

CHAPTER VII

COURTESY IN CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

The Elizabethan age, as a whole, was in search of an ideal of courtly conduct and one of the results of that search was to make courtesy a pervading quality of the literature the age produced. As a mode of behaviour it occurs everywhere in the whole mass of the dramatic literature of the day, as if impregnating it. Most of the characters of that literature are noble men and women who speak and behave in courtly fashion. Even when a play relates to the lower classes, the artisans for instance, the nobility is around or the artisans themselves imitate courtly manners. Acts and expressions of courtesy abound in these plays. Yet few dramatists of that age seem to have used courtesy in the way Shakespeare has done, as a spontaneous expression of inner grace

into beautiful speech and conduct. No one of them, again has used it consciously as a dramatic device to produce different artistic effects, as Shakespeare has done, to reveal character, to set up one character as a foil to another, to dramatise, sentimentalise or poeticise a situation, or to produce an atmosphere of refinement. The reason for this would appear to be that they have not understood courtesy, as Shakespeare has done, to be a blending of inner and outer grace as an ideal of courtly conduct. In the works of other dramatists, therefore, expressions of courtesy become merely outward formalities or turns of speech otherwise unrelated to the character or situation. People, who appear in these plays, use polite language, greet each other and bid farewell, perform acts of courtesy, exhibit a refinement in their relations with others, but with them, this kind of speech and behaviour does not seem to be a natural outcome of inner virtue, an integral part of their being. For ^{reason,} this, we often find their speech, sometimes even after passages of high passion and poetry, lapsing into the uncourteous, even the vulgar. Such experiences in the plays give us rude shocks, and damage the plays themselves by destroying the atmosphere of gentle breeding

and refinement which would otherwise be created by the expressions of courtesy.

A detailed consideration of some of the contemporary plays would bear out the truth of such criticism. Of all the Elizabethan play wrights, Beaumont and Fletcher seem to come nearest to Shakespeare in gentle speech and conduct. At least, these qualities appear natural in the case of some of their characters, like Philaster,¹ though, on reflection, one would wonder how much even Philaster is a deliberate imitation or compilation of several qualities of different Shakespearian characters. At times he reminds us of Hamlet; At others of Othello, and again of Orlando. This makes it difficult for us to accept him as a character moulded after the genuine ideal of courtesy. Even so, gentle speech sits naturally on his lips. A close examination of the play will make clear how the authors differ from Shakespeare in their use of courtesy.

Philaster has 'worth and virtue'. Though deprived by his usurper uncle of his rightful throne, he is loved by the people, even as Hamlet is, for his fair qualities. The people admire the bravery of his mind

¹ Philaster : in Six Elizabethan Plays, Ed. by C. B. Wheeler.

and lament the injuries he has suffered, (I, i, 26-27), "the whole court is bold in praise of him" (I, ii, 11-12); he is called 'the brave prince', 'the king of courtesy', 'the mirror of knighthood', 'thou Mars of man', by the people, who for his sake rebel against the usurper. Even the courtiers who serve the king are his admirers and associate with him. A little overcome by his misfortunes throughout the play, he still impresses us by his courage, gentle speech and courteous bearing. Every thing about him is noble, even the bouts of passion in which he occasionally indulges, appear to spring from his simple, unstained nobility. He is not fawning or feigning when he asks a favour of the tyrant king, who has robbed him of his rightful throne and happiness :

Philaster : (Kneeling) Right noble Sir, as low as
my obedience,
And with a heart as loyal as my knee,
I beg your favour.
(I, i, 82-84)

The favour being granted as unto a subject, Philaster boldly turns ~~his~~ to the Spanish prince, who has come to marry the princess, and receive the two kingdoms as his dowry, to one of which Philaster is the rightful heir. With that 'Prince of Popinjays' (as he calls the foreigner), he is almost blunt :

" I tell thee, Pharamond,
 When thou art king, look I be dead and rotten,
 And my name asks : for hear me, Pharamond !
 This very ground thou goest on, this fat earth
 My father's friends made fertile with their faiths,
 Before that day of shame shall gape and swallow
 Thee and thy nation, like a hungry grave,
 Into her hidden bowels, Prince, it shall;
 By the just Gods, it shall !

(I, i, 201-209)

This outburst has passion in it, but it is from a world far removed from the grace ~~the grace~~ and refinement of Shakespeare's heroes, even when they address their enemies. This defiance, however, is indirectly an insult to the king, who feels displeased at it. But Philaster promptly says :

" No, Sir, I am too tame,
 Too much a turtle, a thing born without passion,
 A faint shadow, that every drunken cloud
 Sails over, and makes nothing."

(I, i, 115-118)

Philaster knows the art of self-abnegation, but the negation itself has passion in it; that is a trait of his character.

He is to be matched to Arethusa, the princess, whom the king has decided to give away in marriage to the Spanish prince. She has 'virtue and beauty', precisely the two attributes that Shakespeare assigns to his heroines. Strongly reminiscent though

Arethusa is of Shakespearian heroines, it is significant that she is never called 'divine' or 'angelic' as Shakespeare's heroines often are. Perhaps the Shakespeare's contemporaries did not pitch the ideal of womanhood so high as he did. Women in contemporary drama certainly do not possess the potent virtue of refinement that they do in Shakespeare. Here, in *Philaster*, however, we have a heroine who has all the virtues - modesty, chastity, beauty, grace, obedience, even wit in a certain measure which she unequally uses on different occasions. In the beginning she finds herself in a position similar to that of Juliet in Romeo and Juliet, having fallen in love with a man, who is an enemy of her father, who, in his turn, wants her to marry an unlovable husband. But the course of Arethusa's love has to run through severe tribulations before marriage. Her love for *Philaster* is yet undeclared. She must do that first and so sends for the Prince. She unveils her feelings to him, with all the guile of a woman, all the wit of a Shakespearian heroine. To *Philaster*, it is a happy surprise, for he all along has loved the princess. Mutual vows are taken in courtly fashion, comparable to any wooing scene in Shakespeare for its grace and

courtesy. Their love is sealed with a kiss and 'to hold intelligence' of their 'true love', it is agreed that Philaster is to place in the service of the princess a boy, whom he has lately found, of gentle parents, 'the trustiest, lovingest and gentlest boy' (I, ii, 138).

Just then Pharamond, the Spanish prince is announced. He has come to show his courtesy to the princess, 'as true lovers aught'. Philaster rejects Arethusa's suggestion to hide himself when the prince comes in, because for him it is 'a simple sin which will for ever on my conscience lie'; but promises to suffer the prince in what he may address to the princess.

When Pharamond arrives, Philaster is pretending to demand answer from Arethusa for his claim to the kingdom. Pharamond, to challenge the claim, voices himself in the self-trumpeting air which is his wont, but Philaster soon silences him in the very presence of the princess whom Pharamond has come to woo, and leaves.

So far in the scene (I, ii), we had a courtly atmosphere, gentle speech, serenity of mutual love, courteous bearing even when young enemies defy each other. But soon after Philaster's exit, our gentler susceptibilities receive a rude shock. Pharamond makes an unseemly proposal to the yet unwedded princess:

" But, madam,
 I hope our hearts are knit; and yet so slow
 The ceremonies of state are, that 't will be long
 Before our hands be so. If then you please.
 Being agreed in heart, let us not wait
 For dreaming form, but take little stolen
 Delights, and so prevent our joys to come."

(I, ii, 189-195)

And this to a lady, noble, chaste, fair and virtuous ! These playwrights, who used the ideal of courtesy and sometimes tried to emulate the finer effects of Shakespeare's dramatic art, little realised the fatality of such a proposal to the Shakespearian concept of courtesy. Not even rascals in Shakespeare dare attempt to display such sensuality to a lady of virtue. Let us recollect Iachimo's reaction to Imogen's sleeping beauty. Virtuous women purge men in Shakespeare; beauty and virtue there have an imperious force, which cleanses, refines and compels decorum. Here the modest Arethusa can only show that she is hurt :

" If you dare speak such thoughts,
I must withdraw in honour". (I, ii, 196-197)

The worse part of Pharamond's sensuality is still to come out. Left alone he mutters : "The constitution of my body will never hold out till wedding; I must seek elsewhere." (198-200)

On his seeking elsewhere, the future course of the play is to hang. Such lapses into the sensual destroys the serenity of courtly atmosphere. Our experience, on such occasions, is like slipping into a noxious fomy ditch while walking in a well-paved orchard breathing the spring air.

