Poets and Authors of the Eighteenth Century.

Sir Isaac Newton. (1642-1727)
Alexander Pope. (1688-1744)
Thomas Gray. (1716-1771)
Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford. (1717-1797)
Tobias Smollett. (1721-1771)
Charles Vanbrugh. (1726-1745)

The enthusiasm of the Elizabethan and early Stuart authors over boys had been frowned upon by the Puritan element, and suppressed by the Commonwealth. It survived in the era of the Restoration mainly in that school of Cambridge Platonists who avowedly set out to restore the ideals of Plato and Socrates.

But the Eighteenth Century saw the nadir of this devotion. This prim era, with its hostility to all "enthusiasm" was alien to a heartfelt devotion to any ideal, be it boy or hero, God or devil.

Hence it was typically the age of frigid bachelordom. The more frivolous and wealthy made long trips to Naples and Venice, where the name of Englishman came to be closely linked with the idea of boy-infatuation.

But some right-minded friendships and ideals stand out in contrast to the age. Sir Isaac Newton, one of the greatest of English scientists, was noted for his long and steadfast friendships. He never displayed the slightest interest in women and died unmarried in 1727.

Alexander Pope is understood to have had a deep and a lasting affection for a young friend but the regard was not reciprocated. He died unmarried in 1744.

Horace Walpole appears to have had a very ardent devotion to his friend Conway, and to the poet Thomas Gray, as shown in various passages in his letters. His biographer, Austin Dobson speaks of that "mixture of effeminacy and real genius that made up Horace Walpole's character." His brother Edward Walpole was attacked in 1751 by a gang of blackmailers. Horace Walpole although a younger son finally inherited his father's Earldom of Orford but died unmarried in 1797.

Thomas Gray, the foremost English poet of the Eighteenth Century, became very intimate with Horace Walpole while at Eton. The friendship reminds one very strikingly of that later friendship at the same school between Dolben and Manning. In both cases books were much preferred to sports. At Cambridge Gray was very unhappy and unpopular. His uncle Rodgers despised him because he preferred reading to hunting and solitary strolls around the country-side to riding to the hounds!
In 1739 Gray and Walpole left England together for a tour on the Continent. Walpole had made a will leaving Gray all his property. But at Reggio the two friends quarrelled and parted. Fortunately the friendship was later renewed. Gray's first poem “Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College” was published in 1742 at Walpole's urgent suggestion. This poem mentions, it will be remembered, the Eton lads swimming in the River Thames.

There is no sign of a romantic interest in women in any of Gray's poetry. Leslie Stephens, his biographer, says “Gray was bored to extinction by a crowd of women and hardly ever opened his mouth in such a company.” Says Stephens: “There is not the slightest suggestion of a romance with a woman in Gray's life, even of the most shadowy kind.” Gray died unmarried in 1771.

Tobias Smolett, who had been a ship's surgeon in the British Navy for three years, published in 1743 his first novel “Roderick Random”. In Chapter XXXIV Smolett describes (probably from some recollections of his naval career) the sexual intimacies between the commander of a man of war and one of his officers. Later, in Chapter LI, a British nobleman, Earl Strutwell, utters a long panegyric of “Greek Love” as being most healthful and fashionable.

One of the most brilliant dramatists of the Eighteenth Century, Charles Vanbrugh, has a scene in his play “The Relapse” showing the amorous advances of an older man toward a younger.

John Cleland, (1707-1789), was the author of one of the most celebrated Eighteenth Century novels (published 1747), “The Adventures of Fanny Hill”. This picturesque novel contains a very charming and striking description of the affection of an older lad toward a younger boy.

John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1647-1680), wrote some very striking verse on this affection. One of his plays on this subject was performed privately before the King and a number of his courtiers. The following is an example of his verse.

But a dear Boy's disinterested Flame
Gives Pleasure and for mere Love gathers Pain:—
In him alone Fondness sincere does prove;
And the kind, tender, naked Boy is Love!
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.  
Dramatist, Essayist and Poet.  
(1749-1832)

George Brandes, the celebrated Danish essayist, has told us that in the Eighteenth Century a wave of romantic friendship spread over Germany and Denmark. This appears to have culminated in the great figure of Goethe, the greatest writer the German race has ever produced. In his high-minded and unselfish friendship with the poet Schiller, he set an ideal worthy of the best days of Greece or Persia.

