Title: Lives of the English Poets : Waller, Milton, Cowley

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Release date: February 1, 2004 [EBook #5098]
Most recently updated: October 26, 2014

Language: English

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LIVES
OF THE
ENGLISH POETS

Waller Milton Cowley

BY
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CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED:
LONDON, PARIS & MELBOURNE.
1891.

INTRODUCTION.

SAMUEL JOHNSON, born at Lichfield in the year 1709, on the 7th of September Old Style, 18th New Style, was sixty-eight years old when he agreed with the booksellers to write his "Lives of the English Poets." "I am engaged," he said, "to write little Lives, and little Prefaces, to a little edition of the English Poets." His conscience was also a little hurt by the fact that the bargain was made on Easter Eve. In 1777 his memorandum, set down among prayers and meditations,

was “29 March, Easter Eve, I treated with booksellers on a bargain, but the time was not long.”

The history of the book as told to Boswell by Edward Dilly, one of the contracting booksellers, was this. An edition of Poets printed by the Martins in Edinburgh, and sold by Bell in London, was regarded by the London publishers as an interference with the honorary copyright which booksellers then respected among themselves. They said also that it was inaccurately printed and its type was small. A few booksellers agreed, therefore, among themselves to call a meeting of proprietors of honorary or actual copyright in the various Poets. In Poets who had died before 1660 they had no trade interest at all. About forty of the most respectable booksellers in London accepted the invitation to this meeting. They determined to proceed immediately with an elegant and uniform edition of Poets in whose works they were interested, and they deputed three of their number, William Strahan, Thomas Davies, and Cadell, to wait on Johnson, asking him to write the series of prefatory Lives, and name his own terms. Johnson agreed at once, and suggested as his price two hundred guineas, when, as Malone says, the booksellers would readily have given him a thousand. He then contemplated only “little Lives.” His energetic pleasure in the work expanded his Preface beyond the limits of the first design; but when it was observed to Johnson that he was underpaid by the booksellers, his reply was, “No, sir; it was not that they gave me too little, but that I gave them too much.” He gave them, in fact, his masterpiece. His keen interest in Literature as the soul of life, his sympathetic insight into human nature, enabled him to put all that was best in himself into these studies of the lives of men for whom he cared, and of the books that he was glad to speak his mind about in his own shrewd independent way. Boswell was somewhat disappointed at finding that the selection of the Poets in this series would not be Johnson’s, but that he was to furnish a Preface and Life to any Poet the booksellers pleased. “I asked him,” writes Boswell, “if he would do this to any dunce’s works, if they should ask him.” Johnson. “Yes, sir; and *say* he was a dunce.”

The meeting of booksellers, happy in the support of Johnson’s intellectual power, appointed also a committee to engage the best engravers, and another committee to give directions about paper and printing. They made out at once a list of the Poets they meant to give, “many of which,” said Dilly, “are within the time of the Act of Queen Anne, which Martin and Bell cannot give, as they have no property in them. The proprietors are almost all the booksellers in London, of consequence.”

In 1780 the booksellers published, in separate form, four volumes of Johnson’s “Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the most Eminent of the English Poets.” The completion followed in 1781. “Sometime in March,” Johnson writes in that year, “I finished the Lives of the Poets.” The series of books to which they actually served as prefaces extended to sixty volumes. When his work was done, Johnson then being in his seventy-second year, the booksellers added £100 to the price first asked. Johnson’s own life was then near its close. He died on the 13th of December, 1784, aged seventy-five.

Of the Lives in this collection, Johnson himself liked best his Life of Cowley, for the thoroughness with which he had examined in it the style of what he called the metaphysical Poets. In his Life of Milton, the sense of Milton’s genius is not less evident than the difference in point of view which made it difficult for Johnson to know Milton thoroughly. They know each other now. For Johnson sought as steadily as Milton to do all as “in his great Taskmaster’s eye.”

H. M.

WALLER.

Edmund Waller was born on the third of March, 1605, at Coleshill, in Hertfordshire. His father was Robert Waller, Esquire, of Agmondesham, in Buckinghamshire, whose family was originally a branch of the Kentish Wallers; and his mother was the daughter of John Hampden, of Hampden, in the same county, and sister to Hampden, the zealot of rebellion.

His father died while he was yet an infant, but left him a yearly income of three thousand five hundred pounds; which, rating together the value of money and the customs of life, we may reckon more than equivalent to ten thousand at the present time.

He was educated, by the care of his mother, at Eton; and removed afterwards to King’s College, in Cambridge. He was sent to Parliament in his eighteenth, if not in his sixteenth year, and frequented the court of James the First, where he heard a very remarkable conversation, which the writer of the Life prefixed to his Works, who seems to have been well informed of facts, though he may sometimes err in chronology, has delivered as indubitably certain:

“He found Dr. Andrews, Bishop of Winchester, and Dr. Neale, Bishop of Durham, standing behind his Majesty’s chair; and there happened something extraordinary,” continues this writer, “in the conversation those prelates had with the king, on which Mr. Waller did often reflect. His Majesty asked the bishops, ‘My Lords, cannot I take my subject’s money, when I want it, without all this formality of Parliament?’ The Bishop of Durham readily answered, ‘God forbid, Sir, but you should: you are the breath of our nostrils.’ Whereupon the king turned and said to the Bishop of Winchester, ‘Well, my Lord, what say you?’ ‘Sir,’ replied the bishop, ‘I have no skill to judge of Parliamentary cases. The king answered, ‘No put-offs, my Lord; answer me presently.’ ‘Then,

Sir,' said he, 'I think it is lawful for you to take my brother Neale's money; for he offers it.' Mr. Waller said the company was pleased with this answer, and the wit of it seemed to affect the king; for a certain lord coming in soon after, his Majesty cried out, 'Oh, my lord, they say you lig with my Lady.' 'No, Sir,' says his lordship in confusion; 'but I like her company, because she has so much wit.' 'Why, then,' says the king, 'do you not lig with my Lord of Winchester there?'"

Waller's political and poetical life began nearly together. In his eighteenth year he wrote the poem that appears first in his works, on "The Prince's Escape at St. Andero:" a piece which justifies the observation made by one of his editors, that he attained, by a felicity like instinct, a style which perhaps will never be obsolete; and that "were we to judge only by the wording, we could not know what was wrote at twenty, and what at' fourscore." His versification was, in his first essay, such as it appears in his last performance. By the perusal of Fairfax's translation of Tasso, to which, as Dryden relates, he confessed himself indebted for the smoothness of his numbers, and by his own nicety of observation, he had already formed such a system of metrical harmony as he never afterwards much needed, or much endeavoured, to improve. Denham corrected his numbers by experience, and gained ground gradually upon the ruggedness of his age; but what was acquired by Denham was inherited by Waller.

The next poem, of which the subject seems to fix the time, is supposed by Mr. Fenton to be the "Address to the Queen," which he considers as congratulating her arrival, in Waller's twentieth year. He is apparently mistaken; for the mention of the nation's obligations to her frequent pregnancy proves that it was written when she had brought many children. We have therefore no date of any other poetical production before that which the murder of the Duke of Buckingham occasioned; the steadiness with which the king received the news in the chapel deserved indeed to be rescued from oblivion.

Neither of these pieces that seem to carry their own dates could have been the sudden effusion of fancy. In the verses on the prince's escape, the prediction of his marriage with the Princess of France must have been written after the event; in the other, the promises of the king's kindness to the descendants of Buckingham, which could not be properly praised till it had appeared by its effects, show that time was taken for revision and improvement. It is not known that they were published till they appeared long afterwards with other poems.

Waller was not one of those idolaters of praise who cultivate their minds at the expense of their fortunes. Rich as he was by inheritance, he took care early to grow richer, by marrying Mrs. Banks, a great heiress in the city, whom the interest of the court was employed to obtain for Mr. Crofts. Having brought him a son, who died young, and a daughter, who was afterwards married to Mr. Dormer, of Oxfordshire, she died in childbed, and left him a widower of about five-and-twenty, gay and wealthy, to please himself with another marriage.

Being too young to resist beauty, and probably too vain to think himself resistible, he fixed his heart, perhaps half-fondly and half-ambitiously, upon the Lady Dorothea Sidney, eldest daughter of the Earl of Leicester, whom he courted by all the poetry in which Sacharissa is celebrated; the name is derived from the Latin appellation of "sugar," and implies, if it means anything, a spiritless mildness, and dull good-nature, such as excites rather tenderness and esteem, and such as, though always treated with kindness, is never honoured or admired.

Yet he describes Sacharissa as a sublime predominating beauty, of lofty charms, and imperious influence, on whom he looks with amazement rather than fondness, whose chains he wishes, though in vain, to break, and whose presence is "wine" that "inflames to madness."

His acquaintance with this high-born dame gave wit no opportunity of boasting its influence; she was not to be subdued by the powers of verse, but rejected his addresses, it is said, with disdain, and drove him away to solace his disappointment with Amoret or Phillis. She married in 1639 the Earl of Sunderland, who died at Newbury in the king's cause; and, in her old age, meeting somewhere with Waller, asked him, when he would again write such verses upon her; "When you are as young, Madam," said he, "and as handsome as you were then."

In this part of his life it was that he was known to Clarendon, among the rest of the men who were eminent in that age for genius and literature; but known so little to his advantage, that they who read his character will not much condemn Sacharissa, that she did not descend from her rank to his embraces, nor think every excellence comprised in wit.

The lady was, indeed, inexorable; but his uncommon comprised in wit, qualifications, though they had no power upon her, recommended him to the scholars and statesmen; and undoubtedly many beauties of that time, however they might receive his love, were proud of his praises. Who they were, whom he dignifies with poetical names, cannot now be known. Amoret, according to Mr. Fenton, was the Lady Sophia Murray. Perhaps by traditions preserved in families more may be discovered.

From the verses written at Penshurst, it has been collected that he diverted his disappointment by a voyage; and his biographers, from his poem on the Whales, think it not improbable that he visited the Bermudas; but it seems much more likely that he should amuse himself with forming an imaginary scene, than that so important an incident, as a visit to America, should have been left floating in conjectural probability.

From his twenty-eighth to his thirty-fifth year, he wrote his pieces on the Reduction of Sallee; on the Reparation of St. Paul's; to the King on his Navy; the Panegyric on the Queen Mother; the two poems to the Earl of Northumberland; and perhaps others, of which the time cannot be

discovered.

When he had lost all hopes of Sacharissa, he looked round him for an easier conquest, and gained a lady of the family of Bresse, or Breaux. The time of his marriage is not exactly known. It has not been discovered that his wife was won by his poetry; nor is anything told of her, but that she brought him many children. He doubtless praised some whom he would have been afraid to marry, and perhaps married one whom he would have been ashamed to praise. Many qualities contribute to domestic happiness, upon which poetry has no colours to bestow; and many airs and sallies may delight imagination, which he who flatters them never can approve. There are charms made only for distant admiration. No spectacle is nobler than a blaze.

Of this wife, his biographers have recorded that she gave him five sons and eight daughters.

During the long interval of Parliament, he is represented as living among those with whom it was most honourable to converse, and enjoying an exuberant fortune with that independence and liberty of speech and conduct which wealth ought always to produce. He was, however, considered as the kinsman of Hampden, and was therefore supposed by the courtiers not to favour them.

When the Parliament was called in 1640, it appeared that Waller's political character had not been mistaken. The king's demand of a supply produced one of those noisy speeches which disaffection and discontent regularly dictate; a speech filled with hyperbolical complaints of imaginary grievances: "They," says he, "who think themselves already undone, can never apprehend themselves in danger; and they who have nothing left can never give freely." Political truth is equally in danger from the praises of courtiers, and the exclamations of patriots.

He then proceeds to rail at the clergy, being sure at that time of a favourable audience. His topic is such as will always serve its purpose; an accusation of acting and preaching only for preferment: and he exhorts the Commons "carefully" to "provide" for their "protection against Pulpit Law."

It always gratifies curiosity to trace a sentiment. Waller has in his speech quoted Hooker in one passage; and in another has copied him, without quoting. "Religion," says Waller, "ought to be the first thing in our purpose and desires; but that which is first in dignity is not always to precede in order of time; for well-being supposes a being; and the first impediment which men naturally endeavour to remove, is the want of those things without which they cannot subsist. God first assigned unto Adam maintenance of life, and gave him a title to the rest of the creatures before he appointed a law to observe."

"God first assigned Adam," says Hooker, "maintenance of life, and then appointed him a law to observe. True it is, that the kingdom of God must be the first thing in our purpose and desires; but inasmuch as a righteous life presupposeth life, inasmuch as to live virtuously it is impossible, except we live; therefore the first impediment which naturally we endeavour to remove is penury, and want of things without which we cannot live."

The speech is vehement; but the great position, that grievances ought to be redressed before supplies are granted, is agreeable enough to law and reason: nor was Waller, if his biographer may be credited, such an enemy to the king, as not to wish his distresses lightened; for he relates, "that the king sent particularly to Waller, to second his demand of some subsidies to pay off the army, and Sir Henry Vane objecting against first voting a supply, because the king would not accept unless it came up to his proportion, Mr. Waller spoke earnestly to Sir Thomas Jermyn, comptroller of the household, to save his master from the effects of so bold a falsity; 'for,' he said, 'I am but a country gentleman, and cannot pretend to know the king's mind:' but Sir Thomas durst not contradict the secretary; and his son, the Earl of St. Albans, afterwards told Mr. Waller, that his father's cowardice ruined the king."

In the Long Parliament, which, unhappily for the nation, met Nov. 3, 1640, Waller represented Agmondesham the third time; and was considered by the discontented party as a man sufficiently trusty and acrimonious to be employed in managing the prosecution of Judge Crawley, for his opinion in favour of ship-money; and his speech shows that he did not disappoint their expectations. He was probably the more ardent, as his uncle Hampden had been particularly engaged in the dispute, and, by a sentence which seems generally to be thought unconstitutional, particularly injured.

He was not, however, a bigot to his party, nor adopted all their opinions. When the great question, whether Episcopacy ought to be abolished, was debated, he spoke against the innovation so coolly, so reasonably, and so firmly, that it is not without great injury to his name that his speech, which was as follows, has been hitherto omitted in his works:

"There is no doubt but the sense of what this nation had suffered from the present bishops hath produced these complaints; and the apprehensions men have of suffering the like, in time to come, make so many desire the taking away of Episcopacy: but I conceive it is possible that we may not, now, take a right measure of the minds of the people by their petitions; for, when they subscribed them, the bishops were armed with a dangerous commission of making new canons, imposing new oaths, and the like; but now we have disarmed them of that power. These petitioners lately did look upon Episcopacy as a beast armed with horns and claws; but now that we have cut and pared them (and may, if we see cause, yet reduce it into narrower bounds), it may, perhaps, be more agreeable. Howsoever, if they be still in passion, it becomes us soberly to consider the right use and antiquity thereof; and not to comply further with a general desire,

than may stand with a general good.

“We have already showed that Episcopacy and the evils thereof are mingled like water and oil; we have also, in part, severed them; but I believe you will find, that our laws and the present government of the Church are mingled like wine and water; so inseparable, that the abrogation of, at least, a hundred of our laws is desired in these petitions. I have often heard a noble answer of the Lords, commended in this House, to a proposition of like nature, but of less consequence; they gave no other reason of their refusal but this, ‘*Nolumus mutare Leges Angliæ*:’ it was the bishops who so answered them; and it would become the dignity and wisdom of this House to answer the people, now, with a ‘*Nolumus mutare*.’

“I see some are moved with a number of hands against the bishops; which, I confess, rather inclines me to their defence; for I look upon Episcopacy as a counterscarp, or outwork; which, if it be taken by this assault of the people, and, withal, this mystery once revealed, ‘that we must deny them nothing when they ask it thus in troops,’ we may, in the next place, have as hard a task to defend our property, as we have lately had to recover it from the Prerogative. If, by multiplying hands and petitions, they prevail for an equality in things ecclesiastical, the next demand perhaps may be *Lex Agraria*, the like equality in things temporal.

“The Roman story tells us, that when the people began to flock about the Senate, and were more curious to direct and know what was done, than to obey, that Commonwealth soon came to ruin; their *Legem regare* grew quickly to be a *Legem ferre*: and after, when their legions had found that they could make a Dictator, they never suffered the Senate to have a voice any more in such election.

“If these great innovations proceed, I shall expect a flat and level in learning too, as well as in Church preferments: *Hones alit Artes*. And though it be true, that grave and pious men do study for learning-sake, and embrace virtue for itself; yet it is true, that youth, which is the season when learning is gotten, is not without ambition; nor will ever take pains to excel in anything, when there is not some hope of excelling others in reward and dignity.

“There are two reasons chiefly alleged against our Church government.

“First, Scripture, which, as some men think, points out another form.

“Second, the abuses of the present superiors.

“For Scripture, I will not dispute it in this place; but I am confident that, whenever an equal division of lands and goods shall be desired, there will be as many places in Scripture found out, which seem to favour that, as there are now alleged against the prelacy or preferment of the Church. And, as for abuses, when you are now in the remonstrance told what this and that poor man hath suffered by the bishops, you may be presented with a thousand instances of poor men that have received hard measure from their landlords; and of worldly goods abused, to the injury of others, and disadvantage of the owners.

“And therefore, Mr. Speaker, my humble motion is that we may settle men’s minds herein; and by a question, declare our resolution, ‘to reform,’ that is, ‘not to abolish, Episcopacy.’”

It cannot but be wished that he, who could speak in this manner, had been able to act with spirit and uniformity.

When the Commons begun to set the royal authority at open defiance, Waller is said to have withdrawn from the House, and to have returned with the king’s permission; and, when the king set up his standard, he sent him a thousand broad-pieces. He continued, however, to sit in the rebellious conventicle; but “spoke,” says Clarendon, “with great sharpness and freedom, which, now there was no danger of being out-voted, was not restrained; and therefore used as an argument against those who were gone upon pretence that they were not suffered to deliver their opinion freely in the House, which could not be believed, when all men knew what liberty Mr. Waller took, and spoke every day with impunity against the sense and proceedings of the House.”

Waller, as he continued to sit, was one of the commissioners nominated by the Parliament to treat with the king at Oxford; and when they were presented, the king said to him, “Though you are the last, you are not the lowest nor the least in my favour.” Whitelock, who, being another of the commissioners, was witness of this kindness, imputes it to the king’s knowledge of the plot, in which Waller appeared afterwards to have been engaged against the Parliament. Fenton, with equal probability, believes that his attempt to promote the royal cause arose from his sensibility of the king’s tenderness. Whitelock says nothing of his behaviour at Oxford: he was sent with several others to add pomp to the commission, but was not one of those to whom the trust of treating was imparted.