In the next scene again (II, ii) we are in a perfectly courtly atmosphere. Philaster, not knowing like us, that Bellario is disguised Euphrasia, pleads to her to go as the princess' page; Ballario, afraid of losing his proximity to Philaster in vain puts forward all kinds of artful excuses. Philaster's original act of taking up Bellario as his boy was itself an act of courtesy; springing from genuine pity and consideration. Now, in this scene, we find, with just a little sentimentality, tenderness, pity and consideration on both sides. There is no contamination

of the serene air anywhere; but the experience is too brief to have any lasting effect. Pharamond, in pursuit of his constitutional urge contacts the ladies of the Court. Galatea, famous for her wit, turns down his suggestions but leaves a sly hint that Megra, the Courtesan, may accept him. It occurs to her that if Pharamond and Megra could be proved to have such relations, it could stop the former's marriage with the princess. She therefore eavesdrops when the prince and the courtesan talk, (a very ungraceful act for a courtly lady of wit and refinement, despite her pious object). Pharamond's address to Megra, from the initial greeting to the end, is, for the most part, couched in courtly language. His appreciation of her beauty is, in parts, almost poetical. But courtly speech is here wasted on an indecorous theme. At the end of the scene, it is agreed that Megra should go to Pharamond's apartment for the business. Galatea, who has overheard, will report the appointment to the princess and further development of the plot must rest on this indecent affair !

Pharamond and Megra vitiate the courtly atmosphere. The Courtesan was a popular character on the

Elizabethan stage. In all likelihood Marston first introduced it and other dramatists soon adopted it. Shakespeare, however, seems intentionally to avoid the courtesan, letting her appear only once, in The Comedy of Errors, probably because she was unavoidable and plays an important role in the Plautine source. But he makes her very minor in his play. There seems to be some reason behind his deliberate avoidance of this character. If such a woman is allowed any important action in a play she would contaminate the air of courtly refinement. There are light women in Shakespeare e.g. Mrs. Quickly in Henry V, Mistress Overdone in Measure for Measure and the bawd in Pericles, but bawdiness is confined the classes other than the courtly, and in a play like Measure for Measure, it is directly counter-balanced by such a strong virtuous character as Isabella.

Arethusa decides to use Pharamond's misconduct to break her proposed marriage with him. Meanwhile, she receives Bellario, dresses him richly to suit his new position and questions him about Philaster's love for her (II, iii). Good courtly talk fills the rest of the scene with bits of poetry on the theme of love.

The next scene again has the suggestion of the sexual act behind the stage. Arethusa has complained to the king who now comes to verify it. After breaking of the doors etc., Pharamond is made to come down but the king only mildly rebukes him for his misconduct. Megra, however, is saucy and boldly accuses the king of deliberately robbing a lady of her honour. She is quick to accuse the princess also of similar misconduct with the boy she has kept and very nearly blackmails the king. He is hard put to it, and, at one moment, like Claudius in Hamlet, repents for his own sins. With Megra's accusation against the princess begins the theme of persecution of virtue. Shakespeare's treatment of the same theme in some of the plays, is vastly different.

Megra appears to have acted too soon on her threat to the king. She has spread the scandal about the princess with speed and determination, and the whole court has come to know it. Strange as it may appear, courtiers like Dion, Cleremont and Thrasiline, who had every esteem for the princess' virtue and for Philaster, now readily believe the charge. The princess' virtue and honour had so far prevented the people from an open rebellion against the usurper but

now they prepare for it. That is the political situation at the moment (III, i). The courtiers, Dion, Cleremont, Thrasiline, plan to persuade Philaster to take action against the king with popular support. It would be difficult for them to convince Philaster of the princess' dishonour. To this end Dion proposes something, which is not only a deliberate perpetration of falsehood but an unthinkable act of discourtesy for a courtier. When Cleremont raises the difficulty :

" but how shall we,
If he be curious work upon his faith ?"
(III, i, 28-29)

Dion replies :

"Since it is true, and tends to his own good,
I'll make this new report to be my knowledge;
I'll say I know it; nay I'll swear I saw it."
(31-33)

And this he does a little later when Philaster comes on the scene. We are surprised that a courtier of Dion's status should commit himself to such a falsehood, whatever his motive. It is not only a lie, it is also a question of a lady's honour, in whom erstwhile they all had faith, and for the sake of whose reputation for virtue the people were reluctant to revolt against the king. Dissemblers in Shakespeare employ such falsehood, and he takes care to mark them out; but

these courtiers, Dion and others, are not that sort. They are intended to be ideal courtiers; but they are not cast in the true ideal of courtesy, despite their refined talk and manners. The trouble seems to be that these contemporary writers had not grasped aright the true ideal of courtesy and therefore fumble over the essentials of it. It is remarkable that the form of mutual addresses, in the conversation that follows, is perfectly courteous in tone and language. Philaster, like a seasoned courtier, thus appreciates the anxiety of these courtiers for his good :

" How honourable is this love in you
 To me that deserved none ! Know, my friends,
 (You that were born to shame your poor Philaster
 With too much courtesy), I could afford
 To melt myself in thanks."

(III, i, 48-52)

but, as we have seen, this 'too much courtesy' has violated more than one condition of true courtesy. In the first place they accepted too easily the story of the princess' dishonour and then they had no scruples in vouching for the truth of it before Philaster. Philaster himself, who is intended to be an ideal prince, comparable to Shakespeare's heroes, is hardly, as we shall see, a consistent pattern of ideal courtesy in his behaviour. When he hears the report about the

princess, his faith in woman's honour gets so shocked that he rages out in ~~impetuous~~ protest, and draws his sword as if to kill any one who would dare utter a word against the princess' honour. With persuasion, however, he soon cools down :

" I ask your pardon, Sir;
My zeal to truth made me unmannerly."
(82-83)

but, just then, he would not believe the story. In the manner of Hamlet or Othello, he bursts out :

" Oh, say not so !
Good Sir, forbear to say so; 'tis then truth,
That womankind is false : urge it no more;
It is impossible.
(87-90)

Dion's avowal works on his mind because Dion has the reputation of being an honourable man. For a time Philaster oscillates between indignation and courtesy, so outraged are his finer susceptibilities at the fall of virtue. To know that Bellario is a party to the fall afflicts him all the more. But with all his vehement protestations he believes the story and promises the courtiers to consider their suggestion.

When he meets Bellario, he can hardly believe the boy is guilty, he looks so innocent. Philaster

uses all tricks to get the truth out of the boy, including the most discourteous suggestion that the boy was to enjoy Arethusa 'nacked as to her bed' and the latter was under oath to let him do so to show her love for Philaster by proxy ! Even as a ruse to make the boy confess, it is hardly consistent with a lover's idea of his lady's honour. Despite the boy's protestations, the suspision persists in Philaster's mind and he dismisses the boy. The boy meets with the same treatment from Arethusa, who calls him a dissembler, purposely placed with her to secure her dishonour. The king in the meantime has commanded Arethusa to give up the boy.

Philaster's meeting with Arethusa (III, ii) is intended to confirm his suspicions of her disloyalty. At the outset he behaves as if he is not yet convinced of her guilt (or he feigning ?). When he learns of the king's command (to dismiss the boy), he interprets it as 'oh my misfortune ! Ten 'tis no idle jealousy.' When the unsuspecting Arethusa gets sentimental over the loss of the boy, Philaster becomes convinced of her disloyalty. He calls her false and wails over woman's falsehood. Arethusa protests, like Desdemona,

"Nay, then, I am betrayed". (100) She is bewildered that a woman may not turn for constancy anywhere in the world. Philaster, like Imogen's lover in Cymbeline, yearns to go to a place where woman may never set foot.

