

JOHN SKELTON AND THE EARLY RENAISSANCE

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CHAPTER ONE.

THE AGE OF TRANSITION.

* The merry tales of Skelton
+ Bishop Lykke in "The
Hundred Merry Tales" by
John Rostell (see how 1526)
Has this not been overlooked?
(see also pp 15 &
30 - 35.)

In the year 1566-7 - ten years after the publication of Tottel's Miscellany - two books were entered on the Stationers' Register that represent both a triumph and a defeat. They were both published shortly afterwards, the Pithy, pleasaunt and profitable workes of maister Skelton, Poete Laureate in 1568, and the Merie Tales Newly Imprinted and made by Master Skelton Poet Laureat in 1567, the one containing his poetry, the other a mass of legend that had accumulated around him since his death in 1529. Since these two volumes appeared, so little has been discovered on the life of this "poet Laureate" that subsequent criticism has repeated the Merie Tales more frequently than it has examined his verse, and the whole conception of the poetry of Skelton has been coloured by the character of buffoon and playboy which he bears in these apocryphal anecdotes. There are few things so astonishing in the history of English literature as the eclipse of John Skelton. In his lifetime a poet popular with court and with commons, the most original and the greatest of his day, he died without leaving any succession. Few of his poems were printed till the fifties and sixties of the Sixteenth Century, but by that time his reputation had already declined, and the decline has continued unchecked till only a few years ago, when a group of contemporary poets found in him one of their poetic ancestors.

The eclipse of his poetry has been not unnaturally accompanied by a corresponding neglect both of his life and work by

scholars. The only biography by a contemporary is that in Bale's Catalogus of 1557, and though Skelton subsequently appeared in innumerable critical works and histories of English Poetry from Webbe's and Puttenham's to Warton's, and in the majority of the historic encyclopaedias of poetry and biography from those of Pits and Tanner and Antony à Wood to Fuller's Worthies and Cibber's Lives of the Poets, none of these studies have added one authenticated fact to his life, while they have accepted an increasing amount of untested fiction from the Merie Tales. The first critical biography of Skelton was that prefaced to Alexander Dyce's monumental edition of his poetry in 1843. Dyce relegated the Merie Tales to an appendix and collected all the contemporary references to Skelton that he could discover in manuscript or in printed book - a collection that must form the basis for any subsequent study of the poet.

In more recent years Skelton has been the subject of studies by both German and American scholars,¹ but even to-day there is much in his poetry that demands further study. Their very subject is still occasionally under dispute; there has never been a complete chronology of his poems; fresh biographical material has been discovered since Dyce's day - some of it printed for the first time in this study; his relationship with the movements of his day - Humanism, Reformation and Renaissance - have been only partially investigated; unfounded traditions of his "merie" conduct in his parish and elsewhere must vanish before the concrete evidence of Cathedral records; the legend of the renegade priest must be discounted by a careful

1. The most important are the monographs of Brie, Kölbing, and Thümmel and Berdan's Early Tudor Poetry. See Bibliography.

study of his profoundly serious religious poetry; the tale of his flight from Wolsey to the sanctuary of Westminster must be modified in the light of new evidence from the Abbey Muniments; and above all a place must be found for the poet in the history of English Literature. What part had the Middle Ages in his make-up and how far is he a child of the Renaissance? These and many similar questions must be answered before the true importance of the poet will emerge from the disreputable legends that have surrounded the "beastly Skelton" of Pope and critics even less acute.

The age of Skelton was an age of transition, when the modern world was coming into being and the Middle Ages had not yet crumbled into complete decay. New creeds were fermenting in Europe and new modes of thought were spreading northwards from the Arno and westwards from Constantinople. Some of these changes were tardy in coming to England but their ultimate arrival was inevitable. In the century and a half between the death of Chaucer and the publication of Tottel's Miscellany, English civilisation underwent a radical transformation, and English poetry broke for ever with the formulae of the Middle Ages. The year 1500 may be regarded as the nodal point, the end of the old culture and the beginning of the new. During the Sixteenth Century the major problems found a gradual solution and the Renaissance replaced the synthesis of the Middle Ages.

Three crucial issues separated the two modes of thought, the social, the intellectual and the religious; and on the response of the poet or scholar of the early Sixteenth Century to these ulti-

-mate criteria depends his final position in the history of English thought and English poetry. The scholars and poets of the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII found their natural level either as survivors of the waning Middle Ages, content to form into new arrangements their time-worn material, or as fore-runners of the Renaissance who rejoiced in the innovations of the approaching revolution. The poets of this age must be considered not simply as poets but as representatives of the thought and the fashions of their time. It is the object of this study not merely to assess Skelton as a poet, but also to place him against this shifting background and discover how far he accepts or rejects the warring principles that were presented to the poet of his day.

The Wars of the Roses had settled England under a virtually unlimited monarchy, and the Tudor kings ruled without the mediaeval check of the nobles. During the Fifteenth Century the silent but persistent spread of the wool trade had raised a new wealthy commercial class whose every instinct was anti-feudal. With the break-down of the feudal system, the poet of the early Renaissance had to choose between two audiences, a stately, conservative and educated nobility, who clung to their traditional literature as an anchor for the age that was slipping from them; the other a largely uneducated but dynamic body for whom the touch of experience and actuality was the greatest proof of an author's merit. One audience looked for traditional pattern and outer form, the other was concerned solely with content and directness of utterance. In the attempt to satisfy something of both demands is to be found the secret

of speculative philosophy and by the end of the Fifteenth Century, its academic practitioners had lost the crystal-clear perception of

of Skelton's extraordinary range from the "pullisshyd eloquence" of mediaeval aureate diction to the rude vernacular "style direct" of the Renaissance bourgeois.

The reorientation of society was accompanied by both a contraction and a widening of horizons. The sense of community that pervaded mediaeval Europe produced men whose scholarship and thought had no national boundaries. Renaissance Europe abandoned the grandiose conception of a united continent and became fiercely national in its aspirations. Vincent of Beauvais and Abelard are European, but Colet is as undeniably English as Bembo is Italian and Ulrich von Hutten German. Yet in spite of the rise of national frontiers, European thought as a whole was revolutionised at the Renaissance, and for Italian and German and English scholars the intellectual boundaries of the Middle Ages were as widely extended as the boundaries of the known world by the new voyages of discovery.

The intellectual issue of the age lay between the forces of Scholasticism and of Humanism. On the one side was the philosophy and logic of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Schoolmen, a magnificently inflexible framework of steel, round which had grown up mediaeval civilisation, resting ultimately on the major premises of the church. On the other side were the new Humanists, weary of the domination of the category, the formula, the dogma and the authority, eager to extend the speculation of man from the exclusively religious and moral to the more "humane" field of belles-lettres. To St. Thomas Aquinas the central object of all study was sacra doctrina and God was its subjectum. Scholastic method became the deadliest enemy of speculative philosophy and by the end of the Fifteenth Century, its academic practitioners had lost the crystal-clear perception of

Catholic fundamentals of Aquinas or Dante, and late mediaeval philosophy demanded mental gymnastics, logical virtuosity, syllogistic argument of the non-essential, and the interminable debate on set topics out of contact with human experience and the fundamentals of religion. One of the greatest controversies of the early Sixteenth Century centred round the obscurantism of Scholastic teachers, the "obscure men" who barred the way to intellectual progress. Humanism swept triumphantly through Europe, breaking the iron shackles of rigid creeds, enlightening the philosopher and poet, leading the mind from arid theological discussion to the re-discovered beauty of classical literature, to the study of the newly accessible Greek language, later to Hebrew and the original texts of the scriptures.

Mediaeval philosophy had been bound hand-and-foot to mediaeval religion. The new age witnessed a divorce of religion and speculation. When dogma could be questioned the individual spirit had freer play, and Humanism led on inevitably to the third great issue of the day, the issue of religion. Over half of Europe, Catholicism, with its central tenet of salvation, super-rational and super-human, gave way before the demand for an individual reading of scripture that was the fundamental novelty of the Reformation. Neither in Germany nor in England was the Reformation entirely a religious movement. Partly it was an intellectual rebellion against the Scholasticism implicit in the mediaeval faith, partly a moral revolt against corruption in the church, and partly a purely economic and political rebellion against Rome. But the demand for emancipation of thought was the essential doctrine of the Reformation common to European countries

a dozen lines he individualises each of the three poets and shows that otherwise differed in their interpretation of the new movement.

The forces that uprooted mediaeval society, philosophy and religion finally killed the Middle Ages. They had been dying for a century. Nothing illustrates their decay so graphically as the history of English poetry in the Fifteenth Century. The serene confidence of Chaucer found no echo in the works of his successors, and Lydgate and Hoccleve are "Chaucerians" only in their veneration for his works. He was their master and their model in the craftsmanship of poetry. With their death the tradition of mediaeval poetry finally hardened into an uncompromising convention, and to the later Fifteenth Century Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate were almost a composite poet from whose originals major deviation was an act of heresy to poetic faith. The greater minds of the earlier Middle Ages had possessed superlative brilliance and clarity. The De Vulgari Eloquio, the Summa Theologiae, and the Canterbury Tales, each in its own manner, revealed the minds of men who could look on life with clear eyes and steady appraisal, but the later Middle Ages lacked their clarity of vision. Fifteenth Century England looked back on its poetic heritage with clouded minds and blunted perceptions, seeing only its external forms. An allegory was an allegory whether written with the delicate incisiveness of Chaucer, or the sprawling ineptitude of Lydgate. No distinction was felt between Chaucer's easy narrative movement and the broken-backed progression of his followers. Chaucer-Lydgate-Gower became a vague undifferentiated ancestor of later Fifteenth Century verse. One of the most significant passages in Skelton is that in Philip Sparow, where in

a dozen lines he individualises each of the three poets and shows that he realises the consummate superiority of Chaucer.

The poetry of the age of Skelton suffered from the imprint of the stereotype, and this is particularly true of the reign of Henry VII. Had the history of printing in England followed the lead of Caxton, it is doubtful whether his introduction of the art would have been accepted as one of the elements that accelerated the Renaissance. Caxton was as conservative as the royal and noble customers for whom he produced saint's legend and chivalric romance. The aristocratic audience at the close of the Fifteenth Century demanded the forms it knew, the allegory, the lament, the Latin complimentary verse, the courtly lyric, the fabliau, the saint's legend. Rime Royal was as standardised as the couplet in the age of Queen Anne.

While the official poets followed the pattern, the Fifteenth Century was producing a vast anonymous body of poetry in the lyric, the ballad, and the carol, few of which were dignified with print in their own age. The popular audience which rejoiced in these often lovely and unsophisticated forms was towards the end of the Fifteenth Century served once again by poets who have left at least a name. The new bourgeoisie began to grow vocal through the medium of such men as Copland and Skelton himself. These poets could abandon the conventions of aristocratic verse, and in poems like the Hye to the Spyttel Hous and Elynour Rummyng they frankly accepted the ribald attitude of the new generation. The contrast between such verses and the imitations of the conventions is violent. A stiff and ineffective dignity

is replaced by an impudent but very effective vitality of treatment and characterisation. Out-spoken criticism of the upper class and direct attack on their artificialities are both characteristics of the new verse.

The reign of Henry VII and Henry VIII was coincident with an outburst of song in which both poets and musicians took part. An English school of music had grown up, headed by John Dunstable in the time of Henry VI, and when Henry VIII came to the throne, the pageantry of his receptions and dramatic evenings was enlivened by the music of his composers. A fine volume in the British Museum contains the words and music of many of these songs, written by a variety of hands - Cornysse, Gilbert Banaster, Richard Davey, Turges, Sheringham and others, and the title of the volume, the Fayrfax Book, commemorates one of the most important of the Tudor composers. Skelton wrote the words for several of the songs in this volume, and took an active part in this newest development of English verse. Henry came to the throne an eager and brilliant supporter of many of the newer modes, and one or two of his songs still show how far he was able to compete with his subjects. Under such encouragement, early Tudor song developed a certain pre-Elizabethan maturity which finds expression, among other places, in the lyrical poetry of Skelton.

Skelton's earliest poem belongs to the year 1483 and his latest to 1527. He began his poetic career in the stillness that followed the death of Hoccleve, a calm scarcely broken by the destination in the language of *Troilus and Criseyde*; the Seven

composition of such a negligible poem as George Ripley's Compend of Alchemy. His major contemporaries in the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII were Stephen Hawes and Alexander Barclay. When he died, Wyatt was a young man of twenty-six and Surrey a boy of eleven. The career of Skelton covers the critical years of the transition, and in many ways his poetry is an epitome of its progress. He is often old-fashioned and in his early poetry conventional, but when he is seen alongside his contemporaries, his verse stands out in sharp contrast from their standardised productions.

Stephen Hawes, courtier to Henry, father and son, wrote complimentary verses like A Joyful Meditation on the accession of Henry VIII, and versified sermons like The Conversion of Swearers, but he is happiest as one of the latest apostles of the allegory. His Example of Virtue of 1503-4 is a moral allegory, and The Pastime of Pleasure of 1505-6 is an allegory of scholastic education. He personified the seven studies of mediaeval scholarship - the trivium and the quadrivium - and Grand Amour's quest for the love of La Bel Pucell is a parable of the pursuit of learning. Hawes was no poet. The stereotype of the allegory weighed heavily upon him, and though the Pastime of Pleasure is one of Elizabeth Browning's "four columnar marbles" of the Faerie Queene, it is an inert mass of re-handled dream-convention, towers and palaces, the parliament of Venus and the siege of a lady's heart. Hawes never ventures a step beyond what his courtly audience would readily recognise. Fortune and Mars discuss free-will and predestination in the language of Troilus and Boethius; the Seven

Deadly Sins, the Wheel of Fortune, the Jean de Meung discussion on creation from the second part of the Roman de la Rose, the armour of St. Paul, and the lament on the shortness of life, all slip appropriately into their places. The only real change is in the qualities allegorised. Danger and Franchise and Déduit have become Lady Grammar and Lady Fame and Geometry and Astronomy. Seldom does the Pastime break into real poetry. The often quoted

For though the day be never so long
At last the belles ringeth to evensong

is but a momentary clearing in the undergrowth of his allegory.

Alexander Barclay was of a different mould. His career began in the priesthood and finished in a Benedictine monastery, and the most persistent feature of his work is moral didactic. Though the cast of his mind is essentially mediaeval, his work is not so intolerably derivative as that of Hawes, and this in spite of his translations from such laborious didactics as Gringoire's Chateau de Labour and Sebastian Brandt's Narrenschiff. The Ship of Fools of 1509 and the Eclogues of 1513-14 established his reputation so strongly that Sir Nicholas Vaux asked Wolsey to send him out to the Field of the Cloth of Gold "to devise histories and convenient raisons" with which to decorate the banqueting hall. Barclay's literary ancestors are not the writers of allegory. The Ship of Fools, with its absence of forward movement, its procession of characters in a straight line, is closer to the mediaeval "tragedies" or to the wall-painting that inspired the Danse Macabre. His Eclogues come from Mantuan and from Aeneas Silvius, pioneers of the new movement back to the

Classics. Though Barclay uses a new form in English, he is too deeply immersed in didactic and mediaeval morality to grasp the possibilities of his discoveries. His conservative and orthodox tranquillity was profoundly disturbed by the more genuine novelties of John Skelton, and some of the few personal passages in his verse are attacks on the poet laureate.

In a world like this Skelton grew up to poetic maturity, a shifting, restless place alive with the sense of expectation. Alone of the poets of his day Skelton looked forward. While his contemporaries wrote in the accepted manner, he was producing a body of poetry, original in form and original in outlook, the one poet of his day who was really conscious of the new forces at work, although his recognition of their agency did not always result in acceptance. It is in his awareness and his vitality that the interest of Skelton lies. The verse of his contemporaries is dead. Skelton's has a restless bustling energy that can vitalise even the formulae of the allegory.

One would not normally have expected the reputation of such an original poet to decline so rapidly. The solution of the enigma lies in the originality itself. Skelton fell between the two ages, the receding Middle Ages, and the advancing Renaissance, without being a part of either. He was too original and unconventional for the guardians of the old tradition, too conservative and mediaeval for the younger poets. He could be regarded neither with the honour due to a prophet nor with the respect due to an antiquity. He does not fit too comfortably in a division of

English literature into schools and periods, and he has been gradually shuffled into an obscure position far below his real merits. "To this day," says Professor Saintsbury of John Skelton, "it is difficult to see why this fit of stuttering should have come upon English." Such a critical judgment ignores entirely Skelton's deliberate use of a novel and appropriate versification. It is the aim of the following pages to reexamine the hitherto rather lightly accepted view of this versatile and stimulating poet, in whom can be discerned the first movements of the approaching Renaissance.

Ungraceful and indignant references to his death at the Council of Westminister, or his head being put on a block of stone in the parish where he lived, are not the only but illuminating moments his life touched the pages of history, of King Henry the Eighth, of Wolsey, and indeed of the greater glory of such figures. These things are to be seen as can be fairly easily ascertained. The names of the lesser figures - with Barclay, the brother of the Earl of Arundel, with William Lily, the scholar of the reign of Henry VIII, and on paper at least one of the best of the age, with the friendly Bradshaw, the scholar of the reign of Henry VIII, with Robert Whittington, the scholar of the reign of Henry VIII, who wrote a set of complimentary letters to the king, and such and similar contacts are to be seen, to give them a time and place in a very different manner.

But by setting out the facts of his life, by

cautiously examining the traditions of it, by establishing the chronological order of his poems, and by then placing all three lines side by side, an ordered career begins to emerge from the

CHAPTER TWO.

obscurity and indecision of casual references, and this in turn forms a criterion for subsequent dating of the more uncertain of

THE CAREER OF JOHN SKELTON.

his works and the less illuminated passages of his life. The

The materials available for a biography of John Skelton are scanty, and till recently were even scantier. Only here character of John Skelton, student, tutor, laureated scholar, parish priest, translator of the Classics, satirist, dramatist, and there does he emerge from the contemporary records with a fugitive and finally exile, throughout all poet, stands out payment in his name, a dedication, a banquet on his behalf at gradually from chance indications in allusions, record, and the Oxford, a graceful compliment from a fellow scholar, an equally man's own work. ungraceful and indignant sneer from a scholar less friendly,

His origin, in spite of the most patient research into State bald references to his death or to his will or to his tenement Papers, Parish Registers, Patent Rolls and other contemporary records, is still a mystery. There are many Skeltons on these in the parish where he spent so many years. For brief but pages, Skeltons in London, Skeltons in Northumberland (including illuminating moments his life crosses the career of Wolsey, of Sir John Skelton of Armisthaite), a tempting but misleading Sir King Henry the Eighth, of Erasmus; And because of the greater John Skelton, Esquire for the Body, of Skelton and Smoryng Wagna glory of such figures, these moments are on record or can be in Norfolk, a John Skelton who incurred in 1586 the displeasure fairly easily authenticated. His contacts with lesser figures - of Bishop Nicke of Norwich, but who turns out on examination to with Barclay, the author of the English Ship of Fools, with be a Benedictine monk of the priory attached to the Cathedral, a William Lily, the schoolmaster of St. Paul's, with Christopher John Skelton who was appointed overseer by Sir Robert Southwell Garnesche, Gentleman - usher at the court of Henry VIII, and on in 1511, John Skelton a vicar of Dultyn - but none of these is paper at least one of Skelton's most despised rivals, with the John Skelton, though some of them have been assumed to be the poet friendly Bradshaw, the author of The Life of St. Werburge, with

Robert Whittington, Laureate of Oxford University, who wrote a set of complimentary Latin verses on this Anglorum vatum gloria - such and similar contacts can be established; to give them a time and place is a more difficult affair.

But by setting out the known record of his life, by

cautiously examining the traditions of it, by establishing the chronological order of his poems, and by then placing all three lines side by side, an ordered career begins to emerge from the obscurity and indecision of casual references, and this in turn forms a criterion for subsequent dating of the more uncertain of his works and the less illuminated passages of his life. The character of John Skelton, student, tutor, laureated scholar, parish priest, translator of the Classics, satirist, dramatist, fugitive and finally exile, throughout all poet, stands out gradually from chance indications in allusions, record, and the man's own work.

His origin, in spite of the most patient research into State Papers, Parish Registers, Patent Rolls and other contemporary records, is still a mystery. There are many Skeltons on these pages, Skeltons in London, Skeltons in Northumberland (including Sir John Skelton of Armathwaite), a tempting but misleading Sir John Skelton, Esquire for the Body, of Shelton and Snoryng Magna in Norfolk,² a John Shelton who incurred in 1526 the displeasure of Bishop Nicke of Norwich, but who turns out on examination to be a Benedictine monk of the priory attached to the Cathedral,³ a John Skelton who was appointed overseer by Sir Robert Southwell in 1511,⁴ John Skelton a vicar of Dultyng⁵ - but none of these is John Skelton, though some of them have been assumed to be the poet

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1. Cf. Letters and Papers I, 296 et passim et passim.
 2. Cf. Letters and Papers I, 394b, 471b et passim.
 3. A. Jessop: Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich pp. 198, 200ff.
 4. Letters and Papers, I, 1472 (14), 1948 (31); 2137 (18).
 5. Wood. Ath. Oxon. Ed. Bliss. i. 47. This John Skelton appears later in Valor Ecclesiasticus as Rector of Westquamtoked in the diocese of Bath and Wells. He was a Bachelor of Canon Law at Oxford in 1518 and a Bachelor of Degrees 1525.

by later writers.

To illustrate the difficulties that await the researcher, an extraordinary example of confusion of names may be quoted from the Norwich Cathedral Institution Books. In the parish of Shelton in June 1518 a new incumbent was instituted. The new rector was Dns. Iohannes Skelton presbiter.¹ Contrary to expectations he is not the poet laureate, for in April 1523 the next rector is instituted on the death of the said Iohannes Skelton.² From Tanner's MS. list of incumbents,³ the institution of Iohannes Skelton is confirmed, but further confusion is added by Tanner's note that the successor to Iohannes Skelton received the living on the presentation of John Shelton - presumably Sir John! Amid the confusion of John Skeltons and Sheltons one must walk warily indeed. When the search is extended to Skeltons who are not also Johns, the problem defies solution. Dyce related the poet to a certain Joanna Skelton,⁴ Brie to a Cecelia Skelton, who appears in the Patent Rolls;⁵ but there is no evidence of relationship beyond the unacceptable one of mere similarity of names. A very rapid inspection of the Early Chancery Proceedings for the period 1485-1530 will produce some twenty Skeltons all distinct and separable, and the evidence of Dyce and Brie must be rejected.⁶ There are too many Skeltons on record in the early Sixteenth Century for one to assume without further evidence that they are related to the poet.

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1. Norwich Cathedral Institution Book XVI. Unpublished.
 2. Institution Book XIV F.179b. Unpublished.
 3. 2 Vols. in Norwich Cathedral. Unpublished.
 4. Dyce Iv. 5. Brie Skelton Studien. (Englishe Studien 1907)
 6. Public Record Office Publications lists and indexes XX, XXIX, XXXVIII. Early Chancery Proceedings (1485-1530).

The most recent and most comprehensive survey of Skelton's genealogy rejects the Norfolk Skeltons, and suggests that the Armathwaite Skeltons had a branch in London, and finds a possible relative for the poet in Edward Skelton, serjeant-at-arms to Henry VI in 1452, and a faithful supporter of the crown till his death in 1510.¹ But of this there is no proof beyond a reasonable likelihood, and while several false claimants to relationship have been finally rejected, the problem of finding a family for John Skelton is still unsolved, and, short of a lucky find, probably insoluble.

The closest contact discoverable with the numerous other bearers of the same name is to be found in a group of records referring to Westminster, with which Skelton was always closely associated. In 1481 a lease was granted to one William Skelton, barber, of Westminster, of certain tenements within the Sanctuary of the Abbey,² and William Skelton retained this tenancy for some years, but apparently abandoned it towards the end of the century. This is clear from two references, which provide limiting dates for his departure. He was still in occupation in 1487. In that year the Abbey granted to Richard Stone, gentleman, of Westminster, divers cottages within the Sanctuary, and they are described as abutting on the tenements late let to William Skelton.³ (original Latin should be given)

The lower date is supplied by a grant in the Patent Rolls, where a tenement is granted by the king in 1503 to one John Williams,

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1. H. L. R. Edwards: John Skelton. A genealogical study (R.E.S. October, 1935. Cf. also R. L. Dunbabin. M.L.R. Vol. 12 129 ff.
 2. Westminster Abbey Muniments 17854 Unpublished.
 3. W.A.M. Register Book I f. 20b. Unpublished.

Yeoman of the Guard, with the following significant description:

1483.que quidem tenementa abbuttant ex vna parte super quodam tenemento spectan. ecclie. parochiali ibidem et ex altera parte super tenemento quondam spectan. cuidam Skelton. ¹.

Between 1487, then, and 1503 William Skelton had left Westminster; but during the course of the next twenty years the poet laureate lived for several periods of his life in a tenement also within the Sanctuary. The contact is teasingly close - closer than any so far suggested - but one can do no more than hint at a relationship between Skelton the poet laureate and Skelton the barber of Westminster.

The If the parentage of Skelton is still unknown, the date of his birth is equally uncertain. The conventional date is 1460, deduced from a reference in a Manuscript Collection of the Reverend William Cole:

"For I find one Scheklton M.A. in the year 1484, at which time allowing him to be 24 years of age, he must be at his death A.D. 1529, 68 or 69 years old, which 'tis probable he might be....." ².

It would indeed be very probable - if Scheklton were actually Skelton and not (as it is more likely to be), Sh^eakleton. ³ But even if one disallows this attempt to relate Skelton with Cambridge in 1484, his poem Of the Death of the Noble Prince, Kynge Edward

1. Public Record Office Patent Rolls December 16, 1503. (P.R.O. 593, 9.32) The granted is calendered in a rough translation in the printed calendar of Patent Rolls, but the all-important word "quondam" is omitted.
2. B.M. Add. 5880 (Unpublished) Alphabetical Collections for an Athene Cantab. Rev. W. Cole. Sub. Skelton
3. Cf. R. L. Dunbabin, M. L. R. Vol. 12.
Cf. A Thümmel Studien über John Skelton pp. 26 ff.

the Fourth proves him active in the year of that King's death, 1483. If Skelton was adult in this year one cannot be far wrong in placing his birth-year fairly close to the conventional 1460.

One more group of references and we are into the daylight of tangible chronology. In the Receipts of the Treasury for the year 12 Edward IV (1472), there are two references to a hard-working clerk, John Skelton. The first is simply a record of a payment made to him under the title of a subclericus:

"Tribus subclericus videlicet Roberto Lane, Nicholao Newbold et Johanni Skelton videlicet praedicto Roberto l.s. et praedictis Nicholao et Johanni cuilibet eorum xls." ¹

The second reference is a record of payments made to several clerks, among them the Nicholas Newbold and John Skelton mentioned in the other entry, and they are specially commended as "continue morantibus London" and "assidue laborantibus circa scripturas domini", and a gift ("de dono Regis") is made to each of them of forty shillings.² Yet there is no reference to a John Skelton in the official list of admissions to the office. Was this our Skelton clerking in his early manhood? Edwards³ suggests that he may have obtained the post by the favour of the aforesaid Edward Skelton. One can only regret the absence of evidence. Skelton's career as a student must have been a long one, and not much time could have been left for the tenure of even a minor position in the Treasury. In any case, after these

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1. Public Record Office. Receipts of the Treasury 12 Edward IV. (P.R.O. E. 36/36/129 f. 64)
 2. Ibidem f. 63, 63b.
 3. Edwards. R.E.S. c.c.

two entries - for the 23rd of February and the 9th of the previous December - the name appears to vanish from the Receipts and henceforth the fortunes of John Skelton are the fortunes of John Skelton, poeta laureatus.

One emerges from those inconclusive surmises to recount the known and discoverable facts about Skelton. The earliest life of the poet is that of John Bale, who published his Summary of British Authors in 1548, and his great Scriptorum Illustrum maioris Brytanniae Catalogus in 1557, which gives the only contemporary life of the poet. Bale collected his material from men who had actually known Skelton, and such an account cannot be lightly neglected. The text is here reprinted in full from the Basel edition of 1557:

Ioannes Skeltonus.

Ioannes Skeltonus, poeta laureatus, ac theologie professor, parochus de Dyssa in Nordoulogiae comitatu, clarus ac facundus in utroque scribendi genere, prosa atque metro, habebatur. facetiis in quotidiana inuentione plurimum deditus fuit: non tamen omisit sub persona ridentis, ut in Horatio Flacco, veritatem fateri. Tam apte, amoenae, ac salse, mordaciter tamen, quorundam facta inamoena carpere nouit, ut alter videretur Lucianus aut Democritus, ut ex opusculis liquet. Sed neque in scripturis sacris absque omni iudicio erat, quamuis illud egregie dissimulauit. In clero non feranda mala videbat, et magna et multa: quae nonnunquam uiuis perstrinxit coloribus, ac scommatibus non obscoenis. Cum quibusdam blateronibus fraterculis, praecipue Dominicanis, bellum gerebat continuum. Sub pseudopontifice Nordouicensi, Ricardo Nixo, mulierem illam, quam sibi secreto ob Antichristi metum desponsauerat, sub concubinae titulo custodiebat. In ultimo tamen vitae articulo super ea re interrogatus, respondit, se nusquam illam in conscientia coram Deo, nisi pro uxore legitima tenuisse. Ob literas quasdam in Cardinalem Vuolsium inuestiuas, ad Vuestmonasteriense tandem asylum confugere, pro vita seruanda coactus fuit: ubi nihilominus sub abbate Islepo fauorem inuenit. De illo Erasmo in quadam epistola, ad Henricum octauum regem, sic scribit: Skeltonum, Brytannicarum literarum lumen ac decus, qui tua

studia possit non solum accendere, sed etiam consummare; hunc domi habes etc. Iste vero edidit partem Anglice, partem Latine.

(Here follows a list of Skelton's works.)¹ Vuestmonasterii tandem, captiuitatis suae tempore, mortuus est; et in D. Margarite sacello sepultus, cum hac inscriptione alebastrica: Ioannes Skeltonus, vates Pierius, hic situs est. Animam egit 21 die Iunii, anno Domini 1529, relictis liberis. De morte Cardin. lis uaticiom edidit: et eius heritatem euentus declarauit.

So far Bale on Skelton - he is a satirist against the clergy, who quarrelled with the Dominicans, a priest (with an unofficial wife) who was praised by Erasmus and yet had to flee to sanctuary because of his attacks on Wolsey, a writer clearly prolific. Round this nucleus we must build our character of Skelton.

Skelton's education followed the traditional lines of University learning before the Renaissance influence invaded Oxford and Cambridge. The trivium and quadrivium of mediaeval scholarship and the translation of the Latin Classics occupied the earlier years of study. Greek was still unknown in the Universities and the non-humanist theological bias of his early reading is everywhere apparent in his later works. Oxford at first claimed him, and by 1490 Skelton had a formidable list of accomplishments to his name. He had by then been created poeta laureatus of the University of Oxford,² so gaining a degree that involved the prolonged study of Grammar and Rhetoric, but, in spite of the title of poeta, no special proficiency in poetry. He had travelled abroad³ and obtained some distinction at a foreign

¹ Reprinted in Appendix D.

² Cf. the Cambridge reference of 1493 quoted below.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Cf. Garton's Prologue quoted below.

⁵ Cf. Saiter Skelton's Speculum Principis (Speculum Jan. 1934)

University - probably (from a dedication to him by Robert Whittington clarissimi Scheltonis Loui^{an}ensis)¹ at Louvaine.

He had already tried to justify the poeta title of his academic degree. When Edward the Fourth died in 1483, Skelton wrote a lament in the mediaeval manner of The Fall of Princes; and on the death of the Earl of Northumberland in 1489 a heroic poem followed, calling on Mars and Clio and Atropos and similar classical deities and again in the mediaeval manner chiding "fykkel Fortune" and her double dice; this achievement he capped with a few lines of Latin verse "Ad dominum properato meum, mea pagina, Percy." During this period he was studying the classics assiduously, and he produced translations of Cicero's Letters Ad Familiares and of Diodorus Siculus.²

The result of such learning and such court paid to the nobility was unusual, and extremely gratifying to the young scholar. Henry VII invited him to become the tutor to the young princes and it appeared as if the fortune of John Skelton were already secure. The year of the Percy poems saw the production of the first of his court poems - the lost Prince Arthuris Creacyoun, which refers to the creation of Prince Arthur Knight of the Bath in 1489 (or, possibly, to his creation Knight of the Garter in 1491).³

By 1490, then, Skelton was an established figure in the worlds of scholarship and of the court. In that year Caxton published his Boke of the Eneydos compyled by Vyrgyle with an

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1. Robert Whittington: Opuscula (Wynkyn de Worde 1519)
Cf. Dyce I, xvi.
 2. Cf. Caxton's Prologue quoted below.
 3. Cf. Salter Skelton's Speculum Principis (Speculum Jan. 1934)

"Item die Mercurii pro Jantaculo et cena cum Magistro Skelton quia fuit cum episcopo Sarum. vd." 6
 effusive compliment to Skelton in the prologue:

Lest we imagine that quia fuit means that Skelton had his dinner
 "But I praye mayster John Skelton, lat created poete laureate in the universitie of oxenforde to ouersee and correcte this sayde booke. And taddresse and expowne where as shall be founde faulte to theym that shall requyre it. For hym I knowe for suffycient to expowne and englysshe euery dyffyculte that is therin/ For he hath late translated the epistlys of Tulle/ and the boke of dyodorus syculus. and diuerse other workes oute of latyn into englysshe not in rude and olde langage. but in polysshed and ornate termes craftely. as he that hath redde vrygyde/ ouyde. tullye. and all the other poetes and oratours/ to me vnknown: And also he hath redde the ix muses and vnderstande theyr musicalle scyences. and to whom of theym eche scyence is appropred. I suppose that he hath dronken of Elycons well....." 1.

The prologue goes on to invite Skelton to correct any faults in the printed translation. Here is praise indeed. It is even possible that Caxton is thinking of the royal pupil to whom Skelton may expound this very book and teach English equally polished and ornate.² Indeed when the elevation of Prince Henry as Duke Meanwhile his academic honours kept pace with his social distinctions. The University of Cambridge followed Oxford in admitting him a laureate in 1493: ³ let a loyalty to Henry that never

wavered th¹"Conceditur Johanni Skelton Poete in partis transmarinis atque Oxonie laurea ornato, ut apud nos eadem decoratur." ³ With others at court were not so happy, and

Two years later under the entries for 1495 - 6, we find the University feasting him in the company of the Bishop of Salisbury. Master John Syclyng, the Senior Proctor, notes down the price of the entertainment along with his other expenses:

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 See also
 pp 27 r
 272

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1. The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton. Ed. W. J. B. Erich P. 109. *Crotch*
 2. Cf. F. M. Salter. *l.c.* *Speculum* 1934.
 3. Grace Book B. of the University of Cambridge. Ed. M. Bateson I, 54.

"Item die Mercurii pro Jantaculo et cena cum Magistro Skelton quia fuit cum episcopo Sarum. vd." 1

Lest we imagine that quia fuit means that Skelton had his dinner only because he was with the Bishop, there is a later entry for the same year where the honour is his alone:

"Item die saboti pro Jantaculo cum Magistro Skelton apud Symsons iijjd." 2

Graduate of three Universities, tutor to the future King, travelling in company with Bishops and feasted by the University, Skelton had become a figure of some consequence in the circles of London and the University towns.

Life at court went on as life at court always will. Skelton was not without enemies and detractors. It was the penalty of a prince's favour. So far he had written verse of the traditional mediaeval type and complimentary Latin verses. The line of compliments was continued when the elevation of Prince Henry as Duke of York evoked from him the graceful Latin hyperboles of Ad tanti principis maiestatem in sua puericia, quando erat insignitus Dux Eboraci.³ This poem illustrates a loyalty to Henry that never wavered throughout the life of Skelton.

His relations with others at court were not so happy, and his initial efforts at self-defence and attack found a ready outlet in the satire that was to become so characteristic of his life-work. Agaynste a Comely Coystrowne,⁴ written in 1495-6 against a court musician, and the companion Latin verses Contra

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1. Grace Book B'. sub 1495-6 I, 92.
 2. Ibidem, I, 92.
 3. Text printed in F. M. Salter: Speculum 1934.
 4. For this dating and an analysis Cf. Chapter 8.

* Printed at Westminster
before 15⁰⁰.

alium cantitantem qui impugnabat Skeltonida Pierium

indicate a dissatisfaction with court life that was perhaps natural in a man of Skelton's scholarly antecedents. It is to this period that one must assign his Bowge of Court, which retains the prevalent allegory of the Middle Ages combined with a satire on court life that reflects personal experience of its less attractive side. Certainly, after a few years of court life, Skelton prepared a line of escape - or did he merely claim the reward of a churchman at court? In 1498 he entered into holy orders and was ordained subdeacon, deacon and priest in rapid succession. Under the date 31st March 1498, the entry appears for his subdeaconship:

"In ecclesia conuentuali domus siue hospitalis sancti Thome martiris de Acon ciuitatis London. per Thomam Rothlucensem episcopum vltimo die mensis Marcis. M. Johannes Skelton London Dioc. ad titulum Mon. beate Marie de Graciis iuxta turrim London." 1.

Similar entries appear for his ordination as deacon (in St. Paul's on April 14th), and as priest (in the Church of the Conventual Hospital of the Blessed Mary of Elsyng on June 9th), with the one difference that in these later entries the poet figures as Johannes Skelton poeta laureatus.² For whatever reason, Skelton had decided that his life-work was to be that of a priest and not of a courtier.

His association with the court remained unbroken, and even when, a few years later, he became the Rector of the parish of

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1. Register Hill. 1489-1505 for the Diocese of London.
Cf. Dyce I, xxi.
 2. Ibidem.

Diss in Norfolk he continued to write court-poetry both complimentary and satirical, and probably never ceased to visit the court till the fear of Wolsey drove him to sanctuary some twenty-five years later. In 1499 Erasmus paid his second visit to England as the friend and protégé of Lord Mountjoy, and paid his well-known tribute to the young Prince Henry in his Ode De Laudibus Britanniae, in the dedication of which he turns aside to praise the prince's tutor:

"...et domi haberes Skelton, unum Britannicarum literarum lumen ac decus, qui studia tua possit, non solum accendere, sed etiam consummare."

To crown such a tribute to Skelton's position and learning, the Dutch scholar composed in his honour an Epigram of ecstatic and exaggerated compliments, where Skelton becomes the equal of Orpheus and the combined Homer and Virgil of Britain: the poet is addressed as

Aeterna vates, Skelton, dignissime lauro;
Calliope has inspired him and his song is sweeter than that of the swan. When Skelton plays on his lyre he can tame wild beasts and move oak trees. Rivers bend back in their courses and rocks can be moved. At last English poetry can vie with the poetry of Greece and Rome:

"Graecia Maeonio quantum debebat Homero,
Mantua Virgilio,
Tantum Skeltoni iam se debere fatetur
Terra Britanna suo:
Primus in hanc Latio deduxit ab orbe Camenas;

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1. B.M. Egerton 1651 f.1. (A small paper MS. volume of Erasmus epigrams.

2. Grace Book B. 1. 148.

3. Ibidem. 1. 148

4. Parland of Laurel 11. 1213 ff.

Primus hic edocuit
 Exculte pureque loqui: te principe, Skelton,
 Anglia nil metuat
 Vel cum Romanis versu certare poetis.
 Vive valeque diu!" 1.

Humanist adulation could hardly go further.

The honours of the next few years, while scarcely as effusive as the praise of Erasmus, were more tangible. Skelton figures once more in the Cambridge accounts where another banquet is recorded by Master Syclyng for the year 1500-1:

"Item eodem die pro cena nostra et
 Magistri Skelton vj d." 2

and again

"Item in camera pro focali et potu cum
 Magistro Skelton ij d." 3

The King's favour was still his and he had every intention of retaining it. His next two works were designed for patrons' eyes. For the Countess of Richmond and Derby, the King's mother, he translated Guillaume^{de} Guilleville's Pélerinage de la Vie Humaine, but no copies of this translation have survived:

"Of my ladys grace at the contemplacyoun,
 Owt of Frenshe into Englysshe prose
 Of Mannes Lyfe the Peregrynacioun
 He did translate, enterprete, and disclose." 4

It sounds like a piece of work suited to a graduate of Louvaine.

In the progress of his two charges he showed a real interest, and he composed for their princely education a manual of moral

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1. Printed from B. M. MSS. Egerton 1651 (f.6b) where it is grouped with other Epigrams of Erasmus. The poem had been formerly ascribed by Dyce (II 485) to Pico della Mirandola. Egerton 1651 was first printed in Erasmus; Preserved Smith (1923) (pp. 453-4)
 2. Grace Book B'. I. 148.
 3. Ibidem. 1, 149.
 4. Garland of Laurel ll. 1219 ff.

maxims. Such manuals for princes were common enough at Renaissance courts where there were Humanist scholars in charge of the heir's education, but Skelton's Speculum Principis (or Methodos Skeltonis as it has sometimes been called) had little of the spirit of the Renaissance and a great deal of Medieval moralising on the Seven Deadly Sins and other similar dangers to be avoided by the young princes. Written in 1501 "apud Eltham 28 Augusti" Skelton's maxims were impeccably virtuous and conservative. He appears to have been taking no chances of losing royal favour or of misleading his charges, and the Speculum Principis bears no comparison with Elyot's Gouvernour or any of the similar Italian treatises on princely courtesy and education. In the following year Prince Arthur died (April 2nd 1502) and Skelton was left to tutor Prince Henry only. In his later life all Skelton's memories of his court-period are associated with Henry, and he preserved a complete silence on the subject of Arthur.

To round off this period of progress, Cambridge again records an honour to the poet, the terms of which imply previous advancement both in Oxford and at the court:

"An. 1504-5. Conceditur Johanni Skelton, Poetae Laureat. quod possit stare eodem gradu hic, quo stetit Oxoniis, et quod possit uti habitu sibi concessa a Principe." 2.

By 1504-5. then, Skelton had advanced from the poet laureate

1. A contemporary copy is preserved in B.M. MSS. Add. 26,787. Text printed by F. M. Salter Speculum 1934 l.c.

2. Cf. Dyce I xiii.

1. Cf. Skelton's Poems Against Carnoche (3) and Callione.

degree to a further degree (probably the Master of Arts, since he has several times now appeared as M. or Mayster - e.g. in the Cambridge accounts) and had been granted a habitus or official uniform in virtue of his office in court - a habit with which his vanity was particularly gratified and which he proudly refers to as the King's colours "wyght and grene."¹

The poet is now approaching the close of what might well be called his first London Period. From now on his name figures in the records of the parish of Diss and his connection with the court is for some years broken.

An even profounder change came over his writings. So far he had written only in the current manners, the Latin compliment, the allegorical dream convention of the Bowge of Courte, the heavy mediaeval lament of the Northumberland and Edward the Fourth verses, translations from Latin and French - all of them standard types in the Fifteenth Century. With the change from London to the country parish came a revolution in his thought and poetry. The satirist who had been latent in The Bowge of Courte and Agaynst a Comely Coystrowne burst into vigorous life with an ever-increasing volume of breathless, and often, to his colleagues and associates, scandalous verse. Skelton shed the paternal moralities and scholarly diffidence of the Speculum Principis and the vague mistiness of allegory for a more trenchant style of satire that gained direction and edge as his interest turned more and more to the topics of the day and the problems that

1. Cf. Skelton's Poems Agaynst Garnesche (3) and Calliope.

underlay them. That he was bitterly criticised for the change is undeniable. He suffered the fate of all innovators in his generation's lack of understanding and the hostile criticism of his fellow-scholars. But in the succeeding generation, which usually swings the pendulum to the opposite side, he had the misfortune to miss the innovator's tardy recognition. In the interval the Italian Renaissance had swept English poetry off its feet, and the novelties and originality of John Skelton were lost in the sweeping changes that overtook the whole life of England, and in the organic transformation that revolutionised English poetry.

There is a mysterious reference (quoted by Dyce) to a Jo. Skelton who was committed to prison in 1502:

"10 Junii apud Westminster Jo. Skelton commissus carceribus Janitoris Domini Regis."

This, if it refers to our John Skelton, would certainly indicate that his unpopularity was not wholly literary, and that he fell out of favour with the King for some misdemeanours. The supposition is made at least plausible by the appearance of Skelton (this time undoubtedly the poet) in the Pardon Roll of 1509-10, where among a long list of persons pardoned (their offences are not stated) appears for October 21st the following comprehensive entry:

"Johannes Skelton nuper de London clericus alias dictus Johannes Skelton nuper de London clericus poeta laureatus

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1. Dyce. I xxvi (Court of Requests. 17 Henry vii)
 1. Public Record Office. Pardon Roll 1509-10. (P.R.O. 407/57/6)

alias dictus Johannes Skelton nuper de Disse in Com. Norff.
 clericus alias dictus Johannes Skelton nuper de Disse in
 Com. Norff. clericus ac poeta laureatus alias dictus Johannes
 Skelton nuper de Disse in Com. Norff. clericus poeta lau-
 reatus ac rector ecclie. parochialis de Dysse in Com. Norff.
 seu quorumque etc. Teste Rege apud Westm. xxj die Octobr.
 Per ipsum Regem." 1.

Pardon for what? For an offence of June 1502, for which he was committed to prison, or for some (perhaps very minor) fault between the date of his leaving court and the year 1509? It is significant that Henry VII died on April 21st, 1509 - the pardon belongs to the first few months of the reign of Skelton's old pupil. Whatever the misdemeanour and whenever it was committed, it seems certain that Henry VIII took fairly rapid steps to re-establish his former tutor to Royal grace. If the offence is that of the 1502 entry, it cannot have been any great matter - probably a personal and perhaps purely temporary annoyance of the elder Henry. The Cambridge degree of 1504-5 already quoted indicates a warm support of Skelton both as scholar and as a court figure that would have been impossible towards anyone genuinely out of favour.

Skelton, however, left court. Years afterwards, as an honoured poet, he remembered with gratitude that his "Occupacyon" with poetry had sweetened the disappointments of his departure. In the *Garlande of Laurell* of 1523 *Occupacyon* reminds him of the aid she had given him:

Whan broken was your mast
 Of worldly trust, then did I you rescu,
 Your storm dryuen shypppe I repared new!

1. Public Record Office. Pardon Roll 1509-10. (P.R.O. c67/57/2 mem 31)

that for this misdemeanour Skelton was suspended from his benefice. The next few years saw him mainly in his benefice of Diss. In 1504 we find him witnessing the will of one Margery Cooper, who was buried in the parish church and who left the sum of 6s. 8d. to the high altar. Her will is

"..witnessed by master John Skelton, laureat, parson of Disse, and Sir John Clarke, sowl-priest of the same town." /

among the manuscripts of Norwich Cathedral. In the Institution and was proved on March 6th, 1504. The said soul-priest John Clarke, died two years later in 1506, leaving money for a pilgrim to go to Rome and pray for the soule of John and his family, but Skelton, undeterred by such piety, wrote an uncomplimentary Epitaphe on the "two knaves sometime of Dis" - A Deuote Trentale for Old John Clarke, Sometye the Holy Patriarke of Dis (1506) and on a companion rogue Adam Uddersall (1507). The satirist had come into his own again. Yet in the same year (1507) when the town of Norwich was destroyed by fire, he returned to Latin Elegiacs to commemorate the Lamentatio Urbis Norvicen.

