

# **A Biography of Edmund Spenser**

John W. Hales

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# A Biography of Edmund Spenser

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- CHAPTER I. 1552–1579. FROM SPENSER'S BIRTH TO THE PUBLICATION OF THE SHEPHEARD'S CALENDAR.
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## *EDMUND SPENSER.*

Ille velut fidis arcana sodalibus olim  
Credebat libris; neque, si male cesserat, unquam  
Decurrens alio, neque si bene; quo fit ut omnis  
Votiva pateat veluti descripta tabella  
Vita senis.

Hither, as to their fountain, other stars  
Repairing in their urns draw golden light.

The life of Spenser is wrapt in a similar obscurity to that which hides from us his great predecessor Chaucer, and his still greater contemporary Shakspeare. As in the case of Chaucer, our principal external authorities are a few meagre entries in certain official documents, and such facts as may be gathered from his works. The birth–year of each poet is determined by inference. The circumstances in which each died are a matter of controversy. What sure information we have of the intervening events of the life of each one is scanty and interrupted. So far as our knowledge goes, it shows some slight positive resemblance between their lives. They were both connected with the highest society of their times; both enjoyed court favour, and enjoyed it in the substantial shape of pensions. They were both men of remarkable learning. They were both natives of London. They both died in the close vicinity of Westminster Abbey, and lie buried near each other in that splendid cemetery. Their geniuses were eminently different: that of Chaucer was the active type, Spenser's of the contemplative; Chaucer was dramatic, Spenser philosophical; Chaucer objective, Spenser subjective; but in the external circumstances, so far as we know them, amidst which these great poets moved, and in the mist which for the most part enfolds those circumstances, there is considerable likeness.

Spenser is frequently alluded to by his contemporaries; they most ardently recognised in him, as we shall see, a great poet, and one that might justly be associated with the one supreme poet whom this country had then produced with Chaucer, and they paid him constant tributes of respect and admiration; but these mentions of him do not generally supply any biographical details.

The earliest notice of him that may in any sense be termed biographical occurs in a sort of handbook to the monuments of Westminster Abbey, published by Camden in 1606. Amongst the 'Reges, Regin{ae}, Nobiles, et alij in Ecclesia Collegiata B. Petri Westmonasterii sepulti usque ad annum 1606' is enrolled the name of Spenser, with the following brief obituary:

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'Edmundus Spenser Londinensis, Anglicorum Poetarum nostri seculi facile princeps, quod ejus poemata faventibus Musis et victuro genio conscripta comprobant. Obijt immatura morte anno salutis 1598, et prope Galfredum Chaucerum conditur qui felicissime poetis in Anglicis literis primus illustravit. In quem haec scripta sunt epitaphia:

Hic prope Chaucerum situs est Spenserius, illi

Proximus ingenio proximus ut tumulo.

Hic prope Chaucerum, Spensere poeta, poetam

Conderis, et versu quam tumulo propior.

Anglica, te vivo, vixit plausitque poetis;

Nunc moritura timet, te moriente, mori.'

'Edmund Spenser of London, far the first of the English Poets of our age, as his poems prove, written under the smile of the Muses, and with a genius destined to live. He died prematurely in the year of salvation 1598, and is buried near Geoffrey Chaucer, who was the first most happily to set forth poetry in English writing: and on him were written these epitaphs:

Here nigh to Chaucer Spenser lies; to whom

In genius next he was, as now in tomb.

Here nigh to Chaucer, Spenser, stands thy hearse, {1}

Still nearer standst thou to him in thy verse.

Whilst thou didst live, lived English poetry;

Now thou art dead, it fears that it shall die.'

The next notice is found in Drummond's account of Ben Jonson's conversations with him in the year 1618:

'Spencer's stanzas pleased him not, nor his matter. The meaning of the allegory of his Fairy Queen he had delivered in writing to Sir Walter Rawleigh, which was, that by the Bleating Beast he understood the Puritans, and by the false Duessa the Queen of Scots. He told, that Spencer's goods were robbed by the Irish, and his house and a little child burnt, he and his wife escaped, and after died for want of bread in King Street; he refused 20 pieces sent to him by my lord Essex, and said he was sure he had no time to spend them.' {2}

The third record occurs in Camden's *History of Queen Elizabeth (Annales rerum Anglicarum et Hibernicarum regnante Elizabetha)*, first published in a complete form in 1628. There the famous antiquary registering what demises marked the year 1598 (our March 25, 1598, to March 24, 1599), adds to his list Edmund Spenser, and thus writes of him: 'Ed. Spenserius, patria Londinensis, Cantabrigienis autem alumnus, Musis adeo ardentibus natus ut omnes Anglicos superioris aevi Poetas, ne Chaucero quidem concive excepto, superaret. Sed peculiari Poetis fato semper cum paupertate conflictatus, etsi Greio Hiberni pro regi fuerit ab epistolis. Vix enim ibi secessum et scribendi otium nactus, quam a rebellibus laribus ejectus et bonis spoliatus, in Angliam inops reversus statim exspiravit, Westmonasterii prope Chaucerum impensis comitis Essexi inhumatus, Poetis funus ducentibus flebilibusque carminibus et calamis in tumulum conjectis.' {3} This is to say: 'Edmund Spenser, a

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*Londoner by birth, and a scholar also of the University of Cambridge, born under so favourable an aspect of the Muses that he surpassed all the English Poets of former times, not excepting Chaucer himself, his fellow-citizen. But by a fate which still follows Poets, he always wrestled with poverty, though he had been secretary to the Lord Grey, Lord Deputy of Ireland. For scarce had he there settled himself into a retired privacy and got leisure to write, when he was by the rebels thrown out of his dwelling, plundered of his goods, and returned to England a poor man, where he shortly after died and was interred at Westminster, near to Chaucer, at the charge of the Earl of Essex, his hearse being attended by poets, and mournful elegies and poems with the pens that wrote them thrown into his tomb.'*{4}

In 1633, Sir James Ware prefaced his edition of Spenser's prose work on the State of Ireland with these remarks:

'How far these collections may conduce to the knowledge of the antiquities and state of this land, let the fit reader judge: yet something I may not passe by touching Mr. Edmund Spenser and the worke it selfe, lest I should seeme to offer injury to his worth, by others so much celebrated. Hee was borne in London of an ancient and noble family, and brought up in the Universitie of Cambridge, where (as the fruites of his after labours doe manifest) he mispent not his time. After this he became secretary to Arthur Lord Grey of Wilton, Lord Deputy of Ireland, a valiant and worthy governour, and shortly after, for his services to the Crowne, he had bestowed upon him by Queene Elizabeth, 3,000 acres of land in the countie of Corke. There he finished the latter part of that excellent poem of his Faery Queene, which was soone after unfortunately lost by the disorder and abuse of his servant, whom he had sent before him into England, being then *a rebellibus* (as Camden's words are) *{e\} laribus ejectus et bonis spoliatus*. He deceased at Westminster in the year 1599 (others have it wrongly 1598), soon after his return into England, and was buried according to his own desire in the collegiat church there, neere unto Chaucer whom he worthily imitated (at the costes of Robert Earle of Essex), whereupon this epitaph was framed.' And then are quoted the epigrams already given from Camden.

The next passage that can be called an account of Spenser is found in Fuller's *Worthies of England*, first published in 1662, and runs as follows:

'Edmond Spenser, born in this city (London), was brought up in Pembroke-hall in Cambridge, where he became an excellent scholar; but especially most happy in English Poetry; as his works do declare, in which the many Chaucerisms used (for I will not say affected by him) are thought by the ignorant to be blemishes, known by the learned to be beauties, to his book; which notwithstanding had been more saleable, if more conformed to our modern language.

'There passeth a story commonly told and believed, that Spenser presenting his poems to queen Elizabeth, she, highly affected therewith, commanded the lord Cecil, her treasurer, to give him an hundred pound; and when the treasurer (a good steward of the queen's money) alledged that the sum was too much; Then give him, quoth the queen, What is reason; to which the lord consented, but was so busied, belike, about matters of higher concernment, that Spenser received no reward, whereupon he presented this petition in a small piece of paper to the queen in her progress:

I was promis'd on a time,

To have reason for my rhyme;

From that time unto this season,

I receiv'd nor rhyme nor reason.

'Hereupon the queen gave strict order (not without some check to her treasurer), for the present payment of the hundred pounds the first intended unto him.

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'He afterwards went over into Ireland, secretary to the lord Gray, lord deputy thereof; and though that his office under his lord was lucrative, yet he got no estate; but saith my author *peculiari poetis fato semper cum paupertate conflictatus est*. So that it fared little better with him than with William Xilander the German (a most excellent linguist, antiquary, philosopher and mathematician), who was so poor, that (as Thuanus saith), he was thought *fami non famae scribere*.

'Returning into England, he was robb'd by the rebels of what little he had; and dying for grief in great want, anno 1598, was honourably buried nigh Chaucer in Westminster, where this distich concludeth his epitaph on his monument

Anglica, te vivo, vixit plausitque poesis;

Nunc moritura timet, te moriente, mori.'

Whilst thou didst live, liv'd English poetry

Which fears now thou art dead, that she shall die.

'Nor must we forget, that the expence of his funeral and monument was defrayed at the sole charge of Robert, first of that name, earl of Essex.'

The next account is given by Edward Phillips in his *Theatrum Poëtarum Anglicanorum*, first published in 1675. This Phillips was, as is well known, Milton's nephew, and according to Warton, in his edition of Milton's juvenile poems, 'there is good reason to suppose that Milton threw many additions and corrections into the *Theatrum Poëtarum*.' Phillips' words therefore have an additional interest for us. 'Edmund Spenser,' he writes, 'the first of our English poets that brought heroic poesy to any perfection, his *Fairy Queen* being for great invention and poetic heighth, judg'd little inferior, if not equal to the chief of the ancient Greeks and Latins, or modern Italians; but the first poem that brought him into esteem was his *Shepherd's Calendar*, which so endeared him to that noble patron of all vertue and learning Sir Philip Sydney, that he made him known to Queen Elizabeth, and by that means got him preferred to be secretary to his brother{5} Sir Henry Sidney, who was sent deputy into Ireland, where he is said to have written his *Faerie Queen*; but upon the return of Sir Henry, his employment ceasing, he also return'd into England, and having lost his great friend Sir Philip, fell into poverty, yet made his last refuge to the Queen's bounty, and had 500\_l. ordered him for his support, which nevertheless was abridged to 100\_l. by Cecil, who, hearing of it, and owing him a grudge for some reflections in *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, cry'd out to the queen, What! all this for a song? This he is said to have taken so much to heart, that he contracted a deep melancholy, which soon after brought his life to a period. So apt is an ingenuous spirit to resent a slighting, even from the greatest persons; thus much I must needs say of the merit of so great a poet from so great a monarch, that as it is incident to the best of poets sometimes to flatter some royal or noble patron, never did any do it more to the height, or with greater art or elegance, if the highest of praises attributed to so heroic a princess can justly be termed flattery.'

When Spenser's works were reprinted the first three books of the *Faerie Queene* for the seventh time in 1679, there was added an account of his life. In 1687, Winstanley, in his *Lives of the most famous English Poets*, wrote a formal biography.

These are the oldest accounts of Spenser that have been handed down to us. In several of them mythical features and blunders are clearly discernible. Since Winstanley's time, it may be added, Hughes in 1715, Dr. Birch in 1731, Church in 1758, Upton in that same year, Todd in 1805, Aikin in 1806, Robinson in 1825, Mitford in 1839, Prof. Craik in 1845, Prof. Child in 1855, Mr. Collier in 1862, Dr. Grosart in 1884, have re-told what little there is to tell, with various additions and subtractions.

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Our external sources of information are, then, extremely scanty. Fortunately our internal sources are somewhat less meagre. No poet ever more emphatically lived in his poetry than did Spenser. The Muses were, so to speak, his own bosom friends, to whom he opened all his heart. With them he conversed perpetually on the various events of his life; into their ears he poured forth constantly the tale of his joys and his sorrows, of his hopes, his fears, his distresses.

He was not one of those poets who can put off themselves in their works, who can forego their own interests and passions, and live for the time an extraneous life. There is an intense personality about all his writings, as in those of Milton and of Wordsworth. In reading them you can never forget the poet in the poem. They directly and fully reflect the poet's own nature and his circumstances. They are, as it were, fine spiritual diaries, refined self-portraits. Horace's description of his own famous fore-runner, quoted at the head of this memoir, applies excellently to Spenser. On this account the scantiness of our external means of knowing Spenser is perhaps the less to be regretted. Of him it is eminently true that we may know him from his works. His poems are his best biography. In the sketch of his life to be given here his poems shall be our one great authority.

### Footnotes

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{1} Compare 'Underneath this sable *hearse*, &c.'

{2} Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden.  
Edinburgh, 1711, p. 225.

{3} *Annales*, ed. *Hearne*, iii. 783.

{4} *History of Elizabeth, Queen of England*. Ed.  
1688, pp. 564, 565.

{5} Father

{6} *Theatrum Poet. Anglic.*, ed. *Brydges*, 1800, pp.  
148, 149.

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Edmund Spenser was born in London in the year 1552, or possibly 1551. For both these statements we have directly or indirectly his own authority. In his *Prothalamion* he sings of certain swans whom in a vision he saw floating down the river 'Themmes,' that

At length they all to mery London came,

To mery London, my most kyndly nurse,

That to me gave this lifes first native sourse,

Though from another place I take my name,

An house of auncient fame.

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A MS. note by Oldys the antiquary in Winstanley's *Lives of the most famous English Poets*, states that the precise locality of his birth was East Smithfield. East Smithfield lies just to the east of the Tower, and in the middle of the sixteenth century, when the Tower was still one of the chief centres of London life and importance, was of course a neighbourhood of far different rank and degree from its present social status. The date of his birth is concluded with sufficient certainty from one of his sonnets, viz. sonnet 60; which it is pretty well ascertained was composed in the year 1593. These sonnets are, as well shall see, of the amorous wooing sort; in the one of them just mentioned, the sighing poet declares that it is but a year since he fell in love, but that the year has seemed to him longer

Then al those fourty which my life out-went.

Hence it is gathered that he was most probably born in 1552. The inscription, then, over his tomb in Westminster Abbey errs in assigning his birth to 1553; though the error is less flagrant than that perpetrated by the inscription that preceded the present one, which set down as his natal year 1510.

Of his parents the only fact secured is that his mother's name was Elizabeth. This appears from sonnet 74, where he apostrophizes those

Most happy letters! fram'd by skilfull trade

With which that happy name was first desynd,

The which three times thrise happy hath me made,

With guifts of body, fortune and of mind.

The first my being to me gave by kind

From mothers womb deriv'd by dew descent.

The second is the Queen, the third 'my love, my lives last ornament.' A careful examination by Mr. Collier and others of what parish registers there are extant in such old churches as stand near East Smithfield the Great Fire, it will be remembered, broke out some distance west of the Tower, and raged mainly westward has failed to discover any trace of the infant Spenser or his parents. An 'Edmund Spenser' who is mentioned in the Books of the Treasurer of the Queen's Chamber in 1569, as paid for bearing letters from Sir Henry Norris, her Majesty's ambassador in France, to the Queen, { 1 } and who with but slight probability has been surmised to be the poet himself, is scarcely more plausibly conjectured by Mr. Collier to be the poet's father. The utter silence about his parents, with the single exception quoted, in the works of one who, as has been said above, made poetry the confidante of all his joys and sorrows, is remarkable.

