their position as academic scholars working under poetic and popular impulses for the public theatres. The new and striking combination in their dramas of elements hitherto wholly separated is but the natural result of their attainments and literary activities. From their univer­sity training and knowledge of the ancients they would be familiar with the technical requirements of dramatic art, the deliberate handling of plot, incident, and char­acter, and the due subordination of parts essential for producing the effect of an artistic whole. Their imagina­tive and emotional sensibility, stimulated by their studies in Southern literature, would naturally prompt them to combine features of poetic beauty and rhetorical finish with the evolution of character and action ; while from the popular native drama they derived the breadth of sympathy, sense of humour, and vivid contact with actual life which gave reality and power to their representations.

The leading members of this group or school were Kyd, Greene, Lodge, Nash, Peele, and Marlowe, of whom, in relation to the future development of the drama, Greene, Peele, and Marlowe are the most important and influential. They were almost the first poets and men of genius who devoted themselves to the production of dramatic pieces for the public theatres. But they all helped to redeem the common stages from the reproach their rude and boisterous pieces had brought upon them, and make the plays represented poetical and artistic as well as lively, bustling, and popular. Some did this rather from a necessity of nature and stress of circumstance than from any higher aim or deliberately formed resolve. But Marlowe, the greatest of them, avowed the redemption of the common stage as the settled purpose of his labours at the outset of his dramatic career. And during his brief and stormy life he nobly discharged the self-imposed task. His first play, *Tamburline the Great,* struck the authentic note of artistic and romantic tragedy. With all its extra­vagance, and over-straining after vocal and rhetorical effects, the play throbs with true passion and true poetry, and has throughout the stamp of emotional intensity and intellectual power. His later tragedies, while marked by the same features, bring into fuller relief the higher characteristics of his passionate and poetical genius. Alike in the choice of subject and method of treatment Marlowe is thoroughly independent, deriving little, except in the way of general stimulus, either from the classical or popular drama of his day. The signal and far-reaching reform he effected in dramatic metre by the introduction of modulated blank verse illustrates the striking originality of his genius. Gifted with a fine ear for the music of English numbers, and impatient of “ the gigging veins of rhyming mother wits,” he introduced the noble metre which was at once adopted by his contemporaries and became the vehicle of the great Elizabethan drama. The new metre quickly abolished the rhyming couplets and stanzas that had hitherto prevailed on the popular stage. The rapidity and completeness of this metrical revolution is in itself a powerful tribute to Marlowe’s rare insight and feeling as a master of musical expression. The originality and importance of Marlowe’s innovation are not materially affected by the fact that one or two classical plays, such as *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta,* had been already written in unrhymed verse. In any case these were private plays, and the monotony of cadence and structure in the verse excludes them from anything like serious comparison with the richness and variety of vocal effect produced by the skilful pauses and musical interlinking of Marlowe’s heroic metre. Greene and Peele did almost as much for romantic comedy as Marlowe had done for romantic tragedy. Greene’s ease and lightness of touch, his freshness of feeling and play of fancy, his vivid sense

of the pathos and beauty of homely scenes and thorough enjoyment of English rural life, give to his dramatic sketches the blended charm of romance and reality hardly to be found elsewhere except in Shakespeare’s early comedies. In special points of lyrical beauty and dramatic portraiture, such as his sketches of pure and devoted women and of witty and amusing clowns, Greene anticipated some of the more delightful and characteristic features of Shakespearian comedy. Peele’s lighter pieces and Lyly’s prose comedies helped in the same direction. Although not written for the public stage, Lyly’s court comedies were very popular, and Shakespeare evidently gained from their light and easy if somewhat artificial tone, their constant play of witty banter and spark­ling repartee, valuable hints for the prose of his own comedies. Marlowe again prepared the way for another characteristic development of Shakespeare’s dramatic art. His *Edward II.* marks the rise of the historical drama, as distinguished from the older chronicle play, in which the annals of a reign or period were thrown into a series of loose and irregular metrical scenes. Peele’s *Edward I.,* Marlowe’s *Edward II.,* and the fine anonymous play of *Edward III.,* in which many critics think Shakespeare’s hand may be traced, show how thoroughly the new school had felt the rising national pulse, and how promptly it responded to the popular demand for the dramatic treat­ment of history. The greatness of contemporary events had created a new sense of the grandeur and continuity of the nation’s life, and excited amongst all classes a vivid interest in the leading personalities and critical struggles that had marked its progress. There was a strong and general feeling in favour of historical subjects, and especially historical subjects having in them elements of tragical depth and intensity. Shakespeare’s own early plays—dealing with the distracted reign of King John, the Wars of the Roses, and the tragical lives of Richard II. and Richard III.—illustrate this bent of popular feeling. The demand being met by men of poetical and dramatic genius reacted powerfully on the spirit of the age, helping in turn to illuminate and strengthen its loyal and patriotic sympathies.

This is in fact the key-note of the English stage in the great period of its development. It was its breadth of national interest and intensity of tragic power that made the English drama so immeasurably superior to every other contemporary drama in Europe. The Italian drama languished because, though carefully elaborated in point of form, it had no fulness of national life, no common elements of ethical conviction or aspiration, to vitalize and ennoble it. Even tragedy, in the hands of Italian dramatists, had no depth of human passion, no energy of heroic purpose, to give higher meaning and power to its evolution. In Spain the dominant courtly and ecclesi­astical influences limited the development of the national drama, while in France it remained from the outset under the artificial restrictions of classical and pseudo-classical traditions. Shakespeare’s predecessors and contemporaries, in elevating the common stages, and filling them with poetry, music, and passion, had attracted to the theatre all classes, including the more cultivated and refined ; and the intelligent interest, energetic patriotism, and robust life of so representative an English audience supplied the strongest stimulus to the more perfect development of the great organ of national expression. The forms of dramatic art, in the three main departments of comedy, tragedy, and historical drama, had been, as we have seen, clearly discriminated and evolved in their earlier stages. It was a moment of supreme promise and expectation, and in the accidents of earth, or, as we may more appropriately and J gratefully say, in the ordinances of heaven, the supreme