The tradition of Skelton's life is not free from the accusation of clerical misdemeanours. Bale relates that, "sub pseudopontifice Nordouicensi, Ricardo Nixo", he was secretly married, but for fear of a public scandal kept his wife under the title of concubine - a relationship more tolerable than marriage in the eyes of the mediaeval church. On his death-bed he confessed that he regarded her in the eyes of God as his legal wife. From this note in Bale a tradition has grown up

1. Rev. F. Blomefield. (Topographical History of Norfolk. Vol 1 p. 18. (London 1805). One is dependent on Blomefield's notes here, as the church records of Diss are no longer extant.

that for this misdemeanour Skelton was suspended from his benefice for a period by Richard Nicke, the Bishop of Norwich. The story is repeated and developed with growing circumstantial detail in Pits¹, in Fuller², and in Anthony à Wood³. But of contemporary evidence there appears to be not one scrap.

A virtual denial of the tradition has now come to light among the manuscripts of Norwich Cathedral. In the Institution Book for the years 1507-11, during which time Richard Nicke was Bishop, there is the record of a case that came before the ecclesiastical court. In 1511 William Dale, the Rector of Redegrave, and Thomas Revet of the same place, appeared before the court. The case occupies several entries, till on the 11th of November two arbiters are appointed:

Magister Simonus Dryver decretorum doctor, atque
Magister Iohannes Skelton Rector de Disse.
The entry goes on to state that if agreement is not reached within eight days, the case is to be brought before the Bishop on the Monday after the feast of St. Edmund's.⁴

Such an appointment confirms the belief that springs from a careful reading of his poetry, that his relations with the church authorities were those of a normal parish priest. It is very doubtful indeed if the traditional Skelton of the Merry Tales would have received this minor but official appointment. The real Skelton was clearly regarded by the Bishop of his

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1. Pits. De Illustr. Ang. Script.
 2. Fuller's Worthies.
 3. A. à Wood. Athenae Oxonienses
 4. Norwich Cathedral. Institution Book xiv f.11. Unpublished. Noted here for the first time.

diocese as a responsible clergyman and a fit judge for a dispute. When it is realised that the Bishop who made this appointment and before whom the case was to be brought if no settlement were reached, was the Bishop Nicke, who, according to tradition, was one of Skelton's persecutors, there seems no reason for not quietly abandoning the legend of Skelton's later biographers.

A more recent writer¹ has revived the legend by suggesting that a Dominus Johannes Shelton who was accused at the 1526 visitation of Bishop Nicke to the Cathedral of Norwich of gravia crimina et nephanda peccata is the poet laureate. The story on first sight looks plausible, and might indicate a quarrel with the Bishop long after the date of the arbiter appointment, but a closer examination of the records reveals that this Dominus Johannes Shelton was not Skelton the poet. Dominus Johannes Shelton was a Benedictine monk at the Priory attached to the Cathedral of Norwich. He appears in the Visitation records for 1520 as:

Dompnus Johannes Shelton camerarius et eleemosinarius. This is a different person from the rector of Diss. Similar references to Shelton the monk appear throughout the Visitation records, including that of his accusation before Bishop Nicke, where his nephanda peccata are stated to have brought his office of "camerarius" into disrepute:

Et sua culpa multum deterioratur officium camerarii sui olim praefuit.²

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1. J. M. Berdan P.M.L.A. 29 (N.S.) 22 xxi.
 2. A. Jessop. Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich pp.198,200, 201,204.

Johannes Shelton is merely another of the Sheltons and Skeltons who obscure the history of the poet's life.

The silence of Bale, the sole contemporary biographer, and the entry from the Institution Book recorded above discount the story completely. The tradition was a legend that grew up after the death of the poet, no doubt assisted by the apocrypha of the Merry Tales. Skelton probably had no quarrel with the church authorities till he crossed swords with Cardinal Wolsey some years after his return to the court of Henry VIII.

It has been noted how the change from the court to Diss was accompanied by new developments in his poetry. In 1508 came the first-fruits of the new maturity.

His Philip Sparrow, a lament for a dead sparrow, that was a mockery of the solemn Offices for the Dead, created a sensation. Skelton broke cleanly and for good with his earlier poetry. The new verse was rude, unpolished and vigorous, written in a scrambling series of runaway short lines that offended the mediaeval courtly tastes of the contemporary critics and poets; while the Goliardic satire of church services by a priest in orders scandalised the conservative clergy. From now on Skelton acquired an unpopularity that has had its echo up to the present day. The respected priest, courtier and royal school-master broke out into the most disrespectful of verses and continued on his outspoken way for almost a couple of decades, undeterred by criticism

1. Cf. Blomefield. l.c. I,19.

or disparagement, writing with the fervour of a man who had at last found a mission in life. It was as if the ^{an earnest} headmaster of Eton had taken to Communist pamphleteering. Skelton's former enemies had their hatreds confirmed, and new enemies rose to the attack, sneering at his new style of verse and his vanity and his ambiguous title of poet laureate. Barclay in his Ship of Fools (1509) repeated the current disdain from the secure position of a poet who had never betrayed the mediaeval conventions:

"I write no jeste ne tale of Robin Hood,
Nor sowe no sparkles ne sede of viciousness;
Wise men loue vertue, wilde people wantonness;
It longeth not to my science nor cunning,
For Philip the Sparow the Dirige to singe."

Skelton was unaffected. Beneath the rugged vigour of the new satire lay a passionate conservatism that his generation never once suspected. Golliard priest he might be - it was in an old enough tradition - but renegade never. When his church at Diss was desecrated by a neighbour priest who had the effrontery to fly his hawk up to the very altar, the full battery of the new verse was turned with devastating effect against the offender in Ware the Hawke (c.1509), which so became the first of a long line of satires on the abuses of the clergy.

The accession of Henry VIII in 1509 turned Skelton's mind for a time from satire back to compliment. The new king was either insensible to, or, more probably, careless of, the court's

1. Ship of Fools, *ed. Jamison. Vol 2.1 (conclusion)*

1. Blomefield l.c.

disapproval of Skelton's latest ventures, and it is clear from the tone and style of the poems of the next dozen years that Skelton wrote not only with the king's approval, but even at his bidding. One of the king's earliest actions was to grant him the pardon already quoted. In that pardon Skelton is mentioned not only as "nuper de London" (after all, he had been some years in his parish) but (more significantly) as "nuper de Disse". The implication is that he had already moved from regular residence in Diss by the end of 1509. From this year onwards his connection with the court grew again more intimate. His rivals and detractors looked on jealously and grumbled at his success, but Skelton played the new role of churchman-courtier in accents so fearless and outspoken that he must have felt very sure of his backing by the King.

His connection with Diss was not, however, broken. There was no necessity for a priest to live in his parish continuously. "Among the evidences of Thomas Goggeshill," says Blomefield of a 1511 entry, "I find the house in the tenure of Master Skelton, Laureat!"¹ Skelton's appointment as an arbiter at Norwich in a case dated November, 1511, has already been noted, and from these two references it is clear that he spent at least part of that year in his parish. He held his benefice till his death. There is no record of a further appointment in Diss till the next Rector, Thomas Clerk, was instituted in 1529 "Per mortem naturalem

1. Blomefield l.c.

magistri Johannes Skeltonne ultimi Rectoris".¹ But from now on, Skelton's life was not confined to his parish. He travelled over England, living at the court and spending periods at the country houses of families as noble as the Howards.

Skelton soon re-established contact with London. Among the records of Westminster Abbey a new and illuminating reference has come to light. In the Book of the Expenses of the Household kept for William Lane, the Prior, there appears an entry for the 5th of July, 1511, giving the expenses of the day's dinner of plaice, soles, saltfish, and "congger snakes"; in the margin appears the note:

"This day there dyned wt. your maistership the soffrecan and Skeltun the poet wt. vthers."²

The poet was probably reviving an acquaintance with colleagues whom he had seldom seen in the previous ten years. Once more Skelton was in the centre of affairs.

Not long after the accession, Henry granted Skelton a new honour. Skelton was partial to titles; the new title of Orator Regius, which he now begins to append to his poems, was as pleasing as his academic degrees and a decisive weapon against those who derided his proud use of his earlier title of poet laureate. There is no sign of a record of the grant of this new title; but

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1. Norwich Cathedral Institution Book XVII f. 9b. Unpublished.
 2. Westminster Abbey Muniments. 33325 f. 17b. Unpublished.
 3. ibid. ibid. first note of this reference.

in nine poems¹ dated from c.1512 to 1527 and all associated with the court, the poet is "Orator Regius" as well as poet laureate. Once more he was in royal favour.

Following his usual custom, he celebrated the new reign both in English and in Latin. The Rose both White and Rede (1509) in a few stanzas of English verse expressed the patriotism that in more grandiose Latin was exhibited in the hexameters of Ad serenissimam iam nunc suam maiestatem regiam Skeltonidis Laureati non ignobile palinodium, in which Henry becomes in turn Alexis, Hector, Scipio, Marcellus and similar classical heroes, and in which Skelton promises him the service of his poetry:

".....illi mea carmina servo"².

How soon afterwards Henry accepted these services of his old tutor is uncertain. There are evidences of an interval in which Skelton was doubtful of his reception at court. The Pallinodium concludes with the appeal:

"Tribuat michi Iuppiter Feretrius ne teram tempus
apud Eurotas."

- an appeal to Jupiter to rescue him from Eurotas; can Jupiter be Henry and Eurotas Diss? The experiment of retreat to a country parish had not been a complete success for an old courtier. The volume which contains the Speculum and the Pallinodium is a

1. ¹ Henry VII Epitaph (1512); ² Eulogy on his Times (1509-12); ³ Chorus de Discontra Scottos (1513); ⁴ Chorus de Discontra Gallos (1513); ⁵ Against Venemous Tongues (c.1515); ⁶ Elegy on the Countess of Derby (1516); ⁷ Calliope (late court period); ⁸ Dedication to the Replycacion (1527); ⁹ Speke Parrot (1521).
2. Text in Speculum l.c. p. 37.

contemporary one, bound in leather boards embossed with the royal arms - probably the very copy that Skelton presented to Henry - and it concludes with an appeal by Skelton against his exile:

"Tacitus secum in soliloquio ceu vir
totus obliuioni datus." ¹

Skelton laments his fate and pleads for the royal generosity, which must have been forthcoming fairly soon, perhaps as a result of the presentation of this volume.

The result of the renewed contact with court circles is seen in his Latin Elegy on Henry the Seventh (1512), dedicated to his friend John Islip, the Abbot of Westminster, and the Eulogium pro Suorum Temporum Conditione (c.1513). England was now at war with France and on the eve of a war with Scotland. Skelton utters threats against both and proclaims the prowess of Henry the Eighth:

Dulce meum decus, et sola Britanna salus.

The following year, (1513) he was given full opportunity for the expression of his patriotism. England was victorious in both Scottish and French campaigns, and Skelton wrote a group of victory-poems celebrating the victors in panegyrics and satirising the defeated in wild scurrility. The Ballad of the Scottish King commemorated Flodden within a few days of the battle and was speedily followed by the satire Against the Scottes, in both of which abuse acquires the value of decoration as Skelton works himself into a verbal fury against the "tratlynge Scottes". Towards the end of the same year came the more dignified but duller

1. B. M. Add. 26,787.
2. f. 29,b.

of St. Warburg's, at the close of which he commends his "littell Latin responses, the Chorus de Diss contra Scottos and the companion poem celebrating the almost simultaneous French defeat at Thérrouenne, the Chorus de Diss contra Gallos. To the same period belongs another anti-Scottish satire, the more personal Against Dundas, which has audible echoes of the Flodden group. The English poems of this group reveal Skelton as a master of invective. A torrent of abuse flows from his pen and envelopes his opponents whether they are individuals or nations:-

Kynge Jany, Jemmy, Jocky my jo

is all the respect paid to the worthy James the Fourth of Scotland. Yet this abuse is balanced by a fierce patriotism and tributes to his patrons. Henry is "Your souerayne lord, our prynce of myght", the Earl of Surrey, the victor of Flodden, is the "White Lyon" and "rampaunt of moode".

There is every indication that Henry enjoyed this invective - he even spurred Skelton on to later "flytings" in a similar abusive style. Skelton's fierce vigour had still plenty of opponents, and this latest flood of graceless and undignified verse raised a storm of protest from (the confession is his own) "diuers people". With characteristic doggedness he wrote a reply, Unto Diuers People that remorde this Rymynge agaynst the Scot Jemmy, in the same short line metre but in language more dignified, taking refuge in his patriotism and the treachery of the Scottish King, and rounding on his detractors as traitors lacking "true English blood".

Commendations Skelton did have. In the year of the Flodden poems (1513) Henry Bradshaw, a monk of Chester, completed his Life

of St. Werburge, at the close of which he commends his "littell book" to poets ancient and contemporary, Chaucer and Skelton only two lines apart, and the rivals Barclay and Skelton receiving equal praise:

To all the auncient poetes, litell book, submytte the,
 Whilom flouryng in eloquence facoundious,
 And to all other whiche present nowe be,
 Fyrst to maister Chaucer and Ludgate sentencious,
 Also to pregnant Barklay nowe beyng religious,
 To inuentiue Skelton and poet laureate. 1

For the opposition Barclay is once again the mouth-piece. His five Eclogues were published about 1513-14, and in Eclogue iv a long passage is directed against the recent developments of Skelton's verse and his advance in courtly favour:

Another thing is yet greatly more damnable:
 Of rascolde poets yet is a shamefull rable,
 Which voyde of wisdomes presumeth to indite,
 Though they haue scantly the cunning of a snite;
 And to what vices that princes moste intende,
 Those dare these fooles solemnize and commende.
 Then is he decked as Poet laureate
 When stinking Thais made him her graduate:
 When Muses rested, she did her season note,
 And she with Bacchus her camous did promote.
 If they haue smelled the artes triuiall,
 Such is their foly, so foolishly they dote,
 Thinking that none can their playne error note:
 Yet be they fooblishe, auoyde of honestie,
 Nothing seasoned with spice of grauitie,
 With many wordes, and fruitlesse of sentence..... 2

What perhaps finally fired the resentment of Barclay and the critics was the production, perhaps a little earlier than the Flodden satires, of Elynour Rummyng, a Bacchic poem beside which The Jolly Beggars might be celebrating a tea-party. The poem is mediaeval in its attack on women - it has the choicest gallery of

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1. Ed. C. Horstmann. E.E.T.S. p. 199.
 2. Eclogue IV, ll. 679-702.

women drunks in English - and Renaissance in its abounding vigour. It is as mordant as Juvenal's Sixth Satire, yet handled without any of the grim disgust against womankind of the Latin satirist. One can see why Barclay and his fellow-churchmen viewed this latest development of a court-poet with horror. To them the poetry of Skelton was not merely repulsive; it was discreditable to the Church. A priest, the rector of a country parish, a churchman who had the ear of King Henry writing with obvious relish bawdries of drunken old women - the situation was intolerable.

Henry VIII did not concur. The following year (1514) Skelton wrote three poems "Be the Kynges most noble commandment" Against Christopher Garneshe, a gentleman-usher of the court. These flytings, like the Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy, are so abusive, one suspects the quarrel was mainly on paper - especially as there are indications that Garnesche and Stephen Hawes put their heads together to frame a reply. The whole affair has the appearance of an elaborate court jest. The self-confident swagger of Skelton's lines and the easy manner in which he refers to Henry confirm Skelton's favoured position at court:

The honor of England I lernyd to spelle
 In dignyte roialle that doth excelle.....lity Play.
 It pleasyth that noble prince roialle
 Me as hys master for to calle
 In hys lernyng primordialle.

(S. H.
 dead by
 1511)

1. Cf. Chapter 11.

Skelton's court poems of the period include his Latin Elegy on the Countess of Derby (1516) - a highly complimentary but perhaps quite sincere lament on his dead patroness - and the undated Calliope, in which he complains (for he was approaching sixty by now) of his advancing age:

Though I wax olde,
And some dele sere;

and in which he defends his court dress embroidered with the name Calliope, promising the Muse his life-long service:

Wyth her certayne
I wyll remayne,
As my souerayne.

Skelton's favour at court resulted in more than complimentary poems and occasional pieces. From now on the interest in affairs of the day which had characterised several of the poems of the preceding few years became stronger, and Skelton grew more and more to look on himself as an elder counsellor of the King. These years coincide with the rise of Cardinal Wolsey, whom Skelton regarded at first with the suspicion of an elderly churchman and courtier towards a brilliant and aggressive junior; but later, as Wolsey's influence over the King grew more potent, with genuine alarm, and in the end with uncompromising hatred. This situation at court finds an echo in Skelton's Morality Play, Magnificence, of the years 1515-16.

The originality alone of Magnificence indicates that Skelton wrote the play for counsel as much as for entertainment. All the extant Moralities of earlier date are essentially religious

For the moment no thought of flight from the busy life of dramas on stereotyped themes - Skelton's is the first Morality the court seemed to have troubled Skelton. He spoke out fearlessly, whatever disquiet his bluntness involved him in, and situation alluded to; but under cover of mediaeval allegorical abstractions Skelton offers advice to the King, and comments on one of these, Robert Whittington, schoolmaster, grammarian and court life as he had in his earlier Bowge of Courte. It is not difficult to see in the good and evil counsellors of Magnificence parallels in the older counsellors of Henry, like the Duke of Norfolk and to some of the greater figures of his court and government - Wolsey, Brandon, the Duke of Suffolk, Sir Thomas More, and the newer group headed by Wolsey. The attack implicit in this secularised Morality could not have passed without notice, but for a few years Skelton's comments on current affairs were free from personal references, and there is no record of any

displeasure felt either by Henry or Wolsey.

That Skelton at this period was dwelling in London is confirmed by a lease granted by Abbot Islip and the Convent of Westminster on the 5th of August, 1518, to one Alice Newebury, of a tenement within sanctuary, on the south side of the Great Belfry:

.....in quoquidem tenemento Johannes Skelton laureatus modo inhabitat.¹

From this it appears that Skelton's London residence was within the precincts of the Abbey, and it was probably to this tenement within the Sanctuary that Skelton retired when only a few years later Abbot Islip received him as a fugitive from the vengeance of the Cardinal.

1. W.A.M. Register Book II f.146. Noted by H. F. Westlake. T.L.S. 1921 p. 699.

For the moment no thought of flight from the busy life of the court seemed to have troubled Skelton. He spoke out fearlessly, whatever dispute his bluntness involved him in, and, though he had still his enemies, his friends remained loyal. One of these, Robert Whittington, schoolmaster, grammarian and, like Skelton, poet laureate, published in 1519 his Opusculum from the press of Wynkyn de Worde. It contained verses to Henry VIII and to some of the greater figures of his court and government - Wolsey, Brandon, the Duke of Suffolk, Sir Thomas More, and John Skelton. Even in such distinguished company, Skelton is highly praised in some hundred and fifty lines of Latin Elegiacs:

After some natural description, Whittington describes Apollo calling on the Muses to praise famous poets. They sing of Homer, Orpheus and other Greek poets like the tragedians and Pindar and Alcaeus; they then praise the Latin poets - Propertius, Ovid, Tibullus, Perius and Seneca. Apollo now calls on the Muses to turn their eyes to Oxford, which has become his shrine like Delos or Tenedos, and above which he sees the Aeonian mount. There Skelton is one of his worshippers:

Alma fovet vates nobis haec terra ministros
 Inter quos Schelton jure canendus adest
 Numina nostra colit.

The poem continues with an exaggerated series of metaphors and comparisons. Skelton's verses are sweeter than honey of Hybla, finer than Punic roses or Parian marble. He is more eloquent than Demosthenes, Ulysses or Nestor. He inspires all hearts

as Tyrtaeus inspired the Spartans, or Homer's trumpet Alexander. He could recall souls from Acheron, soften the heart of lions, dispel the grief of Niobe. He could sing of the mysteries of the skies. The Satyrs praise him and the Dryads and Sea-nymphs. So closes Apollo, and Whittington closes with a couplet of personal praise:

Sat cecinisse tuum sit, mi Schelton, tibi laudi
In Haec Whitintonum; culte poeta, vale.

The humanist virtuosity of Whittington is demonstrated by the couplet which is spelt out by the initial letters of the hexameters:

Quae Whitintonus canit ad laudes tibi, Schelton,
Anglorum vatum gloria, sume libens.

Coming from a schoolmaster of the new-style humanist teaching, such praise is significant, even more significant than Erasmus' Epigram of some twenty years earlier. Skelton was still in favour, as scholar, as poet, and as courtier.

His relationship with Whittington explains an adverse criticism of his poetry that has not aided his reputation. William Lily, the schoolmaster of St. Paul's and protégé of the humanist Colet, wrote a very uncomplimentary epigram on Skelton, that has been accepted too uncritically as conclusive evidence for the poet's unpopularity among the learned of the day:

Lilii Hendecasyllabi in Scheltonum eius
Carmina calumniantem.

1. Quid me, Scheltone, fronte sic aperta
2. Carpis, vipereo potens venemo?
3. Quid versus trutina meos iniqua
Libras? dicere vera num licebit?

teacher
 Lily, Doctrinae tibi dum parare famam
 Et doctus fieri studes poeta,
 Doctrinam nec habes, nec es poeta.

"And this", says Fuller, who quotes the lines, "I will do for
 W. Lily (though often beaten for his sake) endeavour to trans-
 late his answers";

treatise
 and the
 qualif
 vernacu
 Little
 With face so bold and teeth so sharp
 Of viper's venom, why dost carp?
 Why are my verse by thee weigh'd
 In a false scale? may Truth be said?
 While thou to get the more esteem
 A learned poet fain would seem,
 Skelton, thou art, let all men know it,
 Neither learned, nor a poet.¹

This has been accepted so long as a serious and representative
 piece of contemporary criticism that Skelton's fame has suffered
 by its continual citation. The story behind its composition
 is worth an enquiry.

In the very year that Whittington published his Opusculum
 with the Epigram to Skelton, William Horman, the vice-provost
 of Eton, published from Pynson's press, for the use of his scho-
 lars, a volume of Vulgaria, or English sentences interlined with
 specimen Latin translations.² The following year (1520) Whit-
 tington replied with a rival volume of Vulgaria from the presses
 of Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde.³ Horman was furious, especially
 since Whittington had already enraged him by producing (over the
 nom-de-plume of Bossus) verses attacking his efficiency as a

1. Fuller's Worthies. Ex 1662 p. 257.
 2. Ed. M. R. James (Roxburghe Club 1926)
 3. Reprinted E.E.T.S. Ed. B. White.

4. Ath. Ox. Ed. Niles 1881.

5. Dyce I xxxvii.

6. Notes on the History of the English Language 1902, 157.

teacher. The two masters of Eton and St. Paul's, Horman and Lily, put their heads together and produced a volume of scurrilous abuse - the Antibossicon - against their rival pedagogue. Whittington looked round for assistance, and found it in his friend Skelton, who, as ex-tutor and author of such educational treatises as the Ars Ornate Loquendi and a Grammatica Anglica, and the greatest satirist then alive in England, was more than qualified for a schoolmasters' contest of abuse, whether in the vernacular or in humanist Latinity.

Little now remains of the quarrel. Bale lists among Skelton's works an Invecta in Guill. Liliium and quotes the opening line:
Urgeor impulsus tibi, Lilli, retundere.

The expression retundere implies that the verse was a reply to verses of Lily. Wood cites Lily as having written as Apologia ad (Joh. Skeltonum
(Rob. Whittington 2. for which Dyce "sought in vain".³ Bale, however, actually quotes Horman himself as one of his authorities,⁴ and there seems no doubt that Whittington and Skelton engaged with Horman and Lily in a contest of mutual vilification. One can only suggest now which side (if indeed any) won this battle of schoolmasters. But the whole circumstances and background of the quarrel robs Lily's epigram of any value as evidence of Skelton's contemporary reputation. Whittington's laudatory epigram, exaggerated though it

1. Cf. Bale's list and G. of Laurel ll. 1175, 1182, from which Bale derived his information.
2. Ath. Ox. Ed. Bliss, i 52.
3. Dyce I xxxvii.
4. Index Britanniae Scriptorum; Ed. R. L. Poole & M. Bateson. Oxford 1902; 253. ✓

is, probably better represents the contemporary opinion. "Doc-
 trinam nec habes, nec es poeta" is the tu quoque of an angry
 schoolmaster, and not, as it has too long been accepted, the
 considered verdict of the humanists on Skelton.

While the quarrel of the schoolmasters was still enter-
 taining the learned London circle, Skelton had already engaged
 a more serious adversary. The state of the church was disquiet-
 ening. Luther's heresies of 1517 had run insidiously through
 Europe, and Skelton saw with dismay the spread of Protestant
 unorthodoxies in the English Church. Hussians, Arians, and now
 these latest, the Lutherans, were extending their influence, and
 the clergy paid heed only to the acquisition of riches and the
 building of regal palaces. More and more he found himself in
 sympathy with the older conservative statesmen like Norfolk, and
 churchmen like Warham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, while the
 King inclined to the more progressive admonitions of Wolsey.
 Skelton remained passionately loyal to the King, but his Colin
Cloute of 1519-20 reflects his pessimism under the new order,
 and is a bitter attack on the prelates of the church for not
 giving a lead to the nation against luxury and heresy. The
 mediaeval abstractions of Magnificence give way to direct attack
 in his own short line metre, and warnings he had conveyed in
 Morality form as an allegory are now concrete and ominous. The
 Bishops must preach once more and awaken the nation, which at the

moment is ruled

...at the pleasure of one
 That ruleth the roste alone.
 The references to Wolsey are veiled; but they do not remain veiled long. In 1520 war broke out with France again and the conservative group were dismayed at this culmination of the new foreign policy of Wolsey and the King. In 1521 Wolsey travelled to Calais and Bruges to negotiate with the Emperor and the King of France. Skelton attacks the Embassy furiously in Speke of Parrot (late 1521), and in Why Come Ye Nat to Courte? (late 1522 - early 1523) he pilloried the Cardinal in the most incisive satire he ever wrote, a thousand of the most scathing lines ever addressed to any statesman:

Why come ye nat to courte?

- To whyche court?

- To the Kynges court, to wise their rulers:

Or to Hampton Court?

The attack touches every point - vulnerable or not - in the activities of the Cardinal, his presumption, his wealth, his arrogance, his origin, his ecclesiastical and his political policy. It is difficult to see why Wolsey did not take immediate offence, unless the poems were at first circulated privately. None of them were printed in the lifetime of either Skelton or the Cardinal, but even circulating in manuscript form they must have come eventually to the eyes of Wolsey.

Perhaps Skelton's connections with the nobility saved him for the time being. The spring of the year (1523) in which he had finished Why Come Ye Nat to Courte? he spent with the Surreys



at their Northern seat, Sheriff Hutton Castle, where he composed The Garlande of Laurell, a long allegorical poem on the model of the Hous of Fame. The poem is both an apologia for his own life and writings, and a piece of compliment to the ladies of the Surrey household. In the poem Dame Pallas and the Queen of Fame discuss his position among the great poets, who appear in the persons of Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate to welcome him into their ranks. Later Occupacyon reads out a list of his works, which is now of the utmost value in determining the canon of his works; and as his sole personal poem The Garlande of Laurell is of considerable biographical importance. In it Skelton has no doubts of his place among the great poets. In the latter part Skelton defends his style and his satirical verse, and hints at the fate of other poets who have dared to criticise their rulers:

Ouyde was bannished for suche a skylle.....
Iuvenall was thret for to kylle.

He has unbounded faith in his own powers and the reading of his works by Occupacyon becomes a triumphal progress, till all the judges cry out:

A thousande thousande, I trow, to my dome
Triumpha, triumpha! they cryid all aboute.

This judgment on his verse, he proudly implies, must become, in spite of all adverse criticism, the final judgment of England. Any consideration of Skelton's life must pay particular attention to this illuminating allegory!

1. The Garlande of Laurell is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Towards the end of the same year (1523) Skelton turned for the last time to political satire. Once more the target of his ridicule was the hated Scots. Margaret of Scotland had been intriguing with the Duke of Albany for some time; on a renewed outbreak of the war with France, Albany sailed for Scotland and invaded England, but the efforts of the generals Surrey, Dacres and Darcy compelled him to retire discomfited. In late 1523 or early 1524 Skelton completed this final attack on the Scots - Howe the Douty Duke of Albany, like a cowarde knyght, ran away shamfully, with a Hundrede Thousande Tratlande Scottes and faint harted Frenchmen, beside the Water of Tweede. Here the muddier reaches of Renaissance English are dredged for invective to cast at the Scots:

O ye wretched Scottes
 Ye puaunt pyspottes.....
 And ever to remayne.....
 In lousy lothsumnesse
 And scabbed scorffynesse
 And in abhominacion
 Of all manner of nacion.

For all his sixty-odd years Skelton was maintaining his vigour, if only in vituperation.

Skelton's last major poem is a sturdy defence of the Church against the new Lutheran heretics. In 1527 two young students of Cambridge, Thomas Barnes and Thomas Bilney, had been compelled to recant their heresies against the Virgin. Skelton in The Replycacion attacks them and all similar heretics in shrill and scolding verses. It is evident that critics complained of this poem and challenged the right of a poet to

There is no other record of these verses but they may well be enter the field of theological dispute. The challenge brought from Skelton some of his finest fighting poetry - the Confutation attached to The Replycacion, where Skelton, anticipating by over fifty years Sidney's Apology, claims for the poet

attac...heuenly inspyracion
In laureate creacyon.

There are innumerable sophists, doctors and philosophers without number

..sed sunt pauci rarique poetae.

When he wrote this notable defence of his craft Skelton was almost in his seventieth year. He had lived to see the Middle Ages break down and the foundations of the Mediaeval Church shiver; but his plea for the place and function of poetry is a Renaissance conception, undimmed either by his years or by the pessimism of old age.

Skelton's last years were darkened by the shadow of the Cardinal. An indication of his attitude to the policy of Wolsey is contained in Hall's Chronicle for the year 1523-24:

"And in this season, the Cardinall by his power legantine, dissolued the Conuocacion at Paules, called by the Archbishop of Cantorbury, (i.e. the conservative Warham) and called hym and all the clergie to his conuocacion to Westminster, which was neuer ~~seue~~ before in England, whereof master Skelton, a mery Poet, wrote,

Gentle Paule, laye down thy sweard
For Peter of Westminster hath shauen thy beard." ^{1.}

1. Ed. Hall; *The Triumphant Reign of Henry VIII*; (Ed. C. Whibley) London 1904, I. 287.

There is no other record of these verses but they may well be authentic; the incident illustrates Skelton's resentment at Wolsey's abuse of his legatine power and at his high-handed treatment of dignitaries of the church.

How long Wolsey remained in ignorance of the successive attacks of Colin Cloute, Speke Parrot, and Why Come Ye Nat to Courte? one cannot tell. In the end he grew so angry that Skelton spent the last few years of his life in the safety of the sanctuary of Westminster.

Bale gives the only contemporary evidence:

Ob literas quasdam in Cardinalem Vuolsium inuectiuas, ad Vestmonasteriense tandem asylum confugere, pro vita servanda, coactus fuit; ubi nihilominus sub abbate Islepo fauorem inuenit.

Later writers have been inclined to decorate these bare details into a more spectacular dash for liberty - Wood adds a pursuit by the officers of the Cardinal.¹ One must not forget that Skelton's relationship with the Prior and the Abbot of Westminster was very cordial, and that he had no need to dash to sanctuary - he was already during his London years an occupier of a tenement within the precincts. There is no necessity to presume that he had ever given up the rooms he occupied within the Sanctuary in 1518.² The lease of the tenement in that year to Alice Newebury does not imply Skelton's departure - other cases may be cited from the Abbey Muniments of property without the original tenant being disturbed.

1. Ath. Oxon. Ed. Bliss: 51.

2. Cf. p. 45 of this study.

For example, Thomas Lylbourne occupied a tenement within the Sanctuary during the same period. In 1518 the tenement was leased to one Wm. Hubbard¹ and in 1522 to John Hubbard² - Lylbourne was living there at both dates. In 1525 this same tenement was leased to John Barbour with the note "in which Thomas Lylbourne late dwelt"³. In 1529-30 it was leased to Barbour's widow, and Lylbourne is noted as again in residence.⁴ Clearly a change in lessee made no difference to the position of the occupier, and Skelton probably never abandoned his tenancy of the Westminster house. When the fury of the Cardinal reached the danger point, probably in 1523-4 after his discovery of Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?, Skelton simply retired to the safety of his Westminster tenement and the partonage of Abbot John Islip.

Perhaps he was already repenting of his rashness. There are several indications that, in spite of his anti-Wolsey satires, he had expectations of advancement from the Cardinal, and made some attempt to reinstate himself in Wolsey's good graces. His three poems written between 1523 and 1528 have all dedications or verses to Wolsey, and unless one discounts these passages as forgeries or printer's additions,⁵ one must infer that Skelton at last decided to play for safety. The Garlande of Laurell ^^ (continued at foot of page)

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1. Westminster Abbey Muniments Register Book II f. 147b.
 2. Ibid. f. 191
 3. Ibid. f. 217
 4. Ibid. f. 281b. All these references are unpublished.
 5. E.g. J. M. Berdan. P.M.L.A. l.c. denies the Garland and Albany dedications but allows Skelton that of The Replycacion. Brie (Skelton Studien l.c.) denies the latter in addition.

{ concludes with a dedication to Henry and to Wolsey. This dedication was not printed in Fauke's edition of 1523, but appeared first in Marshg's edition of the complete poems in 1568; but since the poem

contains several passages where the poet protests against his work being misinterpreted, and even asks Fame to erase one of his books from the list of his works, the repentant mood must have set in by 1523, and the dedication may very well be genuine.

Wolsey is reminded of his promise of a benefice:

.....et fiat memor ipse precare
 Prebendae, quam promisit mihi credere quondam,
 Meque suum referas pignus sperare salutis
 Inter spem que metum.

Skelton is "between hope and fear" - the hope of the promised advancement, fear of the vengeance of Wolsey. He must have realised by now that his patronage by the King was cancelled out by Wolsey's domination over Henry; the volume is humbly dedicated to both.

The change in front is surprising, but circumstances may have been too strong for even a bold fighter like Skelton. A new pessimistic note appears in the dedication:

Twene hope and drede
 My lyfe I lede
 But of my spede
 Small sekerness.

The old confident swagger has disappeared and Skelton now lacks the "sekerness" to be anything but a humble suppliant.

The Duke of Albany of 1523-24 concludes with a similar dedication. Dyce has suggested that this Lenvoy should be assigned elsewhere - possibly to The Garlande of Laurell.¹ This would still

1. Dyce II 83; I xliii.

The humble suppliant of these lines is a different Skelton from the jaunty self-confident poet of Why Bury I Nat to Courtes

1. This l.c. assumes the dedication to have been added by Pynson for its advertising value.

date it at 1523 and would only support the argument for a change of front about this time; both poems are written within a year of each other. Skelton in the Albany dedication commends his book to the Cardinal and reminds him again of his promise of advancement:

Lenvoy

Go, lytell quayre, apace,
 In moost humble wyse,
 Before his noble grace,
 That caused you to devise
 This lytell enterprise;
 And hym moost lowly pray
 In his mynde to comprise
 These wordes his grace dyd saye
 Of an ammas gray.

Ie foy enterment en sa bone grace.

The third dedication to Wolsey is an even humbler petition - that to The Replycacion of 1528. This poem was published complete with the dedication by Pynson,¹ who died in 1530, and it is a reasonable assumption that a poem published within three years of composition was printed as the poet wrote it. This almost certain authenticity of the 1528 dedication strengthens the case for those of 1523 and 1523-4. In this final dedication Wolsey is addressed in grandiloquent but obsequious Latin:

Honorificatissimo, amplissimo, longequae reverendissimo in Christo patri, ac domino, domino Thomae &c. tituli sanctae Ceciliae, sacrosanctae Romanae ecclesiae presbytero, Cardinali meritissimo, et apostolicae sedis legato, a latereque legato superillustri, &c. Skeltonis laureatus, ora. reg. humillimum dicit obsequium ^{omni} debita reverentia, tanto tamque magnifico digna principe sacerdotum, totiusque justitiae aequabilissimo moderatore, necnon praesentis opusculi fautore excellentissimo, &c., ad cuius auspiciatissimam contemplationem, sub memorabili prelo gloriosae immortalitatis, praesens pagella felicitatur.

The humble suppliant of these lines is a different Skelton from the jaunty self-confident poet of Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?

1. Brie l.c. assumes the dedication to have been added by Pynson for its advertising value.

It is evident that the old man had found the Cardinal too strong an opponent, and even his former favour with the King was powerless to help him. Nothing came of the petitions to Wolsey, and Skelton spent the following two years, probably peaceably enough, in his tenement in the Sanctuary of Westminster. Even if he never proceeded beyond its boundaries, life there was not so restricted as might be imagined. Men like William Cornysse, the musician of the Chapel Royal children, who had set to music several of Skelton's lyrics, had tenements within the Sanctuary.¹ There was even a tavern, called the Hole Tavern, under the Great Belfry, which in 1521-2 had been leased to one William Staverton, citizen and grocer of London. One can imagine worse ways of spending the final years of a crowded and belligerent life.

Skelton died in Westminster on the 21st of June, 1529.² He was buried in the chancel of St. Margaret's, Westminster, and the inscription was placed on his tomb:

Joannes Skelton, vates Pierius, hic situs est.

Bale records that he left several children, and that on his death-bed proclaimed that he regarded their mother in the eyes of God as his legal wife:

...se nusquam illam in conscientiam coram Deo, nisi pro uxore legitima tenuisse.

Skelton left no will; but administration of his goods was

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1. Westminster Abbey Muniments. Register Book I f.49; f.116; f.15. contain leases of this tenement to Cornysse and his wife.
 2. This is Bale's date, accepted by all later writers. [Unpublished.]

granted to William Mott, the curate of St. Margaret's. The record of the administration is preserved in Somerset House, for the year 1529:

(In margin) Magister Johannes Skelton poeta laureatus: decessit xvjto nouembris. anno domini praedict. in domo regri. coram magro. Roberto Bennet archiuio. compart. mr. Williamus Mott curatus ste. Margarete Westm. et peciit administrat. bonorum infra Iurationem existe. sibi committi, cui in forma Iuris Iurat. dominus commisit administrationem huiusmodi saluo Iure etc. deinde ext. Inuentam. eorundem bonorum etc.!

No time was lost in appointing a successor to the vacant living at Diss. For the last time the name of John Skelton figures in the records of his diocese. For the 17th of July the Institution Book has the entry:

Dns. Thomas Clark clericus institutus fuit personaliter in ecclesia paroch. de Dysse Norvicen. Dioc. per mortem naturalem magistri Johannes Skeltonne ultimi Rectoris.²

So ended the life of this unconventional cleric. His had been a very full career, rich in experience among high and low, a life of bustle and excitement and general good fortune, terminating in a few years of seclusion and tranquillity, and dedicated for almost half a century to the Church and to poetry.

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1. Somerset House. Book Bracy f.6. Unpublished.
 2. Norwich Cathedral. Institution Book XVII f.9b. *Unpublished.*

CHAPTER THREE.

The Mediaeval era are the simpler to isolate. In a poem of the early Renaissance the theme is often obscure, the MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE. only in an unconventional attitude, or a changed conception or a new lyrical quickening. Originality in subject-matter, and in poets of the period a Renaissance spirit may be discovered. The career of Skelton falls so neatly into what for England was a period of transition from the decaying forms of the Middle Ages to the novelties of the Renaissance that, unless he had been exceptionally conservative or blindly progressive, he could not fail to show the influences of both modes of thought. Seldom has a poet borne the marks of a transition age so clearly as Skelton. He is a Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, difficult to fit into the classifications of his time, at one moment surprisingly Renaissance in his attitude and his verse-forms, at another uncompromisingly mediaeval. Education at a mediaeval University untouched by the Humanism of the early Fifteenth Century, and a position at a court that had not yet accepted the fall of Feudalism as a reality, had provided him with the background common to the majority of mediaeval poets; but the passionate sincerity and originality of his mind, his evident sympathy with the aspirations of the new rising middle class, his sturdy defence of English as a language for verse, an apology for poetry worthy of Sir Philip Sidney, and his verse-forms as vigorous as they are novel, are all signs that Skelton was a true child of the Renaissance. The social revolution, but the long-spirited and unmerciful

The Mediaeval elements in his verse are the simpler to isolate. In a poem of the early Renaissance the theme is often threadbare, the newer spirit betrays itself only in an unconventional attitude, or a changed conception or a new lyrical quickening. Originality of thought does not imply originality in subject-matter, and in poets of the period a Renaissance spirit may be discovered, of which it is not always easy to find evidence other than the treatment of their topics. By the time Skelton wrote even his earliest verses, the patterns of mediaeval verse had long since been standardised. The later Middle Ages reproduced with scrupulous fidelity the conventions of the Rose, the Daisy, Fortune and her false Wheel, the Lament, the Testament, the Temple of Venus, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Dream Allegory with its traditional May Morning and its personifications from the Romance of the Rose, the Count of Love and its innumerable developments - all the colourful axioms of feudal idealism. Even in the admittedly mediaeval works of Skelton perhaps the most surprising fact is not how many of these conventions he has accepted, but how few.

The early poetry of Skelton was written for a courtly audience which had been brought up on the literature of feudalism. On the battlefield the foot soldier with his firearms had rendered the mailed knight of the Romances obsolete, and the spread of international trade had given the commercial class a status that was to effect in the latter years of the Fifteenth Century a complete social revolution, but the long-winded and unhurrying

poetry of the feudal age persisted into the Sixteenth Century to earn the grave approbation of a nobility which scarcely realised that their civilisation and their literature was dead.

The earliest poem of Skelton is written to a well-worn, mediaeval formula, that of the Falls of Princes, which may be traced in a clear line through the works of Boccaccio in the De Casibus, of Chaucer in the Monk's Tale, of Lydgate in his Falls of Princes, down to the Mirroure for Magistrates, in the earlier editions of which is included Skelton's poem Of the Death of the Noble Prince, Kynge Edward the Forth. The King died in the year 1483 and this is probably the date of the poem.

The poem is in the form of a monologue by the dead king.

He laments the transitoriness of mortal things:

What creature is borne to be eternall?

He rails against mutability; one cannot depend on earthly prosperity. The mediaeval theme of Fortune is introduced; she gave him victory and smiled on him deceitfully. He stored his coffers with the money of the common people:

I toke ther tresure, but of ther prayzers mist.

He enumerates the royal palaces he built at Nottingham and elsewhere:

Yet at the last I went from them all,

Et, ecce, nunc in pulvere dormio!

A further mediaeval stock theme is introduced - the lament of Ubi Sunt? -

Where is now my conquest and victory?

Where is my riches and my royal aray?

Wher be my coursers and my horses hye?

Where is my myrth, my solas, and my play?

As vanyte, to nought al is wandred away.

The prevalent horror of death is echoed in the following verse with its continuation of the ubi sunt motif. The "wormis mete" is the end for all men.

Why, what cam of Alexander the greate?

Or els of Stronge Sampson, who can tell?

Were not wormes ordeyned theyr flesh to frete?

And of Salomon, that was of wyt the well?

Absolon profferyd his heare for to sell,

Yet for al his bewte wormys ete him also;

And I but late in honour dyd excel,
Et, ecce, nunc in pulvere dormio!
 He commends his spirit to God and beseeches the prayers of the commons, concluding with the final repetition of the melancholy Latin refrain.

Though the poem is a jejune and apprentice piece of work, it is illuminating to see what were the models Skelton chose in his apprenticeship. The Elegy is merely a patchwork of mediaeval moralisings and gloomy lamentations on the mortality of man, with so little individuality that Skelton has even been denied the authorship by one recent writer. There is no real warrant for this. The elegy is the work of a young poet simply accepting his most accessible models.

These models served once more for an Elegy on The Dolourus Dethe and muche Lamentable Chaunce of the Most Honorable Erle of Northumberlande (1489).

The poem, which shows the influence of Chaucer, is written in highly alliterated rime royal. Skelton opens by lamenting the death of the earl, and calls on Clio for succour:

Mine homely rudeness and dryghnes to expell
 Withe the freshe waters of Elyconys well.

Clio is accustomed to record the praises of famous men; she must give him inspiration to tell of the treason that killed the earl. He attacks the cowards who abandoned him to his death and the "mayny of rude villayns" that slew him. What wilful folly made them rise against their lord? Skelton tells the story of the

1. F. Brie: Skelton Studien.

rising of the commons and Northumberland's expedition against them. Once again he uses the stock formula:

O dolorus chaunce of Fortunes froward hande!

With an echo of Troilus' wonderful lyrical lament on the empty palace of Criseyde, Skelton continues his lament:

O cruell Mars, thou dedly god of war!

O dolorous tewisday, dedicate to thy name...

...O Atropos, of fatall systers iii

Goddes most cruel unto the lyfe of man,

All merciles, in the is no pite!

O homicide, which sleest all that thou can...

[← Percy had knights and squires and was chief lord;

Tyl fykkell Fortune began on hym to frowne.

If the poet had the power of the nine Muses he would have all too little eloquence to praise the hero. He wishes good fortune to the "yonge lyon", the heir, and the poem concludes in the manner of a mediaeval hymn with an appeal to the

Perlese Prince of heuen emperyall,

and a verse that might have come from any mediaeval hymn to the Virgin:

O quene of mercy, O lady full of grace,
 Mayden most pure, and Goddes moder dere,
 To sorowful hartes chef comfort and solace,
 Of all women O flower withouten pere!
 Pray to thy Son above the sterris clere...

The Elegy on the Earl of Northumberland is less of a stock lament than its predecessor. Along with the railing against Fortune, the echoes from Chaucer and from the mediaeval hymns are current allusions and personal touches - "my wordes vnpullysht" and "my rude pen enkantered all with rust" - that save the poem from the pure formality of the Edward IV Elegy. Its Latin verse-

The poem concludes with a short and conventional appeal to

-dedication to Percy, *Qui Northumbrorum jura paterna gerit*, implies that it was written for the son of the dead earl, and so may claim more personal feeling than the former Elegy on the King. Nevertheless, the Northumberland Elegy belongs to the Falls of Princes tradition and shows no development of the mediaeval convention.

With these two laments may be considered the curious poem (of uncertain but probably early date) Vppon a Deedmans Hed. Skelton had received a skull from an "honorable jentyllwoman" and this strange token resulted in a "gostly medytacyon in English...comendable, lamentable, lacrymable, profytable for the soule." Skelton cannot escape from the Middle Ages' fascinated horror of physical corruption. Death was not merely an allegorical figure but a grim reality of wars abroad and plagues at home. The skull,

With hys worme etyn maw,
And hys gastly jaw
Gapyng asyde
Nakyd of hyde,
Neyther flesh nor fell,

sets the poet brooding on the shortness of life. There is no escape from death:

Oure days be datyd,
To be chekmatyd
With drawttys of deth,
Stoppynge oure breth;
Oure eyen synkyng,
Oure bodys stynkyng,
Oure gummys grynnyng,
Oure soulys brynnyng.