Whoever they were, he was well connected on his father's side at least. 'The nobility of the Spensers,' writes Gibbon, 'has been illustrated and enriched by the trophies of Marlborough; but I exhort them to consider the Faerie Queen as the most precious jewel of their coronet.' Spenser was connected with the then not ennobled, but highly influential family of the Spencers of Althorpe, Northamptonshire. Theirs was the 'house of auncient fame,' or perhaps we should rather say they too belonged to the 'house of auncient fame' alluded to in the quotation made above from the *Prothalamion*. He dedicates various poems to the daughters of Sir John Spencer, who was the head of that family during the poet's youth and earlier manhood down to 1580, and in other places mentions these ladies with many expressions of regard and references to his affinity. 'Most faire and vertuous Ladie,' he writes to the 'Ladie Compton and Mountegle,' the fifth daughter, in his dedication to her of his *Mother Hubberds Tale*, 'having often sought opportunitie by some good meanes to make knowen to your Ladiship the humble affection and faithfull duetie, which I have alwaies professed and am bound to beare to that house, from



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whence yee spring, I have at length found occasion to remember the same by making a simple present to you of these my idle labours, &c.' To another daughter, 'the right worthy and vertuous ladie the Ladie Carey,' he dedicates his *Muiopotmos*; to another, 'the right honorable the Ladie Strange,' his *Teares of the Muses*. In the latter dedication he speaks of 'your particular bounties, and also some private bands of affinitie, which it hath pleased your Ladiship to acknowledge.' It was for this lady Strange, who became subsequently the wife of Sir Thomas Egerton, that one who came after Spenser Milton wrote the *Arcades*. Of these three kinswomen, under the names of Phyllis, Charillis, and sweet Amaryllis, Spenser speaks once more in his *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*; he speaks of them as

The honour of the noble familie

Of which I meanest boast myself to be.

For the particular branch of the Spencer or Spenser family one branch wrote the name with *s*, another with *c* to which the poet belonged, it has been well suggested that it was that settled in East Lancashire in the neighbourhood of Pendle Forest. It is known on the authority of his friend Kirke, whom we shall mention again presently, that Spenser retired to the North after leaving Cambridge; traces of a Northern dialect appear in the *Shepherd's Calendar*; the Christian name Edmund is shown by the parish registers to have been a favourite with one part of the Lancashire branch with that located near Filley Close, three miles north of Hurstwood, near Burnley.

Spenser then was born in London, probably in East Smithfield, about a year before those hideous Marian fires began to blaze in West Smithfield. He had at least one sister, and probably at least one brother. His memory would begin to be retentive about the time of Queen Elizabeth's accession. Of his great contemporaries, with most of whom he was to be brought eventually into contact, Raleigh was born at Hayes in Devonshire in the same year with him, Camden in Old Bailey in 1551, Hooker near Exeter in or about 1553, Sidney at Penshurst in 1554, Bacon at York House in the West Strand, 1561, Shakspeare at Stratford-on-Avon in 1564, Robert Devereux, afterwards second earl of Essex, in 1567.

The next assured fact concerning Spenser is that he was educated at the Merchant Taylors' School, then just founded. This we learn from an entry in 'The Spending of the Money of Robert Nowell, Esq.,' of Reade Hall, Lancashire, brother of Alexander Nowell, Dean of St. Paul's. In an account of sums 'geven to poor schollers of dyvers gramare scholles' we find Xs. given, April 28, 1569, to 'Edmond Spensore Scholler of the Merchante Tayler Scholl;' and the identification is established by the occasion being described as 'his gowinge to Penbrocke Hall in Chambridge,' for we know that the future poet was admitted a Sizar of Pembroke College, then styled Hall, Cambridge, in 1569. Thus we may fairly conclude that Spenser was not only London born but London bred, though he may have from time to time sojourned with relatives and connections in Lancashire before his undergraduateship, as well as after. Thus a conjecture of Mr. Collier's may confidently be discarded, who in the muster-book of a hundred in Warwickshire has noted the record of one Edmund Spenser as living in 1569 at Kingsbury, and conjectures that this was the poet's father, and that perhaps the poet spent his youth in the same county with Shakspeare. It may be much doubted whether it is a just assumption that every Edmund Spenser that is in any way or anywhere mentioned in the Elizabethan era was either the poet or his father. Nor, should it be allowed that the Spenser of Kingsbury was indeed the poet's father, could we reasonably indulge in any pretty picture of a fine friendship between the future authors of *Hamlet* and of the *Faerie Queene*. Shakspeare was a mere child, not yet passed into the second of his Seven Ages, when Spenser, being then about seventeen years old, went up to the University. However, this matter need not be further considered, as there is no evidence whatever to connect Spenser with Warwickshire.

But in picturing to ourselves Spenser's youth we must not think of London as it now is, or of East Smithfield as now cut off from the country by innumerable acres of bricks and mortar. The green fields at that time were not far away from Spenser's birthplace. And thus, not without knowledge and sympathy, but with appreciative

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variations, Spenser could re-echo Marot's 'Eglogue au Roy sous les noms de Pan et Robin,' and its descriptions of a boy's rural wanderings and delights. See his *Shepherd's Calendar*, December:

Whilome in youth when flowrd my joyfull spring,

Like swallow swift I wandred here and there;

For heate of heedlesse lust me did so sting,

That I oft doubted daunger had no feare:

I went the wastefull woodes and forrest wide

Withouten dread of wolves to bene espide.

I wont to raunge amid the mazie thicket

And gather nuttes to make my Christmas game,

And joyed oft to chace the trembling pricket,

Or hunt the hartlesse hare till she were tame.

What wreaked I of wintrie ages waste?

Tho deemed I my spring would ever last.

How often have I scaled the craggie oke

All to dislodge the raven of her nest?

How have I wearied, with many a stroke,

The stately walnut-tree, the while the rest,

Under the tree fell all for nuttes at strife?

For like to me was libertie and life.

To be sure he is here paraphrasing, and also is writing in the language of pastoral poetry, that is, the language of this passage is metaphorical; but it is equally clear that the writer was intimately and thoroughly acquainted with that life from which the metaphors of his original are drawn. He describes a life he had lived.

It seems probable that he was already an author in some sort when he went up to Cambridge. In the same year in which he became an undergraduate there appeared a work entitled, 'A Theatre wherein be represented as well the Miseries and Calamities that follow the Voluptuous Worldlings as also the greate Joyes and Pleasures which the Faithful do enjoy. An Argument both Profitable and Delectable to all that sincerely loue the Word of God. Deuised by S. John Vander Noodt.' Vander Noodt was a native of Brabant who had sought refuge in England, 'as well for that I would not beholde the abominations of the Romyshe Antechrist as to escape the handes of the bloudthirsty.' 'In the meane space,' he continues, 'for the avoyding of idlennesse (the very mother and nourice of all vices) I have among other my travayles bene occupied aboute thys little Treatyse, wherein is sette forth the

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vilenesse and basenesse of worldly things whiche commonly withdrawe us from heavenly and spirituall matters.' This work opens with six pieces in the form of sonnets styled epigrams, which are in fact identical with the first six of the *Visions of Petrarch* subsequently published among Spenser's works, in which publication they are said to have been 'formerly translated'. After these so-called epigrams come fifteen *Sonnets*, eleven of which are easily recognisable amongst the *Visions of Bellay*, published along with the *Visions of Petrarch*. There is indeed as little difference between the two sets of poems as is compatible with the fact that the old series is written in blank verse, the latter in rhyme. The sonnets which appear for the first time in the *Visions* are those describing the Wolf, the River, the Vessel, the City. There are four pieces of the older series which are not reproduced in the later. It would seem probable that they too may have been written by Spenser in the days of his youth, though at a later period of his life he cancelled and superseded them. They are therefore reprinted in this volume. (See pp. 699–701.)

Vander Noodt, it must be said, makes no mention of Spenser in his volume. It would seem that he did not know English, and that he wrote his *Declaration* a sort of commentary in prose on the *Visions* in French. At least we are told that this *Declaration* is translated out of French into English by Theodore Roest. All that is stated of the origin of his *Visions* is: 'The learned poete M. Francisce Petrarche, gentleman of Florence, did invent and write in Tuscan the six firste . . . which because they serve wel to our purpose, I have out of the Brabants speache turned them into the English tongue;' and 'The other ten visions next ensuing ar described of one Ioachim du Bellay, gentleman of France, the whiche also, because they serve to our purpose I have translated them out of Dutch into English.' The fact of the *Visions* being subsequently ascribed to Spenser would not by itself carry much weight. But, as Prof. Craik pertinently asks, 'if this English version was not the work of Spenser, where did Ponsonby [the printer who issued that subsequent publication which has been mentioned] procure the corrections which are not mere typographical errata, and the additions and other variations{3} that are found in his edition?'

In a work called *Tragical Tales*, published in 1587, there is a letter in verse, dated 1569, addressed to 'Spencer' by George Turberville, then resident in Russia as secretary to the English ambassador, Sir Thomas Randolph. Anthony {a} Wood says this Spencer was the poet; but it can scarcely have been so. 'Turberville himself,' remarks Prof. Craik, 'is supposed to have been at this time in his twenty-ninth or thirtieth year, which is not the age at which men choose boys of sixteen for their friends. Besides, the verses seem to imply a friendship of some standing, and also in the person addressed the habits and social position of manhood. . . . It has not been commonly noticed that this epistle from Russia is not Turberville's only poetical address to his friend Spenser. Among his Epitaphs and Sonnets are two other pieces of verse addressed to the same person.'

To the year 1569 belongs that mention referred to above of payment made one 'Edmund Spenser' for bearing letters from France. As has been already remarked, it is scarcely probable that this can have been the poet, then a youth of some seventeen years on the verge of his undergraduateship.

The one certain event of Spenser's life in the year 1569 is that he was then entered as a sizar at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge. He 'proceeded B.A.' in 1573, and 'commenced M.A.' in 1576. There is some reason for believing that his college life was troubled in much the same way as was that of Milton some sixty years later that there prevailed some misunderstanding between him and the scholastic authorities. He mentions his university with respect in the *Faerie Queene*, in book iv. canto xi. where, setting forth what various rivers gathered happily together to celebrate the marriage of the Thames and the Medway, he tells how

... the plenteous Ouse came far from land  
By many a city and by many a towne,  
And many rivers taking under hand  
Into his waters, as he passeth downe,  
The Cle, the Were, the Grant, the Sture, the Rowne.  
Thence doth by Huntingdon and Cambridge flit,  
My mother Cambridge, whom as with a Crowne

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He doth adorne, and is adorn'd of it

With many a gentle Muse, and many a learned wit.

But he makes no mention of his college. The notorious Gabriel Harvey, an intimate friend of Spenser, who was elected a Fellow of Pembroke Hall the year after the future poet was admitted as a sizar, in a letter written in 1580, asks: 'And wil you needes have my testimoniall of youre old Controllers new behaviour?' and then proceeds to heap abusive words on some person not mentioned by name but evidently only too well known to both the sender and the receiver of the epistle. Having compiled a list of scurrilities worthy of Falstaff, and attacked another matter which was an abomination to him, Harvey vents his wrath in sundry Latin charges, one of which runs: 'C{ae}tera fer{e}, ut olim: Bellum inter capita et membra continuatum.' 'Other matters are much as they were: war kept up between the heads [the dons] and the members [the men].' Spenser was not elected to a fellowship; he quitted his college, with all its miserable bickerings, after he had taken his master's degree. There can be little doubt, however, that he was most diligent and earnest student during his residence at Cambridge; during that period, for example, he must have gained that knowledge of Plato's works which so distinctly marks his poems, and found in that immortal writer a spirit most truly congenial. But it is conceivable that he pursued his studies after his own manner, and probably enough excited by his independence the strong disapprobation of the master and tutor of the college of his day.

Among his contemporaries in his own college were Lancelot Andrews, afterwards Master, and eventually Bishop of Winchester, the famous preacher; Gabriel Harvey, mentioned above, with whom he formed a fast friendship, and Edward Kirke, the 'E.K.' who, as will be seen, introduced to the world Spenser's first work of any pretence. Amongst his contemporaries in the university were Preston, author of *Cambyeses*, and Still, author of *Gammer Gurtons Needle*, with each of whom he was acquainted. The friend who would seem to have exercised the most influence over him was Gabriel Harvey; but this influence, at least in literary matters, was by no means for the best. Harvey was some three or four years the senior, and of some academic distinction. Probably he may be taken as something more than a fair specimen of the average scholarship and culture given by the universities at that time. He was an extreme classicist; all his admiration was for classical models and works that savoured of them; he it was who headed the attempt made in England to force upon a modern language the metrical system of the Greeks and Latins. What baneful influence he exercised over Spenser in this last respect will be shown presently. Kirke was Spenser's other close friend; he was one year junior academically to the poet. He too, as we shall see, was a profound admirer of Harvey.

After leaving the university in 1576, Spenser, then, about twenty-four years of age, returned to his own people in the North. This fact is learnt from his friend 'E.K.'s' glosses to certain lines in the sixth book of the *Shepherd's Calendar*. E.K. speaks 'of the North countreye where he dwelt,' and 'of his removing out of the North parts and coming into the South.' As E.K. writes in the spring of 1579, and as his writing is evidently some little time subsequent to the migration he speaks of, it may be believed that Spenser quitted his Northern home in 1577, and, as we shall see, there is other evidence for this supposition. About a year then was passed in the North after he left the University.

These years were not spent idly. The poetical fruits of them shall be mentioned presently. What made it otherwise a memorable year to the poet was his falling deeply in love with some fair Northern neighbour. Who she was is not known. He who adored her names her Rosalind, 'a feigned name,' notes E.K., 'which being well ordered will bewray the very name of hys love and mistresse, whom by that name he colourerth.' Many solutions of this anagram have been essayed, mostly on the supposition that the lady lived in Kent; but Professor Craik is certainly right in insisting that she was of the North. Dr. Grosart and Mr. Fleay, both authorities of importance, agree in discovering the name Rose Dinle or Dinley; but of a person so Christian-named no record has yet been found, though the surname Dyneley or Dinley occurs in the Whalley registers and elsewhere. In the Eclogue of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, to which this note is appended, Colin Clout so the poet designates himself complains to Hobbinol that is, Harvey of the ill success of his passion. Harvey, we may suppose, is paying him a visit in the

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North; or perhaps the pastoral is merely a versifying of what passed between them in letters. However this may be, Colin is bewailing his hapless fate. His friend, in reply, advises him to

Forsake the soyle that so doth thee bewitch, &c.