The question that concerns us in the first two scenes of Act III in regard to courtesy, is, does Philaster in his treatment of Arethusa act like a true courtier? From all references about him we feel that he is intended to be some one like Shakespeare's heroes, in his virtuous qualities and popularity. But when it comes to the crucial point in the play, the reported infidelity of Arethusa, how does he measure up in the test? The impression that his behaviour leaves is that he believes too quickly and too easily so grave a charge against his lady love, particularly when the boy involved in it is his own faithful servant. True he protests vehemently to Dion and others when he first hears the report, but the heat seems to cool off pretty soon. In his meeting with Bellario and later with Arethusa, we get the impression that he would rather believe it and be convinced of the charge than not. In Hamlet's case

the manner of the marriage is itself a fact, apart from the Ghost; in case of Othello, a proof is demanded even of the demi-devil Iago; Iachimo has to produce a proof to convince Posthumus; Leontes is by nature jealous. Philaster is least intended to be jealous. In the whole course of his conduct, since he learns of the princess' disloyalty, he is not only unfair to her but inconsiderate and positively discourteous. He seems to doubt the charge only for a fleeting moment and then believes it.

The king has ordered a hunting expedition for the next morning. When Arethusa is asked to join it, she finds herself in tune with the game. Diana, the chaste, must always hunt. So, as often in Elizabethan drama, the scene is shifted to the sylvan setting of simplicity in contrast with the intrigues of a court.

The king and the courtiers are ready to go ahunting (IV, i). Pharamond looks depressed with the sense of a scandal about him. The king, noticing it, immediately makes light of his misconduct, dismissing it as 'your venial trespass', which is easily forgiven. (What about his promise to the princess - 'You shall be righted.' - one wonders?). The courtiers Dion,

Cleremont and Thrasaline talk among themselves. We may compare their talk with similar things in Shakespeare - in Romeo and Juliet and Tempest, for instance, only to find how much the talk here lacks in wit, refinement and dignity. The courtiers here lapse too easily into the sensual. They express themselves in sexual images which they seem to think is wit. Dion thus describes Pharamond : 'He looks like an old surfeited stallion after his leaping, dull as a dormouse (IV, i, 7-9) and later : 'When my fox-bitch Beauty grows proud, I'll borrow him' (19-20). Cleremont has this to say of Megra: 'As I live, she has got her a goodly protection and gracious; and may use her body discreetly for her health's sake, once a week, excepting Lent and dog-days.' (50-53). Such is the general tone of their conversation.

Events however begin to happen in quick succession in the forest. Philaster, sick of courtly life and of the frailty of courtly women comes there. Then comes ~~the~~ Bellario praising the woods because there is nothing to assault innocence here. When they meet, Bellario asks for Philaster's pity that he may be saved from cold and hunger. Philaster would not

listen to him and they go in opposite directions. Meanwhile, Arethusa happens to be missing from the king's party, and the king and his followers are making a frantic search for her. Dion and Cleremont who are now the king's secret enemies, think that she had 'rode away' willingly. The king comes to where they are searching and demands of the courtiers to bring him to the princess. The courtiers almost defiantly ridicule him. The king who in the beginning gave the impression of a sort of Claudius with his shrewdness, authority and dignity, now lends himself to complete humiliation and ridicule. Not even usurpers use language so devoid of authority, or such pretensions to authority as the king does on this occasion.

In another part of the forest enters Arethusa (IV, iii), fatigued, urging her feet to lead her on. Too sick to go on she sits down and is about to faint when Bellario comes upon the scene. Like the princess, he too does not want to live, yet would try her charity, but he finds her fainting. He gives her succour and urges her to open her eyes just once, if only to send her lord a last farewell. Arethusa revives but would have none of the 'boy'. Just then

Philaster enters to find the princess and the boy together. The sight whips up his passion. His first instinct is to subdue it and temperately to tell Arethusa when and where he had learnt 'the killing truth'. But he cannot hold himself long and bursts into almost a raving passion against 'these hell-bred women'. Bellario rightly describes his condition. 'Alas, my lord, your pulse keeps madman's time ! So does your tongue !' (IV, iii, 55-56). In this mood of passion, Philaster offers his sword first to Arethusa, then to Bellario to kill him, so that the two 'may live and reign in lust without control'. When Bellario refuses, he is just dismissed. As the boy leaves, Philaster urges Arethusa to kill him or he says, 'worse will follow', that is to say he will kill her. It is important to know his reasons for this alternative. The first is :

" We are two
Earth cannot bear atonce"; (IV, iii, 62-63)

The other, Philaster declares to be a performance of justice. Arethusa would rather be killed by him and be in the other world where there would be no slanders, no jealousy, no ill. Just as Philaster wounds

Arethusa, a country-fellow dramatically enters and prevents further blow :

"Hold, dastard! strike a woman ! Thou'rt a craven,
I warrant thee"

(87-88)

This act of Philaster, of striking a woman, sets us thinking once again about Philaster's courtesy. Let us recall what happens in Shakespeare. Leontes, with all his jealousy, sends the queen away; Othello kills Desdemona with 'kiss thee ere I kill thee', the decision itself being reached after a tremendous conflict of emotion for a cause, after a surge of passion reaching the soul. There is no such conflict here. After a brief moment of indignation against the frailty of woman, a momentary beating of a mad man's pulse, our gallant wounds his lady with every murderous intention. If he is jealous, his reason is a scandal spread by an avenging courtesan. Whatever the exigencies of the plot, the dramatists could surely have found a way to avoid this discourteous action.

Philaster's treatment of Arethusa since her reported guilt, makes us think a little less of Arethusa herself than we would have liked to think of such a lady. Shakespeare's heroines have a power over

the heroes. They have a magic in them that compels the men to think of them against their will. Othello, except in the last scene, almost forgets his jealousy when he meets Desdemona, and cannot help loving her and longing for her after she has left. No such reaction occurs here in Philaster. The difference is due to the essential difference in Shakespeare's conception of womanhood, and that of his contemporaries. We have seen in a previous chapter¹ how this is important for Shakespeare's ideal of courtesy.

In the ensuing events the shepherd turns out to be more chivalrous than the prince. Philaster has to fight with the country-fellow. Arethusa prays for the prince and is overheard by him. Philaster gets hurt and just then hears foot-steps of people approaching. He is scared and decides to flee ! The hero, who a short while ago desperate of living wished to be killed by his beloved or to kill her, and who once before had refused to hide himself, now decides to run away to escape death ! His excuse for this unbecoming act is :

¹ Chapter III ante.

"The gods take part against me : could this boor
Have held me thus else ? I must shift for life,
Though I do loathe it. I would find a course
To lose it rather by my will than force".

(IV, iii, 104-109)

If he wore his life so cheap, one may ask, why did he not dare die now and fall fighting ? How did he know who was coming, friend or foe ? We know that the authors cannot let him die now, and must lead him to the happy end. But surely he could have been spared this act of near cowardice. These two acts of Philaster, that of hurting the princess and of running away, not only make his character inconsistent with the previous picture of him but shatter all associations of courtesy with him. They are both unpardonable lapses from courtesy.

The princess is discovered with her wounds by Pharamond, Dion and other courtiers. Arethusa knows that a search will be made for the runaway. Knowing the danger to Philaster, whose name she conceals, she takes a promise from Pharamond to bring the culprit to her because she would herself like to punish him.

In the next scene (IV, iv) Philaster comes to the place where Bellario, overcome by exhaustion and

giddiness, has fallen into sleep, 'that I may never awake'. The prince now repents for his discourtesy :

"I have done ill; my conscience calls me false,
To strike at her that would not strike at me".
(9-10)

The wheel is now turned back to make him see his follies one by one and remove his suspicions. He recollects that the princess was praying for him when he fought the rustic. He realises he may have been unjust to Arethusa :

"she may be abused
And I a loathed villain" (12-13)

Yet, for all this, he sets a test for Arethusa's true love and loyalty. If she loved him, she would hide his name; the country-fellow is too wounded to follow him; he could find a way to escape if the king's men pursue him. At this moment he discovers the sleeping boy. His deep, sound sleep makes Philaster feel that if the boy were guilty he would not sleep so soundly (a reason, one may feel, too flimsy to prove anyone's innocence). Just then he hears the cries of his approaching pursuers. If Arethusa has covered him, the king's men would have no means to know the culprit except by his wounds. So he wounds the sleeping Bellario, whom he had thought

a while ago to be innocent, and lapses once more into discourtesy. The question is one both of morality and courtesy. Was it right to involve an innocent person to shield himself, if we suppose Bellario to be innocent ?