The poem concludes with a short and conventional appeal to

Christ. Nothing could be closer in spirit to the Middle Ages than these few macabre lines.

But These three pieces are his purest examples of mediaeval thought and form. Elsewhere in his poetry the mediaeval elements, where they exist, are tempered by current ideas, or utilised as conscious archaism. It is significant that these formal conventional verses all belong to the earlier period of his poetry, in which he was still content to accept the traditions of the circle that formed his audience, and before he had developed his later individual style. As his sense of dissatisfaction with the life at court grew stronger, his poetry rapidly diverged from the accepted patterns. This departure from the tradition had two stages - at first he preserved the form of the old verse, while expressing the bitterest of dissatisfaction with the society which it represented. This is exemplified by The Bowge of Courte. A few years later he abandoned both the form and the spirit of the mediaeval type in the new verse of Philip Sparrow.

Amourcuse and The Boke of the Courtier were written when it had to bear the weight of the old form.

The first stage in the departure was inspired by a theme that the Middle Ages had often enough handled:- the disappointments of the life at court. There were many poets in the centuries between those of Virgil and of Aenius Silvius who had found court life unsuited to their talents. Skelton was not alone. His special claim to our attention is that he combined

the theme of the courtier's life with the form of the Dream Allegory. Both the elements are unquestionably mediaeval; but there is little in the amalgam that belongs to the Middle Ages. In The Bowge of Courte the allegorical conventions are used for the purpose of covert but well-directed satire against the society of the court.

In the passage of the Fifteenth Century the Dream Allegory had lost most of its original freshness. None of the Chaucerians except Henrison had preserved either the delicacy or the vigour of Chaucer's handling; yet the Allegory became the accepted form for the more serious type of verse. The unrivalled opportunities it offered for internal ramifications was a danger which only a Chaucer or a Jean de Meung could surmount, and which produced in a less competent poet like Lydgate merely wearisome enormities. With the approach of the Sixteenth Century the Dream Allegory was revived seriously for the last time. Hawes combined it with Scholasticism, Skelton turned it to Satire. The form which had given such grace to the Dit de la Fontaine Amoureuse and The Boke of the Duchess became overburdened when it had to bear the weight of educational propaganda and pure satire. The Pastime of Pleasure retained the mediaeval vice of exhausting every aspect of every topic, without proportion and without perspective; The Bowge of Courte by its very lack of this vice, by its satire and its attack on the civilisation that had produced the allegory, denied itself the right to be considered a proper Dream Allegory. The wine of the Renaissance was

* Per P. 25

breaking the mediaeval bottles.

The Bowge of Courte belongs to Skelton's first period at court - the years of his tutorship to the sons of Henry VII. Because of its supposed indebtedness to Barclay's English version of The Ship of Fools (1509) it was formerly presumed to belong to the first years of the new reign.¹ But, as Brie has pointed out,² Locher's Latin translation of Brandt's Narrenschiff was published in 1497 and it is much more likely that the poem belongs to the years around 1500. When Skelton returned to the court at the beginning of the reign of Henry VIII his style was no longer that of the Middle Ages.

The poem, which is written in rime royal, opens with Skelton calling to mind how older poets could write with a serious purpose:

Dyuerse in style, some spared not vyce to wryte,
Some of moralyte nobly dyde endyte.

He is prompted "to aforce the same", but Ignorance discourages him. While his mind is wavering he falls asleep in the port of Harwich.

In myne hostes house, called Powers Keye.

He dreams that a ship anchors in the port, laden with royal merchandise. The poet joins the crowd that flock to the ship, and is told that it is called The Bowge of Courte - literally the

Full subtyll persones, in nombre foure and thre.

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1. Cf. G. H. Herford. Studies in the literary Relations of England and Germany in the Sixteenth Century. pp. 351 ff. Cambridge 1886.
Albert Rey Skelton's Satirical poems in their relation... to Barclay's Ship of Fools. (Bern Dissertation 1899) passim
A. Koelbing Zur Charakteristic John Skeltons. Stuttgart 1904 (p. 69 ff.)
 2. Skelton Studien sub The Bowge of Courte. (Englische Studien 1907)

rations or allowance for an officer at court, and so a metaphor for the rewards of serving a prince. The owner of the ship is Dame Saunce-pere and the merchandise that she carries is called Favour. The poet is upbraided by her chief gentlewoman, Daunger, for approaching so near. To this the poet replies that his name is Drede and that he wishes to buy some of her ware. Daunger leaves him indignantly and a second gentlewoman, Desire, bids him be of good cheer and come forward without fear. She laughs at his plea of poverty, lends him a jewel, Bone Aventure, wherewith to procure entrance to the ship, and warns him to secure the friendship of "she that styreth the shyp".

Fortune gydeth and ruleth all our shyppes:
 Whome she hateth shall ouer the see boorde skyp;
 Whome she loueth, of all plesyre is ryche,
 Whyles she laugheth and hath lust for to playe;
 Whome she hateth, she casteth in the dyche,
 For whan she frouneth, she thynketh to make a fray;
 She cheryssheth him, and hym she casseth away.

The poet joins with the others on board in supplicating the good offices of Fortune. So ends the prologue.

The poem develops as a series of interviews between Drede and a group of seven allegorical figures, who represent the vices of court life. Just as the poet imagines that Favour will never depart from him he sees on board these

Full subtyll persones, in nombre foure and thre.

They are the friends of Fortune and the poet makes advances towards them. The first to address him is Favell, the personification of deceitful flattery, already so brilliantly portrayed in Piers Plowman.

Favell praises the poet lavishly in the manner of a deceitful courtier:

Harvy Hafter greets the poet boisterously, singing lines from
 Ye be an apte man, as ony can be founde,
 To dwell with vs, and serue my ladyes grace;
 Ye be to her yea worth a thousande pounce;
 I herde her speke of you within shorte space... Though

Favell has defended him when other men would have slandered:

I can not flater, I muste be playne to the.

He assures the poet that he is favoured by Fortune. To this speech the poet replied with gratitude, but with some reserve because Methoughte, of wordes that he had full a poke.

As Favell goes he is met by Suspecte, or Suspicion. The poet hears them whispering together.

Suspecte now comes forward and cautions the poet against

Favell:

He wyll begyle you and speke fayre to your face...
 Spake he a fayth no worde to you of me?
 I wote, and he dyde, ye wolde me telle...
 But I wonder what the deuyll of helle
 He sayde of me, whan he with you dyde talke:
 By mine auyse, vse not with him to walke.

Suspecte pledges him to keep his silence and the poet promises never to discover his counsel, ironically questioning him why he had not kept it to himself all the time. Suspecte departs with a mysterious promise to tell the poet more.

The next figure to come forward is Harvy Hafter, the type of the subtle rogue at court, with a more clearly individualised personality than those of the other six allegorical figures, and probably drawn from a court figure known to the poet.

He gased on me with his gotyshe berde;
Whan I loked on hym, my purse was half aferde.

Harvy Hafter greets the poet boisterously, singing lines from popular ballads to show that he realises that Drede is a poet.

What a pleasure it must be to have such knowledge! Though Harvy Hafter is a "homely knaue" he bids the poet welcome:

But ye be welcome to our housholde.

For a moment Skelton has forgotten his allegory and the ship has become the reality - the royal household. Harvy Hafter departs with the promise to let the poet know if anything is ever said against him.

The poet sees him join with Dysdayne and hears the two of them plot his downfall. Dysdayne is painted as a pure allegorical abstraction:

Enuye hathe wasted his lyuer and his lounge,
Hatred by the herte so had hym wrounge,
That he loked pale as ashes to my syghte.

Dysdayne approaches and follows his plan of picking a quarrel with the poet - perhaps with such a complaint as the older courtiers of the court of Henry VII may have made against Skelton:

It is greate scorne to see suche an hayne
As thou arte, one that cam but yesterdaye,
With vs olde seruantes suche maysters to playe...
We be thy betters, and so thou shalte vs take,
Or we shall thé oute of thy clothes shake.

At this point out rushes Ryotte, the drunken courtier, whose appearance and manners are minutely described - bleared eyes, ragged hose and coat, a feather in his hat, and an empty purse, and a flow of ribald language. He demands to know who the poet

is, and Skelton once again forgets his ship allegory and sees himself in the court he was growing to hate: *one will be displeased*

Forsothe, quod I, in this courte I dwelle nowe. *finishes*
 Welcome, quod Ryote, I make God auowe.

Ryotte outlines the life he invites the poet to join. One must
 abandon study and keep good company: *oldewe.*

This worlde is nothyng but ete, drynke and slepe. *the*
 He offers to play dice with the poet, but, discovering nothing
 in his purse but a buckle, he makes for the stews: *himself,*

To wete yf Malkyn, my lemman, haue gete oughte. *ilvian'*

No sooner has Ryotte departed than the poet sees whispering
 in a corner the figures of Dysdayne and Dyssymulacyon. The
 portrayal of the latter is in sharp contrast with the picture of
 Ryotte. Dyssymulacyon, like Dysdayne, is a mediaeval abstraction:

Than in his hode I saw there faces twyene; *the courtier's*
 The one was lene and lyke a pyned goost,
 The other loked as he wolde haue me slayne.

Dyssymulacyon hints darkly at slanders against the poet - the
 allegory is dropped for a moment: *the abstract studies of the*

For all our courte is full of dyceyte. *of the new age.*
 and after some ingenious verses in which he suggests much but
 reveals nothing, Dyssymulacyon departs and leaves the stage free
 for the final figure of Disceyte: *is an excellent piece of*

Yf I had not quyckly fledde the touche, *drunkard, while*
 He had plucte oute the nobles of my pouche.

As Disceyte tells how he saved the poet's life, Drede sees "lewde
 felawes" approaching to slay him. Rushing to the ship's side
 he awoke and:

the poem - the "Fool" literature that grew from the Narrenschiff, of Sebastian Brandt. This German verse survey of the numerous varieties of "fools" was published in 1494 and was rapidly translated into other languages - notably into Latin by Locher, who published in 1497 his Stultifera Navis, ^{and into} English by Barclay whose translation, from Locher, appeared in 1509 as The Ship of Fools. What was in Brandt a mediaeval collection touched with humanist pedantry, became in Locher a Renaissance attack on the extravagances of the age. As there is no reason to suppose that Skelton knew German, he must have read the poem in Locher's Latin. Both the mechanism and the motive of The Ship of Fools are discoverable in The Bowge of Courte.² The Narrenschiff becomes the ship of Fortune and the fools that crowd into it are the fools of court favour. The sketch of Ryotte, in particular, corresponds to a whole class of riotous fools in the original Ship. Skelton has put together with considerable ingenuity his various motifs. The poem is strikingly lacking in the Mediaeval padding, that one might have expected, and Narrenschiff allegory and Court satire combine into an incisive unity quite unmediaeval in compactness.

Some twenty years later Skelton returned to dream allegory in The Garlande of Laurell. In the intervening period his verse

1. Cf. Pompen. English Versions of the Ship of Fools London 1925
 2. Cf. C. H. Herford. Literary Relations p.352 ff.

had been so markedly characterised by Renaissance freedom from earlier authorities that the choice of a mediaeval model must have been deliberate. The Garlande of Laurell was written in Sheriff Hutton Castle, while Skelton was a guest of the Howard family, and the form of the poem acknowledges the old-fashioned taste of an aristocratic household. Only half a dozen years before its appearance a Howard had been born who was to naturalise in England the poetry of the Italian Renaissance. ~~but~~ When Skelton read his leisurely allegory to the Howard ladies, this future Earl of Surrey was only a child of six; and the elders preferred to acclaim the verse of their own generation.

The Garlande was published by Faukes in October 1523, only a few months after its composition, and is the only poem of Skelton that appeared in print during his lifetime. Perhaps the publicity that the poem had gained from its appearance before a noble audience and the sense that it was an Apologia pro Vita Sua, induced this unusual step. It must have been written about the beginning of 1523, because Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey and husband of Elizabeth, to whom the poem is dedicated, became General-in-chief of the Scottish campaign in February 1523 and spent the spring and summer raiding the Borders. Sheriff Hutton Castle was the most northerly seat available for the family, and it is to be presumed that Skelton was a guest of the Howards during this period. This date is confirmed by the mediaeval astrological dating in the opening verse. Mars is described as "retrogradant". The Retrogression of Mars occurs at intervals of a

little over two years, and that which Skelton witnessed has been calculated for April, 1523. The early months of 1523 may be accepted as the date of composition.¹ The poem is partly a piece of personal glorification, partly a graceful compliment to the Countess of Surrey and her ladies. It is written in Rime Royal.

After the astrological dating, Skelton muses on the changes of Fortune and as he is drowned "in this dumpe" he rests in the Forest of Galtres, to fall into the conventional sleep of the Dream Allegory. He sees a vision of a pavilion in which Dame Pallas and the Queen of Fame are disputing his claim to be admitted to the court of Fame. The poem develops as a series of pros and cons from the two disputants.

Fame announces the claim of Pallas to have her servant Skelton admitted to the court of the Queen. She finds in him some deficiency but

Sith he has tastid of the sugred pocioun
Of Elyconis well

it is fitting that Pallas should defend him.

Pallas replies; and through her lips we hear the voice of John Skelton defending himself against his critics. She defends his satires of the previous few years:

And if so hym fortune to wryte true and plaine,
As suntyme he must vyces remorde...

1. Helen Stearns: The Date of the Garlande of Laurell. M.L.N. 1928. The mathematical calculations to establish the dates of the Retrogressions of Mars are noted in this article and in Skelton's Quarrel with Wolsey; William Nelson, P.L.M.A. Essays June 1936.

and cites Ovid and Juvenal as poets whose comments on public affairs brought them into danger. The Queen mentions Demosthenes as a genuine candidate for honour and to this Pallas asks why Aeschines had none. Fame defends herself, but Pallas complains that fame nowadays comes only to those who work evil:

Some haue a name for theft and brybery;
 Some be called crafty that can pyke a purse;
 Some men be made of for their mokery;
 Some carefull cokwoldes, some haue theyr wyues curs.

Why should a poet not have promotion? Fame admits her arguments and announces that if Skelton can produce any works that justify his claim to be a poet he will not be banished from the "laureat senate". This is what Pallas has been waiting for.

Aeolus - the trumpeter of The House of Fame - blows a blast to summon

Lydgate "What poetis we haue at our retenewe." - the mediaeval canon -
 This ends the first section of the poem.

The second section opens with a description of the aspirants to fame:

On euery syde with its diamonds and jaspers and sapphires.
 They presid in faste; some thought they were to longe;
 Some were to hasty, and wold no man byde;
 Some whispered, some rownyd, some spake, and some cryde.

Orpheus and Amphion harp so melodiously that the oak stump against which Skelton is leaning starts back and he sees around the tent of Pallas a thousand poets. Phoebus, their leader, sings a mediaeval complaint on his loss of Daphne; when the complaint is ended the "poets" move by in procession to provide Skelton with one of these poetic catalogues beloved by the Middle Ages. They

pass in disordered ranks, Homer with Cicero, Lucan Virgil,
 Terence followed by Seneca and Boethius, Boccaccio linked
 strangely with Macrobius, Plutarch with Petrarch, and Propertius
 with Vincent of Beauvais. At the end of the line come the three
 great English poets, Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate, who address
 Skelton with "godely chere".

Gower encourages him with praise:
 Ye haue deserved to haue an emplement
 In our collage aboue the starry sky.

Chaucer announces that all three will bring him before the court
 of Fame, and Skelton replies with his tribute to the poet he

revered:
 O noble Chaucer, whos pullysshed eloquence
 Cure Englysshe rude so fressshely hath set out!

Lydgate appoints Skelton to be "pronothary" - the mediaeval can-
 didate who publicly defended his thesis. He is brought by the
 three to the Palace of Fame. Here Skelton turns aside from his
 narrative to give an elaborate mediaeval set-piece, the descrip-
 tion of the palace with its diamonds and jaspers and sapphires.
 To these splendours come pursuivants from all corners of the
 world, with tidings like those in Chaucer's House of Rumour:

With, How doth the north? what tydyngis from the sowth?
 The west is windy, the est is metely wele:

After listening to these rumours, Skelton is presented to Occu-
 pacyon, the "regestary" of Fame. She bids him welcome:

Welcome to me with all my hole desyre!
 And for my sake spare neyther pen nor ynke;
 Be well assurid I shall aquyte your hyre.

Skelton inserts another digression, introduced naively enough by Occupacyon:

Let vs somewhat fynde
To pass the tyme with, but let vs wast no wynde.

She leads him into a field where there are a thousand gates inscribed with the names of all nations, and one is described in detail - the gate called Anglia. Beyond the gates he sees a crowd, and re-echoes the "felde ful of folke" with the authentic accent of Langland:

Some fayne themselfe folys, and wolde be callyd wyse,
Some medelynge spyes, by craft to grope thy mynde,
Some dysdanous dawcokkis that all men dispyse,
Fals flaterers that fawne thé, and kurris of kynde.

The vision of knaves disappears and the scene mysteriously changes to a garden like the garden of the Rose. Apollo sings to Flora and the Muses while:

Dryades there daunsid vpon that goodly soil.

A more personal interlude follows. Skelton has a question to ask of Occupacyon. She anticipates him. He wishes to know the name of his poetic opponent. After a few lines of cryptic Latin attacking this "vatis adversarius", the name "Rogerus Statham" is given in code.¹ The interlude was doubtless directed against one of the other guests - probably a relative of Mistress Geretrude Statham, to whom a complimentary lyric is addressed some lines later. It illustrates well the occasional quality of

1. The code was first worked out by Henry Bradley in Two Puzzles in Skelton. The Academy Aug. 1896 (1265) P.83.

the whole poem.

Occupacyon and the poet now mount "by a wyndyng stayre" to the chamber of the Countess of Surrey, who announces to her ladies:

A cronell of lawrell with verduris light and darke
I haue deuysed for Skelton, my clerke.

As the ladies busy themselves with the embroidery of the laurel chaplet, Occupacyon addresses Skelton:

Beholde and se in your aduertysment
How theis ladys and gentylwomen all
For your pleasure do there endeuourment,
And for your sake how fast to warke they fall:
To your remembraunce wherfore ye must call
In goodly wordes pleasauntly comprysid,
That for them some goodly conseyt be deuysid.

The poet takes up his pen and pays compliment to the Countess of Surrey, and to each of the group of ladies that made up the house party, in a set of graceful lyrics which are not equalled in English again till the publication of Tottel's Miscellany. Their fresh Elizabethan quality is in vivid contrast with the Mediaeval monochrome of their background.

Wearing his new chaplet of laurel, the poet is brought before the Queen of Fame. All marvel at its beauty. The Queen "gaue on me a glum", and demands Skelton to justify his position. The poet calls on Occupacyon to read the list of his books to establish himself as a poet. Here follows the most important, if the least poetic, section of the Garlande, the list of the works of Skelton. In a vainglorious spirit - far different from that in which Chaucer had drawn up a similar list in his "retracciouns" - he establishes the canon of his works, many

of which are known only as names in The Garlande of Laurell, and, perhaps less intentionally, he lets drop biographical hints that these are perhaps his only pieces of pure mediaeval verse. Generally, when he wrote in the forms of the passing age, the idiom of his own generation breaks through. Philip Sparrow is a

When the list is finally read out, Skelton is acclaimed by all the "oratoris and poetis":

A thowsande thowsande, I trow, to my dome,
Triumpha, triumpha! they cryid all aboute;
 Of trumpettis and clarious the noyse went to Rome;
 The starry heuyn, me thought, shoke with the showte;
 The grownde gronid and tremblid, the noyse was so stowte;
 The Quene of Fame commaundid shett fast the boke;
 And therwith sodenly out of my dreme I woke.

The poem closes with a Lenuy and a dedication.

The allegorical conventions do not sit too happily on Shelton. The best part of the Garlande is the group of lyrics where he openly abandons this model. His audience demanded a poem in the old tradition, and all the elements that made up the old tradition are reproduced with an air of elaborate patience. Here are all the set pieces of the Allegory, but the machinery that operates them has grown a little rusty. The vision of the Field and of the Garden of Apollo are introduced abruptly and dismissed without apology. Even the language of the poem is so consciously aureate that its out-moded dignity and elaboration must have possessed a charm for the original audience. Skelton had the manner of the poem imposed on him, but he was not imposed on by his material. He had been writing too much vital verse in the previous few years to believe that there was a future for allegory.

The mediaevalism of Skelton was a very partial affair. The

two Elegies, and the skull poem, and some of his formal hymns - these are perhaps his only pieces of pure mediaeval verse. Generally, when he wrote in the forms of the passing age, the idiom of his own generation breaks through. Philip Sparrow is a mediaeval Mass of the Birds, with long catalogues of authorities and tributes to the Romances, Elynour Rummynge is mediaeval in its attack on women, and Magnyfycence uses the Morality form. Yet all of these works are unmistakably Renaissance in their handling and inspiration. Skelton has sometimes been regarded as one of the last of the mediaeval English poets. The older spelling of his English alone gives his work a superficial air of archaism that will not be found in Tottel's Miscellany, only a few years later. The archaism is mainly in appearance. Lydgate and Occleve belong to Chaucer's world, and even Hawes is sincere in his use of old-fashioned verse. Skelton belongs to his own changing age; the marks of the transition are everywhere apparent in his verse. There is less community of feeling than perhaps Skelton himself realised between Chaucer, Lydgate and Gower - the poets' "college" of The Garlande of Laurell - and their vain protégé at the court of Fame. It is in Skelton, rather than in Wyatt and Surrey, that one discovers the beginnings of the English Renaissance. Legend, commemorating the Merry Tales of a poet now old-fashioned; by the time of Spenser and of the later Elizabethans, the poetry of Skelton had fallen into oblivion. Yet had the Elizabethans scanned his work, they would have found

2. The New Age.

The poets of the reign of Henry VIII fall naturally into an older and a younger group. Between them lies the barrier of Italy. Barclay, Hawes and Skelton were untouched by the Italian Renaissance, the mainspring of the poetry of Wyatt and Surrey. Yet when Skelton is contrasted with his contemporaries, their work appears old-fashioned and conventional. The explanation is not that Skelton felt the influence of Italy. He quotes scraps of German, French, Latin and Greek but Italian never. He had been abroad in France, but he had not joined the growing number of Englishmen who completed their education with an Italian journey. In The Garlande of Laurell he mentions Boccaccio, Poggio and Petrarch as if they had never written a word except in Latin. The De Casibus he may have read; it is almost certain he was unfamiliar with the Rime, although Petrarch's work was to be the dominant influence in English in the coming few years. What claim, then, has he to be considered a Renaissance poet?

To his contemporaries Skelton was ahead of his time and his poetry was sometimes uncomfortably unorthodox. To the poets of Tottel's Miscellany the memory of the old poet laureate was rapidly becoming a legend, commemorating the Merry Tales of a poet now old-fashioned; then, by the time of Spenser and of the later Elizabethans, the poetry of Skelton had fallen into oblivion. Yet had the Elizabethans scanned his work, they would have found

there many of their own usages in practice and something of their own doctrine already formulated. The ferment of the Renaissance affected Skelton, as it affected Wyatt and Surrey and their successors. Though he had none of their sense of exaltation in the glory of an opening era, and probably never fully realised that he was on its threshold, his poetry is touched with Renaissance freedom. His liberation from set forms, his innovations in satire and in the lyric, his attitude to social problems and his conception of the function of a poet are all characteristics of the early Renaissance in England.

His conception of the poet's place in society is that of Sidney in the Defence of Poesie. Like Sidney, he refutes the "platonico-puritan" attack of his own day on poetry. The second part of the Replycacyon, written almost sixty years before Sidney's apology, contains a defence of poetry strikingly parallel to that of the later critic. Poetry to both Skelton and Sidney was one of the highest functions of the brain of man. The poet may aspire to any subject, affirms Skelton against his critics:

Ye say that poetry
 Maye nat flye so hye
 In theology,
 Nor analogy,
 Nor philology,
 Nor philosophy...

This is exactly the charge to which Sidney replies. To him poetry was greater than all the other branches of learning:

"Now therein of all sciences I speake still of humane (and according to the humane conceit) is our Poet the Monarch!"

Poetry occupies such a high position because it is by its very nature something divine. Sidney's second argument for poetry is its divinity - the Romans called the poet vates, which is both poet and seer: "So heavenly a title did that excellent people bestowe upon this hart-ravishing knowledge." Skelton claims the same inspiration, not the classic-mediaeval inspiration from the Muses, but the Platonic Renaissance conception of divine energy: "ner of lyes". His defence rests ultimately on the Aristotele

There is a spirituall, And a mysteriall,
 And a mysticall, Effecte energiall,
 As Greekes do it call, Of suche an industry,
 And suche a pregnancy, Of heuently inspyracion
 In laureate creacyon... God maketh his habytacion
 In poetes whiche excellen, And soiourns with them and dwelles...
 We are kyndled in suche faeyon With hete of the Holy Gost,
 Which is God of myghtes most, That he our penne doth lede,
 And maketh in vs suche spede, That forthwith we must nede
 With penne and ynke procede.

To both Sidney and Skelton the type of the divine poet is David the Psalmist. To Sidney he is the Vates: "And may I not presume a little farther, to shewe the reasonableness of this word Vatis, and say that the holy David's Psalms are a divine Poeme?..... Lastly and principally, his handling his prophecie, which is meerly Poeticall." Skelton justifies all flights of poetry by the same example: "Sixteenth Century is a miracle of insight.

Kyng David the prophete, of prophetes principall,

Of poetes chefe poete.....
 Than, if this noble kyng
 Thus can harp and syng
 With his harp of prophecy
 And spirituall poetry.....
 Why haue ye than disdayne
 At poetes, and complayne
 Howe poetes do but fayne?

These last three lines are a remarkable anticipation of yet one more of Sidney's defences. As a further charge made against poetry, Sidney quotes the puritan-platonist complaint "that it is the mother of lyes". His defence rests ultimately on the Aristotelian theory that poetry deals with the ideal rather than with the factual. Such a defence was beyond the reach of Skelton. Yet to the ethical protests, "Howe poets do but fayne", he responds with ethical defences, and shows that he was thoroughly aware of the implications of this moral criticism. Mediaeval ethics accepted poetry only so far as it supported Christian doctrine, and both Skelton and Sidney are striving for a recognition of the poet as an artist alone. Both men had to make concessions to gain this freedom - they both claim that poetry is beneficial to religion and the state. The assurance is but a sop to a moral Cerberus. Their recognition of the essential - that poetry cannot be bound hand and foot to ethics - shows that they are both moving, the one haltingly, the other triumphantly, along the path to the new freedom of the spirit. There is nothing remarkable in this attitude in Sidney. But that Skelton in 1528 should in his last poem approach so closely to the Renaissance thought of the late Sixteenth Century is a miracle of insight.

As the Renaissance spread from Italy to France and then to England, the poets of all three countries rose to the defence of the vernacular. In Italy the defence that had begun with Dante and Webbe all struggling towards the Aufklärung. Here in Skelton was continued by Bembo and clearly enunciated in the Dialogo delle Lingue by Speroni. In France the poets of the Pleïade formulated the same principle in famous La Defense et Illustration

de la Langue Francoyse of du Bellay (1549). The vernacular movement was to have its finest expression in the poetry of Spenser, the Renaissance poets is in his vigorous use and defence of the English vernacular. The mediaeval school regarded English as a vulgar tongue, incomparable with Latin as a medium for poetry. schoolmaster Richard Mulcaster. Mulcaster's Elementarie (1582) struck a decisive blow for English against the pleas of the classicists. Even in Skelton's own day, this was the normal attitude among educationists and poets. Hawes in the Pastime of Pleasure schoolmaster. Mulcaster's work was written almost at the same time apologises for his rude and barbaric English and regrets that he does not write in Latin; if English must be written, the style once more anticipates by some fifty years doctrines considered inseparable from the Renaissance:

So that elocucyon doth ryght well claryfy
The dulcet speche frome the langage rude "new style", he is
Tellynge the tale in termes eloquent.
The barbary tongue it doth ferre exclude
Electyng wordes whiche are expedyent
In latin or in englysshe after the entent,
Encensyng out of the aromatyke fume
Our langage rude to exyle and consume. /

Indeed, as late as 1544 Ascham is to be found apologising for English in the preface to Toxophilus: "Although to have written this booke either in Latin or Greke...had been more easier and fit for mi trade in study..."
And hard to be enuende
Our language is so rusty,
Of frowardes, and so dull,
To wryte ornately,
Termes to serue my mynd.

He proceeds with some acute criticism of the language of Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate. Gower's English is too archaic, Lydgate's

1. Pastime of Pleasure ll. 917 ff.

As the Renaissance spread from Italy to France and then to England, the poets of all three countries rose to the defence of the vernaculars. In Italy the defence that had begun with Dante was continued by Bembo and clearly enunciated in the Dialogo delle Lingue by Speroni. In France the poets of the Pleiade formulated the same principle in famous La Deffense et Illustration de la Langue Françoise of du Bellay (1549). The vernacular movement was to have its finest expression in the poetry of Spenser, who had first been taught respect for the English tongue by his schoolmaster Richard Mulcaster. Mulcaster's Elementarie (1582) struck a decisive blow for English against the pleas of the classicists, and Skelton's conception of English is that of the later schoolmaster. Mulcaster's work was written almost at the same time as The Defence of Poesie; it is illuminating to see how Skelton once more anticipates by some fifty years doctrines considered inseparable from the Renaissance.

In Phyllyp Sparowe, his first poem in the "new style", he is still apologetic:

My style as yet direct
 With Englysh wordes elect.
 Our naturall tong is rude
 And hard to be enneude
 With pullysshed termes lusty;
 Our language is so rusty,
 So cankered, and so full
 Of frowardes, and so dull,
 That if I wolde apply
 To wryte ornatly,
 I wot not where to fynd
 Termes to serue my mynd.

He proceeds with some acute criticism of the language of Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate. Gower's English is too archaic, Lydgate's

is too diffuse: learned, which understand but English... He that understands no Latin can understand English, and he that understand It is dyffuse to fynde understand English farre better, if he will. The sentence of his mynde.

Chaucer, on the other hand, wrote English simply and clearly:

His termes were not darke,
But pleasaunt, easy, and playne.
This was written about 1508. Skelton echoes the apologetic tone of Barclay, but there is nothing in Skelton of Hawes' championship of Latin. His clear appreciation of Chaucer's superiority is evidence of his accurate valuation of the vernacular. A few years sufficed to show him that he was on the right path. The Garlande of Laurell of 1523 concludes with a defence of the

English tongue against Latin. The tone is now no longer apologetic but openly defiant:

Go, litill quaire,
Demene you faire;
Take no dispare,
That I you wrate
After this rate
In Englysshe letter;
So moche the better
Welcome shall ye
To sum men be:
For Latin warkis
Be good for clerkis;
Yet now and then
Sum Latin men
May happily loken
Vpon your boke,
And so procede
In you to rede,
That so indede
Your fame may sprede
In length and brede.

This downright defence is exactly that of Mulcaster:

I do write in my naturall English tongue, because though I make the learned my judges, which understand Latin, yet I mean

good to the unlearned, which understand but English...He that understands no Latin can understand English, and he that understands Latin very well, can understand English farre better, if he will confess the truth.¹

In spite of his old-fashioned classical training, Skelton grasped more clearly than anyone else of his generation the superiority of English over Latin. His defence was no mere empty utterance. Much of Colin Cloute is an appeal from the unprivileged classes: He handled English with the verve and vitality of one enjoying the use of a living language. Had he lived in the more doctrinaire times of the later Sixteenth Century, these brief notes might have been expanded into a Preface which would not have appeared out of date among the poetic manifestoes of the period.

Perhaps one reason for Skelton's support of the vernacular was his appreciation of the changing social order. The rise of the middle class that characterised the transition from the Fifteenth to the Sixteenth Century is nowhere more apparent than in his verse. Skelton in his most typical moods is a popular poet. In spite of his court position and his many copies of formal verses, he is the mouthpiece neither of the court nor of the nobles. He wrote for the public ear, not learned poetry like The Pastime of Pleasure, but popular pieces - savage public satire like Colin Cloute, coarse bawdry like Elynour Rummyng, and invective against the Scots, whom the people hated and feared. He expresses the sentiments of the commons because he had lived

1. Mulcaster: Positions 1581. Ed. Quick, p. 2.

among them, sharing in their life and feelings, and listening to their complaints:

Thus I, Colyn Cloute,
As I go aboute,
And wandrynge as I walke,
I here the people talke.

Much of Colin Cloute is an appeal from the unprivileged classes:

"Men say", "the communalte dothe reporte", "howe the commons grones", "the people iangle" - these are typical phrases from the poem. The old order of the nobility comes in for severe criticism:

But noble men borne
To lerne they haue scorne,
But hunt and blowe an horne,
Lepe ouer lakes and dykes,
Set nothyng by polytykes.

Here, then, is another Renaissance trait. Skelton is fully aware of the changing social structure. With a certain glib facility he could unashamedly write court poetry by request, complete with the full complement of mediaeval allusions for noble audiences, and perhaps with more sincerity than most poets of his time. But in his parish of Diss and on his rides through England, he had seen situations that deepened the note of passion in his satirical verse. Everywhere the commons were critical of the state of society; they found a ready ally in the pen of Skelton. If the old order was changing Skelton was to be on the side of the new; his vigorous, unpretending style has in it much of the spirit of this critical and not yet cultured bourgeoisie. His appreciation of the age of social change expressed

itself in the types of poetry he wrote. No longer is poetry to be the entertainment of a small cultured class. Just as he supported English against Latin, so he developed popular poetry at the expense of the learned and the recondite. Poetry must leave the calm of the cloister and the pageantry of the court, and come out into the everyday world to learn the ways of men. The scope of poetry must be widened to include politics, national affairs, corruptions in the church, revelry at the ale-house. Nothing could be too high or too low. This sense of the universality of poetry is something that had been lacking in English since the death of Chaucer.

When one adds to these factors his genuine, though cautious, humanistic leanings, and his originality both in satire and in lyric, it cannot be doubted that he felt the power of the Renaissance. His humanism will be considered later. His originality is everywhere apparent. The direct attack in his satire is new. His breathless verse-form is new. His lyric has often the candour and passion of the Elizabethans:

For I haue grauyd her wythin the secret wall
Of my trew hart, to loue her best of all!

Lines like these anticipate some of the best work of the later Renaissance.

Middle Ages and Renaissance jostle each other uneasily in the poetry of Skelton. They seldom mingle and they never combine.

CHAPTER FOUR.WOMAN and the LYRIC.

The attitude of literature towards women can sometimes be a useful criterion of a civilisation. Between the type of mind that conceived the Wife of Bath, the "Wede", the Good Women, the figure of Joan Beaufort, or the ideal subject of The Garment of Good Ladies and the creator of Rosalind and of Lady Macbeth, there lies a gulf that can be explained only by the change of a whole mode of thought. It is difficult to believe that the private relationships of men and women have differed very greatly in any age. In their accepted public attitudes towards women, Middle Ages and Renaissance differed profoundly. Skelton has left so many poems in which women figure, as subjects both for commendation and for satire, that this group of verses forms a further indication of his strangely indeterminate position between the two ages. The verses vary in type, from the boisterous Elynour Rummyng to his personal realistic lyrics, and from the conventionalised praise of Phylp Sparowe to the graceful compliments of the Garlande of Laurell lyrics.

The Middle Ages saw woman only as sinner or saint, a monster sent to lead men's minds to hell or a virgin goddess to raise them to heaven. To the mediaeval church everything connected with sex was corrupt, procreation was a sinful necessity legitimate only for laymen, and the ideal life lay in communion

*Is this true
of Chaucer
or Malory?*

with God, implying celibacy for the priesthood and virginity in the convent. Between these extremes there was no official compromise. Marriage was a concession granted to the ordinary man and woman which prevented their ever aspiring to the higher life. This attitude produced two corresponding literary types, the pattern of which only a few exceptional characters like Criseyde evade successfully. Woman in mediaeval lyric and romance is either idealised beyond the reach of humanity or degraded beneath its contempt.

The idealised type was the standard of all courtly love poetry, and the adultery on which the whole tradition rested detracted in no way from the idealisation. Hymns to the Virgin and lyrics to the beloved both use the same ecstatic and exaggerated style, the hymns borrowing 'endearments' from the love-poetry, and the songs borrowing in return the language of adoration.

She is the clerness and the verray light
That is this derke worlde me wynt and ledeth

sings Chaucer of a queen who was but his patroness.

"My swete moder, my par amour", so the infant Christ addresses the Virgin in one mediaeval religious lyric!

At the other end of the scale was the tradition that had grown out of Juvenal's sixth satire and had developed through the repressions of ascetic churchmen - woman as Mother Eve, the author of man's downfall, her physical attractions a snare against which

1. Chambers and Sidgwick. P. 141.
Early English Lyrics.

the ingenuous spirit must be ever on its guard. Even these physical attractions served only to conceal her depravity. Mediæval authors analyse with bitterness what of them was the inherent lust and ugliness of womankind. The Wife of Bath's Prologue is based on a succession of such diatribes, as the Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum de non ducenda uxore, and the Liber Aureolus Theophrasti de Nuptiis, both favourite reading for the mediæval misogynist. From these Latin attacks developed Jean de Meung's complaints of Le Jaloux in the Roman de la Rose:

Ha! se Theophrastes creüsse,
 Ja fame espousée ne eüsse!
 Il ne tient pas home por sage
 Qui fame prent par mariage., l.

and the further abuse in Deschamp's Miroir de Mariage. Through Langland, Lydgate and Occleve the tradition of bitter satire on the depravity of women continued to the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, where, at the very gateway of the Renaissance, one finds similarly morose attacks in The Ship of Fools, in Dunbar's Two Mariit Wemen and the Wedo and the Elymour Rummyng of Skelton. It was a tradition that died hard.

Renaissance literature accepted women as women. Poets like Spenser and Drayton might idealise them in Petrarchan hyperboles, and satirists like Marston attack them with fury, but Stella and Delia were on the same human plane as the poets themselves. The change in attitude was reflected not only in literature. One

of the marks of the Renaissance educationist was his insistence on the necessity for women's education. Vives developed the theme in his De Institutione Feminae Christianae, while, in a quieter but more practical manner, Sir Thomas More educated his daughters to be a match for the scholars of their time, an achievement that had considerable influence even in his own day. In such an atmosphere idealisation and thoughtless abuse were equally out of place.

The French lyric of the Middle Ages had varied from the idealised adultery of the Court of Love poetry to the idealised debauchery of the Pastourelle. These essentially Gallic formulae less often found a place in the corresponding mediaeval English lyrics. Yet, beyond a handful of perfect things like Alysoun, the love-song of the English Middle Ages seldom achieved either depth of insight or personal revelation. These qualities came easier to the Renaissance poet, who belonged to a society tolerating and later encouraging the expression of romantic love. The new attitude towards women gave them greater freedom and a position of equality with their humble petitioners. The Renaissance poet could frame his appeal with a passion and a directness hitherto the exception. Even a complimentary poem to a lady took on, with its candid appeal, the air of a love poem. Skelton shows no greater contrast in any of his works than when in the Garlande he commends the Countess of Surrey in allusive mediaeval rime royal, and then turns to praise the younger women in the new graceful, direct Renaissance style. They become real women and

not stately patronesses worshipped from afar.

The islofer anyable...

This blossom of fresh colour...

Phylip Sparowe falls into two sections, the first a mock

Mass of the birds on the death of the sparrow, the second a "Commendacion" of Philip's mistress, Jane Scroupe. The commendation is written like the rest of the poem in Skeltonic short lines, which are divided almost into stanza form by a recurring Latin refrain:

Hac claritate gemina

O gloriosa femina

followed by lines from the 118th Psalm. Skelton calls on Arethusa and Apollo, and protests against Envy. He hopes:

That I may say
Honour alway
Of womankynd!
Trowth doth me bynd
And loyalte
Euer to be
Their true bedell.

The poem then proceeds, with a mediaeval wealth of detail, to tell of the idealised beauty of Jane:

Of her features clere
That hath non erthly pere.

Her grey eyes, her bent brows, the white and red of her cheeks, "her lyppes soft and mery" are all dwelt on with grave elaboration. Two stanzas commend "a warte vpon her cheeke", which is set there "lyke to the radyant star". She is all flowers at once:

She is the vyolet,
The daysy delectable.

1. This section is discussed in Chapter 7.

of a y The columbine commendable,
 The ielofer amyable...
 poems This blossom of fresh colour...
 She florysheth new and new
 probab In beaute and vertew.

The poem moves on to commend her "fyngers small", her slender waist, and has a realistic moment that is reminiscent of Herrick:

in The But whereto shulde I note
 How often dyd I tote
 "Orato Vpon her prety fote?
 It rayسد my hert rote
 from 1 To se her treade the grounde
 With heles short and rounde.

The contrast between Formalism descends once more as the poet describes her dress and each runs true to its her kyrtle. He laments the inadequacy of his praise and the of the Commendacions Commendacion closes with the final Latin refrain.

Except for an occasional Cavalier-poet touch, there is and Jane were what little in the poem beyond the commonplaces of the Middle Ages. humorous treatment The catalogue of a lady's features may be paralleled in a dozen of wife, which he of the commoner French Court of Love allegories; the Latin refrain girl, it is only for his own obscenity and this impression is heightened by the continual use of lines from the 118th Psalm. Skelton had no personal feeling for the of Elynour: young Jane Scroupe, and the poem is a piece of compliment for her A comely elders' eyes, who were doubtless as content with its seraphic Her lothly hyperboles as Sir Robert Drury was with the eulogies of The Second Anniversary. It is a charming tribute, but of little importance But vgly of beside the first part of the poem or the more personal lyrics of Scoury and Skelton. They slewed.

As if the poem had In sharp contrast with these almost religious Commendacions of the allegory,

of a young girl is the lively satire of Elynour Rummyng. Both poems are in the same tumbling Skeltonic short line, and it is probable that Elynour Rummyng was the immediate successor to Phylip Sparrowe, the earliest poem in this metre. Phylip Sparrowe was written just shortly before 1509, when it was mentioned in The Ship of Fools. Neither it nor Elynour Rummyng has the "Orator Regius" endorsement, which begins to appear on poems from 1512. Elynour Rummyng must therefore belong to c.1509. The contrast between it and Phylip Sparrowe is startling; yet each runs true to its mediaeval type. The hymn-like adoration of the Commendacions is perfectly consistent with the unholy delight in the drunkenness of Elynour Rummyng. Both Elynour and Jane were what the Middle Ages had made them, and if Skelton's humorous treatment indicates a sneaking sympathy for the old alewife, which he certainly never felt for the red and white school-girl, it is only because he was deserting his mediaeval models for his own observations of real humanity.

The poem opens with a repulsive but humorous description of Elynour:

A comely gyll
That dwelt on a hyll...
Her lothely lere
Is nothyng clere,
But vgly of chere,
Droupy and drowsy,
Scuruy and lowsy,
Her lewde lyopes twayne,
They slauer, men sayne.

As if the poem had been a counterblast to the detailed portraits of the allegory, every feature of Elynour passes under review.

Her nose is crooked, her eyes are bleared, her Lincoln Green
is forty years old.

She dryueth downe the dewe
Wyth a payr of heles
As brode as two wheles.

"But to our tale!" exclaims the poet in the Prima Passus:

She breweth nopyy ale,
And maketh therof port sale
To trauellars, to tynkers,
To sweters, to swynkers,
And all good ale drynkers.

This Passus describes the ill-conditioned wenches who run to
her brewing:

Some wenches come vnased,
Some huswyues come vnbrased,
Wyth theyr naked pappes,
That flyppes and flappes...
A sorte of foule drabbes
All scuruy with scabbes...
Suche a lewde sorte
To Elynour resorte
From tyde to tyde.

The second passus is concerned with the foul brewing of the ale.

Hens run along the mashfat:

And somtyme she blennes
The donge of her hennes
And the ale together;
And sayeth, Gossyp, come hyther,
This ale shal be thycker,
And flowre the more quicker.

Tertius Passus tells of their payments. Some have no money and
bring their hose, their shoes, their husbands' hoods, wedding
rings, spinning wheels, salt, meal, or rabbits - all for a drink
of the wonderful ale! Skelton comments on the drinkers with the
ironical amusement of Chaucer:

Some go streyght thyder,
 Be it slaty or slyder;
 They holde the hye waye,
 They care not what men say...
 Some, lothe to be espyde,
 Start in at the backe syde.

In the remainder of the poem Skelton draws a mordant series of sketches of the women drinkers. "Dronken Ales" is full of the gossip of the London streets:

There hath ben great war
 Betwene Temple Bar
 And the Crosse in Chepe.

Mad Kit follows, and Margery Mylkeducke with legs

As fayre and as whyte
 As the fote of a kyte.

Maude Ruggy is so ugly,

Ones hed wold haue aked
 To se her naked...
 All foggy fat she was.

As figure after figure is added to the gallery, the scene grows more and more riotous. Sybyll drinks:

With a sory face
 Wheywormed about

and retires sick from the orgy:

Than began the sporte
 Amonge the dronken sorte,

till the poem closes abruptly:

My fingers ytche;
 I have wrytten to mytche
 Of this mad mummynge
 Of Elynour Rummynge.

The poet ends with mock solemnity in Latin, inviting all women drunkards and sluts to read his poem:

Omnes foeminas, quae vel nimis bibulae sunt, vel quae

sordida labe squaloris, aut qua spurca foeditatis macula,
aut verbosa loquacitate notantur, poeta invitat ad audien-
dum hunc libellum.

Elynour Rummynge owes much to Langland, whose picture of
the ale-house in the Deadly Sin of Gluttony gave Skelton the
form of the poem. There is a similar gallery of drunkards:

Tymme the tynkere and tweyne of his prentis,
Hikke the hakeneyman and hughe the nedeler.

There is a similar scene of riot and dissipation:

There was laughyng and louryng and "let go the cuppe",
And seten so til euensonge and songen vnmwhile,
Tyle glotoun had y-globbed a galoun and a lille.¹

Skelton transformed Hikke and Hugh and "Clement the cobelere" in-
to the drunken sluts of his Flemish canvas, with something of
the physical loathing of the earlier anti-woman tracts. There
is a certain perverted humour, too, in his enjoyment of deformi-
ties that belongs to earlier times. Yet in the brilliance and
clarity of his sketches he is ahead of Langland's mere character-
labels. Each repulsive figure is individualised in a few strokes
of deadly satire. Of all his poems Elynour Rummynge was probably
the most detrimental to his subsequent reputation. Pope's
"beastly Skelton" is derived almost solely from a judgment of
Elynour Rummynge that ignored its gusto and vitality.

The remainder of Skelton's verses to women are less depen-
dent on traditional measures. He has a group of lyrics that are

1. Passus V ll. 304 ff.

purely personal in their inspiration. In his lifetime they were probably regarded as a coherent group, since shortly after his death, five of them were published together in a pamphlet entitled Diuers Balettys and Dyties. Brie attempted to mould them into the narrative of an early love-affair, but they do not appear to have been written all to the same lady. That they belong to the earlier part of his career is suggested by their intimate tone and by the dedication of one to Mistress Anne of the Key in Thames Street, which suggests his first London period.