The engagement, known by the name of Waller’s plot, was soon afterwards discovered. Waller had a brother-in-law, Tomkyns, who was clerk of the queen’s council, and at the same time had a very numerous acquaintance, and great influence, in the city. Waller and he, conversing with great confidence, told both their own secrets and those of their friends; and, surveying the wide extent of their conversation, imagined that they found in the majority of all ranks great disapprobation of the violence of the Commons, and unwillingness to continue the war. They knew that many favoured the king, whose fear concealed their loyalty; and many desired peace, though they durst not oppose the clamour for war; and they imagined that, if those who had these good intentions should be informed of their own strength, and enabled by intelligence to

act together, they might overpower the fury of sedition, by refusing to comply with the ordinance for the twentieth part, and the other taxes levied for the support of the rebel army, and by uniting great numbers in a petition for peace. They proceeded with great caution. Three only met in one place, and no man was allowed to impart the plot to more than two others; so that, if any should be suspected or seized, more than three could not be endangered.

Lord Conway joined in the design, and, Clarendon imagines, incidentally mingled, as he was a soldier, some martial hopes or projects, which however were only mentioned, the main design being to bring the loyal inhabitants to the knowledge of each other; for which purpose there was to be appointed one in every district, to distinguish the friends of the king, the adherents to the Parliament, and the neutrals. How far they proceeded does not appear; the result of their inquiry, as Pym declared, was, that within the walls, for one that was for the Royalists, there were three against them; but that without the walls, for one that was against them, there were five for them. Whether this was said from knowledge or guess, was perhaps never inquired.

It is the opinion of Clarendon, that in Waller's plan no violence or sanguinary resistance was comprised; that he intended only to abate the confidence of the rebels by public declarations, and to weaken their powers by an opposition to new supplies. This, in calmer times, and more than this, is done without fear; but such was the acrimony of the Commons, that no method of obstructing them was safe.

About this time another design was formed by Sir Nicholas Crispe, a man of loyalty, that deserves perpetual remembrance; when he was a merchant in the city, he gave and procured the king, in his exigencies, a hundred thousand pounds; and, when he was driven from the Exchange, raised a regiment, and commanded it.

Sir Nicholas flattered himself with an opinion, that some provocation would so much exasperate, or some opportunity so much encourage, the king's friends in the city, that they would break out in open resistance, and would then want only a lawful standard, and an authorised commander; and extorted from the king, whose judgment too frequently yielded to importunity, a commission of array, directed to such as he thought proper to nominate, which was sent to London by the Lady Aubigny. She knew not what she carried, but was to deliver it on the communication of a certain token which Sir Nicholas imparted.

This commission could be only intended to lie ready till the time should require it. To have attempted to raise any forces would have been certain destruction; it could be of use only when the forces should appear. This was, however, an act preparatory to martial hostility.

Crispe would undoubtedly have put an end to the session of Parliament, had his strength been equal to his zeal; and out of the design of Crispe, which involved very little danger, and that of Waller, which was an act purely civil, they compounded a horrid and dreadful plot.

The discovery of Waller's design is variously related.

In "Clarendon's History" it is told, that a servant of Tomkyns, lurking behind the hangings when his master was in conference with Waller, heard enough to qualify him for an informer, and carried his intelligence to Pym.

A manuscript, quoted in the "Life of Waller," relates, that "he was betrayed by his sister Price, and her Presbyterian chaplain Mr. Goode, who stole some of his papers; and if he had not strangely dreamed the night before, that his sister had betrayed him, and thereupon burnt the rest of his papers by the fire that was in his chimney, he had certainly lost his life by it." The question cannot be decided. It is not unreasonable to believe that the men in power, receiving intelligence from the sister, would employ the servant of Tomkyns to listen at the conference, that they might avoid an act so offensive as that of destroying the brother by the sister's testimony.

The plot was published in the most terrific manner.

On the 31st of May (1643), at a solemn fast, when they were listening to the sermon, a messenger entered the church, and communicated his errand to Pym, who whispered it to others that were placed near him, and then went with them out of the church, leaving the rest in solicitude and amazement. They immediately sent guards to proper places, and that night apprehended Tomkyns and Waller; having yet traced nothing but that letters had been intercepted, from which it appears that the Parliament and the city were soon to be delivered into the hands of the cavaliers.

They perhaps yet knew little themselves, beyond some general and indistinct notices. "But Waller," says Clarendon, "was so confounded with fear, that he confessed whatever he had heard, said, thought, or seen; all that he knew of himself, and all that he suspected of others, without concealing any person of what degree or quality soever, or any discourse which he had ever upon any occasion entertained with them; what such and such ladies of great honour, to whom, upon the credit of his wit and great reputation, he had been admitted, had spoken to him in their chambers upon the proceedings in the Houses, and how they had encouraged him to oppose them; what correspondence and intercourse they had with some Ministers of State at Oxford, and how they had conveyed all intelligence thither." He accused the Earl of Portland and Lord Conway as co-operating in the transaction; and testified that the Earl of Northumberland had declared himself disposed in favour of any attempt that might check the violence of the Parliament, and reconcile them to the king.

He undoubtedly confessed much which they could never have discovered, and perhaps somewhat which they would wish to have been suppressed; for it is inconvenient in the conflict of factions, to have that disaffection known which cannot safely be punished.

Tomkyns was seized on the same night with Waller, and appears likewise to have partaken of his cowardice; for he gave notice of Crispe's commission of array, of which Clarendon never knew how it was discovered. Tomkyns had been sent with the token appointed, to demand it from Lady Aubigny, and had buried it in his garden, where, by his direction, it was dug up; and thus the rebels obtained, what Clarendon confesses them to have had, the original copy.

It can raise no wonder that they formed one plot out of these two designs, however remote from each other, when they saw the same agent employed in both, and found the commission of array in the hands of him who was employed in collecting the opinions and affections of the people.

Of the plot, thus combined, they took care to make the most. They sent Pym among the citizens, to tell them of their imminent danger and happy escape; and inform them, that the design was, "to seize the Lord Mayor and all the Committee of Militia, and would not spare one of them." They drew up a vow and covenant, to be taken by every member of either House, by which he declared his detestation of all conspiracies against the Parliament, and his resolution to detect and oppose them. They then appointed a day of thanksgiving for this wonderful delivery; which shut out, says Clarendon, all doubts whether there had been such a deliverance, and whether the plot was real or fictitious.

On June 11, the Earl of Portland and Lord Conway were committed, one to the custody of the mayor, and the other of the sheriff; but their lands and goods were not seized.

Waller was still to immerse himself deeper in ignominy. The Earl of Portland and Lord Conway denied the charge; and there was no evidence against them but the confession of Waller, of which undoubtedly many would be inclined to question the veracity. With these doubts he was so much terrified, that he endeavoured to persuade Portland to a declaration like his own, by a letter extant in Fenton's edition. "But for me," says he, "you had never known anything of this business, which was prepared for another; and therefore I cannot imagine why you should hide it so far as to contract your own ruin by concealing it, and persisting unreasonably to hide that truth, which, without you, already is, and will every day be made more manifest. Can you imagine yourself bound in honour to keep that secret, which is already revealed by another? or possible it should still be a secret, which is known to one of the other sex?—If you persist to be cruel to yourself for their sakes who deserve it not, it will nevertheless be made appear, ere long, I fear, to your ruin. Surely, if I had the happiness to wait on you, I could move you to compassionate both yourself and me, who, desperate as my case is, am desirous to die with the honour of being known to have declared the truth. You have no reason to contend to hide what is already revealed—inconsiderately to throw away yourself, for the interest of others, to whom you are less obliged than you are aware of."

This persuasion seems to have had little effect. Portland sent (June 29) a letter to the Lords, to tell them that he "is in custody, as he conceives, without any charge; and that, by what Mr. Waller hath threatened him with since he was imprisoned, he doth apprehend a very cruel, long, and ruinous restraint:—He therefore prays, that he may not find the effects of Mr. Waller's threats, a long and close imprisonment; but may be speedily brought to a legal trial, and then he is confident the vanity and falsehood of those informations which have been given against him will appear."

In consequence of this letter, the Lords ordered Portland and Waller to be confronted; when the one repeated his charge, and the other his denial. The examination of the plot being continued (July 1), Thinn, usher of the House of Lords, deposed, that Mr. Waller having had a conference with the Lord Portland in an upper room, Lord Portland said, when he came down, "Do me the favour to tell my Lord Northumberland, that Mr. Waller has extremely pressed me to save my own life and his, by throwing the blame upon the Lord Conway and the Earl of Northumberland."

Waller, in his letter to Portland, tells him of the reasons which he could urge with resistless efficacy in a personal conference; but he overrated his own oratory; his vehemence, whether of persuasion or entreaty, was returned with contempt.

One of his arguments with Portland is, that the plot is already known to a woman. This woman was doubtless Lady Aubigny, who, upon this occasion, was committed to custody; but who, in reality, when she delivered the commission, knew not what it was.

The Parliament then proceeded against the conspirators, and committed their trial to a council of war. Tomkyns and Chaloner were hanged near their own doors. Tomkyns, when he came to die, said it was a "foolish business;" and indeed there seems to have been no hope that it should escape discovery; for, though never more than three met at a time, yet a design so extensive must by necessity be communicated to many who could not be expected to be all faithful and all prudent. Chaloner was attended at his execution by Hugh Peters. His crime was, that he had commission to raise money for the king; but it appears not that the money was to be expended upon the advancement of either Crispe's or Waller's plot.

The Earl of Northumberland, being too great for prosecution, was only once examined before the Lords. The Earl of Portland and Lord Conway persisting to deny the charge, and no testimony but Waller's yet appearing against them, were, after a long imprisonment, admitted to bail. Hassel, the king's messenger, who carried the letters to Oxford, died the night before his trial.

Hampden [Alexander] escaped death, perhaps by the interest of his family; but was kept in prison to the end of his life. They whose names were inserted in the commission of array were not capitally punished, as it could not be proved that they had consented to their own nomination; but they were considered as malignants, and their estates were seized.

"Waller, though confessedly," says Clarendon, "the most guilty, with incredible dissimulation affected such a remorse of conscience, that his trial was put off, out of Christian compassion, till he might recover his understanding." What use he made of this interval, with what liberality and success he distributed flattery and money, and how, when he was brought (July 4) before the House, he confessed and lamented, and submitted and implored, may be read in the "History of the Rebellion" (B. vii.). The speech, to which Clarendon ascribes the preservation of his "dear-bought life," is inserted in his works. The great historian, however, seems to have been mistaken in relating that "he prevailed" in the principal part of his supplication, "not to be tried by a council of war;" for, according to Whitelock, he was by expulsion from the House abandoned to the tribunal which he so much dreaded, and, being tried and condemned, was reprieved by Essex; but after a year's imprisonment, in which time resentment grew less acrimonious, paying a fine of ten thousand pounds, he was permitted to "recollect himself in another country."

Of his behaviour in this part of life, it is not necessary to direct the reader's opinion. "Let us not," says his last ingenious biographer, "condemn him with untempered severity, because he was not a prodigy which the world hath seldom seen, because his character included not the poet, the orator, and the hero."

For the place of his exile he chose France, and stayed some time at Roan, where his daughter Margaret was born, who was afterwards his favourite, and his amanuensis. He then removed to Paris, where he lived with great splendour and hospitality; and from time to time amused himself with poetry, in which he sometimes speaks of the rebels, and their usurpation, in the natural language of an honest man.

At last it became necessary, for his support, to sell his wife's jewels; and being reduced, as he said, at last "to the rump-jewel," he solicited from Cromwell permission to return, and obtained it by the interest of Colonel Scroop, to whom his sister was married. Upon the remains of a fortune, which the danger of his life had very much diminished, he lived at Hallbarn, a house built by himself very near to Beaconsfield, where his mother resided. His mother, though related to Cromwell and Hampden, was zealous for the royal cause, and, when Cromwell visited her, used to reproach him; he, in return, would throw a napkin at her, and say he would not dispute with his aunt; but finding in time that she acted for the king, as well as talked, he made her a prisoner to her own daughter, in her own house. If he would do anything, he could not do less.

Cromwell, now Protector, received Waller, as his kinsman, to familiar conversation. Waller, as he used to relate, found him sufficiently versed in ancient history; and, when any of his enthusiastic friends came to advise or consult him, could sometimes overhear him discoursing in the cant of the times: but, when he returned, he would say, "Cousin Waller, I must talk to these men in their own way;" and resumed the common style of conversation.

He repaid the Protector for his favours (1654) by the famous Panegyric, which has been always considered as the first of his poetical productions. His choice of encomiastic topics is very judicious; for he considers Cromwell in his exaltation, without inquiring how he attained it; there is consequently no mention of the rebel or the regicide. All the former part of his hero's life is veiled with shades; and nothing is brought to view but the chief, the governor, the defender of England's honour, and the enlarger of her dominion. The act of violence by which he obtained the supreme power is lightly treated, and decently justified. It was certainly to be desired that the detestable band should be dissolved, which had destroyed the Church, murdered the king, and filled the nation with tumult and oppression; yet Cromwell had not the right of dissolving them, for all that he had before done could be justified only by supposing them invested with lawful authority. But combinations of wickedness would overwhelm the world by the advantage which licentious principles afford, did not those, who have long practised perfidy, grow faithless to each other.

In the poem on the War with Spain are some passages at least equal to the best parts of the Panegyric; and, in the conclusion, the poet ventures yet a higher flight of flattery, by recommending royalty to Cromwell and the nation. Cromwell was very desirous, as appears from his conversation, related by Whitelock, of adding the title to the power of monarchy, and is supposed to have been withheld from it partly by fear of the army, and partly by fear of the laws, which, when he should govern by the name of king, would have restrained his authority. When, therefore, a deputation was solemnly sent to invite him to the crown, he, after a long conference, refused it, but is said to have fainted in his coach when he parted from them.

The poem on the death of the Protector seems to have been dictated by real veneration for his memory. Dryden and Sprat wrote on the same occasion; but they were young men, struggling into notice, and hoping for some favour from the ruling party. Waller had little to expect; he had received nothing but his pardon from Cromwell, and was not likely to ask anything from those who should succeed him.

Soon afterwards, the Restoration supplied him with another subject; and he exerted his imagination, his elegance, and his melody, with equal alacrity, for Charles the Second. It is not possible to read, without some contempt and indignation, poems of the same author, ascribing the highest degree of "power and piety" to Charles the First, then transferring the same "power

and piety" to Oliver Cromwell; now inviting Oliver to take the Crown, and then congratulating Charles the Second on his recovered right. Neither Cromwell nor Charles could value his testimony as the effect of conviction, or receive his praises as effusions of reverence; they could consider them but as the labour of invention, and the tribute of dependence.

Poets, indeed, profess fiction; but the legitimate end of fiction is the conveyance of truth, and he that has flattery ready for all whom the vicissitudes of the world happen to exalt must be scorned as a prostituted mind, that may retain the glitter of wit, but has lost the dignity of virtue.

The Congratulation was considered as inferior in poetical merit to the Panegyric; and it is reported that, when the king told Waller of the disparity, he answered, "Poets, Sir, succeed better in fiction than in truth."

The Congratulation is indeed not inferior to the Panegyric, either by decay of genius, or for want of diligence, but because Cromwell had done much and Charles had done little. Cromwell wanted nothing to raise him to heroic excellence but virtue, and virtue his poet thought himself at liberty to supply. Charles had yet only the merit of struggling without success, and suffering without despair. A life of escapes and indigence could supply poetry with no splendid images.

In the first Parliament summoned by Charles the Second (March 8, 1661), Waller sat for Hastings, in Sussex, and served for different places in all the Parliaments of that reign. In a time when fancy and gaiety were the most powerful recommendations to regard, it is not likely that Waller was forgotten. He passed his time in the company that was highest, both in rank and wit, from which even his obstinate sobriety did not exclude him. Though he drank water, he was enabled by his fertility of mind to heighten the mirth of Bacchanalian assemblies; and Mr. Saville said, that "no man in England should keep him company without drinking but Ned Waller."

The praise given him by St. Evremond is a proof of his reputation; for it was only by his reputation that he could be known, as a writer, to a man who, though he lived a great part of a long life upon an English pension, never consented to understand the language of the nation that maintained him.

In Parliament, "he was," says Burnet, "the delight of the House, and though old, said the liveliest things of any among them." This, however, is said in his account of the year seventy-five, when Waller was only seventy. His name as a speaker occurs often in Grey's Collections, but I have found no extracts that can be more quoted as exhibiting sallies of gaiety than cogency of argument.

He was of such consideration, that his remarks were circulated and recorded. When the Duke of York's influence was high, both in Scotland and England, it drew, says Burnet, a lively reflection from Waller, the celebrated wit. He said, "The House of Commons had resolved that the duke should not reign after the king's death: but the king, in opposition to them, had resolved that he should reign even in his life." If there appear no extraordinary "liveliness" in this "remark," yet its reception proves its speaker to have been a "celebrated wit," to have had a name which men of wit were proud of mentioning.

He did not suffer his reputation to die gradually away, which may easily happen in a long life, but renewed his claim to poetical distinction from time to time, as occasions were offered, either by public events or private incidents; and, contenting himself with the influence of his Muse, or loving quiet better than influence, he never accepted any office of magistracy.

He was not, however, without some attention to his fortune, for he asked from the king (in 1665) the provostship of Eton College, and obtained it; but Clarendon refused to put the seal to the grant, alleging that it could be held only by a clergyman. It is known that Sir Henry Wotton qualified himself for it by deacon's orders.

To this opposition, the Biographia imputes the violence and acrimony with which Waller joined Buckingham's faction in the prosecution of Clarendon. The motive was illiberal and dishonest, and showed that more than sixty years had not been able to teach him morality. His accusation is such as conscience can hardly be supposed to dictate without the help of malice. "We were to be governed by Janizaries instead of Parliaments, and are in danger from a worse plot than that of the fifth of November; then, if the Lords and Commons had been destroyed, there had been a succession; but here both had been destroyed for ever." This is the language of a man who is glad of an opportunity to rail, and ready to sacrifice truth to interest at one time, and to anger at another.

A year after the chancellor's banishment, another vacancy gave him encouragement for another petition, which the king referred to the Council, who, after hearing the question argued by lawyers for three days, determined that the office could be held only by a clergyman, according to the Act of Uniformity, since the provosts had always received institution as for a parsonage from the Bishops of Lincoln. The king then said he could not break the law which he had made; and Dr. Zachary Cradock, famous for a single sermon, at most for two sermons, was chosen by the Fellows.

That he asked anything else is not known; it is certain that he obtained nothing, though he continued obsequious to the court through the rest of Charles's reign.

At the accession of King James (in 1685) he was chosen for Parliament, being then fourscore, at Saltash, in Cornwall; and wrote a Presage of the Downfall of the Turkish Empire, which he

presented to the king on his birthday. It is remarked, by his commentator Fenton, that in reading Tasso he had early imbibed a veneration for the heroes of the Holy War, and a zealous enmity to the Turks, which never left him. James, however, having soon after begun what he thought a holy war at home, made haste to put all molestation of the Turks out of his power.