Surely E.K.'s gloss is scarcely necessary to tell us what these words mean. 'Come down,' they say, 'from your bleak North country hills where she dwells who binds you with her spell, and be at peace far away from her in the genial South land.' In another Eclogue (April) the subduing beauty is described as 'the Widdowes daughter of the Glen,' surely a Northern address. On these words the well-informed E.K. remarks: 'He calleth Rosalind the Widowes daughter of the glenne, that is, of a country hamlet or borough, which I thinke is rather sayde to coloure and concele the person, than simply spoken. For it is well known, even in spighte of Colin and Hobbinol, that she is a gentlewoman of no meane house, nor endowed with anye vulgare and common gifts, both of nature and manners: but suche indeede, as neede neither Colin be ashamed to have her made known by his verses, nor Hobbinol be greved that so she should be commended to immortalitie for her rare and singular virtues.' Whoever this charming lady was, and whatever glen she made bright with her presence, it appears that she did not reciprocate the devoted affection of the studious young Cambridge graduate who, with probably no apparent occupation, was loitering for a while in her vicinity. It was some other he is called Menalacas in one of his rival's pastorals who found favour in her eyes. The poet could only wail and beat his breast. Eclogues I. and VI. are all sighs and tears. Perhaps in the course of time a copy of the *Faerie Queene* might reach the region where Menalacas and Rosalind were growing old together; and she, with a certain ruth perhaps mixed with her anger, might recognise in Mirabella an image of her fair young disdainful self{4}. The poet's attachment was no transient flame that flashed and was gone. When at the instance of his friend he travelled southward away from the scene of his discomfiture, he went weeping and inconsolable. In the Fourth Eclogue Hobbinol is discovered by Thenot deeply mourning, and, asked the reason, replies that his grief is because

. . . the ladde whome long I loved so deare  
Nowe loves a lasse that all his love doth scorne;

He plongd in payne, his tressed locks dooth teare.

Shepheards delights he dooth them all forswear;

Hys pleasant pipe, whych made us meriment,  
He wylfully hath broke, and doth forbear

His wonted songs, wherein he all outwent.

. . . . .

Colin thou kenst, the Southerne shepheardes boye;

Him Love hath wounded with a deadly darte. &c.

The memory of Rosalind, in spite of her unkindness, seems to have been fondly cherished by the poet, and yielded to no rival vision though there may have been fleeting fits of passion till some fourteen years after he and she had parted till the year 1592, when, as we shall see, Spenser, then living in the south of Ireland, met that Elizabeth who is mentioned in the sonnet quoted above, and who some year and a half after that meeting became his wife. On the strength of an entry found in the register of St. Clement Danes Church in the Strand '26 Aug. [1587] Florenc Spenser, the daughter of Edmond' it has been conjectured that the poet was married before 1587. This conjecture seems entirely unacceptable. There is nothing to justify the theory that the Edmund Spenser of the register was the poet. It is simply incredible that Spenser, one who, as has been said, poured out all his soul in his

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poems, should have wooed and won some fair lady to his wife, without ever a poetical allusion to his courtship and his triumph. It is not at all likely, as far as one can judge from their titles, that any one of his lost works was devoted to the celebration of any such successful passion. Lastly, besides this important negative evidence, there is distinct positive testimony that long after 1587 the image of Rosalind had not been displaced in his fancy by any other loveliness. In *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, written, as will be seen, in 1591, though not published until 1595, after the poet has 'full deeply divined of love and beauty,' one Melissa in admiration avers that all true lovers are greatly bound to him most especially women. The faithful Hobbinol says that women have but ill requited their poet:

'He is repayd with scorne and foule despite,  
That yrkes each gentle heart which it doth heare.'  
'Indeed,' says Lucid, 'I have often heard  
Faire Rosalind of divers fowly blamed  
For being to that swaine too cruell hard.

Lucid however would defend her on the ground that love may not be compelled:

'Beware therefore, ye groomes, I read betimes  
How rashly blame of Rosalind ye raise.'

This caution Colin eagerly and ardently reinforces, and with additions. His heart was still all tender towards her, and he would not have one harsh word thrown at her:

Ah! Shepherds, then said Colin, ye ne weet  
How great a guilt upon your heads ye draw  
To make so bold a doome, with words unmeet,  
Of thing celestiall which ye never saw.  
For she is not like as the other crew  
Of shepherds daughters which emongst you bee,  
But of divine regard and heavenly hew,  
Excelling all that ever ye did see;  
Not then to her that scorned thing so base,  
But to myselfe the blame that lookt so hie,  
So hie her thoughts as she herselfe have place  
And loath each lowly thing with lofty eie;  
Yet so much grace let her vouchsafe to grant  
To simple swaine, sith her I may not love,

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Yet that I may her honour paravant  
And praise her worth, though far my wit above.  
Such grace shall be some guerdon for the grieffe  
And long affliction which I have endured;  
Such grace sometimes shall give me some reliefe  
And ease of paine which cannot be recured.  
And ye my fellow shepheards, which do see  
And heare the languors of my too long dying,  
Unto the world for ever witnesse bee  
That hers I die, nought to the world denying  
This simple trophe of her great conquest.

This residence of Spenser in the North, which corresponds with that period of Milton's life spent at his father's house at Horton in Buckinghamshire, ended, as there has been occasion to state, in the year 1577. What was the precise cause of Spenser's coming South, is not known for certain. 'E.K.' says in one of his glosses, already quoted in part, that the poet 'for speciall occasion of private affayres (as I have bene partly of himselfe informed) and for his more preferment, removing out of the North parts, came into the South, as Hobbinoll indeede advised him privately.' It is clear from his being admitted at his college as a sizar, that his private means were not good. Perhaps during his residence in the North he may have been dependent on the bounty of his friends. It was then in the hope of some advancement of his fortunes that, bearing with him no doubt in manuscript certain results of all his life's previous labour, he turned away from his cold love and her glen, and all her country, and set his face Town-ward.

It is said that his friend Harvey introduced him to that famous accomplished gentleman that mirror of true knighthood Sir Philip Sidney, and it would seem that Penshurst became for some time his home. There has already been quoted a line describing Spenser as 'the southern shepheardes boye.' This southern shepherd is probably Sidney. Sidney, it would seem, introduced him to his father and to his uncle, the Earl of Leicester. If we are to take Iren{ae}us' words literally and there seems no reason why we should not Spenser was for a time at least in Ireland, when Sidney's father was Lord Deputy. Iren{ae}us, in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, certainly represents Spenser himself; and he speaks of what he *said* at the execution of a notable traitor at Limerick, called Murrough O'Brien; see p. 636 of this volume. However, he was certainly back in England and in London in 1579, residing at the Earl of Leicester's house in the Strand, where Essex Street now stands. He dates one of his letters to Harvey, 'Leycester House, this 5 October, 1579.' Perhaps at this time he commenced, or renewed, or continued his acquaintance with his distinguished relatives at Althorpe. During the time he spent now at Penshurst and in London, he mixed probably with the most brilliant intellectual society of his time. Sidney was himself endowed with no mean genius. He, Lord Leicester, Lord Strange, and others, with whom Spenser was certainly, or in all probability, acquainted, were all eminent patrons and protectors of genius.

This passage of Spenser's life is of high interest, because in the course of it that splendid era of our literature commonly called the Elizabethan Period may be said to have begun. Spenser is the foremost chronologically of those great spirits who towards the close of the sixteenth century lifted up their immortal voices, and spoke words

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to be heard for all time. In the course of this present passage of his life, he published his first important work a work which secured him at once the hearty recognition of his contemporaries as a true poet risen up amongst them. This work was the *Shepherd's Calendar*, to which so many references have already been made.

It consists of twelve eclogues, one for each month of the year. Of these, three (i., vi., and xii.), as we have seen, treat specially of his own disappointment in love. Three (ii., viii., and x.) are of a more general character, having old age, a poetry combat, 'the perfect pattern of a poet' for their subjects. One other (iii.) deals with love-matters. One (iv.) celebrates the Queen, three (v., vii., and ix.) discuss 'Protestant and Catholic,' Anglican and Puritan questions. One (xi.) is an elegy upon 'the death of some maiden of great blood, whom he calleth Dido.' These poems were ushered into the world by Spenser's college friend Edward Kirke, for such no doubt is the true interpretation of the initials E.K. This gentleman performed his duty in a somewhat copious manner. He addressed 'to the most excellent and learned both orator and poet Maister Gabriell Harvey' a letter warmly commending 'the new poet' to his patronage, and defending the antique verbiage of the eclogues; he prefixed to the whole work a general argument, a particular one to each part; he appended to every poem a 'glosse' explaining words and allusions. The work is dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney. It was published in the winter of 1579–80.

More than once in the course of it, Spenser refers to Tityrus as his great master. The twelfth eclogue opens thus:

The gentle shepherd sat beside a springe

All in the shadow of a bushye brere,  
That Colin height, which well could pype and singe,

For hee of Tityrus his songs did lere.

Tityrus, on E.K.'s authority, was Chaucer. It is evident from the language both the words and verbal forms used in this poem that Spenser had zealously studied Chaucer, whose greatest work had appeared just about two centuries before Spenser's first important publication. The work, however, in which he imitates Chaucer's manner is not the *Shepherd's Calendar*, but his *Prosopopoia or Mother Hubberds Tale*, which he says, writing in a later year, he had 'long sithens composed in the raw conceipt of my youth.' The form and manner of the *Shepherd's Calendar* reflected not Chaucer's influence upon the writer, but the influence of a vast event which had changed the face of literature since the out-coming of the *Canterbury Tales* of the revival of learning. That event had put fresh models before men, had greatly modified old literary forms, had originated new. The classical influence impressed upon Europe was by no means an unmixed good; in some respects it retarded the natural development of the modern mind by overpowering it with its prestige and stupefying it with a sense of inferiority; while it raised the ideal of perfection, it tended to give rise to mere imitations and affectations. Amongst these new forms was the Pastoral. When Virgil, Theocritus, 'Daphnis and Chloe,' and other writers and works of the ancient pastoral literature once more gained the ascendancy, then a modern pastoral poetry began to be. This poetry flourished greatly in Italy in the sixteenth century. It had been cultivated by Sannazaro, Guarini, Tasso. Arcadia had been adopted by the poets for their country. In England numerous *Eclogues* made their appearance. Amongst the earliest and the best of these were Spenser's. It would perhaps be unjust to treat this modern pastoral literature as altogether an affectation. However unreal, the pastoral world had its charms a pleasant feeling imparted of emancipation, a deep quietude, a sweet tranquillity. If vulgar men discovered their new worlds, and trafficked and bustled there, why should not the poet discover his Arcadia, and repose at his ease in it, secure from the noises of feet coming and going over the roads of the earth?

That fine melodiousness, which is one of Spenser's signal characteristics, may be perceived in his *Eclogues*, as also a native gracefulness of style, which is another distinguishing mark of him. Perceivable, too, are his great, perilous fluency of language and his immense fecundity of mind. The work at once secured him a front place in the poetical ranks of the day. Sidney mentions it in his *Apologie for Poetrie*; Abraham Fraunce draws illustrations from it in his *Lawyers Logicke*, which appeared in 1588; Meres praises it; 'Maister Edmund Spenser,'



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says Drayton, 'has done enough for the immortality, had he only given us his *Shepherd's Calendar*, a masterpiece, if any.' It is easy to discern in *Lycidas* signs of Milton's study of it.

During Spenser's sojourn in the society of the Sidneys and the Dudleys, letters passed between him and Harvey, some of which are extant. From these, and from the editorial notes of Kirke, we hear of other works written by Spenser, ready to be given to the light. The works thus heard of are *Dreames*, *Legends*, *Court of Cupide*, *The English Poet*, *The Dying Pelican*, *Stemmata Dudleiana*, *Slomber*, *Nine English Comedies*, *The Epithalamion Thamesis*, and also *The Faerie Queene* commenced. Of these works perhaps the *Legends*, *Court of Cupide*, and *Epithalamion Thamesis* were subsequently with modifications incorporated in the *Faerie Queene*; the *Stemmata Dudleiana*, *Nine English Comedies*, *Dying Pelican*, are altogether lost. The *Faerie Queene* had been begun. So far as written, it had been submitted to the criticism of Harvey. On April 10, 1580, Spenser writes to Harvey, wishing him to return it with his 'long expected judgment' upon it. Harvey had already pronounced sentence in a letter dated April 7, and this is the sentence: 'In good faith I had once again nigh forgotten your *Faerie Queene*; howbeit, by good chaunce I have nowe sent hir home at the laste, neither in a better nor worse case than I founde hir. And must you of necessitie have my judgement of hir indeede? To be plaine, I am voyde of al judgement, if your nine Com{oe}dies, whereunto, in imitation of Herodotus, you give the names of the Nine Muses, and (in one man's fansie not unworthily), come not neerer Ariostoes Com{oe}dies, eyther for the finenesse of plausible elocution, or the rareness of poetical invention, than that Elvish queene doth to his Orlando Furioso, which notwithstanding, you will needes seem to emulate, and hope to overgo, as you flatly professed yourself in one of your last letters. Besides that, you know it hath bene the usual practise of the most exquisite and odde wittes in all nations, and especially in Italie, rather to shewe and advaunce themselves that way than any other; as namely, those three notorious dyscoursing heads Bibiena, Machiavel, and Aretine did (to let Bembo and Ariosto passe), with the great admiration and wonderment of the whole countrey; being indeede reputed matchable in all points, both for conceyt of witte, and eloquent decyphering of matters, either with Aristophanes and Menander in Greek, or with Plautus and Terence in Latin, or with any other in any other tong. But I will not stand greatly with you in your owne matters. If so be the Faery Queen be fairer in your eie than the Nine Muses, and Hobgoblin runne away with the garland from Apollo; marke what I saye, and yet I will not say that I thought; but there is an end for this once, and fare you well, till God or some good Aungell putte you in a better minde.'

Clearly the *Faerie Queene* was but little to Harvey's taste. It was too alien from the cherished exemplars of his heart. Happily Spenser was true to himself, and went on with his darling work in spite of the strictures of pedantry. This is not the only instance in which the dubious character of Harvey's influence is noticeable. The letters, from one of which the above doom is quoted, enlighten us also as to a grand scheme entertained at this time for forcing the English tongue to conform to the metrical rules of the classical languages. Already in a certain circle rime was discredited as being, to use Milton's words nearly a century afterwards, 'no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age to set off wretched matter and lame metre.' A similar attempt was made in the course of the sixteenth century in other parts of Europe, and with the same final issue. Gabriel Harvey was an active leader in this deluded movement. When Sidney too, and Dyer, another poet of the time, proclaimed a 'general surceasing and silence of bald rhymes, and also of the very best too, instead whereof they have by authority of their whole senate, prescribed certain laws and rules of quantity of English syllables for English verse, having had already thereof great practice,' Spenser was drawn 'to their faction.'

