

The Areopagus of Sidney and Spenser

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THE AREOPAGUS OF SIDNEY AND SPENSER.

ONE of the famous literary societies of the world, according to historians of literature in recent years, was the Areopagus which came into existence in Elizabeth's reign, just when the light of Spenser's genius was beginning to show its brilliancy. We are commonly told that the society counted both him and Sidney among its members—whence its chief claim to remembrance—and also the pedantic scholar but dear friend of Spenser, Gabriel Harvey, perhaps its founder; and that it grew up in imitation of the Pléiade, the French literary society of a generation earlier. As the Pléiade sought consciously to reform and enrich the French language and to make possible a nobler French literature, so the Areopagus sought to refine and embellish the language and literature of England. How definite was the organization of either society it is difficult, perhaps now impossible, to determine. This, though, is certain of the Pléiade: Ronsard and a few other young men studied, wrote, and talked for a well-defined purpose under the direction of the eminent scholar, Jean Dorat. Their leading spirit, Ronsard, came to be recognized as their head. Whether or not they had formal meetings, they called themselves members of the Pléiade; and ever since the time of Claude Binet at least, friend, pupil, and biographer of Ronsard, their names as members of the society have been matter of record¹. But it is a curious fact that only of late years have scholars mentioned the Areopagus as a definite literary organization and tried to fix its membership. Contemporaries, though recognizing the value of the critical work of Spenser and Sidney and their friends, are dumb regarding the Areopagus. Throughout the sixteenth century and the

¹ 'Binet's list of the poets who composed the *Pléiade*, namely, Ronsard, Dorat, Du Bellay, Baif, Belleau, Jodelle, and Tyard, has been generally accepted as authentic, ... there is no reason why Binet's list should not be accepted.' H. M. Evers, *Critical Edition of the Discours de la Vie de Pierre de Ronsard par Claude Binet*, Philadelphia, 1905, p. 135.

seventeenth, literary historians have nothing to say about it. Not until the later nineteenth century, three hundred years after its existence, do we find such historians referring to the Areopagus as an organized club. In the last thirty years, however, nearly all have agreed that some sort of a club it was, though there is difference of opinion and great vagueness regarding its organization and membership: so much so that, when we consider further the lateness of any mention of it, we have some right to question whether after all the Areopagus, as described by these recent scholars, had any reality.

If the Areopagus ever was a club, with president and secretary, or whatever in Spenser's time would have been the equivalent of these officers, we should expect to hear of it from some contemporary. We might well get word of it from Thomas Nash when, in his *Gabriel Harvey's Hunt is Up*, he insists that 'his Gabrielship' made all the capital he could out of his friendship with Spenser and Sidney¹. Or again, we might hear of it from Ben Jonson, in whose gossip conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden we have some of our earliest information about Spenser. Through Drummond's report of these, we hear of the death of Spenser's youngest child in the sack of Kilcolman by the Irish rebels, and that other story, probably apocryphal, of Spenser's 'dying for want of bread'; but Drummond says never a word about the Areopagus. No more does Fuller, of the generation after Jonson's, whose *History of the Worthies of England*² contains so many literary anecdotes. Nor is there word of it in the 1679 edition of Spenser (printed by Henry Hills for Jonathan Edwin), the introduction to which is responsible for that story of the poet's offering Sidney, on first being presented to him, the ninth canto of the first book of the *Faerie Queene*—the canto relating the visit of the Red Cross Knight to Despair. As Sidney read this, according to the tale, he bade his

¹ 'Having found...that no worke of his, absolute under hys own name, would passe, he used heretofore to draw *Sir Philip Sydney, Master Spenser*, and other men of highest credit, into everie pild pamphlet he set foorth.' *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. by R. B. McKerrow, London, 4 vols. 1908, III, *Have with You to Saffron Walden, or Gabriel Harvey's Hunt is up*, p. 35. Had Nash known of any formal Areopagus, he would have been likely to say here that Harvey, for his own glorification, associated himself in it with Spenser and Sidney. The only possible suggestion of a formal association between Harvey and any of the supposed members of the Areopagus is the following (*ibid.* III, 116): 'Sir Philip Sidney...held him [Harvey] in some good regard, and so did most men; and (it may be) some kind Letters hee writ to him, to encourage and animate him in those his hopeful courses he was entered into.' This could scarcely be stretched into a hint of an Areopagus. And yet Nash must have known of it if it existed, for in his references to Harvey's nickname, 'Angel Gabriel,' and Harvey's mention of the earthquake (cf. this article, p. 294), he shows familiarity with those letters of Spenser and Harvey which are supposed to warrant the assumption that the Areopagus was a formal literary body.