The wounds wake up Bellario. The boy feels genuine relief in death :

" It meant me 'well ! Again for pity's sake !" (27)

But Philaster's wounds have bled too fast, and rendered him too weak to run. He knows his fate now and as if to redeem his guilt in wounding Bellario, he proposes to the latter a fib. Bellario may say that he got his wounds in fighting Philaster from running away; he would himself support the lie and Bellario may get his reward.

Bellarion takes in the situation in a flash and in his innocence and loyalty do just the one thing he could do :

Bellarion : "Fly, fly, my lord, and save yourself!"
(36)

Philaster is struck by the boy's loyalty. But he accepts the suggestion and creeps into the bushes.

As the king's men approach, he says :

"Then I shall die for grief, if not for this,
That I have wounded thee". (44-45)

Bellarion's confession later to the courtiers that he has wounded the princess is an act of supreme self-sacrifice. Even in a state of extreme agony, the boy hunts up a fine excuse for wanting to murder the princess, his sacrifice swelling up his passion (68-80).

Philaster is so taken in by the boy's selflessness that he jumps out of his hiding as the king's men are about to take Bellario away, and stops these 'ravishers of innocence'. It is the same Philaster, once again, that we knew in the beginning, almost impetuous in his virtue, and indignant at himself for his lapse from it. The courtiers are confused at his sudden appearance. Philaster bursts into a passionate praise of the boy, uncovering the boy's innocence. He confesses that he had himself wounded the princess. Bellario, even then tries to wave him off, by saying that he is 'some man weary of life, that would be glad to die'. Philaster's comment on it is significant. "Leave these untimely courtesies, Bellario" (98). Bellario's self-sacrifice is an act of courtesy.

The king comes with Arethusa on the scene. Arethusa looks at the confusion and without being confused herself takes a quick decision to save both Bellario and Philaster. If it was Philaster who wounded her, then, she says, he was disguised. Both of them must have plotted to take her life. For this base act, she herself must frame the punishment, she pleads to the king in the name of filial love to permit her to be the judge. This granted, Philaster and Bellario are taken prisoners in Arethusa's keep.

With the fifth act, events begin to happen which are calculated to resolve the confusion, vindicate virtue and pave a way to the happy end. In the meantime, Dion and other courtiers inform us (V, i) that the king has decided to execute Philaster. The headsmen is ready. But the courtiers have a secret plan to save the prince.

Philaster, in prison, is now reconciled both to the princess and Bellario. His passion now turns to repentance. With the king's summons, his death is certain, and before dying he would ease his conscience. Meanwhile a couple of surprises are sprung on us.

The king is waiting for Arethusa to bring the prisoners. When they come, Bellario, who accompanies them, is dressed in a robe and is wearing a garland. He informs the king that the prince and the princess are lovers and are married. The king in his anger disowns Arethusa as a daughter and pronounces terrible vengeance upon the three. Philaster (even now !) is ready to die. He has languished so much under the king that he would find joy and recreation in death ! At this moment the king receives two pieces of unnerving news; one, that Pharmond (who had gone to see the new terrace) has been taken prisoner by the citizens; the other news is that the whole city is in mutiny against him. The king sends away the prince and the princess to the citadel. He makes an attempt to suppress the mutiny; but fails. Depressed and angry at the situation, he realises that Philaster alone can pacify the people. Accordingly he sends for the Lord Philaster, 'Speak him fair; call him Prince; do him all the courtesy you can; commend me to him'. (V, iii, 164-166). He asks Philaster, when he comes to be forgiven, confesses to having wronged him, swears repentance, and begs him to pacify the people. Philaster agrees to try on condition that the princess and the boy are freed.

The common people, under the leadership of an old captain, treat the prisoner Pharamond with every discourtesy. But they treat Philaster with affection and courtesy, which Philaster duly returns. The uprising is quelled and the people are satisfied that Philaster is safe and is given by the king the treatment deserved by his princely status. The king not only keeps his promise but sincere repentance transforms his character. Philaster is given what was due to him, viz., Arethusa, and succession to the two kingdoms. Everything is set now for the happy end. But virtue is not yet vindicated. Megra's accusation still stands and to clear this dramatic involvement, the dramatists let the hero once again slip into an act of discourtesy. Pharamond is offered an honourable return home but Philaster spoils this by a fling at Merga. He says to Pharamond :

And if you would go furnished to your realm
 With fair provision, I do see a lady,
 Methinks, would gladly bear your company:
 How like you this piece ?

(V, v, 22-25)

In fact 'this piece' is completely out of keeping ~~with~~ for Philaster's courtesy, whatever may be the requirements of the plot. Megra is quick to grasp

the meaning and to retort. If she is a sinner, so is the princess : if she must leave the kingdom with the prince, let the princess and her boy too go with them. The four would be fitting company. It is a challenge to the king and Arethusa is called upon to clear herself of the charge. For a time, all hopes of a happy end very nearly vanish. The king wants to squeeze a confession from the boy by torture and Dion is asked to get it. Bellario would reveal true facts to Dion alone in private. There the father recognises the daughter. The 'boy' turns out to be a girl. Megra's accusation falls to pieces and the king orders her to be seized. Arethusa's virtue is vindicated : Pharamond is only too happy to go home. Philaster does the last act of courtesy. He prays to the king to set Megra free. But how much is this act of courtesy inconsistent with his act of discourtesy a while ago ?

This scene to scene examination of the play reveals to us the outstanding difference between Shakespeare's concept of courtesy and that of the contemporaries. Such a detailed study becomes necessary because the range of Elizabethan dramatic

literature is so large and courtesy as an ideal of social behaviour so widely used by the dramatists that it would be difficult to hit the nail without a detailed study of atleast one play. What we observe in relation to Philaster would be found true of the works of other playwrights. Courtesy was the vogue of the literature of the day and every dramatist was obliged to adopt the set fashion in his works. Yet these dramatists fail to evince an adequately correct understanding of the ideal of courtesy as forged by Shakespeare, an inner grace flowing out into language and behaviour. Therefore we find that the contemporary dramatists use courtesy inconsistently in the play and often subordinate it to the requirements of the plot. They use it if it suits them, discard it if it is necessary to do so for their plot.

Webster came in at the fag end of Shakespeare's career. The influence of the great dramatist on his works can be easily discerned, despite his preoccupation with the Italian atmosphere. The Duchess of Malfi¹ deals with the lives of a princely family.

¹ Six Elizabethan Plays Ed. by Wheeler : The World's Classics.

Most of the characters show a refinement in their actions and speak the language of courtesy. Yet except for the grace, beauty and nobility of the Duchess herself and the virtue of her lover and secret husband Antonio, the play would have been completely devoid of the true ideal of courtesy. The atmosphere of the play, from the beginning to the end, save where the Duchess appears, is one of revenge and intrigue, of terrifying atrocities, blood and murder, though the theme is the familiar one of persecution of virtue. This is because the initiative for action in the development of the plot lies in the hands of the three criminals, Ferdinand, the cardinal, his brother, and Bosola, their stooge and later their avenger. The two virtuous and graceful characters, the Duchess and Antonio, except that they secretly marry and breed children, have only to suffer the effects of the evil deeds of others. They do not counteract; their grace, therefore, unlike similar characters in Shakespeare, is dramatically ineffective. The noble suffering of the Duchess, moulded somewhat after Desdemona's, her self-possession and readiness to die are truly impressive : She has like Shakespeare's heroine, beauty, virtue, grace, but these qualities, live,

silently suffer, and die^{with} her, making little real effect upon other characters, particularly upon her brothers and their agents. There is only one single moment in the play when the lustre of her noble qualities dramatically impresses her antagonist, that is, when Ferdinand is unable to look upon her dead face and wants it to be covered. Grace of a woman, as we have seen, is an active ingredient, a live force in Shakespeare; it emanates, spreads and purges, and is always vividly dramatised and brought into relief by the dramatist. It is contagious and influences others. It is precisely for this reason that Emilia, an ordinary woman, grows out of her average dimensions, to commit extraordinary deeds for her mistress at the end of Othello. Cariola, the Duchess' woman in the present play, though rendered a little after Emilia as her mistress is after Desdemona, shows no sign, like Emilia of the other play, of being influenced by the grace of her mistress' personality. She dies in the end because she is forcibly killed, so unlike Emilia with the willow song beside her mistress.