'I am of late,' he writes to Harvey, 'more in love wyth my Englishe versifying than with ryming; whyche I should have done long since if I would then have followed your counsell.' In allying himself with these Latin prosody bigots Spenser sinned grievously against his better taste. 'I like your late Englishe hexameters so exceedingly well,' he writes to Harvey, 'that I also enure my pen sometime in that kinde, whyche I find in deed, as I have heard you often defende in word, neither so harde nor so harsh [but] that it will easily and fairly yield itself to our mother tongue. For the onely or chiefest hardnesse whyche seemeth is in the accent; whyche sometimes gapeth and as it were yawneth il-favouredly, comming shorte of that it should, and sometimes exceeding the measure of the number; as in carpenter the middle sillable being used short in speache, when it shall be read long in verse,

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seemeth like a lame gosling that draweth one legge after hir. And heaven being used shorte as one syllable, when it is in verse stretched with a Diastole is like a lame dogge, that holdes up one legge.'{6} His ear was far too fine and sensitive to endure the fearful sounds uttered by the poets of this Procrust{ae}an creed. The language seemed to groan and shriek at the agonies and contortions to which it was subjected; and Spenser could not but hear its outcries. But he made himself as deaf as might be. 'It is to be wonne with custom,' he proceeds, in the letter just quoted from, 'and rough words must be studied with use. For why, a God's name, may not we, as the Greekes, have the kingdom of oure owne language, and measure our accentes by the sounde, reserving the quantitie to the verse? . . . I would hartily wish you would either send me the rules or precepts of arte which you observe in quantities; or else follow mine that Mr. Philip Sidney gave me, being the very same which Mr. Drant devised, but enlarged with Mr. Sidney's own judgement, and augmented with my observations, that we might both accorde and agree in one, leaste we overthrowe one another and be overthrown of the rest.' He himself produced the following lines in accordance, as he fondly hoped, with the instructions of the new school:

### IAMBICUM TRIMETRUM.

Unhappie verse! the witness of my unhappie state, [as indeed it was in a sense not meant]  
Make thy selfe fluttering winge of thy fast flying thought,  
And fly forth unto my love whersoever she be.

Whether lying reastlesse in heavy bedde, or else  
Sitting so cheerelesse at the cheerefull boorde, or else  
Playing alone carelesse on hir heavenlie virginals.

If in bed, tell hir that my eyes can take no reste;  
If at boorde, tell hir that my mouth can eat no meete;  
If at hir virginals, tell her I can beare no mirth.

Asked why? Waking love suffereth no sleepe;  
Say that raging love doth appall the weake stomacke,  
Say that lamenting love marreth the musicall.

Tell hir that hir pleasures were wonte to lull me asleepe,  
Tell her that hir beauty was wonte to feede mine eyes,  
Tell hir that hir sweete tongue was wonte to make me mirth.

Now doe I nightly waste, wanting my kindlie rest,  
Now doe I dayly starve, wanting my daily food,  
Now doe I always dye wanting my timely mirth.

And if I waste who will bewaile my heavy chance?  
And if I starve, who will record my cursed end?  
And if I dye, who will saye, This was Immerito?

Spenser of the sensitive ear wrote these lines. When the pedantic phantasy which had for a while seduced and corrupted him had gone from him, with what remorse he must have remembered these strange monsters of his creation! Let us conclude our glance at this sad fall from harmony by quoting the excellent words of one who was a bitter opponent of Harvey in this as in other matters. 'The hexameter verse,' says Nash in his *Fowre Letters Confuted*, 1592, 'I graunt to be a gentleman of an auncient house (so is many an English beggar), yet this clyme of ours hee cannot thrive in; our speech is too craggy for him to set his plough in; hee goes twitching and hopping in our language like a man running upon quagmiers up the hill in one syllable and down the dale in another; retaining no part of that stately smooth gate, which he vaunts himselfe with amongst the Greeks and Latins.'

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Some three years were spent by Spenser in the enjoyment of Sidney's friendship and the patronage of Sidney's father and uncle. During this time he would seem to have been constantly hoping for some preferment. According to a tradition, first recorded by Fuller, the obstructor of the success of his suit was the Treasurer, Lord Burghley. It is clear that he had enemies at Court at least at a later time. In 1591, in his dedication of *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, he entreats Raleigh, to 'with your good countenance protest against the malice of evil mouthes, which are always wide open to carpe at and misconstrue my simple meaning.' A passage in the *Ruines of Time* (see the lines beginning 'O grief of griefs! O full of all good hearts!') points to the same conclusion; and so the concluding lines of the Sixth Book of the *Faerie Queene*, when, having told how the Blatant Beast (not killed as Lord Macaulay says in his essay on Bunyan, but 'supprest and tamed' for a while by Sir Calidore) at last broke his iron chain and ranged again through the world, and raged sore in each degree and state, he adds:

Ne may this homely verse, of many meanest,

Hope to escape his venomous despite,  
More then my former writs, all were they clearest

From blamefull blot, and from all that wite,  
With which some wicked tongues did it backebite,  
And bring into a mighty Peres displeasure,  
That never so deserved to endite.  
Therefore do you my rimes keep better measure,  
And seek to please, that now is counted wisemens threasure.

In the *Tears of the Muses* Calliope says of certain persons of eminent rank:

Their great revenues all in sumptuous pride

They spend that nought to learning they may spare;

And the rich fee which Poets wont divide

Now Parasites and Sycophants do share.

Several causes have been suggested to account for this disfavour. The popular tradition was pleased to explain it by making Burghley the ideal dullard who has no soul for poetry to whom one copy of verses is very much as good as another, and no copy good for anything. It delighted to bring this commonplace gross-minded person into opposition with one of the most spiritual of geniuses. In this myth Spenser represents mind, Burghley matter. But there is no justification in facts for this tradition. It may be that the Lord Treasurer was not endowed with a high intellectual nature; but he was far too wise in his generation not to pretend a virtue if he had it not, when circumstances called for anything of the sort. When the Queen patronized literature, we may be sure Lord Burghley was too discreet to disparage and oppress it. Another solution refers to Burghley's Puritanism as the cause of the misunderstanding; but, as Spenser too inclined that way, this is inadequate. Probably, as Todd and others have thought, what alienated his Lordship at first was Spenser's connection with Leicester; what subsequently aggravated the estrangement was his friendship with Essex.

### Footnotes

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{1} See Peter Cunningham's *Introduction to Extracts from Accounts of the Revels at Court*. (Shakspeare

Society.)

{2} It may be suggested that what are called the archaisms of Spenser's style may be *in part* due to the author's long residence in the country with one of the older forms of the language spoken all round him and spoken by him, in fact his vernacular. I say *in part*, because of course his much study of Chaucer must be taken into account. But, as Mr. Richard Morris has remarked to me, he could not have drawn from Chaucer those forms and words of a *northern* dialect which appear in the *Calendar*.

{3} These are given in the Appendix to the present work.

{4} This supposed description of his first love was written probably during the courtship, which ended, as we shall see, in his marriage. The First Love is said to be portrayed in cant. vii., the Last in cant. x. of book vi. of the *Faerie Queene*. But this identification of Rosalind and Mirabililla is, after all, but a conjecture, and is not to be accepted as gospel.

{5} See this work amongst Mr. Arber's excellent *English Reprints*.

{6} *Ancient Critical Essays*, ed. Hazlewood, 1815, pp. 259, 260.

## CHAPTER II. 1580–1589.

In the year 1580 Spenser was removed from the society and circumstances in which, except for his probable visit to Ireland, he had lived and moved as we have seen, for some three years. From that year to near the close of his life his home was to be in Ireland. He paid at least two visits to London and its environs in the course of these eighteen years; but it seems clear that his home was in Ireland. Perhaps his biographers have hitherto not truly appreciated this residence in Ireland. We shall see that a liberal grant of land was presently bestowed upon him in the county of Cork; and they have reckoned him a successful man, and wondered at the querulousness that occasionally makes itself heard in his works. Towards the very end of this life, Spenser speaks of himself as one

Whom sullein care

Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay

In princes court and expectation vayne

Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away

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Like empty shadows, did afflict my brain.

Those who marvel at such language perhaps forget what a dreary exile the poet's life in Ireland must in fact have been. It is true that it was relieved by several journeys to England, by his receiving at least one visit from an English friend, by his finding, during at any rate the earlier part of his absence, some congenial English friends residing in the country, by his meeting at length with that Elizabeth whose excelling beauty he has sung so sweetly, and whom he married; it is also true that there was in him as in Milton and in Wordsworth a certain great self-containedness, {1} that he carried his world with him wherever he went, that he had great allies and high company in the very air that flowed around him, whatever land he inhabited; all this is true, but yet to be cut off from the fellowship which, however self-sufficing, he so dearly loved to look no longer on the face of Sidney his hero, his ideal embodied, his living Arthur, to hear but as it were an echo of the splendid triumphs won by his and our England in those glorious days, to know of his own high fame but by report, to be parted from the friendship of Shakespeare surely this was exile. To live in the Elizabethan age, and to be severed from those brilliant spirits to which the fame of that age is due! Further, the grievously unsettled, insurgent state of Ireland at this time as at many a time before and since must be borne in mind. Living there was living on the side of a volcanic mountain. That the perils of so living were not merely imaginary, we shall presently see. He did not shed tears and strike his bosom, like the miserable Ovid at Tomi; he 'wore rather in his bonds a cheerful brow, lived, and took comfort,' finding his pleasure in that high spiritual communion we have spoken of, playing pleasantly, like some happy father, with the children of his brain, joying in their caprices, their noblenesses, their sweet adolescence; but still it was exile, and this fact may explain that tone of discontent which here and there is perceptible in his writings. {2}

When in 1580 Arthur, Lord Grey of Wilton, was appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland, he perhaps through Lord Leicester's influence, perhaps on account of Spenser's already knowing something of the country made Spenser his Private Secretary. There can be no doubt that Spenser proceeded with him to Dublin. It was in Ireland, probably about this time, that he made or renewed his acquaintance with Sir Walter Raleigh. In 1581 he was appointed Clerk of Degrees and Recognizances in the Irish Court of Chancery, a post which he held for seven years, at the end of which time he received the appointment of Clerk to the Council of Munster. In the same year in which he was assigned the former clerkship, he received also a lease of the lands and Abbey of Enniscorthy in Wexford county. It is to be hoped that his Chancery Court duties permitted him to reside for a while on that estate. 'Enniscorthy,' says the *Guide to Ireland* published by Mr. Murray, 'is one of the prettiest little towns in the Kingdom, the largest portion of it being on a steep hill on the right bank of the Slaney, which here becomes a deep and navigable stream, and is crossed by a bridge of six arches.' There still stands there 'a single tower of the old Franciscan monastery.' But Spenser soon parted with this charming spot, perhaps because of its inconvenient distance from the scene of his official work. In December of the year in which the lease was given, he transferred it to one Richard Synot. In the following year Lord Grey was recalled. 'The Lord Deputy,' says Holinshed, 'after long suit for his revocation, received Her Majesty's letters for the same.' His rule had been marked by some extreme, perhaps necessary, severities, and was probably somewhat curtly concluded on account of loud complaints made against him on this score. Spenser would seem to have admired and applauded him, both as a ruler and as a patron and friend. He mentions him with much respect in his *View of the Present State of Ireland*. One of the sonnets prefixed to the *Faerie Queene* is addressed 'to the most renowned and valiant lord the lord Grey of Wilton,' and speaks of him with profound gratitude:

Most noble lord the pillar of my life,  
And patron of my Muses pupillage,  
Through whose large bountie poured on me rife,  
In the first season of my feeble age,  
I now doe live, bound yours by vassalage:  
Sith nothing ever may redeeme, nor reave  
Out of your endlesse debt so sure a gage,  
Vouchsafe in worth this small guift to receive,

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Which in your noble hands for pledge I leave,  
Of all the rest, that I am tyde t' account.

Lord Grey died in 1593. Spenser may have renewed his friendship with him in 1589, when, as we shall see, he visited England. For the present their connection was broken. It may be considered as fairly certain that when his lordship returned to England in 1582, Spenser did not return with him, but abode still in Ireland.

There is, indeed, a 'Maister Spenser' mentioned in a letter written by James VI. of Scotland from St. Andrews in 1583 to Queen Elizabeth: 'I have staid Maister Spenser upon the letter quhilk is written with my auin hand quhilk sall be readie within tua daies.' It may be presumed that this gentleman is the same with him of whose postal services mention is found, as we have seen, in 1569. At any rate there is nothing whatever to justify his identification with the poet. On the other hand, there are several circumstances which seem to indicate that Spenser was in Ireland continuously from the year of his going there with Lord Grey to the year of his visiting England with Raleigh in 1589, when he presented to her Majesty and published the first three books of the *Faerie Queene*. Whatever certain glimpses we can catch of Spenser during these ten years, he is in Ireland.

We have seen that he was holding one clerkship or another in Ireland during all this time. In the next place, we find him mentioned as forming one of a company described as gathered together at a cottage near Dublin in a work by his friend Lodovick{3} Bryskett, written, as may be inferred with considerable certainty, some time in or about the year 1582, though not published till 1606. This work, entitled *A Discourse of Civill Life; containing the Ethike part of Morall Philosophie*, 'written to the right honorable Arthur, late Lord Grey of Wilton' written before his recall in 1582 describes in the introduction a party met together at the author's cottage near Dublin, consisting of 'Dr. Long, Primate of Ardmagh; Sir Robert Dillon, knight; M. Dormer, the Queene's sollicitor; Capt. Christopher Carleil; Capt. Thomas Norreis; Capt. Warham St. Leger; Capt. Nicholas Dawtrey; and M. Edmond Spenser, late your lordship's secretary; and Th. Smith, apothecary.' In the course of conversation Bryskett envies 'the happinesse of the Italians who have in their mother-tongue late writers that have with a singular easie method taught all that which Plato or Aristotle have confusedly or obscurely left written.' The 'late writers' who have performed this highly remarkable service of clarifying and making intelligible Plato and Aristotle perhaps the 'confusion' and 'obscurity' Bryskett speaks of mean merely the difficulties of a foreign language for one imperfectly acquainted with it are Alexander Piccolomini, Gio. Baptista Giraldi, and Guazzo, 'all three having written upon the Ethick part of Morall Philosophie [sic] both exactly and perspicuously.' Bryskett then earnestly wishes and here perhaps, in spite of those queer words about Plato and Aristotle, we may sympathise with him that some of our countrymen would promote by English treatises the study of Moral Philosophy in English.