² Fuller died in 1661. His *History of the Worthies* was published the next year.

servant give Spenser fifty pounds, which sum he speedily increased to a hundred and then to two hundred. The introduction to this 1679 edition thus shows an inclination to detail and anecdote (much to be sure erroneous), which makes it likely that were any traditions of the Areopagus then in the air, some echo of them would have reached the editor.

So it is with other editions of Spenser which I have examined for virtually the next two centuries¹, some, like that of 1679, showing a fondness for detail and anecdote in their introductory biographical notices; evidently the editors knew no rumour of an Areopagus. At the beginning of the scholarly nineteenth century, all that Ellis says which bears at all on the matter, in his *Specimens of the Early English Poets*², is that the dedication of the *Shepherd's Calendar* to Sidney seems to have procured Spenser an introduction to that distinguished young gentleman. In his articles on Sidney, on Sidney's devoted friend Fulke Greville, and on Sir Edward Dyer, the common friend of Spenser, Sidney, and Greville, Ellis says nothing which even hints at the Areopagus. Though H. J. Todd, who brought out an important edition of Spenser in eight vols. in 1805, quotes largely from Spenser's correspondence with Gabriel Harvey, generally supposed nowadays to have been a leading member of the society, he says nothing of the Areopagus. Similarly, literary histories through all this period fail to hint at the organization.

At last, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, suggestions of an organized Areopagus begin. The year 1839 saw on each side of the Atlantic a new edition of Spenser. The Rev. John Mitford, who wrote a biographical notice for the *Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, published by Pickering in London, said that the poet 'was introduced by Harvey to Sir Philip Sidney, who recommended him to his uncle, the Earl of Leicester.' He also quotes Spenser's reference to the Areopagus in his letter to Harvey, but gives no opinion regarding the society himself. About the same time Philip Masterman, in his *Essay on the Life and Writings of Edmund Spenser*, introductory to the edition published by Little and Brown, of Boston, hints at Harvey as the leader of a conscious literary movement. He adds: 'Spenser appears...to have entered into the absurd scheme, formed by Harvey and patronized by Sidney, of introducing the use of quantity into English verse.' But

¹ I have read the introductions and notes of all the editions of Spenser during this time which I have found in the Harvard Library.

² London, 1803, 3 volumes. See Notice of Spenser.

Masterman says no word about the Areopagus itself. Sixteen years later, however, in a new edition of Spenser by Little and Brown, we do have a hint that this was a society with some loose organization. In the biographical *Memoir* written by Professor Child, we read that the 'project for reforming English versification...seems to have originated with Harvey and to have been taken up with zeal by a coterie over which Sidney and Dyer presided.' But J. P. Collier, in his five-volume edition of 1862, makes no suggestion that this coterie was organized. Dean Church, on the other hand, in his *Spenser*, published in 1879, implies (pp. 33, 34), though he does not actually say, that the Areopagus was a formal literary body.

Since then this idea seems to have been generally accepted. True, Dr Grosart in his ten-volume *Spenser* (London, 1882-4) is non-committal as to the structure of the Areopagus, but in his *Poetical Works of Sidney*¹, he regards it as a body formally constituted. Mrs Humphrey Ward speaks of Spenser, along with Greville, Dyer, and Sidney, as 'a member of Harvey's Areopagus'². Mr Symonds³ believes in a well-organized 'academy' whose 'critical tendency was indicated by the name Areopagus, given it perhaps in fun by Spenser.' Mr Fox Bourne says⁴ that the Areopagus 'was a sort of club, composed mainly of courtiers, who aspired to be also men of letters, apparently with Sidney as its president.' Spenser and other literary men belonged to it, and Harvey seems to have been 'a corresponding member and counsellor-in-chief.' Mr Bourne thinks that 'Dyer and Greville were evidently busy members.' Professor J. B. Fletcher, of Columbia University, accepts this view, for he says in an article on *The Areopagus and the Pléiade*⁵: 'What we know of the *Areopagus* is derived from references and allusions to it in the Spenser-Harvey letters of 1579-80. There we hear of Dyer and Fulke Greville as members besides Sidney and Spenser and the non-resident Harvey.' And Mr Sidney Lee⁶ says that in 'the meetings of the literary club of the "Areopagus" which Leicester's friends and dependents formed at Leicester House, Spenser, Sidney, and others debated, at Harvey's instance, the application to English poetry of the classical rules of metrical quantity.' He says also in his article on Fulke Greville in the *Dictionary of National*

¹ London, 1877, I, p. lxxv.

