

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Chivalric Courtesy

It has often been noticed that even the minor and socially inferior characters of Shakespeare sometimes show a flash of imaginative activity. The porter in Macbeth, without any apparent mental strain, can elevate himself to the position of Hell's watchman and assume the authority of that dignitary. The fact only reveals his aspiring self-consciousness and ambition. The grave-diggers in Hamlet can stretch their imagination to the days of Adam in order to uphold the dignity of their profession and cite the scripture in support to their argument :

First clown : Come my spade. There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners, ditchers and grave-makers; they hold up Adam's profession.

Second clown : Was he a gentleman ?

First clown : He was the first that bore arms.

Second clown : Why, he had none.

First clown : What, art a heathen ? How dost thou understand the scriptures ? The scripture says, Adam digged; Could he dig without arms ?

(Hamlet : V.i.30-39)¹

They are clowning; but they are very typical Elizabethan men of the working class. Even in their foolery we find that they must find dignity in their work, because they are socially ambitious, self-conscious aspirants to the status of a gentleman. The question that the second clown asks is relevant : "Was Adam a gentleman ?"

Someone answered the question a long long time after Adam :

" When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then a gentleman ?"

¹ The Works of William Shakespeare : The Shakespeare Head Press Edition published by the Oxford University Press, 1938. All the quotations from the plays of Shakespeare in this essay are taken from this edition.

There could not have been one, because the development of the idea of gentility must have been a very slow and painful process and it must have taken centuries to evolve even a workable definition of a gentleman. Yet the grave-digger, with all his clowning, has given one very important mark of a gentleman which survived time until recently; perhaps it has not quite disappeared even now - that he must bear arms. Whenever it was born, as a mark of personal excellence, it lived through the age of Greek Philosophy and Roman Oratory, germanic culture and christianity of the Middle Ages. Other qualities seem to have been added or discarded age after age in search of a perfect ideal of human excellence, and it is not certain that the process even now has ended.

In England the idea can be traced to the Anglo-Saxon sagas. When the Germanic race came to inhabit Britain, it brought with it legends and songs of high adventure and valour. From their tradition evolved the strange, epical, romantic Beowulf, Sad, as the Anglo-Saxon literature on the whole is, with a strain of melancholy running through it, it is full of staggering deeds of adventure and valour. It illustrates the idea of a

hero who must excel in physical strength and skill in arms. With all its sadness, might of arms is the dominating note of the Anglo-Saxon literature; yet critics have found in it a certain strain of courtesy, in the conversation in the beer hall of the Anglo-Saxon warrior and in the overall impression which that literature leaves.¹ In the ^{mead} beer hall must the warrior have learnt the gentler arts of life, and come to cultivate the strength which is expressed in gentleness.² One of the remarkable virtues of Beowulf is his gentleness in the beer hall. Routh finds in the hero something more than strength of arms. "The poet of Beowulf seems to have ^{been} possessed of two ideas. One, that it was now possible to imagine a hero who passed from one country to another, glorious in arms, princely at the banquet, honoured by his peers and yet employed in something nobler and higher than bloodshed".³ Yet the passages

¹ "The impression left by Beowulf, when the carping critic has done his worst is that of a noble manner of life, of courtesy and freedom, with the dignity of tragedy attending to it, even though the poet fails or does not attempt, to work out fully any proper tragic theme of his own". W.P. Ker : Medieval English Literature. pp. 23-24.

² H.V. Routh : God, Man and Epic Poetry, Vol. II, Medieval, pp.11-12.

³ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

in Beowulf "in which men deal with each other at greetings, speeches, entertainments, and the exchange of courtesies", though "spirited and dignified, are not the finest parts of the poem."¹

Yet this literature with its brilliant moments in the time of Alfred and afterwards at that of Saint Dunstan, fell gradually into decay, without leaving any visible marks of influence on the way of living in the times that followed. Courage and skill in wielding arms and the practice of the chief gathering retainers round him are the two aspects of Anglo-Saxon ways that seem to have survived and influenced later ages, more than the tone of gentleness in Anglo-Saxon literature which critics have appreciated. The retinue of the feudal lord during a later period after the conquest was made up of the sons of the nobility and even of the gentry who were employed as pages and retainers. This practice in the early stages of the feudal times formed the 'nurture' of the sons of the nobility in England and was for a time an essential part of the education they received. This way of 'nurture' was in course of time responsible for the publication and popularity of

4. Routh, H.V. : Op.cit., pp. 16-17.

the courtesy books,¹ whose contents bore little relation to the ideal of chivalry but dealt mainly with table manners and the behaviour of the retainer to his lord.

Change in the ideal of excellence accrued after the Norman conquerors had settled in Britain. The conquerors who came from Normandy, from Anjou, from all the provinces of France, brought with them a new outlook on life and a new spirit in literature. They helped to banish the brooding melancholic strain of the Anglo-Saxon sagas, replacing it with gaiety, wit and sunshine of the south. Irrepressible in their 'entrain', noisy and inveterate talkers, they were fond of stories of chivalry, full of marvellous physical exploits and cheerfulness. "The numberless epics in which they delighted", says Jusserand, "had no resemblance with the Beowulf of old. These stories were no longer filled with mere deeds of valour, but also with acts of courtesy. They were full of love and tenderness. Even in more germanic of their poems, in Roland, the hero is shaken by emotions and is seen

¹ Such courtesy books had become popular all over feudal Europe. Erasmus later systematised the contents of such books in his De Civilitate Morum Puerilium. The work influenced later literature on the subject. Gentlefolk in the Making. p.18.

shedding tears"¹. The new hero performs marvellous deeds of valour; like the Anglo-Saxon warrior, he can subdue giants and kill monsters, lay siege to castles, put traitors to death, deceive the enchanters of evil practice; but unlike the old warrior, he is unable to conquer his own passions and desires. The Norman's preference for cheerfulness and things emotional made popular the chivalric romances which poured into England from across the Continent. A new genre of literature is found attracting popularity in England after the Conquest, full of southern inventions and gaieties, and loves and follies. The courtly romances and the tales of chivalry which were produced everywhere in Europe were the ideal for the English writers to follow. If they could not write for a time, they translated. This brought into vogue in course of time, particularly under the impact of the Renaissance, writings of tales and novels of a type which finally culminated in the romances of Lyly, Greene, Lodge and above all the Arcadia of Sidney.²

¹ Jusserand : The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare. p.34.

² It is significant that Malory's Morte D'Arthur was one of the first works Caxton printed : for "herein", as he said, "may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtues and sin". Caxton's Preface. p.xvii in the Works of Sir Thomas Malory. Ed. by Eugene Vinaver.