When Goethe was 37 years old he spent a year in Italy. This visit was the turning point in his career. As with Count Platen, his attitude toward all forms of love became broadened and more philosophic. When he returned to Germany, Goethe broke with his former mistress, Frau von Stein, and as his biographer says "continued the freer customs to which he had adapted himself in Rome."

In 1794 Goethe met Schiller, and began that romantic friendship which lasted until the death of the younger poet. Early in the 19th Century Goethe became interested in Winkelmann, the modern prophet of Greek life, art and love. In 1805 the great poet published his defense of Winkelmann,—"Winkelman and His Times."

Count Platen in his romantic poems on Platonic love had introduced the Persian verse form, the Ghazel, into German prosody. In 1811 a translation of Hafiz' Divan was published. This interested Goethe greatly, and in 1819 he published his own volume of Oriental poems, the "West-East Divan". In this the interest in the boy figured largely, especially in the Ninth Book, "The Book of the Cup-Bearer". Goethe had become warm friends with several boys, especially a son of Professor Paulus of Heidelberg and a young waiter at Weisbaden. This friendship between a young lad and an older man was idealized in the relations between the poet and his youthful Cup-bearer in the "West-East Divan".

"From a volume of lyrics of Eastern poetry" wrote Goethe, "could not be omitted the delight inspired in old age by the grace of youth, nor the answering reverence for wisdom felt by the young. The passionate attachment of a child for an old man is not a rare phenomenon." To this sentiment "The Book of the Cup-Bearer" stands as an undying monument.
The Cup-Bearer to his Master.

"And in your eyes gaze long and deep
Till you shall kiss the Cup-bearer."

The Master watching his Cup-bearer asleep.

"Now the delicious tide of health is flush
In every limb; new life comes momentarily!
But not a sound, hush, hush,
That waking not, I may have joy in thee!

The Cup-bearer to his Master.

"Me thy long-hoped-for gift at last contents;
Deep-felt wisdom in all its elements:—
How lovingly thou givest it! Yet above
All other things the loveliest is thy love.
Translated by Edward Dowden and others.

The Boy Cup-bearer to his Master.

In the market-place appearing
   None thy poet-fame dispute;
I, too, gladly hear thy singing;—
   More, still,—hearken when thou 'rt mute!

For I love thee, when thou printest
   Kisses not to be forgot,
Best of all,—for words may perish,
   But a kiss lives on in thought!

Rhymes on Rhymes fair meaning carry;
   Thoughts to think bring deeper joy;
Sing to other folk,—but tarry
   Silent with thy serving boy."
Translated by Edw. Carpenter.
Lord Byron.
Poet and Liberal.
(1788-1824)

Lord Byron, in spite of his many affairs with women, appears to have had very deep and abiding affection for various boys and young men with whom he became friendly. During his boyhood at Newstead Abbey, he became greatly attached to a village lad. With this boy Byron corresponded even after being sent to Harrow School. This affection the poet has celebrated in his poem "Don Leon".

At Harrow Byron met Lord Clare, for whom he cared with such deep affection that the poet could not hear Lord Clare's name mentioned without experiencing deep emotion.

While at Oxford, Byron met a young choir boy, Eddleston. Byron wrote of this boy: "His voice first attracted my attention, and his countenance fixt it. I certainly love him more than any other human being."

Later, in the last phase of Byron's life, during his stay in Greece, Byron met a young Greek-French lad of great beauty. This lad, Nicolo Giraud, was the model of the Italian painter Lusieri. Byron took possession of the lad with characteristic impetuosity and made a will leaving to this boy the whole of his private fortune!

"The Adieu."
Addressed to Eddleston the choir boy.

And thou, my friend, whose gentle love
Yet thrills my bosom's chords,
How much thy friendship was above
Description's power of words!

"Don Leon."

Then, say, was I or Nature in the wrong?
If, yet a boy, one inclination strong
In wayward fancies domineered my soul,
And bade complete defiance to control?
Among the yeoman's sons on my estate,
A gentle boy would on my mansion wait.
Full well I know, though decency forbade
The same caresses to a rustic lad,
Love, love it was that made mine eyes delight
To have his person ever in my sight—
Oh, how I loved to press his cheek to mine!
How fondly would mine arms his waist entwine!
John Addington Symonds.
Poet, Historian and Essayist.
(1840-1893)

John Addington Symonds was the son of a very serious minded and dominant father. Hence his whole life was an unceasing attempt to bend his temperament to conform to the ideals set by this father. But the attempt was continually a failure, and the conformity was never more than an outward one. The older Symonds had little or no sympathy with Platonic ideals. For instance, at one time in J. A. Symonds' boyhood, the father was extremely shocked by his son's fascination with a picture of a Greek male figure.