² *Ward's English Poets*, I, Introduction to Poems by Fulke Greville.

³ *Sir Philip Sidney*, London, 1886, p. 79.

⁴ *Sir Philip Sidney*, New York and London, 1891, p. 200.

⁵ *Journal of Germanic Philology*, II, 1899, p. 430.

⁶ *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century*, New York, 1904, p. 166.

Biography (1890) that Greville, Sidney, and Dyer were members of the literary society formed by Gabriel Harvey and called by him the Areopagus. And in his article on Sidney (1897), he says that they seem often to have engaged in 'formal literary debate.' Other opinions to the same effect might be quoted. These, however, are enough to show that recent scholars generally believe the Areopagus to have been a formal literary club which met at Leicester House during 1579 and 1580, years when we know that Spenser spent a great deal of his time there. Though there is doubt regarding the exact formation of the society, the consensus of opinion is that Harvey was its prime mover¹. But living in Cambridge as he did, a Fellow of Trinity Hall, he could not have been present at many meetings of the club. He acted rather as a non-resident director². His most active associates were Sidney, Dyer, Fulke Greville, and Spenser. Conjecture has included among others Spenser's friend, Edward Kirke, in all probability 'E. K.' of the *Shepherd's Calendar*; Drant, no less famous than Harvey in his efforts to apply to English verse classical rules of metre; and sometimes even Leicester himself.

Now, if literary commentators and editors of Spenser up to the middle of the nineteenth century have nothing to say of all this, whence comes the information about the Areopagus which recent scholars possess? It comes, all agree, from five letters written in 1579 and 1580, two from Spenser to Harvey and three from Harvey to Spenser. Every mention or hint of the society found in this correspondence it is worth while to consider. By so doing, we shall be able to decide for ourselves, basing our opinion on the only reliable information extant, how the Areopagus was made up.

In these letters of Spenser and Harvey the first hint of a literary club is found in Spenser's letter of October, 1579³. He writes:

As for the two worthy Gentlemen, Master *Sidney* and Master *Dyer*, they haue me, I thanke them, in some use of familiarity: of whom, and to whome, what speache passeth for youre credite and estimation, I leaue your selfe to conceiue, hauing alwayes so well conceiued of my vnfaigned affection and zeale towards you. And nowe they haue proclaimed in their ἀπειρωπάγῳ a generall surceasing and silence of balde Rymers, and also of the verie beste to: in steade whereof, they haue, by authoritie of their whole Senate, prescribed certaine Lawes and rules of Quantities of English sillables for English Verse: hauing had thereof already great practise, and drawn mee to their faction.

¹ Mr Lee, for instance, speaks of debates 'at Harvey's instance.'

² Mr Bourne calls Sidney 'president' of the society, but he says that Harvey seems to have been 'counsellor-in-chief'; and Mrs Ward speaks of 'Harvey's Areopagus.'

³ A. B. Grosart, *Works of Gabriel Harvey*, 3 volumes, London, 1884, I, p. 7.

Presently writing further of the new kind of versifying, he says, in reference to some iambs that Harvey has sent him :

I will imparte yours to Maister *Sidney* and Maister *Dyer* at my nexte going to the Courte. I praye you, keepe mine close to yourselfe, or your verie entire friendes, Maister *Preston*, Maister *Still*, and the reste. (*Ibid.*, p. 9.)

Then, after a page or two, come some Latin hexameters in which Spenser calls Harvey his Angel Gabriel (*Angelus et Gabriel*), perhaps a usual affectionate nickname for him; then a polite message from Sidney; and then farewell.

Replying to this later in the month, Harvey writes, after some preliminary would-be witticisms :

Your new-founded ἀρειώνπαγον I honoure more, than you will or can suppose : and make greater accompte of the two worthy Gentlemente, than of the two hundredth *Dionisiū Areopagītae*, or the verie notablest Senatours, that euer *Athens* dydde affourde of that number. (p. 20.)

