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Subject -

Development of English
Lyrical Poetry.

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The English lyric as one author defines them are short poems, "Dealing with one thought, essentially melodious in rhyme and structure, and if a metaphor may be taken from a sister art, a simple air, without progression, variation, or accompaniment." We are accustomed to hear them spoken of as songs, at the present day, — a term rightly applied, since these poems are written to be set to music. There is no form of literature that is so universally enjoyed by the people as the lyric. As far back as history traces the English people one may find this same love of song so characteristic of our race today. We know the early ancestors were in possession of a great many of them although we have only a few in the ancient books — the Exeter and Vercelli — and also several old manuscripts.

The early literature like the people was very rude. In Beowulf we find this curious poem translated by Thorpe. It seems as strange and wild in spirit as the people of those days.

They that secret land
 inhabit, the wolfe retreats
 windy nesses,
 the dangerous fen-path,
 where the mountain stream,
 under the nesses' mists
 downward flows,
 the flood under the earth,
 It is not far thence,
 a mile's distance,
 that the mere stands,
 over which hang
 barky groves.

The earliest forms were written in couplets and composed of very short lines without either rhythm or metre.

About 670 A.D. Beddmon - the founder of English poetry is supposed to have composed most of his writings. In his works we see a marked change, in that the warlike spirit seems to be partly replaced by a religious spirit and the minds and surroundings of the people improved very much.

Until the time of Chaucer few lyrics were written. The art of singing and composing gradually became the profession of wandering glee-men or minstrels.

The gentlemen were welcomed to the homes of all, even royalty, and considered men of such superior talents as to be above the people in general. This custom did not disappear until after Queen Elizabeth's time.

The fourteenth century claims the greatest poet in English literature up to this time, Geoffrey Chaucer, well known as the Morning Star of English Poetry. It has been said of him that if the histories had all been silent it would be a simple matter to judge of the customs and dress of the people of that age from his Canterbury Tales. His power of narration is truly great and he has never been equalled in animated flowing and picturesque narrative. In all his literary productions a great improvement in mental and physical conditions of man is evident. Metre and rhythm are employed and it is noticeable that the characters he describes are well educated and interesting.

"A good man ther was of religioun,
 And was a poure Person of a town;
 But riche he was of holy thought and werk
 He was also a lerned man, a clerk
 That cristes gospel trevely woulde preche;
 His parishens devoutly woulde he teche.

Benigne he was and wonder diligent,
And in adversite' full pacient:

And such he was i-proved oft sithes".
A decline then followed this luxuriant
growth and an inferior style of ballads
were introduced by the gleemen on subjects
pertaining to the lives and deeds of outlaws.

In Chevy Chase we find
"At last the Douglas and the Perse met
Lyk-to-laptaynes of myght and of mayne;
The swapt together - tyll the both swat,
With swordes that wear of fyn myllan.

With that ther cam an arrowe hastily,
Forth off a myghttē wane;
Hit hath the strekene the yerle Douglas
In at the brest bane.

The perse leanyde on his brande,
And sawe the Douglas de;
He tooke the dede maner be the hande,
And sayd, "Wo ys me for the!"

Off all that se a Skottische knyght
Was called Sir Hewe the Monggounbysry,
He sawe the Douglas to the deth was dyght,
He spendyd a spear, a trusti tre.

He sat uppon the lord Perse
A dynte that was full soare;

With a sawn spear of myghttē tre
 leane throw the body he - the Persi' be,
 A' the tothar syde - that a man myght see
 a large cloth yard and mare;
 Tove better captyns wear not in Christiante,
 Than - that day slain wear - ther."

Although the name of Christopher Marlowe is unfamiliar to many as he was only one of the inferior writers in the latter part of the sixteenth century, yet one lyric, his master-piece still lives. Its description of the wild scenes of nature and its musical tones lend a charm no other could give to it as when he says

"Come live with me and be my Love,
 And we will all the pleasures prove
 That hills and valleys, dale and field,
 And all the craggy mountains yield.
 There will we sit upon the rocks
 And see the shepherds feed their flocks
 By shallow rivers to whose falls
 Melodious birds sing madrigals
 There will I make the beds of roses
 And a thousand fragrant posies
 A cap of flowers and a kirtle
 Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.

Following Marlowe, Edmund Spenser has won fame as the author of the most glorious love song in the language - Epithalamion. He was the one to prepare the way for the greatest of all English poets - ~~Was~~ Shakespeare. The genius of this, the greatest author, has never been questioned by learned men.

The charm that holds one when he reads Shakespeare's plays lies in the fact that he wrote to please others - not himself and the characters he portrays are true to life. One author says, "What he did, thought, learned and felt, he did, thought learned, and felt, as an artist, and it is this purely artistic nature appearing in all his works that gives them the value they possess. He wrote equally well on the passions, pains, joys and sorrows of mankind, and on nature. To those who want quiet and seclusion he says,

"Under the green wood tree
Who loves to lie with me
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet birds-throat -
Come hither, come hither, come hither!
Here shall we see

No enemy
 But winter and rough weather!
 Who doth ambition shun
 And loves to live i'the sun,
 Seeking the food he eats
 And pleased with what he gets -
 Come hither, come hither, come hither
 Here shall we see

No enemy
 But winter and rough weather?"
 In his sonnet on absence he expresses the
 blindness of love well when he says
 "So true a fool is love, that in your will,
 Though you do any thing he thinks no ill."