Military needs made personal courage, physical prowess and skill in handling arms the distinctive marks of man's excellence in the early feudal ages. These are the qualities of all the heroes of the medieval chivalric romances, of Roland, Launcelot and Arthur. But the need for the Norman temperament to satisfy the urges of the heart, to see their passions and desires fulfilled, brought into literature a new order of ideals. Physical prowess is now sought to be blended with the urges of the emotions in the new idea of excellence. This requirement seems to have helped popularise in literature the ideal of love which, with the passage of time, was to hold the poets and writers of romances so as to make it the prime spirit, the vita nuova of literature. This regard for feelings was also to help build that ideal of courtesy which has as its prerequisite a feeling for others and consideration of their state.

The powerful medieval Church, however, exerted a potent influence on every thing that concerned the life and literature of the period. Upon the mere play of passions, medieval Christianity wielded a remarkable restraint. The man of arms is now conscious of the urges of his feelings and at the same time finds

himself required by religion to accord his actions to the necessity of man's relation to God, particularly to purge himself of the evils which came from Original Sin. In the first place, he had to assume humility and accept the worthlessness of human life. The ideal of human excellence accordingly enlarges itself and the human hero comes to imbibe a wider range of qualities than was hitherto necessary for him to possess. Routh thus assesses the influence of Christianity on the concept of human excellence: "When we come to Ousín, the perfect king, we find that he had all the greatness of a warrior and besides, the new found Christian virtue of humility"¹; and

" The Homeric warriors who received divine help rose to the height by ambition and self-confidence. The northern pagans aspired to become supermen by the knowledge and application of runes and by wisdom to be learnt from birds and serpents. With the Christian, it was generally the sense of utter worthlessness, the consciousness of evil or the fear of God's wrath..... In fact the chieftains who accepted the cross often

¹ H.V. Routh : God, Man and Epic Poetry, Vol.II. p. 69.

ended by resigning their worldly state. Eorwend, the Christian, became a hermit in old age. So did As-wolf his grandson"¹.

As the influence of Christianity spread, religious morality came to be more and more insisted upon. Virtue came to be regarded as important as courage and skill in arms in the standard of excellence. The creative activity of the poet and the story-teller was conditioned to ethical tenets which brought about a restraint upon the free delineation of emotions and carnal passions. The literary artist found himself in a quandary, says Routh :

" The advent of Christianity prevented the poet and story-teller with a choice of careers. He could stay at the court of some half-converted, or wholly pagan king, and keep alive the aggressive and domineering spirit of the chieftain's followers with his tales of strength and daring. Or he could enter some monastery and after learning the vanity of trusting the carnal weapons, might discover that the miracles brought by Christian piety and holiness were the chief glory of human nature whichever his mode of life

¹ H.V. Routh : Op.cit., p.77.

he must have realised that it did not stand supreme. The dream of human excellence and power had to be shared between two opposite ideals..... So, for a while atleast in hopes and ideals the knight and the cenobite stood together¹.

The courtly romances of the middle ages treat of these hopes and ideals. The knight, who has now become the standard of excellence, must combine his valour with virtues prescribed by religion. He has to be brave and humble, pious and god-fearing; he should have pity, piety and courtesy. In course of time even the last mentioned knightly quality, which in the ordinary sense, should mean polite behaviour and consideration for others, came to be regarded as a religious virtue and was set-off against one of the seven deadly sins - envy². This only shows how far religion had influenced the fashioning of ideals even in literature.

¹ H.V. Routh : Op.cit., p.154.

² Salzman in his English Life in the Middle Ages reproduces a picture from a Paris manuscript, (Bibli-ste-Genevieve), describing the world of good and evil. The inhabitants of the Heavenly City look out over the City of Human Life, which is divided into several sections, each representing one of the seven Deadly Sins and the corresponding Virtue. Courtesy in the illustration is set off against envy. Langland's works in the later Middle Ages show the same trend.

On the practical side, the feudal lord, who distinguished himself in his military status from the common man by his horse - cavalier or chavalier - (from which is derived the word chivalry), now combines with his physical strength, courage and dexterity in the use of arms, the qualities of religious virtues. As such he finds favour with the powerful Church and the King. The fact that the knight received his ceremonious initiation in a church with the priest presiding reflects, again, how much religion was to influence the personality and conduct of the knight, though it was the king who, from the time of the Conquest created the knights.¹ The relation between religion and arms was so close that

¹ The knight was created by the king or by some great lord by the ceremony of girding him with a sword, and in token of the high ideals which were supposed to inspire him, the sword lay during the night before the ceremony upon the altar in the church and there the candidate for knighthood kept his vigil..... The ideal of the knight as stated by an English writer in the twelfth century was : to protect the church, to fight against treachery, to reverence the priesthood, to defend the poor from injustice, to make peace in his own province, to shed his blood for his brethren, and if necessary, lay down his life". Salzman : English Life in the Middle Ages. p.190.

knighthood, which consecrated itself as a vassal of God and was ready to fight the crusades for the church, was called the eighth sacrament and the ranks of knighthood were graded as Templars and Hospitallers. The virtues that Christianity fostered in the mere warrior can be summed up as courage, good faith, courtesy,¹ hospitality,

¹ In the context of reality in the courtly romances, Auerbach observes thus about the origin of the word : "Here (in Yvain, a courtly romance of the second half of the twelfth century, by Chrétien de Troyes the feudal ethos serves no political function : it serves no practical reality; it has become absolute. It no longer has any purpose but self-realization. This changes its nature completely. Even the term which we find for it in the Chanson de Roland most frequently and in the most general acceptation - the term 'vèssèlage' seems gradually to drop out of fashion. Chrétien uses it three times in Erec, in Cliges and Lancelot it occurs in one passage each and after that not at all. The new form which he now prefers is 'Corteisie', a word whose long and significant history supplies the most complete interpretation of the real concept of class and man in Europe. In the Chanson de Roland the word does not yet occur. Only the adjective curteis appears three times..... It would appear that corteisie achieved its synthetic meaning only in the age of chivalry, or courtly culture, which indeed derives the latter name from it.

The values expressed in it - refinement of laws of conduct, courteous social intercourse, service to women, have undergone a striking process of change and sublimation in comparison with Chanson de Geste and all directed towards a personal and absolute ideal - absolute both in reference to the absence of any earthly and practical purpose. The personal element in the courtly virtues is not simply 'gift of nature', nor is it acquired by birth; to implant them now requires, besides birth, proper training too, as preserving them requires the conferred will to renew them by constant and tireless proving". Erich Auerbach : Mimesis. p.134.

liberality, sacrifice, respect for women, humility, piety and sense of honour. These qualities formed the elaborate code of chivalrous conduct. Though class-determined, it was essentially based on ethical virtues and, save for its love side, easy for the Church to exploit it for its own ends. It was meant to offer the knight an opportunity to prove himself. In literature he becomes the standard per excellence to be idealised and extolled as the human hero in the romances. Cast in an atmosphere of romance, away from earthly contingencies, the ideal gave to its votaries a sense of aloofness and superiority over the common man. "The ethics of feudalism, the ideal conception of the perfect knight, thus attained a very considerable and very long-lived influence. Concepts associated with it, courage, honour, loyalty, mutual respect, refined manners, service to women continued to cast their spell on contemporaries of completely changed cultural periods. Social strata of later urban and bourgeois prevenience adopted his ideal, although it is not only class-conditioned and exclusive but completely devoid of reality. As soon as it transcends the sphere of mere conversations of intercourse and has to do with the practical business of the world, it proves inadequate and needs to be supplemented, often in a manner not unpleasantly in contrast to it.