In the rest of the letter he discusses principally classical versification, his favourite subject. Speaking of some experiments of Spenser in this, which Harvey finds not entirely faultless, he says that

the Error may rather proceede of his Master, M. Drantes Rule, than of himselfe. (p. 23.)

And a little later he says of Drant's Rules :

My selfe neither sawe them, nor heard of them before : and therefore will neither praise them, nor dispraise them nowe : but vpon the suruiewe of them, and farther conference, (both which I desire) you shall soone heare one mans opinion too or fro. (p. 24.)

The next published letter of the two friends is one from Spenser in the following April. He mentions briefly an earthquake which had just occurred, and then goes on to discuss some English hexameters of Harvey's. Though he likes them 'so exceeding well' that he tries his pen at the same kind of verse, yet he finds 'hardnesse' in the 'accente,'

whyche sometime gapeth, and as it were yawneith ilfauouredly, comming shorte of that it should, and sometime exceeding the measure of the Number, as in *Carpenter*, the middle sillable being used shorte in speache, when it shall be read long in Verse, seemeth like a lame Gosling that draweth one legge after hir : and Heauen being vsed shorte as one sillable, when it is in verse stretched out with a *Diastole*, is like a lame Dogge that holdes vp one legge. (p. 35.)

He wishes for perfect agreement between his friends and himself in town, and Harvey in Cambridge, regarding the rules for new schemes of versifying.

I would hartily wish, you would either send me the Rules and Precepts of Arte, which you obserue in Quantities, or else followe mine, that *M. Philip Sidney* gaue me, being the very same which *M. Drant* deuised, but enlarged with *M. Sidney's* own

iudgement, and augmented with my Obseruations, that we might both accorde and agree in one: leaste we ouerthrowe one an other, and be ouerthrown of the rest. Truste me, you will hardly beleuee what greate good liking and estimation Maister *Dyer* had of your *Satyrlicall Verses*, and I, since the viewe thereof, hauing before of my selfe had speciall liking of *Englishe Versifying*, am euen nowe aboute to giue you some token, what, and howe well therein I am able to doe. (p. 36.)

Harvey's two subsequent letters, both in reply to this of Spenser's, are long and verbose. The first is chiefly concerned with the earthquake; but the second refers to that part of Spenser's letter which deals with versifying.

I cannot choose, but thanke and honour the good Aungell, whether it were Gabriell or some other that put so good a notion into the heads of those two excellent Gentlemen *M. Sidney*, and *M. Dyer*, the two very Diamondes of hir Maiesties Courte for many speciall and rare qualities; as to helpe forwarde our new famous enterprise for the Exchanging of Barbarous and Balductum Rymes with Artificiall Verses: the one being in manner of pure and fine Goulde, the other but counterfet and base yl-fauoured Copper. (p. 75.)

Then soon he writes:

I would gladly be acquainted with *M. Drants* Prosodye, and I beseeche you, commende me to good *M. Sidneys* iudgement, and gentle *M. Immeritos* Obseruations. I hope your nexte Letters, which I daily expect, wil bring me in farther familiaritie & acquaintance with al three. Mine owne Rules and Precepts of Arte, I beleuee wil fal out not greatly repugnant, though peradventure somewhat different. (p. 76.)

Still discussing verses, he speaks of some possible

delicate, and choyce elegant Poesie of good *M. Sidneys*, or *M. Dyers* (ouer very *Castor*, & *Pollux* for such and many greater matters). (p. 86.)

The rest of the letter contains mostly advice to Spenser of a personal kind, including the extraordinary wish, based on the samples of the *Faerie Queene* which Spenser had sent for Harvey's criticism, that 'God or some good Aungell' will put the younger man in a 'better mind' than to continue the poem.