A simple little love song is
 "Oh Mistress mine where are you roaming?
 O stay and hear! your true love's coming
 That can sing both high and low;
 Trip no farther pretty Sweeting,
 Journeys end in lovers meeting
 Every wise man's son doth know.

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
 Present mirth hath present laughter;
 What's to come is still unsure;
 In delay there lies no plenty, -
 Then come kiss me sweet and twenty
 Youth's a stuff will not endure."

We realize how short life is and
 how fast time is passing in
 "Like as the waves make to the pebbled shore
 So do our minutes hasten to their end;
 Each changing place with that which goes
 before

In sequent toil all forwards do contend.

Nativity once in the main of light
 crawls to maturity, where with being crowned,
 Crooked eclipses' gainst his glory fight,
 And Time that gave doth now that gift confound.
 Shakespeare has been called the moon among less
 or stars in the firmament of Literature.

Dr. Sam'l Johnson says, "The stream of time which is
 continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of
 other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of
 Shakespeare."

Lord Macaulay pronounced him the greatest poet
 that ever lived.

Thos. De Quincy says, "In the gravest sense it may
 be affirmed of Shakespeare that he was among the
 modern luxuries of life; it was his prerogative
 to have thought more finely and more extensively
 than all the other poets combined."

Lord Jeffrey says, "He is more full of wisdom,
 and ridicule and sagacity than all the moralists

that ever existed, he is more wild, airy and inventive, and more pathetic^{and} fantastic, than all the poets of all regions and ages of the world."

According to the law of nature every thing has its highest standard of development after which it deteriorates and so it was with poetry. After Shakespeare it declined in the works of Robert Herrick. We are all familiar with his Council to Girls in which he says,
 "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
 Old Time is still a flying;
 And this same flower that smiles today,
 Tomorrow will be dying.
 The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
 The higher he's a getting
 The sooner will his race be run
 And nearer he's to setting."

One author has said of him, "Without much depth of feeling or splendor of imagery, his poems are tender and melodious, and leave an impression of grace which is difficult to analyze." This we can feel in the little poem although it is hard to define it.

But poetry was not destined to perish. It almost reached its once high standard

in the works of our most sublime writer, John Milton. He possessed wonderful command of language which was strengthened continually by study. His great ambition was to excel in composition for the honor of his country alone - not for any selfish motive. To aid him in his work he received a good education. He was blessed with a powerful mind and the means of using it. His great genius can be appreciated in the following when he speaks of Christs sacrifice for us.

"That glorious Form, - that Light unsufferable
And that far beaming blaze of Majesty
Wherewith he was wont at Heavens high
council table

To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,
He laid aside; and, here with us to be
Forsook the courts of Everlasting day,
And chose with us a darksome house
of mortal clay."

And again when he describes the stars
gazing at the babe in the manger
"The stars with deep amaze,
Stand fixed in steadfast gaze

Bending one way their precious influence
 And will not take their flight,
 For all the morning light
 Or Lucifer that often warned them thence;
 But in their glimmering orbs did glow,
 Until their Lord himself bespoke and bid them go."

Milton was followed by writers on
 sarcasm and severe critics among the most
 important being Pope^{2nd} & Dryden. Pope was not con-
 sidered a lyricist but Dryden's Song for St
 Cecilia's Day is especially prized as a gem
 in our Literature. Upon this poem rests his
 fame as a lyricist. Especially impressive is
 the chorus

"As from the power of sacred lays
 The spheres began to move,
 and sung the great Creator's praise
 To all the blest above;
 So when the last and dreadful hour
 This crumbling pageant shall devour
 The trumpet shall be heard on high
 The dead shall live, the living die,
 And music shall intune the sky."

In the eighteenth ^{century}, the subject changed
 to nature. During this period which was
 in the earlier part of this century the

finest lyric in our language was written by Thomas Gray - his Elegy written in a Country Church yard. As one reads it he can feel the terrible anguish of those whose hopes are crushed by deaths of dear ones and feel the darkness which seems to fall on him as he reads of the forgotten ones there lying whose dumb lips seem to plead for him - to shed one tear of pity on their tomb. No other poem in our Literature better expresses utter hopelessness. So sad is

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
All that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour,
The paths of glory lead but to the grave".
Loneliness finds expression in

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air".

One feels in suspense all through the poem relieved only partially in the last verse by
"There they alike in trembling hope repose: -
The bosom of his Father and his God".

The Scottish literature became popular in the works of Robert Burns known as

Scotland's Sweet Singer. His charm lies in simplicity of language and subject. He is called by John Service "The poet of homely human nature not half so homely as it seems; and," his claim to be considered the first of song writers is hardly disputed. He is also the poet of passion and feeling possessing a rich rare humor unlike any other. To the daisy he sympathetically yet simply says
 "Oe, modest, crimson tipped flower,
 Thou hast met me in an evil hour;
 For I must crush amang the stoure
 Thy slender stem;
 To spare thee now is past my power,
 Thou bonny gem."