But precisely because it is so removed from reality, it could - as an ideal-adopt itself to any and every situation, atleast as long as there were ruling classes at all".¹

Yet one aspect of this knightly ideal, viz. respect for women, by a striking process of change, gradually came to seize the full sense of chivalry. What is more, by historical change, in the courtly romances, by the poets' inability to confine himself to the rigour of religious dictates, the knight was to accept for himself the love of some lady and to find in her the symbol of his 'honour, happiness and dream of refinement'.² The knight was to have the qualities just summed up, it is true, but these qualities would not have their true worth without the love of woman. Performance of knightly duties would require a rigorous abstention from sensual temptations and when related to the exigencies of a religion which forbade the priest to marry and looked upon woman as the temptress of the original sin, the emotion of love would have to be ruled out of court. The Church could not very well encourage the swing of physical

¹ E. Auerbach : Op.cit., p.137.

² H.V. Routh : Op.cit., p.262.

or emotional passions in the knight whom it had enlisted in its service ostensibly for the good of humanity. In that case it would be difficult for the poet to idealise the knight in the courtly romance, if he could not hold his energy within the radius of religious saction. C.S. Lewis thus observes about the poet's reaction to this impasse :

" The general impression left on the medieval mind by its official teachers was that all love - atleast all such passionate and exalted devotion as a courtly poet thought worthy of the name - was more or less wicked. And this impression combining with the nature of feudal marriage produced in the poets a certain wilfulness, a readiness to emphasize rather than to conceal the antagonism between their amatory and their religious ideals"¹.

Perhaps the difficulty was not alone of the poet. The knight himself for whom the ideal was created, saw reason to complain of the bondage laid upon him by religion. The knight was a member of the aristocracy or one who had attained the status and developed the virtues of a knight. In either case it would be difficult for him to

¹ C.S. Lewis : The Allegory of Love. p.17.

adhere to the ethical virtues of the code of chivalry as envisaged by the church and perform his duties with ascetic detachment unless his passions were sublimated and something of an emotional satisfaction obtained. The Troubadours fortunately showed a way to fill this need. They sang of love - love for a woman, but applied to the rigours of an unrelenting and elaborate code of virtues it became a ceremony. It is said by some to have been modelled on the service of the page to the feudal lord. Lewis thinks that in the earlier stages, as in Ovid, it is a parody of religious ceremonies or an escape from their rigours. "The French poet had taken over this conception of an erotic religion with a full understanding of its flippancy and proceeded to elaborate the joke in terms of the only religion he knows - medieval christianity. The result is a close and impudent parody of the practices of the church Where it is not a parody of the church it may be, in a sense, her rival - a temporary escape, a truancy, from the ardours of a religion..... An extension of religion, an escape from religion, a rival religion - Frauendienst may be any of these or any combination of them"¹.

¹ C.S. Lewis : Op.cit., pp. 20-21.

Or was the passion of love in the romances an expression of the futility of the crusades and disillusionment in the promises of Christianity? Routh thinks that it was, at least partially, an escape from the sense of disillusionment that men and women in reality suffered at the time.

" This altered view of life may be partly due to the new doctrine of love which from the twelfth century onward began to spread from one aristocracy of Europe to another. But even if we accept that explanation, we have still to ask how such a theory came to exercise so resistless a fascination, and why the passion was supposed to unsettle the warrior's conception of knight-hood and duty. So we discover in the chronicles that the sense of futility and disillusionment hung over the actual business of life. The fevered aimlessness of the romances was at least in some part the expression of what men and women really felt".¹

Nevertheless the passion of love in the romances was spiritualised to a degree so that it might not befoul religious purity or jar with the behests of the

¹ Routh : Op.cit., p.148.

church of which the knight was a limb. The physical side of the emotion was, in the abstract ideal, so far sublimated that woman was raised to the pedestal of a deity and even adultery in her was condoned.¹ The warrior therefore now lay prostrate before his lady with all his valour and virtues. He reduced himself to nothing and stood ever willing to live or die as her whim or fancy should dictate. The ideal caught the imagination of the poets so irresistibly that this reverence for woman came to stand at a later time for the entire meaning of chivalry and even became synonymous with it. In fact it was a pagan God foisted on an unemotional ethical code of conduct. Two dominating forces form the core of

¹ "All true knights were expected to recognise in some woman a charm which was almost divine and so to succumb to the spell, and if Tristram and Lancelot wasted their heroism in such dangerous and exacting service, it was a proof of their nobility, rather than a reproach to the fair adultress". Ibid., p.140.

"Malory declares that every man should have God first and his mistress afterwards; and so long as a man does love his God first, the other love seems to him to be not only permissible but even commendable; it is a virtue". Jusserand: The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare. p.59.

medieval life and literature in Europe. One was to find a redemption of man from the Original Sin; the other was to compromise the ideal of amorous, even adulterous love with religion, to reconcile the conflict between Carbonek and Camelot. The battle was long and arduous until Dante made woman a stepping stone to heaven and found Beatrice in his Paradise.

This ceremonial and spiritualised love was of course only an abstract ideal, wholly one-sided and removed from the practical business of life. The courtly romances offer no accurate or adequate picture of contemporary life, yet its significance lies in the way it reflects certain cultural ideals. As Auerbach says : " Though it (the courtly romance) offers a great many culturally significant details concerning the customs of social intercourse and external forms and conventions in general, we can get no penetrating view of contemporary reality from it even in respect of the knightly class"¹.

But in a sense the whole ideal of chivalry was abstract for in no age was it followed to perfection

¹ Auerbach : Op.cit., p. 136.

Professor Coulton rightly thinks¹ that there was never the Golden Age of Chivalry. "A close study even of such a panegyrist as Froissart compels us to look to some other age than his for the spirit of chivalry and many writers would place the palmy days of knighthood in the age of St. Louis. Here again, however, we find the same difficulty; for in Joinville himself there are so many jarring notes and other pictures of chivalry are still less flattering to knightly society. The most learned of apologists for the middle ages, Leon Gauntier is driven to put back the Golden Age one century further yet even at this sacrifice the Golden Age escapes us..... Even if in medieval fashion, we trace this institution back to Romulus, to David, to Joshua, or to Adam himself, we shall after all find it nowhere more flourishing than in the first half of the 13th century, imperfectly as the code was kept even there".