As for the language of courtesy, the characters use it as most of them belong to the nobility, but it is easily cast off when not convenient, and even

ordinarily it ill-suits their thoughts and character. It has no pith, and sounds hollow like meadless music. The greetings and farewells which so abound in Shakespeare, yielding aesthetic pleasure, are scarce in the play and when used by one of the criminal group are mere formalities indifferently uttered. The only farewell in the play which approximates to Shakespeare's, is the one given by the Duchess and Antonio to each other (III, v, 59-91). It is consistent with the Duchess' mood at the moment, and the quiet dignity of her suffering.

Webster's other play The White Devil is similar. It has a seamy theme, of adultery and unlawful love. A brother panders for his sister. Isabella with all her love, devotion and loyalty, despite her action of taking over the blame upon herself for the divorce vow, fails to make of her grace and virtue a strong enough counteracting force. She is killed^{as} early as Act II, Sc. 3, and it is Vittoria, something of a courtesan, who predominates the play. Though the criminals die in the end, the means adapted by Francisco to bring about the punishment is another crime, murder by poisoning, and his desire for revenge is mixed up with his momentary amour for Vittoria.

Characterisation is completely subordinated to plot, and we fail to discern the ideal of courtesy in any distinct form. Even the language though the nobles address other in gentle terms, not infrequently lapses into the sensual :

Lawyer : "For to sow kisses (mark what I say), to sow kisses is to reap lechery; and I am sure, a woman that will endure kissing is half *won*."

Flammineo : True, her upper part, by that rule : if you will win her nether part too, you know what follows".

(II, iv, 27-34)

Dekker's main gift as a dramatist is forcefully to convey the realism of London middle-class life. Plays that portrayed the life of the town, as distinguished from courtly life, were as popular at the time as any other variety. They vividly depicted the social life of the lower and middle classes of society as may be found in the plays of Dekker, Marston, Middleton and Heywood. What is of interest to us in relation to courtesy is the social ambition of the economically thriving middle class of Elizabethan society. In their zeal to rise socially, they imitated the speech and manners of the nobility.

Courtiers, however, are not altogether excluded from the cast of the characters in the plays. Indeed there may be one taking active part in the action of the play or be standing round the corner influencing it. Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday¹ is typical of these plays.

While on the one hand in the story there are the Lord Mayor and the Earl of Lincoln, with the problem one of his daughter, the other of his nephew, adamant in their class distinction, cheating each other with gentle speech and mutual courtesy, we have on the other hand, the indelible picture of Simon Eyre's day-to-day life with his working journeymen and his dame, Margery, with their quarrels, their abuses, their greetings and compliments to each other, all mixed up, and modulated always with refreshing good humour. Hans, the Earl's nephew, connects the two patterns of social life, by becoming a shoemaker with Eyre for the sake of his beloved, the Mayor's daughter. There is again the story of the journeymen Ralph and his wife Jane. Two things relevant to our problem come out in the fusion of these three threads and the finale of the play. Dekker's portrayal of the social

¹ Six Elizabethan Plays : Ed. By C.B. Wheeler : The World's Classics. 1937.

ambition of the middle class workmen and his attitude to women. Simon Eyre, as he steps up the ladder to Lord Mayorship, loses not a particle of his robust, infectious good humour, which brings him the nickname, 'the mad Lord Mayor', yet he wears his gown as alderman, Mayor and lord Mayor with obvious self-consciousness. His dame on the other hand, gets puffed up with every rise in society, and her vanity is difficult to conceal. Simon Eyre and Dame Margery are different from his grace the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress.

Dekker handles his women delicately. Rose, the Lord Mayor's daughter, has the tender romantic aura of the Shakespearian heroine of the comedies, sans her wit. Her obduracy for her marriage with Lacy, is Dekker's tribute to love. Jane is delicately drawn, and has loyalty, gentleness and simplicity. There is some grace in Hammon's giving Jane up to Ralph. It is an act of courtesy and reflects Dekker's attitude to woman's virtue. Yet this is no proof that Dekker understood the ideal of courtesy; it was perhaps the result of the author's own tenderness of feeling for women than his regard for true courtesy.

In Heywood's plays again we find the life of London citizens drawn with Dekker's tenderness but without Dekker's gaiety. Copious and prolific in his dramatic output, Heywood's works have a pathetic tenderness about them. He is guided by a strong moral sense, makes most of his sinners repentant and consigns them to infinite remorse. Frankeford, the hero of A Woman Killed With Kindness has such moral loftiness and dignified feelings that he refuses to kill his wife when he discovers her adultery with his friend and guest Wendoll. He sends her away to a manor-house and gives her money, servants and everything she may need for the rest of her life. She is dead to him and is not permitted to see him or her two children again. The kindness of this punishment may be questioned today because we follow different standards but in Tudor England it was veritable kindness. When Mistress Frankeford is on her way to the new house, pathetically remorseful, Frankeford performs a real act of courtesy. He sends after her, her lute^{of} which she was very fond. Mistress Frankeford however breaks it, calling the sound her last music. She goes to the new house, abandons food and waits for her death. When she is about to die, she sends a

message to her husband expressing her last desire to see him. Frankeford complies and the Mistress dies with her husband's kiss upon her lips. These actions of the husband are formally in accord with courtesy but are not necessary therefore acts of courtesy. There is involved in them a certain consideration for the wife, but it is done to satisfy a sense of moral self-righteousness in the husband, not out of kindness for its own sake. The fact is that though, in the works of these contemporaries there are qualities such as tenderness, kindness, even gentle speech and refined behaviour, they do not evince an awareness of the true concept of courtesy, which is abundantly in evidence in the plays of Shakespeare.

Ben Jonson is in various ways an antithesis to Shakespeare. The essential beat of his genius was to satirize the prevailing social and artistic order. He adapted the classical view that virtue could be inculcated by exposing vice. His avowed function was to expose 'the times' deformity'. But his preoccupation with this process, despite his genius in the study of vice, and its delineation on the stage; restricts him from enunciating the ideal of a new

order of things. It is one thing to criticize an existing order; it is another to seek to set up a new one in terms of creative art. It is here, in point of courtesy, that Jonson becomes an antithesis to Shakespeare. Shakespeare sought in his plays to create an ideal of conduct through his concept of courtesy and drew his men and women with this norm of conduct ever before his eyes; he showed up the lapse always by contrast. Jonson, on the other hand, picked up a single vice and concentrated on it, exaggerating it and caricaturing it. In consequence, his characters become mono-maniacs, obsessed by single 'honours'. It is impossible to find a mere or complete man or woman in his plays. In his comedies he exposes under his satirical focus, the manners, customs and passing fashions of his age (as he does those of Rome in the Roman tragedies). He does this so well that his plays may well serve as important documents for the social historian, but he does not create in the plays the alternative to what he seeks to destroy should be. Shakespeare's ideal of excellence, derived from courtesy, seems to encompass life itself; his characters, unlike Jonson's, are full-blooded men and women, and the ideal of excellence, often suggestively

but positively, is felt in the plays, large as life itself.

A character like Mopsa in Volpone may appear to resemble one of the dissemblers¹ in Shakespeare. His conversation with Bonario (III, i)², his antithesis in courtesy is couched in gentle speech. He even sheds tears in support of what he says, and Bonario is so touched that he regards them as 'the sign is soft and good' and, therefore, 'this cannot be a personated passion.' Bonario is completely gulled. He is the only good man in the play but only one quality of his, that of being good to the point of being easily dupped, is depicted. Nowhere in Ben Jonson is an effective foil to the dissemblers to be found. Virtue when an attempt is made to depict it, is dramatically too thinly rendered, to be effective against vice. In the characters of Sir Politick and his lady, the avarice and affected manners of the courtly people (as also Sir Epicure Mammon's Voluptuous desires in The Alchemist), are held up to ridicule, but where in the plays has Jonson portrayed

¹ Chapter IV ante.

