only become a dramatist but had excelled Greene himself in his chosen field of romantic comedy becomes intelligible enough. Even in his wrath, however, Greene bears eloquent witness to Shakespeare’s diligence, ability, and marked success, both as actor and playwright. All this is fully confirmed by the more deliberate and detailed language of Chettle’s apology, already quoted. Of Shake­speare’s amazing industry and conspicuous success the next few years supply ample evidence. Within six or seven years he not only produced the brilliant reflective and descriptive poems of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece,* but at least fifteen of his dramas, including tragedies, comedies, and historical plays. Having found his true vocation, Shakespeare works during these years as a master, having full command over the materials and resources of his art. The dramas produced have a fulness of life and a richness of imagery, a sense of joyousness and power, that speak of the writer’s exultant absorption and conscious triumph in his chosen work. The sparkling comedies and great historical plays belonging to this period evince the ease and delight of an exuberant mind realizing its matured creations.

Nor after all is this result so very surprising. Shake­speare entered on his London career at the very moment best fitted for the full development of his dramatic genius. From the accession of Elizabeth all the domi­nant impulses and leading events of her reign had pre­pared the way for the splendid triumph of policy and arms that closed its third decade, and for the yet more splendid literary triumph of the full-orbed drama that followed. After the gloom and terror of Mary’s reign the coming of Elizabeth to the crown was hailed with exultation by the people, and seemed in itself to open a new and brighter page of the nation’s history. Elizabeth’s personal charms and mental gifts, her high spirit and dauntless courage, her unfailing political tact and judgment, her frank bearing and popular address, combined with her unaffected love for her people and devotion to their interests, awakened the strongest feelings of personal loyalty, and kindled into passionate ardour the spirit of national pride and patriotism that made the whole kingdom one. The most powerful movements of the time directly tended to reinforce and concentrate these awakened energies. While the Reformation and Renais­sance impulses had liberalized men’s minds and enlarged their moral horizon, the effect of both was at first of a political and practical rather than of a purely religious or literary kind. The strong and exhilarating sense of civil and religious freedom realized through the Reformation was inseparably associated with the exultant spirit of nationality it helped to stimulate and diffuse. The pope, and his emissaries the Jesuits, were looked upon far more as foreign enemies menacing the independence of the kingdom than as religious foes and firebrands seeking to destroy the newly established faith. The conspiracies, fomented from abroad, that gathered around the captive queen of Scots, the plots successively formed for the assassination of Elizabeth, were regarded as murderous assaults on the nation’s life, and the Englishmen who organized them abroad or aided them at home were denounced and prosecuted with pitiless severity as traitors to their country. Protestantism thus came to be largely identified with patriotism, and all the active forces of the kingdom, its rising wealth, energy, and intelligence, were concentrated to defend the rights of the liberated empire against the assaults of despotic Europe represented by Rome and Spain. These forces gained volume and impetus as the nation was thrilled by the details of Alva’s ruthless butcheries, and the awful massacre of St Bar­tholomew, until at length they were organized and hurled

with resistless effect against the grandest naval and military armament ever equipped by a Continental power,—an arma­ment that had been sent forth with the assurance of victory by the wealthiest, most absolute, and most determined monarch of the time. There was a vigorous moral element in that national struggle and triumph. It was the spirit of freedom, of the energies liberated by the revolt from Rome, and illuminated by the fair humanities of Greece and Italy, that nerved the arm of that happy breed of men in the day of battle, and enabled them to strike with fatal effect against the abettors of despotic rule in church and state. The material results of the victory were at once apparent. England became mistress of the seas, and rose to an assured position in Europe as a political and maritime power of the first order. The literary results at home were equally striking. The whole conflict reacted powerfully on the genius of the race, quickening into life its latent seeds of reflective knowledge and wisdom, of poetical and dramatic art.

Of these effects the rapid growth and develop­ment of the national drama was the most brilliant and characteristic. There was indeed at the time a unique stimulus in this direction. The greater num­ber of the eager excited listeners who crowded the rude theatres from floor to roof had shared in the adventurous exploits of the age, while all felt the keenest interest in life and action. And the stage represented with admirable breadth and fidelity the struggling forces, the mingled elements, humorous and tragic, the passionate hopes, deep-rooted animosities, and fitful misgivings of those eventful years. The spirit of the time had made personal daring a common heritage : with noble and commoner, gentle and simple, alike, love of queen and country was a romantic passion, and heroic self-devotion at the call of either a beaten way of ordinary life. To act with energy and decision in the face of danger, to strike at once against any odds in the cause of freedom and independence, was the desire and ambition of all. This complete unity of national sentiment and action became the great characteristic of the time. The dangers threatening the newly liberated kingdom were too real and pressing to admit of anything like seriously divided councils, or bitterly hostile parties within the realm. Everything thus conspired to give an extraordinary degree of concentration and brilliancy to the national life. For the twenty years that followed the destruction of the Armada London was the centre and focus of that life. Here gathered the soldiers and officers who had fought against Spain in the Low Countries, against France in Scotland, and against Rome in Ireland. Along the river side, and in noble houses about the Strand, were the hardy mariners and adventurous sea captains, such as Drake, Hawkins, and Frobisher, who had driven their dauntless keels into unknown seas, who had visited strange lands and alien races in order to enlarge the knowledge, increase the dominions, and augment the wealth of their fellow- countrymen. Here assembled the noble councillors, scholars, and cavaliers whose foresight and skill guided the helm of state, whose accomplishment in letters and arms gave refinement and distinction to court pageants and ceremonials, and whose patronage and support of the rising drama helped to make the metropolitan theatre the great centre of genius and art, the great school of historical teaching, the great mirror of human nature in all the breadth and emphasis of its interests, convictions, and activities. The theatre was indeed the living organ through which all the marvellous and mingled experiences of a time incomparably rich in vital elements found expression. There was no other, no organized or adequate means, of popular expression at all. Books were a solitary