The cultural value of the delineation of love in the courtly romances is of relevance to our argument for it lies at the foundation of the ideal of courtesy

¹ Prof. G.G. Coulton : Chaucer and His England. pp. 189-190.

as it came to be shaped in later ages.¹ The love depicted in the courtly romances, though it had little to do with actuality, pointed to the ideal of behaviour of a cultured young man to a cultured young lady, irrespective of her feelings or reaction to such behaviour. In fact, literature until recently trafficked more in abstract ideals than in actuality. If literature today must spring from reality for long ages in the past it was literature that shaped the ways of life by propounding ideals in the abstract. The slick young man of today who chaperons his girlfriend home, little realises that it was the Troubadours² who first served the idea. The fact is that literature has always been one of the most artful and

¹ "To be sure, antiquity offers one form of turning away from reality even more compelling in its hold on man's mind, and that is Platonism. There have been repeated attempts to show that Platonic elements were a contributory factor in the development of the courtly ideal. In later times Platonism and the courtly ideal complemented each other perfectly. The most famous illustration of this is probably Count Castiglione's Il Courtigiano". Auerbach : Op.cit., pp. 138-9-40.

² ".....it. (Troubadour poetry) appears quite suddenly at the end of the eleventh century in Languedoc. The characteristics of the Troubadour poetry have been repeatedly described..... The sentiment of course is love, but love of a highly specialised sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love". (continued on the next page.)

potent builders of refinement. However barbarous we may call the medieval people with their unclean habits and crude ways of living, their ignorance and superstition, they struggled to see light and what they saw they have left us in shape of ideas which refused to perish for centuries and which evoked other ideas, as one lamp kindles another. "There must have been something great about the age," says Routh, "which endowed its hero with so much generosity, courage, skill and courtesy and raised him so high above material considerations".¹

The knight kneeling reverently to his lady was one such abstract ideal which not only elevated woman to

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This solemn amatory ritual is felt to be part and parcel of courtly life. It is possible only to those who are in the old sense of the word, polite. It thus becomes from one point of view, the flower, from another, the seed, of all those noble usages which distinguish the gentle from the villain; only the courteous can love but it is love that makes them courteous". C.S. Lewis : Op.cit., pp. 2-3. Also : "Among the gentle nation/Love is an occupation/which for to keep the lustis' same/should every gentle heart have". Gower : Confessio Amantis. Bk. IV.

¹ Routh : Op.cit., p.128.

the status of a deity but later shaped in general the attitude of the refined man to woman. We shall see how this elevated conception of womanhood becomes a basic ingredient of courtesy in Shakespeare's plays. In England the conception provided the germ for the ideal of love in relation to marriage. Love in the courtly romances had an adulterous character but it is significant that this adulterous amor began to be transformed into married love even earlier than Chaucer. "The loves of Troilus and Cryseide (Chaucer's) are so nobly conceived," observes Lewis, "that they are divided only by the thinnest partition from the lawful loves of Dorigen and her husband. It seems almost an accident that the third book celebrates adultery instead of marriage. Chaucer has brought the old romance of adultery to the very frontiers of the modern (or shall we say the late?) romance of marriage. He does not himself cross the frontiers; but we see that his successors will soon inevitably do so. In the centuries that followed, poems of secondary importance in the history of poetry acquire primary importance in the history of humanity, because they pour the sentiment which the Middle Ages had created into moulds that the law of Reason can approve. The conflict between

Carbonek and Camelot begins to be reconciled. In this momentous change Chaucer and graver of his predecessors have borne important part, for it is they who have refined and deepened the sentiment of love till it is qualified for such sanction. The wild provençal vine has begun to bear such fruit that it is now worth taming"¹.

~~This~~ This medieval ideal ~~that~~ later formed the inspiration for the courtly love poems by Wyatt, Surrey and Sidney. Trevelyan, describing what happened to this chivalric ideal in course of time, traces its influence upto the Victorian era :

" The lawless pagan 'God of Love', whose altar the medieval poets had created, has been baptized, and has settled down as a married man in the England of Alfred Tennyson and Mr. and Mrs. Browning. In Elizabethan Literature mutual love between man and woman is treated as the proper though not inevitable bond of marriage"².

¹ C.S. Lewis : Op.cit., p.197.

² G.M. Trevelyan : English Social History : Chaucer to Queen Victoria. p.69.

Thus do abstractions in literature help in moulding the actuality in life. The ideal considerably influenced Elizabethan literature. We cannot forget though that the Elizabethan held their women in special esteem and gave them a relatively more distinctive status than that given by contemporary society in other countries on the continent. A powerful lady was ruling over them, herself proficient in Greek, Latin and other languages. Such was her sway over her country and so emblematic was she of the period that well did Jusserand advise that "whatever the branch of art or literature of the epoch you wish to understand, you must first study Elizabeth"¹. Literary writers wrote books expressly for women. Lyly for instance, wrote *Eupheus* for women in a style imported from Spain, which remained in fashion for atleast a decade. Sidney wrote his *Arcadia* for his sister the Duchess of Pembroke. Like the Queen,^{some} women of the aristocracy knew Greek, Latin, Italian, French. They read Plutarch and Plato and judged men learnedly as the cut of a ruff or a fashion from France or Italy.²

¹ Jusserand : Op.cit., p.95.

² Shakespeare's England, Vol. I., Ch. VIII. p.238; by John Edwin Sandys. English Literature.

The status given to women in general gave them a large sphere of influence by which to shape man's behaviour towards them. An attempt is made in a later chapter¹ to discuss man's attitude to woman in the plays of Shakespeare as part of the ideal of courtesy.