James treated him with kindness and familiarity, of which instances are given by the writer of his life. One day, taking him into the closet, the king asked him how he liked one of the pictures: "My eyes," said Waller, "are dim, and I do not know it." The king said it was the Princess of Orange. "She is," said Waller, "like the greatest woman in the world." The king asked who was that; and was answered, Queen Elizabeth. "I wonder," said the king, "you should think so; but I must confess she had a wise council." "And, Sir," said Waller, "did you ever know a fool choose a wise one?" Such is the story, which I once heard of some other man. Pointed axioms, and acute replies, fly loose about the world, and are assigned successively to those whom it may be the fashion to celebrate.

When the king knew that he was about to marry his daughter to Dr. Birch, a clergyman, he ordered a French gentleman to tell him that "the king wondered he could think of marrying his daughter to a falling church." "The king," said Waller, "does me great honour in taking notice of my domestic affairs; but I have lived long enough to observe that this falling church has got a trick of rising again."

He took notice to his friends of the king's conduct; and said that "he would be left like a whale upon the strand." Whether he was privy to any of the transactions that ended in the revolution is not known. His heir joined the Prince of Orange.

Having now attained an age beyond which the laws of nature seldom suffer life to be extended, otherwise than by a future state, he seems to have turned his mind upon preparation for the decisive hour, and therefore consecrated his poetry to devotion. It is pleasing to discover that his piety was without weakness; that his intellectual powers continued vigorous; and that the lines which he composed when "he, for age, could neither read nor write," are not inferior to the effusions of his youth.

Towards the decline of life he bought a small house, with a little land, at Coleshill; and said "he should be glad to die, like the stag, where he was roused." This, however, did not happen. When he was at Beaconsfield, he found his legs grow tumid: he went to Windsor, where Sir Charles Scarborough then attended the king, and requested him, as both a friend and physician, to tell him "what that swelling meant." "Sir," answered Scarborough, "your blood will run no longer." Waller repeated some lines of Virgil, and went home to die.

As the disease increased upon him, he composed himself for his departure; and calling upon Dr. Birch to give him the holy sacrament, he desired his children to take it with him, and made an earnest declaration of his faith in Christianity. It now appeared what part of his conversation with the great could be remembered with delight. He related, that being present when the Duke of Buckingham talked profanely before King Charles, he said to him, "My lord, I am a great deal older than your grace and have, I believe, heard more arguments for atheism than ever your grace did; but I have lived long enough to see there is nothing in them; and so, I hope, your grace will."

He died October 21, 1687, and was buried at Beaconsfield, with a monument erected by his son's executors, for which Rymer wrote the inscription, and which I hope is now rescued from dilapidation.

He left several children by his second wife, of whom his daughter was married to Dr. Birch. Benjamin, the eldest son, was disinherited, and sent to New Jersey as wanting common understanding. Edmund, the second son, inherited the estate, and represented Agmondesham in parliament, but at last turned quaker. William, the third son, was a merchant in London. Stephen, the fourth, was an eminent doctor of laws, and one of the commissioners for the union. There is said to have been a fifth, of whom no account has descended.

The character of Waller, both moral and intellectual, has been drawn by Clarendon, to whom he was familiarly known, with nicety, which certainly none to whom he was not known can presume to emulate. It is therefore inserted here, with such remarks as others have supplied; after which, nothing remains but a critical examination of his poetry.

"Edmund Waller," says Clarendon, "was born to a very fair estate, by the parsimony, or frugality, of a wise father and mother; and he thought it so commendable an advantage, that he resolved to improve it with his utmost care, upon which in his nature he was too much intent; and in order to that, he was so much reserved and retired, that he was scarcely ever heard of, till by his address and dexterity he had gotten a very rich wife in the city, against all the recommendation and countenance and authority of the court, which was thoroughly engaged on the behalf of Mr. Crofts, and which used to be successful, in that age, against any opposition. He had the good fortune to have an alliance and friendship with Dr. Morley, who had assisted and instructed him in the reading many good books, to which his natural parts and promptitude inclined him, especially the poets; and at the age when other men used to give over writing verses (for he was near thirty years when he first engaged himself in that exercise, at least that he was known to do so), he surprised the town with two or three pieces of that kind; as if a tenth Muse had been newly born to cherish drooping poetry. The doctor at that time brought him into that company which was most celebrated for good conversation, where he was received and esteemed with

great applause and respect. He was a very pleasant discourser in earnest and in jest, and therefore very grateful to all kind of company, where he was not the less esteemed for being very rich.

“He had been even nursed in parliaments, where he sat when he was very young; and so, when they were resumed again (after a long intermission) he appeared in those assemblies with great advantage; having a graceful way of speaking, and by thinking much on several arguments (which his temper and complexion, that had much of melancholic, inclined him to), he seemed often to speak upon the sudden, when the occasion had only administered the opportunity of saying what he had thoroughly considered, which gave a great lustre to all he said; which yet was rather of delight than weight. There needs no more be said to extol the excellence and power of his wit, and pleasantness of his conversation, than that it was of magnitude enough to cover a world of very great faults; that is, so to cover them, that they were not taken notice of to his reproach, viz., a narrowness in his nature to the lowest degree; an abjectness and want of courage to support him in any virtuous undertaking; an insinuation and servile flattery to the height, the vainest and most imperious nature could be contented with; that it preserved and won his life from those who most resolved to take it, and in an occasion in which he ought to have been ambitious to have lost it; and then preserved him again from the reproach and the contempt that was due to him for so preserving it, and for vindicating it at such a price that it had power to reconcile him to those whom he had most offended and provoked; and continued to his age with that rare felicity, that his company was acceptable where his spirit was odious; and he was at least pitied where he was most detested.”

Such is the account of Clarendon; on which it may not be improper to make some remarks.

“He was very little known till he had obtained a rich wife in the city.”

He obtained a rich wife about the age of three-and-twenty; an age, before which few men are conspicuous much to their advantage. He was now, however, in parliament and at court; and, if he spent part of his time in privacy, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he endeavoured the improvement of his mind as well as his fortune.

That Clarendon might misjudge the motive of his retirement is the more probable, because he has evidently mistaken the commencement of his poetry, which he supposes him not to have attempted before thirty. As his first pieces were perhaps not printed, the succession of his compositions was not known; and Clarendon, who cannot be imagined to have been very studious of poetry, did not rectify his first opinion by consulting Waller’s book.

Clarendon observes, that he was introduced to the wits of the age by Dr. Morley; but the writer of his life relates that he was already among them, when, hearing a noise in the street, and inquiring the cause, they found a son of Ben Jonson under an arrest. This was Morley, whom Waller set free at the expense of one hundred pounds, took him into the country as director of his studies, and then procured him admission into the company of the friends of literature. Of this fact Clarendon had a nearer knowledge than the biographer, and is therefore more to be credited.

The account of Waller’s parliamentary eloquence is seconded by Burnet, who, though he calls him “the delight of the House,” adds, that “he was only concerned to say that which should make him be applauded, he never laid the business of the House to heart, being a vain and empty, though a witty man.”

Of his insinuation and flattery it is not unreasonable to believe that the truth is told. Ascham, in his elegant description of those whom in modern language we term wits, says, that they are “open flatterers, and private mockers.” Waller showed a little of both, when, upon sight of the Duchess of Newcastle’s verses on the Death of a Stag, he declared that he would give all his own compositions to have written them, and being charged with the exorbitance of his adulation, answered, that “nothing was too much to be given, that a lady might be saved from the disgrace of such a vile performance.” This, however, was no very mischievous or very unusual deviation from truth; had his hypocrisy been confined to such transactions, he might have been forgiven, though not praised: for who forbears to flatter an author or a lady?

Of the laxity of his political principles, and the weakness of his resolution, he experienced the natural effect, by losing the esteem of every party. From Cromwell he had only his recall; and from Charles the Second, who delighted in his company, he obtained only the pardon of his relation Hampden, and the safety of Hampden’s son.

As far as conjecture can be made from the whole of his writing, and his conduct, he was habitually and deliberately a friend to monarchy. His deviation towards democracy proceeded from his connexion with Hampden, for whose sake he prosecuted Crawley with great bitterness; and the invective which he pronounced on that occasion was so popular, that twenty thousand copies are said by his biographer to have been sold in one day.

It is confessed that his faults still left him many friends, at least many companions. His convivial power of pleasing is universally acknowledged; but those who conversed with him intimately, found him not only passionate, especially in his old age, but resentful; so that the interposition of friends was sometimes necessary.

His wit and his poetry naturally connected him with the polite writers of his time: he was joined with Lord Buckhurst in the translation of Corneille’s Pompey; and is said to have added his help

to that of Cowley in the original draft of the Rehearsal.

The care of his fortune, which Clarendon imputes to him in a degree little less than criminal, was either not constant or not successful; for having inherited a patrimony of three thousand five hundred pounds a year in the time of James the First, and augmented at least by one wealthy marriage, he left, about the time of the Revolution, an income of not more than twelve or thirteen hundred; which, when the different value of money is reckoned, will be found perhaps not more than a fourth part of what he once possessed.

Of this diminution, part was the consequence of the gifts which he was forced to scatter, and the fine which he was condemned to pay at the detection of his plot; and if his estate, as is related in his life, was sequestered, he had probably contracted debts when he lived in exile; for we are told, that at Paris he lived in splendour, and was the only Englishman, except the Lord St. Albans, that kept a table.

His unlucky plot compelled him to sell a thousand a year; of the waste of the rest there is no account, except that he is confessed by his biographer to have been a bad economist. He seems to have deviated from the common practice; to have been a hoarder in his first years, and a squanderer in his last.

Of his course of studies, or choice of books, nothing is known more than that he professed himself unable to read Chapman's translation of Homer without rapture. His opinion concerning the duty of a poet is contained in his declaration, that "he would blot from his works any line that did not contain some motive to virtue."

The characters by which Waller intended to distinguish his writing are sprightliness and dignity; in his smallest pieces, he endeavours to be gay; in the larger to be great. Of his airy and light productions, the chief source is gallantry, that attentive reverence of female excellence which has descended to us from the Gothic ages. As his poems are commonly occasional, and his addresses personal, he was not so liberally supplied with grand as with soft images; for beauty is more easily found than magnanimity.

The delicacy, which he cultivated, restrains him to a certain nicety and caution, even when he writes upon the slightest matter. He has, therefore, in his whole volume, nothing burlesque, and seldom anything ludicrous or familiar. He seems always to do his best; though his subjects are often unworthy of his care.

It is not easy to think without some contempt on an author, who is growing illustrious in his own opinion by verses, at one time, "To a Lady, who can do anything but sleep, when she pleases;" at another, "To a Lady who can sleep when she pleases;" now, "To a Lady, on her passing through a crowd of people;" then, "On a braid of divers colours woven by four Ladies;" "On a tree cut in paper;" or, "To a Lady, from whom he received the copy of verses on the paper-tree, which, for many years, had been missing."

Genius now and then produces a lucky trifle. We still read the Dove of Anacreon, and Sparrow of Catullus: and a writer naturally pleases himself with a performance, which owes nothing to the subject. But compositions merely pretty have the fate of other pretty things, and are quitted in time for something useful; they are flowers fragrant and fair, but of short duration; or they are blossoms to be valued only as they foretell fruits.

Among Waller's little poems are some, which their excellency ought to secure from oblivion; as, To Amoret, comparing the different modes of regard with which he looks on her and Sacharissa; and the verses on Love, that begin, "Anger in hasty words or blows."

In others he is not equally successful; sometimes his thoughts are deficient, and sometimes his expression.

The numbers are not always musical; as,

> Fair Venus, in thy soft arms
> The god of rage confine:
> For thy whispers are the charms
> Which only can divert his fierce design.
> What though he frown, and to tumult do incline;
> Thou the flame
> Kindled in his breast canst tame
> With that snow which unmelted lies on thine.

He seldom indeed fetches an amorous sentiment from the depths of science; his thoughts are for the most part easily understood, and his images such as the superfices of nature readily supplies; he has a just claim to popularity, because he writes to common degrees of knowledge; and is free at least from philosophical pedantry, unless perhaps the end of a song to the Sun may be excepted, in which he is too much a Copernican. To which may be added the simile of the "palm" in the verses "on her passing through a crowd;" and a line in a more serious poem on the Restoration, about vipers and treacle, which can only be understood by those who happen to know the composition of the Theriaca.

His thoughts are sometimes hyperbolical and his images unnatural

The plants admire,
No less than those of old did Orpheus' lyre;
If she sit down, with tops all tow'rds her bow'd,
They round about her into arbours crowd;
Or if she walks, in even ranks they stand,
Like some well-marshall'd and obsequious band.

In another place:

While in the park I sing, the listening deer
Attend my passion, and forget to fear:
When to the beeches I report my flame,
They bow their heads, as if they felt the same.
To gods appealing, when I reach their bowers
With loud complaints they answer me in showers.
To thee a wild and cruel soul is given,
More deaf than trees, and prouder than the Heaven!

On the head of a stag:

O fertile head! which every year
Could such a crop of wonder bear!
The teeming earth did never bring,
So soon, so hard, so large a thing:
Which might it never have been cast,
Each year's growth added to the last,
These lofty branches had supplied
The earth's bold sons' prodigious pride:
Heaven with these engines had been scaled,
When mountains heap'd on mountains fail'd.

Sometimes having succeeded in the first part, he makes a feeble conclusion. In the song of "Sacharissa's and Amoret's Friendship," the two last stanzas ought to have been omitted.

His images of gallantry are not always in the highest degree delicate.

Then shall my love this doubt displace
And gain such trust that I may come
And banquet sometimes on thy face,
But make my constant meals at home.

Some applications may be thought too remote and unconsequential; as in the verses on the Lady Dancing:

The sun in figures such as these
Joys with the moon to play:
To the sweet strains they advance,
Which do result from their own spheres;
As this nymph's dance
Moves with the numbers which she hears.

Sometimes a thought, which might perhaps fill a distich, is expanded and attenuated till it grows weak and almost evanescent.

Chloris! since first our calm of peace
Was frighted hence, this good we find,
Your favours with your fears increase,
And growing mischiefs make you kind.
So the fair tree, which still preserves
Her fruit, and state, while no wind blows,
In storms from that uprightness swerves;
And the glad earth about her strows
With treasure from her yielding boughs.

His images are not always distinct; as in the following passage, he confounds *Love* as a person with *Love* as a passion:

Some other nymphs, with colours faint,
And pencil slow, may Cupid paint,
And a weak heart in time destroy;
She has a stamp, and prints the boy;
Can, with a single look, inflame
The coldest breast, the rudest tame.

His sallies of casual flattery are sometimes elegant and happy, as that in return for the Silver Pen; and sometimes empty and trifling, as that upon the Card torn by the Queen. There are a few lines written in the Duchess's Tasso, which he is said by Fenton to have kept a summer under

correction. It happened to Waller, as to others, that his success was not always in proportion to his labour.

Of these pretty compositions, neither the beauties nor the faults deserve much attention. The amorous verses have this to recommend them, that they are less hyperbolical than those of some other poets. Waller is not always at the last gasp; he does not die of a frown, nor live upon a smile. There is, however, too much love, and too many trifles. Little things are made too important: and the Empire of Beauty is represented as exerting its influence further than can be allowed by the multiplicity of human passions, and the variety of human wants. Such books, therefore, may be considered as showing the world under a false appearance, and, so far as they obtain credit from the young and unexperienced, as misleading expectation, and misguiding practice.

Of his nobler and more weighty performances, the greater part is panegyrical: for of praise he was very lavish, as is observed by his imitator, Lord Lansdowne:

> No satyr stalks within the hallow'd ground,
> But queens and heroines, kings and gods abound;
> Glory and arms and love are all the sound.

In the first poem, on the danger of the prince on the coast of Spain, there is a puerile and ridiculous mention of Arion at the beginning; and the last paragraph, on the cable, is in part ridiculously mean, and in part ridiculously tumid. The poem, however, is such as may be justly praised, without much allowance for the state of our poetry and language at that time.

The two next poems are upon the king's behaviour at the death of Buckingham, and upon his Navy.

He has, in the first, used the pagan deities with great propriety:

> 'Twas want of such a precedent as this
> Made the old heathens frame their gods amiss.

In the poem on the Navy, those lines are very noble which suppose the king's power secure against a second deluge; so noble, that it were almost criminal to remark the mistake of "centre" for "surface," or to say that the empire of the sea would be worth little if it were not that the waters terminate in land.

The poem upon Sallee has forcible sentiments; but the conclusion is feeble. That on the Repairs of St. Paul's has something vulgar and obvious; such as the mention of Amphion; and something violent and harsh: as,

> So all our minds with his conspire to grace
> The Gentiles' great apostle and deface
> Those state obscuring sheds, that like a chain
> Seem'd to confine, and fetter him again:
> Which the glad saint shakes off at his command,
> As once the viper from his sacred hand.
> So joys the aged oak, when we divide
> The creeping ivy from his injured side.

Of the two last couplets, the first is extravagant, and the second mean.

His praise of the Queen is too much exaggerated; and the thought, that he "saves lovers, by cutting off hope, as gangrenes are cured by lopping the limb," presents nothing to the mind but disgust and horror.

Of the Battle of the Summer Islands, it seems not easy to say whether it is intended to raise terror or merriment. The beginning is too splendid for jest, and the conclusion too light for seriousness. The versification is studied, the scenes are diligently displayed, and the images artfully amplified; but as it ends neither in joy nor sorrow, it will scarcely be read a second time.

The panegyric upon Cromwell has obtained from the public a very liberal dividend of praise, which, however, cannot be said to have been unjustly lavished; for such a series of verses had rarely appeared before in the English language. Of the lines some are grand, some are graceful, and all are musical. There is now and then a feeble verse; or a trifling thought; but its great fault is the choice of its hero.

The poem of the War with Spain begins with lines more vigorous and striking than Waller is accustomed to produce. The succeeding parts are variegated with better passages and worse. There is something too farfetched in the comparison of the Spaniards drawing the English on by saluting St. Lucar with cannon, "to lambs awakening the lion by bleating." The fate of the Marquis and his Lady, who were burnt in their ship, would have moved more, had the poet not made him die like the Phoenix, because he had spices about him, nor expressed their affection and their end by a conceit at once false and vulgar:

> Alive, in equal flames of love they burn'd,
> And now together are to ashes turn'd.

The verses to Charles, on his return, were doubtless intended to counterbalance the panegyric on Cromwell. If it has been thought inferior to that with which it is naturally compared, the cause of its deficience has been already remarked.

The remaining pieces it is not necessary to examine singly. They must be supposed to have faults and beauties of the same kind with the rest. The Sacred Poems, however, deserve particular regard; they were the work of Waller's declining life, of those hours in which he looked upon the fame and the folly of the time past with the sentiments which his great predecessor Petrarch bequeathed to posterity, upon his review of that love and poetry which have given him immortality.