'In the meane while I must struggle with those  
bookes which I vnderstand and content myselfe to  
plod upon them, in hope that God (who knoweth the  
sincerensse of my desire) will be pleased to open  
my vnderstanding, so as I may reape that profit of  
my reading, which I trauell for. Yet is there a  
gentleman in this company, whom I have had often a  
purpose to intreate, that as his leisure might serue  
him, he would vouchsafe to spend some time with me  
to instruct me in some hard points which I cannot of  
myselfe understand; knowing him to be not onely  
perfect in the Greek tongue, but also very well read  
in Philosophie, both morall and naturall.  
Neuertheless such is my bashfulnes, as I neuer yet  
durst open my mouth to disclose this my desire unto  
him, though I have not wanted some hartning  
thereunto from himselfe. For of loue and kindnes to

me, he encouraged me long sithens to follow the reading of the Greeke tongue, and offered me his helpe to make me vnderstand it. But now that so good an oportunitie is offered vnto me, to satisfie in some sort my desire; I thinke I should commit a great fault, not to myselfe alone, but to all this company, if I should not enter my request thus farre, as to moue him to spend this time which we have now destined to familiar discourse and conuersation, in declaring unto us the great benefits which men obtaine by knowledge of Morall Philosophie, and in making us to know what the same is, what be the parts thereof, whereby vertues are to be distinguished from vices; and finally that he will be pleased to run ouer in such order as he shall thinke good, such and so many principles and rules thereof, as shall serue not only for my better instruction, but also for the contentment and satisfaction of you al. For I nothing doubt, but that euery one of you will be glad to heare so profitable a discourse and thinke the time very wel spent wherin so excellent a knowledge shall be reuealed unto you, from which euery one may be assured to gather some fruit as wel as myselfe. Therefore (said I) turning myselfe to *M. Spenser*, It is you, sir, to whom it pertaineth to shew yourselfe courteous now unto us all and to make vs all beholding unto you for the pleasure and profit which we shall gather from your speeches, if you shall vouchsafe to open unto vs the goodly cabinet, in which this excellent treasure of vertues lieth locked up from the vulgar sort. And thereof in the behalfe of all as for myselfe, I do most earnestly intreate you not to say vs nay. Vnto which wordes of mine euery man applauding most with like words of request and the rest with gesture and countenances expressing as much, *M. Spenser* answered in this maner: Though it may seeme hard for me, to refuse the request made by you all, whom euery one alone, I should for many respects be willing to gratifie; yet as the case standeth, I doubt not but with the consent of the most part of you, I shall be excused at this time of this taske which would be laid vpon me, for sure I am, that it is not vnknowne unto you, that I haue already vndertaken a work tending to the same effect, which is in *heroical verse* under the title of a *Faerie Queene* to represent all the moral vertues, assigning to every vertue a Knight to be the patron and defender of the same, in whose actions and feates of arms and chialry the operations of that vertue, whereof he is the

protector, are to be expressed, and the vices and unruly appetites that oppose themselves against the same, to be beaten down and overcome. Which work, as I haue already well entred into, if God shall please to spare me life that I may finish it according to my mind, your wish (*M. Bryskett*) will be in some sort accomplished, though perhaps not so effectually as you could desire. And the may very well serue for my excuse, if at this time I craue to be forborne in this your request, since any discourse, that I might make thus on the sudden in such a subject would be but simple, and little to your satisfactions. For it would require good aduisement and premeditation for any man to vndertake the declaration of these points that you have proposed, containing in effect the Ethicke part of Morall Philosophie. Whereof since I haue taken in hand to discourse at large in my poeme before spoken, I hope the expectation of that work may serue to free me at this time from speaking in that matter, notwithstanding your motion and all your intreaties. But I will tell you how I thinke by himselfe he may very well excuse my speech, and yet satisfie all you in this matter. I haue seene (as he knoweth) a translation made by himselfe out of the Italian tongue of a dialogue comprehending all the Ethick part of Moral Philosophy, written by one of those three he formerly mentioned, and that is by *Giraldi* under the title of a dialogue of ciuill life. If it please him to bring us forth that translation to be here read among vs, or otherwise to deliuer to us, as his memory may serue him, the contents of the same; he shal (I warrant you) satisfie you all at the ful, and himselfe will haue no cause but to thinke the time well spent in reuiewing his labors, especially in the company of so many his friends, who may thereby reape much profit and the translation happily fare the better by some mending it may receiue in the perusing, as all writings else may do by the often examination of the same. Neither let it trouble him that I so turne ouer to him againe the taske he wold have put me to; for it falleth out fit for him to verifie the principall of all this Apologie, euen now made for himselfe; because thereby it will appeare that he hath not withdrawne himselfe from seruice of the state to live idle or wholly priuate to himselfe, but hath spent some time in doing that which may greatly benefit others and hath serued not a little to the bettering of his owne mind, and increasing of his knowledge, though he for modesty pretend much



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ignorance, and pleade want in wealth, much like some rich beggars, who either of custom, or for couetousnes, go to begge of others those things whereof they haue no want at home. With this answer of *M. Spensers* it seemed that all the company were wel satisfied, for after some few speeches whereby they had shewed an extreme longing after his worke of the *Faerie Queene*, whereof some parcels had been by some of them seene, they all began to presse me to produce my translation mentioned by *M. Spenser* that it might be perused among them; or else that I should (as near as I could) deliuer unto them the contents of the same, supposing that my memory would not much faile me in a thing so studied and advisedly set downe in writing as a translation must be.'

Bryskett at length assents to Spenser's proposal, and proceeds to read his translation of Giraldi, which is in some sort criticised as he reads, Spenser proposing one or two questions 'arising principally,' as Todd says, 'from the discussion of the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle.' This invaluable picture of a scene in Spenser's Irish life shows manifestly in what high estimation his learning and genius were already held, and how, in spite of Harvey's sinister criticisms, he had resumed his great work. It tells us too that he found in Ireland a warmly appreciative friend, if indeed he had not known Bryskett before their going to Ireland. Bryskett too, perhaps, was acquainted with Sir Philip Sidney; for two of the elegies written on that famous knight's death and printed along with *Astrophel* in the elegiac collection made by Spenser were probably of Bryskett's composition, viz., *The Mourning Muse of Thestylis*, where 'Liffey's tumbling stream' is mentioned, and the one entitled *A Pastoral Eclogue*, where Lycon offers to 'second' Colin's lament for Phillisides.

What is said of the *Faerie Queene* in the above quotation may be illustrated from the sonnet already quoted from, addressed to Lord Grey one of the sonnets that in our modern editions are prefixed to the great poem. It speaks of the great poem as

Rude rymes, the which a rustick Muse did weave

In savadge soyle, far from Parnasso mount.

See also the sonnet addressed to the Right Honourable the Earl of Ormond and Ossory.

A sonnet addressed to Harvey, is dated 'Dublin this xvij of July, 1586.' Again, in the course of the decad now under consideration, Spenser received a grant of land in Cork of 3,028 acres, out of the forfeited estates of the Earl of Desmond.

All these circumstances put together make it probable, and more than probable, that Spenser remained in Ireland after Lord Grey's recall. How thorough his familiarity with the country grew to be, appears from the work concerning it which he at last produced.

The years 1586–7–8 were eventful both for England and for Spenser. In the first Sidney expired of wounds received at Zutphen; in the second, Mary Queen of Scots was executed; in the third, God blew and scattered the Armada, and also Leicester died. Spenser weeps over Sidney there was never, perhaps, more weeping, poetical and other, over any death than over that of Sidney in his *Astrophel*, the poem above mentioned. This poem is scarcely worthy of the sad occasion the flower of knighthood cut down ere its prime, not yet

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In flushing

When blighting was nearest.

Certainly it in no way expresses what Spenser undoubtedly felt when the woeful news came across the Channel to him in his Irish home. Probably his grief was 'too deep for tears.' It was probably one of those 'huge cares' which, in Seneca's phrase, not 'loquuntur,' but 'stupent.' He would fain have been dumb and opened not his mouth; but the fashion of the time called upon him to speak. He was expected to bring his immortelle, so to say, and lay it on his hero's tomb, though his limbs would scarcely support him, and his hand, quivering with the agony of his heart, could with difficulty either weave it or carry it. All the six years they had been parted, the image of that chivalrous form had never been forgotten. It had served for the one model of all that was highest and noblest in his eyes. It had represented for him all true knighthood. Nor all the years that he lived after Sidney's death was it forgotten. It is often before him, as he writes his later poetry, and is greeted always with undying love and sorrow. Thus in the *Ruines of Time*, he breaks out in a sweet fervour of unextinguished affection:

Most gentle spirite breathed from above,  
Out of the bosom of the Makers blis,  
In whom all bountie and all vertuous love  
Appeared in their native propertis  
And did enrich that noble breast of his  
With treasure passing all this worldes worth.  
Worthie of heaven itselfe, which brought it forth.

His blessed spirite, full of power divine  
And influence of all celestially grace,  
Loathing this sinfull earth and earthlie slime,  
Fled backe too soone unto his native place;  
Too soone for all that did his love embrace,  
Too soone for all this wretched world, whom he  
Robd of all right and true nobilitie.

Yet ere this happie soule to heaven went  
Out of this fleshie gaole, he did devise  
Unto his heavenlie Maker to present  
His bodie as a spotles sacrificise,  
And chose, that guiltie hands of enemies  
Should powre forth th' offering of his guiltles blood,  
So life exchanging for his countries good.

O noble spirite, live there ever blessed,  
The world's late wonder, and the heaven's new ioy.  
Live ever there, and leave me here distressed  
With mortall cares and cumbrous worlds anoy;  
But where thou dost that happiness enjoy,  
Bid me, O bid me quicklie come to thee,  
That happie there I maie thee alwaies see.

Yet whilst the Fates affoord me vitell breath,  
I will it spend in speaking of thy praise,  
And sing to thee untill that timelie death  
By Heaven's doome doe ende my earthlie daies:

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Thereto doo thou my humble spirite raise,  
And into me that sacred breath inspire  
Which thou there breathe'st perfect and entire.

It is not quite certain in what part of Ireland the poet was living when the news that Sidney was not reached him. Was he still residing at Dublin, or had he transferred his home to that southern region which is so intimately associated with his name? The sonnet to Harvey mentioned above shows that he was at Dublin in July of the year of his friend's death. It has been said already that he did not resign his Chancery clerkship until 1588. We know that he was settled in Cork county, at Kilcolman castle, in 1589, because Raleigh visited him there that year. He may then have left Dublin in 1588 or 1589. According to Dr. Birch's *Life of Spenser*, prefixed to the edition of the *Faerie Queene* in 1751,<sup>{4}</sup> and the *Biographia Britannica*, the grant of land made him in Cork is dated June 27, 1586. But the grant, which is extant, is dated October 26, 1591. Yet certainly, as Dr. Grosart points out, in the 'Articles' for the 'Undertakers,' which received the royal assent on June 27, 1586, Spenser is set down for 3,028 acres; and that he was at Kilcolman before 1591 seems certain. As he resigned his clerkship in the Court of Chancery in 1588, and was then appointed, as we have seen, clerk of the Council of Munster, he probably went to live somewhere in the province of Munster that same year. He may have lived at Kilcolman before it and the surrounding grounds were secured to him; he may have entered upon possession on the strength of a promise of them, before the formal grant was issued. He has mentioned the scenery which environed his castle twice in his great poem; but it is worth noticing that both mentions occur, not in the books published, as we shall now very soon see, in 1590, but in the books published six years afterwards. In the famous passage already referred to in the eleventh canto of the fourth book, describing the nuptials of the Thames and the Medway, he recounts in stanzas xl.–xliv. the Irish rivers who were present at that great river-gathering, and amongst them

Swift Awniduff which of the English man  
Is cal'de Blacke water, and the Liffar deep,  
Sad Trowis, that once his people ouerran,  
Strong *Allo* tombling from Slewlogher steep,  
And *Mulla* mine, whose waues I whilom taught to weep.

The other mention occurs in the former of the two cantos *Of Mutability*. There the poet sings that the place appointed for the trial of the titles and best rights of both 'heavenly powers' and 'earthly wights' was

. . . vpon the highest hights  
Of *Arlo-hill* (Who knowes not *Arlo-hill*?)  
That is the highest head (in all mens sights)  
Of my old father *Mole*, whom Shepheards quill  
Renowned hath with hymnes fit for a rurall skill.

His poem called *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, written in 1591, and dedicated to Sir W. Raleigh 'from my house at Kilcolman the 27 of December, 1591'<sup>{5}</sup> written therefore after a lengthy absence in England exhibits a full familiarity with the country round about Kilcolman. On the whole then we may suppose that his residence at Kilcolman began not later than 1588. It was to be roughly and and terribly ended ten years after.

We may suppose he was living there in peace and quiet, not perhaps undisturbed by growing murmurs of discontent, by signs of unrepressed and irrepressible hostility towards his nation, by ill-concealed sympathies with the Spanish invaders amongst the native population, when the Armada came and went. The old castle in which he had lived had been one of the residences of the Earls of Desmond. It stood some two miles from Doneraile, on the north side of a lake which was fed by the river Awbeg or Mulla, as the poet christened it.

'Two miles north-west of Doneraile,' writes Charles Smith in his *Natural and Civil History of the County and City of Cork*, 1774, (i. 340, 341) 'is Kilcoleman, a ruined castle of the Earls of Desmond, but more celebrated for

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being the residence of the immortal Spenser, when he composed his divine poem *The Faerie Queene*. The castle is now almost level with the ground, and was situated on the north side of a fine lake, in the midst of a vast plain, terminated to the east by the county of Waterford mountains; Bally– howra hills to the north, or, as Spenser terms them, the mountains of Mole, Nagle mountains to the south, and the mountains of Kerry to the west. It commanded a view of above half the breadth of Ireland; and must have been, when the adjacent uplands were wooded, a most pleasant and romantic situation; from whence, no doubt, Spenser drew several parts of the scenery of his poem.'

Here, then, as in some cool sequestered vale of life, for some ten years, his visits to England excepted, lived Spenser still singing sweetly, still, as he might say, piping, with the woods answering him and his echo ringing. Sitting in the shade he would play many a 'pleasant fit;' he would sing

Some hymne or morall laie,

Or carol made to praise his loved lasse;

he would see in the rivers that flowed around his tower beings who lived and loved, and would sing of their mutual passions. It must have sounded strangely to hear the notes of his sweet voice welling forth from his old ruin to hear music so subtle and refined issuing from that scarred and broken relic of past turbulencies

The shepheard swaines that did about him play  
... with greedie listfull eares  
Did stand astonisht at his curious skill  
Like hartlesse deare, dismayed with thunders sound.

He presents a picture such as would have delighted his own fancy, though perhaps the actual experience may not have been unalloyed with pain. It is a picture which in many ways resembles that presented by one of kindred type of genius, who has already been mentioned as of affinity with him by Wordsworth. Wordsworth too sang in a certain sense from the shade, far away from the vanity of courts, and the uproar of cities; sang 'from a still place, remote from men;' sang, like his own Highland girl, all alone with the 'vale profound' 'overflowing with the sound;' finding, too, objects of friendship and love in the forms of nature which surrounded his tranquil home.

Of these two poets in their various lonelinesses one may perhaps quote those exquisite lines written by one of them of a somewhat differently caused isolation: each one of them too lacked

Not friends for simple glee

Nor yet for higher sympathy.

To his side the fallow–deer

Came and rested without fear;

The eagle, lord of land and sea,

Stooped down to pay him fealty.

.....

*He knew the rocks which angels haunt*

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Upon the mountains visitant;  
He hath kenned them taking wing;  
And into caves where Faeries sing  
He hath entered; and been told  
By voices how men lived of old.

Here now and then he was visited, it may be supposed, by old friends. Perhaps that distinguished son of the University of Cambridge, Gabriel Harvey, may for a while have been his guest; he is introduced under his pastoral name of Hobbinol, as present at the poet's house on his return to Ireland. The most memorable of these visits was that already alluded to that paid to him in 1589 by Sir Walter Raleigh, with whom it will be remembered he had become acquainted some nine years before. Raleigh, too, had received a grant from the same huge forfeited estate, a fragment of which had been given to Spenser. The granting of these, and other shares of the Desmond estates, formed part of a policy then vigorously entertained by the English Government the colonising of the so lately disordered and still restless districts of Southern Ireland. The recipients were termed 'undertakers;' it was one of their duties to repair the ravages inflicted during the recent tumults and bring the lands committed to them into some state of cultivation and order.