If love, as an ingredient of refinement, in the medieval courtly literature, influenced later ages, there was another pervasive quality of medieval thinking which persisted in the following centuries, and coloured Elizabethan literature, contributing a positive influence in the formation of an ideal of behaviour. The middle ages, under the influence of early Christianity, had a complex and colourful yet clearly defined conception of the universe. Tillyard treats of this theocratic conception of the universe in his excellent "Elizabethan World Picture" as also A.J. Lovejoy in "The Chain of Being". This cosmic conception is based on a chain of 'degree' and planes of correspondences, with Man standing above Beasts and below the Angels. Shakespeare's 'What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason' etc. is a microcosm working in a complex system of macrocosm built on degrees and correspondences. It is a dynamic system and at each level the units share the qualities of these immediately above and below

¹ Chapter III post.

them. Man is striving not to lapse into beastliness and struggling to raise himself to the order of the Angels. The picture of the ass-headed Bottom being wooed by the fairy queen Titania in A Midsummer Nights' Dream is a grotesque mixture of the three stages presented in one picture. According to this conception, Man is endowed with 'will' and 'wit' (in the sense of understanding). At that point in history he already had the code of chivalry on which to base his conduct. Even among men there are 'degrees'. As among the planets the sun is supreme so correspondingly among men is the king. Again the behaviour of men towards each other is based on this concept of degree and it is ~~xxx~~ in harmony with the code of chivalry. "Chivalry", as one writer puts it, "indeed was a class conception, an elaborate and ornate code of courtesy towards equals and superiors which concerned itself little with the
2) existence of inferiors"¹. Shakespeare works up this

¹ Also : "Only members of chivalric courtly society are worthy of adventure, hence they alone can undergo serious and significant experiences. Those outside this class cannot appear except as accessories and even then generally in merely comic, grotesque or despicable roles. This state of affairs is less apparent in antiquity and in the older heroic epic than here (the courtly romance), where we are dealing with a conscious exclusiveness within a group characterised by class solidarity. Now it is true that before very long there were tendencies at work which sought to base the solidarity of the group not on descent but on personal factors,

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theme to a dramatic pitch in Coriolanus. The dramatist there does not just attempt to model Coriolanus after the original: by making him courteous to equals and superiors but consciously depicts him as a hero constitutionally incapable of being polite to the

(Footnote 1 continued from the previous page)

on noble behaviour and refined manners. The beginnings of this can already be discerned in the most important examples of the courtly epic itself, for in them the picture of the knightly individual, with increasing emphasis on inner values, is based on personal election and personal formation. Later when, in Italy especially, the social strata of urban background took over the courtly ideal and refashioned it, the concept nobility became ever more personal, and as such it was actually often contrasted polemically with the other concept of nobility based solely on lineage..... But all this did not render the ideal less exclusive. It continued to apply to a class of the elect, which at times indeed seemed to constitute a secret society. In the process social, political, educational, mystical and class motifs were interwoven in the most varied way. But the most important point is that the emphasis on inner values by no means brought a closer approach to earthly realities. On the contrary in part at least it was precisely the emphasis laid on inner values of the knightly ideal which caused the connection with the real things of this earth to become even more fictitious and devoid of practical purposes". Auerbach : Op.cit., p.139.

common people. He is uncomfortable in the 'gown of humility' and cannot solicit them to elect him consul. When Menenius implores him to be polite to the citizens, he says :

"What must I say ?
' I pray, Sir,'- Plague upon't ! I cannot bring
My tongue to such a pace'
(Coriolanus : II,3, 49-51)

When Menenius expresses his fear that Coriolanus' discourtesy would wear all his political chances and requests him again, 'to speak to them in wholesome manner', he impatiently bursts out :

Cor : 'Bid them wash their faces
And keep their teeth clean'.
(Coriolanus : II, 3, 62-63)

Such is his contempt for the common people. He somehow stands the 'limitation', as Menenius calls it, on this occasion but on another quite succumbs to it. The common people are to him "this bisson multitude." With his position in the order of 'degree', he is simply not bound to be polite to the inferior order. Yet this is Nature's defect in him, a want of political sense. The cosmic conception embraced all fields of human activity including politics. Tillyard quotes Ulysses' 'degree' speech in Troilus and Cressida, as

describing the pivot round which moves all human action. The system of the universe with man in the centre is so well-knit that a little disturbance in the microcosm may disturb the whole macrocosm. Therefore when Coriolanus sees his mother kneeling in solicitation (which is the inverse of 'degree' in courtesy) he says :

Cor : " What is this ?
Your knees to me ? to your corrected son ?
Then let the pebbles on the hungry beach
Fillip the starts; then let the mutinous winds
Strike the proud cedars 'gainst the fiery sun;
Murdering impossibility, to make
What cannot be, slight work."

(Coriolanus : V,iii,56-62)

That this conception of 'degree' ruling the behaviour of man must have been actively present in the mind of Shakespeare is evident from the use he makes of it even in moments of high dramatic tension. Macbeth's "You know your own degrees. Sit down",¹ according them to the lords at the beginning of the banquet scene reflects, in a sense, how conscious he was of his own degree which he has unfairly obtained or how much obsessed was he by the fear of losing it.

¹ Macbeth : III, vi, 1.

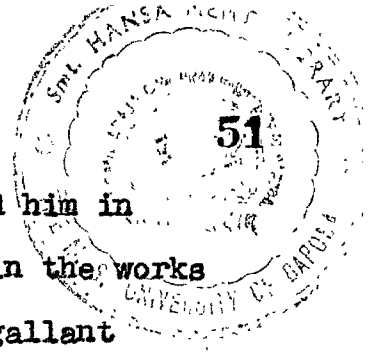
nobility in their degrees. But they would form the middle part of the vertical chain and at its nether end came the lower classes. Now courtesy as a refining process is largely the function of the head and heart and as such it belongs to the king and the nobility in the scheme of things and therefore do we find the lower classes generally deficient in courtesy. Their conversation is almost without exception devoid of any expression of courtesy when they talk within their degree, e.g. the grave-diggers' talk in Hamlet and the conversation between the gardener and the servants in King Richard II, Act III, Sc. 4. yet their behaviour to those belonging to a higher degree has to be humble and courteous.. In the plays of Shakespeare, as also in the works of Dekker and others, the artisans show a social self-consciousness and an ambition to be graded up. But this was chiefly the result of the spirit of rugged individualism that has almost always informed the attitude of the English labour, and the economic prosperity brought to the nation by Tudor rule.

These medieval ideas so strongly influenced the England of Shakespeare that they became an inevitable

base for the courtier's behaviour. The Renaissance brought a refining influence on the knight, who had with him at the time, the ethical virtues stipulated to him by religion and the quality of amorous love endowed on him by the courtly ideal. But we must remember that the Renaissance had started much before Shakespeare's age, from the time of Erasmus and Thomas More.¹ In fact the courtly ideal had begun to be shaped some hundred years before Shakespeare, and under the Tudor Kings the knight was already becoming a courtier. What the age of Elizabeth did was to give sharper outline to his figure and to define for him clearly the tenets of his behaviour. In England, again, the

¹ "Another aspect of the half century of calm before the storm, was the Renaissance of classical scholarship and biblical exegesis under Groeyn and Linaere, Colet and More, the English friends of Erasmus. Their work, more than all Wolsey's pride, was preparing the future but it was not altering much of the present. None of these friends thought that their new knowledge of the classics and of the Greek Testament would destroy the medieval church which they helped to liberalise and reform. More radical was the intention of William Tyndale, as in penury and danger he translated the Bible into words of power and beauty that unborn millions were to have daily on their lips, and to interpret in a hundred different ways disruptive of the past." G.M. Trevelyan : Op.cit., p.94.