That natural jealousy which makes every man unwilling to allow much excellence in another, always produces a disposition to believe that the mind grows old with the body; and that he, whom we are now forced to confess superior, is hastening daily to a level with ourselves. By delighting to think this of the living, we learn to think it of the dead; and Fenton, with all his kindness for Waller, has the luck to mark the exact time when his genius passed the zenith, which he places at his fifty-fifth year. This is to allot the mind but a small portion. Intellectual decay is doubtless not uncommon; but it seems not to be universal. Newton was in his eighty-fifth year improving his chronology, a few days before his death; and Waller appears not, in my opinion, to have lost at eighty-two any part of his poetical power.

His Sacred Poems do not please like some of his other works; but before the fatal fifty-five, had he written on the same subjects, his success would hardly have been better.

It has been the frequent lamentation of good men that verse has been too little applied to the purposes of worship, and many attempts have been made to animate devotion by pious poetry. That they have very seldom attained their end is sufficiently known, and it may not be improper to inquire why they have miscarried.

Let no pious ear be offended if I advance, in opposition to many authorities, that poetical devotion cannot often please. The doctrines of religion may indeed be defended in a didactic poem; and he, who has the happy power of arguing in verse, will not lose it because his subject is sacred. A poet may describe the beauty and the grandeur of nature, the flowers of the spring, and the harvests of autumn, the vicissitudes of the tide, and the revolutions of the sky, and praise the Maker for his works, in lines which no reader shall lay aside. The subject of the disputation is not piety, but the motives to piety; that of the description is not God, but the works of God.

Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical. Man, admitted to implore the mercy of his Creator, and plead the merits of his Redeemer, is already in a higher state than poetry can confer.

The essence of poetry is invention; such invention as by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights. The topics of devotion are few, and being few are universally known; but, few as they are, they can be made no more; they can receive no grace from novelty of sentiment, and very little from novelty of expression.

Poetry pleases by exhibiting an idea more grateful to the mind than things themselves afford. This effect proceeds from the display of those parts of nature which attract, and the concealment of those which repel, the imagination: but religion must be shown as it is; suppression and addition equally corrupt it; and such as it is, it is known already.

From poetry the reader justly expects, and from good poetry always obtains, the enlargement of his comprehension and elevation of his fancy: but this is rarely to be hoped by Christians from metrical devotion. Whatever is great, desirable, or tremendous, is comprised in the name of the Supreme Being. Omnipotence cannot be exalted; Infinity cannot be amplified; Perfection cannot be improved.

The employments of pious meditation are Faith, Thanksgiving, Repentance, and Supplication. Faith, invariably uniform, cannot be invested by fancy with decorations. Thanksgiving, the most joyful of all holy effusions, yet addressed to a Being without passions, is confined to a few modes, and is to be felt rather then expressed. Repentance, trembling in the presence of the judge, is not at leisure for cadences and epithets. Supplication of man to man may diffuse itself through many topics of persuasion; but supplication to God can only cry for mercy.

Of sentiments purely religious, it will be found that the most simple expression is the most sublime. Poetry loses its lustre and its power, because it is applied to the decoration of something more excellent than itself. All that pious verse can do is to help the memory and delight the ear, and for these purposes it may be very useful; but it supplies nothing to the mind. The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestic for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures, is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere.

As much of Waller's reputation was owing to the softness and smoothness of his numbers, it is proper to consider those minute particulars to which a versifier must attend.

He certainly very much excelled in smoothness most of the writers who were living when his poetry commenced. The poets of Elizabeth had attained an art of modulation, which was afterwards neglected or forgotten. Fairfax was acknowledged by him as his model; and he might have studied with advantage the poem of Davies, which, though merely philosophical, yet seldom

leaves the ear ungratified.

But he was rather smooth than strong; of “the full resounding line,” which Pope attributes to Dryden, he has given very few examples. The critical decision has given the praise of strength to Denham, and of sweetness to Waller.

His excellence of versification has some abatements. He uses the expletive “do” very frequently; and, though he lived to see it almost universally ejected, was not more careful to avoid it in his last compositions than in his first. Praise had given him confidence; and finding the world satisfied, he satisfied himself.

His rhymes are sometimes weak words: “so” is found to make the rhyme twice in ten lines, and occurs often as a rhyme through his book.

His double rhymes, in heroic verse, have been censured by Mrs. Phillips, who was his rival in the translation of Corneille’s “Pompey;” and more faults might be found were not the inquiry below attention.

He sometimes uses the obsolete termination of verbs, as “waxeth,” “affecteth;” and sometimes retains the final syllable of the preterite, as “amazed,” “supposed,” of which I know not whether it is not to the detriment of our language that we have totally rejected them.

Of triplets he is sparing; but he did not wholly forbear them: of an Alexandrine he has given no example.

The general character of his poetry is elegance and gaiety. He is never pathetic, and very rarely sublime. He seems neither to have had a mind much elevated by nature nor amplified by learning. His thoughts are such as a liberal conversation and large acquaintance with life would easily supply. They had however then, perhaps, that grace of novelty which they are now often supposed to want by those who, having already found them in later books, do not know or inquire who produced them first. This treatment is unjust. Let not the original author lose by his imitators.

Praise, however, should be due before it is given. The author of Waller’s Life ascribes to him the first practice of what Erythræus and some late critics call “Alliteration,” of using in the same verse many words beginning with the same letter. But this knack, whatever be its value, was so frequent among early writers, that Gascoigne, a writer of the sixteenth century, warns the young poet against affecting it; Shakespeare, in the “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” is supposed to ridicule it; and in another play the sonnet of Holofernes fully displays it.

He borrows too many of his sentiments and illustrations from the old mythology, for which it is vain to plead the example of ancient poets; the deities, which they introduced so frequently, were considered as realities, so far as to be received by the imagination, whatever sober reason might even then determine. But of these images time has tarnished the splendour. A fiction, not only detected but despised, can never afford a solid basis to any position, though sometimes it may furnish a transient allusion, or slight illustration. No modern monarch can be much exalted by hearing that, as Hercules had his “club” he has his “navy.”

But of the praise of Waller, though much may be taken away, much will remain; for it cannot be denied that he added something to our elegance of diction, and something to our propriety of thought; and to him may be applied what Tasso said, with equal spirit and justice, of himself and Guarini, when, having perused the Pastor Fido, he cried out, “If he had not read Aminta, he had not excelled it.”

As Waller professed himself to have learned the art of versification from Fairfax, it has been thought proper to subjoin a specimen of his work, which, after Mr. Hoole’s translation, will perhaps not be soon reprinted. By knowing the state in which Waller found our poetry, the reader may judge how much he improved it.

1.

Erminia’s steed (this while) his mistresse bore
Through forrests thicke among the shadie treene,
Her feeble hand the bridle raines forelore,
Halfe in a swoune she was for fear I weene;
But her flit courser spared nere the more,
To beare her through the desart woods unseene
Of her strong foes, that chas’d her through the plaine
And still pursu’d, but still pursu’d in vaine.

2.

Like as the wearie hounds at last retire,
Windlesse, displeased, from the fruitlesse chace,
When the slie beast Tapisht in bush and brire,
No art nor paines can rowse out of his place:
The Christian knights so full of shame and ire
Returned backe, with faint and wearie pace!
Yet still the fearfull Dame fled, swift as winde
Nor euer staid, nor euer lookt behinde.

3.

Through thicke and thinne, all night, all day, she driued,
Withouten comfort, companie, or guide,
Her plaints and teares with euery thought reuiued,
She heard and saw her greefes, but nought beside.
But when the sunne his burning chariot diued
In Thetis wane, and wearie teame vntide,
  On Iordans sandie banks her course she staid,
  At last, there downe she light, and downe she laid

4.

Her teares, her drinke; her food, her sorrowings,
This was her diet that vnhappie night;
But sleepe (that sweet repose and quiet brings)
To ease the greefes of discontented wight,
Spred forth his tender, soft, and nimble wings,
In his dull armes foulding the virgin bright;
  And loue, his mother, and the graces kept
  Strong watch and warde, while this faire Ladie slept

5.

The birds awakte her with their morning song,
Their warbling musicke pearst her tender eare,
The murmuring brookes and whistling windes among
The rattling boughes, and leaues, their parts did beare;
Her eies vnclos'd beheld the groues along
Of swaines and shepherd groomes, that dwellings weare;
  And that sweet noise, birds, winds, and waters sent,
  Prouokt again the virgin to lament.

6.

Her plaints were interrupted with a sound,
That seem'd from thickest bushes to proceed,
Some iolly shepherd sung a lustie round,
And to his voice had tun'd his oaten reed;
Thither she went, an old man there she found,
(At whose right hand his little flock did feed)
  Sat making baskets, his three sonnes among
  That learn'd their father's art, and learn'd his song.

7.

Beholding one in shining armes appeare
The seelie man and his were sore dismaid;
But sweet Erminia comforted their feare,
Her ventall vp, her visage open laid
You happie folke, of heau'n beloued deare,
Work on (quoth she) upon your harmless traid,
  These dreadfull armes I beare no warfare bring
  To your sweet toile, nor those sweet tunes yon sing.

8.

But father, since this land, these townes and towres,
Destroied are with sword, with fire and spoile,
How may it be unhurt, that you and yours
In safetie thus, applie your harmlesse toile?
My sonne (quoth he) this pore estate of ours
Is euer safe from storm of warlike broile;
  This wilderneese doth vs in safetie keepe,
  No thundering drum, no trumpet breakes our sleepe.

9.

Haply iust heau'ns defence and shield of right,
Doth loue the innocence of simple swains,
The thunderbolts on highest mountains light,
And seld or neuer strike the lower plaines;
So kings have cause to feare *Bellonaes* might,
Not they whose sweat and toile their dinner gaines,
  Nor ever greedie soldier was entised
  By pouertie, neglected and despised.

10.

O Pouertie, chefe of the heau'nly brood,

Dearer to me than wealth or kingly crowne!
No wish for honour, thirst of others good,
Can moue my hart, contented with mine owne:
We quench our thirst with water of this flood,
Nor fear we poison should therein be throwne;
These little flocks of sheepe and tender goates
Giue milke for food, and wool to make us coates.

11.

We little wish, we need but little wealth,
From cold and hunger vs to cloath and feed;
These are my sonnes, their care preserues from stealth
Their fathers flocks, nor servants moe I need:
Amid these groues I walks oft for my health,
And to the fishes, birds, and beastes give heed,
How they are fed, in forrest, spring and lake,
And their contentment for ensample take.

12.

Time was (for each one hath his doting time,
These siluer locks were golden tresses than)
That countrie life I hated as a crime,
And from the forrests sweet contentment ran,
To Memphis' stately pallace would I clime,
And there became the mightie Caliphes man
And though I but a simple gardner weare,
Yet could I marke abuses, see and heare.

13.

Entised on with hope of future gaine,
I suffred long what did my soule displease;
But when my youth was spent, my hope was vaine,
I felt my native strength at last decrease;
I gan my losse of lustie yeeres complaine,
And wisht I had enjoy'd the countries peace;
I bod the court farewell, and with content
My later age here have I quiet spent.

14.

While thus he spake, Erminia husht and still
His wise discourses heard, with great attention,
His speeches graue those idle fancies kill,
Which in her troubled soule bred such dissention;
After much thought reformed was her will,
Within those woods to dwell was her intention,
Till fortune should occasion new afford,
To turne her home to her desired Lord.

15.

She said therefore, O shepherd fortunate!
That troubles some didst whilom feele and proue.
Yet liuest now in this contented state,
Let my mishap thy thoughts to pitie moue,
To entertaine me as a willing mate
In shepherds life, which I admire and loue;
Within these plessant groues perchance my hart,
Of her discomforts, may vnload some part.

16.

If gold or wealth of most esteemed deare,
If iewels rich, thou diddest hold in prise,
Such store thereof, such plentie haue I seen,
As to a greedie minde might well suffice:
With that downe trickled many a siluer teare,
Two christall streames fell from her watrie eies;
Part of her sad misfortunes then she told,
And wept, and with her wept that shepherd old.

17.

With speeches kinde, he gan the virgin deare
Towards his cottage gently home to guide;
His aged wife there made her homely cheare,
Yet welcomde her, and plast her by her side.

The Princesse dond a poor pastoraes geare,
A kerchiefe course vpon her head she tide;
But yet her gestures and her lookes (I gesse)
Were such, as ill beseem'd a shepherdesse.

18.

Not those rude garments could obscure, and hide
The heau'nly beautie of her angels face,
Nor was her princely ofspring damnifide,
Or ought disparag'de, by those labours bace;
Her little flocks to pasture would she guide,
And milke her goates, and in their folds them place,
Both cheese and butter could she make, and frame
Her selfe to please the shepherd and his dame.

MILTON.

THE life of Milton has been already written in so many forms, and with such minute inquiry, that I might perhaps more properly have contented myself with the addition of a few notes on Mr. Fenton's elegant abridgment, but that a new narrative was thought necessary to the uniformity of this edition.

John Milton was by birth a gentleman, descended from the proprietors of Milton, near Thame, in Oxfordshire, one of whom forfeited his estate in the times of York and Lancaster. Which side he took I know not; his descendant inherited no veneration for the White Rose.

His grandfather, John, was keeper of the forest of Shotover, a zealous Papist, who disinherited his son because he had forsaken the religion of his ancestors.

His father, John, who was the son disinherited, had recourse for his support to the profession of a scrivener. He was a man eminent for his skill in music, many of his compositions being still to be found; and his reputation in his profession was such, that he grew rich, and retired to an estate. He had probably more than common literature, as his son addresses him in one of his most elaborate Latin poems. He married a gentlewoman of the name of Caston, a Welsh family, by whom he had two sons, John, the poet, and Christopher, who studied the law and adhered, as the law taught him, to the king's party, for which he was a while persecuted; but having by his brother's interest obtained permission to live in quiet, he supported himself so honourably by chamber-practice, that, soon after the accession of King James, he was knighted and made a judge; but, his constitution being too weak for business, he retired before any disreputable compliances became necessary.

He had likewise a daughter Anne, whom he married with a considerable fortune to Edward Philips, who came from Shrewsbury, and rose in the Crown-office to be secondary: by him she had two sons, John and Edward, who were educated by the poet, and from whom is derived the only authentic account of his domestic manners.

John the poet, was born in his father's house, at the Spread Eagle, in Bread Street, Dec. 9, 1608, between six and seven in the morning. His father appears to have been very solicitous about his education; for he was instructed at first by private tuition under the care of Thomas Young, who was afterwards chaplain to the English merchants at Hamburgh, and of whom we have reason to think well, since his scholar considered him as worthy of an epistolary elegy.

He was then sent to St. Paul's school, under the care of Mr. Gill; and removed, in the beginning of his sixteenth year, to Christ's College, in Cambridge, where he entered a sizar, Feb. 12, 1624.

He was at this time eminently skilled in the Latin tongue; and he himself, by annexing the dates to his first compositions, a boast of which the learned Politian has given him an example, seems to commend the earliness of his own proficiency to the notice of posterity.

But the products of his vernal fertility have been surpassed by many, and particularly by his contemporary Cowley. Of the powers of the mind it is difficult to form an estimate: many have excelled Milton in their first essays, who never rose to works like "Paradise Lost."

At fifteen, a date which he uses till he is sixteen, he translated or versified two Psalms, 114 and 136, which he thought worthy of the public eye; but they raise no great expectations: they would in any numerous school have obtained praise, but not excited wonder.

Many of his elegies appear to have been written in his eighteenth year, by which it appears that he had then read the Roman authors with very nice discernment. I once heard Mr. Hampton, the translator of Polybius, remark, what I think is true, that Milton was the first Englishman who, after the revival of letters, wrote Latin verses with classic elegance. If any exceptions can be made, they are very few: Haddon and Ascham, the pride of Elizabeth's reign, however they may have succeeded in prose, no sooner attempt verse than they provoke derision. If we produced anything worthy of notice before the elegies of Milton, it was perhaps Alabaster's "Roxana."

Of these exercises, which the rules of the University required, some were published by him in his maturer years. They had been undoubtedly applauded; for they were such as few can form: yet there is reason to suspect that he was regarded in his college with no great fondness. That he obtained no fellowship is certain; but the unkindness with which he was treated was not merely negative. I am ashamed to relate what I fear is true, that Milton was one of the last students in either University that suffered the public indignity of corporal correction.

It was, in the violence of controversial hostility, objected to him, that he was expelled: this he steadily denies, and it was apparently not true; but it seems plain, from his own verses to "Diodati", that he had incurred "rustication," a temporary dismission into the country, with perhaps the loss of a term.

> Me tenet urbs refluâ quam Thamesis alluit undâ,
> Meque nec invitum patria dulcis habet.
> Jam nec arundiferum mihi cura revisere Camum
> Nec dudum *vetiti* me *laris* angit amor.—
> Nec duri libet usque minas preferre magistri,
> Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo.
> Si sit hoc exilium patrias adiisse penates,
> Et vacuum curis otia greta sequi,
> Non ego vel *profugi* nomen sortemve recuso,
> Lætus et *exilii* conditione fruor.

I cannot find any meaning but this, which even kindness and reverence can give to the term, "vetiti laris," "a habitation from which he is excluded;" or how "exile" can be otherwise interpreted. He declares yet more, that he is weary of enduring "the threats of a rigorous master, and something else which a temper like his cannot undergo." What was more than threat was probably punishment. This poem, which mentions his "exile," proves likewise that it was not perpetual; for it concludes with a resolution of returning some time to Cambridge. And it may be conjectured, from the willingness with which he has perpetuated the memory of his exile, that its cause was such as gave him no shame.

He took both the usual degrees: that of bachelor in 1628, and that of master in 1632; but he left the University with no kindness for its institution, alienated either by the injudicious severity of his governors, or his own captious perverseness. The cause cannot now be known, but the effect appears in his writings. His scheme of education, inscribed to Hartlib, supersedes all academical instruction, being intended to comprise the whole time which men usually spend in literature, from their entrance upon grammar, till they proceed, as it is called Masters of Art. And in his discourse "on the likeliest Way to remove Hirelings out of the Church," he ingeniously proposes that the profits of the lands forfeited by the act for superstitious uses should be applied to such academies all over the land where languages and arts may be taught together that youth may be at once brought up to a competency of learning and an honest trade, by which means such of them as had the gift, being enabled to support themselves (without tithes) by the latter, may, by the help of the former, become worthy preachers.

One of his objections to academical education, as it was then conducted, is, that men designed for orders in the church were permitted to act plays, writhing and unboning their clergy limbs to all the antic and dishonest gestures of Trincalos, buffoons, and bawds, prostituting the shame of that ministry which they had, or were near having, to the eyes of courtiers and court-ladies, their grooms and mademoiselles.

This is sufficiently peevish in a man, who, when he mentions his exile from the college, relates, with great luxuriance, the compensation which the pleasures of the theatre afford him. Plays were therefore only criminal when they were acted by academics.

He went to the university with a design of entering into the church, but in time altered his mind; for he declared, that whoever became a clergyman, must "subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, which, unless he took with a conscience that could retch, he must straight perjure himself. He thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing."