² Jonson : Volpone in Four Great Elizabethan Plays :

the ideal courtier as Shakespeare has done in play after play ? Let us remember here that Shakespeare's courtesy is based on his ideal of man and woman, and man's attitude to woman (Chapter III ante). The creation of Imogen, Portia, Ophelia, Viola, Miranda, Perdita, one after another, leaves a permanent impression of the ideal; Jonson's preoccupation with the seamy side and his avoidance of the ideal, only helps to lower the esteem of womanhood, despite the fact that he paints vice to inculcate virtue. The depiction of a negative aspect, however powerful, is not the same thing as a portrayal of the positive. Lady Politick in Volpone is a case in point. The lady wandering in the streets to catch her adulterous husband with another woman, upon mere hearsay, is ungentle and unlady like :

" But knights, I see, care little for their oath
They make to ladies; chiefly their own ladies"
(IV, ii, 39-40)

She tells her husband. And the same lady kisses Volpone in the open court, his nose and mouth running in pretended illness. It is a horrible act for any lady to commit. Celia in the play is a model woman. But all her chastity and gentility cannot prevent her

husband beating her and dragging her to Volpone's bed. The lustre of virtue in Shakespeare's plays is altogether a different thing. It emanates from them like light and beautifies men. The same husband, for money, points at Celia and thus accuses her in the open court :

"This woman, please your fatherhoods, is a whore
Of most hot exercise, more than a patridge,
Upon record.

(IV, v, 147-149)

Jonson's penchant for satire and his zeal for reform prevent him from shaping an ideal of excellence, and, in vain, therefore, we look for the ideal of courtesy in his works.

In some of the works of these contemporaries, we also find the knightly ideals ridiculed. Jonson does it in the person of Puntarvalo in Every Man Out of his Humour. This crazy, quixotic gentleman acts as if he is living a chivalrous romance. Beaumont and Fletcher's The Knight of the Burning Pestle is a parody of the chivalric ideal, giving expression to the spirit of the working classes which had devoured cheap Spanish romances and which had gone to their heads. It is interesting that chivalry was thus being

ridiculed when Shakespeare was forging the courtier's décor in his plays.

A study of the contemporary dramatic literature in relation to courtesy reveals that while the dramatists adopted gentle speech and behaviour in their plays, in conformity with the prevailing taste and temper of the age, they do not evince a correct enough understanding of the ideal of courtesy. Some of the ingredients of courtesy they do reveal; they draw courteous characters; where the characters belong to the lower working classes, they also faithfully depict their social aspirations and conscious emulation of the manners of the higher classes; yet, of the true ideal of courtesy, they touch only the fringe. They do not drain the cup, so to say, but only sip the froth. Courtesy with Shakespeare is a composite thing. It blends the different ingredients into an organic whole, where every one part embellishes the others. This is what we miss in the works of contemporary dramatists.

2. Spenser and Shakespeare

For a clearer understanding of Shakespeare's concept of courtesy, we may turn rather to the works of Sidney and Spenser. Both wrote with the precise object of shaping a gentleman, the former in the Arcadia, and the latter, in the Faerie Queene. These works show mixed influences of the chivalric romances, the Italian courtesy books, especially Castiglione's Courtegiانو, of Aristotle's Temperate man, and the pastoral romances. Their attempt is in consonance with the general urge all over Europe to seek an ideal of conduct, Sidney and Spenser have endeavoured to frame one, consistent with the traditions of their soil. Both writers, again, adopt chivalry as the ideal of noble conduct and reshape it in terms of the Renaissance ideals, for English men to follow.

But it is Spenser who gives the new ideal clear ethical articulation. The highest artistic excellence of the Faerie Queene remains in the superb sensuous pictures which Spenser creates, but we may also find in it a general enunciation of the ideal courtly

~~Spenser's ideal of the gentleman~~

conduct, particularly in Book VI. Spenser's concept of courtesy at many points runs parallel to that of Shakespeare and a comparison of the two would be both interesting and profitable.

Two things emerge clearly from a study of the Faerie Queene in relation to courtesy. In the first place Spenser has set forth a moral scheme in the form of an allegory. Secondly, for Spenser courtesy is not just morality. It is a quality which may embrace any moral code and yet transcend it, to stand as an ideal in any environment irrespective of the limits of time or space. Shakespeare's concept, too, is precisely this, though he has dramatised and put on the stage what Spenser has formally schematised in an allegory. This is not to say that Shakespeare has borrowed it from Spenser. They were both acting under the same influences and Shakespeare may have been influenced by Spenser as chronologically he followed him,¹ but that is something far removed from

¹ Professor Abbie Findlay Potts thinks Shakespeare was so influenced "Our hypothesis can be briefly stated as follows. At that turn of the century, the better to enhance his plays written from 1599 to 1604, Shakespeare was studying the Faerie Queene of Edmund Spenser..... We shall study the ethical content and (contd. next page)

borrowing. Their aim is the same, to establish the worth and dignity of man.

As common legatees, they both draw upon the same material, viz. the chivalric romances with the knightly ideal, and a conciliation is sought between Castiglione's courtier and the pastoral shepherd. The knight Hermit, the courtier who relinquishes courtly life because of its ills, the storms and tempests, the neo-platonic love discourses, the wild beasts, the savages, the contented shepherds and shepherdesses, above all the beautiful women, all come from a common inheritance. Also, the use of all this material in different literary forms with the object of evolving an ideal of noble conduct is common to both.

(Foot-note 1 continued from the previous page)

metaphorical structure in the other plays noted before 1598..... We shall find in all these plays no certain trace of Spenser's action, his situations, his agents, or his diction..... With Much Ado About Nothing, however, Shakespeare's comedy begins to acquire another dimension." Professor Potts finds in plays written after 1598, "many demonstrable analogies with agents and actions of Spenserian allegory". A.F. Potts: Shakespeare and The Faerie Queene; pp. 9-10.

To start with, Shakespeare bases his ideal of courtesy as a social grace on the concept of 'degree' in the universe. Spenser's concept of good conduct is also based on the same view. Spenser is quite as plain about it as Shakespeare :

"What vertue is so fitting for a knight,
Or for a Ladie whom a knight should love,
As Courtesie; to beare themselves aright
To all of each degree as doth behove ?
For whether they be placed high above
Or low beneath, yet ought they well to know
Their good; that none them rightly may reprove
Of rudenesse for not yeelding what they owe;
Great skill it is such duties timely to bestow".¹
(VI, ii, 1)

The composition of society based on degree once conceded, it follows that noble conduct must spring naturally from the noble. Nature herself has bestowed the better graces of conduct on the nobly born. Their acceptance of 'degree' in the Universe, and their simultaneous adherence to the ideals of the institution of chivalry make both Spenser and Shakespeare insist on noble birth as a pre-requisite of courtesy, though, as we shall see later in the reconciling these ideas with those of the Italian courtesy books and the pastoral romances, both writers had to make certain concessions.

¹ Edmund Spenser : The Faerie Queene.

In Shakespeare's plays, the nobly born, even when lowly placed, shine out in noble grace. Thus, Perdita, even though she is brought up among the shepherds, has all the grace of a lady; and, though Florizel falls in love with a mere shepherdess, she must turn out to be a born princess. Miranda, without any formal courtly upbringing has grace flowing naturally in all her speech and behaviour. We get Shakespeare's most authentic expression of this view in Cymbeline, when the old banished knight, Belarius, waxes lyrical over the natural qualities of the two princes of king Cymbeline, whom he has brought up :

" O thou goddess,
 Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st
 In these two princely boys ! They are as gentle
 As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,
 Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough,
 Their royal blood enchafed, as the rudest wind,
 That by the top doth take the mountain pine,
 And make him stoop to the vale. 'Tis wonder
 That an invisible instinct should frame them
 To royalty unlearn'd; honour untaught;
 Civility not seen from other; valour,
 That wildly grows in them, but yields a crop
 As if it had been sow'd."