The wars had been followed by a famine. 'Even in the history of Ireland,' writes a recent biographer of Sir Walter Raleigh, 'there are not many scenes more full of horror than those which the historians of that period rapidly sketch when showing us the condition of almost the whole province of Munster in the year 1584, and the years immediately succeeding.' {6}

The claims of his duties as an 'undertaker,' in addition perhaps to certain troubles at court, where his rival Essex was at this time somewhat superseding him in the royal favour, {7} and making a temporary absence not undesirable, brought Raleigh into Cork County in 1589. A full account of this visit and its important results is given us in *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, which gives us at the same time a charming picture of the poet's life at Kilcolman. Colin himself, lately returned home from England, tells his brother shepherds, at their urgent request, of his 'passed fortunes.' He begins with Raleigh's visit. One day, he tells them, as he sat

Under the foote of Mole, that mountaine hore,  
Keeping my sheepe amongst the cooly shade  
Of the greene alders by the Mullaes shore,  
a strange shepherd, who styled himself the Shepherd of the Ocean  
Whether allured with my pipes delight,  
Whose pleasing sound yshrilled far about,  
Or thither led by chance, I know not right  
found him out, and  
Provoked me to plaie some pleasant fit.

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He sang, he tells us, a song of Mulla old father Mole's daughter, and of another river called Bregog who loved her. Then his guest sang in turn:

His song was all a lamentable lay  
Of great unkindnesse and of usage hard,  
Of Cynthia the ladie of the sea,  
Which from her presence faultlesse him debard,  
And ever and anon, with singults rife,  
He cryed out, to make his undersong:  
Ah! my loves queene and goddesses of my life,  
Who shall me pittie when thou doest me wrong?  
After they had made an end of singing, the shepherd of the ocean  
Gan to cast great lyking to my lore,  
And great dislyking to my lucklesse lot  
That banisht had my selfe, like wight forlore,  
Into that waste where I was quite forgot,  
and presently persuaded him to accompany him 'his Cinthia to see.'

It has been seen from one of Harvey's letters that the *Faerie Queene* was already begun in 1580; and from what Bryskett says, and what Spenser says himself in his sonnets to Lord Grey, and to Lord Ormond, that it was proceeded with after the poet had passed over to Ireland. By the close of the year 1589 at least three books were completely finished. Probably enough parts of other books had been written; but only three were entirely ready for publication. No doubt part of the conversation that passed between Spenser and Raleigh related to Spenser's work. It may be believed that what was finished was submitted to Raleigh's judgment, and certainly concluded that it elicited his warmest approval. {8} One great object that Spenser proposed to himself when he assented to Raleigh's persuasion to visit England, was the publication of the first three books of his *Faerie Queene*.

### Footnotes

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{1} One might quote of these poets, and those of a like spirit, Wordsworth's lines on 'the Characteristics of a Child three years old,' for in the respect therein mentioned, as in others, these poets are 'as little children:'

As a faggot sparkles on the hearth,

Not less if unattended and alone,  
Than when both young and old sit gathered round,  
And take delight in its activity;  
*Even so this happy creature of herself*  
Is all-sufficient; Solitude to her  
Is blithe society, who fills the air  
With gladness and involuntary songs.

{2} See *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, vv. 180–184,  
quoted below.

{3} This is the 'Lodovick' mentioned in Sonnet 33,  
quoted below. It was from him a little later, in  
1588, that Spenser obtained by 'purchase' the  
succession to the office of the Clerk of the  
Government Council of Munster. See Dr. Grosart's  
vol. i. p. 151.

{4} Dr. Birch refers in his note to *The Ancient and  
Present State of the County and City of Cork*, by  
Charles Smith, vol. i. book i. c. i. p. 58–63.  
Edit. Dublin 1750, 8vo. And Fiennes Moryson's  
*Itinerary*, part ii. p. 4.

{5} Todd proposes to regard this date as a printer's  
error for 1595, quite unnecessarily.

{6} Mr. Edward Edwards, 1868, I. c. vi.; see also  
*Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, vv. 312–319.

{7} 'My lord of Essex hath chased Mr. Raleigh from the  
court and confined him in Ireland.' Letter, dated  
August 17, 1589, from Captain Francis Allen to  
Antony Bacon, Esq. Quoted by Todd from Dr. Birch's  
*Memoirs of Queen Elizabeth*. See Mr. Edwards's  
*Life of Raleigh*, I. c. viii.

{8} See Raleigh's lines entitled 'A Vision upon this  
Concept of the *Faery Queene*,' prefixed to the  
*Faerie Queene*.

### CHAPTER III. 1590.

Thus after an absence of about nine years, Spenser returned for a time to England; he returned 'bringing his

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sheaves with him.' Whatever shadow of misunderstanding had previously come between his introducer or perhaps re-introducer and her Majesty seems to have been speedily dissipated. Raleigh presented him to the Queen, who, it would appear, quickly recognised his merits. 'That goddess'

To mine oaten pipe enclin'd her eare

That she thenceforth therein gan take delight,

And it desir'd at timely houres to heare

All were my notes but rude and roughly dight.

In the Registers of the Stationers' Company for 1589 occurs the following entry, quoted here from Mr. Arber's invaluable edition of them:

Primo Die Decembris. Master Ponsonbye.

Entered for his Copie a book intituled the fayre

Queene, dyposed into xii bookes &c. Authorysed

vnder thandes of the Archb. of Canterbery &bothe

the Wardens, vjd.

The letter of the author's prefixed to his poem 'expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke, which for that it giveth great light to the reader, for the better understanding is hereunto annexed,' addressed to 'Sir Walter Raleigh, Knight, Lord Wardein of the Stanneryes and her Maiesties lieftenaunt in the county of Cornewayll,' is dated January 23, 1589 that is, 1590, according to the New Style. Shortly afterwards, in 1590, according to both Old and New Styles, was published by William Ponsonby 'THE FAERIE QUEENE, Disposed into twelve books, Fashioning XII Morall vertues.' That day, which we spoke of as beginning to arise in 1579, now fully dawned. The silence of well nigh two centuries was now broken, not again to prevail, by mighty voices. During Spenser's absence in Ireland, William Shakspeare had come up from the country to London. The exact date of his advent it seems impossible to ascertain. Probably enough it was 1585; but it may have been a little later. We may, however, be fairly sure that by the time of Spenser's arrival in London in 1589, Shakspeare was already occupying a notable position in his profession as an actor; and what is more important, there can be little doubt he was already known not only as an actor, but as a play-writer. What he had already written was not comparable with what he was to write subsequently; but even those early dramas gave promise of splendid fruits to be thereafter yielded. In 1593 appeared *Venus and Adonis*; in the following year *Lucrece*; in 1595, Spenser's *Epithalamion*; in 1596, the second three books of the *Faerie Queene*; in 1597 *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Richard the Second*, and *King Richard the Third* were printed, and also Bacon's *Essays* and the first part of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*. During all these years various plays, of increasing power and beauty, were proceeding from Shakspeare's hands; by 1598 about half of his extant plays had certainly been composed. Early in 1599, he, who may be said to have ushered in this illustrious period, he whose radiance first dispersed the darkness and made the day begin to be, our poet Spenser, died. But the day did not die with him; it was then but approaching its noon, when he, one of its brightest suns, set. This day may be said to have fully broken in the year 1590, when the first instalment of the great work of Spenser's life made its appearance.

The three books were dedicated to the Queen. They were followed in the original edition are preceded in later editions first, by the letter to Raleigh above mentioned; then by six poetical pieces of a commendatory sort, written by friends of the poet by Raleigh who writes two of the pieces, by Harvey who now praises and



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well-wishes the poem he had discountenanced some years before, by 'R.S.,' by 'H.B.,' by 'W.L.:' lastly, by seventeen sonnets addressed by the poet to various illustrious personages; to Sir Christopher Hatton, to Lord Burghley, to the Earl of Essex, Lord Charles Howard, Lord Grey of Wilton, Lord Buckhurst, Sir Francis Walsingham, Sir John Norris, Knight, lord president of Munster, Sir Walter Raleigh, the Countess of Pembroke, and others. The excellence of the poem was at once generally perceived and acknowledged. Spenser had already, as we have seen, gained great applause by his *Shepherd's Calendar*, published some ten years before the coming out of his greater work. During these ten years he had resided out of England, as has been seen; but it is not likely his reputation had been languishing during his absence. Webbe in his *Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586, had contended 'that Spenser may well wear the garlande, and step before the best of all English poets.' The *Shepherd's Calendar* had been reprinted in 1581 and in 1586; probably enough, other works of his had been circulating in manuscript; the hopes of the country had been directed towards him; he was known to be engaged in the composition of a great poem. No doubt he found himself famous when he reached England on the visit suggested by Raleigh; he found a most eager expectant audience; and when at last his *Faerie Queene* appeared, it was received with the utmost delight and admiration. He was spoken of in the same year with its appearance as the new laureate. {1} In the spring of the following year he received a pension from the crown of 50\_l. per annum. Probably, however, then, as in later days, the most ardent appreciators of Spenser were the men of the same craft with himself the men who too, though in a different degree, or in a different kind, possessed the 'vision and the faculty divine.'

This great estimation of the *Faerie Queene* was due not only to the intrinsic charms of the poem to its exquisitely sweet melody, its intense pervading sense of beauty, its abundant fancifulness, its subtle spirituality but also to the time of its appearance. For then nearly two centuries no great poem had been written in the English tongue. Chaucer had died heirless. Occleve's lament over that great spirit's decease had not been made without occasion:

Alas my worthie maister honorable

This londis verray tresour and richesse

Deth by thy dethe hathe harm irreperable

Unto us done; hir vengeable duresse

Dispoiled hathe this londe of swetnesse

Of Rethoryk fro us; to Tullius

Was never man so like amonges us. {2}

And the doleful confession this orphaned rhymer makes for himself, might have been well made by all the men of his age in England:

My dere mayster, God his soule quite,

And fader Chaucer fayne would have me taught,

But I was dull, and learned lyte or naught.

No worthy scholar had succeeded the great master. The fifteenth century in England had abounded in movements of profound social and political interest in movements which eventually fertilised and enriched and ripened the mind of the nation; but, not unnaturally, the immediate literary results had been of no great value. In the reign of Henry VIII, the condition of literature, for various reasons, had greatly improved. Surrey and Wyatt had heralded

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the advent of a brighter era. From their time the poetical succession had never failed altogether. The most memorable name in our literature between their time and the *Faerie Queene* is that of Sackville, Lord Buckhurst a name of note in the history of both our dramatic and non-dramatic poetry. Sackville was capable of something more than lyrical essays. He it was who designed the *Mirror for Magistrates*. To that poem, important as compared with the poetry of its day, for its more pretentious conception, he himself contributed the two best pieces that form part of it the *Induction* and the *Complaint of Buckingham*. These pieces are marked by some beauties of the same sort as those which especially characterise Spenser; but they are but fragments; and in spirit they belong to an age which happily passed away shortly after the accession of Queen Elizabeth they are penetrated by that despondent tone which is so strikingly audible in our literature in the middle years of the sixteenth century, not surprisingly, if the general history of the time be considered. Meanwhile, our language had changed much, and Chaucer had grown almost unintelligible to the ordinary reader. Therefore, about the year 1590, the nation was practically without a great poem. At the same time, it then, if ever, truly needed one. Its power of appreciation had been quickened and refined by the study of the poetries of other countries; it had translated and perused the classical writers with enthusiasm; it had ardently pored over the poetical literature of Italy. Then its life had lately been ennobled by deeds of splendid courage crowned with as splendid success. In the year 1590, if ever, this country, in respect of its literary condition and in respect of its general high and noble excitement, was ready for the reception of a great poem.

Such a poem undoubtedly was the *Faerie Queene*, although it may perhaps be admitted that it was a work likely to win favour with the refined and cultured sections of the community rather than with the community at large. Strongly impressed on it as were the instant influences of the day, yet in many ways it was marked by a certain archaic character. It depicted a world the world of chivalry and romance which was departed; it drew its images, its forms of life, its scenery, its very language, from the past. Then the genius of our literature in the latter part of Queen Elizabeth's reign was emphatically dramatic; in the intense life of these years men longed for reality. Now the *Faerie Queene* is one long idealizing. These circumstances are to be accounted for partly by the character of Spenser's genius, partly by the fact already stated that chronologically Spenser is the earliest of the great spirits of his day. In truth he stands between two worlds: he belongs partly to the new time, partly to the old; he is the last of one age, he is the first of another; he stretches out one hand into the past to Chaucer, the other rests upon the shoulder of Milton.

### Footnotes

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{1} Nash's *Supplication of Pierce Pennilesse*, 1592.

{2} Skeat's *Specimens of English Literature*, p. 14.

## CHAPTER IV. 1591–1599.

It is easy to imagine how intensely Spenser enjoyed his visit to London. It is uncertain to what extent that visit was prolonged. He dates the dedication of his *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* 'from my house at Kilcolman, the 27 of December, 1591.' On the other hand, the dedication of his *Daphnida* is dated 'London this first of Januarie 1591,' that is 1592 according to our new style. Evidently there is some mistake here. Prof. Craik 'suspects' that in the latter instance 'the date January 1591' is used in the modern meaning; he quotes nothing to justify such a suspicion; but it would seem to be correct. Todd and others have proposed to alter the '1591' in the former instance to 1595, the year in which *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* was published, and with which the allusions made in the poem to contemporary writers agree; but this proposal is, as we shall see, scarcely tenable. The manner in which the publisher of the *Complaints*, 1591, of which publication we shall speak presently, introduces that work to the 'gentle reader,' seems to show that the poet was not at the time of the publishing easily accessible.

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He speaks of having endeavoured 'by all good meanes (for the better encrease and accomplishment of your delights) to get into my hands such small poems of the same authors, as I heard were disperst abroad in sundrie hands, and not easie to bee come by by himselfe; some of them having been diverslie imbeziled and purloyned from him since his departure ouer sea.' He says he understands Spenser 'wrote sundrie others' besides those now collected, 'besides some other Pamphlets looselie scattered abroad . . . which when I can either by himselfe or otherwise attaine too I meane likewise for your fauour sake to set foorth.' It may be supposed with much probability that Spenser returned to his Irish castle some time in 1591, in all likelihood after February, in which month he received the pension mentioned above, and on the other hand so as to have time to write the original draught of *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* before the close of December.

The reception of the *Faerie Queene* had been so favourable that in 1591 it would seem, as has been shown, after Spenser's departure the publisher of that poem determined to put forth what other poems by the same hand he could gather together. The result was a volume entitled '*Complaints, containing sundrie small Poemes of the Worlds Vanitie, whereof the next page maketh mention. By Ed. Sp.*' 'The next page' contains 'a note of the Sundrie Poemes contained in this volume:'

1. The Ruines of Time.
2. The Teares of the Muses.
3. Virgils Gnat.
4. Prosopopoeia or Mother Hubbards Tale.
5. The Ruines of Rome, by Bellay.
6. Muiopotmos or The Tale of the Butterflie.
7. Visions of the Worlds Vanitie.
8. Bellayes Visions.
9. Petrarches Visions.