These expressions are, I find, applied to the subscription of the Articles; but it seems more probable that they relate to canonical obedience. I know not any of the Articles which seem to thwart his opinions: but the thoughts of obedience, whether canonical or civil, raise his indignation.

His unwillingness to engage in the ministry, perhaps not yet advanced to a settled resolution of declining it, appears in a letter to one of his friends, who had reproved his suspended and dilatory life, which he seems to have imputed to an insatiable curiosity, and fantastic luxury of various knowledge. To this he writes a cool and plausible answer, in which he endeavours to persuade him, that the delay proceeds not from the delights of desultory study, but from the desire of obtaining more fitness for his task; and that he goes on, "not taking thought of being late, so it gives advantage to be more fit."

When he left the University, he returned to his father, then residing at Horton, in Buckinghamshire, with whom he lived five years, in which time he is said to have read all the Greek and Latin writers. With what limitations this universality is to be understood, who shall inform us?

It might be supposed, that he who read so much should have done nothing else; but Milton found time to write the “Masque of Comus,” which was presented at Ludlow, then the residence of the Lord President of Wales, in 1634; and had the honour of being acted by the Earl of Bridgewater’s sons and daughter. The fiction is derived from Homer’s “Circe;” but we never can refuse to any modern the liberty of borrowing from Homer:

> —a quo ceu fonte perenni
> Vatum Pieriis ora rigantur aquis.

His next production was Lycidas, an elegy, written in 1637, on the death of Mr. King, the son of Sir John King, Secretary for Ireland in the time of Elizabeth, James, and Charles. King was much a favourite at Cambridge, and many of the wits joined to do honour to his memory. Milton’s acquaintance with the Italian writers may be discovered by a mixture of longer and shorter verses, according to the rules of Tuscan poetry, and his malignity to the church by some lines which are interpreted as threatening its extermination.

He is supposed about this time to have written his Arcades; for while he lived at Horton he used sometimes to steal from his studies a few days, which he spent at Harefield, the house of the Countess Dowager of Derby, where the Arcades made part of a dramatic entertainment.

He began now to grow weary of the country, and had some purpose of taking chambers in the Inns of Court, when the death of his mother set him at liberty to travel, for which he obtained his father’s consent, and Sir Henry Wotton’s directions; with the celebrated precept of prudence, *i pensieri stretti, ed il viso sciolto*; “thoughts close, and looks loose.”

In 1638 he left England, and went first to Paris; where, by the favour of Lord Scudamore, he had the opportunity of visiting Grotius, then residing at the French court as ambassador from Christina of Sweden. From Paris he hasted into Italy, of which he had with particular diligence studied the language and literature; and, though he seems to have intended a very quick perambulation of the country, stayed two months at Florence; where he found his way into the academies, and produced his compositions with such applause as appears to have exalted him in his own opinion, and confirmed him in the hope, that, “by labour and intense study, which,” says he, “I take to be my portion in this life, joined with a strong propensity of nature,” he might “leave something so written to after-times, as they should not willingly let it die.”

It appears, in all his writings, that he had the usual concomitant of great abilities, a lofty and steady confidence in himself, perhaps not without some contempt of others, for scarcely any man ever wrote so much, and praised so few. Of his praise he was very frugal; as he set its value high, and considered his mention of a name as a security against the waste of time, and a certain preservative from oblivion.

At Florence he could not indeed complain that his merit wanted distinction. Carlo Dati presented him with an encomiastic inscription, in the tumid lapidary style; and Francini wrote him an ode, of which the first stanza is only empty noise; the rest are perhaps too diffuse on common topics: but the last is natural and beautiful.

From Florence he went to Sienna, and from Sienna to Rome, where he was again received with kindness by the learned and the great. Holstenius, the keeper of the Vatican library, who had resided three years at Oxford, introduced him to Cardinal Barberini: and he, at a musical entertainment, waited for him at the door, and led him by the hand into the assembly. Here Selvaggi praised him in a distich, and Salsilli in a tetrastich: neither of them of much value. The Italians were gainers by this literary commerce; for the encomiums with which Milton repaid Salsilli, though not secure against a stern grammarian, turn the balance indisputably in Milton’s favour.

Of these Italian testimonies, poor as they are, he was proud enough to publish them before his poems; though he says, he cannot be suspected but to have known that they were said *non tam de se, quam supra se*.

At Rome, as at Florence, he stayed only two months: a time indeed sufficient, if he desired only to ramble with an explainer of its antiquities, or to view palaces and count pictures; but certainly too short for the contemplation of learning, policy, or manners.

From Rome he passed on to Naples, in company of a hermit, a companion from whom little could be expected; yet to him Milton owed his introduction to Manso, Marquis of Villa, who had been before the patron of Tasso. Manso was enough delighted with his accomplishments to honour him with a sorry distich, in which he commends him for everything but his religion: and Milton, in return, addressed him in a Latin poem, which must have raised a high opinion of English elegance and literature.

His purpose was now to have visited Sicily and Greece; but hearing of the differences between the king and parliament, he thought it proper to hasten home, rather than pass his life in foreign amusements while his countrymen were contending for their rights. He therefore came back to Rome, though the merchants informed him of plots laid against him by the Jesuits, for the liberty of his conversations on religion. He had sense enough to judge that there was no danger, and therefore kept on his way, and acted as before, neither obtruding nor shunning controversy. He had perhaps given some offence by visiting Galileo, then a prisoner in the Inquisition for philosophical heresy; and at Naples he was told by Manse, that, by his declarations on religious questions, he had excluded himself from some distinctions which he should otherwise have paid

him. But such conduct, though it did not please, was yet sufficiently safe; and Milton stayed two months more at Rome, and went on to Florence without molestation.

From Florence he visited Lucca. He afterwards went to Venice; and, having sent away a collection of music and other books, travelled to Geneva, which he probably considered as the metropolis of orthodoxy.

Here he reposed as in a congenial element, and became acquainted with John Diodati and Frederick Spanheim, two learned professors of divinity. From Geneva he passed through France; and came home, after an absence of a year and three months.

At his return he heard of the death of his friend, Charles Diodati; a man whom it is reasonable to suppose of great merit, since he was thought by Milton worthy of a poem, entitled “Epitaphium Damonis,” written with the common but childish imitation of pastoral life.

He now hired a lodging at the house of one Russel a tailor in St. Bride’s Churchyard, and undertook the education of John and Edward Philips, his sister’s sons. Finding his rooms too little, he took a house and garden in Aldersgate Street, which was not then so much out of the world as it is now; and chose his dwelling at the upper end of a passage, that he might avoid the noise of the street. Here he received more boys, to be boarded and instructed.

Let not our veneration for Milton forbid us to look with some degree of merriment on great promises and small performance, on the man who hastens home, because his countrymen are contending for their liberty, and, when he reaches the scene of action, vapours away his patriotism in a private boarding-school. This is the period of his life from which all his biographers seem inclined to shrink. They are unwilling that Milton should be degraded to a schoolmaster; but since it cannot be denied that he taught boys, one finds out that he taught for nothing, and another that his motive was only zeal for the propagation of learning and virtue; and all tell what they do not know to be true, only to excuse an act which no wise man will consider as in itself disgraceful. His father was alive; his allowance was not ample; and he supplied its deficiencies by an honest and useful employment.

It is told, that in the art of education he performed wonders; and a formidable list is given of the authors, Greek and Latin, that were read in Aldersgate Street by youth between ten and fifteen or sixteen years of age. Those who tell or receive these stories should consider, that nobody can be taught faster than he can learn. The speed of the horseman must be limited by the power of his horse. Every man that has ever undertaken to instruct others can tell what slow advances he has been able to make, and how much patience it requires to recall vagrant inattention, to stimulate sluggish indifference, and to rectify absurd misapprehension.

The purpose of Milton, as it seems, was to teach something more solid than the common literature of schools, by reading those authors that treat of physical subjects, such as the Georgic, and astronomical treatises of the ancients. This was a scheme of improvement which seems to have busied many literary projectors of that age. Cowley, who had more means than Milton of knowing what was wanting to the embellishments of life, formed the same plan of education in his imaginary college.

But the truth is, that the knowledge of external nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind. Whether we provide for action or conversation, whether we wish to be useful or pleasing, the first requisite is the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong; the next is an acquaintance with the history of mankind, and with those examples which may be said to embody truth, and prove by events the reasonableness of opinions. Prudence and justice are virtues and excellences of all times and of all places; we are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance. Our intercourse with intellectual nature is necessary; our speculations upon matter are voluntary, and at leisure. Physiological learning is of such rare emergence, that one may know another half his life without being able to estimate his skill in hydrostatics or astronomy; but his moral and prudential character immediately appears.

Those authors, therefore, are to be read at schools that supply most axioms of prudence, most principles of moral truth, and most materials for conversation; and these purposes are best served by poets, orators, and historians.

Let me not be censured for this digression as pedantic or paradoxical; for, if I have Milton against me, I have Socrates on my side. It was his labour to turn philosophy from the study of Nature to speculations upon life; but the innovators whom I oppose are turning off attention from life to nature. They seem to think that we are placed here to watch the growth of plants, or the motions of the stars. Socrates was rather of opinion that what we had to learn was how to do good and avoid evil.

> Οτι ποι ἐν μεγάροισι κακόντ’ ἀγαθόντε τέτυκται

Of institutions we may judge by their effects. From this wonder-working academy I do not know that there ever proceeded any man very eminent for knowledge: its only genuine product, I believe, is a small History of Poetry, written in Latin by his nephew Philips, of which perhaps none of my readers has ever heard.

That in his school, as in everything else which he undertook, he laboured with great diligence, there is no reason for doubting. One part of his method deserves general imitation. He was

careful to instruct his scholars in religion. Every Sunday was spent upon theology, of which he dictated a short system, gathered from the writers that were then fashionable in the Dutch universities.

He set his pupils an example of hard study and spare diet; only now and then he allowed himself to pass a day of festivity and indulgence with some gay gentlemen of Gray's Inn.

He now began to engage in the controversies of the times, and lent his breath to blow the flames of contention. In 1641 he published a treatise of Reformation in two books, against the Established Church, being willing to help the Puritans, who were, he says, "inferior to the Prelates in learning."

Hall, Bishop of Norwich, had published an Humble Remonstrance, in defence of Episcopacy; to which, in 1641, five ministers, of whose names the first letters made the celebrated word *Smectymnuus*, gave their answer. Of this answer a confutation was attempted by the learned Usher; and to the confutation Milton published a reply, entitled, "Of Prelatical Episcopacy, and whether it may be deduced from the Apostolical Times, by virtue of those Testimonies which are alleged to that purpose in some late Treatises, one whereof goes under the Name of James, Lord Bishop of Armagh."

I have transcribed this title to show, by his contemptuous mention of Usher, that he had now adopted the Puritanical savageness of manners. His next work was, "The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelacy," by Mr. John Milton, 1642. In this book he discovers, not with ostentatious exultation, but with calm confidence, his high opinion of his own powers, and promises to undertake something, he yet knows not what, that may be of use and honour to his country. "This," says he, "is not to be obtained but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit that can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His seraphim, with the hallowed fire of His altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom He pleases. To this must be added, industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs till which in some measure be compassed, I refuse not to sustain this expectation." From a promise like this, at once fervid, pious, and rational, might be expected the "Paradise Lost."

He published the same year two more pamphlets, upon the same question. To one of his antagonists, who affirms that he was "vomited out of the university," he answers in general terms: "The fellows of the college wherein I spent some years, at my parting, after I had taken two degrees, as the manner is, signified many times how much better it would content them that I should stay.—As for the common approbation or dislike of that place, as now it is, that I should esteem or disesteem myself the more for that, too simple is the answerer, if he think to obtain with me. Of small practice were the physician who could not judge by what she and her sister have of long time vomited, that the worser stuff she strongly keeps in her stomach, but the better she is ever kecking at, and is queasy; she vomits now out of sickness; but before it will be well with her, she must vomit with strong physic. The university, in the time of her better health, and my younger judgment, I never greatly admired, but now much less."

This is surely the language of a man who thinks that he has been injured. He proceeds to describe the course of his conduct, and the train of his thoughts; and, because he has been suspected of incontinence, gives an account of his own purity: "That if I be justly charged," says he, "with this crime, it may come upon me with tenfold shame."

The style of his piece is rough, and such perhaps was that of his antagonist. This roughness he justifies by great examples, in a long digression. Sometimes he tries to be humorous: "Lest I should take him for some chaplain in hand, some squire of the body to his prelate, one who serves not at the altar only, but at the court-cupboard, he will bestow on us a pretty model of himself; and sets me out half-a-dozen phthisical mottoes, wherever he had them, hopping short in the measure of convulsion fits; in which labour the agony of his wit having escaped narrowly, instead of well-sized periods, he greets us with a quantity of thumb-ring posies.—And thus ends this section, or rather dissection, of himself." Such is the controversial merriment of Milton; his gloomy seriousness is yet more offensive. Such is his malignity, "that hell grows darker at his frown."

His father, after Reading was taken by Essex, came to reside in his house, and his school increased. At Whitsuntide, in his thirty-fifth year, he married Mary, the daughter of Mr. Powel, a justice of the peace in Oxfordshire. He brought her to town with him, and expected all the advantages of a conjugal life. The lady, however, seems not much to have delighted in the pleasures of spare diet and hard study; for, as Philips relates, "having for a month led a philosophic life, after having been used at home to a great house, and much company and joviality, her friends, possibly by her own desire, made earnest suit to have her company the remaining part of the summer, which was granted, upon a promise of her return at Michaelmas."

Milton was too busy to much miss his wife; he pursued his studies, and now and then visited the Lady Margaret Leigh, whom he has mentioned in one of his sonnets. At last Michaelmas arrived; but the lady had no inclination to return to the sullen gloom of her husband's habitation, and therefore very willingly forgot her promise. He sent her a letter, but had no answer; he sent more with the same success. It could be alleged that letters miscarry; he therefore despatched a messenger, being by this time too angry to go himself. His messenger was sent back with some contempt. The family of the lady were Cavaliers.

In a man whose opinion of his own merit was like Milton's, less provocation than this might have

raised violent resentment. Milton soon determined to repudiate her for disobedience; and, being one of those who could easily find arguments to justify inclination, published (in 1644) “The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,” which was followed by the “Judgment of Martin Bucer concerning Divorce,” and the next year his “Tetrachordon, Expositions upon the four chief Places of Scripture which treat of Marriage.”

This innovation was opposed, as might be expected, by the clergy, who, then holding their famous assembly at Westminster, procured that the author should be called before the Lords; “but that house,” says Wood, “whether approving the doctrine, or not favouring his accusers, did soon dismiss him.”

There seems not to have been much written against him, nor anything by any writer of eminence. The antagonist that appeared is styled by him, “A Serving Man turned Solicitor.” Howel, in his Letters, mentions the new doctrine with contempt; and it was, I suppose, thought more worthy of derision than of confutation. He complains of this neglect in two sonnets, of which the first is contemptible, and the second not excellent.

From this time it is observed that he became an enemy to the Presbyterians, whom he had favoured before. He that changes his party by his humour is not more virtuous than he that changes it by his interest; he loves himself rather than truth.

His wife and her relations now found that Milton was not an unresisting sufferer of injuries; and perceiving that he had begun to put his doctrine in practice, by courting a young woman of great accomplishments, the daughter of one Doctor Davis, who was, however, not ready to comply, they resolved to endeavour a reunion. He went sometimes to the house of one Blackborough, his relation, in the lane of St. Martin’s-le-Grand, and at one of his usual visits was surprised to see his wife come from another room, and implore forgiveness on her knees. He resisted her entreaties for a while; “but partly,” says Philips, “his own generous nature, more inclinable to reconciliation than to perseverance in anger or revenge, and partly the strong intercession of friends on both sides, soon brought him to an act of oblivion and a fair league of peace.” It were injurious to omit that Milton afterwards received her father and her brothers in his own house, when they were distressed, with other Royalists.

He published about the same time his “Areopagitica, a speech of Mr. John Milton for the liberty of unlicensed Printing.” The danger of such unbounded liberty, and the danger of bounding it, have produced a problem in the science of government, which human understanding seems hitherto unable to solve. If nothing may be published but what civil authority shall have previously approved, power must always be the standard of truth; if every dreamer of innovations may propagate his prospects, there can be no settlement; if every murmurer at government may diffuse discontent, there can be no peace; and if every sceptic in theology may teach his follies, there can be no religion. The remedy against these evils is to punish the authors; for it is yet allowed that every society may punish, though not prevent, the publication of opinions which that society shall think pernicious; but this punishment, though it may crush the author, promotes the book; and it seems not more reasonable to leave the right of printing unrestrained because writers may be afterwards censured, than it would be to sleep with doors unbolted, because by our laws we can hang a thief.

But whatever were his engagements, civil or domestic poetry was never long out of his thoughts.

About this time (1645) a collection of his Latin and English poems appeared, in which the “Allegro,” and “Penseroso,” with some others, were first published.

He had taken a larger house in Barbican for the reception of scholars; but the numerous relations of his wife, to whom he generously granted refuge for a while, occupied his rooms. In time, however, they went away; “and the house again,” says Philips, “now looked like a house of the Muses only, though the accession of scholars was not great. Possibly his having proceeded so far in the education of youth may have been the occasion of his adversaries calling him pedagogue and schoolmaster; whereas it is well known he never set up for a public school, to teach all the young fry of a parish, but only was willing to impart his learning and knowledge to his relations, and the sons of gentlemen who were his intimate friends, and that neither his writings nor his way of teaching savoured in the least of pedantry.”

Thus laboriously does his nephew extenuate what cannot be denied, and what might be confessed without disgrace. Milton was not a man who could become mean by a mean employment. This, however, his warmest friends seem not to have found; they therefore shift and palliate. He did not sell literature to all comers at an open shop; he was a chamber-milliner, and measured his commodities only to his friends.

Philips, evidently impatient of viewing him in this state of degradation, tells us that it was not long continued; and, to raise his character again, has a mind to invest him with military splendour: “He is much mistaken,” he says, “if there was not about this time a design of making him an adjutant-general in Sir William Waller’s army. But the new-modelling of the army proved an obstruction to the design.” An event cannot be set at a much greater distance than by having been only “designed, about some time,” if a man “be not much mistaken.” Milton shall be a pedagogue no longer; for, if Philips be not much mistaken, somebody at some time designed him for a soldier.

About the time that the army was new-modelled (1645), he removed to a smaller house in Holborn, which opened backward into Lincoln’s Inn Fields. He is not known to have published

anything afterwards till the king's death, when, finding his murderers condemned by the Presbyterians, he wrote a treatise to justify it, "and to compose the minds of the people."