The young Symonds soon developed indications of lung trouble. Thenceforth his whole life was an unceasing battle against this relentless enemy.

Symonds' literary genius early showed itself. His biographer, Horatio Brown, complains that there was no unity in Symonds' literary or historical work. But it is obvious that all his studies centered about his interest in boys and boy-love. From this came his interest in the Greek poets, in the Italian Renaissance, in the Elizabethians, in Walt Whitman.

Indeed, of the coterie of literary men surrounding Symonds, Swinburne maliciously remarked that they "were more interested in the blue velvet of the Venetian gondoliers' trousers than they were in the blue of Venetian skies." It was not for nothing that they were nick-named the "Calamites" after the "Calamus" of Walt Whitman.

In 1898 Symonds visited the celebrated publicist Ulrichs in his retreat in Northern Italy. Shortly afterwards Symonds published his masterly "Problem in Greek Ethics" and a little later his "Problem in Modern Ethics". He had previously published two very lovely poems on the affection between Jonathan and David and the tragic episode of the Emperor Hadrian and the lad Antinoos. His monumental studies in the Italian Renaissance have placed him in the front rank of English historians.
Lad's Love.
He was all beautiful: as fair
As summer in the silent trees,
As bright as sunshine on the leas,
As gentle as the evening air.

His voice was swifter than the lark
Softer than thistle down his cheek
His eyes were stars that shyly break
At sundown ere the skies are dark.

But sloth and fear of men and shame
Impose their limit on my bliss:—
Else I had laid my lips to his
And called him by love's dearest name!

A Dream.
I saw a vision of deep eyes
In morning sleep when dreams are true,
Wide humid eyes of hazy blue
Like seas that kiss the horizon skies.

Then as I gazed, I felt the rain
Of soft warm curls around my cheek
And heard a whisper low and meek
"I love and canst thou love again?"

A gentle youth beside me bent,
His cool, moist lips to mine were pressed,
That throbbed and burned with love's unrest
When lo, the powers of sleep were spent.

And noiseless on the airy wings
That follow after night's dim way,
The beauteous boy was gone for aye,
A theme of vague imaginings.

Yet I can never rest again:
The flocks of morning dreams are true;
And till I find those eyes of blue
And golden curls, I walk in pain.
Paul Verlaine.
(1844-1896)

Paul Verlaine had the ordinary education of a middle-class French boy. At the age of twenty-five he had a momentary glimpse of a sixteen year old school girl, Mathilde Maute and instantly proposed marriage to her. He was accepted. But within fifteen months of the wedding ceremony a strange sixteen year old lad, Arthur Rimbaud, came to live at Verlaine's home. This brought about strained relations between Verlaine and his wife. Suddenly Verlaine and Rimbaud left for London where they lived together. Madame Verlaine obtained a divorce from her husband. Verlaine and Rimbaud quarrelled, and Verlaine shot Rimbaud, the bullet lodging in his wrist. For this Verlaine was sentenced to two years in prison.

After his release from prison, Verlaine finally became Professor of English at the Roman Catholic College of Notre Dame at Rethel in the Ardennes. Here he met a slim graceful young lad, Lucien Letinois, seventeen years old. Verlaine became greatly attached to this student. When Letinois was graduated Verlaine resigned his professorship. Verlaine then bought a farm and here he and Letinois lived together. But the experiment was not a success. Letinois was called up for military service and afterward died of typhoid fever. Verlaine in great grief published his “Amour” in Lucien Letinois’ memory.

Verlaine's later career was very melancholy. He alternated between the Parisian hospitals and the Parisian wine-shops. But upon his death in 1896 he was awarded a public funeral in honor of his services to French Literature as a poet.

“Lucien.”

“Je connus cet enfant, mon amère douceur
Dans un pieux collège où j’étais professeur.
Ses dix-sept ans mutins et maigres, sa réelle
Intelligence, et la pureté vraiment belle
Que disaient et ses yeux et son geste et sa voix
Captivèrent mon cœur et dictèrent mon choix.”