In a short notice addressed to the Gentle Reader which follows the notice just referred to the publisher of the volume mentions other works by Spenser, and promises to publish them too 'when he can attain to' them. These works are *Ecclesiastes*, *The Seven Psalms*, and *Canticum Canticorum* these three no doubt translations of parts of the Old Testament *A Sennight Slumber*, *The State of Lovers*, the *Dying Pelican* doubtless the work mentioned, as has been seen, in one of Spenser's letters to Harvey *The Howers of the Lord*, and *The Sacrifice of a Sinner*. Many of these works had probably been passing from hand to hand in manuscript for many years. That old method of circulation survived the invention of the printing press for many generations. The perils of it may be illustrated from the fate of the works just mentioned. It would seem that the publisher never did attain to them; and they have all perished. With regard to the works which were printed and preserved, the *Ruines of Time*, as the Dedication shows, was written during Spenser's memorable visit of 1589–91 to England. It is in fact an elegy dedicated to the Countess of Pembroke, on the death of Sir Philip Sidney, 'that most brave Knight, your most noble brother deceased.' 'Sithens my late cumming into England,' the poet writes in the Epistle Dedicatorie, 'some friends of mine (which might much prevaile with me and indeede commaund me) knowing with howe straight bandes of duetie I was tied to him; as also bound unto that noble house (of which the chiefe hope then rested in him) have sought to revive them by upbraiding me; for that I have not shewed anie thankefull remembrance towards him or any of them; but suffer their names to sleepe in silence and forgetfulnesse. Whome chieflie to satisfie, or els to avoide that fowle blot of unthankfulnesse, I have conceived this small Poeme, intituled by a

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generall name of the *Worlds Ruines*: yet speciallie intended to the renouming of that noble race from which both you and he sprong, and to the eternizing of some of the chiefe of them late deceased.' This poem is written in a tone that had been extremely frequent during Spenser's youth. Its text is that ancient one 'Vanity of Vanities; all is Vanity' a very obvious text in all ages, but perhaps especially so, as has been hinted, in the sixteenth century, and one very frequently adopted at that time. This text is treated in a manner characteristic of the age. It is exemplified by a series of visions. The poet represents himself as seeing at Verulam an apparition of a woman weeping over the decay of that ancient town. This woman stands for the town itself. Of its whilome glories, she says, after a vain recounting of them,

They all are gone and with them is gone,

Ne ought to me remaines, but to lament

My long decay.

No one, she continues, weeps with her, no one remembers her,

Save one that maugre fortunes injurie

And times decay, and enuies cruell tort

Hath writ my record in true seeming sort.

Cambden the nourice of antiquitie,

And lanterne unto late succeeding age,

To see the light of simple veritie

Buried in ruines, through the great outrage

Of her owne people, led with warlike rage,

Cambden, though time all moniments obscure,

Yet thy just labours ever shall endure.

Then she rebukes herself for these selfish moanings by calling to mind how far from solitary she is in her desolation. She recalls to mind the great ones of the land who have lately fallen Leicester, and Warwick, and Sidney and wonders no longer at her own ruin. Is not *Transit Gloria* the lesson taught everywhere? Then other visions and emblems of instability are seen, some of them not darkly suggesting that what passes away from earth and apparently ends may perhaps be glorified elsewhere. The second of these collected poems *The Teares of the Muses* dedicated, as we have seen, to one of the poet's fair cousins, the Lady Strange, deplores the general intellectual condition of the time. It is doubtful whether Spenser fully conceived what a brilliant literary age was beginning about the year 1590. Perhaps his long absence in Ireland, the death of Sidney who was the great hope of England Spenser knew, the ecclesiastical controversies raging when he revisited England, may partly account for his despondent tone with reference to literature. He introduces each Muse weeping for the neglect and contempt suffered by her respective province. He who describes these tears was himself destined to dry them; and Shakspeare, who, if anyone, was to make the faces of the Muses blithe and bright, was now rapidly approaching his prime. There can be little doubt that at a later time Spenser was acquainted with Shakspeare; for Spenser was an intimate friend of the Earl of Essex; Shakspeare was an intimate friend of the Earl of Southampton, who was one of

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the most attached friends of that Earl of Essex. And a personal acquaintance with Shakspeare may have been one of the most memorable events of Spenser's visit to London in 1589. We would gladly think that Thalia in the *Teares of the Muses* refers in the following passage to Shakspeare: the comic stage, she says, is degraded,

And he the man whom Nature selfe had made

To mock herselfe and Truth to imitate,

With kindly counter under Mimick shade,

Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late;

With whom all joy and jolly meriment

Is also deaded and in dolour drent.

The context shows that by 'dead' is not meant physical death, but that

That same gentle spirit, from whose pen

Large streames of honnie and sweete nectar flowe,

produces nothing, sits idle-handed and silent, rather than pander to the grosser tastes of the day. But this view, attractive as it is, can perhaps hardly be maintained. Though the *Teares of the Muses* was not published, as we have seen, till 1591, it was probably written some years earlier, and so before the star of Shakspeare had arisen. Possibly by Willy is meant Sir Philip Sidney, a favourite haunt of whose was his sister's house at Wilton on the river Wiley or Willey, and who had exhibited some comic power in his masque, *The Lady of May*, acted before the Queen in 1578. Some scholars, however, take 'Willy' to denote John Lily. Thus the passage at present remains dark. If written in 1590, it certainly cannot mean Sidney, who had been dead some years; just possibly, but not probably, it might in that case mean Shakspeare.

Of the remaining works published in his *Complaints*, the only other one of recent composition is *Muiopotmos*, which, as Prof. Craik suggests, would seem to be an allegorical narrative of some matter recently transpired. It is dated 1590, but nothing is known of any earlier edition than that which appears in the *Complaints*. Of the other pieces by far the most interesting is *Prosopopoia, or Mother Hubbards Tale*, not only because it is in it, as has been said, Spenser most carefully, though far from successfully, imitates his great master Chaucer, but for its intrinsic merit for its easy style, its various incidents, its social pictures. In the dedication he speaks of it as 'These my idle labours; which having *long sithens composed in the raw conceipt of my youth*, I lately amongst other papers lighted upon, and was by others, which liked the same, mooved to set them foorth.' However long before its publication the poem in the main was written, possibly some additions were made to it in or about the year 1590; as for instance, the well-known passage describing 'a suitor's state,' which reflects too clearly a bitter personal experience to have been composed before Spenser had grown so familiar with the Court as he became during his visit to England under Raleigh's patronage. But it is conceivable that his experiences in 1578 and 1579 inspired the lines in question.

The remaining pieces in the *Complaints* consist of translations or imitations, composed probably some years before, though probably in some cases, as has been shown, revised or altogether recast.

Probably in the same year with the *Complaints* that is in 1591 was published *Daphnida*, {1} 'an Elegie upon the death of the noble and vertuous Douglas Howard, daughter and heire of Henry Lord Howard, Viscount Byndon, and wife of Arthur Georges, Esquire.' This elegy was no doubt written before Spenser returned to

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Ireland. It is marked by his characteristic diffuseness, abundance, melody.

Certainly before the close of the year 1591 Spenser found himself once more in his old castle of Kilcolman. A life at Court could never have suited him, however irksome at times his isolation in Ireland may have seemed. When his friends wondered at his returning unto

This barrein soyle,

Where cold and care and penury do dwell,

Here to keep sheepe with hunger and with toyle,

he made the answer that he,

Whose former dayes

Had in rude fields bene altogether spent,

Durst not adventure such unknowen wayes,

Nor trust the guile of fortunes blandishment;

But rather chose back to my sheepe to tourne,

Whose utmost hardnesse I before had tryde,

Then, having learnd repentance late, to mourne

Emongst those wretches which I there descryde.

That life, with all its intrigues and self-seeking and scandals, had no charms for him. Once more settled in his home, he wrote an account of his recent absence from it, which he entitled *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*. This poem was not published till 1595; but, whatever additions were subsequently made to it, there can be no doubt it was originally written immediately after his return to Ireland. Sitting in the quiet to which he was but now restored, he reviewed the splendid scenes he had lately witnessed; he recounted the famous wits he had met, and the fair ladies he had seen in the great London world; and dedicated this exquisite diary to the friend who had introduced him into that brilliant circle. It would seem that Raleigh had accused him of indolence. That ever-restless schemer could not appreciate the poet's dreaminess. 'That you may see,' writes Spenser, 'that I am not alwaies ydle as yee think, though not greatly well occupied, nor altogether undutifull, though not precisely officious, I make you present of this simple pastorall, unworthie of your higher conceipt for the meanesse of the stile, but agreeing with the truth in circumstance and matter. The which I humbly beseech you to accept in part of paiment of the infinite debt in which I acknowledge myselfe bounden unto you for your singular favours and sundrie good turnes shewed to me at my late being in England, &c.'

The conclusion of this poem commemorates, as we have seen, Spenser's enduring affection for that Rosalind who so many years before had turned away her ears from his suit. It must have been some twelve months after those lines were penned, that the writer conceived an ardent attachment for one Elizabeth. The active research of Dr. Grosart has discovered that this lady belonged to the Boyle family a family already of importance and destined to be famous. The family seat was at Kilcoran, near Youghal, and so we understand Spenser's singing of 'The sea that neighbours to her near.' Thus she lived in the same county with her poet. The whole course of the wooing and the winning is portrayed in the *Amoretti or Sonnets* and the *Epithalamium*. It may be gathered from these

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biographically and otherwise interesting pieces, that it was at the close of the year 1592 that the poet was made a captive of that beauty he so fondly describes. The first three sonnets would seem to have been written in that year. The fourth celebrates the beginning of the year 1593 the beginning according to our modern way of reckoning. All through that year 1593 the lover sighed, beseeched, adored, despaired, prayed again. Fifty-eight sonnets chronicle the various hopes and fears of that year. The object of his passion remained as steel and flint, while he wept and wailed and pleaded. His life was a long torment.

In vaine I seeke and sew to her for grace

And doe myne humbled hart before her poure;

The whiles her foot she in my necke doth place

And tread my life downe in the lowly floure.

In Lent she is his 'sweet saynt,' and he vows to find some fit service for her.

Her temple fayre is built within my mind

In which her glorious image placed is.

But all his devotion profited nothing, and he thinks it were better 'at once to die.' He marvels at her cruelty. He cannot address himself to further composition of his great poem. The accomplishment of that great work were

Sufficient werke for one man's simple head,

All were it, as the rest, but rudely writ.

How then should I, without another wit,

Thinck ever to endure so tedious toyle?

Sith that this one is tost with troublous fit

Of a proud love that doth my spirit spoyle.

He falls ill in his body too. When the anniversary of his being carried into captivity comes round, he declares, as has already been quoted, that the year just elapsed has appeared longer than all the forty years of his life that had preceded it (sonnet 60). In the beginning of the year 1594,

After long stormes and tempests sad assay

Which hardly I endured hertofore

In dread of death and daungerous dismay

With which my silly bark was tossed sore,

he did 'at length descry the happy shore.' The heart of his mistress softened towards him. The last twenty-five sonnets are for the most part the songs of a lover accepted and happy. It would seem that by this time he had completed three more books of the *Faerie Queene*, and he asks leave in sonnet 70,

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In pleasant mew

To sport my Muse and sing my loves sweet praise,

The contemplation of whose heavenly hew

My spirit to an higher pitch doth raise.

Probably the Sixth Book was concluded in the first part of the year 1594, just after his long wooing had been crowned with success. In the tenth canto of that book he introduces the lady of his love, and himself 'piping' unto her. In a rarely pleasant place on a fair wooded hill-top Calidore sees the Graces dancing, and Colin Clout piping merrily. With these goddesses is a fourth maid; it is to her alone that Colin pipes:

Pype, jolly shepheard, pype thou now apace

Unto thy love that made thee low to lout;

Thy love is present there with thee in place;

Thy love is there advaunst to be another Grace.

Of this fourth maid the poet, after sweetly praising the daughters of sky-ruling Jove, sings in this wise:

Who can aread what creature mote she bee;

Whether a creature or a goddesse graced

With heavenly gifts from heven first enraced?

But what so sure she was, she worthy was

To be the fourth with those three other placed,

Yet she was certes but a countrey lasse;

Yet she all other countrey lasses farre did passe.

So farre, as doth the daughter of the day

All other lesser lights in light excell;

So farre doth she in beautyfull array

Above all other lasses beare the bell;

Ne lesse in vertue that beseems her well

Doth she exceede the rest of all her race.

The phrase 'country lass' in this rapturous passage has been taken to signify that she to whom it applied was of mean origin; but it scarcely bears this construction. Probably all that is meant is that her family was not connected



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with the Court or the Court circle. She was not high-born; but she was not low-born. The final sonnets refer to some malicious reports circulating about him, and to some local separation between the sonneteer and his mistress. This separation was certainly ended in the June following his acceptance that is, the June of 1594; for in that month, on St. Barnabas' day, that is, on the 11th, Spenser was married. This event Spenser celebrates in the finest, the most perfect of all his poems, in the most beautiful of all bridal songs in his *Epithalamion*. He had many a time sung for others; he now bade the Muses crown their heads with garlands and help him his own love's praises to resound:

So I unto my selfe alone will sing,

The woods shall to me answer, and my echo ring.

Then, with the sweetest melody and a refinement and grace incomparable, he sings with a most happy heart of various matters of the marriage day of his love's waking, of the merry music of the minstrels, of her coming forth in all the pride of her visible loveliness, of that 'inward beauty of her lively spright' which no eyes can see, of her standing before the altar, her sad eyes still fastened on the ground, of the bringing her home, of the rising of the evening star, and the fair face of the moon looking down on his bliss not unfavourably, as he would hope. The *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* were registered at the Stationers' Hall on the 19th of November following the marriage. They were published in 1595, Spenser as appears from the 'Dedication' of them to Sir Robert Needham, written by the printer Ponsonby being still absent from England.