compromise between the king and the church, with the king obtaining an upper hand, brought the knight more under the glamour of the court and to that extent was freed from the dogma of the church. With this liberalization, we must also take into account another important factor which created in the Elizabethans an urge to give expression to their courtly ideal. England, under the Tudors had already become conscious of her nationhood and the consciousness was sufficiently intense to drive the nation to seek a self identity, her own distinguishing mark, in every sphere of activity. As the court, particularly under the power of Elizabeth, had become the centre of political, social, cultural and intellectual activity, the nation fervently set about to establish a standard of courtly excellence symbolic of her culture. Yet in this business the past was to her as important as the present. It is significant how sharply the courtier came to be reprimanded for his imitation of foreign manners, French and Italian, - and his recession from theocratic ideals. Ascham's censure of the travelled



gentleman is famous¹. Bishop Hall denounced him in "Quo Vadis?" Other examples may be found in the works of Marston and in Dekker's picture of the gallant knights in The Gull's Horn Book. Fletcher's description of the courtier² may not have been intended, as Boyle assumes³, to ridicule the 'travelled gallants' of the

¹ "In 1570 the Puritanical Roger Ascham was shocked to find the London book shops full of 'Fonde Bookes of late translated out of the Italian into English'. He is probably referring to William Painter's Palace of Pleasure (1566) and Sir Geoffrey Fenton's Certain Tragical Discourses (1567). These books are collections of Italian "novelle" or short but highly coloured and sensational stories breathing the spirit of the fierce sensual life of renaissance Italy. They fired the imagination of many young Englishmen, one of whom was William Shakespeare."

See also : V. De Sola Pinto : The English Renaissance. p.67.

² King Henry VIII : Act I, Sc. 3. The scene is generally attributed to Fletcher.

³ "It probably has this contemporary example", says Boyle, (new Shakespeare Society's translations, 1880-86, p.461), but at the same time it was directly suggested by a passage in Holinshed. 'During this time (1519) remained in the French Court diuerse young gentlemen', says Holinshed, following Hall, 'And French, in eating, drinking and apparell, yea, and in French vices and brags, so that all the estates of England were by them laughed at, and the ladies and gentlewomen were dispraised; so that nothing by them was praised, but it were after the French turne'. Complaint about their behaviour caused the Lord Chamberlain to 'Banish them the court for diuerse considerations'. (pp. 850-52). The passage is quoted in Notes to the scene in the Warwick edition of the play. pp.99-100.

reign of James I. It reflects the condition of the courtier a hundred years before Shakespeare and his 'diseases had grown so catching' that Henry VIII had to give 'Physic' by banishing from Court some of the travelled courtiers, who aped foreign manners and morals. The scene (Act I, Sc.3, King Henry VIII) is one of those scenes which deal exclusively with courtesy, and a major portion of it is reproduced below¹ to mark how keenly un-English and un-Christian modes of behaviour were resented :

Enter the Lord Chamberlain and Lord Sands.

Chamb : Is't possible the spells of France should juggle
Men into such strange mysteries ?

Sands : New customs,

Though they be never so ridiculous,
Nay, let'em be unmanly, yet are follow'd.

Chamb : As far as I see, all the good our English
Have got by the late voyage is but merely
A fit or two o' the face; but they are shrewed
ones;
For when they hold'em, you would swear directly
Their very noses had been counsellors
To Pepin or Clotharins, they keep state so.

Sands : They have all new legs, and lame ones :
one would take it,
That never saw'em pace before, the spavin
Or springhalt reign'd among 'em.

¹ King Henry VI : I, iii, 1-56.

Chamb : Death ! my lord,
Their clothes are after such a pagan cut too,
That sure, they've worn out Christendom.

Enter Sir Thomas Lovell

How now?

what news Sir Thomas Lovell?

Lov : Faith, my lord,
I hear of nothing but the new proclamation
That's clapp'd upon the court-gate.

Chomp : What is't for ?

Lov : The reformation of our travell'd gallants,
 That fill the court with quarrels, talk, and
 tailors.

Chamb : I'm glad 't is there : now I would pray our
monsieurs

To think an English courtier may be wise,
And never see the Louvre.

Lov : They must either,
For so run the conditions, leave those remnants
Of fool and feather that they got in France,
With all their honourable points of ignorance
Pertaining thereunto, as fights and fireworks,
Abusing better men than they can be
Out of a foreign wisdom, renouncing clean
The faith they have in tennis and tall stockings,

Short blister'd breeches and those types of
travel,

And understand again like honest men,

Or pack to their old playfellows : there,
I take it,

They may 'cum privilegio', wear away

The leg end of their lewdness, and be laugh'd at.

Sands : 'T is time to give 'm physic, their diseases
Are groun so catching.

Chamb : What a loss our ladies
Will have of these trim vanities !

Lov : Ay, marry,
A French song and a fiddle has no fellow.

Sands : The devil fiddle 'em ! I am glad they are going,
For, sure, there's no converting of 'em : now
An honest country lord, as I am, beaten
A long time out of play, may bring his plain-
song
And have an hour of hearing; and, by'r lady,
Held current music too.

Chamb : Well said, lord Sands;
Your colt's tooth is not cast yet.

Sands : No, my lord;
Nor shall not, while I have a stump.

Chamb : Sir Thomas,
Whither were you a going ?

Lov : To the cardinal's :

Your lordship is a guest too.

Chamb : O, 't is true :

This night he makes a supper, and a great one,

To many lords and ladies; there will be

The beauty of this kingdom, I'll assure you.

Lov : That churchman bears a bounteous mind indeed,

A hand as fruitful as the land that feeds us;

His dews fall every where.

France had influenced England from the time of the conquest and all throughout the Middle Ages; and during the Hundred Years' Wars French noblemen as prisoners of War greatly influenced the manners of English nobility. According to the knightly tradition prisoners of war of the nobility had to be treated with especial consideration worthy of their status and so French prisoners mixed freely with their hosts of the English nobility. Again the custom then of young Englishmen going to the continent to learn manners resulted only in bringing home vices and foreign ways unsuited to English tradition. In the scene quoted above may be marked the typical English resentment against the influence of foreign ways. The Chamberlain's "Death, my lord, their

clothes are after such a pagan cut too, That sure they've worn out Christendom", shows among other things how steadfast the nobles wanted to remain to the theocratic ideals. On the other hand the Lord Chamberlain's assurance, 'there will be the beauty of the kingdom, I'll assure you', suggests something of the Renaissance quality of appreciation for physical beauty.¹ Again Lowell's comparison of 'that churchman' who has now become the arm of the king, with the fruitful English soil reflects the Englishman's attachment to the Church, his pride in and consciousness of his land and its traditions. It was one of the commitments of knighthood to respect the church, and that respect is now coupled with a strong sense of nationalism. It must have been, furthermore the perseverance of people like Sands who would not let the colt's tooth be cast as long as they had a stump,