The first, Womanhood, wanton, ye want, is for Mistress Anne, and is an indignant protest against the lady: a lady who had deceived

her Why so koy and full of skorne? the ancient acquaintance be-
The poet repays his rejection with interest: freely:

But one thyng is, that ye be lewde: to ryse,
Holde youre tong now, all beshrewde! le dellyght,

He closes with the sardonic dedication:

To mastres Anne, that farly swete, and and counsels her to
That wonnes at the Key in Temmys Strete.

This was not his only poem to the fair Mistress Anne. The
Garlande of Laurell mentions at least one other that has been lost:

The vmbelis of venyson, the botell of wyne, cast, and of more
To fayre maistres Anne that shuld haue be sent,
He wrate therof many a praty line,
Where it became, and whether it went.

Similar in spirit to Womanhood, wanton is My Darlyng Dere,
a song of a deluded lover, set to a not unpleasing jog-trot
rhythm:

What dremyst thou, drunchard, drousy pate!
Thy lust and lykyng from thé gone.

He praises the lady's features: she is the star of the evening:

The third of a boisterous trio is made up by Manerly Margery, Mylk and Ale, wherein the lady makes indignant mock protests:

Be Crist, ye shall not, no hardely;
I will not be japed bodely:
Gup, Cristian Clowte, gup, Jake of the vale!
With, Manerly Margery Mylk and Ale.

Manerly Margery was set to music by William Cornyssh, who became Henry VIII's Master of the Chapel Royal children. The music, along with that of Skelton's hymn Wofully Araid is preserved in a contemporary volume of settings.

The Auncient Acquaintance is a song to a lady who had deceived her husband. The poet claims that the ancient acquaintance between them and the lady allows him to speak freely:

Yet it is that a rumer begynneth to ryse,
How in good horsemen ye set your hole delyght,
And haue forgotten your old trew louyng knyght.

Skelton describes the anger of her husband and counsels her to *be more secret in future and!*

Play fayre play, madame, and loke ye play clene,
Or ells with gret shame your game wylbe sene.

The two remaining *poems* are of a more serious cast, and of more poetic value.

Knowledge, Aquayntance, resort, fauour with grace, seems to be a genuine love poem. It begins with a description of the effects of love; that

Deadly wo and payne
Of thoughtfull hertys plungyd in dystres.

He praises the lady's features: she is the star of the evening:

Radyent Esperus, star of the cloudy nyght,
Lode star to lyght these louers to theyr porte.

The lyric continues in happy phrases with Elizabethan fervour:

Remorse haue I of youre most goodlyhod,
Of youre behauoure curtes and benyng,
Of your bownte and of youre womanhod
Which makyth my hart oft to lepe and sprynge,
And to remember many a praty thyng;
But absens, alas, with tremblyng fere and drede
Abashyth me, albeit I haue no nede.

You I assure, absens is my fo,
My dedely wo, my paynfull heuynes;
And if ye lyst to know the cause why so
Open myne hart, behold my mynde expres:
I wold ye could! then shuld ye se, mastres,
How there nys thyng that I couet so fayne
As to enbrace you in myne armes twayne.

Nothyng yerthly to me more desyrous
Than to beholde youre bewteous countenance:
But hateful absens, to me so enuyous,
Though thou withdraw me from her by long distaunce,
Yet shall she neuer oute of remembrance;
For I haue grauyd her wythin the secret wall
Of my trew hart, to loue her best of all!

There is here such a contrast with the boisterous rhythms of
Manerly Margery and Womanhod, Wanton that one must assume a very
different recipient, a nobler lady, less accessible for a scholar.
She is probably the subject of Go, pytyous hart, which is sub-
scribed "At the instance of a noble lady". In this poem Skelton
bewails the cruelty of fortune, that compels him to conceal his
love:

One ther is, and euer one shalbe,
For whose sake my hart is sore dyseasyd;
For whose loye, welcom dysease to me!
I am content so all partys be pleasyd:

Yet, and God wold, I wold my payne were easyd,
 But Fortune enforseyth me so carefully to endure,
 That where I loue best I dare not Dyscure.

Both these poems are strikingly personal and have a sincerity that seems to point to some real experience of the poet, perhaps some ill-concealed passion of his early court days. Their most surprising quality is their direct statement, their absence of traditional compliment and of surplusage. In this they correspond with the later satires of the poet - they have a hard clean quality that is an advance of the love-poetry of his age, an anticipation of the lyrics of the end of the century.

This same disciplined movement may be discovered in several of The Garlande of Laurell lyrics. Here there is no question of a love-affair. The eleven lyrics are simply compliments. Four are in the rime royal of the Garland itself and continue its mediaeval manner, comparing each lady with famous Biblical and classical heroines. The remaining seven are in a variety of metres, and are mainly stanzaic - the verse to Margery Wentworth is a variation of the rondeau. Some of Skelton's most delightful passages occur in these complimentary poems:

To maystres Jane Blenner-Haiset.

What though my penne wax faynt,
 And hath smale lust to paint?
 Yet shall there no restraynt
 Cause me to cese,
 Among the prese,
 For to encrease
 Youre goodly name...

The verses to Isabel Pennell have a particularly fresh charm:

By saynt Mary, my lady,
Your mammy and your dady
Brought forth a godely babi!

The poem continues with echoes from a mediaeval Spring song and anticipates the bird-calls of Nashe and the other Elizabethans:

Sterre of the morow gray,
The blossom on the spray,
The fresshest flower of May...
It were an heuenly helth,
It were an endles welth,
A lyfe for God hymselfe,
To here the nightingale,
Among the byrdes smale,
Warbelynge in the vale,
Dug, dug,
Iug, iug,
Good yere and good luk,
With chuk, chuk, chuk, chuk!

The compliment to Isabell Knyght is courteous and graver:

But if I sholde aquyte your kyndnes,
Els saye ye myght
That in me were grete blyndnes,
I for to be so myndles,
And cowde not wryght
Of Isabell Knyght.
It is not my custome nor my gyse
To leue behynde
Her that is bothe womanly and wyse...

This direct approach, which he has transferred from satire to lyric, he keeps quite distinct from the more involved Mediaeval manner of the first four pieces. The old court-poets' verses have not the passion of later lyrists - he was now over sixty years of age - but they are touched with their sincerity and grace. Something of the incisiveness of his public utterances finds its way into the compact phrases of his lyric.

More important is their anticipation of things to come.

Skelton's lyrics are scattered throughout his work, and both that dispersion and their scantiness make it easy to miss their total effect. They have all the discipline of metre, the athletic phraseology, the Spring-like freshness and occasionally even the insight of the Renaissance lyric. Only the best lines of Wyatt and Surrey are superior to early Renaissance characteristics

Her that is bothe womanly and wise. want of questioning.

Sterre of the morow gray.

Thoughtfull hertes plungyd in dystress.

I haue grauyd her wythin the secret wall
Of my trew hart, to loue her best of all!

Skelton can use the English vernacular with a better sense of its accent than Wyatt, who often fumbles a line like:

With his hardiness takes displeasure.

Compared with such a line (and there are many such in Wyatt) Skelton's metre marches with military precision. Yet, in spite of his anticipation of the later lyrists, it does not appear that he had any influence on their verses. Lyric for Skelton was a side-line, and in the later Renaissance it was forgotten that he had written even one.

His poems on woman have a wide range of expression, both mediaeval and new-fashioned, and they form a considerable section of his work. Yet she was not for him, as she could be for the Elizabethan sonneteers, a subject of real importance. He never completely grew away from the mediaeval attitudes of adoration and contempt, never really trusted the Renaissance literary

humanising of woman. The expression of passionate love lay for ever beyond him. He was married "in the eyes of God", and, it can be believed, married happily, but his marriage produced no poetry.¹ In these poems on woman he is not always a mediaeval poet, but he never ceases to be a mediaeval thinker. One has to realise that behind all his early Renaissance characteristics lie traditions, some of which he never dreamt of questioning that call for a periodical re-definition. With changes of period and of nationality, *****ing of Humanism has similarly altered, and even the Fifteenth Century, which enunciated its fundamental principles, cannot offer, any more than can the present day, a concise definition of that great movement. Before tracing Skelton's relations with the Humanist movement, it is as well to realise the complexity of the conception, and the alterations which it underwent even in the lifetime of the poet.

Humanism was the product of the Italian Renaissance. The individualistic instinct of the Quattrocento turned to the Classics and Italy re-discovered a literature that gratified both her artistic instinct and her sense of patriotism. The church was *intransigent. Pagan morality and pagan poetry were the* not so closely linked in the pages of Ovid and Martial, and even a Messianic Eclogue did not make Virgil a complete Christian. In spite of the church's disapproval the early Italian Humanists eagerly studied the Classics and found there a nobler Italy,

a finer poetry and an educational ideal that they strove to put

1. Kölbing claims as Skelton's the verses "On the Parting from his Wife", first printed by Gray Birch in *The Athenaeum*. Nov. 29/1873.

(d. 1446), who founded a school in Mantua under the patronage of

the Gonzagas, and Guarino Veronese, head of a similar school in Ferrara, reconciled their interest in classical antiquity with their Catholic duties. SKELTON and the HUMANISTS. Particularly had a great influence on the earliest English Humanists.

1. The Springs of English Humanism. For these terms of a new era. Barbarism at last was abandoned after the darkness of the Middle Ages. There are certain widely used terms like Romance and Beauty that call for a periodical re-definition. With changes of period and of nationality, the meaning of Humanism has similarly altered, and even the Fifteenth Century, which enunciated its fundamental principles, cannot offer, any more than can the present day, a concise definition of that great movement. Before tracing Skelton's relations with the Humanist movement, it is as well to realise the complexity of the conception, and the alterations which it underwent even in the lifetime of the poet.

Humanism was the product of the Italian Renaissance. The individualistic instinct of the Quattrocento turned to the Classics and Italy re-discovered a literature that gratified both her artistic instinct and her sense of patriotism. The church was *enthusiastic. Pagan morality and pagan poetry were too* not so closely linked in the pages of Ovid and Martial, and even a Messianic Eclogue did not make Virgil a complete Christian. In spite of the church's disapproval the early Italian Humanists eagerly studied the Classics and found there a nobler Latinity, a finer poetry and an educational ideal that they strove to put into practice. Early Humanist teachers like Vittorino da Feltre (d. 1446), who founded a school in Mantua under the patronage of

the Gonzagas, and Guarino da Verona, head of a similar school in Ferrara, reconciled their interest in classical antiquity with their Catholic doctrine, and the latter particularly had a great influence on the earliest English Humanists.

For these teachers Humanism was the beginning of a new era. Barbarism at last was at an end after the darkness of the Middle Ages. Scholastic philosophy was to give way to individual inquiry, and mediaeval prolixity to classical conciseness. They could not realise that in a few decades Humanism was to develop along several divergent lines and have results that even the most far-seeing could not have prophesied. In Italy Humanism abandoned Christianity. In Germany it split Christianity into two irreconcilable divisions. In England Humanism, after toying for a few years with Ciceronianism and mere stylistic exercises, settled down to apply Humanist education to the needs of daily life; this practical Humanism in turn fell under the influence of the now transformed Humanism from Germany to lend a ready support to the Protestant Reformation; till in the end English Humanism, hardened in its arteries and somewhat stiffened in its joints, passed from Protestantism to Puritanism and looked askance at the Italy from which the whole movement had sprung.

The transitions from the earliest variety of Humanism to the further stages were natural enough. While many of the finest Italian Humanists remained within the church, the attraction towards freedom of thought was irresistible, and the study of the Classics developed in Italy a secondary semi-pagan Humanism.

Italian writers, conscious that they were heirs in the direct line to the Roman heritage, found it easy to adopt with classical poetry classical philosophical systems, which could be Christianised to any required degree or left almost transparently pagan. Neo-Platonism flourished under such Humanists as Politian, Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola, and the Platonic Academy of Florence, founded in 1438 under Cosimo di Medici and reaching its peak under his brilliant grandson Lorenzo at the end of the century, opened men's eyes to a world of philosophic thought beyond the authority of the Schoolmen. Though the Academy itself strove to reconcile antiquity with Christian dogma, it was a reawakening that led in many cases to scepticism.

Humanist influence grew every day. Lorenzo di Medici gathered round him a circle of Humanist scholars and poets. Leo X patronised the new group and won his reward in elegies and orations. The State required the Humanists, for diplomacy still demanded elegant Latin correspondence and resounding public orations. Yet in spite of this high position, by the middle of the Sixteenth Century the Humanists in Italy were in disgrace, openly charged with self-conceit, with profligacy and with irreligion. It is true that they remained within the church, and an open declaration of atheism was for economic reasons unusual. But an age that read Machiaecalli's Il Principe with approbation pursued their enquiries undeterred by mere Christian scruples, and Burckhardt¹ records several sharp passages between church

1. Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien (Trans. S.C. Middlemore) II, VI, iii.

authorities and Humanists who had too openly declared for rationalism. Piero Valeriano, writing in 1527 and inspired no doubt by the Imperialist Sack of Rome, gives in his De literatorum Infelicitate a gloomy picture of the miseries of a scholar's life, where but a few years previously the status of the Humanist had been unchallenged. The tide of their popularity receded, but their influence was deep and lasting both in Italy and in the wider civilisation of Europe. In Germany the situation was radically different. The transition to classical modes of thought was easy for a nation like Italy that had never really ceased to regard Latin as a native tongue. Germany in the Fifteenth Century was still mediæval, and Universities like that of Cologne were strongholds of Scholastic philosophy and education. Beyond Christianity Italy could look back to a civilisation older still, the complex organisation of the Roman Empire, in which the bolder and more enquiring spirits of the Italian Renaissance saw an age akin to their own. Germany looked beyond Christianity and saw only barbarity. Her cultural roots seemed to strike no deeper. The old Teutonic gods and early Germanic poetry represented pre-Christian darkness, whereas Virgil had remained continuously familiar and Jupiter Optimus Maximus guarded in extant temples a mythical golden age. Humanism was a more difficult creed for the Teutonic peoples, and in its transition from Italy it lost much of its literary tone and gained a greater depth of moral significance. Rudolph Agricola (d. 1485), whom all the German humanists claim

as their forerunner, is typical of the early days of Humanism in Germany. Born in Holland and educated successively at Groningen Erfurt, Louvain and Cologne (the study of whose Scholastic philosophy he always regretted) he spent some years in the Ferrara circle, returning in 1479 with a command of Humanist Latin and - what was then far more uncommon - of Greek. Already he was a Humanist with a difference. Studies in Hebrew and Divinity and religious verse reveal the transalpine bias towards a Christian outlook even in Humanist exercises. Principles came before mere knowledge. Such a view is already far removed from the Humanism of Italy, and it is only a step to the writings of the greatest German Humanists, Melanchthon and Ulrich von Hutten and Erasmus himself.

Side by side with the growth of a moralistic outlook developed an impatience with the older Scholastic philosophy and a revolt against the intolerant theology, the mediaeval logic and the monasticism that accompanied Scholasticism, and the ignorance that all too often it concealed. The younger German Humanists rose in open warfare and despised even the degrees of the Universities, till the University of Cologne was driven to expel Humanist reformers from her class-rooms. The feud came to a crisis when one of the younger Humanists, Reuchlin, whose interests in Hebrew literature had been stimulated by Pico della Mirandola, defended the Talmud against the attacks of Johan Pfefferkorn, a Jew who was strongly supported by the Theological Faculty of the University of Cologne. Reuchlin was attacked by the Dominicans

and the case was carried to Rome, where in the end Reuchlin lost, in spite of a majority verdict for him. The controversy became the common battlefield in the fight of Humanism against Scholasticism, and all Europe was involved. The English Humanists - More, Fisher, Linacre, Grocyn, Colet, Latimer, Tunstall - rallied to the side of Reuchlin. The formal victory appeared to be with the older scholars, till the publication of the famous Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum reversed the position and changed their victory into a rout.

In these epistles the "obscure men" - the Scholastic philosophers of Cologne and of every other University in Europe - are parodied in a series of letters supposedly addressed to Ortwin Gratius, don of the University of Cologne. The Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum had a European success. More wrote enthusiastically of their brilliance to Erasmus, and not even the Index Expurgatorius could kill their popularity. They clinched the victory for Humanism. In the letters the Scholastic theologians are held up to ridicule, with their ignorance of Greek and their complaints against scholars "non graduates". A passage from Ovid is expounded in four different ways - "Scilicet naturaliter, literaliter, historialiter, et spiritualiter; quod non sciunt isti poetae".¹ - a parody of the allegorical expositions of Scriptures and the Classics. The obscure men solemnly discuss whether the chicken in the egg is flesh and so forbidden on Friday.² They

date?
1563

1. Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum Ed. Stokes I, 28.
2. Ibid. I, 26.

complain of Virgil and Pliny in atrocious Latin ("noves auctores"!) and of the Humanists' "novum Latinum".¹ One of the obscure men writes:

Et isti humanistae nunc vexant me cum suo novo latino, et annihilant illos veteres libros, Alexandrum, Remigium, Ioannem de Garlandia, Cornutum, Composita verborum, Epistolae magistri Pauli Niavis",²

enumerating one by one the text-books of mediaeval Latinity, which the advanced Humanists brushed aside with impatience. The Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum raised a laugh over all Europe, and the victory for the Humanists was complete, though the Universities of Paris and Cologne and Louvain did not realise their defeat for many years - by which time the tide of European thought had passed them by. The Epistolae is a valuable criterion for distinguishing one of the varieties of Humanism - the patriotic and scholarly German type that rejected mediaeval pedantry.

For the moment one must leave German Humanism to prepare itself for the Reformation and turn back over half a century to the beginnings of English Humanism. The movement attracted at first men whose interests were more in the formal aspects than in the intellectual and spiritual. Of the first important figure, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (d. 1447), it is not unfair to say that he came on Humanism by accident, without realising the

1. Ibid. I, 46.

2. Ibid. I, 7.

For a detailed study of these early scholars s.f. W. Schermer Die Englische Frühhumanismus.

influence his activities would have on English scholarship. A patron and a book buyer rather than a scholar, he corresponded with Italian Humanists and was familiar with the work of Guarino. His love of learning was genuine, and his example gave an impetus to the purchase and presentation of Latin and Greek volumes at a time when they were particularly necessary. His patronage and interest in the rising culture was continued under such men as Thomas Beknyton (d. 1465), Bishop of Bath and Wells, Thomas Chaundlers (d. 1490), Chancellor of the University of Oxford and an early promoter of Greek studies, and John Whethamstede (d. 1465) Abbot of St. Albans and a donor of books to Glastonbury College, Oxford.

The direction once given, the development of Humanism was accelerated, and in the second half of the Fifteenth Century the gathering of printed books and manuscript volumes and the journey to Italy to study with Guarino or other teachers became the method by which Humanist ideas were carried towards England. This newer period of study and research was essentially an affair of the individual. The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, though never such strongholds of Scholasticism as those of Cologne, Louvaine, and the Sorbonne, were still untouched by the newer learning, and their official recognition of the teaching of Greek, the knowledge of which was becoming almost synonymous with Humanism itself, did not come till half a century later. England was still far behind,

1. For a detailed study of these early scholars c.f. W. Schärmer Die Englische Frühhumanismus.

but the keener students turned instinctively southwards. they gave

The newer group were students who found in Italy a spiritual homeland. Most of them were pupils of Guarino - Tiptoft, Grey, Free, Gunthorp and Flemming all owe their Humanist ideals to the Ferrara teacher. Yet just because their interest in Humanism was that of the individual student, these men had less influence than the later English Humanists, and their names are obscure beside those of Colet and More and Latimer. John Tiptoft (d.1470) was friendly with Italian Humanists and presented gifts of books to Oxford; his translations from Cicero won the praises of the industrious Leland. William Grey (d.1478) returned from Italy with about six hundred books and manuscripts which he presented, as Duke Humphrey had done before him, to Balliol College. John Free (d.1465) made translations, and on his Italian journey studied not only Latin and Greek but Hebrew and Science and Medicine, and on his return he kept his friendship with Guarino by correspondence. The succession was carried on by John Gunthrop (d. 1498) whose career presented the now standard features of study under Guarino and the gift of a library to the two English Universities, and Robert Flemming, who produced a volume of Latin poems including a short epic for Sixtus IV.

The whole group dissipated their learning in mere Humanist exercises - elegant letters to Guarino and poems such as those of Flemming, with the result that their eventual influence was not so great as that of Duke Humphrey. Though for them the greatest interest in the Renaissance was that of language and style, and

of the reformation. It can be seen from afar in the early German though they had no direct influence on the Universities, they gave Humanists. The opposition to the Scholastic philosophy and the- English education direction, and they established Italy as the- logy in the Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum, the insistence on Ger- point from which all the newer ideals of the Sixteenth Century- man nationality against the influence of a "supercilious" Italian were to spring.

In England, ^{a newer} Humanism was at hand. The Humanism of the early Renaissance itself all combined to make a breach that Luther found already half-broken. Beatus Rhenanus praises Erasmus as Colet and Wolsey had little use for mere exercises. Humanist the equal of Cicero; Ulrich von Hutten and Johann Reuchlin both Latinity was for them only a means to an end, and the subject was wide themselves on being Germans as well as Humanists. What of more importance than the manner, till with Wolsey a Humanist the end the breach came it is clear that in Germany Humanism had education was the sine qua non for a life of action. William Selling (d. 1494) studied in Italy and introduced Greek to his new religion. In Germany, and later in England, Reformation and monastery at Canterbury, linking up his Humanism with practical Humanism seemed to have joined hands for ever against the Catholic educational ideals. The literary studies of Thomas Linacre, Church. The later German Humanists like Melancthon at Witten- (d. 1524) were merely an adjunct to the practice of medicine - he berg and Zwingli at Zurich were responsible for the remodelling published the pioneer edition of Galen. William Grocyn, (d. 1519) of German education on lines that combined the ideals of his new lectured on Greek at Oxford and at London and numbered young Thomas age - at once Germanic, Humanist and Protestant - where classical More among his pupils. Grocyn's bias was towards Biblical Criti- teaching and evangelical doctrine ran together to found a complete- ism, where again the native feature of later English Humanists- ly national education. The movement, which in Italy had developed is evident, the urge to do something with the Humanism.

The development was not yet at an end, and before the story of English Humanism is complete one must turn once again to Ger- Not all the German Humanists were Protestant. Erasmus the- manly. There Humanism had found from the beginning an ethical- greatest of them all, like most of the English Humanists, still- the very moment of the Reformation bases his Humanism upon Catho- and national note of its own, and this, allied to the anti-scho- lic theology. He is the nearest of all the continental scholars- lasticism so apparent in the Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum, soon- to the English Humanists, and his relations with them were intimate- divorced German Humanism from the Humanism of Italy and sometimes- and cordial. He first came to England at the invitation of Lord- even from Humanism itself. This is not the place for a history

of the Reformation. It can be seen from afar in the early German Humanists. The opposition to the Scholastic philosophy and theology in the Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum, the insistence on German nationality against the influence of a "supercilious" Italian culture, the transalpine ethical bias and the spirit of independence of the Renaissance itself all combined to make a breach that Luther found already half-broken. Beatus Rhenanus praises Erasmus as the equal of Cicero; Ulrich von Hutten and Johann Reuchlin both pride themselves on being Germans as well as Humanists. When in the end the breach came it is clear that in Germany Humanism had become inextricably entangled with religion - and with a completely new religion. In Germany, and later in England, Reformation and Humanism seemed to have joined hands for ever against the Catholic Church. The later German Humanists like Melanchthon at Wittenberg and Zwingli at Zürich were responsible for the remodelling of German education on lines that combined the ideals of the new age - at once Germanic, Humanist and Protestant - where classical teaching and evangelical doctrine ran together to found a completely national education. The movement, which in Italy had developed into irreligion, ended in Germany as Protestant-Humanism.

Not all the German Humanists were Protestant. Erasmus, the greatest of them all, like most of the English Humanists up till the very moment of the Reformation, based his Humanism upon Catholic theology. He is the nearest of all the continental scholars to the English Humanists, and his relations with them were intimate and cordial. He first came to England at the invitation of Lord

Mountjoy in 1499, soon becoming friendly with the Grocyn-Linacre circle, and subsequently was a periodical visitor to England. For some years he lectured in Greek at Cambridge. In many ways Erasmus, Germanic though he is, is typical not of German Humanism but of the practical and less theological Humanism of England. the finest elements of the English Renaissance.

Humanism was not a rigid doctrine, even in any one country. By the turn of the century Humanism had been established as the strongest force in the intellectual life of England. The Venetian printer, Aldus Minutius, in his introduction to a translation of Linacre's, praised Britain as the real centre of Humanism - so rapid had been the development in the previous half century. It produced its own system of education under the guidance of almost every great Humanist of the early Sixteenth Century. Colet, Erasmus and Richard Croke - to mention only a few of them - all lectured on Humanist subjects; Wolsey founded his school at Ipswich and his Cardinal's College at Oxford; Colet founded St. Paul's School; Linacre helped to found the Royal College of Physicians. Erasmus produced his translation of the New Testament, the Novum Instrumentum, in the year that saw the publication of Utopia, in which More pictured the ideal State governed and disciplined by Humanists. In England the movement was producing results. When the Reformation did come to England, the results of Humanism were too firmly established to be altered in character as they had been in Germany. The Reformation combined easily with the now established English Humanism and

achieved a balance in such men as Spenser that remained stable until the Puritans rejected many of its purely intellectual and cultural aspects. In the early years of the Sixteenth Century Humanism as it was exemplified in men of such diverse character and accomplishments as More, Colet, Linacre and Erasmus was one of the finest elements of the English Renaissance.

Humanism was not a rigid doctrine, even in any one country. There were irreconcilable differences between the Humanism of Vittorino da Feltre, of Melanchthon, and of Sir Thomas More, though all three recognised no prouder title than that of Humanist. It was a variable quality that might be combined with any degree of scepticism, Catholicism, Protestantism, even Puritanism, and still remain nominally Humanism. Yet, in spite of the diversity of beliefs of the Humanists there remain highest common factors in all their mutual differences that bring one as close as is possible to a definition of the movement.

The fundamental criterion was the renewed interest in the Classics. The fall of Constantinople let loose on Europe a flood of Greek manuscripts and teachers of Greek, and men saw in the authors of Greece and Rome at once a model and an inspiration. Prelates of the Church like Warham set out in their old age to learn Greek, and men bought "brown Greek manuscripts" and accumulated volumes with an almost religious reverence. Side by side with the interest in antiquity grew up a desire for choice Latinity. Humanists wrote to each other in elegant Ciceronianisms, and only the wiser of the Humanists saw the danger to their native

vernaculars. Perhaps one of the healthiest features of the English movement was the comparative disregard for Latin elegance and the tenacious hold on the native tongue.

The return to the Classics implied a denial of the thought and education of the Middle Ages. The Parva Logica of Petrus Hispanus, the Doctrinale of Alexander, and similar text-books of mediaeval learning acquired the same disreputable reputation among the advanced Humanists as University degrees. One of the obscure men quotes a Humanist lecturer with indignation: One poet, this scholar had said, was worth ten Masters of Arts, and the Masters were not masters of the Seven Liberal Arts but of the Seven Deadly Sins, and knew nothing of the Parva Logica! This violent reaction had not been a characteristic of the older Italian Humanists like Vittorino; the more level-headed English scholars, like Richard Croke, recognised the value of the older studies. Even in their darkest hour the English Universities never incurred the contempt that fell upon Cologne; English scholars lectured gladly at Oxford and Cambridge, and Skelton prided himself on his University degrees.

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1. All the German writers on Skelton - Gessner, Gessner-Langer, Brie, and KÜlbing.
 2. J. M. Bérden. Early English Literature.
 3. R. E. Dunbabin. M.L.R. viii.
 4. L. J. Lloyd. M.L.R. viii.

placing him in 12. Skelton and the Humanists. contemporaries. It has not always been realised that in some respects Skelton lagged a century. The question of Skelton's relationship with the Humanist movement has been discussed in several studies and the results have been widely divergent. There has been a tendency to set him too rigidly on one side or the other, either praising him as a Humanist for his knowledge of the Classics, or condemning him as a mediaeval scholar for the lapses in that knowledge. Several accept him as a Humanist without question;¹ another sees in him an anti-humanist and proclaims "that the Humanists disliked Skelton might almost be posited a priori";² another argues for his being a purely mediaeval poet and scholar;³ while a later writer suggests a via media by making Skelton a late product of the continental Renaissance.⁴ Critics have clearly had difficulty in assessing his real position. These discrepancies are largely due to the absence of any attempt to differentiate between the varieties of Humanism in the early Renaissance period. The position of Skelton is interesting. He had no contacts that can be discovered with the fully developed Humanism of More or Colet, but he has distinct affinities with the older school of Humanists, the pupils of Guarino of the previous century. The downright denials of Skelton's Humanism come from the blind. One cannot condemn Skelton off-hand if he did not grasp

1. All the German writers on Skelton - Thuemmel, Bischoffberger, Brie, and Kölbing.
2. J. M. Bérnan. Early Tudor Poetry, p. 218.
3. R. L. Dunbabin. M.L.R. vol. 12.
4. L. J. Lloyd. M.L.R. 24, 446.

placing him in too sharp contrast with his contemporaries. It has not always been realised that in some respects Skelton lagged a couple of generations behind his times. Humanism had roughly three levels in English, the patrons like Humphrey, the student-researchers like Free and Tiptoft, and the more recognisable Humanists of the early Sixteenth Century. Skelton has many features in common with the middle group.

One must guard against the temptation to think of Humanism not confined to one country. Erasmus, a Dutchman, wrote the *De Civilitate Morium Puerilium*; Guillaume Budé, the French Humanist where some of the standard beliefs or accomplishments are absent. There were not a few men of the early Renaissance who could in honesty be only partially Humanist, when the vogue of Humanism cut across their major loyalties to state or religion. The German Melancthon has made of his educational theory in his *De Moribus Paedagogorum*; and the series was rounded off by an Italian and an Englishman - Castiglione with his *Il Cortesiano* and Elyot with the fine Tudor idealism of *The Governour*. Skelton could sympathise with Humanist education - he had been tutor to a Humanist king - and yet recognise valuable elements of discipline in the older schooling; he could write Humanist poems and yet be afraid of the disruptive tendencies of the new doctrine; he could regret the passing of the Middle Ages at the very moment he was writing verse instinct with the spirit of the Humanist inspiration.

Renaissance. At a time when the state of society and the fundamental beliefs of the age are in process of irrevocable alteration, there is some excuse for being cautious and even for being a little blind. One cannot condemn Skelton off-hand if he did not grasp the implications of Humanism, and accepted it only partially, nor, on the other hand, if he saw some of its implications more clearly than many of his contemporaries and fought fiercely and often

Any expectation that it might be stridently against a movement that was to alter for ever the religion of the country.

One result of the humanist interest in the Classics was the reawakened enthusiasm for education. One and all the Humanists read Quintilian and several of the early Sixteenth Century wrote treatises of their own on the educational ideals of the day. A list of some of these reveals that the educational interest was not confined to one country. Erasmus, a Dutchman, wrote the De Civilitate Morium Puerilium; Guillaume Budé, the French Humanist, L'Institution du Prince; Vives, a Spaniard and a visiting lecturer to Oxford, wrote the De Tradendis Disciplinis on the decay of learning and was with More a supporter of women's education; the German Melanchthon has much of his educational theory in his De Miseriis Paedagogorum; and the series was rounded off by an Italian and an Englishman - Castiglione with his Il Cortegiano and Elyot with the fine Tudor idealism of The Governour. Skelton's treatise to Prince Henry, the Speculum Principis, is rather earlier than any of these, and it has all too little of their Humanist inspiration.

This rediscovered Speculum Principis is one of his most disappointing works. The title was so suggestive of a Humanist treatise on the education of a prince that several writers have treated it as such in a consideration of his work. The manuscript of this piece, after disappearing from Lincoln Cathedral Library, has lain till recently unnoticed in the British Museum.¹

1. Printed by F.M. Salter in Speculum 1934 pp25#. B.M. Add 26,787.

Any expectation that it would be a Renaissance "Courtesy Book" has been proved to be unfounded. The Speculum Principis is Renaissance only in name. Skelton mentions it in The Garlande of Laurell:

A tratyse he dsuisid and browght it to pas,
 Callid Speculum Principis, to bere in his honde,
 Therin to rede, and to vnderstande
 All the demeanour of princely astate.

This claim is an overestimate of both the scope and the value of the Speculum.

After a dedication, the treatise outlines (with authorities quoted and docketed in the mediaeval manner) the virtues of a prince. Honour is preferable to the force of arms; Scipio's authority is cited for princes "nobilitate litterarum bene prae-diti". Horace supports the same view. Listen to Aristotle's advice to Alexander; be patient. Above all, the prince requires virtue and knowledge. Avoid riches, which are snares. After quoting from the second Psalm, the treatise laments that few princes have kept the path of virtue; let our princes take these as warnings and not as examples. Non vt principis nostri occasionem emulandi; verum deuitandi capiant instrumentum. The examples are then quoted of Zedekiah, Pilate and Manasses, and the treatise briefly outlines the life of Saul and adds a commendation of virtue, honesty, knowledge, learning and discipline. But the prince may object and point to his illustrious family history. Skelton excuses himself by citing Lucilius and Juvenal's Difficile est satiram non scribere. In spite of noble family, exile may overtake the prince; after a riming list of its horrors

the poet announces that everything must suffer change - cuncta sub sole sunt mutabilia. Ode De Laudibus Britanniae, where Skelton Now lest the treatise become too long and tedious for a prince to read, Skelton gives a list of riming precepts - surely a strange collection of warnings! Avoid gluttony; be temperate; avoid fornication and the deflowering of virgins; do not be afraid of marriage; love your wife; do not be ungrateful; listen to the other side of an argument. The list continues with more counsel - to avoid anger, to preserve faith, deliberate long and speak little, to honour doctors and consult philosophers and revere theologians; especially to love poets. Be humble, pious and gentle. Learn of misery from the lives of Caesar, Pompey and Alexander. Read books, histories and annals, and commit them to memory. The treatise closes with the date in astronomical terms and the note:

Per Britonum vatem Skeltonida Laureatum. Apud Eltham,
28 Augusti, anno gracie, MCCCCI.

This is far nearer Hoccleve than Castiglione; the tone is that of the Regiment of Princes rather than that of Il Cortegiano. On this treatise Skelton can put forward no claim to Humanism. There is nothing here but a bundle of moral tags and a few citations from mediaeval authorities like Juvenal and the Vulgate. One must look elsewhere for evidence of Skelton's contact with the Humanists.

Writers who argue against Skelton's Humanism stress the silence of the records. Why, they demand, should he not be mentioned by the other Humanists? One of them, William Lily,

and subsequent correspondence.

S. K. Berdan I.S.

indeed wrote an epigram against him. Even the praise by Erasmus in the Dedication to his Ode De Laudibus Britanniae, where Skelton is litterarum lumen ac decus has been taken to represent merely praise of Prince Henry that conceals actual ignorance of the poet's work.¹ This argument is difficult to maintain in the light of recent evidence. The Lily epigram has already been shown to be part of a schoolmaster's battle of invective and not a serious charge against Skelton.² The praise by Erasmus gains in value because of the recent discovery that an Ode to Skelton, which Dyce had assigned to Pico, was actually written by Erasmus. It is true that in 1499, when Erasmus first visited England and when he probably composed the Ode, he was not the public figure he was later to become on the publication of the Adagia; but the testimony of Erasmus must be counted, and even when allowance is made for Erasmus' skill in rhetorical flattery, the poem is still a solid tribute to Skelton.³ From the title, Carmen Ex-temporalè, it would appear that Erasmus and Skelton had met, and from the references to Skelton as the Homer and Virgil of Britain it is equally certain that it is Skelton's poetry that Erasmus praises. Even if the praise is exaggerated it is sufficient to disprove such assertions as "that the Humanists disliked Skelton might almost be posited a priori."⁴

If Skelton could be considered an admirable poet by a humanist in 1499, the question must immediately arise "What did he know of

1. R. L. Dunbabin M.L.R. l.c.

2. Cf. Chapter 21.

3. Cf. Chapter 21 and I. A. Gordon: New Light on Skelton T.L.S. 1934 p. 636 and subsequent correspondence.

4. J. M. Berdan l.c.

of the learned world. He had no objection to Greek itself - if Greek?" By 1500 a knowledge of Greek was the first tenet in the Humanist credo. Skelton's point of view is curious. Some could handle neither Greek nor Latin, Greek he knew. There are scraps of Greek in Speke Parrot and occasional Greek phrases elsewhere throughout his poems. Calon, agaton, cum areta, in the Countess of Derby Elegy and a Latin gloss like that in A Replicacion, Energia Graece, Latine efficax operatio reveal some knowledge of Greek vocabulary. It is probable that his acquaintance with Greek was never more than slight. He did not receive the new language with the typical enthusiasm of the Humanists. When the older scholars in Oxford banded themselves as "Trojans" against the "Greeks" and open warfare broke out between the two parties, Skelton wrote in Speke Parrot:

In Academia Parrot dare no problem kepe:
 For Graeci fari so occupyeth the chayre
 That Latinum fari may fall to rest and slepe.

In another part of the poem he makes his position clear:

Let Parrot, I pray you, haue lyberte to prate,
 For aurea lingua Graeca ought to be magnyfyed,
 Yf it were cond perfytely, and after the rate,
 As lingua Latina, in scole matter occupied;
 But our Grekis theyr Greke so well haue applyed,
 That they cannot say in Greke, rydyng by the way,
 How, hosteler, fetche my hors a botell of hay!

Later in the poem he complains that small children can say "Aveto in Graeco", who cannot run through their Latin conjugations. Skelton's point of view is easy to appreciate. He saw the end of the old learning, and noted with dismay the spread of Greek among young students before they had obtained a really working knowledge of Latin, which was still the international language

might complain of the decline of classical education and the

of the learned world. He had no objection to Greek itself - if it were "cond perfytely" - but the "Grekis" against whom he rails could handle neither Greek nor Latin. There is perhaps another reason for his stand against the too easy introduction of Greek. - Speke Parrot is an attack on the policy of Wolsey, educational, political and diplomatic, and Wolsey was an ardent supporter of Greek, the founder of the Oxford Chair. Nothing more was necessary to make Greek suspect in the eyes of Skelton. By the date of Speke Parrot anything associated with the Cardinal had a bitter flavour; perhaps in these lines his natural conservatism makes him view Greek with a caution that was only too eagerly buttressed by his hatred of Cardinal Wolsey. Yet these quotations from Speke Parrot reveal an enthusiasm for education. He regrets the passing of the old Scholastic education: mere obscurantism in his support of the culture under which Tryuuals and quatryuals so sore now appayre.

In an attack on Wolsey he sneers at his ignorance of these scholastic studies: between English and German Humanists, Greke

was a poore maister of arte
God wot, had lytell parte
Of the quatryuals an intimate friend of Hutten, one of its
Nor yet of tryuials.

Yet although in the Epistolae he is mentioned several times as if he were a Humanist exactly on the plane of Hutten, from his Cambridge oration it is clear that he sympathized with the German Humanists neither in their attitude to mediaeval Arithmetic, Geometry and Astronomy - before the advance of the new Humanist studies, as an older-fashioned educationist to-day might complain of the decline of classical education and the

advance of science. Skelton was not alone. The older Italian Humanists had a great respect for mediaeval education; and Richard Croke, who was appointed Reader in Greek at Cambridge, delivered his inaugural oration in July 1519 - a few months before Skelton wrote Speke Parrot - and in the very middle of an enthusiastic support of Greek, asserting its superiority over Latin, he puts forward as one of its greatest claims its utility in the study of the trivium and the quadrivium, which in spite of the contempt of many is of great educational value: "He passes on to show the utility of the study (of Greek)...to commence with the trivium and quadrivium - which many 'inflated with a vain prétençe of knowledge' cavil at as trivial and sterile." If a Humanist lecturer in Greek at Cambridge can find so much good in the mediaeval curriculum, Skelton may be allowed something more than mere obscurantism in his support of the culture under which he had been brought up.

This speech of Croke's brings into higher relief an essential difference between English and German Humanists. Croke was in the very centre of the circle that produced the Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum, and an intimate friend of Hutten, one of its main authors. Yet although in the Epistolae he is mentioned several times as if he were a Humanist exactly on the plane of Hutten, from his Cambridge oration it is clear that he sympathised with the German Humanists neither in their attitude to mediaeval

1. J.B.Mullinger. The University of Cambridge. i.532, where the whole address is summarised.

education nor to University degrees. In this he falls exactly in line with Skelton, who consistently lauds the trivium and quadrivium and takes a never-failing pride in his University degrees. The English Humanist was at all times a more cautious and less disruptive personality than the Humanist of Germany, and was more inclined to retain useful mediaeval elements than the Continental scholar rejected impatiently as old-fashioned.

Skelton's classical reading has been on occasion held suspect, but his early translation of Cicero's Letters and of Poggio's version of Diodorus Siculus suggests a familiarity with the Classics more than could be gathered from mediaeval collections of quotations. One cannot measure the extent of his knowledge simply by counting the number of times he mentions Latin authors. He has seventeen references to Virgil and only four to Cicero.¹ One writer has attempted to show that his classical reading was exclusively mediaeval.² A glance at the reading of an early Humanist school invalidates this argument. The classical authors he does mention with commendation are not particularly mediaeval and could be found in any of the earlier Humanist Schools in Italy. The procession of famous authors in The Garlande contains the following classical names: Quintilian, Theocritus, Hesiod, Homer, Cicero, Sallust, Lucan, Persius, Virgil, Juvenal, Livy, Aulus Gellius, Horace, Terence, Plautus, Boethius, Maximinianus, Quintus Curtius, Macrobius, Plutarch, Propertius and Valerius Maximus.

1. H. J. Lloyd. l.c.

2. R. Dunbabin. l.c.

Elsewhere in his works he refers to Pliny, Ovid, Martial, Claudian, Statius, Plato, Catullus and Seneca. Even if he had not read them all - and the Greeks he must have read only in translation - the list is impressive. It is illuminating to compare the list with an average list of school books read in the first century of Humanist education.¹ These included the following: Phaedrus, Valerius Maximus, Virgil, Cicero's letters, and the Cataline speeches, Ovid, Lucan, Sallust, Statius, Seneca, Claudian, Horace, Terence and Plautus for general education and poetry; Justin, Quintus Curtius, Florus, the Latin version of Arrian, Plutarch, Caesar, Sallust and Livy for History; Cicero, Quintilian, and the church Fathers for oratory; Cicero, Seneca, Plato, Aristotle, Boethius and Augustine for Philosophy.² These two lists reveal less discrepancy than might be imagined. Three quarters of the Humanist authors occur in the Skelton list; the remainder was already known to the Middle Ages. There is nothing in the list of classical authors known to Skelton that suggests a mind exclusively mediaeval; the reading of Skelton and the reading of a pupil of Vittorino or Guarino were remarkably alike; the only real difference was Skelton's lesser interest in Greek. The coincidence of the two lists, and the absence from both of authors, like Tacitus and Lucretius, who were familiar to the later Humanists supports the suggestion² that Skelton's sympathies lay not with the Humanists of his day but with the earlier Humanists of the Continent, whose break with the older scholarship English Humanists.

1. From W. H. Woodward Vittorino da Feltre and other Humanist Educators. 179 ff. "A review of the educational aims & methods of the first century of Humanism."

2. Cf. H. J. Lloyd l.c.

was seldom abrupt or impatient.

That he had sympathies with some form of Humanism is undeniable. He uses the term "Humanity" frequently in the sense of culture and learning. To him it is something new. In Speke Parrot he talks of

Retoricyons and oratours in fresh humanyte,
and asks for the support of their suffrages. In his attack on Wolsey he complains of his lack of scholarship:

His Latyne tonge doth hobbyll,
He doth but cloute and cobbil
In Tullis faculte
Called Humanyte.

What Skelton thought of "Tullis faculte" is clear from a few lines in Philip Sparrow:

Wolde God myne homely style
Were pullysshed with the fyle
Of Cicero's eloquence.

To Skelton, then, "Humanyte" and Cicero's eloquence were something close akin, as they had been for the Italian and the Earlier English Humanist. "Humanyte" was for him a term of commendation, and it seems reasonable to argue that Skelton credited himself with the virtue and was in his own eyes a Humanist. Ciceronian eloquence, however, was not regarded by the later English Humanists as the chief or even as an essential part of Humanism, and Skelton's conservative leanings towards an older and by this time out-of-date conception may go a long way towards explaining the apparent absence of relations between Skelton and the later English Humanists. What Humanism he aspired to was in his own

day quite old-fashioned. It becomes increasingly difficult in

the other arguments have been advanced against his claim to Humanism, notably that of religion. He was a conservative in religion, and this has been used to strengthen the argument for his mediaeval scholarship. An argument from a man's religion in these years of the early Renaissance can prove nothing whatsoever concerning his scholarship. It has already been shown that the religious and the educational issues were distinct. Humanism could embrace any doctrine from orthodoxy to paganism. In The Replycacion Skelton attacked scholars who were Humanists; he attacked them not as scholars but as heretics, objecting to their Protestantism and not to their Humanism. For Skelton, as for Erasmus and More, Reformation and Renaissance did not form one indissoluble whole.

Skelton is between two ages, and a genuine love of learning like that of the older Continental Humanists struggles with only partial success against a distrust of the newer philosophies and the religious difficulties they involved. On the one side is his classical reading, differing little from the pupils of Guarino; the testimony of Erasmus; his retention - in company with the more conservative Humanists - of the older "solid" education; his confessed admiration for "humanyte". On the other is his blindness to Italy and perhaps his lack of enthusiasm for Greek. Cutting across these lines and confusing the issue are his private hatreds, of Wolsey, of Lily, of Lutherans, of all desecrators of the Church. As he grew older his prejudices hardened and his

hatreds grew fiercer, till it becomes increasingly difficult in the criss-cross of "humanyte" and mediaevalism to form a clear conception of where Skelton stood. Faced with the question of whether he was a Humanist he might be tempted to reply that he had always loved "fresh Humanyte". Presented with a curriculum from the school at Ferrara, he would have given his complete approval, with the caution that so much Greek must not interfere with the pupils' groundwork in grammar and rhetoric. But when he thought of his arch-enemy Wolsey, endowing a college for the new learning and founding a chair of Greek, of Bilney misled by the Protestant-Humanism from Germany, he would have forgotten all the attractions of the new study and damned it outright. There too lies the danger for the modern critic of Skelton - one cannot be any more certain of his attitudes than he was himself. Humanism is not a tag which can be tied to one group of scholars and denied to another. It was a developing doctrine of surprising latitude. Skelton stands with one foot over its boundary.

In Skelton's own day his Humanism was old-fashioned. In a few years the progress of learning had passed him by. The Humanist pattern became that of More, and even the memory of the early English student Humanists was forgotten till recent research revived an interest in ^{their} wanderings and aspirations. As Humanism gradually combined with Protestantism to become English Puritanism the reputation of Skelton waned. He had chosen the by-path in the belief that it was the highroad, but the main traffic of

English culture had already taken a different route, and Skelton was left alone in his blind alley.

THE FAITHFUL SON.