He made some remarks on the Articles of Peace between Ormond and the Irish rebels. While he contented himself to write, he perhaps did only what his conscience dictated; and if he did not very vigilantly watch the influence of his own passions, and the gradual prevalence of opinions, first willingly admitted, and then habitually indulged; if objections, by being overlooked, were forgotten, and desire superinduced conviction, he yet shared—only the common weakness of mankind, and might be no less sincere than his opponents. But, as faction seldom leaves a man honest, however it might find him, Milton is suspected of having interpolated the book called "Icon Basilike," which the council of state, to whom he was now made Latin Secretary, employed him to censure, by inserting a prayer taken from Sidney's "Arcadia," and imputing it to the king, whom he charges, in his "Iconoclastes," with the use of this prayer, as with a heavy come, in the indecent language with which prosperity had emboldened the advocates for rebellion to insult all that is venerable or great: "Who would have imagined so little fear in him of the true all-seeing deity—as, immediately before his death, to pop into the hands of the grave bishop that attended him, as a special relic of his saintly exercises, a prayer stolen word for word from the mouth of a heathen woman praying to a heathen god?"

The papers which the king gave to Dr. Juxon on the scaffold the regicides took away; so that they were at least the publishers of this prayer; and Dr. Birch, who had examined the question with great care, was inclined to think them the forgers. The use of it by adaptation was innocent, and they who could so noisily censure it, with a little extension of their malice could contrive what they wanted to accuse.

King Charles the Second, being now sheltered in Holland, employed Salmasius, professor of polite learning at Leyden, to write a defence of his father and of monarchy; and, to excite his industry, gave him, as was reported, a hundred Jacobuses. Salmasius was a man of skill in languages, knowledge of antiquity, and sagacity of emendatory criticism, almost exceeding all hope of human attainment; and having, by excessive praises, been confirmed in great confidence of himself, though he probably had not much considered the principles of society or the right of government, undertook the employment without distrust of his own qualifications; and, as his expedition in writing was wonderful, in 1649 published "Defensio Regis."

To this Milton was required to write a sufficient answer; which he performed (1651) in such a manner, that Hobbes declared himself unable to decide whose language was best, or whose arguments were worst. In my opinion, Milton's periods are smoother, neater, and more pointed; but he delights himself with teasing his adversary as much as with confuting him. He makes a foolish allusion of Salmasius, whose doctrine he considers as servile and unmanly, to the stream of Salmasius, which, whoever entered, left half his virility behind him. Salmasius was a Frenchman, and was unhappily married to a scold. *Tu es Gallus*, says Milton, *et*, *ut aiunt*, *nimium gallinaceus*. But his supreme pleasure is to tax his adversary, so renowned for criticism, with vicious Latin. He opens his book with telling that he has used *Persona*, which, according to Milton, signifies only a *Mask*, in a sense not known to the Romans, by applying it as we apply *Person*. But as Nemesis is always on the watch, it is memorable that he has enforced the charge of a solecism by an expression in itself grossly solecistical, when for one of those supposed blunders, he says, as Ker, and I think some one before him, has remarked, "*propino te grammatistis tuis vapulandum*." From *vapulo*, which has a passive sense, *vapulandus* can never be derived. No man forgets his original trade: the rights of nations, and of kings, sink into questions of grammar, if grammarians discuss them.

Milton, when he undertook this answer, was weak of body and dim of sight; but his will was forward, and what was wanting of health was supplied by zeal. He was rewarded with a thousand pounds, and his book was much read; for paradox, recommended by spirit and elegance, easily gains attention; and he, who told every man that he was equal to his king, could hardly want an audience.

That the performance of Salmasius was not dispersed with equal rapidity, or read with equal eagerness, is very credible. He taught only the stale doctrine of authority, and the unpleasing duty of submission; and he had been so long not only the monarch, but the tyrant of literature, that almost all mankind were delighted to find him defied and insulted by a new name, not yet considered as any one's rival. If Christina, as is said, commended the defence of the people, her purpose must be to torment Salmasius, who was then at court; for neither her civil station, nor her natural character, could dispose her to favour the doctrine, who was by birth a queen, and by temper despotic.

That Salmasius was, from the appearance of Milton's book, treated with neglect, there is not much proof; but to a man, so long accustomed to admiration, a little praise of his antagonist would be sufficiently offensive, and might incline him to leave Sweden, from which however he was dismissed, not with any mark of contempt, but with a train of attendants scarce less than regal.

He prepared a reply, which, left as it was imperfect, was published by his son in the year of the Restoration. In the beginning, being probably most in pain for his Latinity, he endeavours to defend his use of the word *persona*; but, if I remember right, he misses a better authority than any that he has found, that of Juvenal in his fourth satire:

> —Quid agis cum dira et fœdior omni

Crimine *persona* est?

As Salmasius reproached Milton with losing his eyes in the quarrel, Milton delighted himself with the belief that he had shortened Salmasius's life, and both perhaps with more malignity than reason. Salmasius died at the Spa, Sept. 3, 1653; and, as controvertists are commonly said to be killed by their last dispute, Milton was flattered with the credit of destroying him.

Cromwell had now dismissed the parliament by the authority of which he had destroyed monarchy, and commenced monarch himself, under the title of Protector, but with kingly and more than kingly power. That his authority was lawful, never was pretended; he himself founded his right only in necessity; but Milton, having now tasted the honey of public employment, would not return to hunger and philosophy, but, continuing to exercise his office under a manifest usurpation, betrayed to his power that liberty which he had defended. Nothing can be more just than that rebellion should end in slavery; that he, who had justified the murder of his king, for some acts which seemed to him unlawful, should now sell his services, and his flatteries, to a tyrant, of whom it was evident that he could do nothing lawful.

He had now been blind for some years; but his vigour of intellect was such, that he was not disabled to discharge his office of Latin secretary, or continue his controversies. His mind was too eager to be diverted, and too strong to be subdued.

About this time his first wife died in childbed, having left him three daughters. As he probably did not much love her, he did not long continue the appearance of lamenting her; but after a short time married Catharine, the daughter of one Captain Woodcock, of Hackney, a woman doubtless educated in opinions like his own. She died, within a year, of childbirth, or some distemper that followed it; and her husband honoured her memory with a poor sonnet.

The first reply to Milton's "Defensio Populi" was published in 1651, called "Apologia pro Rege et Populo Anglicano, contra Johannis Polypragmatici (alias Miltoni) defensionem destructivam Regis et Populi." Of this the author was not known; but Milton and his nephew Philips, under whose name he published an answer so much corrected by him, that it might be called his own, imputed it to Bramhal; and, knowing him no friend to regicides, thought themselves at liberty to treat him as if they had known what they only suspected.

Next year appeared "Regii Sanguinis clamor ad Cœlum." Of this the author was Peter du Moulin, who was afterwards prebendary of Canterbury; but Morus, or More, a French minister, having the care of its publication, was treated as the writer by Milton, in his "Defensio Secunda," and overwhelmed by such violence of invective, that he began to shrink under the tempest, and gave his persecutors the means of knowing the true author. Du Moulin was now in great danger; but Milton's pride operated against his malignity; and both he and his friends were more willing that Du Moulin should escape than that he should be convicted of mistake.

In this second Defence he shows that his eloquence is not merely satirical; the rudeness of his invective is equalled by the grossness of his flattery, *Deserimur*, *Cromuelle tu solus superes*, *ad te summa nostrarum rerum*, *rediit*, *in te solo consistit*, *insuperabili tuæ virtuti cedimus cuncti*, *nemine vel obloquente*, *nisi qui æquales inæqualis ipse honores sibi quærit*, *aut digniori concessos invidet*, *aut non intelligit nihil esse in societate hominum magis vel Deo gratum*, *vel rationi consentaneum*, *esse in civitate nihil æquius*, *nihil utilius*, *quam potiri rerum dignissimum*. *Eum te agnoscunt omnes*, *Cromuelle*, *ea tu civis maximus*, *et gloriosissimus*, *dux publici consilii*, *exercituum fortissimorum imperator*, *pater patriæ gessisti*. *Sic tu spontanea bonorum omnium et animitus missa voce salutaris*.

Cæsar, when he assumed the perpetual dictatorship, had not more servile or more elegant flattery. A translation may show its servility; but its elegance is less attainable. Having exposed the unskilfulness or selfishness of the former government, "We were left," says Milton, "to ourselves: the whole national interest fell into our hands, and subsists only in your abilities. To your virtue, overpowering and resistless, every man gives way, except some who, without equal qualifications, aspire to equal honours, who envy the distinctions of merit greater than their own, or who have yet to learn, that in the coalition of human society nothing is more pleasing to God, or more agreeable to reason, than that the highest mind should have the sovereign power. Such, sir, are you by general confession; such are the things achieved by you, the greatest and most glorious of our countrymen, the director of our public councils, the leader of unconquered armies, the father of your country; for by that title doss every good man hail you with sincere and voluntary praise."

Next year, having defended all that wanted defence, he found leisure to defend himself. He undertook his own vindication against More, whom he declares in his title to be justly called the author of the "Regii Sanguinis Clamor." In this there is no want of vehemence nor eloquence, nor does he forget his wonted wit. *Morus es*? *an Momus*? *an uterque idem est*? He then remembers that Morus is Latin for a mulberry-tree, and hints at the known transformation:

—Poma alba ferebat
Quæ post nigra tulit Morus.

With this piece ended his controversies; and he from this time gave himself up to his private studies and his civil employment.

As secretary to the Protector he is supposed to have written the Declaration of the reasons for a

war with Spain. His agency was considered as of great importance; for, when a treaty with Sweden was artfully suspended, the delay was publicly imputed to Mr. Milton's indisposition; and the Swedish agent was provoked to express his wonder that only one man in England could write Latin, and that man blind.

Being now forty-seven years old, and seeing himself disencumbered from external interruptions, he seems to have recollected his former purposes, and to have resumed three great works which he had planned for his future employment—an epic poem, the history of his country, and a dictionary of the Latin tongue.

To collect a dictionary seems a work of all others least practicable in a state of blindness, because it depends upon perpetual and minute inspection and collation. Nor would Milton probably have begun it, after he had lost his eyes; but, having had it always before him, he continued it, says Philips, "almost to his dying day; but the papers were so discomposed and deficient, that they could not be fitted for the press." The compilers of the Latin dictionary, printed at Cambridge, had the use of those collections in three folios; but what was their fate afterwards is not known.

To compile a history from various authors, when they can only be consulted by other eyes, is not easy, nor possible, but with more skilful and attentive help than can be commonly obtained; and it was probably the difficulty of consulting and comparing that stopped Milton's narrative at the Conquest—a period at which affairs were not very intricate, nor authors very numerous.

For the subject of his epic poem, after much deliberation, long choosing, and beginning late, he fixed upon "Paradise Lost," a design so comprehensive, that it could be justified only by success. He had once designed to celebrate King Arthur, as he hints in his verses to Mansus; but "Arthur was reserved," says Fenton, "to another destiny."

It appears, by some sketches of poetical projects left in manuscript, and to be seen in a library at Cambridge, that he had digested his thoughts on this subject into one of those wild dramas which were anciently called Mysteries; and Philips had seen what he terms part of a tragedy, beginning with the first ten lines of Satan's address to the Sun. These mysteries consist of allegorical persons, such as Justice, Mercy, Faith. Of the tragedy or mystery of "Paradise Lost" there are two plans

The Persons.	*The Persons*.
Michael.	Moses.
Chorus of Angels.	Divine Justice, Wisdom
Heavenly Love.	Heavenly Love.
Lucifer.	The Evening Star, Hesperus.
Adam, Eve, with the Serpent	Chorus of Angels.
Conscience.	Lucifer.
Death.	Adam.
Labour, }	Eve.
Sickness, }	Conscience.
Discontent, } Mutes.	Labour, }
Ignorance, }	Sickness, }
with others; }	Discontent, } Mutes
Faith.	Ignorance, }
Hope.	Fear, }
Charity.	Death, }
	Faith.
	Hope.
	Charity.

PARADISE LOST.

The Persons.

Moses, προλογίζει, recounting how he assumed his true body; that it corrupts not, because it is with God in the mount; declares the like of Enoch and Elijah; besides the purity of the place, that certain pure winds, dews, and clouds, preserve it from corruption; whence exhorts to the sight of God; tells they cannot see Adam in the state of innocence, by reason of their sin.

Justice, Mercy, Wisdom } debating what should become of man, if he fall.

Chorus of Angels singing a hymn of the Creation.

ACT II.

Heavenly Love.

Evening Star.

Chorus sing the marriage-song, and describe Paradise.

ACT III.

Lucifer contriving Adam's ruin.

Chorus fears for Adam, and relates Lucifer's rebellion and fall.

ACT IV.

Adam, Eve } fallen.

Conscience cites them to God's examination.

Chorus bewails, and tells the good Adam has lost.

ACT V.

Adam and Eve driven out of Paradise.

— — presented by an angel with Labour, Grief, Hatred, Envy, War, Famine, Pestilence, Sickness, Discontent, Ignorance, Fear, Death } Mutes.

To whom he gives their names. Likewise Winter, Heat, Tempest, etc.

Faith, Hope, Charity, comfort him and instruct him.

Chorus briefly concludes.

Such was his first design, which could have produced only an allegory or mystery. The following sketch seems to have attained more maturity.

ADAM UNPARADISED.

The angel Gabriel, either descending or entering; showing, since this globe was created, his frequency as much on earth as in heaven; describes Paradise. Next the Chorus, showing the reason of his coming to keep his watch in Paradise, after Lucifer's rebellion, by command from God; and withal expressing his desire to see and know more concerning this excellent new creature, man. The angel Gabriel, as by his name signifying a prince of power, tracing Paradise with a more free office, passes by the station of the Chorus, and, desired by them, relates what he knew of man; as the creation of Eve, with their love and marriage. After this, Lucifer appears; after his overthrow, bemoans himself, seeks revenge on man. The Chorus prepare resistance on his first approach. At last, after discourse of enmity on either side, he departs: whereat the Chorus sings of the battle and victory in Heaven, against him and his accomplices: as before, after the first act, was sung a hymn of the creation. Here again may appear Lucifer, relating and exulting in what he had done to the destruction of man. Man next, and Eve, having by this time been seduced by the serpent, appears confusedly covered with leaves. Conscience in a shape accuses him; Justice cites him to the place whither Jehovah called for him. In the meanwhile, the Chorus entertains the stage, and is informed by some angel the manner of the fall. Here the Chorus bewails Adam's fall; Adam then and Eve return; accuse one another; but especially Adam lays the blame to his wife; is stubborn in his offence. Justice appears, reasons with him, convinces him. The Chorus admonishes Adam, and bids him beware of Lucifer's example of impenitence. The angel is sent to banish them out of Paradise; but before causes to pass before his eyes, in shapes, a mask of all the evils of this life and world. He is humbled, relents, despairs; at last appears Mercy, comforts him, promises the Messiah; then calls in Faith, Hope, and Charity;—instructs him; he repents, gives God the glory, submits to his penalty. The Chorus briefly concludes. Compare this with the former draft.

These are very imperfect rudiments of "Paradise Lost;" but it is pleasant to see great works in their seminal state, pregnant with latent possibilities of excellence; nor could there be any more delightful entertainment than to trace their gradual growth and expansion, and to observe how they are sometimes suddenly advanced by accidental hints, and sometimes slowly improved by steady meditation.

Invention is almost the only literary labour which blindness cannot obstruct, and therefore he naturally solaced his solitude by the indulgence of his fancy, and the melody of his numbers. He had done what he knew to be necessarily previous to poetical excellence; he had made himself acquainted with "seemly arts and affairs;" his comprehension was extended by various knowledge, and his memory stored with intellectual treasures. He was skilful in many languages, and had, by reading and composition, attained the full mastery of his own. He would have wanted little help from books, had he retained the power of perusing them.

But while his greater designs were advancing, having now, like many other authors, caught the love of publication, he amused himself, as he could, with little productions. He sent to the press (1658) a manuscript of Raleigh, called "The Cabinet Council;" and next year gratified his malevolence to the clergy, by a "Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Cases, and the Means of removing Hirelings out of the Church."

Oliver was now dead; Richard constrained to resign; the system of extemporary government, which had been held together only by force, naturally fell into fragments when that force was

taken away; and Milton saw himself and his cause in equal danger. But he had still hope of doing something. He wrote letters, which Toland has published, to such men as he thought friends to the new commonwealth; and even in the year of the Restoration he "bated no jot of heart or hope," but was fantastical enough to think that the nation, agitated as it was, might be settled by a pamphlet, called "A Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth;" which was, however, enough considered to be both seriously and ludicrously answered.

The obstinate enthusiasm of the commonwealth-men was very remarkable. When the king was apparently returning, Harrington, with a few associates as fantastical as himself, used to meet, with all the gravity of political importance, to settle an equal government by rotation; and Milton, kicking when he could strike no longer, was foolish enough to publish, a few weeks before the Restoration, Notes upon a Sermon preached by one Griffiths, entitled, "The Fear of God and the King." To these notes an answer was written by L'Estrange, in a pamphlet petulantly called "No Blind Guides."

But whatever Milton could write, or men of greater activity could do, the king was now about to be restored with the irresistible approbation of the people, he was therefore no longer secretary, and was consequently obliged to quit the house which he held by his office; the importance of his writings, thought it convenient to seek some shelter, and hid himself for a time in Bartholomew Close, by West Smithfield.

I cannot but remark a kind of respect, perhaps unconsciously paid to this great man by his biographers: every house in which he resided is historically mentioned, as if it were an injury to neglect naming any place that he honoured by his presence.

The king, with lenity of which the world has had perhaps no other example, declined to be the judge or avenger of his own or his father's wrongs; and promised to admit into the Act of Oblivion all except those whom the Parliament should except; and the Parliament doomed none to capital punishment but the wretches who had immediately co-operated in the murder of the king. Milton was certainly not one of them; he had only justified what they had done.

This justification was indeed sufficiently offensive; and (June 16) an order was issued to seize Milton's "Defence," and Goodwin's "Obstructors of Justice," another book of the same tendency, and burn them by the common hangman. The attorney-general was ordered to prosecute the authors; but Milton was not seized, nor perhaps very diligently pursued.

Not long after (August 19) the flutter of innumerable bosoms was stilled by an Act, which the king, that his mercy might want no recommendation of elegance, rather called an Act of Oblivion than of Grace. Goodwin was named, with nineteen more, as incapacitated for any public trust; but of Milton there was no exception.

Of this tenderness shown to Milton the curiosity of mankind has not forborne to inquire the reason. Burnet thinks he was forgotten; but this is another instance which may confirm Dalrymple's observation, who says, "that whenever Burnet's narrations are examined, he appears to be mistaken."