¹ Appreciation of physical beauty is not something altogether new to the Renaissance. The Roman Catholic Church with all its decorations and highly ornate altar indicates a lively sense of physical beauty. The Renaissance, however, brought a new intensity in Europe's response to physical beauty.

that preserved the old English song tradition whose echoes we hear everywhere in Elizabethan lyric and drama.¹

II. Influence of the Renaissance

The English mind is not too prone to break too readily with tradition or to drop its ancestry and identity. It is pliable enough to adopt from other's traditions and cultures what it may find good but its characteristic way is to absorb it and make it its own. The feeling that the English have their own traditions and are somehow basically different from other European nations is already manifest towards the middle of the Sixteenth century. By the time Shakespeare was writing, England had reached her full stature as nation and Tudor literature is full of the evidence of her consciousness as a nation. In the use of her own

¹ "In the lyric tradition there was no break; the key to the old music was never lost; and Wyatt's lyrics are a noble example of a lovely metrical tradition maintained, but adopted to a new ethical and social sensibility..... Like Wyatt, Sidney, the greatest of the court-poets, was a great experimenter and was familiar with Italian. He could be academic and fantastic and formal at times, both songlike and dramatic, through the union of medievalism and novelty." E.M.W. Tillyard : The English Renaissance, Fact or Fiction ? pp. 48 and 60.

vernacular,¹ as against Latin, she exhibited, like France a growing pride; she continues paying at the same time her reverence to classical languages and learning. But in religion, unlike France, she hit upon a compromise. The Reformation in England was peculiarly English and she was conscious of it. Therefore when the Englishman aped others, as he could not help doing, he did so reluctantly, and his national pride always made him feel the sting of demeaning himself and his country in this way. That is one of the reasons why certain ideals of the old knightly tradition, despite the Renaissance, persisted so obstinately in Elizabethan Literature. All the same, the impact of the new learning was formidable, and its novelty irresistible the historical situation brought about by the

¹ "..... Certainly in France and England, the sense of nationality strong and growing even among humanists who professed an intellectual culture, find its natural symbol in the national speech". W.L. Renwick : Edmund Spenser : An Essay on Renaissance Poetry. p.13. Renwick also cites in the same work (p.18) from Elementarie p.254 : "I love Rome, but London better; I favour Italy, but England more; I honor the Latin, but I worship the English."

disintegration of medieval institutions, clamoured urgently for a change and the Englishman, with his acute national consciousness and his genius for fusing diversities, was inevitably led to a compromise. If in her architecture, England could combine the Gothic and the Renaissance styles, so also in the literature that she created, she could fuse the old knightly ideals with the vitality and refinement of the new learning. Thus in Sidney's Arcadia we should not be surprised to find knightly hunters placed in a picturesque background of nude plastic art. So about his Arcadian groves with Italian atmosphere may be found an English chapel lurking round the corner. There are indeed parks like English parks and palaces like those of English noblemen in Arcadia: the customs and furniture are also half-Italian, half English. Spenser in The Faeric Queene¹, with his poetic vision,

¹ "We have long looked for the origins of the Faeric Queene (in its epic form Italian) in Renaissance palaces and platonic academics and forgotten that it has humbler origins of at least equal importance in the Lord Mayor's show, the chap-book, the bed-time story, the family Bible, and the village church. What lies next beneath the surface in Spenser's palm is the world of popular imagination: almost a popular mythology" - C.S. Lewis: Op.cit., p.312.

endeavoured to blend the ethical and amorous ideals of the old chivalrous knight with the grace and form of classical learning. The Legend of Courtesy (Bk. VI : The Faerie Queene) is an authentic expression of this fusion and in the entire field of Elizabethan Literature can be marked a conscious will to adjust and harmonise the old with the new.

It has already been suggested that the cosmic conception of 'degree' survive into the plays of Shakespeare to furnish the ground-work for the Shakespearian ideal of courtesy. The chivalric knight has been gradually transformed, by a complex process of historical change, into a courtier. Yet, save for the quality of amorous adultery, the essential qualities of the knight of chivalry do not radically change. If qualities like courage, valour, honour, loyalty, mutual respect, respect for women, went into the making of the personality of the knight, the Shakespearian heroes whether in the tragedies, comedies or English and Roman history plays are not without them. Even the essentially religious qualities of piety and pity are preserved in substance under the different name of virtue, which characterises most of Shakespeare's heroes. There is indeed a shifting of emphasis in respect of

these qualities, but that is a logical consequence of the difference in the purpose for which the knight and the courtier were created. The hero of the chivalrous romance was to prove himself worthy of the possession of the knightly qualities by means of adventure and for that purpose he was brought into being; but time had so changed the scale of values of human excellence that the hero of Elizabethan drama had to prove his worth by a pursuit of altogether different objectives. He is still adventurous, for instance, but adventure is not the sole motive of his action nor the only means of proving his worth; it is only one of his excellencies in spite of which he may meet his doom, if he is too ambitious like Macbeth or too subjective like Hamlet.

Nevertheless, it cannot be gainsaid that the classical Renaissance played its distinctive part in moulding the new ideal of human excellence. While differing emphasis are laid on the old qualities of the chivalric knight, new ones are added both as a result of historical change and the influence of classical learning. Might of arms and noble birth are still the qualities of the new hero. The old knight was undoubtedly intellectual but that was only a subordinate

minor shade of his make-up. The new courtier is to have wit, not only in the old sense of understanding, but as an ability to play on words and to use it with as much dexterity as is necessary for victorious sword play. Scholarship was no accoutable virtue of the old knight but it becomes the indispensable quality of the courtier. Hamlet is not the only scholar among Shakespeare's heroes. Lear is not because he cannot be one with his lack of wit (in the old sense of understanding), but Othello's want of learning is regretfully mentioned at several places. Bassanio is described as a scholar and Orlando's whole grievance against his brother is that he had no schooling. 'Grace', which in the chivalric sense meant a divine gift of certain qualities, becomes for the courtier the sum total of refinement to be consciously developed and expressed in speech and action.

The most remarkable change brought about by the Renaissance seems to consist not only in the change in emphasis in the qualities associated with courtesy, but in the way knightly qualities were called into action. The medieval knight (even Chaucer's knight) wore his virtues externally, as a condition of good breeding and

conduct and carried out his duties objectively without a corresponding expression of the emotions. Even the sentiment or love is expressed ceremoniously as a ritual. In the new ideal of excellence in the Renaissance there is a complete change in the *modus operandi*. It demands that these qualities must come from within and flow out naturally into action, that is, what a courtier does must be felt by him. This is what Spenser means when he says that grace must flow from within and this is also what Orlando means when he asks the Senior Duke :

" If ever you have look't on better days,
 If ever been where bells have knoll'd to church,
 If ever sat at good man's feast,
 If ever from your eyelids wiped a tear
 And know what 'tis to pity and be pitied,
 Let gentleness my strong enforcement be;¹
 In the which hope I blush, and hide my sword.