Skelton's position in the humanistic world is undefined and even undefinable. He could claim a fair allegiance to the older school of humanists without compromising himself too far with the younger. But the second great movement of the Renaissance shifted Skelton never an inch from his orthodoxy. Towards the Reformation he showed nothing but repugnance, and towards the reformers nothing but unflinching hatred. Yet it is tempting to see in his work the influence of the new doctrines in religion. His attacks on church and churchmen are often as bitter as those on persons and nations that he genuinely hated. Cardinal Wolsey, the prelates of the Church, the nuns, the mendicant orders, the parish priest all come in for their share of bludgeonings as hearty as he dealt to the early supporters of Luther; but one must guard against the temptation to assign his attacks on the church to even unconscious sympathy with the reformed religion. To Skelton there was the difference of a whole mode of thought between mere reform and Reformation. To the end he was a faithful son of the Mother Church, critical of her servants and of many of the ways into which they had fallen, but never swerving for a moment from the central tenets of his faith and ready to use his poetic powers to defend her from the attacks of her critics.

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CHAPTER SIX.THE FAITHFUL SON.

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in Germany, but in England the course of events had not yet advanced far enough to give official and royal sanction to the English Reformation, and Reformers in England were represented by individuals who had found spiritual sanction for their breach in Luther's Wittenberg theses rather than by a nation encouraged from above to a political breakaway. Events in Germany, however, though several decades ahead of those in England, foreshadowed the issues and methods of the English Reformation.

Germany had found the temporal claims of the church particularly oppressive. The growing secularisation of the clergy made her more and more reluctant to see her revenues drained southwards to support a Papacy that was both corrupt and alien. The rank and file of the clergy had taken their cue from Rome, and the literature of the Century before the Reformation rings with complaints against their corruption and their licentiousness. The burgher of free Nürnberg, the questioning student of Erfurt or even of scholastic and mediaeval Cologne, and the peasant of Bohemia might never have visited Rome; but they listened to dark and often authentic tales of the moral degradation of the Eternal City, in which serious-minded Northerners found all too often a complete separation of morality and religion. Nor was it better at home. The priest had his concubine. The secular clergy neglected their manifest duty and became fair game for the satire of Brandt's Narrenschiff, Erasmus' Enconium Morae, and dozens of other attacks on the corrupt clergy of the day. m/

Devoutness was not entirely dead. It would not be difficult

to find throughout the whole period more communities like the Brethren of the Common Life of Deventer and spiritual clerics like Thomas à Kempis. Catholic writers have tried to prove that these were typical and not exceptional. "It does not suffice," says F. M. Gasquet, "to speak in general terms of the 'corrupt state of the church'." ¹ And this is undoubtedly true. Many of the charges against the clergy must, in the light of subsequent research, be considerably modified. But this "subsequent research" is just what the European countries of the Reformation period lacked. It is of only academic importance now that a charge is only half true if Fifteenth Century Germany believed it to be wholly so. Often to-day we know more about the real facts of a historical event than the average man of the time did. He judged, however, not on what historical research has subsequently brought to light but on what he believed to be true. The Reformation began in Germany not with men who had access to State Papers and Papal Archives and the records of Council and Convocation, but with a people who were hostile to the temporal claims of the Pope and severely critical of the corrupt state of the church, clerical life, and in the clergy some of the original

The younger German Humanists had begun not only to ridicule the forms of Scholastic philosophy but even to enquire into the fundamental tenets of their faith. When the time came, Luther's doctrinal novelties were a novelty. It had been called for generations

1. F. M. Gasquet. The Eve of the Reformation p. 392.

found an enthusiastic group of scholars whose opinions marched perfectly in step with his own. A still stronger argument for the Reformation Germany found in her patriotism and her resentment against the interference of an Italian papacy. After the Diet of Worms of 1521, Humanist and evangelical peasant stood solidly behind Luther and made the Reformation a national reality.

Such was the state of the church at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century. All thinking men realised the necessity for reform. But there was a sharp division on the method of reformation, and the religious history of the subsequent century is that of the struggles of the Reformers like Luther and of the Catholic reformers, with whom Skelton so ardently sympathised, who looked for reformation from within. A century of counsel-taking, from the Council of Constance of 1414-18 to the Council of Rome of 1512, had produced little real change in the church, and the Catholic Reformation did not come till after the Council of Trent of 1545-64. In religion, Erasmus in his *Novum Instrumentum* might

The Catholic Reformers did not differ greatly from Luther in their attitude to the clergy. They wished to purify the church, reform clerical life, restore in the clergy some of the original church's enthusiasm for the salvation of man's soul. The dogma of the church they preserved intact. The reform they aimed at was as much a tradition as the Reformers' rejection of the fundamental doctrines was a novelty. It had been called for generations back by the Wandering Orders - the Franciscans and Dominicans in particular - and by poets as far back as Gower, Langland and

Chaucer. But occasionally these two schools of thought overlapped. The position of Erasmus was ambiguous to everyone but himself. He hated Lutheranism and monasticism with equal force, and preserved his faith to the end. Yet his translation of the New Testament, the Novum Instrumentum of 1516, was second to Luther's writing in promoting the Reformation, by striking a decisive blow at the infallibility of the Vulgate.

It was in such a critical period that Skelton wrote his poems on the church and her churchmen, and here our Janus looked in one direction only, and that determinedly backwards. It is strange that three men so different as Sir Thomas More, Erasmus, and John Skelton, who represent the Renaissance from angles so different and often so incompatible, should here travel one path so single-mindedly. All three stood for reform, but reform within the church, of her men and mechanism and never of her doctrines. More in his Utopia might imply a new faith in science along with an old faith in religion, Erasmus in his Novum Instrumentum might claim a more scholarly basis for the text of the Vulgate and in the Enconium Morae might laugh at the follies of monasticism, Skelton in Colin Clout might charge the bishops with accusations later the common stock of the Reformation attacks; all three stood firmly for Mother Church and lived and died in her confession.

The first of Skelton's attacks is of least poetic value, but it expresses significantly his resentment at the licence of the parish priest. Some hunting priest had flown his hawk right into the parish church at Diss, where, while Skelton was celebrating

Mass, it desecrated the Host itself. The result is the indignant Ware the Hauke. Skelton bursts out into characteristic abuse of "Dominie Dawcocke", but the poem goes far deeper than a mere personal attack:

The pryest that hawkes so
All grace is farre him fro;

and this although the offender is "A parson benefyced". His irreverence shocks the orthodox susceptibilities of Skelton, who gives a vivid description of the commotion - the hawk tearing off the altar cloth and coming to rest

Upon my corporas face,

the falconers crying out, and the irreverent priest threatening to re-invade the Church of Diss not with falcons but with hounds.

The whole incident had been hushed up by bribery, and Skelton just bitterly complains in the imagery of Langland:

How be it, mayden Meed
Made them to be agreed
And so the Scrybe was feed -

and, turning to the prevailing laxity of church government, he utters a dark warning that shows he was only too aware of the signs of the times:

Or els is this Goddis law,
Decrees or decretals
Or holy sinodals,
Or els provincials,
Thus within the wals
Of holy church to deale,
Thus to ryng a peale
With his hawkis bels?
Dowtles such losels
Make the church to be
In smale auctoryte;

1. *John Skelton*, p. 53 ff.
2. E.E.T.S. 30.
3. Wright's *Political Songs*, p. 149.

A curate in speciall
To snapper and to fall
Into this open cryme;
To loke on this were tyme.

To loke on this were tyme! Ware the Hauke was probably written in the first decade of the Sixteenth Century. Later, as Skelton became increasingly alarmed at the menace to the church of the misdeeds of her own servants, he returned to the problem in Colin Clout in 1519, by which time Lutheran heresies were beginning to filter into England. But Colin Clout is not, as the Replycacion was to be, an attack on heresy; it is a solemn and passionate appeal to the prelates to preach to the people and reform the mother church before it is too late. Everywhere the people complain of laxity and corruption. Skelton but repeats their murmurs, those accumulated complaints of generations against the church, which provided a breeding ground for heresies of Reform.

Such complaints had a long tradition in both clerical and secular writings. The Wandering Orders and the poets and pamphleteers of the Middle Ages had often enough castigated or satirised the failings of the Church. But it would be a mistake to regard Colin Clout as simply a continuation of the mediaeval tradition of poetry calling for reform. Kölbing¹ quotes innumerable examples of similar indictments in the poetry before 1400, in the Roman de la Rose, in Gower's Vox Clamantis, in Chaucer, in Piers the Plowman's Crede; further in lesser known works - God Spede the Plow,² The Husbandman,³ The Mery Gest how the Plowman learned

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1. Kölbing; Zur Charakteristik John Skeltons, p. 83 ff.
 2. E.E.T.S. 30.
 3. Wright's Political Songs, p. 149.

his Pater Noster and the like, in several of which the indictment of the church is cloaked under a pastoral pseudonym. But the only pastoral element in Colin Clout is the name. The poem is thoroughly Renaissance in spirit and form and in method of approach, and cannot be regarded simply as another mediaeval complaint. The questions with which it deals are too alive and its charges too specific. The problems that had caused grave shakings of learned heads in Councils from those of Constance and Basel onwards find passionate expression in Skelton, who here represented the inarticulate complaint of the ordinary people. The ignorance, the arrogance, and the laxity of the prelates are held up to scorn in the language of burning indignation. Yet throughout Skelton is consistently orthodox; like all good churchmen of the day, he leaves dogma severely alone. Doubts were for weaker spirits; for him the faith that never questions.

The fundamental question is the struggle between lay and clergy:

For the temporalte
 Accuseth the spiritualte;
 The spiritual agayne
 Doth grudge and complayne
 Vpon the temporall men

and the general charges against the spirituality are quoted:

All to haue promocyon
 That is theyr hole deuocyon.

The Bishops are no better, caring little what occur in their sees:

1. Hazlitt, i, 209. The prelates (and especially
 Skelton) should learn humility from the example of Christ.

In theyr prouynciall cure
They make but lytell sure.

The Bishops have become political figures and neglect their original charge of preaching:

The temporalyte say playne,
How bisshoppes dysdayne
Sermons for to make
Or suche labour to take.

Skelton is afraid to name even the few exceptions. The Church has forgotten the lessons of Thomas à Becket:

Thomas manum mittit ad fortia
Spernit damna, spernit opprobia,
Nulla Thomam frangit iniuria
But now euery spirituall father,
Men say, they had rather
Spende moche of theyr share
Than to be combred with care.

The commons complain of their laxity and luxury - partridge and pheasant in Lent and at night "wanton warkes" - and of their ignorance:

Theyr lernynge is so small
Theyr pryms and houres fall
And lepe out of theyr lyppes
Lyke sawdust and dry chyppes.

The priests are equally ignorant:

Alas, for very shame!
Some can not declayne their name;
Some can scarsely rede,
And yet he wyll not drede
For to kepe a cure.

Simony and corruption hold sway - "Myters are bought and solde" - and the bishops sitting softly at home care nothing for the spiritual welfare of the people. The breaking-up of foundations has corrupted many a religious house. The prelates (and especially Wolsey) should learn humility from the example of Christ. Skelton

proclaims himself a true follower of the Church, but he realises that the opposition of the people had a real foundation.

The poem attacks the heretics, who are daily becoming more common. Some argue of predestination, some of Christ's incarnation,

And some haue a smacke
Of Luther's sacke
And a brennyng sparke
Of Luther's warke.....
And some be Hussyans,
And some be Arryans,
And some be Pollegians,
And make moche varyans
Between the clergy
And the temporalte.

The people complain of pluralities and dispensations and

How prelacy is solde and bought,
And come vp of nought.

The prelates rule even the King, so arrogant are they - and Wolsey is hinted at again. The Bishops should preach:

Ye bisshops of estates
Shulde open the brode gates
Of your spirituall charge,
And come forth at large
Lyke lanternes of lyght
In the peples syght.

Instead this essential work is done by masters of arts or friars, or by some doctor "dronken as a mouse". The friars preach merely for a living. The Bishops occupy their time in saying Mass:

They occupye them so
With syngyng Placebo
They will no further go

and do not defend the church against the recent attacks:

Such temporall warre and bate
As nowe is made of late

Agaynst holy Churche estate,
 but they merely build fine houses with magnificent decorations.
 The example of Wolsey is again suggested. Skelton refuses to
 judge these charges - the people make them and he simply repeats
 them - and he closes with a commendation of all zealous and de-
 vout churchmen:

Of no good bysshop speke I,
 Nor good preest I escrye,
 Good frere, nor good chanon,
 Good nonne, nor good canon,
 Good monke, nor good clerke,
 Nor yette of no good werke,
 But my recounting is
 Of them that do amys,
 In speking and rebellyng,
 In hyndering and dysauaylyng
 Holy Churche, our mother,
 One agaynst the other;
 To vse suche despytyng
 Is all my hole wrytyng.

All this is not just Langland redone. The personal tone; the
 directness of the attack, the specific charges against the upper
 clergy and the grasp of problems that troubled every thinking
 man at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century stamp Colin Clout
 not as a mediaeval complaint over the corruption of the clergy,
 but a very live and intensely personal survey of contemporary
 evils. Whatever Skelton was, he was no trimmer. There is an
 inflexibility about the quality of his mind that made him often
 enough blind to newer conceptions, but this very stiffness of
 intellect implied an unusual vigour and an independence bordering

1. Cf. Chapter 8.

Colin Clout reveals how Skelton could attack his own church sometimes on eccentricity. There is nothing subtle about the in exactly the same terms as the Reformers, and yet turn on these poetry of Colin Clout. Skelton charges like a rhinoceros. But Reformers in still bitterer satire. There is nothing inconsis- its intensity gives it form, and the short tumbling lines are -tent in his attitude. Criticism from within the church by a controlled by the dominant mood. Satire calls for a well-defined faithful son was always legitimate and in this period it was es- target and palpable hits. Whether the hits are justified or no pecially salutary. The identical criticism from without was may be a problem for ethics, but certainly not for poetry. Skel- heresy - it was not meant to reform but to disrupt. Skelton in- ton did not pause to consider. He may never have seen life whole, The Replycation attacked the Reformers with truculent savagery, but what he saw he saw steadily. The vigour of his poetry carries off the satire admirably. What might with less indignation have been a mere succession of short stumping lines became in his hands a fluid and passionate unity. There is nothing like it in Eng- The Replycation is an attempt to win back Wolsey's lost favour- lish poetry of his time; better satires have been written since, with a poem of unimpeachable orthodoxy. This may be possible, but none more sincere.

Perhaps its most astonishing feature is its clarity of vision. The only difference is that in the one poem Skelton attacks the Skelton saw more clearly than most of his contemporaries where corruptions within the church and in the other he attacks how the progress and doubts of the last fifty years would end. The ansies. His attitude to the church is consistent throughout secularisation of the church and the growth of speculation could all his verse, and the Skelton of Colin Clout is the same poet as have only one result. More could in his Utopia combine doctrines the Skelton of The Replycation.

he knew were incompatible in a Renaissance Catholicism, Erasmus could retain his faith while he undermined the whole structure Skelton's lifetime. But no sooner had Luther set Germany and of the mediaeval church. Skelton admitted no such compromise. than Europe by the ears than his doctrines began to permeate into All who were not with the church, wholly and unquestioningly, England, particularly after the publication of his three volumes were against it. He realised that one must be faithful or go of 1520, and though the treatise were publicly burnt at St. Paul's under in the general cataclysm; he calls on the prelates for a

renewed assurance of their faith years before the Council of Trent enjoined it in grave assembly.

Colin Clout reveals how Skelton could attack his own church in exactly the same terms as the Reformers, and yet turn on these these condemnations only accentuated the spread of Lutheran Doctrines in still bitterer satire. There is nothing inconsistent in his attitude. Criticism from within the church by a reformed son was always legitimate and in this period it was especially salutary. The identical criticism from without was known as "Germany". Many who later became famous as Reformers - Robert Barnes, Hugh Latimer, Thomas Bilney, Thomas Arthur - belong to the same category. The authorities became panicky. Barnes and the others were summoned before the Bishops, condemned and imprisoned until they ultimately escaped to Germany. Wolsey discovered that his own Cardinal's College at Oxford had become a Lutheran centre and strong measures were taken both there and at Cambridge. Towards the end of 1527 Bilney and Arthur were summoned before the Chapter at Westminster on a charge of heresy. But for the moment their courage failed. Arthur recanted; Bilney recanted twice; and on Sunday, the 8th of December, the Feast of the Conception, they carried their faggot of repentance at St. Paul's Cross, and for all his verse, and the Skelton of Colin Clout is the same poet as the Skelton of The Replycacion.

The Replycacion must be dated as late as 1528, and from a very fulsome dedication to Wolsey (which some have dismissed as a fabrication by Skelton's printer) it has been suggested that The Replycacion is an attempt to win back Wolsey's lost favour with a poem of unimpeachable orthodoxy. This may be possible, but The Replycacion is not a whit more orthodox than Colin Clout. The only difference is that in the one poem Skelton attacks the corruptions within the church and in the other he attacks her enemies. His attitude to the church is consistent throughout all his verse, and the Skelton of Colin Clout is the same poet as the Skelton of The Replycacion.

The main progress of the Reformation in England lies outside Skelton's lifetime. But no sooner had Luther set Germany and then Europe by the ears than his doctrines began to permeate into England, particularly after the publication of his three volumes of 1520, and though the treatise were publicly burnt at St. Paul's

1. Cf. Brie and Skelton Studien.

2. See Boyar. M.L.N. Dec. 1913. of the University of Cambridge.

Cross on the 12th of May, 1521,¹ and later at Oxford and Cambridge, these condemnations only accentuated the spread of Lutheran Doctrines. A group of Cambridge scholars were converted to the Reformed doctrines and held discreet meetings under the presidency of Robert Barnes at the White Horse Inn, which rapidly became known as "Germany".² Many who later became famous as Reformers - Robert Barnes, Hugh Latimer, Thomas Bilney, Thomas Arthur - belonged to the confederacy. The authorities became panicky. Barnes was summoned before the Bishops, condemned and imprisoned until he ultimately escaped to Germany. Wolsey discovered that his own Cardinal's College at Oxford had become a Lutheran centre and strong measures were taken both there and at Cambridge. Towards the end of 1527 Bilney and Arthur were summoned before the Chapter at Westminster on a charge of heresy. But for the moment, their courage failed. Arthur recanted; Bilney recanted twice; and on Sunday, the 8th of December, the Feast of the Conception, they carried their faggot of repentance at St. Paul's Cross, and for the moment the authorities breathed freely again. It is to these events that Skelton refers in The Replycacion.

The poem begins with a few lines of sympathy with the University of Cambridge which has had to suffer these degeneres filioli, and Skelton summarises his argument in highly decorative and (though Lily was not yet born) Euphuistic prose:-

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1. Letters and Papers: iii.485.
 2. Cf. J.B.Mulliner: History of the University of Cambridge, 1. 572-3.

"Howe yong scholars nowe a dayes embolned with the flyblowen blast of the moche vayne glorious pipplyng wynde, whan they haue delectably lycked a lytell of the lycorous electuary of lusty lernyng, in the moche studious scholehous of scrupulous Philology, countyng them selfe clerkes excellently enformed and transcendingly sped in moche high connyng, and whan they haue superciliously caught

A lytell ragge of rethorike,
 A lesse lumpe of logyke,
 A pece or a patche of philosophy,
 Than forthwith by and by
 They tumble so in theology,
 Drowned in dregs of diuinite,
 That they iuge them selfe able to be
 Doctors of the chayre in the Untre
 At the Thre Cranes..."

The young men have not yet completed their studies and yet they dared to proclaim:

"Howe that it was idolatry to offre to ymages of our blessed lady, or to pray and go on pylgrimages, or to make oblacions to any ymages in churches or els where."

Against such heresies, and especially the belittlement of the Virgin, Skelton is indignant:

Wotte ye what ye sayed
 Of Mary, mother and mayed?
 With baudrie at her ye brayed;
 With baudy words unmete...

But for such heresies they were openly shamed at St. Paul's:

Ye were fayne to beare fagottes;
 At the feast of her conception
 Ye are brought to, lo, lo, lo!
 Se where the heretykes go,
 Wytlesse wandring to and fro!

It would have been better if their mouths had been stopped before they could utter:

Your sysmaticate sawes
 Agaynst Goddes lawes.

Skelton then remembers that some of these heretics even hold

exhibitions at the University - the Church was paying for such
heretics!

Some of you had ten pounde,
Therewith for to founde,
At the unyversite,
Employed whiche myght have be
Noche better other wayes.

For they have strayed into various heresies of Jovinian, of
Wycliffe, and of Luther:

Ye scored ouer hye,
In the ierarchy
Of Iouinians heresy,
Your names to magnifie
Among the scabbed skyes
Of Wycliffes flesshe flyes;
Ye strynged so Luthers lute,
That ye dawns all in a sute
The heretikes ragged ray,
That bringes you out of the way
Of holy churches lay.

These heretics are doing great damage among the people, among
whom the taint of Lollardy lingered - the renegade scholars
have taught "Lollardy learning" and have glossed the scriptures
to their own ends:

Ye cobble and ye clout
Holy Scripture so about,
That people are in great doubt
And fear lest they be out
Of all good Christen order.

Better had they never been learned and remained devout!
They are well checked by Mother Church, who will never countenance
priests of such temper:

Railyng in your rages
To worshyppe none ymages,
Nor do pilgrymages.

The fathers of the Church would never have tolerated such heresies:

Saint Gregorie and saynt Ambrose
 You haue reed them, I suppose,
 Saint Jerome and saynt Austen,

and Skelton closes with the hint that unless they repent they may find themselves "brent at a stake".

Skelton's attitude to the Cambridge Reformers is uncompromising. He was ready to accept the judgment of Westminster as the judgment of the whole Church and beyond her judgment he refused to trespass. The poem is a natural development from Colin Clout. The scourge of the prelates has become the scourge of the heretics, and throughout both poems there persists the same savage delight in defending the Church against all corrupters within and without. The second part of The Replycacion is a defence of poetry against the typical Renaissance and Puritan attacks - the uselessness of poetry and the "lies" that poets tell. Skelton claims the inspiration of the poet, and it is clear that he had a clear conception of the function of poetry - poetry often justified, as Colin Clout and The Replycacion had been, by a moral purpose. To the mature Skelton such verse was of greater value, both artistically and ethically, than the allegorisings, and mediaevalism of his own early verse and of much of his contemporaries. Skelton was throughout his career a religious poet. But the thought of his age did not lead to personal religion. To Skelton religion was an institution. In the days when that institution was threatened, he used all his powers to support the religion he knew and trusted.

From such strict orthodoxy and such blind faith one cannot

hope for a personal revelation. The religious lyrics of Skelton are what might be expected from a priest of his outlook, orthodox, impersonal, and rather old-fashioned. Their style is rather the style of the early Fifteenth Century than that of the beginning of the Sixteenth, and this has led Brie to query their authenticity.¹ Doubts on authorship are always disturbing for the critic, and they must be answered before any further consideration can be given to the religious poems; they are a bare half dozen lyrics and the question is fairly easy to dispose of.

They appear originally in three sections -

1. Wofully Araid in two B.M. manuscripts, Fairfax 5465, and Harl 4012, and on the fly-leaf of an old copy of Boethius (cf. Dyce I 141). Only the Boethius version ascribes the poem to Skelton.
2. Vexilla Regis Prodeunt appears in Kele's Christmas Carolles (no date) with no name attached.
3. The remaining four - of Tyme, and a trilogy of hymns Prayer to the Father of Heaven, To the Seconde Person, and To the Holy Gooste appear first in three small and almost identical octavo volumes with the title Hereafter foloweth certaine bokes copyled by mayster Skelton, Poet Laureat, whose names here after shall appere. A list of contents (all of fairly long poems like Elynour Rummynge) follows on the title page, but the four hymns are not mentioned in the list though they are printed in the subsequent text. This edition appears without a date in three versions with slight variations

1. F. Brie: Skelton Studien pp. 25 ff.

under the imprints of John Day, of Richard Lant, and of John Kyngge and Thomas Marche. The hymns ^{later} appear both in the text and in the list of contents in Thomas Marche's Collected Edition of 1568. Dyce printed all six as Skelton's largely on the evidence of a verse in the Garlande of Laurell, where Skelton lists his religious lyrics:

With, Wofully arayd, and shamefully betrayd;
 Of his making deuoute meditacyons;
Vexilla regis he deuysid to be displayd;
 With Sacris solemn, and other contemplacyouns,
 That in them comprisid consideracyons;
 Thus passyth he the tyme both nyght and day,
 Sumtyme with sadness, sumtyme with play;

Brie argues that Wofully arayd is attributed to Skelton in one manuscript only out of three; that one of them (Harleian 4012) is in a hand possibly belonging to 1475-1500; that the poem did not appear in Marshé's collected edition; and that the style is too early for Skelton. He suggests that Skelton's Wofully Arayd is lost, but was probably based on this extant version. The latter argument surely assumes more than Dyce himself did! There are perhaps grounds for querying the authorship, but they seem no stronger for denial than for ascription. The date 1475-1500 covers the period of Skelton's mediaeval verse, and is an argument for, rather than against, his authorship. The argument from style counts for nothing. We should have doubted any religious lyric of Skelton written in a style other than old-fashioned.

But Brie's arguments are weaker on the other poems. Vexilla Regis he simply denies: A Vexilla Regis by Lydgate exists; the style is that of Wofully Arayd. This is arguing from weakness to

weakness. And the ^{reason for the} denial to Skelton of the Four Hymns is weaker still - that they do not appear on the title page of the first three editions is the sole reason adduced. But neither do the Chorus de Dis contra Scottos nor the Chorus de Dis...contra Gallos, which are yet printed, like the four hymns, in the text, and which no one has denied to Skelton! All six poems are short and their non-appearance on the title page of a diminutive octavo is easily explained. There was no room for them. The title page measures only about 3.5" x 5.5"; the title is long and displayed over seven lines of Black Letter; the larger poems mentioned occupy another seven lines; there is a wood-cut above and below the type and one at each side. So the edition of King and Marche in the B.M. The editions of Day and Lant have in addition the printer's device. Where on the page could a fifteenth century printer with his large Black Letter crowd six more titles - all of smaller poems? The argument from the non-appearance in the title page takes no account of the limitations of early sixteenth century printing and is of no validity whatsoever. The four hymns are Skelton's. Indeed a later manuscript (B.M. Egerton 2642 f. 230.) contains a copy of the verses On Tyme ascribed without hesitation to Skelton. If the bibliographical arguments against the four hymns are invalid the stylistic ones are so automatically, and considerable doubt may be cast backwards on the denial of Vexilla Regis and Wofully Arayd. When one adds ^{to this evidence} that the Fairfax manuscript, which contains Wofully Arayd, has the undoubted Skelton song Mannerly Margery at only a few pages' distance, there seems no reason for doubting any further Skelton's authorship of the six hymns.

The most convincing evidence is the general tone of these

1. Cf. Appendix C, where a reprint of the title page is given.

religious lyrics. They are mainly hymns in the later mediaeval manner. Skelton passed the time "Suntyme with sadness", and called his hymns rightly "contemplacyons". There is little that was personal in the poems - only a few great spirits could achieve a direct personal relationship with God in the Middle Ages.

"Mediaeval religion", writes one of the greatest authorities on the Middle Ages, "is turned utterly towards God; the relationship of the soul to God is its whole matter. It is not humanitarian: not human, but divine scientia, fides et amor make mediaeval Christianity."¹ Not till after the Reformation did ordinary men come into contact with their God. In the seventeenth century men with backgrounds so divergent as Donne and Bunyan could achieve personal relationship, but for Skelton, with his blind acceptance of mediaeval orthodoxy and indignant reception of the Reformation in action and spirit, such a relationship could neither be achieved nor understood. This explains the difference between the impersonal tone of the hymns and the fiercely personal tone of Ware the Hauke, Colin Clout, and The Replycacion. The other poems were religious, but they dealt with the externalities of the Church - the corruptions of the clergy, the evils of simony, the luxury of the prelates, the heresy, the scandals and the gossip of College or Convocation. About these Skelton could feel indignantly and personally. But on dogma he was dumb. So the religious lyrics are less characteristic, more of the age than of the

1. H. O. Taylor: *The Mediaeval Mind* ii, 582.

man. Mediaeval religion demanded standardisation of theological thought and achieved all too often only standardised devotion.

The only personal feeling is vicarious. Both Wofully Arayd and Vexilla Regis deal with the sufferings of Christ. Here Catholic, poetic and artistic tradition allowed vivid personal treatment:

Behold my body, how Jewes it donge
 With knots of whipcord and scourges strong;
 As stremes of a well the blode out sprong
 On euery syde;
 The knottes were knyht,
 Right well made with wyt,
 They made the woundes wyde
 Now synge we, as were wont
Vexilla regis prodeunt

or in Wofully Arayd:

Off sharpe thorne I have worne a crowne on my hede
 So payned, so stayned, so ruful, so red;
 Thus bobbid, thus robbid, thus for thy loue ded,
 On fayned, not deynynd my blod for to shed;
 My fete and handes sore
 The sturdy nailis bore;
 What myght I suffir more
 Than I haue don, O man, for thé?
 Cum when thou list, wellcum to me,
 Wofully araide.

One remembers the emaciated Saviours of German carved crucifixes and of Italian paintings of the Quattrocento. Skelton is here writing in the mediaeval catholic tradition that so often expressed personal sorrow through artistic representations of the sufferings of Christ.

But in the three prayers To God the Father, To the Seconde Person, and To the Holy Gooste, there is nothing but impersonal devotion. Even an individual poet like Dunbar, who could strike

such an original and personal note in his secular verse, was traditional and impersonal in his hymns. There is no personal feeling in

Hale, sterne superne! Hale, in eterne
 In Godis sicht to schyne!
 Lucerne in derne, for to discerne
 Be glory and grace devyne;

It was the mediaeval manner; into which Skelton falls automatically:

O radiant Luminary of lyght intermynable
 Celestial Father, potencial God of myght
 Of heauen and earth, O Lord incomperable,
 Of all perfections the essential most perfyght!

Strange that an independent poet could write so like his contemporaries! But it was not strange to his contemporaries. To be original in one's devotions was heresy; and the thought of heresy even in others maddened him. Among all her devoted followers the Mother Church had no more faithful son than John Skelton.

The Goliards were a class of young men in the mid-fifteenth century who brought a glory to literature and to the name of the nation, till she was forced to recognize their existence. Of Chaucer even the memory of the name of the Goliards is lost.

He was a jangler

Handwritten notes:
 The name of the Goliards is lost
 in a poem 'The Goliards' by Skelton
 1984

*
CHAPTER SEVEN.

THE GOLIARD.

It is one of the paradoxes of orthodoxy that there is often more latitude inside than outside of its boundaries, and this is notably true of the Middle Ages. One step beyond orthodoxy and the penalties were severe - degradation, loss of caste, excommunication, in the end the stake. Let a man but preserve intact his allegiance to the spiritual demands of the church and he might satirise her clergy, mock her institutions, write sacriligious parodies on her most sacred services, and pervert for his own secular use the verses and antiphons of Missal and Breviary. Devout churchman though Skelton was, militant churchman though he became, in his earlier poetry he did not hesitate to claim the orthodox churchman's prescriptive right to mockery even of religious services. There was in Skelton much of the Goliard, something of the independent gamin quality that had produced the rebellious satire and the sheer lyric of the Carmina Burana.

The Goliards were long since dead. The Arch-Poet had died young in the mid-fifteenth century. The family of Golias became a glory to literature and an increasing scandal to the church, till she was forced to legislate against them, and by the time of Chaucer even the memory of the wandering scholars was dying out:

He was a janglere and a goliardeys.

This chapter is substantially a reprint of an article already published —
Ian A. Gordon: "Skelton's 'Philip Sparrow' and the Roman Service Book."

M. L. R. Gordon 1934.

Goliard has perhaps no more significance here than that of a merry rogue. Yet the spirit of the goliards lived on. The original Goliards had been wandering clerks, on the road through wander-lust or lack of a benefice, rebellious against an authority that left them to starve or provided support only at the price of stability and loss of freedom. They sang as rebels on sang, of the things the church officially frowned upon, of love and Venus, of drinking and Bacchus, of youth and Springtime; they satirised the abbot and the Pope; they wrote scandalous Gospels and parodied the Mass; they cited scripture for their own irreligious purposes. Though the Goliards decayed and by the Fourteenth Century disappeared, the tunes they sang and the patterns they created persisted. In the first few years of the Sixteenth Century we find Skelton, tutor to the King and beneficed clergyman, returning in Philip Sparow and the mock Epitaphs for John Clarke and Adam Uddersal to the manner and spirit of the Goliards, to the intense annoyance of equally orthodox but more susceptible clergymen like Alexander Barclay.

When Skelton took up his office in Diss, he came in contact with the "soul-priest" of Diss, John Clark, who had succeeded a certain William Bokynham in 1490. Clark was an older man than Skelton, who calls him "old John Clarke, the holy patriarke of Diss", and it is possible that there was some professional jealousy between the two priests. The old man died at the beginning of 1507 and with piety becoming his years left money "to a pylgrym, a priest, to be in prayer and pilgrimage, at Rome the

whole Lent, there to pray and syng for me and myn children, my fader and my moder, Rober and Cate, John Kew and Maut, Steven Brightled, and John Payne, the which I am in debt to".¹ About the same time there died in Diss another whom Skelton regarded with disfavour, Adam Uddersall, the "Holy Baillif" of Diss. The death of the two men gave Skelton an opportunity for a satire on their lives and deaths in the form of an epitaph.

Though this knaues be deade,
Full of muschiefe and queed,
Yet, where so euer they ly,
Their names shall neuer dye.

The "epitaph" on Clarke is called "a devoute trental for old John Clarke", i.e. a Mass of thirty days duration. It consists of some sixty Latin lines praying for the damnation of his soul, followed by a few lines in English. Clarke is depicted as a scoundrel:

De Dis haec sceler erit camera,
Non erat sibi similis:thema!
In malitia vir insignis;
Duplex corde et bilinguis...
Sepultus est amonge the wedes:
God forgeue hym his misdedes!

Skelton remembers his old quarrels with the soul-priest, who had insulted the established rector of Diss:

De malo in peius
Rectori proprio
Tam verba retorta loquendo...

The soul-priest had been a querulous old man:

Dum vixerat is,
Sociantur jurgia, vis, lis.

1. Cf. Blomefield's History of Norfolk p.17ff. ibid., but there is

The epitaph continues with a mock appeal for priests to pray for his soul:

Fratres, orate
 For this knavate
 By the holy rode,
 Dyd neuer man good...
 With, fill the blak bowle
 For Jayberdes sowle.
 Bibite multum:
 Ecce sepultum
 Sub pede stultum...
 With, hey, howe, rumbelowe,
 Rumpopulorum,
 Per omnia secula seculorum.

The epitaph to Uddersall is on similar lines. The bailiff had extorted money from the common people:

Namque extorquebat
 Quidquid natus habebat.

Skelton looses a flood of invective against the dishonest officer and joins with the commons in cursing him:

De Dis haec semper erit camena,
 Adam Uddersall sit anathema!

Both poems are mock prayers for the soul of the dead, interceding not for salvation but for damnation, and thoroughly Goliardic in spirit.

Anima ejus
 De malo in pejus
 Amen.

might have been a tag from the Carmina Burana themselves.

Philip Sparowe is the lament of Joanna Scroupe for the death of her sparrow, a trivial enough subject that became in Skelton's skilled hands telling poetry. It is tempting to see in it a parallel to Catullus' Passer deliciae meae puellae, but there is

nothing of Catullus in Philip Sparow, nor was there meant to be. Philip Sparow is a Goliardic poem, a lament that mocks systematically the various offices for the Dead from the Breviary and the Missal, and though it is written in English and the Carmina Burana in Latin, though it is his earliest poem in an original verse-form, Skelton never perhaps combined so well his half-appreciation of the Renaissance with his sympathy for the Middle Ages, here the Middle Ages of the Goliards.

The typical Goliardic parody of the Breviary and Missal is either a hymn-parody:

Vinum bonum cum sapore
Bibat Abbas cum Priore,

which burlesques the Stabat Mater, or a Drinkers' or Gamblers' Mass, where the form of the Mass is preserved but the words are perverted and parodied. Novati and Lehman quote example after example: Bacchus becomes the Deity and the Introit of the Mass, Introibo ad altare Dei, becomes Introibo ad altare Bacchi, amen becomes stramen, Dominus vobiscum becomes Dolus vobiscum, oremus becomes potemus, and so the Goliardic Mass pursues its riotous and sacriligious course. Skelton never parodied the actual terminology of the Service Books. His usage is more subtle. The phrases and appropriate psalms and hymns are quoted with sly relish and followed up by the most inappropriate developments to form a grim but effective background to the mock lament for

1. F. Novati. *Studi Critici*. Turin 1889

2. P. Lehman. *Die Parodie Im Mittelalter*. Munich, 1922.

3. E. E. S. *Log-Folio* 210.

Philip Sparrow. There is now no trace of the Court of Love
 Skelton does not employ only the Goliardic parodies of the
 Mass. These parodies themselves had been used by the singers of
 the Amour Courtois, who found in them yet another vehicle for
 the worship of Venus. In addition to Bacchus-Masses there were
 Venus-Masses, which gradually appear as the Mass of the Birds.
 The Mass of the Birds developed naturally enough. Doves had al-
 ways been associated with Venus. What more natural than to in-
 clude other birds than doves? Venus is worshipped in the language
 of religious devotion and in the forms of religious services. The
 anonymous Lovers' Mass of Bodleian Fairfax with the apparatus of
 Introibo, Confiteor, Misereatur, Officium, Kyrie, Gloria in Ex-
 celsis, Prose Epistle, and the rest, represents the second stage
 in the development, from which it is but a short step to the Mass
 to Venus sung by the birds themselves. The Bacchus-Masses, the
 Venus-Masses and the Masses of the Birds show a shift of emphasis
 among their various elements but the spirit and the religious
 attitude involved is the same throughout. series of Orations, and
 The Mass of the Birds occurs in several forms- in The Court
 of Love as a general service by the birds without any regular
 use of the Missal, and in Jean de Condé's La Messe des Oisiaus
 as a point-to-point parody of the Mass from the Introibo of the
 nightingale to the Ite, Missa est of the blackbird. Philip
 Sparrow represents yet a further stage in the development of the
 short titles for the Vespers and Matins in the Office.

1. E.E.T.S. Lay-folks Mass Book 1879, and E.P. Hammond p. 210.

Mass of the Birds. There is now no trace of the Court of Love convention which had associated the birds with Venus. Venus herself has disappeared. The birds gather to celebrate not a Lovers' Mass but the more appropriate Missa pro Defunctis - the Mass for the Dead led by Robin Redbreast. The Goliardic spirit that runs through Philip Sparow takes the form not so much of parody as of a consistent mockery of the Services for the Dead and the dying. Verses and antiphons and psalms from these services add piquancy to the lament and give to the poem a thread of sombre commentary. The Officium Defunctorum and the Missa pro Defunctis are impressive and solemn rites, and in spite of the underlying parody Philip Sparow now and again catches something of their serious tone and breaks into almost unexpected poetry.

It is possible to analyse with accuracy the services of which Skelton made use in his most Goliardic of laments; they are of four separate functions:

- (i) The Commendatio Animae, where the soul of the dying man is commended to God with a short litany, a series of Orations, and the reading of Psalms 117 and 118.
- (ii) The Officium Defunctorum - the Office for the Dead - the most important parts of which are the services at Vespers and at Matins. They begin with the antiphons Placebo Domino in regione Vivorum and Dirige, Domine, Deus meus, In conspectu tuo viam meam, and the head-words Placebo and Dirige are continually used as short titles for the Vespers and Matins in the Office.
- (iii) Both of these services are from the Breviary. In the Missal

is found the magnificent Mass for the Dead, the Missa pro Defunctis, with the Introitus Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine and its Sequence the great hymn of the day of Judgment, the Dies Irae, Ichi dies illa.

(iv) At the close of the Mass, if Absolution is to be celebrated, the Missal contains the order for the Absolutio super Tumulum, where the celebrating priest puts off the maniple and assuming a black cloak recites a short oration, after which a Responsory is sung - Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna in die illa tremenda.

Skelton uses all these forms except that of the Matins, and Philip Sparow is remarkable, even in Goliardic poetry, for the way in which it uses first the Vespers in the Office for the Dead, then without indication or warning becomes the mediaeval Mass of the Birds - on this occasion naturally the Missa pro Defunctis; again without warning shifts into the Absolution over the Tomb; and then with a few lines on the coming of night returns to the close of Vespers in the Office from the Breviary. After a section on the composition of a Latin Epitaph, which owes nothing to the mediaeval parodies of the Mass but much to the mediaeval habit of erudition - for the poet cites dozens of authors in as many lines - come the Commendacyons, commendations not on the soul of Philip Sparow, but with an understandable play on the word of the beauty of Joanna Scroupe, the supposed author of the first part. The poem ends with a defence against those churchmen to whom even the suspicion of Goliardic poetry suggested scandal.

Skelton combined the spirit of the Goliard with the accurate

knowledge of the well-educated priest. In an analysis of the poem and the usage it makes of the Breviary and Missal, nothing comes through so clearly as Skelton's accurate use of both, which a casual reading or unfamiliarity with the Roman Service books is all too liable to obscure. The first part of the poem is spoken in the person of Joanna Scroupe, the young girl whose sparrow has been slain, and from the Placebo of the first line the mockery of the burial service continues unchecked. The first three hundred and eighty-six lines use throughout the Vespers in the Office. The borrowed passages run in pairs - in every case an antiphon followed by the first lines of the following psalm, the whole rigidly keeping to the order in the Office - and never, strange though it appears, once parodying it, though the temptation to parody the psalms was obvious enough. Dunbar's method in the Dirige to the King at Stirling admitted no such self-denial. Instead, Skelton remained content to tell the mock serious tale, punctuating it throughout with the key-phrases from the Office in their precisely correct order.

The poem begins with the antiphon Placebo; the next couplet replies with Psalm 114, Dilexi (quoniam, exaudiet Dominus vocem orationis meae):

Pla ce bo,
 Who is there, who?
Di lex i,
 Dame Margery;
 Wherefore and why, why?
 For the sowle of Philip Sparowe,
 That was lately slayn at Carowe...

It continues to describe the grief of the girl at the death of

Philip: *Lord, how he wolde hop
After the gressop!*

I syghed and I sobbed,
For that I was robbed
Of my sparowes lyfe.
O mayden, wydow, and wyfe,
Of what estate ye be,
Of hye or lowe degre,
Great sorowe than ye myght se,
And lerne to wepe at me!

There is no trace of verbal parody. After the antiphon Heu, heu me (quia incolatus meus prolongatus est) follows Psalm 119 Ad Dominum cum tribularer, clamavi:

Of God nothyng els craue I
But Phyllypes soule to kepe
From the marees deepe
Of Acherontes well,
That is a flood of hell;
And from the great Pluto.

These lines may perhaps be an echo of the "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue" (a labiis iniquis et a lingua dolorosa) of the second verse of the Psalm. The antiphon follows, Dominus (custodit te ab omni malo) and the poem quotes the appropriate Psalm 120 Levavi oculos in montes, but instead of the Lord who keeps Israel there follows a charming and delicate description of Philip: Joanna's premonitions of his

It had a veluet cap,
And wold syt vpon my lap,
And seke after small wormes,
And sometyme white bred crommes;
And many tymes and ofte
Betwene my brestes softe
It wolde lye and rest;
It was propre and prest.
Sometyme he wold gaspe
Whan he sawe a waspe,
A fly or a gnat,
He wolde flye at that...

Lorde, how he wolde hop with the Magnificat - which is
After the gressop!

We are shortly brought up with the antiphon Si iniquitates

(observaveris Domine):

Si in i qui ta tes

Alas, I was euyl at ease!

De pro fun dis cla ma vi,

Whan I sawe my sparowe dye!

Here Psalm 129, De profundis clamavi, is mocked for a couple of
lines, and then is promptly dropped for:

Phillip had leue to go

To pyke my lytell too

Phillip wolde seke and take

All the flees blake

That he coulde there espye

With his wanton eye.

This in turn yields, unexpectedly enough, to the solemn antiphon

"Despise not the worksof thy hands, O lord (Opera manuum

tuarum, Domine, ne despicias), a strangely incongruous finish

for the exploits of Philip

Vpon my naked skyn.

Undeterred by incongruity, the poem quotes the correct

Psalm 137 Confiteor tibi, Domine, in toto corde meo, and continues

with the adventures of Philip and Joanna's premonitions of his

death, till the lament:

A porta inferi

Good Lorde, haue mercy

Vpon my sparowes soule

Wryten in thy bederoule!

Then comes the verse - this time perhaps more appropriate -

Audivi vocem (de caelo dicentem) to which the response is

"Blessed are they that die in the Lord!"

Skelton follows correctly with the Magnificat - which is transformed into a fierce curse against Gib the cat:

That vengauce I aske and crye,
By way of exclamacyon,
On all the hole nacyon
Of cattes wylde and tame;
God sende them sorowe and shame!

The vengeance calls for one terrible fate after another:

Of Inde the grede grypes
Myght tere out all thy trypes!
Of Arcady the beares
Myght plucke away thyne eares!

She remembers poor Philip sitting

Many tymes and oft
Vpon my fynger soft

till the reader is brought up suddenly and dramatically with the "Lord have mercy upon us", the

Kyrie, eleison,
Christe, eleison,
Kyrie, eleison!

of the Sarum Breviary. The climax is so effective that one almost forgets that Philip was only a sparrow, for the external form of the Office is continued in the following lines:

For Phylpp Sparowes soule,
Set in our bederoule,
Let vs now whysper
A pater noster.

The quiet Lord's Prayer is an excellent conclusion - and it is strictly in order. The Rubric in the Breviary for the Pater Noster after the Magnificat reads "secreto" - "in a whisper". So the first part closes with the Psalm from the Office, "Praise the Lord, O my soul". So far Skelton's use of the Office has been a little derisive, but on occasion intensely dramatic. The

sonorous phrases of the Office deepen the note of sorrow in the girl's lament, and the burlesque of the Office for the Dead trembles on the verge of pathos - a transition the Goliards would have understood very well.

The puffin and the teal give alms, and the ostrich because

He can not well fly
Nor synge tumbly

In the next section Skelton abandons the Office for the Dead and adopts a new ceremony - the Mass of the Birds. The change comes at line 387, but with the transition from the Breviary to the Missal Skelton changes his method. He makes no attempt to follow out the formulae of the Requiem Mass, as Jean de Condé had done, and as he himself had done in the earlier part of the poem. Only the general details of the Bird Mass are used and these in no special order. The birds are all summoned to the Requiem:

To wepe with me loke that ye come,
All maner of byrdes in your kynd;
So none be left behynde
To mornynge loke that ye fall
With dolorous songes funerall.

The robin is the priest:
And robyn redbreast
He shall be the preest
The requiem mass to synge,

and he is followed by a long list of assistants. The parrot reads the Gospel (the Oratio), and

The maus with her whystell
Shall rede there the pystell

- the Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians which is peculiar to the Mass for the Dead. The stock-dove, the peewit and other

birds sing the versicles; the peacock sings the Graduale:

The pecocke so prowde,
Because his voyce is lowde,
And hath a glorious tayle,
He shall synge the grayle.