Forgotten he was not; for his prosecution was ordered; it must be therefore by design that he was included in the general oblivion. He is said to have had friends in the House, such as Marvel, Morrice, and Sir Thomas Clarges: and undoubtedly a man like him must have had influence. A very particular story of his escape is told by Richardson in his Memoirs, which he received from Pope, as delivered by Betterton, who might have heard it from Davenant. In the war between the King and Parliament, Davenant was made prisoner and condemned to die; but was spared at the request of Milton. When the turn of success brought Milton into the like danger, Davenant repaid the benefit by appearing in his favour. Here is a reciprocation of generosity and gratitude so pleasing, that the tale makes its own way to credit. But if help were wanted, I know not where to find it. The danger of Davenant is certain from his own relation; but of his escape there is no account. Betterton's narration can be traced no higher; it is not known that he hid it from Davenant. We are told that the benefit exchanged was life for life; but it seems not certain that Milton's life ever was in danger. Goodwin, who had committed the same kind of crime, escaped with incapacitation; and, as exclusion from public trust is a punishment which the power of Government can commonly inflict without the help of a particular law, it required no great interest to exempt Milton from a censure little more than verbal. Something may be reasonably ascribed to veneration and compassion; to veneration of his abilities, and compassion for his distresses, which made it fit to forgive his malice for his learning. He was now poor and blind; and who would pursue with violence an illustrious enemy, depressed by fortune and disarmed by nature?

The publication of the "Act of Oblivion" put him in the same condition with his fellow-subjects. He was, however, upon some pretence now not known, in the custody of the serjeant in December; and when he was released, upon his refusal of the fees demanded, he and the serjeant were called before the House. He was now safe within the shade of oblivion, and knew himself to be as much out of the power of a griping officer as any other man. How the question was determined is not known. Milton would hardly have contended but that he knew himself to have right on his side.

He then removed to Jewin Street, near Aldersgate Street, and, being blind and by no means wealthy, wanted a domestic companion and attendant; and therefore, by the recommendation of Dr. Paget, married Elizabeth Minshul, of a gentleman's family in Cheshire, probably without a

fortune. All his wives were virgins; for he has declared that he thought it gross and indelicate to be a second husband: upon what other principles his choice was made cannot now be known; but marriage afforded not much of his happiness. The first wife left him in disgust, and was brought back only by terror; the second, indeed, seems to have been more a favourite, but her life was short. The third, as Philips relates, oppressed his children in his lifetime, and cheated them at his death.

Soon after his marriage, according to an obscure story, he was offered the continuance of his employment, and, being pressed by his wife to accept it, answered, “You, like other women, want to ride in your coach; my wish is to live and die an honest man.” If he considered the Latin secretary as exercising any of the powers of government, he that had shared authority, either with the Parliament or Cromwell, might have forborne to talk very loudly of his honesty; and if he thought the office purely ministerial, he certainly might have honestly retained it under the King. But this tale has too little evidence to deserve a disquisition; large offers and sturdy rejections are among the most common topics of falsehood.

He had so much either of prudence or gratitude, that he forbore to disturb the new settlement with any of his political or ecclesiastical opinions, and from this time devoted himself to poetry and literature. Of his zeal for learning in all its parts, he gave a proof by publishing, the next year (1661), “Accidence commenced Grammar;” a little book which has nothing remarkable, but that its author, who had been lately defending the supreme powers of his country, and was then writing “Paradise Lost,” could descend from his elevation to rescue children from the perplexity of grammatical confusion, and the trouble of lessons unnecessarily repeated.

About this time, Elwood the Quaker, being recommended to him as one who would read Latin to him for the advantage of his conversation, attended him every afternoon except on Sundays. Milton, who, in his letter to Hartlib, had declared, that “to read Latin with an English mouth is as ill a hearing as Law French,” required that Elwood should learn and practise the Italian pronunciation, which, he said, was necessary, if he would talk with foreigners. This seems to have been a task troublesome without use. There is little reason for preferring the Italian pronunciation to our own, except that it is more general; and to teach it to an Englishman is only to make him a foreigner at home. He who travels, if he speaks Latin, may so soon learn the sounds which every native gives it, that he need make no provision before his journey; and if strangers visit us, it is their business to practise such conformity to our modes as they expect from us in their own countries. Elwood complied with the directions, and improved himself by his attendance; for he relates, that Milton, having a curious ear, knew by his voice when he read what he did not understand, and would stop him, and “open the most difficult passages.”

In a short time he took a house in the Artillery Walk, leading to Bunhill Fields; the mention of which concludes the register of Milton’s removals and habitations. He lived longer in this place than any other.

He was now busied by “Paradise Lost.” Whence he drew the original design has been variously conjectured by men who cannot bear to think themselves ignorant of that which, at last, neither diligence nor sagacity can discover. Some find the hint in an Italian tragedy. Voltaire tells a wild and unauthorised story of a farce seen by Milton in Italy which opened thus: “Let the Rainbow be the Fiddlestick of the Fiddle of Heaven.” It has been already shown, that the first conception was a tragedy or mystery, not of a narrative, but a dramatic work which he is supposed to have began to reduce to its present form about the time (1655) when he finished his dispute with the defenders of the king.

He long had promised to adorn his native country by some great performance, while he had yet perhaps no settled design, and was stimulated only by such expectations as naturally arose from the survey of his attainments, and the consciousness of his powers. What he should undertake it was difficult to determine. He was “long choosing, and began late.”

While he was obliged to divide his time between his private studies and affairs of state, his poetical labour must have been often interrupted; and perhaps he did little more in that busy time than construct the narrative, adjust the episodes, proportion the parts, accumulate images and sentiments, and treasure in his memory, or preserve in writing, such hints as books or meditation would supply. Nothing particular is known of his intellectual operations while he was a statesman; for, having every help and accommodation at hand, he had no need of uncommon expedients.

Being driven from all public stations, he is yet too great not to be traced by curiosity to his retirement; where he has been found by Mr. Richardson, the fondest of his admirers, sitting before his door in a grey coat of coarse cloth, in warm sultry weather, to enjoy the fresh air; and so, as in his own room, receiving the visits of people of distinguished parts as well as quality. His visitors of high quality must now be imagined to be few; but men of parts might reasonably court the conversation of a man so generally illustrious, that foreigners are reported, by Wood, to have visited the house in Bread Street where he was born.

According to another account, he was seen in a small house, neatly enough dressed in black clothes, sitting in a room hung with rusty green; pale but not cadaverous, with chalkstones in his hands. He said that, if it were not for the gout, his blindness would be tolerable.

In the intervals of his pain, being made unable to use the common exercises, he used to swing in a chair, and sometimes played upon an organ.

He was now confessedly and visibly employed upon his poem, of which the progress might be noted by those with whom he was familiar; for he was obliged, when he had composed as many lines as his memory would conveniently retain, to employ some friend in writing them, having, at least for part of the time, no regular attendant. This gave opportunity to observations and reports.

Mr. Philips observes, that there was a very remarkable circumstance in the composure of "Paradise Lost," "which I have a particular reason," says he, "to remember; for whereas I had the perusal of it from the very beginning, for some years, as I went from time to time to visit him, in parcels of ten, twenty, or thirty verses at a time (which, being written by whatever hand came next, might possibly want correction as to the orthography and pointing), having, as the Summer came on, not been showed any for a considerable while, and desiring the reason thereof, was answered, that his vein never happily flowed but from the autumnal equinox to the vernal; and that whatever he attempted at other times was never to his satisfaction, though he courted his fancy never so much; so that, in all the years he was about this poem, he may be said to have spent half his time therein."

Upon this relation Toland remarks, that in his opinion Philips has mistaken the time of the year; for Milton, in his Elegies, declares, that with the advance of the spring he feels the increase of his poetical force, *redeunt in carmina vires*. To this it is answered, that Philips could hardly mistake time so well marked; and it may be added, that Milton might find different times of the year favourable to different parts of life. Mr. Richardson conceives it impossible that "such a work should be suspended for six months, or for one. It may go on faster or slower, but it must go on." By what necessity it must continually go on, or why it might not be laid aside and resumed, it is not easy to discover.

This dependence of the soul upon the seasons, those temporary and periodical ebbs and flows of intellect, may, I suppose, justly be derided as the fumes of vain imagination. *Sapiens dominabitur astris*. The author that thinks himself weather-bound will find, with a little help from hellebore, that he is only idle or exhausted. But while this notion has possession of the head, it produces the inability which it supposes. Our powers owe much of their energy to our hopes; *possunt quia posse videntur*. When success seems attainable, diligence is enforced; but when it is admitted that the faculties are suppressed by a cross wind, or a cloudy sky, the day is given up without resistance; for who can contend with the course of nature?

From such prepossessions Milton seems not to have been free. There prevailed in his time an opinion, that the world was in its decay, and that we have had the misfortune to be produced in the decrepitude of nature. It was suspected that the whole creation languished, that neither trees nor animals had the height or bulk of their predecessors, and that everything was daily sinking by gradual diminution. Milton appears to suspect that souls partake of the general degeneracy, and is not without some fear that his book is to be written in "an age too late" for heroic poesy.

Another opinion wanders about the world, and sometimes finds reception among wise men; an opinion that restrains the operations of the mind to particular regions, and supposes that a luckless mortal may be born in a degree of latitude too high or too low for wisdom or for wit. From this fancy, wild as it is, he had not wholly cleared his head, when he feared lest the *climate* of his country might be *too cold* for flights of imagination.

Into a mind already occupied by such fancies, another, not more reasonable, might easily find its way. He that could fear lest his genius had fallen upon too old a world, or too chill a climate, might consistently magnify to himself the influence of the seasons, and believe his faculties to be vigorous only half the year.

His submission to the seasons was at least more reasonable than his dread of decaying nature, or a frigid zone; for general causes must operate uniformly in a general abatement of mental power; if less could be performed by the writer, less likewise would content the judges of his work. Among this lagging race of frosty grovellers he might still have risen into eminence by producing something which "they should not willingly let die." However inferior to the heroes who were born in better ages, he might still be great among his contemporaries, with the hope of growing every day greater in the dwindle of posterity. He might still be the giant of the pigmies, the one-eyed monarch of the blind.

Of his artifices of study, or particular hours of composition, we have little account, and there was perhaps little to be told. Richardson, who seems to have been very diligent in his inquiries, but discovers always a wish to find Milton discriminated from other men, relates that "he would sometimes lie awake whole nights, but not a verse could he make; and on a sudden his poetical faculty would rush upon him with an *impetus* or *æstrum*, and his daughter was immediately called to secure what came. At other times he would dictate perhaps forty lines in a breath, and then reduce them to half the number."

These bursts of light, and involutions of darkness, these transient and involuntary excursions and retrocessions of invention, having some appearance of deviation from the common train of nature, are eagerly caught by the lovers of a wonder. Yet something of this inequality happens to every man in every mode of exertion, manual or mental. The mechanic cannot handle his hammer and his file at all times with equal dexterity; there are hours, he knows not why, when *his hand is out*. By Mr. Richardson's relation, casually conveyed, much regard cannot be claimed. That, in his intellectual hour, Milton called for his daughter "to secure what came," may

be questioned; for unluckily it happens to be known that his daughters were never taught to write; nor would he have been obliged, as it is universally confessed, to have employed any casual visitor in disburdening his memory, if his daughter could have performed the office.

The story of reducing his exuberance has been told of other authors; and, though doubtless true of every fertile and copious mind, seems to have been gratuitously transferred to Milton.

What he has told us, and we cannot now know more, is, that he composed much of this poem in the night and morning, I suppose before his mind was disturbed with common business; and that he poured out with great fluency his “unpremeditated verse.” Versification, free, like this, from the distresses of rhyme, must, by a work so long, be made prompt and habitual; and, when his thoughts were once adjusted, the words would come at his command.

At what particular times of his life the parts of his work were written, cannot often be known. The beginning of the third book shows that he had lost his sight, and the introduction to the seventh, that the return of the king had clouded him with discountenance; and that he was offended by the licentious festivity of the Restoration. There are no other internal notes of time. Milton, being now cleared from all effects of his disloyalty, had nothing required from him but the common duty of living in quiet, to be rewarded with the common right of protection; but this, which, when he skulked from the approach of his king, was perhaps more than he hoped, seems not to have satisfied him; for no sooner is he safe, than he finds himself in danger, “fallen on evil days and evil tongues, and with darkness and with danger compassed round.” This darkness, had his eyes been better employed, had undoubtedly deserved compassion; but to add the mention of danger was ungrateful and unjust. He was fallen indeed on “evil days;” the time was come in which regicides could no longer boast their wickedness. But of “evil tongues” for Milton to complain, required impudence at least equal to his other powers; Milton, whose warmest advocates must allow that he never spared any asperity of reproach or brutality of insolence.

But the charge itself seems to be false; for it would be hard to recollect any reproach cast upon him, either serious or ludicrous, through the whole remaining part of his life. He pursued his studies or his amusements, without persecution, molestation, or insult. Such is the reverence paid to great abilities, however misused; they, who contemplated in Milton the scholar and the wit, were contented to forget the reviler of his king.

When the plague (1665) raged in London, Milton took refuge at Chalfont, in Bucks; where Elwood, who had taken the house for him, first saw a complete copy of “Paradise Lost,” and, having perused it, said to him, “Thou hast said a great deal upon Paradise Lost; what hast thou to say upon Paradise Found?”

Next year, when the danger of infection had ceased, he returned to Bunhill Fields, and designed the publication of his poem. A licence was necessary, and he could expect no great kindness from a chaplain of the Archbishop of Canterbury. He seems, however, to have been treated with tenderness; for, though objections were made to particular passages, and among them to the simile of the sun eclipsed in the first book, yet the licence was granted; and he sold his copy, April 27, 1667, to Samuel Simmons, for an immediate payment of five pounds, with a stipulation to receive five pounds more when thirteen hundred should be sold of the first edition; and again, five pounds after the sale of the same number of the second edition; and another five pounds after the same sale of the third. None of the three editions were to be extended beyond fifteen hundred copies.

The first edition was ten books, in a small quarto. The titles were varied from year to year; and an advertisement and the arguments of the books were omitted in some copies, and inserted in others.

The sale gave him in two years a right to his second payment, for which the receipt was signed April 26, 1669. The second edition was not given till 1674; it was printed in small octave; and the number of books was increased to twelve, by a division of the seventh and twelfth; and some other small improvements were made. The third edition was published in 1678; and the widow, to whom the copy was then to devolve, sold all her claims to Simmons for eight pounds, according to her receipt given December 21, 1680. Simmons had already agreed to transfer the whole right to Brabazon Aylmer for £25; and Aylmer sold to Jacob Tonson half, August 17, 1683, and half, March 24, 1690, at a price considerably enlarged. In the history of “Paradise Lost” a deduction thus minute will rather gratify than fatigue.

The slow sale and tardy reputation of this poem have been always mentioned as evidences of neglected merit, and of the uncertainty of literary fame; and inquiries have been made, and conjectures offered, about the causes of its long obscurity and late reception. But has the case been truly stated? Have not lamentation and wonder been lavished on an evil that was never felt?

That in the reigns of Charles and James the “Paradise Lost” received no public acclamations is readily confessed. Wit and literature were on the side of the court: and who that solicited favour or fashion would venture to praise the defender of the regicides? All that he himself could think his due, from “evil tongues” in “evil days,” was that reverential silence which was generously preserved. But it cannot be inferred that his poem was not read, or not, however unwillingly, admired.

The sale, if it be considered, will justify the public. Those who have no power to judge of past times but by their own, should always doubt their conclusions. The call for books was not, in

Milton's age, what it is at present. To read was not then a general amusement; neither traders, nor often gentlemen, thought themselves disgraced by ignorance. The women had not then aspired to literature, nor was every house supplied with a closet of knowledge. Those, indeed, who professed learning, were not less learned than at any other time; but of that middle race of students who read for pleasure or accomplishment, and who buy the numerous products of modern typography, the number was then comparatively small. To prove the paucity of readers, it may be sufficient to remark, that the nation had been satisfied from 1623 to 1664—that is, forty-one years—with only two editions of the works of Shakespeare, which probably did not together make one thousand copies.

The sale of thirteen hundred copies in two years, in opposition to so much recent enmity, and to a style of versification new to all and disgusting to many, was an uncommon example of the prevalence of genius. The demand did not immediately increase; for many more readers than were supplied at first the nation did not afford. Only three thousand were sold in eleven years; for it forced its way without assistance; its admirers did not dare to publish their opinion; and the opportunities now given of attracting notice by advertisements were then very few; the means of proclaiming the publication of new books have been produced by that general literature which now pervades the nation through all its ranks. But the reputation and price of the copy still advanced, till the Revolution put an end to the secrecy of love, and "Paradise Lost" broke into open view with sufficient security of kind reception.

Fancy can hardly forbear to conjecture with what temper Milton surveyed the silent progress of his work, and marked its reputation stealing its way in a kind of subterraneous current through fear and silence. I cannot but conceive him calm and confident, little disappointed, not at all dejected, relying on his own merit with steady consciousness, and waiting without impatience the vicissitudes of opinion, and the impartiality of a future generation.

In the meantime he continued his studies, and supplied the want of sight by a very odd expedient, of which Phillips gives the following account:—

Mr. Philips tells us, "that though our author had daily about him one or other to read, some persons of man's estate, who, of their own accord, greedily catched at the opportunity of being his readers, that they might as well reap the benefit of what they read to him, as oblige him by the benefit of their reading; and others of younger years were sent by their parents to the same end; yet excusing only the eldest daughter by reason of her bodily infirmity and difficult utterance of speech (which, to say truth, I doubt was the principal cause of excusing her), the other two were condemned to the performance of reading and exactly pronouncing of all the languages of whatever book he should, at one time or other, think fit to peruse, viz., the Hebrew (and I think the Syriac), the Greek, the Latin, the Italian, Spanish, and French. All which sorts of books to be confined to read, without understanding one word, must needs be a trial of patience almost beyond endurance. Yet it was endured by both for a long time, though the irksomeness of this employment could not be always concealed, but broke out more and more into expressions of uneasiness; so that at length they were all, even the eldest also, sent out to learn some curious and ingenious sorts of manufacture, that are proper for women to learn, particularly embroideries in gold or silver."

In the scene of misery which this mode of intellectual labour sets before our eyes, it is hard to determine whether the daughters or the father are most to be lamented. A language not understood can never be so read as to give pleasure, and very seldom so as to convey meaning. If few men would have had resolution, to write books with such embarrassments, few likewise would have wanted ability to find some better expedient.

Three years after his "Paradise Lost" (1667) he published his "History of England," comprising the whole fable of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and continued to the Norman Invasion. Why he should have given the first part, which he seems not to believe, and which is universally rejected, it is difficult to conjecture. The style is harsh; but it has something of rough vigour, which perhaps may often strike, though it cannot please.

On this history the licenser again fixed his claws, and before he could transmit it to the press tore out several parts. Some censures of the Saxon monks were taken away, lest they should be applied to the modern clergy; and a character of the Long Parliament, and Assembly of Divines, was excluded; of which the author gave a copy to the Earl of Anglesea, and which, being afterwards published, has been since inserted in its proper place.