This is still the old knight's humility; the blush and the sword are there and we remember Chaucer's knight 'whose port was as meeke as is a mayde'; pity also is here but the condition is that he must know what it is to pity and be pitied, to feel what he is doing; then gentleness may ask the sword to hide. As the Duke says : "Your gentleness shall force More than your force move us to gentleness" (line 101-2).

¹ As You Like It : II, vii, 113-119.

The contrast between feeling and action is often emphasised by Shakespeare and characters who are genuine and dissembling in courtesy are dramatically placed as foils to each other in the plays.¹ The Shakespearian courtier has a humanity so large that he imaginatively feels the condition of others as he himself would experience it, and so extends his sympathy to them. The Senior Duke in As You Like It is doing precisely this when he asks the impolite Orlando :

" Art thou thus bolden'd, man, by thy distress,
Or else a rude despiser of good manners,²
That in civility thou seem'st so empty ?

It is with obvious feeling that he promises to wait for Adam and asks Orlando to set down his 'venerable burden' and fall to eating. Tillyard refers to this change when he observes :

" Now into the idea of courtesy there entered the element of human consideration that was lacking in the medieval ideal of the knight, and as the years went on, it grew in importance at the expense of the rigid scheme in which it first germinated. Not that the element was absent from medieval literature, only it is

¹ This aspect of courtesy in the plays is discussed in Chapter IV.

² As You Like It : II, vii, 91-93.

felt to be subordinate..... It was in the early Tudor age that the element came into sudden prominence to be able to change the chivalric into the courtly ideal. And the men who chiefly promoted it were Erasmus and More".¹

This tendency to introspection, humanism, if that is a better description, certainly enlarged the range of the human spirit and gave a wider scope for the exercise of its finer qualities, showing in speech and action a humaner consideration for others. Polite speech, as index of inner and genuine gentleness, is often - and how often - emphasised by Shakespeare as an essential mark of his 'proper man'. It is for this reason that we find even minor characters in Shakespeare indulging in acts and expressions of courtesy without appearing unnatural or artificial. The Captain in Twelfth Night who saves Viola and promises her to take her into the Duke's presence is only one of many such people in Shakespeare. His promise to Viola :

" Be you his eunuch, and your mute I'll be :
When my tongue blabs, then let mine eyes²
not see".

¹ E.M.W. Tillyard : Op.cit., p.31.

² Twelfth Night : I, ii, 62-63.

is a sincere expression of this ideal of courtesy, and there is no exaggeration in Viola's praise of him :

" There is a fair behaviour in thee, captain;
And though that Nature with a beauteous wall
Doth oft close in pollution, yet of thee
I will believe thou hast a mind that suits,¹
With this they fair and outward character."

This insistence on the harmony between inner feeling at outward action, resulting from introspection, gave a new colour to the old knightly ideal and furnished a fine motive for dramatic action in Shakespeare's plays. But it made courtesy, which was only one, though indispensable, of the many characteristics of the chivalric knight, a pivotal attribute of the courtier, round which all other action moved. We have already seen how Orlando has to sheathe his sword in deference to courtesy. Hamlet without his courtesy is unthinkable. Othello can 'a round unwarnished tale unfold' but his lack of formal schooling in polite behaviour is a deficiency of his character. In a sense this change from a minor to a central attribute was only a shifting of the centre, yet it brought courtesy in the forefront of human behaviour and made of it an attribute so essential to the refinement of human

¹ Twelfth Night : I, ii, 47-51.

conduct that Spenser was impelled to call it the fountain-head of human grace.

The human spirit thus enlarged could find a stronger impetus than ever before for the enjoyment of finer things of life and create even a yearning for the aesthetic pleasure of the fine arts. It is no accident that lovers of music are frequent in Shakespeare. The love of the finer arts, in fact, became a necessary mark of a courtier. Love of dance and music is a quality to be noticed everywhere in Elizabethan literature, in its poetry as well as its drama. In the great political epic of Spenser we find love of music praised as a quality of grace indispensable for a gentleman. Sidney's knights often sing in Arcadia. As an essential accomplishment of a courtier it is regarded as healthful to the soul. It was in order to stress this need of aesthetic culture that Sidney, himself a model courtier, wrote his Apologie for Poetrie and gave it a place in his theory of poetry. It is significant that the work like Spenser's was written, to fashion a gentleman into virtuous and gentle discipline. Castiglione, again, mentions music in The Courtier,¹ as a necessary quality

¹ The Courtier of Count Baldesar Castiglione, done into English by Thomas Hoby.

of the courtier. Yet this love of music was also in a sense a continuation of the old song tradition.

With this revaluation of the old virtues of the knight and the addition of new ones to them, the courtier became the ideal of excellence; courtesy became his prime virtue, something which would embellish the other virtues and make them flow into grace. The new courtier has thus his moorings in the past and his lineage is to be derived from the knight of chivalry. He is yet a soldier and of noble birth, but he is also a scholar and a wit. He is a lover of art, and though love is still his occupation, he is to venture in it only to find in it the felicity of marriage. From love is to spring courtesy and from courtesy the other virtues. Above all he has to fulfil his calling, maintaining at the same time ^a harmony of physical agility and mental sprightliness, a grace and a careless abandon, the sprezzatura, and show an art in his actions which may conceal all art.

The courtier thus is an off-spring and a legatee of the medieval knight, fashioned anew in the alembic of historical circumstances such as decay of feudal institutions, the Hundred Years' Wars, the

disillusionment of the Holy Wars, the Reformed religion, the new learning and above all by England's national self-consciousness and pride in her traditions. He is the product of the compromise between the old and the new which was the main preoccupation of the Elizabethan age and which it succeeded in bringing about with astonishing vigour and energy and fashioned an ideal which was at once old and new.

The process by which the change was brought about is so complex and the reasons which prompted the change so numerous that it would be difficult to trace every single constituent of the new ideal to any one particular influence. It would be more profitable and interesting to study the way in which Shakespeare made use of the new ideal and how, as we shall see, he turned it into an effective instrument to produce diverse dramatic effects; as a result there hangs over the plays a benign atmosphere of gentility and refinement.

It is a truism of Shakespearian criticism that in the world of Shakespeare's plays we move in timeless, ageless human nature. Yet it is surprising how often Shakespeare employs a specific norm of human conduct,

that of courtesy, to probe and assess human nature. It is one of the objects of this study to reach at that norm as it is found in the plays and to appreciate how effectively Shakespeare uses it to fulfil several dramatic functions.