The puffin and the teal give alms, and the ostrich because

He can not well fly
Nor synge tunably

is made the bellman:

Let hym ryng the bellys;
He can do nothyng ellys.

Skelton's indebtedness to the mediaeval Bird Mass is clear. He uses the Mass and the birds, but he dropped the conventional love theme of the French and English poets, and refashioned the Bird Mass in the form of the Requiem.

He develops the Bird Mass further along original lines. At line 513 the Phoenix is introduced after the other birds and given special duties that indicate, though there is no break in the verse, the introduction of a new service. The duties of the Phoenix are those associated with the priest celebrating the Absolution over the Tomb, a continuation of the Mass for the Dead, but in itself a separate office. The Phoenix blesses the hearse and censes it

With aromatycke gunnes
That cost great summes.

He is dressed

As a patryarke or pope
In a blacke cope

and he is bidden to sing:

He shall sing the verse
Libera me.

Now the celebrating priest of the Mass does not in fact wear a black cloak, even for the Mass for the Dead. But in the Rubric to the Absolution over the Tomb, are the following directions:

Finita missa, si facienda est Absolutio, celebrans...deposito accipit pluviale nigrum, i.e., the celebrating priest puts off the maniple and assumes a black cloak. And at the close of the oration, the priest is directed to sing the Responsory Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna, the "verse" assigned to the Phoenix in the poem.

The other details of the poem fit the Rubric and verses for this Office with complete precision. The eagle is to be

the sedean
The quere to demeane,

i.e., the Subdiaconus of the Rubric, while

The hobby and the muskette
The sencers and the crosse shall fet;
The kestrell in all this warke
Shall be holy water clarke

assign three more duties mentioned in the Rubric - the Subdiaconus bears the cross ('Subdiaconus...defert crucem'), and two Acolytes carry the incense and the holy water ('praecedentibus duobus aliis Acolythis, uno cum thuribulo et navicula incensi, alio cum aquae benedictae et aspersorio'). These coincidences, with the citation of the significant Responsory Libera Me, leave no doubt whatsoever that the Mass for the Dead sung by the birds changes at line 513 for the succeeding Office - the Absolution

(Handwritten notes at the bottom of the page, partially illegible)

over the Tomb. This ends at line 570.

(insertion at top of page)

In the next line (571) the poet is back again at the Vespers for the Office, with Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, the closing lines of the final psalm; to which the verse follows A porta inferi; the antiphon Credo videre bona Domini of the Sarum Breviary and the verse Domine, exaudi orationem meam of the other forms of the Office; to end with the final words of the Office, the Dominus vobiscum, the command Oremus, and the Oratio - the Oration with which the Office for the Dead at Vespers closes - Deus cui proprium est misereri et parcere, the special form of the Oration used when the body was present in the church. And here, for the first time in six hundred lines, Skelton parodies the Office:

On Phillipps soule haue pyte!
For he was a prety cocke
And came of a gentyll stocke
And wrapt in a maiden es smocke
Tyll cruell fate made him to dy,

and Philip is commended to the appropriate joys of his particular heaven in a few lines of parody on the words of the oration sed iubeas eam (i.e. the soul - anima) a sanctis Angelis suscipi, et ad patriam paradisi perduci:

To Jupyter I call
Of heuen emperyall
That Phyllyp may fly
Aboue the starry sky
To treade the prety wren,
That is our ladyes hen:
Amen, amen, amen!

The whole conception is wonderfully clever and the use of the Service formulae adds piquancy to an excellent piece of poetic

(insertion) in the Office for the Dead. Evening is coming on:
And now the darke cloudy nyght
chase away the bus bright,
Taking his course toward the west
God send my sparrowe soles good rest!
and Skelton returns with telling effect to the close of the Vespers —

workmanship. The use of the Vespers for the Dead, the change to the Requiem Mass and again to the Absolution over the Tomb are finely handled, while the final return to the Vespers from the Office is a piece of masterly technique. Even the Goliards did no better.

The remainder of the poem falls into two sharply contrasted sections; in the first (lines 603-844) Skelton decides to write a Latin epitaph for the dead sparrow, and here he gathers together a procession of his reading in the Classics and the Romances and the greater English poets before he composes his epitaph in Latin.

The final part is a new and independent section, The Commendacions, where the last of the services is used, the Commendations for the Soul. But there is even less attempt than in the Mass of the Birds to follow the form of the Breviary. Indeed even the meaning of Commendations is altered. Commendatio in the Breviary was a commendation of the soul to God. The Commendacions in Philip Sparrow mean the praise of Joanna Scroupe. The use of the Breviary is even more incidental and is confined almost to a running commentary derived from the psalm used in the Ordo Commendationis, Psalm 118. Starting with the couplet

Beati immaculati in via (Psalm 118)
O gloriosa femina,

he closes each verse-paragraph with four lines of Latin,

Hac claritate gemina
O gloriosa femina,

the invariable first couplet, and a second couplet consisting of

a line from each of the sections in turn of Psalm 118 followed by a line of Latin generally derived from the Vulgate psalms. One example will show the pattern:

Hac claritate gemina
O gloriosa femina,
Bonitatem fecisti cum servo tuo, domina,
Et ex prae cordiis sonant praeconia,

where line 3, as usual, is from Psalm 118, and line 4 is from the Hymn of St. Thomas Aquinas sung at Matins on the Feast of Corpus Christi. This one example is sufficient to show that the structure of the Commendacions is completely different from that of the lament and that there is actually no great connection between the two parts. At the end of the Commendacions (line 1238) Skelton makes a belated attempt to link them with the Requiem, and for a few lines he adheres once again to the Breviary:

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine!
With this psalme, Domine, probasti me
Shall sayle over the see
With Tibi, Domine, commendamus -

this last being the final Oration, Tibi, Domine, commendamus animam famuli tui, of the Ordo Commendationis Animae from the Breviary. But, with the shift Skelton made in the meaning of 'commendation', this new reminiscence of the Service-Book has hardly the telling effect of the more sardonic first part. The Commendacions read better as an independent poem. They differ in mood and in manner from the earlier lament, and they form a sequel rather than a continuation. In Philip Sparow is best regarded

1. The Commendacions have been discussed more fully in Chapter IV.

as two related poems, the first of which, containing the lament, the Requiem Mass, the Office for the Dead and the Absolution over the Tomb, is Goliardic both in spirit and execution.

A retrospect of the Offices used reveals the thoroughness of Skelton's Goliardic mockery. Philip Sparow falls into five divisions, each a burlesque of one service:

Officium Defunctorum (Breviary), 1-386.

Missa pro Defunctis (Missal), 387-512.

Absolutio super Tumulum (Missal), 513-570.

Officium Defunctorum (Breviary), 571-602.

Ordo Commendationis Animae (Breviary), 845-1260.

The poem is not a parody as Dunbar's Dirige to the King at Stirling is parody. There the Scottish poet burlesqued the Matins in the Office for the Dead, parodying each of the three Lessons and their Responses in turn, concluding with a Latin word-for-word parody of the close of the service, which closely resembles the rehandling of devotional language in the Drinking Masses:

Yet some there be
 A porta tristitie de Strivilling
 Erue, Domine, animas et corpora eorum.
 Credo gostare statim vinum Edinburgi
 In villa viventium.
 Requiescant Edinburgi. Amen.

This is not Skelton's method. The formulae of the various services remain unchanged. Perhaps they are not always even ridiculed. Instead they give a mock-serious background to the lament for Philip that is at any moment liable to lose its mockery. There is no parody and no mockery in the close of the first three services:

God send my sparowes soule good rest!

Skelton was as serious over Joanna's loss and as sensitive in his handling of it as Catullus over Lesbia's, and his use of the Services for the Dead gives a formal note that has an attraction of its own.

Perhaps the most convincing proof that the poem was Goliardic is the reception that it evidently had among the more unbending churchmen. The Goliards had long since fallen into disgrace, and the sight of a beneficed clergyman reviving the irreverence of the *Carmina Burana* was to the more conservative distasteful. In a passage already quoted from the *Ship of Fools* Barclay contrasts the morality of his own writings with the "wantonness" of Philip Sparrow. Skelton was stung into defence in the "adicyon" or epilogue to the poem, which he later incorporated into *The Garlande of Laurell* with the introduction:

Of Phillip Sparrow the lamentable fate,
The doleful destiny, and the carefull chaunce,
Dyuysed by Skelton after the funerall rate;
Yet some there be therewith that take greuauce,
And grudge therat with frownyng countenaunce.

It is pretty clear that his offence was the burlesque of the "funerall rate" and his return to the Goliardic poetry so discredited in the eyes of most churchmen.

Luride, cur, livor, volucris pia funera damnas?

"Why should one condemn the holy rites of a sparrow?" demands Skelton fiercely in the "adicyon". His orthodoxy was surely sufficient guarantee of good faith, and he himself later turned on those who strayed from Catholic fundamentals. The difference between Skelton and his critics was not radical. But Skelton

had a sympathy with the roguish wandering clerics of the Middle Ages that found no place in the early Renaissance. Perhaps the sympathy was literary rather than real. He could be bitter enough against any actual abuse of privilege or of doctrine.

Philip Sparow is a graceful and sensitive poem by a man not given either to grace or to sensitivity. One looks in vain for the "wantonness" of Barclay's depreciation. The lament strengthened Skelton's reputation as a poet and did not in the end detract from his reputation as a churchman. It would be difficult to see how it could. The eclipse of the Goliards was only temporary - and Skelton went back to their best element, their poetry. That some of his contemporaries considered he had returned to their less worthy elements, their scurrility and abuse of the church, is a reflection on their critical powers and not on the poetry of Skelton. The Goliardic poetry of Philip Sparow is as much the product of a churchman as the devotional hymns and the attacks on Cardinal Wolsey. Its rehandling of a mediaeval form and mediaeval formulae combined with a usage of English and an alert intelligence that is typical of the Renaissance, make the poem one of the most individual things that *Skelton ever wrote*.

The Morality prevails in the morality and is an origin

CHAPTER EIGHT.

SKELTON AND THE MORALITY.

In the Garlande of Laurell list Skelton claims to have written three plays, only one of which has survived:

Of Vertu also the souerayne enterlude...
 His Commedy, Achademios callyd by name...
 Of Magnyfycence a notable mater,
 How Cownterfet Cowntenaunce of the new get,
 With Crafty Conueyaunce dothe smater and flater,
 And Cloked Collucyoun is brought in to clater
 With Courtely Abusyoun; who prynt ith is wele in mynde
 Moche dowblenes of the worlde therin he may fynde.

The survivor, Magnyfycence, written in 1516 when English drama was still in its infancy, acquires an importance from its early date that is not altogether justified by its intrinsic merits. By far the longest, it is by no means the best of Skelton's works. He was no dramatist, and the cut-and-thrust of his satire, which might have added lively conversational passages to a play, is denied to the Morality form in which he worked. Yet in spite of these disadvantages Magnyfycence represents an advance on previous Moralities, with their exclusive interests in topics religious and moral. Skelton, without any apparent connection with the small circle of dramatists writing under the eye of Sir Thomas More, made with them the simple and yet revolutionary step of writing secular drama.

The Morality previous to 1500 bore all the marks of an origin

within the church and a development under its influence. Plays like The Castle of Perseverance and Mundus et Infans combined allegory with religious moralising, and ignored both human character and dramatic action. Mankind in the Moralities is a static figure, and the dramatic conflict for the soul of man is a struggle between abstract vices and abstract virtues, the most dramatic moment the coming of Death to summon Mankind to his appointed end. Towards the end of the century, however, reality entered and a new type of drama arose which had its beginnings in a frankly secular play on a Roman theme, Fulgens et Lucrez of ^{Henry} Thomas Medwall, (c. 1495). At the beginning of the Sixteenth Century this minor revolt against the hitherto exclusively religious tone of the drama resulted in a completely altered attitude to the stage. It has been shown that the change originated with a group of which More was the driving force and his brother-in-law, John Rastell, the agent.¹ Rastell showed his sympathy with the new secularised drama by publishing Fulgens et Lucrez in 1518, the year following his own scientific rehandling of a Morality in The Four Elements. The secular interest was further developed in the plays of Rastell's son-in-law, John Heywood, whose interludes - discussion dramas like The Play of the Wether and comedies like The Four PP - represent one further removed from the conventional ethical discussions of the Morality. As the tone of drama altered open-air public performances of The
In Magnificence Skelton's cordial relations with the noble

1. A. W. Reed Early Tudor Drama, London 1926. ^{ional evidence.}

Castle of Perseverance type gave way to productions at court and elsewhere of the new secular Morality and the Interlude. Skelton's drama of Magnyfycence falls between the old type and the new. It retains the old-fashioned form of the Morality with a cast of allegorical abstractions, but, in its acceptance of the current secular tone it represents a striking advance on the older model. Magnyfycence is an allegory of contemporary history. Humanity or Mankind becomes the individual prince Magnyfycence, and the Virtues and the Vices of the older Morality become his good and evil counsellors. Like so many of Skelton's productions, the play is a blend of the old and the new, the form conservative, the theme entirely novel. No evidence has yet appeared connecting Skelton with the More circle, and it is probable that he had little, if any, contact with them. Yet it may well have been their recognition of the novelties in his Morality that prompted John Rastell to print it in 1533, four years after the death of the poet, with the recommendation on the title-page "A goodly interlude and a mery". The most distinctive and original dramatic of Henry VIII's reign came from the presses of the Rastells, and the inclusion of Magnyfycence suggests that the More circle regarded it as similar in type to their own dramatic work, a piece of active rebellion against the restraints of the formal Morality. used for political satire and propaganda. Skelton had already in The Bowge of Courtis adapted the Dream Allegory for the anti- In Magnyfycence Skelton's cordial relations with the noble family of the Howards, already noted, finds additional evidence.

1. Magnyfycence S.E.F.S. edition. I am indebted to the excellent introduction for many subsequent details in this chapter.

The Prince in the play is tempted by Fancy and Folly to abandon Measure, who represents prudence, and he is saved from ultimate ruin only by the intervention of Good Hope and Circumspection.

R. L. Ramsay¹ has shown that the situation is an allegory of the state of affairs in England between 1509 and 1516. Magnyfycence represents Henry VIII, and the "vices" and "virtues" in the play are the two parties among his councillors - those, headed by Wolsey, advocating a campaign of showy extravagance, and those in favour of a more economical policy, of whom the chief was Thomas Howard, the Earl of Surrey. Victory at Flodden raised him to favour but the two parties split and the Howards were finally rejected in 1516, when Surrey (now the Duke of Norfolk) retired to the country. Wolsey already a Cardinal now became Chancellor, and his triumph was complete. This dating of the play at 1516 is confirmed by a reference (ll. 279-282) to a quarrel between Henry and Francis I immediately after the death of Louis XII in 1515: For, syth he dyed, Largesse was lytell used.

The play is then a justification of Norfolk's policy of economy and watchfulness, and the first of Skelton's succession of satires on the Cardinal.

Magnyfycence is the earliest example in English of any dramatic form used for political satire and propaganda. Skelton had already in The Bowge of Courte adapted the Dream Allegory for the satire of court life. Once again he takes a purely mediaeval

1. Ramsay's division is used.
 1. Magnyfycence E.E.T.S. edition. I am indebted to the excellent introduction for many subsequent details in this chapter.

form, the Morality, and handles it freely without conservative misgivings. "Skelton's Magnyfycence", writes A. W. Pollard, "... is on the older lines".¹ This does not represent the whole truth. Into the apparently rigid mould of the old-fashioned Morality Skelton has poured numerous elements that had never before found a place. The conservatism of his form is deceptive. Magnyfycence falls to temptation in the conventional manner, but under their allegorical names, his tempters may even be outline portraits of actual councillors at court. Propaganda, satire, comment on contemporary politics and covert advice to a reigning monarch were all original material with which to build a Morality.

The play is without act or scene division, but the development of the plot divides it into five clearly defined stages.² In the first of these the Prince is in prosperity, but one of the conspiring Vices wins his allegiance. The play opens with a discussion between Felycyte (or Wealth) and Lyberte (who represents license or prodigality) - should a prince preserve Wealth and Felicity or indulge his desires? An arbiter appears in the person of Measure (or Moderation) who claims dominion over both:

Where Measure is mayster, Plenty dothe none offence;
Where Measure lackyth, all thyng disorderyd is;
Where Measure is absent, Ryot kepeth resydence;
Where Measure is ruler, there is nothyng amysse...

All three conclude the discussion amicably:

There is no prynce but hath nede of vs thre.

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1. A. W. Pollard English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes Introduction lxvi.
 2. R. I. Ramsay's division is used.

The Prince, Magnificence, enters and sets Measure over both the others:

For by Measure I warne you we thynke to be gydyd; and they have
Wherin it is necessary my pleasure to knowe:
Measure and I wyll neuer be deuydyd.

The appeal of Lyberte for "Ioy and Myrthe" meets with universal disapproval. One detects the complaints of the older statesmen against the policy of Wolsey in Felycyte's lines:

Yet Measure hath ben so longe from vs absent,
That all men laugh at Lyberte to scorne.

On the discomfited departure of Lyberte, Magnificence piously condemns him:

It is a wanton thyng, this Lyberte.

At this point, the first of the conspirators enters, Fansy, who proclaims that he is Largesse (or Liberality):

Largesse, that all lordes sholde loue, Syr, I hyght.

He produces as his credentials a letter from "Sad Cyrccumspeccyon".

Fansy ingratiates himself with Magnyfycence and slyly insinuates that Measure is beneath his dignity:

Measure is mete for a marchauntes hall,
But Largesse becometh a state ryall.
What! sholde you pynche at a pecke of otes,
Ye wolde sone pynche at a pecke of grottes.
Thus is the talkynge of one and of other,
As men dare speke it hugger mugger:
"A lorde is a negarde, it is a shame."
But Largesse may amende your name.

The second stage in lengthy static monologues introduces each of the conspirators in turn, and reveals their conspiracy against the Prince. Counterfet Countenaunce delivers a long monologue exulting over the triumph of vice in England:

Counterfet maters in the lawe of the lande.....
 To him enters Fanny with Crafty Conueyaunce to report the progress
 of the conspiracy. Magnyfycence is already beguiled and they have
 both been accepted into his household. A fourth conspirator,
 Cloked Colusyon, joins them, and they scheme that he too shall be
 introduced into the household under a false name. He is left
 alone on the stage to recommend himself to the audience in a
 monologue:

I am neuer glad but whan I may do yll,
 And neuer am I sory but whan that I se
 I can not myne appetyte accomplysse and fulfyll
 In hynderaunce of Wealth and of Prosperyte.

The final abstract court vice is now introduced, Courtly Abusyon,
 for whose benefit Cloked Colusyon stages a mock quarrel with
 Crafty Conueyaunce:

COU. AB. What the deuyll! vse ye not to drawe no swordes?
 CRA. CON. No, by my trouthe; but crake grete wordes.
 COU. AB. Why, is this the gyse nowe adays?
 CLO. COL. Ye, for surty; ofte peas is taken for frayes.

Courtly Abusyon is left in his turn to deliver his introductory
 monologue in sprightly short-line *stanzas*:

What nowe? Let se
 Who loketh on me
 Well rounde aboute,
 Howe gay and stoute
 That I can were
 Courtly my gere.

He is a spruce young fop who has introduced new fashion to the
 country:

All this nacyon
 I set on fyre;
 In my facyon,
 This theyr desyre,
 This newe atyre.....

The conspirators have now all been introduced and the plot proceeds. Fanny rushes in to announce the fall of Measure. Lyberte is free! He remains on the stage to sing a song to his hawk and sketch his own character:

Of a spyndell I wyll make a sparre;
 All that I make forthwith I marre;
 I blunder, I bluster, I blowe, and I blother;
 I make on the one day, and I marre on the other;
 Bysy, bysy, and euer bysy,
 I daunce vp and downe tyll I am dyssy.

Folly enters "in a foles case" and a clowning interlude ensues where the two fools bargain for the sale of Folly's dog:

FAN. Where the deuyll gate he all these hurtes?
 FOL. By God, for snatchynge of puddynge and wortes.
 After some further clowning between Foly and Crafty Conueyaunce,

Foly reveals his character to the audience. He makes fools of all men - and he hints darkly at the folly of the Cardinal:

Anone he waxyth so hy and prowde,
 He frownyth fyersly, brymly browde.

Fanny and Foly boast of their triumphs before the admiring Crafty Conueyaunce and both depart to take up service in the palace. Crafty Conueyaunce remains for his monologue.

3. The time is now ripe for the final deception of the Prince. He enters with the newly-honoured Lyberte and the older counsellor Felycyte, who is protesting against the rejection of Measure. Magnyfycence is now completely blind to all moderate counsel. He announces that henceforth Felycyte must be ruled by Lyberte and by "Largesse", who enters to claim his prisoner. The stage is left clear for the vaunting monologue of Magnyfycence,

who in stately old-fashioned rime royal proclaims himself greater than all the great princes of the past; Alexander, Caesar, Hercules, Charlemagne all yield to him in honour. He repeats not the mediaeval lament for their past glory, but the proud man's boast of his own:

I drede no daunger; I dawnce all in delyte:
 My name is Magnyfycence, man most of myght.....
 Of all doughty I am doughtyest duke as I deme;
 To me all prynces to lowte man beseme.

Courtly Abusyon enters and swaggers before him, fascinating the prince with fantastic fashions. The newcomer advises Magnyfycence to acquaint himself with Carnall Delectacyon and find a "fayre mistress", whom Skelton describes in what seems a parody of the aureate style:

Fasten your Fansy vpon a fayre mistress
 That quyckly is enuyued with rudyes of the rose,
 Inpurtured with fetures after your purpose,
 The streynes of her vaynes as asure inde blewe,
 Enbudded with beautye and colour fresshe of hewe,
 As lyly whyte to loke vpon her leyre,
 Her eyen relucnt as carbuncle so clere,
 Her mouth enbawmyd, dylectable, and mery...

Skelton continues the description with a sly mockery of the current "high-style" poetry of a compliment. Magnyfycence is wholly deluded by the suggestions of his new courtier. The discredited Measure enters, but Magnyfycence rejects him angrily and flares up into a temper as his new friends have tutored him to do:

MAGN. Alas! my stomake fareth as it wolde cast.
 CLO. COL. Abyde, Syr, abyde; let me holde your hede.
 MAGN. A bolle or a basyn, I say, for Goddes brede!
 A, my hede! but is the horson gone?
 God gyue hym a myscheffe!

The Prince is now entirely in the hands of the conspirators. He

boasts once more of his security:

I drede no dyntes of fatall Desteny.

But as he utters these words Fanny enters to announce that the conspirators have cheated him. His wealth is gone and Felycyte is no more.

Stage four is the fall of Magnyfycence, emphasised by one of the few stage directions: Here Magnyfycence is beten downe and spoyled from all his goodys and rayment. Aduersyte enters to complete the overthrow, followed by the grim figure of Pouerte.

Skelton draws a realistic picture:

POUERTE. A, my bonys ake! my lymmys be sore;
 Allasse, I haue the cyatyca full euyll in my hyppe!
 Allasse, where is youth that is wont for to skypepe?
 I am lowsy and vnlykyng and full of scurffe;
 My colour is tawny, colouryd as a turffe.
 I am Pouerte, that all men doth hate.
 I am batyd with doggys at euery mannys gate;
 I am raggyd and rent, as ye may se.

Poverty shows no sympathy with the lamentations of Magnyfycence:

With curteyns of sylke ye were wonte to be drawe;
 Nowe must ye lerne to lye on the strawe...
 Syr, remembre the tourne of Fortunes whele.

Magnyfycence falls to uttering a mediaeval lament on the mutability of Fortune in terms that show Skelton remembering his almost thirty-year old Elegy for Edward the Fourth:

Where is now my welth and my noble estate?
 Where is nowe my treasure, my landes, and my rent?

One by one the conspirators return to jeer at the fallen Prince:

LYBERTE. What brothell, I say, is yonder bounde in a mat?
 MAGNYF. I am Magnyfycence, that somtyme thy mayster was.
 LYBERTE. What! is the worlde thus come to pass?
 Cokes armes, Syrs!.....
 COU.COL. Ye, but trowe ye, Syrs, that this is he?

CRA.CO. Go we nere and let vs se.

CLO.CON. By Cockys bonys, it is the same.....

5. The final scene of Restoration is short. Magnyfycence is saved from killing himself by Good Hope. He is now a repentant tyrant, and listens to the advice given by Redresse, Sad Cyrcumspeccyon, and finally by Persueraunce. The four characters finally left on the stage address the audience, rounding off the play with a "Moral" in rime royal stanzas on the mutability of Fortune:

To day a lorde, to morowe ly in the duste;
 Thus in this worlde there is no erthly truste.
 To day fayre wether, to morowe a stormy rage;
 To day hote, to morowe outragyous colde;
 To day a yoman, to morowe made of page;
 To day in surty, to morowe bought and solde;
 To day maysterfest, to morowe he hath no holde.

Magnyfycence is restored to his palace and the play closes with a pious prayer for the audience.

As a drama Magnyfycence has its moments of success. The major defect is the long monologues with which each character introduces himself to the audience. Sometimes these monologues are edged satire - that of Courtly Abusyon is rapier-keen - but structurally they are a mistake. They slow the action till all sense of drama is lost. The humorous scenes are excellent pieces of rough fooling - Foly swindling Fandy over the price of a "pylde curre", the battle of words between Cloked Colusyon and Courtly Abusyon are lively scenes for any stage. Fandy and Foly play into eachother's hands with the skill of practised comedians. Here they are fooling Crafty Conueyaunce:

Foppish Courtly Abusyon, not too clearly differentiated.

Magny FOLY. Hem, Fandy! Regardes, voyes vous. his speeches are
 (Here FOLY maketh semblaunt to take a lowse from
 CRAFTY CONUEYAUNCE showlder.
 FANSY. What hast thou founde there?
 FOLY. By God, a lowse.
 CRAFTY CONUEYAUNCE. By Cokes harte, I trow thou lyste.
 FOLY. By the masse, a Spaynysshe moght with a gray lyste.
 FANSY. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!
 CRAFTY CONUEYAUNCE. Cokes armes! It is not so, I trowe.

Crafty Conueyaunce tears off his gown indignantly to the delight of the two tormentors.

The graver scenes can on occasion be impressive. The fall of Magnyfycence and the entrance of Pouerte is a dramatic moment admirably calculated, while the irony of the boastful monologue of Magnyfycence on his invulnerable position at the very moment when the conspiracy against him has succeeded reveals the hand of a writer with a sense of dramatic presentation. The dénouement of the play is statuesque. Standing figures round the fallen Prince chant alternate verses like antiphons, in a scene that has rich possibilities of dignified presentation. Except for the expository monologues, the play is well proportioned, and the construction ordered - Pride gives rise to conspiracy, conspiracy to the fall of pride, the fall gives way to despair, and after despair comes restoration. Characterisation is best in the comic parts. Foly and Fandy are very nimble fools and their by-play darts round the heavier artillery of the others. The more serious parts show little sense of human character. The abstract quartet of confusingly similar court vices are, with the exception of the foppish Courtly Abusyon, not too clearly differentiated.

Magnyfycence himself has human qualities, but his speeches are all public utterances. There is no intimate touch to humanise him or win our sympathy. Skelton came too early in the history of the drama to allow his characters to reveal themselves in action. Instead they announce their characteristics in set speeches, and this difficulty of exposition is a grave obstacle in the way of efficient characterisation that no early dramatist was able to overcome.

If its allusions were to have any piquancy, such a topical play as Magnyfycence must have been produced immediately after composition. There is no record of any production, but it could have been produced only in two households - that of the Howards or that of the King. Skelton's Garlande of Laurell, written and recited in Sheriff Hutton Castle before the Howard family, shows how highly they regarded his public performances, and the consistent support of the Howard policy throughout the play was a solidier compliment than the airy commendations of the Garlande. Yet what evidence there is suggests a production in court. Henry's love of dramatic performances needs no illustration. In spite of a passion for the elaborate and decorative masque he found the "Interlude" entertaining.

The allusions in Magnyfycence are aimed at the King. Skelton was at court from c. 1511 onwards, writing on occasion at the king's command, his pen always ready for defence and for advice.

Some years after the play was written he could continue the attack on Wolsey unscathed - apparently secure in the King's support. Magnyfycence was so almost certainly written for production before Henry. The warnings of Colin Clowte and Speke Parrot first find utterance in the scornful references to Wolsey's low birth:

A carter a courtyer, it is a worthy warke...
 A counterfet courtyer with a knaues marke.

To the court of Henry VIII the allegorical figures were easy to identify as court types if not actually as court personages.

The moral was clear enough for those who had eyes to see:

This mater we haue mouyd, you myrthys to make,
 Precely purposyd vnder purpose of play,
 Shewyth Wysdome to them that Wysdome can take.

This hortatory tone provides further evidence of a court production. Skelton would not have given advice to the Howards - they were only too well aware of their own policy. But to the poet Henry was blindly following the path to destruction and Magnyfycence was an effort to open his eyes "vnder pretence of play". The allegorical form and Henry's own friendliness to him gave Skelton a double immunity from any vengeance of the Cardinal.

Naturally there were critics. Some of the courtiers were touché by the innuendoes of his Morality. It is fairly certain that the short satire Against Venemous Tonges is an epilogue to Magnyfycence. Some of its phrases and lines are direct references to the drama:

Such tunges ynhappy hath made great diuision,
 In realmes, in cities, bu suche fals abusion;
 Of fals fickil tunges suche cloked collusion
 Hath brought nobil princes to extreme confusion.

The "venemous tongues" are those of his critics at court shortly after the production of Magnyfycence. Skelton complains of slanders that have been uttered against him by some adversary to him unknown. He defends himself:

He saith vntruly, to say that I would
 Controlle the cognisaunce of noble men
 Either by language or by pen.

There was a time when women alone slandered:

But men take vpon them nowe all the shame,
 With skoldyng and sklaundering make their tunge lame.

The poem concludes with a threat against his adversary, regretting that the poet does not know "what his name hight". The name of his opponent is as much a mystery to us as it was to Skelton, but it is not difficult to see a connection between this defence of his writings against Fals Abusion and Cloked Collusion and the veiled attack in Magnyfycence on the councillors of Henry, to whom he had already attached these very names.

Yet it would be a mistake to identify the characters of the play too closely with real people. Though they masquerade under allegorical names, they are not shadows, but they represent court types rather than individuals. Magnyfycence himself is not a portrait study of Henry VIII, and probably no individual courtier is represented. The play is an allegorical parallel to the situation at court and not merely disguised satire upon it. The King could view the pride and the downfall of Magnyfycence without

feeling that he himself could be fooled so easily.

Whatever success it gained as drama, this novel rehandling of the Morality was apparently a failure as propaganda. Henry accepted the play as entertainment without being seriously perturbed at its counsel, and its serious intentions. It must have been a bitter disappointment for the Howard party to see Wolsey continue in favour, and the more conservative like Skelton realised that Henry had abandoned their policy. For the poet, however, Magnyfycence was only the beginning of the campaign. It will be seen how he abandoned allegory for satire and then for pure invective in a final attempt to warn the King of the dangers of retaining the Cardinal. At once more cryptic and less apologetic, and Wolsey is now the sole victim of the poet's anger; while in Why Come Ye Nat to Court? Skelton in the end has come out into the open with a scathing personal attack on the public and private life of the Cardinal, whom he had first criticised merely as a Churchman but who later became the object of his uncontroliable personal hatred.

The development of the satires requires, as with all occasional poems, a fairly precise date to be assigned to each, and until the order of the three poems can be determined and the events to which they refer tracked down, criticism of Skelton's development in satire may lead to serious misinterpretation. Fortunately, the poems are full of references to events of the time and may be dated as follows: Colin Cloute in 1519-20, Spoke, Parrot towards the end of 1521, Why Come Ye Nat to Court? at the end of

1522 and during the first CHAPTER NINE. of 1522. To the events of these years they form a running commentary from the point of view of the people and the THE WOLSEY GROUP.

Wolsey's rise to a pre-eminent position in the state had been swift and unhesitated. The man who in 1498 had been a master in Skelton's satires against Wolsey form a clearly defined group of poems in an ascending scale of bitterness and outspoken expression. Colin Cloute, which to contemporaries was the most famous of these outbursts, is in reality a general assault on the slackness of the higher clergy, and the comparatively few personal passages probably do not refer exclusively to Wolsey. But in Speke, Parrot the satire is at once more cryptic and less apologetic, and Wolsey is now the sole victim of the poet's anger; while in Why Come Ye Nat to Court? Skelton in the end has come out into the open with a scathing personal attack on the public and private life of the Cardinal, whom he had first criticised merely as a Churchman but who later became the object of his uncontrolled personal hatred. The development of the satires requires, as with all occasional poems, a fairly precise date to be assigned to each, and until the order of the three poems can be determined and the events to which they refer tracked down, criticism of Skelton's development in satire may lead to serious misinterpretation. Fortunately, the poems are full of references to events of the time and may be dated as follows: Colin Cloute in 1519-20, Speke, Parrot towards the end of 1521, Why Come Ye Nat to Court? at the end of

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 Borden (The ...)
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CHAPTER NINE

THE WOLSEY GROUP

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* An article "Skelton's Quarrel with Wolsey" (Wm. Nelson PMLA June 1936) has just come to hand, which confirms my dating of these satires.

1522 and during the first few months of 1523.¹ To the events of these years they form a running commentary from the point of view of the people and the older Churchmen.

Wolsey's rise to a pre-eminent position in the state had been swift and unhampered. The man who in 1498 had been a master in William Waynfleet's school, and in 1506 a chaplain to Sir Richard Nanfan, entered the King's service, and Cavendish relates in his *Life of Cardinal Wolsey* how he first commended himself to Henry by his speed of action in an embassy. In the next few years his reputation became European and his adroitness in diplomacy brought honours from home and abroad. In 1514 he became Bishop of Lincoln and later Archbishop of York. In 1515 he became a Cardinal and, obtaining the Great Seal, succeeded Warham as Lord Chancellor. In 1518 he became legatus a latere, and so short circuited the superior office of Archbishop of Canterbury to the indignation of the more conservative clergy.

Skelton's three satires refer to the period from 1518, when Wolsey had become supreme in Church and State, as Chancellor and Cardinal and Legate of the Pope. Skelton's first attack simply echoed the popular complaint - prelates should attend more to things of the spirit and less to affairs of the world. As Wolsey grew in power and interfered in Church affairs both parochial and national, eventually dictating even to Convocation, and not content with leadership of the Church assumed virtual control of England's internal and foreign policy, Skelton's satire became more and more specific and increasingly virulent.

1. These dates differ considerably from those assigned by Professor Berdan (*"The Dating Of Skelton's Satires"* P.M.L.A. 29. 499 #) and the evidence on which they rest is presented in full with the consideration of each poem. *

From his point of view he was perhaps justified. The events of these years were disquieting to others than Skelton. Abroad Wolsey preserved England's independence by trimming a precarious balance of power among Europe's three most influential monarchs - Maximilian, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Francis, the King of France, and Charles, the King of Spain. When in 1519 the death of Maximilian made Charles Emperor in addition, the hegemony of Europe lay between Francis and Charles - and Wolsey took full advantage of the situation to support now one and now the other, till further diplomatic duplicity was out of the question. The Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520 was a fine affair, but at the very moment Francis and Henry were entertaining each other with lavish spectacles, Henry was in touch with the Emperor. Next year in 1521 Wolsey met Francis in a conference at Calais - but took the opportunity to meet Charles at Bruges. The following year war broke out in May. Charles and Henry settled the general plan of the war at Windsor in June, and Wolsey lent his aid to raise a tax to pay for the war against France. Surrey, the Lord Admiral, conducted a campaign of devastation in France towards the end of 1522. Meanwhile France as usual created a diversion in Scotland, where Albany re-appeared and marched with the Scottish nobles and 80,000 men against Carlisle, to be bluffed into a truce and eventual retirement by Dacre, the Warden of the East Marches. Wolsey's influence with Henry in these diplomatic moves was unlimited. Everywhere people saw his hand, and Skelton

was not slow to echo the popular rumour. ^{and especially in London,}
 that But his hand was not merely in diplomacy. As early as 1518 he received a bull from the Pope to visit monasteries and nunneries, and the clerical resentment at his reforms and suppressions gave the satirist full scope. In education his influence was pervasive. In 1517 the University of Oxford gave him the power to codify its statutes in spite of the opposition of Warham, and when the "Trojans" - the supporters of the older education at Oxford - attacked the teaching of Greek it was to Henry and to Wolsey that the "Greeks" appealed. Feeling ran high until More wrote a letter to the Senate warning them against opposing the King and Wolsey, who was especially keen on the new Humanist study of Greek.² In 1520 Wolsey founded a chair of Greek at Oxford, and the path of preferment lay through a study of the new fashionable language. ^{truly religious men must beg}
 and "Wolsey in the eyes of the public was at first merely a pushing Churchman. But the rapidity with which he made himself pre-eminent in the state, his contemptuous attitude to Warham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and to the older school of Churchmen, his attacks on monasteries and foundations, his support of the new education, his extensive diplomatic entanglements and his regular meetings with foreign rulers, his rapid succession of Church offices, his hope of the Papacy itself - all of these

1. Arber Reprint of Strachan's 1638 edition.

1. Letters and Papers. II 4399 III 540.

2. H. C. Maxwell-lyte History of the University of Oxford, 236.

created a feeling of alarm in England, and especially in London, that provided a common motive for many poems, similar in spirit to Roy and Barlowe's Rede Me and be not Wroth¹ (1528), Of the Cardnall Wolse² (1521-22), and the satires of Skelton between 1518 and 1523.

In the first of his satires Colin Clout³, Skelton presents himself in the character of Colin Clout, the mouth piece of the lay-folks, and continually emphasises that he is speaking not of individual Churchmen, but only repeating the popular complaints. The complaints are sweeping enough. The bishops are neglecting their duty, and the honest Churchmen are "loth to mell". They are slothful and ignorant and can construe "neither Gospell nor Pystle"; they live in ease forgetful of the poor people who live in misery and pay no heed to "the people mones" and even pervert law in favour of Churchmen. The truly religious men must beg and "synge from place to place", and even nuns must leave their nunneries, for foundations and monasteries are being broken up. The prelates should be "lanternes of light", but among them is one who will have a "fatal fall". The Church is falling into disrepute because of Lutheran, Wycliffite, Hussian and similar heresies. The prelates now "rule both Kynge and Kayser", and noble lords pay tribute to them, in spite of the prelates' lowly

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1. Arber Reprint of Strasburg 1528 edition.
 2. Furnivall Ballads from MSS II 240.
 3. For a detailed discussion of Colin Clout see Chapter #6.

led Professor Jordan to suggest that the poem was written piecemeal

origins. The bishops should not delegate their duties to Masters of Arts or friars - they should preach themselves, instead of allowing sermons to be delivered by an often ignorant clergy or, by friars who preach simply for a living. The bishops do not even support the Church's cause, but build royally and fill their halls with wanton tapestries. So runs the general complaint - one man rules the King; but his fortune may change, though at present nothing may be commanded but by permission of "our presy- dent".... "or els his substytute". When such is the people's complaint "somewhat there is amysse". Skelton assures his readers of his own disinterestedness. He speaks only "of them that do amys", and if there be any who feel "touched to the quycke" let them amend speedily. The Bishops are represented as replying angrily - and revealingly - and the poem closes with a prayer to Christ to "rectyfye and amende/Thynges that are amys".

The continually apologetic tone is significant. Skelton is speaking for the people and accuses no individual. But the references to "our presydent", to the tampering with monasteries and nunneries and foundations and to Churchmen ruling the King point to a concealed attack on Wolsey, while "his substitute" probably covers a reference to Thomas Ruthall, the Bishop of Durham, who was his faithful henchman during these years. The poem is surprisingly general in its language, and time and again Skelton seems to avoid the possibility of uttering specific charges.

This air of generality coupled with references to Wolsey has led Professor Berdan to suggest that the poem was written piecemeal

before Skelton began his attack on Wolsey and that the Wolsey passages were grafted on as late as 1524-5.¹ Colin Clout is mentioned in The Garlande of Laurell (1523) and so must be earlier, but Berdan finds evidence for subsequent additions in references to events that are apparently later than 1523. There are four such crucial allusions. However, an examination of contemporary records reveals that all four passages can be dated before 1523, and so proves that Colin Clout must have been written in its present form as a continuous and completed poem before Skelton listed it in the Garlande.

These four allusions must be examined in detail:

1. The breaking up of foundations: Religious men are compelled to "syng from place to place"; the nuns "must cast up their blacke veyles"; the people tell how the prelates

...with foundacyons melles,
 And talkys lyke tytyuelles,
 Howe ye brake the dedes wylles,
 Turne monasteris into water milles,
 Of an abbay ye make a graunge.

Berdan takes these lines to be an allusion to the bull which Wolsey procured in 1524 to allow him to use monastery funds to found his Cardinal's College at Oxford.

Wolsey, however, had been casting his eyes at the monasteries far earlier than 1524. In 1518 he procured a bull (dated August 27th) through the agency of Giglis de Silvester, Bishop of Worcester and ambassador in Rome, the terms of which are nearer to

1. J. M. Berdan The Dating of Skelton's Satires P.M.L.A. 29. 499 ff.

the Skelton passage. Silvester writes to Wolsey that he sends the bull for the visitation of the monasteries, of the same tenor as that obtained by the Bishop of Luxemburg for France. It contains no provision for reforming the clergy, as that belongs to the Bishops, but he has often been struck by the necessity for reforming the monasteries, although he considers those in his diocese will complain. Great care will be required in visiting nunneries, as many errors will be found in them!

It is unnecessary to assume an allusion to the 1524 bull when one had already been granted in 1518; on these grounds one must doubt the suggestion that this passage was an addition to the original poem.

2. Berdan takes the passage (ll. 162-186) on the fear of the honest clergy to interfere with Wolsey, and on the extravagance of the prelates as a reference to Wolsey's attempt in 1523 to extract from Convocation by his legatine authority a fifty per cent war tax:

Wyth dame Dyana naked;
Howe lusty Venus quaked,
But nowe euery spirituall father,
Men say, they had rather
Spend moche of theyr share
Than to be combred with care;
Spend! nay, nay, but spare.

The sense of the passage is against this. It is a general attack on the luxury of "euery spirituall father", who would rather spend money on his private pleasures than be "combred with care"

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1. This letter is calendared in Letters and Papers II 4399, from B.M. Vit B. III 231.

of preaching and leading the church. These prelates will not even defend the church against the criticism of the laity:

But it is not worth a leke:
 Boldness is to seke
 The Church for to defend.

The attack is on the spending of money for private luxury - not on the extravagance of a war-loan - and this nullifies the arguments for referring the passage to 1523. It could belong to any year in the previous decade.

3. Berdan cites as a later addition the description of the tapestries with which the pleasure-loving prelates decorate their halls. Skelton's description tallies exactly with a set which Wolsey possessed in Hampton Court. Here the evidence requires careful examination.

Skelton's description can be no other than an eye-witness's account:

Arras of ryche aray,
 Fresshe as flours in May;
 Wyth dame Dyana naked;
 Howe lusty Venus quaked,
 And howe Cupyde shaked
 His darte, and bent his bowe
 For to shote a crowe
 At her tyrly tyrlowe;
 And howe Parys of Troy
 Daunced a lege de moy,
 Made lusty sporte and ioy
 With dame Helyn the quene;
 With such storyes bydene
 Their chambres well besene;
 With triumphs of Caesar,
 And of Pompeyus war,
 Of renowne and of fame
 By them to get a name;
 Nowe all the worlde stares,
 Howe they ryde in goodly chayres,
 Conueyed by olyphantes,

1. *Erasmian*, p. 100.
 2. *Let*, p. 100.

With lauryat garlantes,
 And by vnycornes
 With their semely hornes;
 Vpon these beestes rydyng,
 Naked boyes strydyng,
 With wanton wenches winkyng.
 Nowe truly, to my thynkyng,
 That is a speculacyon
 And a mete meditacyon
 For prelates of estate,
 Their courage to abate
 From worldly wantonnesse.

Some at least of these tapestries have been identified as a set still preserved at Hampton Court:

"Of these six triumphs (Wolsey having duplicates of those of Time and Eternity) we at once identify three, namely, those of Death, Renown, and Time, as still remaining at Hampton Court in Henry VIII's great Watching or Guard Chamber; while the other three - of Love, Chastity, and Eternity or Divinity - complete the set of six designs, which are illustrative, in an allegorical form, of Petrarch's Triumphs."¹

These tapestries tally so closely with those described by Skelton that they must be accepted as the same. They are listed in Wolsey's inventory as:

"Hangings bought of the executors of my lord of Durham 14 Henry VIII, containing the triumphs of Time, Death, Chastity, Eternity, Cupid and Venus, and Renown or Julius Caesar and others de filio producto."²

Now "my lord of Durham" is Wolsey's lieutenant, Thomas Ruthal, Bishop of Durham, who died on the 4th of February, 1523.

Two interpretations are therefore possible. The description of the tapestries belongs to the original draft of the poem, which was written while Ruthall was alive, and the attack is an attack on Ruthall; or the description belongs to the period after 1523

1. Ernest Law: A History of Hampton Court Palace 2nd Ed. 1890
 2. Letters and Papers IV 6184. (I p.63-65.

when the tapestries were in the possession of Wolsey. In this case (and Berdan accepts the latter hypothesis) the whole passage must be a later addition.

There are as good reasons for accepting Ruthall as the object of attack. The whole poem is a general attack on the Bishops and not simply on the Cardinal alone. Among the covert references to individuals is one to the deputy of Wolsey:

.....Without his presydent be by,
Or els his substytute
Whom he will depute.

This "substitute" so singled out for attack is almost certainly the same Lord of Durham, who is represented by Brewer as Wolsey's drudge, and who accompanied him on most of his diplomatic missions. In a general onslaught on the luxury of the prelates - "ye bisshops of estates" - there is no reason for assuming that Wolsey rather than the Bishop of Durham is the object of attack. Skelton seems to be describing the tapestries while they were still in the possession of Ruthall, and there is no evidence for the assumption that when he wrote the description they had passed into the hands of Wolsey. They may be accepted as part of the original poem, and so another argument for the piecemeal construction of the poem is discounted.

4. Berdan finds evidence for other versions of Colin Clout in William Bullein's citation from it in his Dialogue against the Fever Pestilence (1564), where the lines of Colin Clout:

Howe prelacy is solde and bought
And come up of nought

appear as:

How the Cardinall came of nought
And his Prelacies solde and bought.

It is placing too great faith on the accuracy of quotation in the Sixteenth Century to base a theory of varying versions on a possible misquotation or a citation from memory.

There is a very strong tradition that Colin Clout is Skelton's first attack on the Cardinal, and though the attack is not yet pointed and is more often on the prelates than on the virtual head of the church, the tradition of its priority must be allowed some weight in deciding the date of the poem. The view that Colin Clout is a single coherent poem and the earliest of the Wolsey group is strongly supported by the internal evidence. One compelling argument that it is one poem and not a collection of oddments circulated privately and later fitted together is the impression of unity that comes from a reading of the poem. Professor Berdan states that Skelton inserted the Wolsey passage and then "erased the lines of cleavage". The lines of cleavage have certainly disappeared - there is no trace of patchwork in the complete poem. It reads as a whole, and the passages hinting at Wolsey as integral parts of it.