“Arthur Rimbaud.”

Le roman de vivre à deux hommes
Mieux que non pas d’êpoux modèles,
Chacun au tas versant des sommes
De sentiments forts et fidèles.
Digby Mackworth Dolben.
Religious and Poet.
(1848-1868)

Dolben entered Eton College at the age of fourteen. Here he became great friends with Thomas Bridges afterwards Poet Laureate of England and Edward Manning, after Cardinal of the Roman Church. Many of Dolben’s poems were addressed to Manning under his nick-name “Archie”.

Dolben soon became profoundly interested in the revival of the Monastic Life in the Church of England under the influence of the Oxford Movement. He was received into the Anglican Benedictines and shocked the simple country folk by tramping about at night in his sandals and scapular. After being prepared for Oxford by various tutors, he entered Christchurch at the age of twenty. A month later he was drowned accidentally in the river Welland.

In appearance Dolben was the typical young poet,—fair, beautiful and shy. He had the best Earth gives and then was early snatched away from life. Who knows from what shame and agony he was saved!

To Edward Manning.

O come, my King, and fill the palaces
(Where sceptered Loss too long hath held her state)
With courts of joyance and a laughing breeze
Of voices—if thou wilt, come,—I wait
Unquestioning; no equal but thy slave!
I plead no merit and no claim for wages,
Nor that sweet favour which my sovereign gave
In other days of his own grace;—But pages
Are privileged to linger at the door
With longing eyes, (while nobles kiss the hand
Of him the noblest), though elect no more
To touch the train, nor at the throne to stand.
 Ah, come,—content me with the lowest place
So be it that I may but see thy face!

45
My love and once again my love,
And then no more until the end,
Until the waters cease to move,
Until we rest within the Ark
And all is light that now is dark,
And loves can never more descend;—
And yet, and yet,—be just to me;
At least for manhood; for the whole
Love-current of a human soul,—
Though bent and rolled through fruitless ways,
Though marred with slime and chocked with weed:—
(Long lost the silver ripple-song,
Long past the sprouting water-mead)
Is something awe-ful, broad and strong;
Remember that this utterly,—
With all its waves of passion, set
To you!
My brother, hear me, for the name
Which is as fire within my bones
Has burned away the former shame;
Held I my peace, the very stones
Would cry against me; hear me then,
Who will not bid you hear again,—
Though how the waters were made sweet
That night thou knowest,—only thou!
Edward Cracroft Lefroy.
Priest and Poet.
(1855-1891)

Lefroy's mother was a niece of the novelist, Jane Austen. As
a school boy his friendships were few but very close, his greatest
delight being to wander afield in the woods with a chosen chum.

In 1874 Lefroy entered Keble College Oxford; he took his
B.A. in 1877 and was priested in 1878.

But Lefroy's heart was weak and in 1882 he was compelled
to give up his clerical work. As he set his face bravely toward
the setting sun, the priest-poet wrote in his diary that his one re-
gret would be "that I will not be able to watch the after career of
the many lads in whom I have taken an interest." He died,
mourned by his many friends, in 1891. He had never married.

To a Lovely Friend.
Now may God bless thee for thy face, at least,
Seeing there is such comfort in the mere
Mute watching of it,—yea, a constant feast
Of golden glamour when the days are drear,
And Summer harmonies have sunk and ceased.
This is the very death-day of the year;
Yet beauty is not dead; thou art her Priest
Thy face her temple 'mid the shed leaves here.
And if for me no Spring shall ever prank
My fields again with daisies anywhere,
And though all other faces, dull and blank,
Look through the darkness till they seem to bear
The guise of death; I cannot choose but thank
My God for having fashioned one so fair!

An Idler Listening to Socrates Discussing Philosophy
with his Boy Friends.

The old man babbles on! Ye gods, I swear
My soul is sick of these philosophers!
In sooth I marvel that young blood should care
To hear such vapid stuff; yet no one stirs.
Who's for a breath of unpolluted air?
See yonder brown-eyed nursling of the Muse,—
I'll pluck his robe and ask him; if he choose
We two can steal away and none be ware.
What joy to find a woodland rill and wade
Knee-deep through pebbly shallows; then to lie
With glistening limbs along the open glade
And let the soft-lipped sunbeams kiss them dry;
Or wandering in the Grove's remoter shade
To sport and jest and talk—Philosophy?