Such is the correspondence of Spenser and Harvey that throws light on the Areopagus. In all this, only one reference points to Harvey as director of the society, if it ever existed—his question whether it was not the 'Aungell Gabriell,' evidently a reference to Spenser's 'Angelus et Gabriel,' that put it into the heads of Sidney and Dyer to take so much interest in reformed versifying. Here is a suggestion from Harvey himself that he was the leading spirit among the young men who dreamed of refining English poetry. But, on the other hand, when Spenser writes that he will impart Harvey's verses to Sidney and Dyer for their criticism, he implies consultation between these gentlemen and Harvey rather than direction by the latter; and

when he writes of their making a proclamation in their *ἀρειωπάγῳ*, he suggests clearly their independence of Harvey. So he does, too, in writing about Harvey's 'Rules and Precepts of Arte' and Drant's. Evidently, there were two sets of rules for applying classical metres to English verse, one by Drant and one by Harvey; and Sidney and Dyer in their experiments were as likely to use one set as the other. Moreover, Harvey himself, in writing of the 'new-founded *ἀρειώνπαγον*' and the 'choyce elegant poesie' of Sidney and Dyer, gives no hint that he is directing them. Indeed, he as much as says that he is not, when referring to their rules for versification, based on Drant's, he declares explicitly, 'myself neither saw them, nor heard of them before.' Clearly, if there was any president of the Areopagus it was not Harvey, but probably Sidney. It is even doubtful whether Harvey was one of the hypothetical members. If he was, there would seem not to have been ideal cooperation between those who made up the club in applying the rules for reformed versification. More likely, if Harvey influenced the Areopagus, he did so only as a corresponding friend of Spenser.

But what shows that the Areopagus ever had a president? In the letters of Spenser and Harvey, from which, we must remember, we get our only knowledge of the society except as recent scholars have imagined it—in these there is no hint that there were members enough to warrant any officers. Despite Mrs Ward's assertion that Fulke Greville belonged to the Areopagus; and Mr Gosse's, that 'almost the only reference to the famous Areopagus includes their names'¹ (that is, Dyer's and Greville's); and Professor Fletcher's, that 'in the Spenser-Harvey letters...we hear of Dyer and Fulke Greville as members,' there is no reference whatsoever to Greville as a member. Indeed, his name nowhere appears in the correspondence. This fact points to the conclusion that Greville had nothing to do with the Areopagus. We know that he was Sidney's closest friend, and we have verses of Sidney testifying to the literary intimacy of Greville with himself and Dyer, *Two Pastorals Made by Sir Philip Sidney*:

Ioyne Mates in mirth with me,
 Graunt pleasure to our meeting:
 Let Pan our good God see,
 How gratefull is our greeting.
*Ioyne hearts and hands, so let it be,
 Make but one Minde in Bodies three.*

* * * * *

¹ *Sir Philip Sidney, Contemporary Review*, L, p. 642.

My two and I be met,
 A happy blessed Trinitie;
 As three most ioyntly set,
 In firmest band of Vnitie.
Ioyne hands, etc.

Welcome my two to me,
 The number best beloved,
 Within my heart you be,
 In friendship unremoved.
Ioyne hands, etc.

E. D. F. G. P. S.

Now had this close friend of Sidney been associated with him and Dyer in the plans for new versification of which Spenser and Harvey write so much, his name, it would seem, must have appeared in their correspondence. Since it does not, apparently Greville was not one of Sidney's and Dyer's 'whole Senate' of reformed versifiers.

What makes probability in the matter almost certainty is the further fact that Greville himself nowhere refers to the club in his *Life of Sidney*. Had he belonged to it, he could hardly have failed to mention it. From the day the two boys met at their school at Shrewsbury, Greville's devotion to Sidney was one of the governing forces of his life, and so in writing his memoirs of Sidney he had two purposes: to glorify his friend, who was also his hero, and, with pardonable pride, to dwell on the closeness of their association. Thus he not only records all the noble acts of Sidney and all the golden opinions of him expressed by great statesmen, like William of Orange, and great scholars, like Languet; he recalls also, with manifest pleasure and affection, the school days when even as a child Sidney had 'such staidness' of mind, 'lovely and familiar gravity, as carried grace and reverence above greater years'¹. He recalls, too, a hundred details of their subsequent adventures, whether in England or on the Continent, which testify to their mutual affection. For example, he tells circumstantially of the unsuccessful attempt of himself and Sidney, burning with the Elizabethan desire for adventure and exploration, to sail across the seas to the New World. But the Queen was often unwilling to let her favourites, in the number of whom Sidney and Greville were emphatically to be counted, stray far from her court; and so to the young men's request for permission to sail with Sir Francis Drake to the West Indies, she refused her consent. Eager for the expedition, they decided to sail, nevertheless, without the royal permission, Greville according to his own words, having 'the honor...to be' Sidney's 'loving

¹ *Life of Sidney*, Chap. 1.

and beloved Achates' in the journey¹. Their plans matured, they went to Plymouth with Drake's connivance, to embark the moment the wind should be favourable. But when they were laid in bed that night, Greville told Sidney that he feared, from the expression on Drake's face, they should not be allowed to make the voyage after all. Sure enough, royal messengers came commanding that either they be stayed or the whole fleet. By way of compensation for Sidney's disappointment, Elizabeth soon after gave him permission to serve with Leicester in the campaign in the Netherlands. Then came the fatal wound at Zutphen, and not only Greville but all England was mourning for Sidney.