Meanwhile the poet had been vexed by other troubles besides those of a slowly requited passion. Mr. Hardiman,{2} in his *Irish Minstrelsy*, has published three petitions presented in 1593 to the Lord Chancellor of Ireland by Maurice, Lord Roche, Viscount Fermoy, two against 'one Edmond Spenser, gentleman', one against one Joan Ny Callaghan who is said to act 'by supportation and maintenance of Edmond Spenser, gentleman, a heavy adversary to your suppliant.' 'Where,' runs the first petition, 'one Edmond Spenser, gentleman, hath lately exhibited suit against your suppliant for three ploughlands, parcels of Shanballymore (your suppliant's inheritance) before the Vice-President and Council of Munster, which land hath been heretofore decreed for your suppliant against the said Spenser and others under whom he conveyed; and nevertheless for that the said Spenser, being Clerk of the Council in the said province, and did assign his office unto one Nicholas Curteys among other agreements with covenant that during his life he should be free in the said office for his causes, by occasion of which immunity he doth multiply suits against your suppliant in the said province upon pretended title of others &c.' The third petition averred that 'Edmond Spenser of Kilcolman, gentleman, hath entered into three ploughlands, parcel of Ballingerath, and disseised your suppliant thereof, and continueth by countenance and greatness the possession thereof, and maketh great waste of the wood of the said land, and converteth a great deal of corn growing thereupon to his proper use, to the damage of the complainant of two hundred pounds sterling. Whereunto,' continues the document, which is preserved in the Original Rolls Office, 'the said Edmond Spenser appearing in person had several days prefixed unto him peremptorily to answer, which he neglected to do.' Therefore 'after a day of grace given,' on the 12th of February, 1594, Lord Roche was decreed the possession. Perhaps the absence from his lady love referred to in the concluding sonnets was occasioned by this litigation. Perhaps also the 'false forged lyes' the malicious reports circulated about him referred to in Sonnet 85, may have been connected with these appeals against him. It is clear that all his dreams of Faerie did not make him neglectful of his earthly estate. Like Shakspeare, like Scott, Spenser did not cease to be a man of the world we use the phrase in no unkindly sense because he was a poet. He was no mere visionary, helpless in the ordinary affairs of life. In the present case it would appear that he was even too keen in looking after his own interests. Professor Craik charitably suggests that his poverty 'rather than rapacity may be supposed to have urged whatever of hardness there was in his proceedings.' It is credible enough that these proceedings made him highly unpopular with the native inhabitants of the district, and that they were not forgotten when the day of reckoning came. 'His name,' says Mr. Hardiman, on the authority of *Trotter's Walks in Ireland*,{3} 'is still remembered in the vicinity of Kilcolman; but the people entertain no sentiments of respect or affection for his memory.'

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In the same year with the *Amoretti* was published *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, several additions having been made to the original version.

Probably at the close of this year 1595 Spenser a second time crossed to England, accompanied, it may be supposed, by his wife, carrying with him in manuscript the second three books of his *Faerie Queene*, which, as we have seen, were completed before his marriage, and also a prose work, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. Mr. Collier quotes the following entry from the Stationers' Register:

20 die Januarii [1595]. Mr. Ponsonby. Entred

&c. The Second Part of the Faerie Queene, cont.

the 4, 5, and 6 bookes, vj\_d.

This second instalment which was to be the last of his great poem was duly published in that year. The *View of the Present State of Ireland* was not registered till April 1598, and then only conditionally. It was not actually printed till 1633. During his stay in England he wrote the *Hymns to Heavenly Love and Heavenly Beauty*, and the *Prothalamion*, which were to be his last works.

More than four years had elapsed since Spenser had last visited London. During that period certain memorable works had been produced; the intellectual power of that day had expressed itself in no mean manner. When he arrived in London towards the close of the year 1595, he would find Shakspeare splendidly fulfilling the promise of his earlier days; he would find Ben Jonson just becoming known to fame; he would find Bacon already drawing to him the eyes of his time. Spenser probably spent the whole of the year 1596, and part of 1597, in England. In 1597 appeared, as has already been said, the first part of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, and Bacon's *Essays*, and also Jonson's *Every Man in His Own Humour*.

The reigning favourite at this time was the Earl of Essex. In 1596 his successful descent upon Cadiz raised him to the zenith of his fame. With this nobleman Spenser was on terms of intimacy. At his London house in the Strand a house which had previously been inhabited by Spenser's earlier patron, the Earl of Leicester it stood where Essex Street now is, and is still represented by the two pillars which stand at the bottom of that street Spenser no doubt renewed his friendship with Shakspeare. This intimacy with Essex, with whatever intellectual advantages it may have been attended, with whatever bright spirits it may have brought Spenser acquainted, probably impeded his prospects of preferment. There can be no doubt that one of the motives that brought him to England was a desire to advance his fortunes. Camden describes him as always poor. His distaste for his residence in Ireland could not but have been aggravated by his recent legal defeat. But he looked in vain for further preferment. He had fame, and to spare, and this was to suffice. It was during this sojourn in England that he spoke of himself, as we have seen, as one

Whom sullein care

Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay

In Princes court and expectation vayne

Of idle hopes which still doe fly away

Like empty shaddows, did afflict my brayne.

The publication of the second three books of the *Faerie Queene*, with a re-impression of the first three books, placed him on the highest pinnacle of fame. Its plentiful references to passing events its adumbrations of the

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history of the time however it might damage the permanent value of the work from an artistic point of view, increased its immediate popularity. How keenly these references were appreciated appears from the anxiety of the Scotch King to have the poet prosecuted for his picture of Duessa, in whom Mary Queen of Scots was generally recognised. 'Robert Bowes, the English ambassador in Scotland, writing to Lord Burghley from Edinburgh 12th November, 1596, states that great offence was conceived by the King against Edmund Spenser for publishing in print, in the second part of the *Faery Queen*, ch. 9, some dishonourable effects, as the King deemed, against himself and his mother deceased. Mr. Bowes states that he had satisfied the King as to the privilege under which the book was published, yet he still desired that Edmund Spenser for this fault might be tried and punished. It further appears, from a letter from George Nicolson to Sir Robert Cecil, dated Edinburgh, 25 February, 1597–8, that Walter Quin, an Irishman, was answering Spenser's book, whereat the King was offended.'

The *View of the Present State of Ireland*, written dialogue-wise between Eudoxus and Iren{ae}us, though not printed, as has been said, till 1633, seems to have enjoyed a considerable circulation in a manuscript form. There are manuscript copies of this tractate at Cambridge, at Dublin, at Lambeth, and in the British Museum. It is partly antiquarian, partly descriptive, partly political. It exhibits a profound sense of the unsatisfactory state of the country a sense which was presently to be justified in a frightful manner. Spenser had not been deaf to the ever-growing murmurs of discontent by which he and his countrymen had been surrounded. He was not in advance of his time in the policy he advocates for the administration of Ireland. He was far from anticipating that policy of conciliation whose triumphant application it may perhaps be the signal honour of our own day to achieve. The measures he proposes are all of a vigorously repressive kind; they are such measures as belong to a military occupancy, not to a statesmanly administration. He urges the stationing numerous garrisons; he is for the abolishing native customs. Such proposals won a not unfavourable hearing at that time. They have been admired many a time since.

It is to this work of Spenser's that Protector Cromwell alludes in a letter to his council in Ireland, in favour of William Spenser, grandson of Edmund Spenser, from whom an estate of lands in the barony of Fermoy, in the county of Cork, descended on him. 'His grandfather,' he writes, 'was that Spenser who, by his writings touching the reduction of the Irish to civility, brought on him the odium of that nation; and for those works and his other good services Queen Elizabeth conferred on him that estate which the said William Spenser now claims.'

Spenser dates the dedication of his *Hymns* from Greenwich, September 1, 1596. Of these four hymns, two had been in circulation for some years, though now for the first time printed; the other two now first appeared. 'Having in the greener times of my youth,' he writes, 'composed these former two hymnes in the praise of love and beautie, and finding that the same too much pleased those of like age and disposition, which being too vehemently caried with that kind of affection, do rather sucke out poyson to their strong passion than hony to their honest delight, I was moved by one of you two most excellent ladies [the ladies Margaret, Countess of Cumberland, Mary, Countess of Warwick] to call in the same; but unable so to doe, by reason that many copies thereof were formerly scattered abroad, I resolved at least to amend, and by way of retraction to reforme them, making (instead of those two hymnes of earthly or naturall love and beautie) two others of heavenly and celestiall.' This passage is interesting for the illustration it provides of Spenser's popularity. It is also highly interesting, if the poems themselves be read in the light of it, as showing the sensitive purity of the poet's nature. It is difficult to conceive how those 'former hymns' should in any moral respect need amending. The moralising and corrective purpose with which the two latter were written perhaps diminished their poetical beauty; but the themes they celebrate are such as Spenser could not but ever descant upon with delight; they were such as were entirely congenial to his spirit. He here set forth special teachings of his great master Plato, and abandoned himself to the high spiritual contemplations he loved. But perhaps the finest of these four hymns is the second that in honour of Beauty. Beauty was indeed the one worship of Spenser's life not mere material beauty not 'the goodly hew of white and red with which the cheekes are sprinkled,' or 'the sweete rosy leaves so fairly spred upon the lips,' or 'that golden wyre,' or 'those sparckling stars so bright,' but that inner spiritual beauty, of which fair hair and bright eyes are but

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external expressions.

So every spirit, as it is most pure

And hath in it the more of heavenly light,

So it the fairer bodie doth procure

To habit in, and it more fairely dight

With chearfull grace and amiable sight;

For of the soule the bodie forme doth take,

For soule is forme and doth the bodie make.

This hymn is one of high refined rapture.

Before the close of the year 1596 Spenser wrote and published the *Prothalamion* or 'A spousall verse made in honour of the double marriage of the two honourable and vertuous ladies, the ladie Elizabeth, and the ladie Katherine Somerset, daughters to the right honourable the Earle of Worcester, and espoused to the two worthie gentlemen, M. Henry Gilford and M. William Peter Esquyers.' It was composed after the return of Essex from Spain, for he is introduced in the poem as then residing at his house in the Strand. It is a poem full of grace and beauty, and of matchless melodiousness.

This is the last complete poem Spenser wrote. No doubt he entertained the idea of completing his *Faerie Queene*; and perhaps it was after 1596 that he composed the two additional cantos, which are all, so far as is known, that he actually wrote. But the last poem completed and published in his lifetime was the *Prothalamion*.

This second visit to England at last came to an end. It was probably in 1597 that he returned once more to Kilcolman. In the following year he was recommended by her Majesty for Sheriff of Cork. But his residence in Ireland was now to be rudely terminated.

The Irishry had, ever since the suppression of Desmond's rebellion in 1582, been but waiting for another opportunity to rise, that suppression not having brought pacification in its train. In the autumn of 1598 broke out another of these fearful insurrections, of which the history of English rule in Ireland is mainly composed.

In the September of that year Spenser was at the zenith of his prosperity. In that month arrived the letter recommending his appointment to be Sheriff of Cork. It seems legitimate to connect this mark of royal favour with the fact that at the beginning of the preceding month Lord Burghley had deceased. The great obstructor of the Queen's bounty was removed, and Spenser might hope that now, at last, the hour of his prosperity was come. So far as is known, his domestic life was serene and happy. The joys of the husband had been crowned with those of the father. Two sons, as may be gathered from the names given to them they were christened Sylvanus and Peregrine had been by this time born to him; according to Sir William Betham, who drew up a pedigree of Spenser's family, another son and a daughter had been born between the birth of Sylvanus and that of Peregrine. Then he was at this time the recognised prince of living poets. The early autumn of 1598 saw him in the culminating enjoyment of all these happinesses.

In October the insurgents burst roughly in upon his peace. No doubt his occupation of the old castle of Desmond had ever been regarded with fierce jealousy. While he had dreamed his dreams and sung his songs in the valley, there had been curses muttered against him from the hills around. At last the day of vengeance came. The

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outraged natives rushed down upon Kilcolman; the poet and his family barely made their escape; his home was plundered and burned. According to Ben Jonson, in the conversation with Drummond, quoted above, not all his family escaped; one little child, new born, perished in the flames. But, indeed, the fearfulness of this event needs no exaggeration. In profound distress Spenser arrived once more in London, bearing a despatch from Sir Thomas Norreys, President of Munster, to the Secretary of State, and of course himself full of direct and precise information as to the Irish tumult, having also drawn up an address to the Queen on the subject. Probably, the hardships and horrors he had undergone completely prostrated him. On January 16, 1599, he died in Westminster. As to the exact place, a manuscript note found by Brand, the well-known antiquary, on the title-page of a copy of the second edition of the *Faerie Queene*, though not of indisputable value, may probably enough be accepted, and it names King Street. Ben Jonson says, 'he died for lack of bread;' but this must certainly be an exaggeration. No doubt he returned to England 'inops' in a state of poverty as Camden says; but it is impossible to believe that he died of starvation. His friend Essex and many another were ready to minister to his necessities if he needed their ministry. Jonson's story is that he 'refused twenty pieces sent him by my lord Essex, and said he was sure he had no time to spend them.' This story, if it is anything more than a mere vulgar rumour, so far as it shows anything, shows that he was in no such very extreme need of succour. Had his destitution been so complete, he would have accepted the pieces for his family, even though 'he had no time to spend them himself.' It must be remembered that he was still in receipt of a pension from the crown; a pension of no very considerable amount, perhaps, but still large enough to satisfy the pangs of hunger. But numerous passages might be quoted to show that he died in somewhat straitened circumstances.

It was said, some thirty-four years after Spenser's death, that in his hurried flight from Ireland the remaining six books of the *Faerie Queene* were lost. But it is very unlikely that those books were ever completed. {6} Perhaps some fragments of them may have perished in the flames at Kilcolman certainly only two cantos have reached us. These were first printed in 1611, when the first six books were republished. The general testimony of his contemporaries is that his song was broken off in the midst. Says Browne in his *Britannia's Pastorals* (Book ii. s. 1):

But ere he ended his melodious song,

An host of angels flew the cloud among,

And rapt this swan from his attentive mates

To make him one of their associates

In heaven's faire choir.

One S. A. Cokain writes:

If, honour'd Colin, thou hadst lived so long

As to have finished thy Fairy song,

Not only mine but all tongues would confess,

Thou hadst exceeded old M{ae}onides.

He was buried near Chaucer by his own wish, it is said in Westminster Abbey, 'poetis funus ducentibus,' with poets following him to the grave bearing the pall, as we might say the Earl of Essex furnishing the funeral expenses, according to Camden. It would seem from a passage in Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* 'that the Queen ordered a monument to be erected over him, but that the money was otherwise appropriated by one of her agents.'

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The present monument, restored in 1778, was erected by Anne, Countess of Dorset, in 1620.

His widow married again before 1603, as we learn from a petition presented to the Lord Chancellor of Ireland in that year, in which Sylvanus sues to recover from her and her husband Roger Seckerstone certain documents relating to the paternal estate. She was again a widow in 1606. Till a very recent time there were descendants of Spenser living in the south of Ireland.

1869 JOHN W. HALES.

Revised 1896.

### Footnotes

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{1} This poem is in this volume reprinted from the edition of 1591. Mr. Morris thinks that Todd was not aware of this edition. Mr. Collier reprinted from the 2nd edition that of 1593.

{2} *Irish Minstrelsy; or, Bardic Remains of Ireland*, by J. Hardiman. London, 1831.

{3} 'The name and occupation of Spenser is handed down traditionally among them (the Irish); but they seem to entertain no sentiments of respect or affection for his memory; the bard came in rather ungracious times, and the keen recollections of this untutored people are wonderful.' Trotter's *Walks through Ireland in the Years 1812, 1814, and 1817*. London, 1819, p. 302.

{4} Cooper's *Athen. Cantab.*

{5} See Mr. Edwards's *Life of Raleigh*, vol. i. p. 128.

{6} No doubt he intended to complete his work. See book vi. canto v. st. 2:

'When time shall be to tell the same;'

but this time never was.