(Cymbeline : IV, ii, 168-180)

If courtesy is to be based on noble birth and the 'degree' order, then what of the lower classes, what of nurture, we may ask ? These are vexing questions,

but we shall find proper answers to them as we proceed.

Let us understand, for the sake of clarity, that the task before Spenser, as before Shakespeare, was to evolve a new code of conduct for the courtier, not for the ordinary 'w~~r~~ight'. For this purpose the material they found, consisted of contraries. Unless they found the means to reconcile the opposites, they could not create a new ideal. On the one hand, they could not possibly rid themselves of the deeply-rooted ideals of chivalry, however decadent; on the other hand, the fresh ideals ushered in by the new learning were so irresistible and their influence so pervasive on their age, that they must needs be adopted. Moreover, the pastoral romances, to which they were traditionally accustomed, with their ideals of simplicity and natural goodness, could not easily be given up. These three forces had something in common, but many more things uncommon and conflicting. It was within the triangle formed by these three points that Shakespeare and Spenser, like many of their contemporaries had to work. A way had to be found which would bring all differing ideals into a harmonious whole. It is when we come to Spenser's vision of the

graces, that we realize that a certain way has been found to reconcile all differences and a new formula evolved. It is important to remember that both Spenser and Shakespeare were poets, not social philosophers. It is with their poetic vision that they have achieved this miracle.

In the meantime, if they were searching for an ideal for the courtier, what was their practical experience of the courtly life of their own day? Spenser certainly and Shakespeare probably had intimate experience of the court of Elizabeth. Spenser describes with bitterness his experience in Colin Clout's Come Home Againe and the Faerie Queene. Shakespeare inveighs against it in the plays whenever there is scope, and portrays the ills of courtly life in the themes of the plays. The picture is so unattractive that for a moment we may think that courtesy and courtliness are antithetical. In fact it is to ennoble the degenerate again that they want to lay down an ideal. Every thing that is directly opposed to the virtues which constitute courtesy exists in excess of courtliness. Envy, hypocrisy, detraction, falsehood, intrigue, reign supreme there.

As Spenser says :

But, in the triall of true courtesie,
Its now so farre from that which then was,
That it indeed is nought but forgerie,
Fashion'd to please the eies of them that pas,
But vertues seat is deepe within the mynd,
And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts
defynd.

(VI, Proem : 5)

It is to regenerate what once was lustrous and
which is now rusty with vice that a new ideal is
sought : in fact, the court is the place where
courtesy ought to dwell :

"Of court, it seems, men Courtesie doe call,
For that it there most useth to abound;
And well beseemeth that in Princes hall
That vertue should be plentifully found,
Which of all goodly manners is the ground,
And roote of civill conversation"

(VI, i, 1)

The ideal is sought for the courtier only, for
the highborn. The true has become false, the courteous
have become dissemblers, the beautiful have become
ugly. We have seen in a previous chapter¹ how Shakes-
peare carefully distinguishes the true from the false
in the plays. Good speech and good manners can be
worn externally to deceive others, and this in its

¹ Chapter IV ante.

own turn may lead to all-round degeneration, a state into which, as Spenser complains, and as Shakespeare depicts, court life has already fallen. They have therefore to seek for an ideal which would tear the outward mask and penetrate to the inward or inversely which may spring from the inward and 'flow outward'. This explains, as we have seen earlier, why Shakespeare insists on a harmony between the inward and the outward, as does Spenser. Here the Renaissance ideal of bright soul in a bright body comes to their aid - the ideal of grace. The essence of the Renaissance ideal was self-expression - the expression in speech and behaviour of the inner spirit. Here, there was something that could easily be fused with the knightly ideals of service, charity, pity, loyalty, etc. What would remain is to connect the fusion to the ideal of the pastoral romances - the ideal of simple natural life, shorn of any polish or sophistication. The degeneracy of courtly life would inevitably drive them there. Thus, in both Spenser and Shakespeare we find courtiers abandoning courtly life in disgust and settling down in the pastoral existence. The banished Senior Duke and Orlando, like Sir Calidore of *The Faerie Queene*, resort to the

forest only to find peace, away from the ills of
painted pomp :

" Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?"
Here 'exempt from public haunt' may be found,
"tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in every thing".

(As You Like It : II,i,3-17)

Yet this simple pastoral life in the lap of
nature is only an antidote to the evils of court life
and at best it is a restorative for them but it is
not the ideal life of courtesy. The ideal life is a
life of realization of the inward grace. The end of
self-expression is self-realization, the reward is
joy. It is Spenser's poetic vision which brings this
about in the Faerie Queene, though only for a brief
moment.

Sir Calidore, an ideal courtier, seeking to live
a life of courtesy, becomes disgusted with the
intrigue, intemperance, envy, and hollowness of court
life and renounces it to seek peace elsewhere. He
comes among the pastoral shepherds, who live in
peace and contentment, and finds his own peace there,
like the Senior Duke in As You Like It. He falls in
love with the shepherdess Pastrolla, for whose sake

he puts on the shepherd's weeds. He has to correct his own manners to suit the simple life. It is here, at a spot, on top of a hill, guarded by nymphs and fairies, that Spenser gives him a vision of the graces, because the simple natural life that he lives, is not the ideal life of courtesy. The courtier must learn that lesson. In the vision he finds a hundred hand-maids of Venus, encircling three ladies in the centre, who are Juno's daughters, and Venus' Chief attendants. Their business, like that of Juno and Ceres, in The Tempest, is to bestow gifts on men. They all dance to the tune played by the simple shepherd, Colin. For Calidore, the sight of the lustrous naked beauty, the sound of the music, and the movement of the dance, make an experience of sheer ecstasy. Joy is the reward of the vision. But what are the gifts that the three maids bestow ?

"These three on men all gracious gifts bestow,
Which deeke the body or adorne the mynde,
To make them lovely or well-favoured show;
As comely carriage, entertainment kynde,
- Sweete semblaunt, friendly offices bynde,
And all the compements of curtesie :
They teach us how each degree and kynde
We should our selves demeane, to low, to hie,
To friends, to foes; which skill men call
Civility."

(VI, x, 23)

Generally it is the gift of all the virtues of courtesy, of civil conduct and intercourse, but the chief among them is the harmony of the mind and the body, the harmony of the inward and the outward. This is the essence of the Spenserian - and the Shakespearian - concept of courtesy. It includes all the virtues that make up courtesy. In other words, courtesy is inner grace, flowing out in outward form and speech and conduct. The ideal is comprehensive, and covers all the moral virtues necessary to the chivalric ideal. It would also properly fall in with the natural simple living of the pastoral ideal and it also conforms to the new Renaissance ideal. The three different ideals are thus fused into a single whole.

Whence do we get this inner grace ? Obviously it is a gift from the Gods. Hence the vision. It is dealt out to each according to his degree. And therefore it is necessary that every one must know his degree, and realize the portion of grace bestowed upon him. This would mean self-realization, which, according to the new Renaissance ideal, must be achieved by self-expression. The fruit of this

realization would be joy and happiness. In fact the resulting human picture would be that of the complete or perfect man.

If courtesy is the process by which the inner gift of grace finds outward expression, then the awkward question still remains : What about Nurture ? If the gods give man a gift, would they not grant him also the means wherewith to express it ? If again the concept is based on 'degree' would the gift not be confined exclusively to the nobly born ? The answer is that grace is bestowed on each according to his degree. Such a deduction would mean a concession from the courtly for whom the ideal is framed. Spenser makes this concession :

"Thereto great helpe dame Nature selfe doth lend;
For some so goodly gracious are by kynd,
That every action doth ~~them~~ much commend,
And in the eies of men great liking fynd,
Which others that have greater skill in mynd,
Though they enforce themselves cannot attaine.
For every thing, to which one is inclin'd
Doth best become and greatest grace".

(VI, ii, 2)

Yet the really nobly born may express their grace, in all circumstances :

"O what an easie thing is to descry
 The gentle bloud, how ever it be wrapt
 In sad misfortunes foule deformity
 And wretched sorrows, which have often hapt".