The final and strongest argument for the poem's integrity is to me conclusive. The Wolsey passages are not strong or bitter enough to represent what ought, on Berdan's hypothesis, to be Skelton's later attitude - they are in the same disinterested tone as the rest of the work. In 1523 Skelton finished his

bitterest attack on Wolsey in Why Come Ye Nat to Court?. Every reference to the Cardinal has a poisoned sting. Why should Skelton after 1523 (in 1524-5 as Berdan suggests) return to a poem of perhaps 1519 and add, not more vitriolic passages, but obscure references for which he is at some pains to apologise?

For no man have I named: 34^o at the end of the poem's sections. Wherefore sholde I be blamed?

Which he conjectures is Skelton's method of indicating the date of the composition. He suggests that Skelton dated the poem Why not in 1524-5? Indeed it has already been shown that by 1524 Skelton, far from renewing an attack on the Cardinal, was indeed supplicating Wolsey in language which has at least the semblance of penitence. Colin Clout, then, is one single poem, composed within a fairly short and discoverable space of time. Skelton was artist enough not to throw together his poems as if from a rag-bag. As Speke Parrot, the second of the Wolsey series, was written in 1521, and Luther references demand that Colin Clout should be later than 1517-18, one may safely ascribe to it the date of 1519-20, and so establish it as the first of the attacks on Wolsey. So far the attack is apologetic, not exclusively devoted to the Cardinal, appearing side by side with stock pre-Renaissance complaints against the clergy. Skelton was only standing further back from his victim to sight his next shot more accurately, and in perhaps only a year's time every shot was going to find its mark with the uncompromising assault in Speke Parrot.

Speke Parrot has always been a baffling poem. Under the cloak of Parrot, a bird "of a wonderous kynde", Skelton continues

the attack on the Cardinal, and by almost every device known to satire, innuendo and frontal attack, cryptic oracular utterance and direct charges, he lays bare the weakness of Wolsey's policy. The date is again of importance if one is to steer aright through a poem of concealed topical reference. Berdan¹ dates the poem from mysterious numbers 33⁰ and 34⁰ at the end of the poem's sections, which he conjectures is Skelton's method of indicating the date of the composition. He suggests that Skelton dated the poem from the accession of Henry VII, in whose court he had served and whom he might still regard as his master. 33 Henry VII and 34 Henry VII would give the dates 1517 and 1518, which Berdan accepts as the date of the composition - the poem thus being a series of scattered and separate comments on the events of these years. But, like Colin Clout, Speke Parrot gives an impression of unity. The disjointed composition is intentional, and the attack centres so deliberately round one theme that one cannot allow the arrangement to be purely haphazard. The attempt to square the allusions in the poem with the years 1517 and 1518 breaks down, particularly in the Secunde Lenvoy, where what must be a reference to Wolsey on a mission to France is taken by Berdan to refer to a 1518 embassy of Charles Somerset, Earl of Worcester:

With porpose and graundpose he may fede hym fatte,
 Thoughe he pampyr not hys paunche with the grete seell:
 We haue longyd and lokyd long tyme for that,
 Whyche cawsythe pore suters haue many a hongry mele:
 As presydentt and regente he rulythe every deall.

1. M.L.N. XXX 140-144.

1. State Papers Henry VIII Vol. I Letters 29, 31, 35, 37, 39, 39, 44, 50.

Berdan interprets these lines as inapplicable to Wolsey because they appear to suggest that Wolsey had not the Great Seal. But the use of "thowghe" is evidently concessive - he may feed himself fat with porpoise and grampus even if he did not have the Great Seal - and the reference to the "presydent and regente" can be to Wolsey alone. The poem is concerned not with an embassy of Somerset of 1518 but with a later embassy of Wolsey himself traceable to the year 1521.

An examination of the poem confirms the later date. It must have been written towards the end of 1521, for the references, as we shall see, are to Wolsey's meeting at Calais with Francis I and with Charles at Bruges in the autumn of that year. This date is confirmed and strengthened by Skelton's references to Greek.

The Latin dates throughout the poem agree exactly with the progress of Wolsey's embassy. He left Dover on August 2nd 1521 and left France on November 28th. In Speke Parrot we find that he is abroad (Penultimo die Octobris); he is "ovyr the salte fome" (in diebus Novembris); he is invited to return - "he may now come agayne as he wente" (15 Kalendis Decembris i.e. November 17, a few days before his return); the King is warned against him in Latin verse (Kalendis Decembris); and the rest of the poem is a general attack on Wolsey after an embassy with

So myche consultation, almoste to none entente (l. 445).
Wolsey is invited to return "the way he went;

From Calys to Dover, to Canterbury in Kent"

1. Cf. I. A. Gordon P.L.S. 1906 - another indication that the Calais embassy of 1521 is intended.

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1. State Papers Henry VIII Vol. I Letters 19, 21, 24, 25, 27, 29, 39, 44, 50.

The second section confirms the later date. In it Skelton attacks the progress of Greek studies. "In 1516 Bishop Fox had founded Corpus Christi College, Oxford, as a Humanist College encouraging Greek. This led to bitter quarrels between "Trojans" and "Greeks" but after More's letter of 1519 and Wolsey's foundation of a Greek Chair in 1520 Greek was studied without further opposition. Skelton has these events in mind when, remembering the faction fights, he talks of "our Grekis", while the lines (167-8)

In Academia Parrot dare no problem kepe;
For Graeci fari so occupyeth the chayre

imply that Greek had now an official position, and the chayre is very probably Wolsey's professorship of 1520. The poem is unquestionably later than 1517-18 and the end of 1521 is clearly implied in its contemporary references.

Having now established that Speke Parrot was written at the end of 1521, we are in a much better position to understand the meaning of this hitherto very obscure poem. It is an extremely clever piece of work and its abrupt transitions and cryptic allusions ally it closely with the more allusive poems of our own day - but with Skelton we lack the explanatory bibliography appended to The Waste Land. The Parrot, like the modern poet, is a learned bird. He can cite Latin, Greek, Spanish, French, German, and gibberish for his own purpose, and glance at a topic by

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1. Cf. I. A. Gordon T.L.S. 1934 p. 74, where this evidence was first published. A recent article in P.M.L.A. 1936 - Wm. Nelson; "Skelton's Speke Parrot" gives substantially the same evidence & confirms my original dating.

the merest skimming of its surface to pass swiftly on to another hinted accusation before one is quite sure whether or not the victim has been touched.

The first section describes Parrot in fanciful language. Parrot is the master of all languages and prays for the King and that every he is mortal:

Kateryne incomparable, our ryall quene also.

The policy of Wolsey is hinted at - "wylfulness is vycar generall", but he immediately drops the topic of "Vitulus in Oreb" (i.e. Wolsey) because it is "besynes again". Skelton pleads:

I pray you, let Parrot haue lyberte to speke,

and Wolsey is alluded to under a variety of biblical names like that of "Og, that fat hog Basan", but Skelton again drops the theme:

Parrot pretendith to be a bybyll clarke,

and the section ends with the dark hint that Wolsey will betray the King's confidence:

Quod magnus est dominus Judas Scarioth.

The second section is Skelton's attack on Wolsey's educational policy. As a result of Wolsey's educational schemes (it is implied) the old education has become neglected and young scholars presume to learn Greek and read Plautus and Quintilian who can hardly construe a verse of Cato Minor:

Settynge theyr myndys so moche of eloquens
That of theyr scole maters lost is the whole sentence,

and Wolsey's foundation of a Greek chair has corrupted the old Latin learning.

Skelton claims the satirist's right:

But that metaphora, allegoria with all,
Shall be his protectyon, his pauys and his wall,

and the section closes with a fine appeal, for a moment reminiscent of Dunbar's Lament for the Makers, to Wolsey to remember that even he is mortal:

For that pereless prynce, that Parrot dyd create,
He made you of nothyng by his magistye:
Point well this problem that Parrot doth prate
And remembre amonge how Parrot and ye
Shall lepe from thys lyfe, as merry as we be;
Pompe, pryde, honour, riches, and worldly lust
Parrot sayth playnly, shall tourne al to dust.

The third section is an inset lyric on "What mone he made when Pamphylus lost his mate", apparently an addendum to a popular poem on the loves of Pamphilus and Galathea.

With the following sections, the three envoys, Skelton returns to the attack on Wolsey, who is wasting his time abroad on useless embassies:

Go, litell quayre, namyd the Popagay
Home to resorte Jerebesethe perswade.

Parrot must call Wolsey home again. There was nothing to be gained by bargaining with either Charles or Francis:

For Jerico and Jerssey shall come togethyr as sone
As be exploite the man owte of the mone.

After a protest

Was neuyr suche a senatour syn Crystes incarnation,
Henry the Eighth is warned in Latin verse:

1.

church Rex regeris, non ipse regis: rex inclyte, calle; assumption,
Subde tibi vitulum, ne fatuet nimium,

of his hopes of the Papacy for himself and of Europe for Henry.
and Skelton adds in his Lenvoy royall:

Skelton - the "royal parrot" - was more and more inclined to
For trowthe in parabyll ye wantonlye pronounce,
Langagys diuers, yet undyr that dothe reste: satire in
Maters more previous than the ryche jacounce
Speke Diamounde or rubye, or balas of the beste. direct. The

The poem rounds again on Wolsey. The King is eclipsed by the

Cardinal: fiercer because under these names is concealed the

hated Iuplyter for Saturne dare make no royall chere.

Wolsey plays his game boldly: ingenious. The garrulous Parrot,

who is bold
He caryeth a Kyng in hys sleve, yf all the worlde fayle; He
He facithe oute at a flusshe, with, slave, take all!
is bold Of Pope Julius cardys he ys chefe cardynall, ters his thoughts

and in the final section, spurred on by the call to ideas often

as the Sette asyde all sophysms, and speke now trew and playne,

the poem closes with a general lament, closely resembling Dunbar's

"A General Satire", that forms the most effective part of the poem.

Indignation and moral fervour combine to make a sombre but im-

pressive finale expressed in language at once bitter and effective:

In an So many vacabondes, so many beggars bolde; places the order
of logic So myche decay of monasteries and of relygious places;
design So hote hatred agaynste the Chyrche, and cherythe so colde;
So myche of my lordes Grace, and in hym no grace ys;
So many holow hartes, and so dowbyll faces. eating can hard-

Speke Parrot is not such a puzzle after all. Spe As an attack on

Wolsey in the year 1521 after an embassy that boded no good for

England, it throws a revealing light on the temper of the average

man, who regarded Wolsey's schemes with distrust and whose attitude

Skelton reflects in every line. po The time was long past when

Wolsey might be counted merely the worst offender in a corrupt

church. The people complained of his arrogance and presumption, of his hopes of the Papacy for himself and of Europe for Henry. Skelton - the "royal popagay" - was more and more inclined to come into the open with his attack, and though the satire in Speke Parrot is often allusive, it is none the less direct. The onslaught on Og, Jerebeseth, Syre Sydrake, and Seigneour Sadoke is all the fiercer because under these names is concealed the hated title of Cardinal Wolsey.

The form of the poem is ingenious. The garrulous Parrot, who is merely Skelton, is surprisingly modern in conception. He is bound neither by logic nor by chronology and utters his thoughts as they emerge from his mind with the association of ideas often as their only link with each other. But the dominant mood is preserved throughout and imposes a unity on what might easily have been a collection of satirical oddments. The difficulty of Speke Parrot has obscured its amazing originality. Here in the first few years of the Sixteenth Century is Skelton writing in an idiom of the Twentieth. Thought order replaces the order of logic. A unity of mood and of objective replaces unity of design. How far Skelton realised what he was creating can hardly be known. But his method of writing in Speke Parrot is disconcertingly close to that of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, and emphasises the allusive bias of the mind of Skelton. It is hardly to be wondered at that his contemporaries misunderstood and in some cases disliked his poetry. Occasionally it could be too original even for the Renaissance.

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1. Cf. Brie; Skelton Studien.
 2. Letters and Papers III 2614.

His final attack on Wolsey came in the following year, Why Come Ye Nat to Court?, in the last months of 1522 and the early months of 1523. Skelton is cryptic and allusive no longer. England had become involved in a foreign War, with its inevitable companion a Scottish campaign. Wolsey was attempting to raise a new war tax towards the end of 1522. Commons, clergy and people were united against his new measures, and in Why Come Ye Nat to Court? Skelton fights with the gloves off against a political and foreign policy that seemed to involve the country in ruinous expense all for one man's glory.

The poem is the easiest of all the satires to date, so frequent are the references to current events. A brief survey of these references leaves no doubt that the months October 1522 to March 1523 saw the composition of the bulk of the poem. The evidence may be briefly summarised:

1. At l. 638 it is sixteen years, according to Skelton, since Wolsey was a chaplain "with a poore knyght". The knight was Sir R. Nanfan, who died in January 1507. This brings the poem down to about January 1523.
2. Line 905 makes the mayor of London a goldsmith. The goldsmith, Sir John Munday, became mayor on October 28th, 1522.¹
3. Lines 150 ff. are concerned with Surrey's expedition to France. Surrey was back again in Calais after his raid on October 14th, 1522.²
4. Lines 282 ff: Lord Rose, Warden of the East and Middle

1. Cf. Brie; Skelton Studien.
 2. Letters and Papers III 2614.

Marches, is in the North. He was back South again by
October 24th, 1522.¹

5. Lines 269 ff. mention with some acrimony the truce of
September 11th 1522 made by Dacres and Albany.²

6. Line 1096. Wolsey has made himself Abbot of St. Albans
in commendam. The Bull for this was granted by Adrian
VI on November 8th, 1522.³

7. Other minor details all point to the end of 1522- the
reference to "Mutrell" (l. 375) i.e. Montrieul, which
was in the news at the time, and the protest throughout
against Wolsey's taxation towards the end of the year.⁴

8. A lower date is provided by the reference (l. 784) to
"Master Mewtis" the King's French secretary, who, it is
darkly hinted, has been privately killed for treason.
The patent for his successor, Brian Tuke, was issued on
March 15th 1523,⁵ and between this date and the October
or November of the previous year the poem was composed.
Such a reference to earlier events (as at l. 74 to "the
countryside at Callis" i.e. the 1521 embassy) is naturally
a cut back and is not - as has been sometimes held - of
the same date as the poem.⁶

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1. Letters and Papers III 2636
 2. Letters and Papers III 2717, 2723.
 3. Letters and Papers III 2658.
 4. Letters and Papers III 2707, 2706.
 5. Letters and Papers III 2894.
 6. E.g. J. M. Berdan l.c. P.M.L.A. 29.

Haec vates ille
De quo loquuntur mille,

is Skelton's introduction to the bitterest of all his attacks.

He is not alone, not a mere minor priest crossing swords with a powerful Cardinal, but a satiric poet of the people with all the characteristics of the type - the faults of railing and invective and the virtues of vigour and saeva indignatio. Why Come Ye

Nat to Court? is a fine piece of satire, unscrupulous, as satire so often is, in its charges, but quivering with indignation and a sense of justification that raises it above the purely personal

lampoon. Skelton's hatred of Wolsey was a profounder emotion

than the dislike behind his moral attack in Colin Cloute. Truth and rumour both provide material for abuse of the Cardinal.

Skelton aimed his blows with a savage barbarity that indicates how he enjoyed the attack, and his language becomes even more

than usually vigorous and direct. Every word hits its mark.

One is tempted to ask where it all came from? Satire like this

had not been written in England and would not be written for many

years. It is not the mediaeval English satire of the Piers Plowman tradition, and classical satire was still to come. Here

again perhaps Skelton is unwittingly in advance of his time.

There is nothing mediaeval in Why Come Ye Nat to Court?. The

vigour and directness is that of the Renaissance; but the con-

ception is Skelton's own.

Reason, complains the poet, is banished in the present age.

The past few years has been a period of; -

The ban - banketyng braynesse, For drede of the bochers dogge,
 With ryotyng rechelesse,
 Wolsey With gambaudyng thryftlesse,
 With spende and wast witlesse,
 Treatinge of truce restlesse,
 Prating for peace peacelesse;
 And in the Checker he them cheke;
 Only one man is responsible: oddis and beks,
 And bereth him there so stowte,
 For whyles he doth rule
 All is warse and warse. lorde

But to his sentence must accorde.
 We have made "a worthy truce", and our army returns "and never a
 Scotland is mishandled. Surrey is checked. Foreign affairs
 Scot slayne" though Surrey has conquered the French. But they
 go none too well. Skelton restrains himself no longer but
 have overshot us and bribed the Cardinal:

launches into the attack that gave the poem its title:

They shote all at one marke,
 At the Cardynals hat
 They shot all at that,

To the Kynges courts
 for the Cardinal in the "Chambre of Starres" rules everything -

The Kynges courts
 but can easily be corrupted. He breaks all the strict rules

But Hampton court
 against Simony and Fast Days and has even darker vices:

And Yorkes Place
 But at the naked stewes...
 I vnderstande how that

All 1 The sygne of the Cardynall Hat go there by the board:
 That inne is now shut up
 With, gup, hore, gup, now gup.....

Or for the lawe common
 Skelton turns again to the course of public events, so disappoint-

ing to a public kept in ignorance of the diplomacy behind them:

For those who disagree there are the Fleet and the Tower and the

Marche
 What here ye of the Scottes
 They make vs all sottes, subverted. Yet Wolsey is of lowly

and the recent moves of the Warden of the Marches seem no better:

He is What here ye of the lorde Dakers
 He maketh vs Jack Rakers.

Latin is suspect:

The other Warden is no better:

His latyne tonge doth hobbyll
 What here ye of the lorde Rose?
 Nothyng to purpose.

The barons are afraid to move "For drede of the bochers dogge",
Wolsey, who lords over everybody:

Thus royally he dothe deale
Vnder the Kynges brode seale;
And in the Checker he them cheks;
In the Star Chamber he noddis and beks,
And bereth him there so stowte,
That no man dare rowte,
Duke, erle, baron, nor lorde
But to his sentence must accorde.

Scotland is mishandled. Surrey is checked. Foreign affairs
go none too well. Skelton restrains himself no longer but
launches into the attack that gave the poem its title:

Why come ye not to court? -
To whyche courte?
To the Kynges courte
Or to Hampton court?
The Kynges courte
Shulde have the excellence
But Hampton court
Hath the preemynence
And Yorkes Place
With my lordes grace.....

All laws, legal and ecclesiastical, go there by the board:

Strawe for lawe canon
Or for the lawe common
Or for the lawe cyuyll!
It shall be as he wyll.

For those who disagree there are the Fleet and the Tower and the
Marshalsea. Even the King is subverted. Yet Wolsey is of lowly
origin - "his greasy genealogy" is Skelton's expressive phrase!
He is not even a doctor, but "a poor maister of arte" and his
Latin is suspect:

His latyne tonge doth hobbyll
He doth but cloute and cobbill
In Tullis faculte,

and but for the King's favour he would still be nothing. But now he rails "lyke Mahounde in a play" or puts off suitors even of the King, who ought to realise the danger:

It is a wonders case
That the Kynges grace
Is towards him so mynded,
And so farre blynded,

and illustrative tales are told from Patrarch and Gaguin, the French Historian and friend of Erasmus:

Christ kepe King Henry the Eyght
From treachery and dysceyght
And graunt him grace to know
The faucon from the crow.

Skelton then deals in a deliberately mystifying manner with the fate of Meautis, the King's French secretary, implying that he had earned his fate because of his treachery and wishing that everyone

Of his affynyte
Were gone as well as he!

Wolsey has exhausted the country with taxation and the money has gone abroad:

Now nothyng but pay, pay
With laughe and lay downe
Borowgh, cyte, and towne.

The state of England has been brought low. "Now all is out of

facion". Now Wolsey accuses even preachers:

He calleth the prechours dawis,
And of holy scriptures sawis
He counteth them for gygawis.

No preacher may speak "Of my lordis grace nor his wife" - a grave fault in a highly placed prelate, though Skelton is reputed

to have a "wife" himself.

The attack becomes more and more specific: Wolsey eats "pigges in Lent"; he has made himself Abbot of St. Albans; he abuses the Great Seal and his Legatine authority, he disregards the authority of Canterbury, he is afflicted with the pox. With this final fling the satire closes and Skelton justifies his attack with Juvenal's Quia difficile est satiram non scribere:

Blame Iuuinall, and blame nat me.

After a few Latin verses equally barbed against Wolsey Skelton concludes where he had begun:

Haec vates ille
De quo loquuntur mille.

The satire is one of the bitterest and most effective in English. There is no mediaeval allegory here - no attempt to conceal Wolsey as Holy Church or Lady Mede, nor is he concealed in the classical satire manner as Gracchus or even as Pontifex Maximus. Every blow is meant and every blow tells. The very indignation and exaggeration strengthen its value both as history and as literature. These were the feelings of the people of London at the time, indignant, bitter, and ready to catch at any slanderous attack to augment their hatred of the Cardinal. Why Come Ye Nat to Court? is historically important because it reflects so vividly the temper of London, and this faithful representation gives it much of its literary importance. As a mere personal attack, Why Come Ye Nat to Court? would be on a lower satirical plane. But it catches just the popular temper and expresses it

in the decisive terms that a London public would - and did - appreciate.

The pungent terms of Why Come Ye Nat to Court are Renaissance in their vernacular vigour and precision. There is a whole world and a whole civilisation between the "sugrit terminis aureat" of the Chaucerians, English and Scottish, and the stark but purposeful intensity of Skelton. The depth of his hatred gave direction to his style and meaning to his poetic vocabulary. Skelton is the poet of plain words rebelling against the colourful but all too often meaningless vocabulary of his predecessors as effectively (though not so explicitly) as Wordsworth did when he abandoned the poetic diction of the Eighteenth Century. Skelton's verse, as he himself ruefully admits, is rude. But it has life and vigour. All the intensity of the Renaissance, that so often overshot its mark and left later ages to achieve balance, all the boisterous abandon of vocabulary and thought that later appealed to the Elizabethan dramatists, go into the satires of Skelton to be debited against his blindness and his intense partiality. These faults are, however, personal. His virtues are essentially literary. If Skelton had seen the events of the day from a more impartial point of view, if he had halted to consider the rights and wrongs of the Scots and of Albany and Wolsey, we might have had a more balanced picture of his times, but the piquancy of his satire would have been lost for ever.

The development of the attack was as rapid as it was striking. A few years sufficed to turn a possible patron into the most dangerous and hated figure in England, and evolved from the general

satire of Colin Clout with its dark hints, its apologetic and hesitant references to current affairs, the cryptic but direct attack of Speke Parrot and the uncompromising fury of Why Come Ye Nat to Court?. None of these poems were printed in the lifetime of either Skelton or the Cardinal. But for a parish priest to circulate Why Come Ye Nat to Court? even in manuscript must have required courage of no mean order and a passionate belief in the justice of the accusations.

As literature perhaps Why Come Ye Nat to Court? is the best of them. It has all the elements of good satire - unity of object, precision of attack, intensity, sincerity, and that clarity so characteristic of the Renaissance and so seldom present in the tangled obscurities of mediaeval allegory. Skelton hit hard because visualised clearly. He has no subtlety and no finesse. Atticus and Sporus, Zimri and Donne's Courtier are alike beyond his range. But he could produce excellent hammer strokes, and his indignation raised his satire above the mere railing of, for example, Marston. All the time he used his language with a sense of the value of his words. One seldom feels, as one does with Hawes and Barclay, that the language is running away with the matter. Skelton's line-groups in a late poem like Why Come Ye Nat to Court? often run into blocks of a dozen or more riming lines; but even in the longest of these groups there is an essential element of control - they do not tail away weakly into expletives and similar mediaeval padding, but continue expressive and succinct till a fresh wave catches the verse and carries the

attack a stage further forward. Classical satire always excepted, there is nothing so successful till Hudibras - and against Butler Skelton scores both on language and on sincerity.

Skelton's association with the noble family of Howards meant that he was in daily touch with the politics of the day, and his ready pen lent to the service of his monarch and his patron. His steady criticisms of Henry VIII and his more personal regard for both Henry and Elizabeth the first resulted in a series of political poems in which the occasional scold and the vigorous vernacular poet signally distinguished himself. Skelton's patriotism developed along the lines - *Wolsey* was the flag and hatred of his enemies. There is in the *Wolsey* poem no central figure, like Wolsey in the political subject, she could be a target for his attacks and a symbol of all he was fighting against. There is nothing of the gentler aspects of patriotism, no explicit love of the English countryside, no special content in her reality. But there is a fierce and constant prevalent attack on her enemies. Now the target is the Scots, now the French. The satire lays from James the Fourth of Scotland to Louis, the Most Christian King of France, from the Duke of Albany to the rough Scots of Galloway, and elsewhere by contrast the death of Henry himself and of his able lieutenants the Lord Surrey and Howard. The attack and the satire is mainly in English, the praise in more partly Latin. Sometimes the Latin and English

CHAPTER TEN.POETRY and POLITICS.

Skelton's association with the court and the noble family of Howards meant that he was in close touch with the politics of the day, and his ready pen leapt to the service of his monarch and his patron. His sturdy patriotism for England and his more personal regard for both Henry the Eighth and his father resulted in a series of political poems in which the classical scholar and the vigorous vernacular poet strangely alternate. Skelton's patriotism developed along two lines - admiration of the King and hatred of his enemies. There is in the political poems no central figure, like Wolsey in the religious satires, who could be a target for his attacks and a symbol of all he was fighting against. There is nothing of the gentler aspects of patriotism, no explicit love of the English countryside, no special delight in her reality. But there is a fierce and sometimes irreverent attack on her enemies. Now the target is the Scots, now the French. The satire plays from James the Fourth of Scotland to Louis, the Most Christian King of France, from the Duke of Albany to the rough Scots of Galloway, and elevates by contrast the deeds of Henry himself and of his able lieutenants the Lord Surrey and Howard. The attack and the satire is mainly in English, the praise in more portly Latin. Sometimes the Latin and English

poems must have been written within a few days of each other, and the contrast is made all the stronger between the unemotional praises of the Latin elegiacs and the scornful denunciations of the English poems. Skelton's political poems are destructive, inspired by hatred rather than ^{by} constructive ideas, blindly prejudiced as so many of his poems are, but made all the more vital by the intensity of his hatred. He could hate a nation as heartily as he hated an individual, and the false Scots can rouse him to the same burning indignation as the arrogance of the Cardinal.

In these political poems lies the proof, if proof is required, that Skelton's poems were often circulated while they were still red-hot from the anvil. His work must have been often written at speed in the heat of the event - sometimes before he was fully aware of the truth - and rushed out to celebrate or comment on events still fresh in the public mind. His first ballad on Flodden was written and published within weeks (perhaps days) of the battle and a second revised version produced within another week or two, when it appeared that the details of the earlier poem were mainly rumours! At such periods Skelton appears to have composed in a fever of political excitement and hastened to be the first to condemn the enemy and congratulate the King.

The political poems mainly cluster round the years 1513 and 1523-4, the years in which Henry had most to fear from a Scottish invasion. But even earlier than this Skelton showed

his private hatred of the Scots in his Epitaphium in Henricum Septimum (which he dates 1512) where Henry VII is the great Achilles of whom the Scottish King is in terror:

Nobilis Achises, armis metuendus Atrides
Hic erat; hunc Cottus rex timuit Jacobus,

Treasurer of England, and in which he praises Henry for keeping the French in awe and increasing his treasury. After the defeat of Flodden Skelton turned back grimly to this Epitaph and added four lines on the death of James "Qui sua fata luit", well pleased that his comment had turned out to be a prophecy. In another of his Latin poems, the Eulogium pro Suorum temporum conditione (1511-12) which is half praise of the dead Henry VII and half a eulogy on Henry VIII. One incident in Skelton is alive to the danger from abroad:

Undique bella fremunt nunc, undique proelia surgunt;
Noter honor solus, filius, ecce suus!

He looks to Henry to protect England - peacefully if possible:
Sors tamen est versanda diu, sors ultima belli.

When the war did begin Skelton has thoughts for nothing but victory and the domination of Henry.

Dulce meum decus, et sola Britanna salus.

The story of Flodden is well known and only a brief summary of the leading events need be given. When Henry VIII decided on November 17th, 1511, to support the Holy League, Aragon, Venice, and the Pope, and to go to war against France he fully realised the danger of a Scottish invasion, but he invaded France in 1513 and settled down to the siege of Thérouanne, which capitulated on August 22. In the meantime Louis XII had been negotiating

with James IV of Scotland inviting him to attack England; James after some deliberation declared war and crossed the Tweed on the very day Théroutenne fell. The campaign was short lived. James besieged Norham Castle and captured it while Surrey, the Lord Treasurer of England, hastened northwards to defend the Border. On September 9th the two armies met at Flodden, and by evening the King and most of the Scottish nobility lay dead on the field. News of the victory spread to England immediately, though the details were garbled or unknown. Rumour had it that James escaped, but in a few days the truth began to filter through, and Henry's triumph was complete.

One incident in the tangle of intrigues angered Skelton above all. While Henry was at Théroutenne he received a letter from the King of Scots complaining of Henry's invasion of France and desiring him "to desiste fra further invasion and utter destruction of our brother and Cousing the mast Christan Kyng". Henry replied in protest that James had been merely lying in wait for Henry's departure, that England was ready for him, and that he had better remember the example of the King of Navarre "who is a Kyng withoute a realme, and so the Frenche Kynge peacably suffereth hym to continue, whereunto goode regard would be taken".

Skelton rushed into print to celebrate the victory of Flodden with A Ballade of Scottyshe Kynge, which was printed by Richard

1. Cf. M. Wood's Flodden Papers S.H.S. 1933 (introduction lxv) and p. 79-83.

Fawkes in 1513. Throughout the poem the King of Scotland is jeered at in the present tense as if he were still alive. A few days after its publication the King's body was found, and more details of the battle came through, especially of the parts played by Surrey and Howard. Skelton recast the whole poem in VIII at Thérouanne. He cast the poem in the past tense, added further references to the White Lion (the crest of Surrey, his patron), tacked on an introduction and a final defence of the Ballad and produced this - Skelton Laureate against the Scottes - towards the end of the year.

The earliest poem of the Flodden group is in Latin, the Chorus de Dis super Triumphali Victoria contra Gallos, in which Skelton celebrates the victory at Thérouanne on August 22. The sixteen lines of Latin have all the air of being dashed off on the receipt of the news. Henry is hailed as victor:

Salve festa dies, toto memorabilis aevo
Qua rex Henricus Gallica bella premit.

The pride of the French nobles is fallen. But the British are magnanimous to the defeated. The poem closes with the praise of the banner of St. George:

Hoc insigne bonum, divino numine gestum
Anglica gens referat semper, ovansque canat.

The Chorus de Dis contra Gallos is simply a complimentary Latin ode, with the victorious Henry appearing as Validissimus Hector.

There is nothing in it that could not be done equally well by Bernard André or any other court poet, or better by Erasmus.

The Ballade of the Scottish King is different. Here the vernacular is used with Skelton's fierce vigour, set to a swinging



couplet rhythm:

King Jamy, Jemy your Joye is all go
 Ye sommoned our Kynge, why dyde ye so!
 To you nothyng it dyde accorde
 To sommon our Kynge, your soverayne lorde,

and the King of Scots is taunted for the letter he sent to Henry VIII at Thérrouanne. He ought to have honoured Henry before the King of France. The defeat of Flodden is but the vengeance for James' part in his father's death:

Through your counseyle your fader was slayne
 Wherefore I fere ye wyll suffre payne.

The Scots have proved traitors to Henry:

Ye be bound tenauntes to his estate
 Give up your game, ye playe chekmate,

and the King of Scots is now a prisoner (so ran the earlier rumour):

For to the castell of Norham
 I understende to soone ye cam.
 For a prysoner there now ye be
 Either to the devyce or the trinitee.
 Thanked be saynte George our ladyes knyght
 (text untrue)
 Your pryde is past, adwe good nyght!

James had attacked England in Henry's absence, but he was "beten with his own rod". Let him remember - and here Skelton echoes, surely consciously, the words of Henry himself - the example of the King of Navarre:

Of the Kynge of Naverne ye may take hede
 How unfortunately he doth now spede;
 In double welles now he dooth dreme
 That is a Kynge without a realme.

But the Earl of Surrey and his son Lord Howard, the Lord High Admiral, have humbled him:

The noble erle the whyte Lyon

London 1832.

2. Cf. Letters and Papers, Volume I 442.

3. Cf. Letters and Papers, I 452.

Your pompe and pryde hath layde adowne
 His sone the Lorde Admyrall is full good
 His swerde hath bathed in the Scottes blode.
 God save Kynge Henry and his lordes all
 And sende the Frensshe Kynge suche an other fall!

"Amen for saynt charyte", concludes the four page quarto "And God save noble Kynge Henry the VIII".¹ Skelton liked neither Scotsmen nor the King of Scots.

The Ballade of the Scottyshe King has all the signs of a popular poem. For the court Bernard André wrote a Latin poem celebrating the victory.² But Skelton was not to be outdone even in court verses. He turned back to his Epitaph on Henry VII of the previous year and added an envoi:

Vel mage, si placeat, hunc timuit Jacobus,
 Scottorum dominus, qui sua fata luit;
 Quem Leo Candidior Rubeum necat ence Leonem
 Et jacet usque modo non tumulatus humo.

The Leo Candidior is Surrey. The rubeum Leonem is the Lion Gules of the Scottish Arms. The Envoi must have been written shortly after the Ballad, because Skelton is now aware of the death of James - but his body is not yet buried. James' attack had automatically excommunicated him under an older treaty, and it was not till the 29th November that Leo X authorised the burial.³ This fixes the date of the envoi within fairly close limits.

A mere envoi to a year-old epitaph was obviously insufficient and no special compliment to the reigning monarch. Skelton, who

1. A Ballad of the Scottysse Kynge printed Richard Fawkes, London 1513. Capitals and punctuation modernised, and some misprints corrected. The text is reproduced by J. Aston, London 1882.

2. Cf. Letters and Papers, Volume I 4443.

3. Cf. Letters & Papers, I. 4582.

de Dis, it was out of date. Yet he was loth to write off such excellent poetic capital. With considerable ingenuity he revised the Ballad, cut out the erroneous references to James, recast the whole poem in the past tense, gave fuller credit to the "White Lion", and enlarged the whole poem to more than double the original length to make Skelton Laureate against the Scottes. This is the only example of his work of which two versions are extant, and some interesting light is thrown on his workmanship. We see Skelton resolutely clinging to his good lines, carefully saving them from loss by transposing them to other parts of the poem if the original place or sense were unsuitable.

Against the Scottes is even more bitter than the Ballad, and includes a good deal more of general satire on the whole nation. The Scots are all traitors and even yet they are so proud they will not admit defeat:

That is a trew
 As black is blew
 And grene is gray
 Whatever they say
 Jemmy is ded
 And closed in led,
 That was theyr owne Kynge;
 Fy on that wynnyng!
 At Flodden hyllys
 Our bowys, our byllys,
 Slewe all the floure
 Of theyr honour.

The poem continues with an attack on James' "summoning" of Henry (burgh Castle) and pours scorn on his pretensions in verses of startling vigour:

Your valth, your joy, your sport, your play,
 Ye may be lorde of Locrian -
 Christ sence you with a frying pan! -
 Of Edingborow and of Saint Ionis towne;
 Adieu, syr sumner, cast off youre crowne!

In mock-heroic mood Skelton drops back for a few lines into parody of the mediaeval manner:

Continually I shall remember
 The mery moneth of September,
 With the IX daye of the same,
 For then began our myrth and game;
 So that now I have devysed,
 And in my mind comprysed,
 Of the prowde Scot, Kynge Jemmy,
 To write some lyttle tragedy,

and still keeping up the mock-mediaeval tone he calls for help from Melpomene to write the tragedy of the Scots, and from Thalia:

A medley to make of myrth with sadnes,
 The hartes of England to comfort with gladnes,

and the poem passes immediately into

Kynge Jamy, Jemmy, Jocky my jo
 Ye summond our Kynge, - why dyd ye so?

and then to the recast of the rest of the Ballade from which it differs only in details. But the details are significant. There is a new heraldic passage:

The Whyte Lyon, there rampaunt of moode,
 He ragyd and rent out your hart bloode;
 He the Whyte, and ye the Red,
 The Whyte there slew the Red starke ded,

which may well be a reference to the incorporation of the demi-lion gules of the King of Scots into the arms of Surrey, granted on February 1st of the following year (1514). James had collected guns for the battle (including "the Seven Sisters" from Edinburgh Castle) which led to the following addition:

Your welth, your joy, your sport, your play,
 Your bragyng bost, your royal aray,
 Your beard so brym as bore at bay,
 Your Seven Systems, that gun so gay,
 All have ye lost and cast away,

and there is a reference to the Pope's excommunication. The poem continues substantially as the Ballad to the end.

Even this was not the close of the Flodden group. All Skelton's readers were not equally pleased, and some, who could read the dignified but colourless Latin verses of the Chorus de Dis with approbation, were offended by the racy abuse of Against the Scottes. They remembered that James was the brother-in-law of King Henry and protested. It was not the first time his originality had displeased the more conservative, and Skelton promptly repeated his tactics against the earlier critics of Philip Sparow, with an appendix addressed "Unto Divers People that remorde this Rymynge agaynst the Scot Jemmy". He is compelled to reply to his critics who say his verse is merely abuse without justification:

- Reprehending
And venomously stingynge
Rebukynge and remordyng,
And nothing according.

They plead the close relationship of the two Kings, but Skelton claims that James was merely a traitor, who died excommunicated by the Church:

He was a recrayd knyght
A subtyll sysmatyke,
Ryght nere an heretyke
Of grace out of the state
And died excommunicate.

Skelton plays a safe card. The excommunication of the Church (though it made James neither "schismatic" nor "heretic") no one could lightly criticise, and the tables are neatly turned on the

critics. Even their loyalty is made suspect:

He skantly loueth our Kyngge
That grudgeth at that thyng;
That cast such ouerthwartes
Percase haue hollow hartes.

The argument is lifted adroitly on to major issues. Behind the double bulwark of King and Church Skelton darkly hints at the capital crimes of treason and heresy and leaves his critics suspect of the gravest intentions against the temporal and spiritual authorities, while he solemnly reproves them for the offence of criticising his verses! We can almost see his sardonic grin.

The Flodden group hardly shows Skelton's best poetry, but it is of considerable importance in a study of his verse. The poems can be dated accurately often within a week, one of them to an actual day. They reveal him living the life of a parish priest at Diss, supervising a thanksgiving service for the victory of Flodden, dashing off a hasty Ballad for immediate publication, then turning without effort to formal Latin court and complimentary verses. We can see him in the act of revising his poetry and note the changes he made and the lines he retained; we can even reconstruct the criticism of his opponents and note the sturdy independence of his reply and his immediate appeal to orthodoxy - a trait that has occurred before. In the verse of these months, from August to November of 1513, we can see him commenting freely on contemporary events, almost stand behind his shoulder as he writes. There are not many poets of so early a date who reveal so much of themselves so unconsciously through their verses.

During the next ten years Skelton came more and more to deal with contemporary affairs. But he concentrated in his year public satires on the Church and attacked Cardinal Wolsey with increasing violence and scorn.¹ No sooner had he completed in 1523 the final and most bitter of these attacks, Why Come Ye not to Court? than the course of public affairs turned his pen once more against the perfidious Scots. Skelton's hatred of the Scots had grown no less in the interval. The purely personal satire against Dundas, where

Skelton Laureat
After this rate
Defendeth with his pen
All Englysh men
Agayn Dundas
That Scottishe asse,

reveals a bitterness that is part of the national attitude towards Scotland rather than any merely personal feeling. When, in 1521, there were rumours that the widow of James IV, now married to the Earl of Angus, was suing the Pope for a divorce and the election of James V as King of Scotland in July finished simultaneously intriguing with the Duke of Albany, who was warmly supported by the court of France, the whole 1513 situation seemed to be repeated.

Events moved speedily enough. England declared war on France in 1522, and by August Surrey (the son of the victor of Flodden) was sacking Northern France. Albany had been made governor of Scotland and in spite of Henry's protest was supported by Margaret and The Estates of Scotland. Towards the end of 1522 he invaded England and besieged Carlisle but was ingeniously inveigled into a truce by Dacres, the Warden of the West

1. Cf. Chapter 9.

marches, on the 11th September, 1522. On the 27th October he sailed again for France. The campaign opened the following year with the appointment on February 26th 1523 of Surrey as lieutenant-general, and he spent the months from April to September in devastating the Scottish border, burning whatever castle or abbey he could lay hands on.

Albany gave the English fleet the slip, collected an army of Scots and French and started out on the 22nd October for Carlisle but diverted his invasion to besiege Wark Castle, which was held by Sir William Lisle and a hundred defenders. Surrey was at Alnwick within easy reach. The other generals were close at hand, Darcy at Bamburgh, Dacres at Carlisle. Surrey concentrated the English forces towards Wark Castle where Sir William Lisle was still holding out, and at his approach the Scottish forces crumpled up. It was Albany's second chance and he had again failed. He sailed for France in the early summer of 1524 and the election of James V as King of Scotland in July finished his pretensions for ever.

England went mad with delight. Scotland had been kept at bay once again, and the Howards had won new laurels. Here was opportunity enough for Skelton, both for satire and for praise. He had spent part of 1523 actually staying with the Howards, for the Garlande of Laurell, written and published in that year, was composed at Sheriff Hutton Castle (near York), the most northerly seat of the family. But while the Garlande of Laurell is largely a graceful lyrical compliment to the Howard ladies, Skelton

seized on the defeat of Albany to praise once again the deeds of the White Lion in his poem of late 1523 or early 1524, How the Douty Duke of Albany, lyke a cowarde knyght, ran away shamefully, with a Hundred Thousand Tratlande Scottes and faint harted Frenchmen, beside the Water of Twede. The poem shifts back to a

Skelton opens in triumph:

Reioyse, Englande
 And understande
 These tidinges newe,
 Which be as trewe
 As the gospell;
 This Duke so fell
 Of Albany
 So cowardly,
 With all his hoost
 Of the Scottyshe coost,
 For all theyr boost,
 Fledde lyke a beest,
 Wherefore to ieste
 Is my delyght.

Skelton goes on to jeer at the Scots and their defeat "at the Castell of Warke" and compliments the defender Sir William Lisle: That valiaunt knyght Puite you to flyght; By his valyaunce Two Thousand of Fraunce.....

while the Duke of Albany ran off on the news of Surrey's arrival:

When he herde tell
 That my lorde amrell (admiral)
 Was comyng downe.....

The poem then turns to the Duke of Albany himself and accuses him of aspiring to the throne of Scotland by killing the young King:

My lord amrell
 And set his crowne
 On your owne heed
 When he was deed

Such trechery
 And traytory
 Is all your cast;
 Thus ye have compast
 With the Frenche Kyng,

and Skelton, as ever, goes on to praise Henry VIII who has outwitted both Albany and Francis. The poem shifts back to a savage attack on the false Scots:

False and false agayne,
 Neuer true nor playn,
 But flery, flatter, and fayne
 And euer to remayne
 In wretched beggary
 And maungy misery
 In lousy lothsumnesse
 And scabbed scorffynesse

.....
 Nacion moost in hate
 Proude and poore of state,
 Twyt, Scot go keep they den
 Mell nat with Englyshe men,

and after a catalogue of threats back goes the poem to the Duke of Albany who is attacked in the manner and the language of a flyting. The Scots are a mere rabble - let them creep into their caves and never dare to attack England again. The flyting of the Duke begins again:

Syr Duke, nay, syr ducke,
 Syr drake of the lake, sir ducke
 Of the Donghyll, for small lucke
 Ye haue in feates of warre:
 Ye make nought, but ye marre,

and to underline the contrast he draws a companion portrait of the Earl of Surrey:

My lord amrell
 Of chiuallry the wele,
 Of knyghthode the floure
 In euery marciall shoure.

Albany is further blamed for his cowardice with another page of abuse:

Nor durst nat crak a worde
 Nor durst nat drawe his swerde
 Agaynst the Lyon White
 But ran away quyte.
 He ran away by nyght,
 In the owle flyght,
 Lyke a cowarde knyght.
 Aduē, cowarde, adue
 Fals knyght, and mooste untrue!
 I render the, fals rebelle,
 To the flingande fende of helle.

Skelton continues on the plot of Albany and Francis against "most royal Harry". But the plot has come to nothing.

Are ye not frantyke madde,
 And wretchedly bestadde,
 To rayle agaynst his grace,
 That shall bring you full bace.

After more abuse of both Albany and Francis, the poem goes on to praise the virtues of Henry in despite of his French rival, of whom he was more than a little jealous. Henry is as strong as Hercules, as wise as Solomon, as handsome as Absalom, as loyal as Hector and so the comparisons extend to Scipio, Ptolemy and the Maccabees. His virtues are numberless, and Skelton lists a few of them in characteristic fashion:

His nobilyte,
 His magnanymite,
 His animosite,
 His frugalite,
 His liberalite,
 His affabilite,
 His humanyte,

and so on through a round dozen. But this rude vernacular verse is hardly the dignified Latin of the Eulogy of his own Times,

and Skelton puts forward a courageous defence for addressing the King in his direct manner and not in the style of the average court poet:

What though my stile be rude?
 With trouthe it is ennewde:
 Trouth ought to be rescude,
 Trouthe should nat be subdude.

Henry is a noble King; he inspires his generals by his own deeds of arms; his subjects are loyal. How could the plotters dare to attack such a monarch? The poet closes with an envoi in which Skelton again defends the rudeness of his style because his attack is grounded upon truth. There is a short envoi to the Cardinal; but of that elsewhere.

The main theme of these political satires is the bitter attack on England's enemies and intense loyalty to the throne. Skelton's early relationship with Henry seems to have left him with a considerable personal admiration for the King that cannot be credited simply to courtly adulation. Perhaps not even a King would have been altogether safe from Skelton's satire. His praise sounds altogether sincere. In these satires religious conviction has given way to an intense patriotism that brings Skelton closely in touch with the current feeling of his day. The anger of these poems is often the anger of relief. The danger of the Scots had twice been averted - and it was a very real danger. Skelton - and England - regarded the diplomacy of the "false Scots" with genuine suspicion and their Border warfare with very real alarm. They were an alien race plotting

with a foreign King against a monarchy which had done everything to establish England's pre-eminent position in European politics. Boisterous jubilation over a fallen enemy may not always be decorous, but it is very human, and Skelton in these railing attacks on Scotland and France reveals the real feeling of England after Flodden and the defeat of Albany. They spelt tragedy for Scotland, but for England a period of joyful recovery. In the vernacular satire of Skelton, rather than in his Latin poems on the victories, can be found, clearer than in official report or documented account, the reaction of England to the campaign. But while his sentiments are those of the average Englishman, his relations with the victorious leaders were peculiarly personal. Amid all the satire and abuse of the Flodden and Albany poems, the portraits of Henry and of the Surreys, father and son, invited admiration and praise from the contemporary reader. Not every poet was so fortunate in his patron's deeds of prowess. Skelton had no need to spin praises from nothing.

