe had written: *Faust*. How comes it then that thou art out of hell? *Mephisto*. Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed

In one self place; for where we are is hell,

And where hell is there must we ever be.

Marlowe's third play is *The Jew of Malta*, a study of the lust for wealth, which centers about Barabas, a terrible old money lender, strongly suggestive of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. The first part of the play is well constructed, showing a decided advance, but the last part is an accumulation of melodramatic horrors. Barabas is checked in his murderous career by falling into a boiling caldron which he had prepared for another, and dies blaspheming, his only regret being that he has not done more evil in his life.

Marlowe's last play is *Edward II*, a tragic study of a king's weakness and misery. In point of style and dramatic construction, it is by far the best of Marlowe's plays, and is a worthy predecessor of Shakespeare's historical drama.

Marlowe is the only dramatist of the time who is ever compared with Shakespeare.[143] When we remember that he died at twenty-nine, probably before Shakespeare had produced a single great play, we must wonder what he might have done had he outlived his wretched youth and become a man. Here and there his work is remarkable for its splendid imagination, for the stateliness of its verse, and for its rare bits of poetic beauty; but in dramatic instinct, in wide knowledge of human life, in humor, in delineation of woman's character, in the delicate fancy which presents an Ariel as perfectly as a Macbeth,--in a word, in all that makes a dramatic genius, Shakespeare stands alone. Marlowe simply prepared the way for the master who was to follow.

VARIETY OF THE EARLY DRAMA.

The thirty years between our first regular English plays and Shakespeare's first comedy[144] witnessed a development

of the drama which astonishes us both by its rapidity and variety. We shall better appreciate Shakespeare's work if we glance for a moment at the plays that preceded him, and note how he covers the whole field and writes almost every form and variety of the drama known to his age.

First in importance, or at least in popular interest, are the new Chronicle plays, founded upon historical events and characters. They show the strong national spirit of the Elizabethan Age, and their popularity was due largely to the fact that audiences came to the theaters partly to gratify

their awakened national spirit and to get their first knowledge of national history. Some of the Moralities, like Bayle's *King Johan* (1538), are crude Chronicle plays, and the early Robin Hood plays and the first tragedy, *Gorboduc*, show the same awakened popular interest in English history. During the reign of Elizabeth the popular Chronicle plays increased till we have the record of over two hundred and twenty, half of which are still extant, dealing with almost every important character, real or legendary, in English history. Of Shakespeare's thirty-seven dramas, ten are true Chronicle plays of English kings; three are from the legendary annals of Britain; and three more are from the history of other nations. Other types of the early drama are less clearly defined, but we may sum them up under a few general heads: (1) The Domestic Drama began with crude home scenes introduced into the Miracles and developed in a score of different ways, from the coarse humor of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* to the Comedy of Manners of Jonson and the later dramatists. Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and *Merry Wives of Windsor* belong to this class. (2) The so-called Court Comedy is the opposite of the former in that it represented a different kind of life and was intended for a different audience. It was marked by elaborate dialogue, by jests, retorts, and endless plays on words, rather than by action. It was made popular by Lyly's success, and was imitated in Shakespeare's first or "Lilian" comedies, such as *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the complicated *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. (3) Romantic Comedy and Romantic Tragedy suggest the most artistic and finished types of the drama, which were experimented upon by Peele, Greene, and Marlowe, and were brought to perfection in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest*. (4) In addition to the above types were several others,--the Classical Plays, modeled upon Seneca and favored by cultivated audiences; the Melodrama, favorite of the groundlings, which depended not on plot or characters but upon a variety of striking scenes and incidents; and the Tragedy of Blood, always more or less melodramatic, like Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, which grew more blood-and-thunder in Marlowe and reached a climax of horrors in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. It is noteworthy that *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth* all belong to this class, but the developed genius of the author raised them to a height such as the Tragedy of Blood had never known before.

These varied types are quite enough to show with what doubtful and unguided experiments our first dramatists were engaged, like men first setting out in rafts and dugouts on an unknown sea. They are the more interesting when we remember that Shakespeare tried them all; that he is the only dramatist whose plays cover the whole range of the drama from its beginning to its decline. From the stage spectacle he developed the drama of human life; and instead of the doggerel and bombast of our first plays he gives us the poetry of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In a word, Shakespeare brought order out of dramatic chaos. In a few short years he raised the drama from a blundering experiment to a perfection of form and expression which has never since been rivaled. (The End)