(VI, vi, 1)

A study of some of the characters born in the nobler classes, in Shakespeare would show that the dramatist holds the same views. Nature expresses in them the inner gift in her own way. We have just referred to what the old courtier Belarius has to say about the two young princes of King Cymbeline. Perdita's grace expresses itself spontaneously even in her Shepherd's weeds and environment. "She is as forward of her breeding as she is i'th' rear o'her birth" (The Winter's Tale : IV, iii, 584-585):

" I cannot say
 She lacks instructions, for she seems a mistress
 To most that teach."

(585-587)

And :

"This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever
 Ran on the green-sward : nothing she does or
 But smacks of something greater than herself,
 Too noble for this place".

(156-159)

The emphasis here is so pronounced that it would appear as if Shakespeare does not believe even in nurture. Despite schooling, at the hands of Prospero,

Caliban in the Tempest does not improve. Miranda away from courtly environment is perfect in the expression of her grace. In this context the conversation in The Winter's Tale between Perdita and the old Polixenes is significant : Perdita has been asked by her shepherd - father to act as hostess at the sheep-shearing festival. She welcomes Polixenes and Camillo with flowers fitting for their respective ages. To Polixenes she offers rosemary and rue, not carnations and gullivors; they are bastard flowers, worn by light women and she would have none of them in her garden :

" Reverend Sirs,
For you there's rosemary and rue - these keep
Seeming and savour all the winter long :
Grace and remembrance be to you both,
And welcome to our shearing !

Polixenes : Shepherdess,
 (A fair one are you !) Well you fit our ages
With flowers of winter.

Perdita : Sir, the year growing ancient -
Not yet on summer's death nor on the birth
Of trembling winter - the fairest flowers
 o'th' season
Are our carnations and streaked gillyvors,
Which some call nature's bastards. Of that
 kind
Our rustic garden's barren, and I care not
To get slips of them.

mere low-born shepherdess, proceeds :

"You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of noble race, This is an art
Which does mend nature, change it rather, but
The art itself is nature".

(88-97)

Perdita has to agree.

Perdita : (her eye on Florizel) So it is.

Polixenes : Then make your garden rich in gullyvors
And do not call them bastards".

(97-99)

There are bastards in Shakespeare's plays also.

But Perdita would not accept the advice because to
her simple breeding and maidenly purity it savours
of artificiality.

Perdita : " I'll not put
The dibble in earth to set one slip of them;
No more than, were I painted, I would wish
This youth should say 't were well ! and
only therefore
Desire to breed by me".

(99-103)

This obduracy on her part is meant only to emphasise
her purity and innocence. Let us not conclude from
the dialogue that Shakespeare therefore rules nurture
out of court. Such a conclusion would be wholly
unwarranted by the passage. Rather it reveals the

poet-dramatist's vision of 'the great creating Nature', the vision that framed his view of human life, the vision that created the great plays and poetry.

In the work of "the great creating Nature" may be found all varieties of creation, exhibiting degrees of good and evil, of the beautiful and the ugly. Uniformly with the concept of 'degree', the creation is both vertical and parallel in different classes. There are beasts as well as savages in the Faerie Queene and the plays of Shakespeare. But even among the human genre, Dame Nature has produced inexhaustible variety. Human nature too is not unmixed good or evil. In Shakespeare, with the dramatist's uncanny insight into human nature, we have characters representing all grades of the mixture. We have also those representing the ugly side of Nature in the savages and characters like Caliban. Spenser's Blatant Beast may be a personified representation of the evil in human nature. This explains why Shakespeare so clearly marks out the dissemblers in courtesy from the genuine in the plays, and dramatically contrasts them. Noble birth alone is not the criterion of the good and the beautiful. Many of the nobly-born

are dissemblers and evil characters in the plays; and the different forms of evil in them often become the themes of the plays. Nor are the good characters perfect in their goodness, standing up every bit to the ideal of courtesy, god-given grace flowing out unimpeded into beautiful conduct. That is not Nature's way to create, nor Shakespeare's dramatically to recreate on the stage. On these defects, those of the heroes of the plays, very often hangs the action of the plays. Hamlet, with an abundance of grace, procrastinating, Lear's filial infirmity, Macbeth's leaping ambition, Leontes' jealousy are illustrations. It is for this reason that we meet with many people in the plays who are good and courteous yet not so nobly born. The many innominate 'gentlemen' in the plays, who often act just as 'chorus', commenting on the action or reporting events to the audience, illustrate this truth. Shakespeare makes their courtesy the measure of their goodness, that is to say, through their courteous speech and dealings with others, we come to know them. As we already know, it is Shakespeare's device to reveal his characters by means of courtesy. Such characters as Miranda, Perdita, Orlando, who unconsciously reveal their

grace, despite absence of nurture, reflect the dramatist's belief in the phenomenon of heredity, but he cannot therefore be said to belittle nurture.

Shakespeare and Spenser, then, endeavoured to profound ideals of conduct. Their characters are the agents of their intention. It would now be clear that their ideals are almost identical. In different literary forms they run parallel.

The comparison may yet further be extended to their respective conception of women and love. This conception plays no small part in the construction of their belief about courtesy. It is based on the tradition of the chivalric ideals - that of deification of women. We have already seen how the angelic women in Shakespeare exert a refining influence. Their purity resists even a shadow of the evil. Desdemona cannot utter the word 'whore', Perdita would not grow the bastard flowers which light women wear. Both Spenser and Shakespeare insist on chastity and purity in women. Spenser, enamoured from the beginning, of the beauty of woman, as an inspiration to love, saw in them the symbol of the divine :

"Therefore, where-ever that thou doest behold
 A comely corpse, with beauty faire endewed,
 Know this for certaine, that the same doth hold
 A beauteous soule, with faire conditions the wed;
 Fit to receive the seede of vertue strewed;
 For all that fair is, is by nature good :¹
 This is the sign to know the gentle blood".

This in fact is a compound of the Renaissance ideal of a fair soul in a fair body; the chivalric deification of woman and the medieval insistence on chastity in women. It is a process which moralises the sensuous.

Love and women are assigned the same status and function as in Shakespeare.

"Ye gentle Ladies, in whose souveraine powre
 Love hath the glory of his kingdom left,
 And the hearts of men, as your eternall dowre,
 In yron chaines of liberty bereft".

(VI, vii, 1)

And with this power woman becomes the civiliser. These ideas are intended to school men into gentle discipline.

The ideal of courtesy which Spenser and Shakespeare produce with these ideas is the ideal of the perfect human being. The ideal is offered so that men may strive to reach perfection. It is based on

¹ A hymne in Honour of Beautie : 134-140.

Nature and her workings. Hamlet wonders what a piece of work is man ! True, he is just a piece in the great scheme of Creation, but he possesses nature's gifts which he may cultivate according to rules which are also given by nature. Courtesy which is the means whereby grace finds expression, is acquired through these rules. What these rules are is for the social philosopher to discover and to get implemented in social conduct. As far as Spenser and Shakespeare are concerned, they have based them on the virtues of the chivalric knight, the angelic beauty and purity of woman, on love, on the ideals of the Renaissance courtier and the pastoral shepherd.

We thus find a virtual identity in the Spenserian and Shakespearian ideals of courtesy, and this comparison helps us toward a correct understanding of the dramatist's concept of ideal behaviour. They both have a cultural pre-possession, and their inspiration is similar. But in the works of the contemporary dramatists we miss this true ideal of courtesy. They betray an inadequate understanding of the ideas that went into the making of this ideal. As a mode of social behaviour courtesy was in vogue

in the Elizabethan age, and in delineating courtly life the Elizabethan dramatists used courteous speech and manners as social graces of their characters. As we have seen, they sometimes seem to emulate certain graces of Shakespeare's characters in speech and conduct, but they do not evince a true enough understanding of the ideal of courtesy as we find it in Shakespeare or Spenser. Courteous manners are worn by the characters in contemporary drama as external embellishments or ornamental signs, and readily discarded when not required, as we have seen in our study of some of them. In the plays of Shakespeare courtesy becomes an inseparable integral part of the characters. Its use in the plays creates a genuine atmosphere of social grace and good breeding which we miss in the works of his contemporary dramatists.