In the well known poem 'For a' That an a' That he takes a brave stand for labor and the laborer, condemning the proud aristocrat in
 "Is there, for honest poverty,
 That hangs his head and a' that?
 The coward slave we pass him by:
 We dare be poor for a' that!
 For a' that, and a' that,

Our toils obscure, and a' that

The rank is but the guinea's stamp

The man's the gowd for a' that"

This simple honest singer has won a place no other can fill. All nationalities recognize in Burns a genius of no mean quality whose name will last as long as our literature exists.

Well may Scotland be proud of Burns and yet she as dearly loves her great war poet, Sir Walter Scott who is equalled by no one in composing war lyrics. His power can be felt if not described in the patriotic

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,

"This is my own, my native land?"

Whose heart has ne'er within him burned
As homeward his footsteps he hath turned
From wandering on a foreign strand?
If such there breath, go, mark him well;
For him no minstrel raptures swell!

High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim:
Despise those titles, power, and pelf,
The wretch concen'tered all in self,
Living shall forfeit fair renown,

And doubly dying shall go down
To the vile dust from which he sprung
Unwept, unhonored and unsung."

During the latter part of the eighteenth
and the earlier part of the present
century the subject of Nature was
most highly developed in England's
Nature poet - William Wordsworth
who believed that Nature possessed a
soul. One can read his character and
life from his writings - a life so full of
pure devotion and love that all seem-
ed to think him almost a perfect
man. To the skylark he says

"Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
Lost - thou despise the earth where cares
abound?

Or while the wings aspire, are heart
and eye

Both with thy nest upon the ground?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at
will

Those quivering wings composed, that music still!
and also

"Type of the wise; who soar but never roam
True - to the kindred points of Heaven & Home."

He is - the author of three poems on birds the equal of which no language can produce - To - the Cuckoo, being recognized as the best. No praise that I could give him would convey any idea of his wonderful ability and power. The greatest - thing - that can be said of him is - that he was a true poet.

Following Wordsworth and almost in his footsteps was - the late Alfred Tennyson - a poet of very great power. One can imagine they hear - the echo of - the bugle in

"Oh hark I hear! how - thin and clear,
And - thinner, clearer, farther going!

A sweet and far from cliff and scar,
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing."
In the following poem the author expresses all - that is dreary cold and sad.

"Break, break, break,
On - thy cold gray stones Oh Sea!
And I would that my tongue could
utter

The thoughts that arise in me"
also -

"And - the stately ships go on
To - their haven under the hill;
But O for - the touch of a vanished hand

And the sound of a voice - that is still.

Break, break, break,

At the foot of thy crags O, Sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

It can safely and truly be said - that the lyrics are more universally developed and of a higher standard than ever before in either England or young America who now claims a place.

William Cullen Bryant, the American Wordsworth was our first great poet. Altho equal to Wordsworth - they differ greatly in that Bryant is cold, dignified or of a more lofty moral tone, sublime, and painfully correct sometimes while Wordsworth is warm and gushing simple, unassuming, and often quite childlike in his gentle sweetness.

Both men were finely educated Undoubtedly Bryant surpasses all others in writing of death in "The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,
Of wailing winds and naked woods
and meadows brown and sear.

Heaped in the hollows of the grove the
withered leaves lie dead;

They rustle in the eddying gusts and to
-the rabbits tread.

The robins and the wrens are flown
and from the shrub the jay,

And from the wood top calls the crow
-through all the gloomy day."

Although England considered Bryant
a poet of wonderful ability, she seem-
-ed inclined to think Longfellow the
most conspicuous person belonging to
our own small class of American
poets. We feel his great mental
powers in

"Thou too sail on, O ship of State!

Sail on O Union strong and great!

Humanity with all its fears.

With all the hopes of future years,

Is hanging breathless on thy fate!"

Unlike Bryant he was of a more
hopeful turn of mind and possessed
a more cheerful disposition not
prone to discouragement as is evidence
-ed by

"Tell me not in mournful numbers,

Life is but an empty dream!
And the soul is dead - that slumbers
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real, life is earnest!

And the grave is not its goal;
'Dust thou art, to dust returnest'
Was not spoken of the soul."

John G. Whittier is famous as the great American war poet. To him the credit has been given as one of the principal moving agents during the late war against slavery. But death has claimed all the great stars in our literature. To the future we look with expectant eyes for even greater authors who will direct the hearts and minds of our people aright. It is well said - that the songs of a country do the most in keeping the morals pure and may the future generation enjoy even sweeter songs than those the great men of the past have left. In the words of Barry Cornwall
"Songs from baser thoughts should win us;
Songs should charm us out of woe;

2
Song should stir the heart within us
Like a patriots friendly blow.
Song should spur the mind to duty
Nerve the weak and stir the strong.
Every deed of truth and beauty,
Should be crowned by starry song."