This was in 1586. Greville lived on to be seventy-four years old, but he never lost his affection for his early friend. His *Life of Sidney*², written in his later years, was a labour of love; and when he was dead and buried his monument bore the epitaph which he himself had composed: 'Fulke Greville, Servant to Queen Elizabeth, Councillor to King James, Friend to Sir Philip Sidney.' Surely the man who, forty-two years after the death of his friend, wished this for his epitaph, would not have neglected to mention the Areopagus had he and Sidney been joint members of it. Evidently it testified neither to their intimacy, nor, in Greville's estimation, to Sidney's glory.

Now if Greville—such a dear friend of Sidney, and himself a poet—was not one of the Areopagus, its membership, we should say, must have been very limited. As a matter of fact, the correspondence of Spenser and Harvey suggests that its membership was limited to two, or at most three. The two were Sidney and Dyer, and the testimony points surely to no others. The possible third was Spenser. Harvey was clearly an outsider.

What, then, was the constitution of this Areopagus, this 'whole Senate' of two, or at most three? Pretty certainly it was not a formal body, as we may judge from Spenser's reference to it: 'Master Sidney and Master Dyer...haue proclaimed in their ἀρειωπάργω a generall surceasing and silence of balde Rymers...: in steade whereof, they haue, by authoritie of their whole Senate, prescribed certaine Lawes and rules of Quantities...for English Verse.' It looks as if Spenser, reporting the scheme of Sidney and Dyer, had applied the name of the great Athenian tribunal to them jocosely, as one to-day in raillery at the deliberation of

¹ *Life of Sidney*, Chap. vii.

² The title which Greville intended to give this was *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*. It was to appear with the complete edition of his works. Though Greville died in 1628, the dedication was not published until 1652, when it appeared with the title which it has borne ever since, *The Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney*.

two friends might speak of a decision of their Supreme Court. Now Spenser, though not conspicuously gifted with humour, as any one can tell who has read a canto of the *Faerie Queene*, was not totally without it. There are clumsy attempts at humour in these very letters to Harvey, as when Spenser, poking fun at some of Harvey's English verses in classical metre, says that they yawn and remind him of a lame gosling; and again, of a lame dog. Harvey, generally even more clumsy in his attempts at humour than Spenser, is replying in Spenser's spirit when he says:

Your new-founded ἀρειόνπαγον I honour more, than you will or can suppose: and make greater accompte of the two worthy Gentlemen, than of the two hundredth *Dionisii Areopagitae*, or the verye notablest Senatours, that euer *Athens* dydde affourde of that number.

Apparently the high-sounding name of Areopagus was only a joke.

What strengthens the probability that the Areopagus as a literary society never existed, is the failure, already noted, of any contemporary echo of its deliberations to reach us, except the two references of Spenser and Harvey. Yet with its conjectured membership, it must, even as an informal society, have been of importance in the literary world. One would expect Sidney to make some reference to it in his *Apologie for Poetrie*, in which it is often assumed, and not improbably, that he expressed opinions which he held in common with his literary friends. Had he and they formed a club more or less known, it would have been only natural for him, in declaring his literary creed, to give it support by at least the suggestion that his fellow club-members held similar opinions. But he never does. Then again, it is singular, if the Areopagus was really a literary society modelled after the *Pléiade*, that it did not for convenience Anglicize its name. *Pléiade*, save for its origin, is thoroughly French; but as Spenser and Harvey write of their hypothetical society, instead of making its name English, they keep it Greek. 'In their ἀρειωπάγωφ,' says Spenser, using the dative case. And Harvey replying writes, 'your new-founded ἀρειόνπαγον,' using the accusative, which is the case called for. The Greek letters and the Greek declension point to no society that gave itself the Anglicized name Areopagus¹.