The Latin poems were probably circulated at first only in the court. All three of the Latin Flodden group - the Epitaphium in Henricum Septimum and the Chorus de Dis against both Scots and French are signed by Skelton "regius orator". Whatever was the official significance of this title, it is clear that Skelton regarded himself as the poet specially attached to the King, and so "orator regius" is used appropriately of the author of these mainly court poems.

The English poems are more popular and were designed for

public circulation - The Ballade of the Scotty she King for immediate circulation - and in these Skelton designates himself merely poet laureate, without mention of his more courtly function. The difference in tone is also due to a difference in audience, and it becomes still more certain that Skelton in these vernacular satires was expressing popular sentiments and expected ~~to~~ ^{poems} to become known among the rank and file of Englishmen as well as in the more educated circles of the court.

On the subject of Skelton's position at court the records are curiously silent. No trace of any payment made to him has yet been discovered, though his contemporaries Hawes and Barclay and his fellow-tutor Bernard André all occur in the King's accounts. ***** Skelton had two periods at court in each of which he served in different capacities, and the character which he presented to the outside world altered radically in the interval between his tutorship under Henry VII and his less official but privileged position of "orator regius" under Henry VIII. In the court of the earlier Henry he was a scholar and only occasionally a poet, accepting the conventions of his post and of the society in which he moved. The Bowge of Courte was the manifesto of his rebellion and the retreat to Diss the result. On the accession of Henry VIII and the return of the poet to court, the position of Skelton was that of a free-lance. He was no Orator of the Chamber as Hawes had been, but a poet, to whom the King granted a title and liberty of speech. From the previous reign he had inherited an official costume of which he was inordinately proud. The Cambridge entry of 1604-5 mentions the "habitus" of which Skelton boasts in the Garnesche

poems:

CHAPTER ELEVEN

What syllyth thú, reborn, us to the world
 A kyng to me myn baby's nurse.

SKELTON AND THE COURT.

Your swerde ye swere, I vane,
 So tranchaunt
 Kall kyt bot The Minor Court Poems.
 Your foly is to grett
 The kynges coloure to throte.

As the Garnesche poems belong to the year 1510, it appears

that Skelton continued to be at court during the reign of Henry VIII, the period of the word Jailhouse who jeered at the variety that Skelton wrote his Golden Dole whose name implies I dare be sworn. In the court of the earlier Henry he was a scholar and only occasionally a poet, accepting the conventions of his post and of the society in which he moved. The Bowge of Courte was the manifesto of his rebellion and the retreat to Diss the result. On the accession of Henry VIII and the return of the poet to court, the position of Skelton was that of a free-lance. He was no Groom of the Chamber as Hawes had been, but a poet, to whom the King granted a title and liberty of speech. From the previous reign he had inherited an official costume of which he was inordinately proud. The Cambridge entry of 1504-5 mentions the "habitus" of which Skelton boasts in the Garnesche

poems:

What eylyth thé, rebawde, on me to raue?
A kyng to me myn habyte gauē.....

The colours of the habit were apparently white and green:

Your sworde ye swere, I wene,
So tranchaunt and so kene
Xall kyt both wyght and grene:
Your foly is to grett
The kynges colours to threte.

As the Garnesche poems belong to the years 1513-14, it appears that Skelton continued to wear this official uniform during the reign of Henry VIII, who perhaps suggested the addition to it of the word Calliope embroidered in letters of gold. Against those who jeered at the vanity that had accepted this final decoration Skelton wrote his Why were ye Calliope embradred in letters of Golde?

Whose name enrolde
With silke and golde
I dare be bolde
Thus for to were.

Calliope is regent "of poetes al" and he is proud to wear her token. The Calliope poem must be dated fairly late in the court career of the poet as he complains in the Latin appendix of approaching old age:

Quamquam conficior senio marcescoque sensim.

To this dignity Henry added the title of "orator Regius", with which Skelton proudly signs all the court poems after the accession. The position seems to have been that of an unofficial poet laureate, in the modern sense of the word and not the "poeta laureatus" University honour that Skelton boasts of so frequently. As orator

Regius he was granted considerable latitude to criticise and to admonish. The major result of this freedom is Magnyfycence, and its outspoken assurance and critical spirit are as much a symbol of Skelton's secure position under Henry VIII as the disgust with court life of The Bowge of Courte is the result of his later relationships with Henry VII. These two poems, however, are not his only reflections on life at court. A group of minor court poems has survived, which falls into the two well-marked types of satire on his opponents and rivals, and commendations of his royal patrons.

The Epitaph on Henry VII is in a similar strain, and was designed as verses for the tomb in Westminster Abbey:

Septimus Henricus mole sub hac tegitur.

The commendations were all written in the reign of Henry VIII. Skelton's eulogies of Henry VII belong to the period after his death and are expressions of conventional patriotism rather than of personal admiration. When Henry VIII came to the throne, Skelton greeted the new monarch in The Rose both White and Rede (1509): Justice, which has been absent for the past hundred years, will now come down from the starry sky and Right shall drive away the wolves and foxes (like Dudley and Empson) who have brought England to woe:

Therfor no more they shall
The commonns ouerbase,
That wont wer ouer all
Bothe lorde and knight to face;
ffor now the yeris of grace
And welthe ar com agayne
That maketh England faine.

The praise of Henry VIII was continued in a Latin poem written

temporum

about 1512. The Eulogium pro suorum Tempore Conditione after some formal praise of:

Septimus Henricus, Britonum memorabilis heros,
proceeds to the greater glory of:

Noster honor solus, filius, ecce, suus!

Henry VIII becomes in turn "omne decus nostrum", "Spes unica tantum", "sola Britanna salus"; the fortunes of the land depend upon him:

Summa rei nostrae remanet, celeberrime princeps,
In te praecipuo, qui modo sceptrum geris.

The Epitaph on Henry VII is in a similar strain, and was designed as verses for the tomb in Westminster Abbey:

Septimus Henricus mole sub hac tegitur.

Henry VII is Anchises and Atrides, feared by the Scots and the French. Skelton defends him against the charge of hoarding wealth - his wealth has proved England's salvation:

Immensas sibi divitias cumulasse quid horres?
Ni cumulasset opes, forte, Britanne, lues.
Urgentes casus tacita si mente volutes,
Vix tibi sufficeret aurea ripa Tagi.

The poem closes by calling all readers to pray for the soul of the king. The Epitaph is a more formal piece than the Eulogy; and lacks the air of enthusiasm with which Skelton greeted the new reign.

This group of Latin court-pieces is completed by The Elegy on the Countess of Derby. Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby, and mother of Henry VII, had died in 1509. Skelton's poem, which he dates 1516, is a companion epitaph to that on

her son: *satirical language than any real personal animosity.*

Hac sub mole latet regis celeberrima mater. *ly personal.*
 Skelton compares her with the pious heroines of antiquity. She had been a patron of the arts and of Skelton himself, and with a fine disregard of her sex, he mourns her as a lost "Maecenas":

*Plura referre piget, calamus torpore rigescit,
 Dormit Maecenas, negligitur probitas.*

Lord, how Perkin is proud of his pohen!
 He concludes the verses with a curious threat against any who dare to "tear or snatch away" the epitaph, which suggests that and Perkin Warbeck, the second of the spurious claimants to Henry's crown, appeared some years later. The "pohen" of whom he is so proud is the person who became his

*Qui lacerat, violatve, rapit praesens epitoma,
 Hunc laceretque voret Cerberus absque mora!*

his These commendations have an air of formality that is entirely lacking in Skelton's other poems written for the court. The court-satires vary in type from purely private verses tossed off under the impulse of a sudden annoyance to "official" flytings undertaken at the bidding of the King himself. Three sets of such court-satires survive, an early satire against a court musician of Henry VII's time, a group of one-sided "flytings" against a gentleman-usher of Henry VIII's court, and a less definitely datable poem against some mysterious adversary who had spread slanders against Skelton and against whom he storms with just indignation and with bitter regret that his adversary is nameless. Whether they are known or unknown, Skelton attacks his opponents with the hearty vigour of one very sure of his position in the court of both monarchs, and in the case of the flytings against Garnesche with more of a literary show of

coarse satirical language than any real personal animosity.

The earliest of these court satires was purely personal.

Agaynste a Comely Coystrowne is a defence of the poet against the criticisms of a court musician, which can be ascribed from a reference in the third verse to the reign of Henry VII:

Curyowsly he can both counter and knak
Of Martyn Swart and all hys mery men.
Lord, how Perkyn is proud of hys pohen!

Martin Swart was the leader of Lambert Simnel's invasion of 1487 and Perkin Warbeck, the second of the spurious claimants to Henry's crown, appeared some years later. The "pohen" of whom he is so proud may very well be the Lady Katherine Gordon who became his wife. This brings the poem down to 1495, to which year it probably belongs. It is a somewhat cryptic but intelligible court satire against "a comely coystrowne, that curyowsly chawntyd, and curryshly cowntred, and madly in hys musykkys mokkyshly made agaynste the Musys of polytyke poems and poettys matryculate". Skelton begins with an attack on "peevishness", the eighth deadly sin, and taunts his musical opponent with social

ambition:

Et violere sacrum desine, stulte, virus,
But, for in his gamut carp that he can,
So it Lo, Jak wold be a jentylman!

The opponent is aspiring too high. Search where he may he will find no authority to make

An holy water clarke a ruler of lordys.

For a few verses Skelton plays confidently with satirical puns on the terms of Tudor music:

He can not fynd it in rule nor in space;
 Hys solfyth is to haute, hys trybyll is to high;
 He braggyth of hys byrth, that borne was full bace;
 Hys musyk withoute mesure, to sharp is hys my. more forcibly

This upstart must be put in his place: inat Christopher Garnesche.

This For Jak wold be a jentylman, that late was a grome. thout
 Musician though he be, the lords and ladies who learn from him
 can sing neither prick-song nor plain, and Skelton warns him not
 to meddle again: several references to him are made in the Let-

tars A prouerbe of old, say well or be styll bring him into kny
 Ye are to vnhappy occasyons to fynde
 direct Vppon me to clater, or els to say yll. the poems it is ap-
 paren Now haue I shewyd you part of your proud mynde;
 paren Take thys in worth, the best is behynde. and incurred more

The piece is of little poetic value, but the versification is
 thoroughly competent even for such an early set of verses. and The -
 quarrel was closed with a Latin poem Contra alium cantitantem The
et organisantem asinum, qui impugnabat Skeltonida Pierium. Sar-
casmos - the trick of writing up an incident in both an English
 and a Latin version is quite a characteristic of Skelton; here
 the Latin verses take the more dignified form of a comparisonerry
 of music and poetry: ras, Syr Douglas and finally (a shrewd blow)

Syr T Ergo tuum studeas animo deponere fastum, nesche's elevation
 Et violare sacrum desine, stulte, virum.

to the knighthood in 1513 is being satirised.
 So it is often with Skelton's Latin poems. They express in
 The first poem answers the challenge of Garnesche, who has
 dignified conventional terms what his English expressed more
 been:

forcibly and naturally. The Latin lines are insipid beside
 Rudely revilyng me in the kynge's noble hall.

the English description of the musician:
 Skelton demands what authority Garnesche has to call him a knave.

Comely he clappyth a payre of clauycordys;
 He whystelyth so swetely, he makyth me to swete;

1. Helen Stearns. John Skelton and Garnesche M.L.R. 1938 314-5.

and His descant is dassed full of dyscordes;
A red angry man, but easy to intrete.

Your wynde scalyng shankes, your long lothy legges
The rude power of Skelton's vernacular is still more forcibly
demonstrated in the group of poems against Christopher Garnesche.
As a glede glownges, your ian-glyster as glasse,
This forms a flyting with one side left out - a Dunbar without
Your tethe teintyd with tawny; your sensly mawte doth passe,
a Kennedy - and it equals Dunbar's in extravagant and reckless
abuse. The Christopher Garnesche was a Gentleman-Usher in the court
of Henry VIII and several references to him are made in the Let-
ters and Papers of the period, none of which bring him into any
direct relationship with Skelton. But from the poems it is ap-
parent that he replied to Skelton's attacks and incurred more
torrential abuse from that indefatigable satirist. The four
satires are all subscribed "By the Kyngys most noble commandment" -
Henry not only sanctioned the flyting but even initiated it. The
The attack concludes with mysterious references to the new oppo-
poems belong to Skelton's period of court favour after his return
ment:
from Diss and can be assigned to the years 1513-1514. Such a
Ye grounde you vpon Godfrey, that gryssly gargon's face,
satirical emphasis is laid on Garnesche's knighthood - he is
Baile, baile, at yow botne, frentyke folys! follow on the
successively Syr Satrapas, Syr Tyrmagant, Syr Chrystyn, Syr Terry
Cum Garnesche, cum Godfrey, with as many as ye may!
of Trace, Syr Ferumbras, Syr Duglas and finally (a shrewd blow)
In the final stanza the two are derided:
Syr Thopas - that one is safe in assuming Garnesche's elevation
to the knighthood in 1513 is being satirised.

There The first poem answers the challenge of Garnesche, who has
been: Stephen Hawes, the poet of the Pastime of Pleasure. Hawes
was a Rudely revilyng me in the kynges noble hall. sher. The
Skelton demands what authority Garnesche has to call him a knave,

sure (1506) contains the comic character of Godfrey Gabeliva;
1. Helen Stearns. John Skelton and Garnesche M.L.N. 1928 314-6.

and proceeds to vigorous abuse: slight variant Gorbellyd God-

frey. Your wynde schakyn shankkes, your long lothy legges
 Crokyd as a camoke, and as a kowe calves,
 Bryngges yow out of fauyr with alle female teggys...
 I say, ye solem Sarson, alle blake ys your ble;
 As a glede glowynge, your ien glyster as glasse,
 Rowlynge in yower holow hede, vgly to see;
 Your tethe teintyd with tawny; your semely snowte doth passe,
 Howkyd as in a hawkys beke, lyke Syr Topyas.
 Boldly bend you to batell, and buske your selfe to saue:
 Challenge yourselfe for a fole, call me no more knaue.

Garnesche was not loth to reply. He sought for assistance in
 Household staff.

court, and Skelton's second poem is an attack on both his old
 and his new adversary. He addresses them in scornful language:

Ye hobble very homly before the kynges borde.
 The typical physical abuse of the flyting follows:

Lusty Garnesche, lyke a lowse, ye jet full lyke a jaspe
 As wytless as a wyldye goos.....

The attack concludes with mysterious references to the new oppo-
 nent: Garnesche considered his own beginnings?

Ye grounde yow vpon Godfrey, that grysly gargon's face,
 Your stondearde, Syr Olifranke, agenst me for to splay;
 Baile, baile, at yow bothe, frantyke folys! follow on the
 chase!

Cum Garnesche, cum Godfrey, with as many as ye may!

In the final stanza the two are derided:

Lytyll wit in your scrybys nolle
 That scrybblyd your fond scrolle.

There is every possibility that the so far unidentified opponent

was Stephen Hawes, the poet of the Pastime of Pleasure. Hawes

was a Groom of the Chamber, Garnesche a Gentleman-Usher. The

two may very well have come into contact. The Pastime of Plea-

sure (1506) contains the comic character of Godfrey Gobelive;

under the thin disguise of the slight variant Gorbellyd Godfrey, Skelton appears to be attacking his fellow-poet.¹ If this is so, Garnesche must have found the task of replying in verse too difficult and for assistance he turned to one of Garnesche's more abused members of the animal world - scorpion, bear, goat, serpent and warhound. The poem concludes with a hearty curse on both assailants: I rekyn yow in my rowillys... God sende you wale good spede, unken sowillys...

The first two poems had been in a variant of rime royal, with the rime royal scheme, but with four-stressed and heavily alliterated lines. The third poem is written in "Skeltonics".

It opens with a defence: yet of vs tweyne,

I am laureat, I am no lorelle
Lewdely your tyme ye spende,
My lyuyng to reprehende.

The current court scandal is repeated with relish - how Garnesche has Garnesche considered his own beginnings?

Whan ye were yonger of age,
Ye war a kechyn page, with lemans his success is small:
A dyshwasher, a dryuyll
In the pott your nose dedde sneuyll.

Altogether he is a "gresy knyght", and Skelton relates a tale of his unsavoury love affairs. The scribe "that scrybblyd your fond scroll" is no better - his verse has neither rime nor reason, and though:

The honor of England I lernyd to spelle
Ye wolde be callyd a maker... excelle.
Ye lernyd of sum py bakar.

How dare Garnesche attack one to whom the King granted such honour!

1. This identification was first suggested in T.L.S. were I. A. Gordon A Skelton Query.

The poem returns to the abuse of Garnesche:

Your skyn scabbyd and scuruy
Tawny, tannyd, and shuruy...
Men say ye wyll wax lowsy,
Drunkyn, drowpy, drowsy.

Garnesche becomes in turn the more abused members of the animal world - scorpion, boar, goat, serpent and marmoset. The poem

concludes with a hearty curse on both assailants:

I rekyn yow in my rowllys
For ij dronken sowllys...
God sende you wele good spede,
With Dominus vobiscum!

The fourth poem is set in swinging four-beat iambs:

Wyth, knaue, syr knaue, and knaue ageine!
To cal me knaue thou takyst gret payne:
The prowdest knaue yet of vs tweyne,
Within thy skyn he xall remayne...
Thou thynkest thyself Syr Pers de Brasy
Thy catyvys carkes cours and crasy.

The current court scandal is repeated with relish - how Garnesche

betrays his friends and consorts "with Lumbardes lemman" in

Fenchurch Street, but even with lemman his success is small:

Sche sware with her ye xulde nat dele
For ye war smery, lyke a sele,
And ye war herey, lyke a calfe;
Sche praid ye walke, on Goddes halfe!

Skelton defends his own character; he has been honoured by King and University and has taught the King in his youth:

The honor of England I lernyd to spelle
In dygnyte roialle that doth excelle.

How dare Garnesche attack one to whom the King granted such honour!

How dare he criticise a poet laureate! If the Latin satirists

were alive, Persius, Juvenal, Horace, and Martial:

They wolde thé wryght, all with one steuyn, staunch sup-
The follest slouen ondyr heuen.

Let Garnesche beware of presumptuous pride:

Presumptuous pride is all thyn hope
God garde thé, Garnesche, from the rope!

The poem concludes defiantly:

A reme of papyr wyll nat holde
Of thi lewdnes that may be tolde.

My study myght be better spynt
But for to serue the kynges entent,
Hys noble pleasure and comaundement.

The four poems against Garnesche show Skelton in one of his less serious moments. The satire has none of the fire of the Wolsey poems - whether it hit its mark or not was of little consequence. All that mattered was that the exaggerated abuse should raise a laugh when the poem was read to the court. Even the victim would not take the poem too seriously.

Only one other court-satire remains - Against Venemouse Tunges. This was a reply to his critics after the production of Magnyfycence in 1516 and has already been discussed in connection with the play.

The two types of verse which Skelton produced at court are not without significance. They reveal a man who is highly favoured by his monarch but who is regarded with some suspicion by the courtiers. The continual tone of self-defence throughout these satires cannot be ignored. Skelton is ever on his guard, to defend his character and his poetry. He never wearies of referring to his titles of poet laureate and orator regius, never fails to seize an opportunity of reminding his readers that he

had tutored the King and that the King is now his staunch supporter, honours of which he is jealously proud. In his complimentary poems to Henry he seldom forgets that the King was once his pupil. The Latin verses to him, even when the hyperboles are reduced to their real value, show a sense of unbounded admiration, while he does not shrink from admonishing him in the warnings of Magnyfycence and Speke Parrot and Colin Clowte.

There is in his poetry none of the supplications which his contemporary Dunbar addressed to James IV. Though they were both satirists of court life, a brief comparison of their verses reveals that Skelton was more intimate with court life and more secure in his position. Dunbar's court poems are expostulations from a man disappointed of preferment, Skelton's are satirical comments from one who moved with complete confidence in the society of the court. Skelton never had to beg for a benefice, as Dunbar did so vainly.

The court has done my curage cuill
 is Dunbar's embittered comment on his aspirations. Skelton remained for years in favour, in spite of the jealousy of other courtiers. When he did at length lose the protection of the King, it was because of the hostility of the Cardinal, then almost as great a power as Henry himself, and even the poet would have admitted that the hostility was not without reason.

use of the "Skeltonic" short line was dissipated by what followers he had in the Sixteenth Century. The "Skeltonic" became a byword for short-line doggerel, because the principles of its scansion

To may well. *Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Henry VIII, Skelton, Speke Parrot, Magnyfycence, Colin Clowte, I. David, 18*

CHAPTER TWELVE.

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF SKELTON.

Skelton's three hundred years as an oddity brought him at last into Disraeli's gallery of the Curiosities of Literature, from which inglorious scrap-heap he has been only recently rescued, not merely as an accepted poet but as a pattern and the father of a tradition. Greater poets like John Donne have emerged from obscurity after a period of neglect and misunderstanding, but the re-discovery of John Skelton must surely be a unique occurrence in the vicissitudes of English critical taste. Had he emerged as a forgotten poet considered worthy of study, the renewed interest would be as understandable as the revival of a seldom-staged Elizabethan drama. The contemporary interest in Skelton is not antiquarian, it is literary. Instead of a la wless, unmetrical, "stuttering" writer of doggerel, contemporary criticism has re-discovered in Skelton a poet of genuine merit, a satirist of pungent force, and a metrist of considerable originality and skill.

Skelton's originality as a metrist has never been fully appreciated or examined. The value of his discovery and extensive use of the "Skeltonic" short line was dissipated by what followers he had in the Sixteenth Century. The "Skeltonic" became a byword for short-line doggerel, because the principles of its scansion

1. The index reads: *Shoening, horns; silhouette; silk stockings; Silli; Skelton; Sneezing; snuff-boxes. Curiosities of literature. I. Disraeli. London, 1881.*

were at variance with the current Chaucerian-French syllabic metre. Various attempts have been made to discover an origin for the Skeltonic short line, without any realisation of its metrical characteristics. Lee derived it from French poetry, finding an analogous "jog-trot melody of five and six-syllable lines" in contemporary French verse. "Skelton", he considers, "was clearly practising a French tune".¹ Brie derived the line from the Latin hymns and quoted some unconvincing parallels.² Berdan cites the French short-line of Marot, the fatrasie, "analogous to the type produced by Skelton", and the Italian frattola, which Florio in 1611 defined as "skeltonical riming". He suggests a common origin in the accentual Latin of the Middle Ages.³ All of these arguments ignore the essentially English quality of Skelton's verse. Ramsay alone suggests a purely English origin and points out that many lines of Magnyfycence fall naturally into two halves, each one a "Skeltonic".⁴ The attempt to find a foreign origin for an essentially English metre has produced nothing but a series of contradictory suggestions, none of which can be conclusively proved.

Most investigators have fallen into the mistake of scanning the Skeltonic in trochees and iambs, allowing free substitution where the syllabic system momentarily broke down. Such an attempt

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1. Sir S. Lee The French Renaissance in England.
 2. Brie Skelton Studien.
 3. J.M. Berdan The Poetry of Skelton. Rom. Rev. 6.364 ff.
 4. H.L. Ramsay Introduction to Magnyfycence, which contains an excellent analysis of the metres of the play.

ignores the powerfully accentual character of the Skeltonic, and the alliteration which it so often affects:

He cryeth and he creaketh
 He pryeth and he peketh,
 He chydes and he chatters,
 He prates and he patters,
 He clytters and he clatters.

These lines may be scanned as three iambs:

He crýeth ánd he créketh.

But the stress on "and" is negligible and the alliteration gives the clue to the real scansion:

He crýeth and he créketh,
 He pryéth and he péketh.

The Skeltonic is the descendant of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative line through the alliterative revival of Middle English. The original four-stressed line has broken down into two short two-stressed lines, bound together by rime. The Skeltonic has normally two (occasionally three) powerful stresses and a group of unstressed syllables, the whole line containing a total length of three syllables and upwards. One page of Colyn Cloute¹ supplies all these variants:

(Three syllables)	Váriableness
(Four ")	Fýckell fálseness
(Five ")	Rúdely ráyne beaten
(Six ")	For though my ríme by rágged
(Seven ")	For, as fárré as I can sé
(Seven ")	It is wrónge with each degréé.

The metrical unit of these lines is neither the iamb nor the trochee nor any substitution for them. It is the heavily stressed

1. Dyce I, page 313.

foot followed by one, two or three unstressed syllables. Skelton developed this metre neither from Latin hymn nor from French nor Italian short-line but from the native rhythm into which English speech readily falls. The long list of English Romances cited in Phyllyp Sparowe is sufficient evidence of his extensive reading in accentual Middle English verse. Chaucer's contempt for the "rum, ram, ruff" of accentual English finds no echo in Skelton's ready acceptance of its colloquial and satirical force.

In the Fifteenth Century Chaucer's pentameter had been misunderstood through corruption of the text and the final loss of terminal syllabic -e. In the Sixteenth and subsequent centuries the strongly accentual metre of Skelton was similarly misunderstood because English poetry, after a belated revival of accentual verse in the Fifteenth Century, accepted once more the French system of regular syllabic stress. Not till the twentieth century were the principles of Skelton's metre recognised. The "invention" of Sprung Rhythm by Gerard Manley Hopkins at the end of the nineteenth century was simply a conscious return to the principles of accentual verse and less consciously a return to the Skeltonic. Hopkins' outline of the principles of "Sprung Rhythm" might be illustrated at every point from the lines of Colyn Cloute or Phyllyp Sparowe:

"Sprung Rhythm, as used in this book, is measured by feet of from one to four syllables, regularly, and for particular effects any number of weak or slack syllables may be used.

1. It has one stress, which falls on the only syllable, if there
2. is only one, or, if there are more, then scanning as above,
3. on the first, and so gives rise to four sorts of feet, a monosyllable and the so-called accentual Trochee, Dactyl, and

4. Author's Preface, P. 6.

all the First Paeon." ¹

"I had long had haunting my ear the echo of a new rhythm which now I realised on paper. To speak shortly, it consists in scanning by accents or stresses alone, without any account of the number of syllables, so that a foot may be one strong syllable or it may be many light and one strong. I do not say the idea is altogether new; there are many hints of it in music, in nursery rhymes and popular jingles, in the poets themselves..... No one has professedly used it and made it a principle throughout that I know of". ²

In his short-lined verse Hopkins wrote pure Skeltonics.

When Henry, heart-forsook,
Dropped eyes and dared not look.
Eh, how áll rúng!
Young dog, he did give tongue!
But Harry - in his hands he has flung
His tear-tricked cheeks of flame
For fond love and for shame. ³

Hopkins does not appear to have realised that he had been forestalled by Skelton - Piers Plowman he acknowledges and Greene was "the last writer who can be said to have recognised it". ⁴ But more recent poets who see in Hopkins one of the founders of post-war poetry have traced Sprung Rhythm to its source and recognise Skelton as one of the most powerful influences on contemporary verse. It is difficult to read the poetry of Robert Graves or the choruses of Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral without feeling in the background the rhythm of the Skeltonic. "In the Sixteenth Century", writes Graves, "John Skelton, in my opinion one of the three or four outstanding English poets, though reducing the

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1. Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins Ed. Robert Bridges Author's Preface, p.4.
 2. The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon. Ed. C. C. Abbot. P. 14.
 3. Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins "Brothers" No. 30 The accents are the poet's.
 4. Author's Preface, P. 6.

alliteration, adding rhyme, and even using the lineal arrangement of rhyme-royal, wrote in the native style as often as the continental." Graves uses the Skeltonic as one of his favourite metres and has paid in the measure an appropriate tribute to the older poet:

John Skelton

What could be dafter
Than John Skelton's laughter?
What sound more tenderly
Than his pretty poetry?

So where to rank old Skelton?

He was no monstrous Milton, beyond the Skeltonic.

Nor wrote no Paradise Lost,

So wondered at by most, metre in lyrical measures

Phrased so disdainfully,
Composed so painfully, from Macrytence.

He struck what Milton missed,

Lyb. Milling an English grist should it be.

I With homely turn and twist. me;

I He was English through and through,

With Not Greek, nor French, nor Jew,

I Though well their tongues he knew,

She The living and the dead: e.

Learned Erasmus said,

Hic, unum Britannicarum

Lumen et decus literarum.

But oh, Colin Clout!

How his pen flies about,

Skelton's poets does not cease with

Twiddling and turning,

his influence on and variety of his verse,

Scorching and burning,

and the nimble metres have been influential

Thrusting and thrumming!

factors in recent of W. H. Auden.

How it hurries with humming,

Skelton has a withers an opponent

Leaping and running,

with a few words Jest and grief mingle

At the tipsy-topsy Tunning
Of Mistress Eleanor Rumming!

How for poor Philip Sparrow
Was murdered at Carow,

How our hearts he does harrow!

Jest and grief mingle
In this jangle-jingle,

Be ye and your host

full of bragge and boast

1. Robert Graves Another Future for Poetry. London 1926.

1. Robert Graves Poems 1914-22 P. C.

His command of
 the delights of
 of a vernacular
 It is a w
 That can
 Within th
 while his comman
 is astonishing.
 logy" and
 Was heard,

For he will not stop
 To sweep nor mop,
 To prune nor prop,
 To cut each phrase up
 Like beef when we sup,
 Nor sip at each line
 As at brandy-wine,
 Or port when we dine.
 But angrily, wittily,
 Tenderly, prettily,
 Laughingly, learnedly,
 Sadly, madly,
 Helter-skelter John
 Rhymes serenely on,
 As English poets should.
 Old John, you do me good!⁴

Skelton's metrical virtuosity extends beyond the Skeltonic.
 His precise and assured manipulation of metre in lyrical measures
 is well illustrated in Lyberte's song from Magnyfycence.

Lyb. With, ye mary, syrs, thus sholde it be.
 I kyst her swete, and she kyssed me;
 I garde her gaspe, I garde her gle,
 With, daunce on the le, the le!
 I bassed that baby with harte so free;
 She is the bote of all my bale.

Skelton's attraction for modern poets does not cease with
 his influence on their metre. The speed and variety of his verse,
 and the nimble rapier stroke of his satire have been influential
 factors in recent verse, notably in the work of W. H. Auden.
 Skelton has a power of incisive abuse that withers an opponent
 with a few words:

Be ye and your hoost
 Full of bragge and boost
 And full of waste wynde.

1. Robert Graves Poems 1914-26 P. 6.

of unusual acumen and insight. From the "terris aureat" of
 His command of English, direct, central and sinuous, is one of
 the delights of his poetry. He can write with the pith and point
 of a vernacular proverb:

It is a wyly mous
 That can bylde his dwellinge-house
 Within the cattes eare,

while his command of powerful phrases - often enough abusive -
 is astonishing. "Rayn betyn beggers" and Wolsey's "gresy genea-
 logy" and

Was hedyd, drawen, and quartered
 And dyed stynkingly martred

are a striking contrast to the uninspired diction of his contem-
 poraries. Skelton was so comfortable in the English tongue that
 one can easily mistake for mere colloquialism the easy grace of
 his movement:

He wyll drynke vs so drye,
 And suck vs so nye,
 That men shall scantly
 Haue peny or halpeny.
 God saue his noble grace
 And graunt him a place
 Endlesse to dwell
 With the deuyll of hell!

This moves so like conversational English prose that one tends
 to underestimate the art behind it. It is Coleridge's "neutral
 style," the simple direct mode of Chaucer and Herbert. Skelton
 could write the English tongue with the control and precision
 of Swift. His poetry has many of the ^{athletic} virtues of Swift's prose.
 Opinion may vary whether this is the finest language for poetry,
 but that Skelton could write verse of such vernacular clarity
 at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century pre-supposes a mind
 such an original combination?

of unusual acumen and insight. From the "terminis aureat" of Fifteenth Century feudal poetry he turned to the lower linguistic strata unexplored by his contemporaries, and even to the present day he provides a pattern of individual and incisive speech.

Skelton was an innovator of insufficiently recognised but nevertheless profound originality, one of the greatest anti-Romantics in English verse, a hard-headed practical poet and a poetical realist. His limitations are easy to discover, the result of deliberately chosen restrictions rather than poetical blind spots. There is no Romance in his poetry, nothing ethereal or beyond the ordinary man's range of experience. But there is much in his verse that is profoundly serious and passionately thought out. The virtues of Skelton are those of sincerity - directness of approach and a continuous contact with reality:

What though my stile be rude?
With trouthe it is ennewde.
Trouth ought to be rescude,
Troushe should nat be subdude.

A few years after his death the flood-gates of Romance were thrown open, and no one can blame late Tudor or Jacobean poetry for ignoring such a resolute anti-Romantic. At the present day, however, the decay of Romanticism has brought a re-appreciation of the virtues of Skelton. He has much in his favour, powerful verse-satire, graceful lyric measures, originality of attack and incisive diction allied to a Shavian spirit of criticism and Rabelaisian powers of wit and vocabulary. How many poets can offer such an original combination?

Appendix A.

- 1506 Chronology of Skelton's Life and Works.
1507. Lamentatio Urbis
Norwicen.
Epitaph for Adam Uddersall
- c.1460. Birth year.
- 1479-80. "Skelton" in Cambridge
Grace Book A. A possible
reference.
1483. Edward the Fourth Elegy
- c.1485 Translations of Diodorus
Siculus and of Cicero
1486. The Palladium
1489. Skelton by now laureate
of Oxford and of Louv-
aine.
1511. Poem on Arthur's "Crea-
tion" (Latin)
Two Poems on Death of
Earl of Northumberland
1490. Caxton's reference; Skel-
ton by now tutor to the
Princes.
1512. Mistress Anne group of
lyrics about here.
1493. Admitted laureate at
Cambridge.
1494. Verses to Henry as Duke
of York. (Latin)
1495. Entertained by the Univ-
ersity of Cambridge.
- 1495-6. Against a Comely Coy-
strowne. Latin verses
appended to that poem.
1497. Translation of the
Pelérinage about now.
1498. Skelton takes holy
orders. Ordained dea-
con, sub-deacon and
priest.
1499. Erasmus' praise of Skel-
ton and "Carmen Extempo-
rale" for him.
1500. Bowge of Court about now.
- 1500-1. Entertained by Cambridge.
1501. The Speculum Principis.
1502. A Joh. Skelton "commisus
carceribus"- the poet?
1517. (June 10) Theses at
Wittenberg.
- 1504-5. Cambridge: admitted "eo-
dem gradu quo stetit
Oxoniiis!"
1504. First appearance in Diss
records: witness to will.
- ← Questionable, in view
of next entry under
1483.
- Accession of Henry VII.
- Birth of Prince Arthur.
Death of Earl of North-
umberland.
Prince Arthur created
Knight of the Bath
- Prince Henry created
Duke of York.
- Wolsey M.A. at Oxford.
- Death of Prince Arthur,
April, 2nd.
- W. Skelton in Westminster.

Chronology. 3.Chronology. 2.

- (Clark.)
 1506. Deuout Trental for John
 1507. Lamentatio Urbis
Norvicen.
Epitaph for Adam Uddersall
 c.1508. Philip Sparow
Ware the Hawke
Elynour Rummyng.
 1509. The Rose both White
and Rede.
 Skelton "pardoned" by
 the new king.
The Pallinodium
 1509-10.
 1511. The Complaint of
Skelton.
 Dines at Westminster
 with Prior (July)
 Appointed arbiter in
 ecclesiastical case
 at Norwich (November)
 Witnesses will at
 Diss.
 1512. Skelton by now back in
 court. Latin Elegy for
Henry VII. First mention
 of appointment as "Ora-
 tor Regius".
 1513. Latin Eulogy for his
Own Times.
Ballad of the Scottish
King.
Chorus de Diss Contra
Gallos.
Chorus de Diss Contra
Scottos
 Addition to Henry VII
Elegy.
Against the Scottes.
Against Dundas.
 1513-4. Poems against Garnesche.
 1515. The Replycacion against
Garnes and Bilney.
 Dedication contains more
 1516. Elegy on the Countess
of Derby (Latin)
Magnyfycence.
Against Venemous Tonges.
 1517. Luther's Theses at
Wittenberg.

Hawes' Pastime of Pleasure

Accession of Henry VIII.
 Barclay's Ship of Fools

Wolsey B.D. at Oxford.

William Lily headmaster
 of St. Paul's.

Battle of Flodden
 (September)

Bradshaw's reference to
 Skelton in the Life of
St. Werburge.

Faukes publishes Ballad
of the Scottish King

Barclay attacks Skelton
 in Eclogues

Accession of Francis I.
 Wolsey becomes Cardinal
 and Chancellor.

More's Utopia
 Erasmus' Novum Instrumentum.

Institution of successor
 at Diss.

Chronology. 3.

1518. Reference to Skelton's tenement at Westminster. Skelton probably living there at this time. Battle of "Trojans" and "Greeks" at Oxford.
1519. Whittington's Eulogy on Skelton. Hormann's Vulgaria. Chair of Greek founded at Oxford by Wolsey.
- 1519-20. Colin Clowte - the beginning of the Wolsey attacks.
1520. Skelton's (lost) poem against Lily. Whittington's Vulgaria. Horman and Lily's Anti-Bossicaon against Whittington. Lily's Epigram against Skelton. Wolsey's embassy to Calais and Bruges. Publication of the Life of St. Werburge.
1521. Speke Parrot - late in year. Against Wolsey's embassy. Decasticon after Why Come (a part of Speke Parrot) Wolsey's taxation resented; his attempt at a capital levy.
- 1522-3. Why Come Ye Not to Courte? - final satire against Wolsey. Calliope about this time.
1523. Garlande of Laurell - with dedication to Wolsey. Skelton attempting to regain favour with the Cardinal. Vives at Oxford. Faukes publishes the Garlande of Laurell.
- (late in year) Defeat of the Duke of Albany in the north.
- 1523-4. The Duke of Albany. - contains verses to Wolsey. Albany sails for France.
1525. Wolsey founds Cardinal's College.
1527. (late in year - December) Barnes and Bilney abjure their heresy.
1528. The Replycacion against Barnes and Bilney. Dedication contains more praise of Wolsey. The Attempt to gain favour unsuccessful.
1529. Death at Westminster. Institution of successor at Diss.

Another issue with imprint; A. Veale.

Another issue with imprint; J. Wallye.

Change, Carley, Kell (in a.) (Carley, Veale, Kell)

Appendix B.The Editions of Skelton's Poems.

The editions of Skelton's poems mostly belong to the period following his death. He seems to have enjoyed a wave of popularity from c.1550 which culminated in the collected edition of his poems published in 1568. The Short Title Catalogue records some thirty editions in the Sixteenth Century. After that the rate dwindles to a few per hundred years.

Hand-list of editions:

- A ballade of the scottysse kynge (Anon.) 4to. R. Fawkes. 1513.
- A ryght delectable traytise upon a goodly garlande or chapelet of laurell. 4to. R. Fawkes. 1523..
- A replycacion agaynst certayne yong scolers. 4to. R. Pynson. 152-.
- Here folowythe Dyuers balettys and dyties. 4to. R. Pynson. n.d.
- Skelton laureate agaynst a comely coystrowne. 4to. R. Pynson. n.d.
- Magnyfycence: A goody interlude etc. Fol. J. Rastell. 1533.
- Here after foloweth the Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe. 8vo. R. Kele. 1545?
- Another edition; J. Wyght. 1552.
- Another edition; A. Kitson. 1565.
- Another issue with imprint; A. Veale. Here after foloweth a litel boke etc.
- Another issue with imprint: J. Walley.
- Here begynneth a lytell treatyse named the Bowge of Court.* (Anon) 4to. westmynster. Wynkyn the worde.
- Here after foloweth Certayne bokes cōpyled by mayster Skelton. 8vo. R. Lant for H. Tab. 1545?
- Another edition. 8vo. J. Kynge and T. Marche. 1560?
- Another edition. 8vo. J. Day. 1565?
- Here after foloweth a litel boke called Colyn Cloute. 8vo. R. Kele.
- Another edition. 8vo. J. Wyghte. 1560?
- Another edition. 8vo. A. Kytson. 1565?
- Another issue with imprint; A. Veale.
- Another issue with imprint; J. Wallye.
- Christmas Carolls; Kelle (n.d.) (*canonis Vexilla Regis*).

* see p. 25

Little works compiled by maister Skelton. 8vo.R.Lant for H.Tab.
 Appendix 2. 1547.

Here after foloweth a lytell boke, whiche hath to name, Why
 come ye nat to courte. 8vo. R.Kele.1545?

Another edition. 8vo.R.Toy.1552.

Another edition. 8vo. A.Kytson.1565.

Another issue with imprint;A.Veale.

Another issue with imprint; J.Wyght.

Pithy, pleasaunt and profitable workes of maister Skelton. T.
 Marshe. 1568.

Elynour Rumming. 4to. For J.Busbie and G.Loftis. 1609.

Elynour Rummin, the famous ale-wife of England. 4to.For S.Rand.
 1624.

The Tunning of Elynour of Rumming. 4to. (n.p.1624)

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 from Boston, 1856,1866,1887.

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 iams. London,1902. (Text From Dyce.)

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 English text from Dyce)

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American edition of Henderson's edition;New York,1932.
 (1931.

Elynoure Rummynge. Decorations by Claire Jones. San Francisco,

Appendix B.

Appendix C.

Title-page of Lant's (Tab)'s edition of "Certain Books".

(Cf. p. 159)

Here after
foloweth certayne bokes / copyled
by mayster Skelton / Poet
Laureat / whose names
here after shall
appere

Speke Parrot
The deth of the noble prince
Kynge Edwarde the fourth
A treatyse of the Scottes
Ware the Hawke
The Tunnyng of Elynour
Rummyng

Printed at London by Richard
Lant / for Henry Tab / dwelling
in Pauls churchyard | at
the sygne of Judith

This Title is surrounded by four borders, top and bottom of the page a floral design, left side leaf design and right side a man's figure.

In addition to the poems mentioned on the Title-page the volume contains the two Latin choruses contra Scottos and contra Gallos and the six hymns.

Speculum principis.
De Allanora Eusey*****
Iannem Iyones.
Culinus Clout.
Cantilenas de magistra Anna.
Epitaphium Ade nebalensis.
De porcorum grunnitu.
De genuu radice acerolis.
Precationem ad Moysi cornua.
Theatrales ludos.
De Rosemunde Thalaso.
De Minerva et Oliva.

Appendix D.

Bale's list of Skelton's works. (Cf. p. 21)

Bale's collection was first published as the Illustrium maioris Britanniae Scriptorum Summarium in 1548 and in an enlarged edition as the Scriptorum illustrium maioris Brytannie Catalogus in 1557, re-issue in 1559. The notice of Skelton is almost the same in all three and the following list of works is common to all: "Hic edidit inter cetera,"

- Lauream Coronam.
 Philippum Passerculum.
 Cur ad curiam non venis.
 Contra Linguas venenatas.
 Anglie tubam.
 De statu honoris.
 De peccatis fugiendis.
 Viam acquirendi honoris.
 Artem ornate loquendi.
 Artem bene moriendi.
 De virtute comediam.
 De rosario ac principe.
 Creatonionem Arturij principis.
 De quotidiana perfidia.
 Dialogos de imaginatione.
 Grammaticam Anglicam.
 De moribus curie.
 Transtulit ex Tullio Achademion.
 De bona deliberatione.
 Adversus Robertum Gaguinum.
 Psytacum loquacem.
 Schedulam superioritatis.
 De magnificentia comediam.
 Sales de domina Margeria.
 Humane vite peregrinationem.
 Triumphus rose rubeae.
 Speculum principis.
 De Alienora Rummynge.
 Iannem Iuonem.
 Colinum Clout.
 Cantilenas de magistrâ Anna.
 Epitaphium Ade nebulonis.
 De porcorum grunnitu.
 De gemitu radice aceris.
 Precationem ad Moysi cornua.
 Theatrales ludos.
 De Rosamunde thalamo.
 De Minerua et Oliua.
 De ...

Bibliography

(a) Bibliography

- De moléndinario et eius consorte.
- Meditationes deuotas.
- Declarationes duorum hymnorum.
- Nacionem stultorum.
- Apollinem fatiloquum.
- De virgine Cantiana.
- Testamentum amasiorum.
- Diodorum Siculum transtulit.
- Cantilenas consolatorias. Receipt of the Exchequer.
- Contra pseudopoetam.
- Meditationem diue Anne.
- Accipitrem deuota.
- Automedon meditandi amoris.

Westminster Abbey

This list is based on Skelton's own list of his works in The Garlande of Laurell and so includes a number of poems or treatises which Skelton claims as his own but which have been lost since his time.

Somerset House.

Book Bracy.

Add. 25013. Copy of Blomefield's Topographical History of Norfolk.

Norwich Cathedral.

Institution Books.
Tanner's MS. Indexes and Notes. 2 Volumes.

(b) Manuscripts containing copies of Skelton's poems.

British Museum

- Eg. 2642. (Verses on Time)
- 29,739. }
- Harl. 4011. } (Edward IV Elegy)
- Harl. 2258. (Group of poems including Colin Clowte and Speke, Parrot)
- Reg. 18. D. 21. 5. (Northumberland Elegy)
- Cott. Vit. E. X. (Garlande of Laurell)
- Lands. 762. ("The Prophecy of Skelton")
- Harl. 367. (Carnesche poems)
- Fairfax Book - Add. 5445. (Manerly Margery and Wofully Araid)
- Harl. 4012. (Wofully Araid.)
- Add. 4787. (Latin Verses beginning Salve plus decies.)
- Add. 25,737. (The Speculum Principis)
- Add. 28,504. (Attempted facsimile of a Black-Letter edition of Elynour Rymyng; dated 1695)
- 58,899. (Description of a copy of Colin Clowte)

Bibliography: Manuscripts.(a) Biographical.Public Record Office.

Books of the Treasury of the Receipt of the Exchequer.
 Early Chancery Proceedings.
 Patent Rolls.
 Court of Requests.
 Exchequer Rolls.

Westminster Abbey.

Muniments.
 Register Book.

British Museum.

Add. 5880. Collections
 for an Athenae Cantabrig-
 ienses. W. Cole.

Somerset House.

Book Bracy.

Add. 23013. Copy of Blome-
 field's Topographical Hist-
 ory of Norfolk.

Norwich Cathedral.

Institution Books.
 Tanner's MS. Indexes and Notes. 2 Volumes.

(b) Manuscripts containing copies of Skelton's poems.British Museum

Eg. 2642. (Verses on Time)
 29,729.)
 Harl. 4011.) (Edward IV Elegy)
 Harl. 2252. (Group of poems including Colin Clowte and
 Speke, Parrot)
 Reg. 18. D. 21. 5. (Northumberland Elegy)
 Cott. Vit. E. X. (Garlande of Laurell)
 Lands. 762. ("The Prophecy of Skelton")
 Harl. 367. (Garnesche poems)
 Fairfax Book - Add. 5465. (Manerly Margery and Wofully
 Araid)
 Harl. 4012. (Wofully Araid.)
 Add. 4787. (Latin Verses beginning Salve plus decies.)
 Add. 26,787. (The Speculum Principis)
 Add. 28,504. (Attempted facsimile of a Black-Letter edition
 of Elynour Rummyng; dated 1693)
 38,899. (Description of a copy of Colin Clowte)

Bodleian

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C.C.C. 432. (Latin verses I, liber et propra) London, 1935.

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Trin. Coll. 2. 53. (Claimed by Brie as "Recule against Gaguin"
Cf. Eng. Stud. 37. 31-2.

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