By all this I do not mean that Spenser and Sidney and the other

¹ For suggesting this significance of the Greek letters and declension, I am indebted to Mr W. E. McNeill, a graduate student at Harvard University, who, in a course on Spenser given under my direction, wrote a thesis on *The Areopagus and the Pléiade*. Mr McNeill's impression was that recent scholars have exaggerated the resemblance between the French society and the supposed English one in almost every way.

young men who might have been members of an Areopagus never came together for earnest literary discussion. During two years at least there were chances for many such meetings. It was in the summer of 1578 that Sidney with his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, in the suite of Queen Elizabeth during one of her progresses, met Gabriel Harvey at Audley End, then the greatest country-place in Essex¹. Harvey, a native of the neighbouring town of Saffron Walden, had come as one of the literary lights of Cambridge, some fifteen miles away, to make an address to the Queen. In Latin verses which he wrote for the occasion, entitled *Gratulationes Waldenses* and filled with laudation of the sovereign, he spoke of Sidney also in terms of highest praise. Perhaps he had met Sidney before, for Harvey seems to have been already known to Leicester². If so, after the meeting at Audley End and the complimentary Latin verses, Harvey was probably in greater favour with both Leicester and his nephew. Perhaps that is why Harvey seems soon afterwards to have been able to procure a place for his friend, Spenser, who had been living in the north of England, in the household of Elizabeth's favourite. Thus the opportunity was given at Leicester House for a friendship between Spenser, then about twenty-six, and Sidney, who was twenty-four.

The two young men, with the many literary tastes which they had in common, did not fail to improve their opportunity. We have seen in Spenser's letters to Harvey that he made use of the opportunity likewise to know Dyer, who was a few years older than Sidney. All three seem to have esteemed Harvey and to have valued his opinions on the classics, because of his well-known scholarship and his six or seven years seniority of Spenser. We have seen, also, in the letters of Spenser and Harvey, that the latter was in frequent consultation with his three friends in London about classical metres. No doubt when he came to town, he talked with them at length on the subject.

It would be odd if sometimes other friends of the three young men were not present when they discussed literary matters. At such times we might imagine more interesting conversations than those in Harvey's company, for his letters suggest that there would have been difficulty in getting him off his favourite metrical subject. Possibly Spenser introduced his friend Kirke to Sidney and Dyer. Possibly Greville talked with them occasionally; but, as we have seen, not often; other-

¹ Cf. Fuller's *Worthies*.

² When Harvey was presented to the Queen she spoke of him as one of whom she had previously heard from Leicester.

wise there would have been mention of the fact in his *Life of Sidney*. Indeed, for the time being, if we may judge from the letters of Spenser and Harvey, Dyer was Sidney's closest literary friend, perhaps because he reflected Sidney's opinions better than Spenser and Greville, who were more independent. Despite Sidney's verses, too, about the 'happy blessed Trinitie' which he and Dyer and Greville made up, we may, considering the weakness of human nature, wonder if Greville was not somewhat jealous of Dyer. Three-cornered friendships are seldom entirely agreeable. It may be significant that in his *Life of Sidney*, Greville mentions Dyer but once, and then only as the messenger who 'stayed him by a princely mandate' on one of the several occasions when his youthful desire for travel and adventure was balked by Queen Elizabeth's fondness.

The serious and enthusiastic literary talks of Spenser, Sidney, and Dyer had notable results. More or less they served the purpose, indeed, which the Areopagus would have served had it existed. To them, probably, the critical opinions expressed in the introduction and notes of the *Shepherd's Calendar* owed something, as did also the *Apologie for Poetrie*. The same talks probably quickened and helped to define the poetical feelings which found expression in the *Arcadia* and in the various poems of Sidney and Spenser. *The Faerie Queene*, when still only tentative fragments were written, won so much praise from Sidney that Spenser had little hesitation about going on with it¹. No doubt, too, knowing French literature and Italian, the young men discussed the critical opinions not only of classical authors but also of recent continental writers. But there is nothing to show that these meetings were not purely casual. If there was any pre-arrangement, it was in all probability nothing more than a tacit agreement of Sidney and Dyer to meet from time to time for reading and discussion. The existence of a literary club with definite membership, known as the Areopagus, is doubtful. Except the statements of scholars in the last fifty years, there seems to be no evidence that Spenser and Sidney and their friends ever organized such a society.

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¹ See the poem of 'W. L.' in the *Verses to the Author*, prefatory to the *Faerie Queene*.