The same year were printed "Paradise Regained;" and "Samson Agonistes," a tragedy written in imitation of the ancients, and never designed by the author for the stage. As these poems were published by another bookseller, it has been asked whether Simmons was discouraged from receiving them by the slow sale of the former. Why a writer changed his bookseller a hundred years ago, I am far from hoping to discover. Certainly, he who in two years sells thirteen hundred copies of a volume in quarto, bought for two payments of five pounds each, has no reason to repent his purchase.

When Milton showed "Paradise Regained" to Elwood, "This," said he, "is owing to you; for you put it in my head by the question you put to me at Chalfont, which otherwise I had not thought of."

His last poetical offspring was his favourite. He could not, as Elwood relates, endure to hear "Paradise Lost" preferred to "Paradise Regained." Many causes may vitiate a writer's judgment

of his own works. On that which has cost him much labour he sets a high value, because he is unwilling to think that he has been diligent in vain; what has been produced without toilsome efforts is considered with delight, as a proof of vigorous faculties and fertile invention; and the last work, whatever it be, has necessarily most of the grace of novelty. Milton, however it happened, had this prejudice, and had it to himself.

To that multiplicity of attainments, and extent of comprehension, that entitled this great author to our veneration, may be added a kind of humble dignity, which did not disdain the meanest services to literature. The epic poet, the controvertist, the politician, having already descended to accommodate children with a book of rudiments, now, in the last years of his life, composed a book of logic for the initiation of students in philosophy; and published (1672) "Artis Logicæ plenior Institutio ad Petri Rami Methodum concinnata;" that is, "A new Scheme of Logic, according to the method of Ramus." I know not whether, even in this book, he did not intend an act of hostility against the universities; for Ramus was one of the first oppugners of the old philosophy, who disturbed with innovations the quiet of the schools.

His polemical disposition again revived. He had now been safe so long that he forgot his fears, and published a "Treatise of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration, and the Best Means to Prevent the Growth of Popery."

But this little tract is modestly written, with respectful mention of the Church of England and an appeal to the Thirty-nine Articles. His principle of toleration is, agreement in the sufficiency of the Scriptures; and he extends it to all who, whatever their opinions are, profess to derive them from the sacred books. The Papists appeal to other testimonies, and are therefore, in his opinion, not to be permitted the liberty of either public or private worship; for though they plead conscience, "we have no warrant," he says, "to regard conscience which is not grounded in Scripture."

Those who are not convinced by his reasons, may perhaps be delighted with his wit. The term "Roman Catholic is," he says, "one of the Pope's Bulls; it is particular universal, or Catholic schismatic."

He has, however, something better. As the best preservative against Popery, he recommends the diligent perusal of the Scriptures, a duty from which he warns the busy part of mankind not to think themselves excused.

He now reprinted his juvenile poems, with some additions.

In the last year of his life he sent to the press, seeming to take delight in publication, a collection of "Familiar Epistles in Latin;" to which, being too few to make a volume, he added some academical exercises, which perhaps he perused with pleasure, as they recalled to his memory the days of youth; but for which nothing but veneration for his name could now procure a reader.

When he had attained his sixty-sixth year, the gout, with which he had been long tormented, prevailed over the enfeebled powers of nature. He died by a quiet and silent expiration, about the 10th of November, 1674, at his house in Bunhill Fields; and was buried next his father in the chancel of St. Giles at Cripplegate. His funeral was very splendidly and numerously attended.

Upon his grave there is supposed to have been no memorial; but in our time a monument has been erected in Westminster Abbey "To the Author of 'Paradise Lost,'" by Mr. Benson, who has in the inscription bestowed more words upon himself than upon Milton.

When the inscription for the monument of Philips, in which he was said to be *soli Miltono secundus*, was exhibited to Dr. Sprat, then Dean of Westminster, he refused to admit it; the name of Milton was, in his opinion, too detestable to be read on the wall of a building dedicated to devotion. Atterbury, who succeeded him, being author of the inscription, permitted its reception. "And such has been the change of public opinion," said Dr. Gregory, from whom I heard this account, "that I have seen erected in the church a statue of that man, whose name I once knew considered as a pollution of its walls."

Milton has the reputation of having been in his youth eminently beautiful, so as to have been called the lady of his college. His hair, which was of a light brown, parted at the fore-top, and hung down upon his shoulders, according to the picture which he has given of Adam. He was, however, not of the heroic stature, but rather below the middle size, according to Mr. Richardson, who mentions him as having narrowly escaped from being "short and thick." He was vigorous and active, and delighted in the exercise of the sword, in which he is related to have been eminently skilful. His weapon was, I believe, not the rapier, but the back-sword, of which he recommends the use in his book on education.

His eyes are said never to have been bright; but, if he was a dexterous fencer, they must have been once quick.

His domestic habits, so far as they are known, were those of a severe student. He drank little strong drink of any kind, and fed without excess in quantity, and in his earlier years without delicacy of choice. In his youth he studied late at night; but afterwards changed his hours, and rested in bed from nine to four in the summer and five in the winter. The course of his day was best known after he was blind. When he first rose, he heard a chapter in the Hebrew Bible, and then studied till twelve; then took some exercise for an hour; then dined, then played on the organ, and sang, or heard another sing, then studied till six; then entertained his visitors till

eight; then supped, and, after a pipe of tobacco and a glass of water, went to bed.

So is his life described; but this even tenour appears attainable only in colleges. He that lives in the world will sometimes have the succession of his practice broken and confused. Visitors, of whom Milton is represented to have had great numbers, will come and stay unseasonably; business, of which every man has some, must be done when others will do it.

When he did not care to rise early, he had something read to him by his bedside; perhaps at this time his daughters were employed. He composed much in the morning, and dictated in the day, sitting obliquely in an elbow-chair, with his leg thrown over the arm. Fortune appears not to have had much of his care. In the civil wars, he lent his personal estate to the Parliament; but when, after the contest was decided, he solicited repayment, he met not only with neglect, but "sharp rebuke;" and, having tired both himself and his friends, was given up to poverty and hopeless indignation, till he showed how able he was to do greater service. He was then made Latin Secretary, with two hundred pounds a year; and had a thousand pounds for his "Defence of the People." His widow, who, after his death, retired to Nantwich, in Cheshire, and died about 1729, is said to have reported that he lost two thousand pounds by entrusting it to a scrivener; and that, in the general depredation upon the Church, he had grasped an estate of about sixty pounds a year belonging to Westminster Abbey, which, like other sharers of the plunder of rebellion, he was afterwards obliged to return. Two thousand pounds which he had placed in the Excise Office were also lost. There is yet no reason to believe that he was ever reduced to indigence. His wants, being few, were competently supplied. He sold his library before his death, and left his family fifteen hundred pounds, on which his widow laid hold, and only gave one hundred to each of his daughters.

His literature was unquestionably great. He read all the languages which are considered either as learned or polite: Hebrew, with its two dialects, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and Spanish. In Latin his skill was such as places him in the first rank of writers and critics; and he appears to have cultivated Italian with uncommon diligence. The books in which his daughter, who used to read to him, represented him as most delighting, after Homer, which he could almost repeat, were Ovid's "Metamorphoses" and Euripides. His Euripides is, by Mr. Cradock's kindness, now in my hands: the margin is sometimes noted; but I have found nothing remarkable.

Of the English poets he set most value upon Spenser, Shakespeare, and Cowley. Spenser was apparently his favourite; Shakespeare he may easily be supposed to like, with every other skilful reader; but I should not have expected that Cowley, whose ideas of excellence were different from his own, would have had much of his approbation. His character of Dryden, who sometimes visited him, was, that he was a good rhymist, but no poet.

His theological opinions are said to have been first Calvinistical; and afterwards, perhaps when he began to hate the Presbyterians, to have tended towards Arminianism. In the mixed questions of theology and government, he never thinks that he can recede far enough from Popery, or Prelacy; but what Baudius says of Erasmus seems applicable to him, "*Magis habuit quod fugeret, quam quod sequeretur*." He had determined rather what to condemn, than what to approve. He has not associated himself with any denomination of Protestants: we know rather what he was not than what he was. He was not of the Church of Rome; he was not of the Church of England.

To be of no Church is dangerous. Religion, of which the rewards are distant, and which is animated only by faith and hope, will glide by degrees out of the mind, unless it be invigorated and reimpressed by external ordinances, by stated calls to worship, and the salutary influence of example. Milton, who appears to have had a full conviction of the truth of Christianity, and to have regarded the Holy Scriptures with the profoundest veneration, to have been untainted by any heretical peculiarity of opinion, and to have lived in a confirmed belief of the immediate and occasional agency of Providence, yet grew old without any visible worship. In the distribution of his hours, there was no hour of prayer, either solitary or with his household; omitting public prayers, he omitted all.

Of this omission the reason has been sought upon a supposition which ought never to be made, that men live with their own approbation, and justify their conduct to themselves. Prayer certainly was not thought superfluous by him, who represents our first parents as praying acceptably in the state of innocence, and efficaciously after their fall. That he lived without prayer can hardly be affirmed; his studies and meditations were an habitual prayer. The neglect of it in his family was probably a fault for which he condemned himself, and which he intended to correct; but that death, as too often happens, intercepted his reformation.

His political notions were those of an acrimonious and surly Republican; for which it is not known that he gave any better reason than that "a popular government was the most frugal; for the trappings of a monarchy would set up an ordinary commonwealth." It is surely very shallow policy that supposes money to be the chief good; and even this, without considering that the support and expense of a court is, for the most part, only a particular kind of traffic, for which money is circulated, without any national impoverishment.

Milton's Republicanism was, I am afraid, founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence; in petulance impatient of control, and pride disdainful of superiority. He hated monarchs in the State, and prelates in the Church; for he hated all whom he was required to obey. It is to be suspected that his predominant desire was to destroy rather than establish, and that he felt not so much the love of liberty as repugnance to authority.

It has been observed that they who most loudly clamour for liberty do not most liberally grant it. What we know of Milton's character, in domestic relations, is, that he was severe and arbitrary. His family consisted of women; and there appears in his books something like a Turkish contempt of females, as subordinate and inferior beings. That his own daughters might not break the ranks, he suffered them to be depressed by a mean and penurious education. He thought woman made only for obedience, and man only for rebellion.

Of his family some account may be expected. His sister, first married to Mr. Philips, afterwards married Mr. Agar, a friend of her first husband, who succeeded him in the Crown office. She had, by her first husband, Edward and John, the two nephews whom Milton educated; and by her second, two daughters.

His brother, Sir Christopher, had two daughters, Mary and Catharine, and a son, Thomas, who succeeded Agar in the Crown office, and left a daughter living in 1749 in Grosvenor Street.

Milton had children only by his first wife: Anne, Mary, and Deborah. Anne, though deformed, married a master-builder, and died of her first child. Mary died single. Deborah married Abraham Clark, a weaver in Spitalfields, and lived seventy-six years, to August, 1727. This is the daughter of whom public mention has been made. She could repeat the first lines of Homer, the "Metamorphoses," and some of Euripides, by having often read them. Yet here incredulity is ready to make a stand. Many repetitions are necessary to fix in memory lines not understood; and why should Milton wish or want to hear them so often? These lines were at the beginning of the poems. Of a book written in a language not understood, the beginning raises no more attention than the end; and as those that understand it know commonly the beginning best, its rehearsal will seldom be necessary. It is not likely that Milton required any passage to be so much repeated as that his daughter could learn it; nor likely that he desired the initial lines to be read at all; nor that the daughter, weary of the drudgery of pronouncing unideal sounds, would voluntarily commit them to memory.

To this gentlewoman Addison made a present, and promised some establishment, but died soon after. Queen Caroline sent her fifty guineas. She had seven sons and three daughters; but none of them had any children, except her son Caleb and her daughter Elizabeth. Caleb went to Fort St. George, in the East Indies, and had two sons, of whom nothing now is known. Elizabeth married Thomas Foster, a weaver in Spitalfields, and had seven children, who all died. She kept a petty grocer's or chandler's shop, first at Holloway, and afterwards in Cock Lane, near Shoreditch Church. She knew little of her grandfather, and that little was not good. She told of his harshness to his daughters, and his refusal to have them taught to write; and, in opposition to other accounts, represented him as delicate, though temperate, in his diet.

In 1750, April 5th, *Comus* was played for her benefit. She had so little acquaintance with diversion or gaiety, that she did not know what was intended when a benefit was offered her. The profits of the night were only one hundred and thirty pounds, though Dr. Newton brought a large contribution; and twenty pounds were given by Tonson, a man who is to be praised as often as he is named. Of this sum one hundred pounds were placed in the stocks, after some debate between her and her husband in whose name it should be entered; and the rest augmented their little stock, with which they removed to Islington. This was the greatest benefaction that "Paradise Lost" ever procured the author's descendants; and to this he who has now attempted to relate his Life, had the honour of contributing a Prologue.

In the examination of Milton's poetical works, I shall pay so much regard to time as to begin with his juvenile productions. For his early pieces he seems to have had a degree of fondness not very laudable; what he has once written he resolves to preserve, and gives to the public an unfinished poem which he broke off because he was "nothing satisfied with what he had done," supposing his readers less nice than himself. These preludes to his future labours are in Italian, Latin, and English. Of the Italian I cannot pretend to speak as a critic; but I have heard them commended by a man well qualified to decide their merit. The Latin pieces are lusciously elegant: but the delight which they afford is rather by the exquisite imitation of the ancient writers, by the purity of the diction, and the harmony of the numbers, than by any power of invention or vigour of sentiment. They are not all of equal value; the elegies excel the odes; and some of the exercises on Gunpowder Treason might have been spared.

The English poems, though they make no promises of "Paradise Lost," have this evidence of genius—that they have a cast original and unborrowed. But their peculiarity is not excellence; if they differ from the verses of others, they differ for the worse; for they are too often distinguished by repulsive harshness; the combinations of words are new, but they are not pleasing; the rhymes and epithets seem to be laboriously sought, and violently applied.

That in the early parts of his life he wrote with much care appears from his manuscripts, happily preserved at Cambridge, in which many of his smaller works are found as they were first written, with the subsequent corrections. Such relics show how excellence is acquired; what we hope ever to do with ease, we must learn first to do with diligence.

Those who admire the beauties of this great poet sometimes force their own judgment into false approbation of his little pieces, and prevail upon themselves to think that admirable which is only singular. All that short compositions can commonly attain is neatness and elegance. Milton never learned the art of doing little things with grace; he overlooked the milder excellence of suavity and softness; he was a "Lion" that had no skill in "dandling the Kid."

One of the poems on which much praise has been bestowed is “Lycidas;” of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing. What beauty there is we must therefore seek in the sentiments and images. It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius, nor tells of rough “satyrs” and “fauns with cloven heel.” Where there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief.

In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral; easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are long ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. When Cowley tells of Hervey, that they studied together, it is easy to suppose how much he must miss the companion of his labours, and the partner of his discoveries; but what image of tenderness can be excited by these lines?—

> We drove afield, and both together heard
> What time the grey fly winds her sultry horn,
> Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night.

We know that they never drove afield, and that they had no flocks to batten; and though it be allowed that the representation may be allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote, that it is never sought, because it cannot be known when it is found.

Among the flocks, and copses, and flowers, appear the heathen deities; Jove and Phœbus, Neptune and Æolus, with a long train of mythological imagery, such as a college easily supplies. Nothing can less display knowledge, or less exercise invention, than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion, and must now feed his flocks alone, without any judge of his skill in piping; and how one god asks another god what is become of Lycidas, and how neither god can tell. He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy; he who thus praises will confer no honour.

This poem has yet a grosser fault. With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverent combinations. The shepherd likewise is now a feeder of sheep, and afterwards an ecclesiastical pastor, a superintendent of a Christian flock. Such equivocations are always unskilful; but here they are indecent, and at least approach to impiety, of which, however, I believe the writer not to have been conscious.

Such is the power of reputation justly acquired, that its blaze drives away the eye from nice examination. Surely no man could have fancied that he read Lycidas with pleasure, had he not known the author.

Of the two pieces, “L’Allegro” and “il Penseroso,” I believe, opinion is uniform; every man that reads them, reads them with pleasure. The author’s design is not, what Theobald has remarked, merely to show how objects derive their colours from the mind, by representing the operation of the same things upon the gay and the melancholy temper, or upon the same man as he is differently disposed; but rather how, among the successive variety of appearances, every disposition of mind takes hold on those by which it may be gratified.

The *cheerful* man hears the lark in the morning; the *pensive* man hears the nightingale in the evening. The *cheerful* man sees the cock strut, and hears the horn and hounds echo in the wood; then walks, *not unseen*, to observe the glory of the rising sun, or listen to the singing milkmaid, and view the labours of the ploughman and the mower; then casts his eyes about him over scenes of smiling plenty, and looks up to the distant tower, the residence of some fair inhabitant; thus he pursues real gaiety through a day of labour or of play, and delights himself at night with the fanciful narratives of superstitious ignorance.

The *pensive* man at one time walks *unseen* to muse at midnight, and at another hears the sullen curfew. If the weather drives him home, he sits in a room lighted only by “glowing embers;” or by a lonely lamp outwatches the North Star, to discover the habitation of separate souls, and varies the Shades of meditation by contemplating the magnificent or pathetic scenes of tragic and epic poetry. When the morning comes—a morning gloomy with rain and wind—he walks into the dark, trackless woods, falls asleep by some murmuring water, and with melancholy enthusiasm expects some dream of prognostication, or some music played by aërial performers.

Both mirth and melancholy are solitary, silent inhabitants of the breast, that neither receive nor transmit communication; no mention is therefore made of a philosophical friend, or a pleasant companion. The seriousness does not arise from any participation of calamity, nor the gaiety from the pleasures of the bottle.

The man of *cheerfulness*, having exhausted the country, tries what “towered cities” will afford, and mingles with scenes of splendour, gay assemblies, and nuptial festivities; but he mingles a mere spectator, as, when the learned comedies of Jonson, or the wild dramas of Shakespeare, are exhibited, he attends the theatre.

The *pensive* man never loses himself in crowds, but walks the cloister, or frequents the cathedral. Milton probably had not yet forsaken the Church.

Both his characters delight in music; but he seems to think that cheerful notes would have obtained from Pluto a complete dismission of Eurydice, of whom solemn sounds procured only a conditional release.

For the old age of Cheerfulness he makes no provision: but Melancholy he conducts with great dignity to the close of life. His Cheerfulness is without levity, and his Pensiveness without asperity.

Through these two poems the images are properly selected and nicely distinguished; but the colours of the diction seem not sufficiently discriminated. I know not whether the characters are kept sufficiently apart. No mirth can, indeed, be found in his melancholy; but I am afraid that I always meet some melancholy in his mirth. They are two noble efforts of imagination.

The greatest of his juvenile performances is the "Mask of *Comus*," in which may very plainly be discovered the dawn or twilight of "Paradise Lost." Milton appears to have formed very early that system of diction, and mode of verse, which his maturer judgment approved, and from which he never endeavoured nor desired to deviate.

Nor does *Comus* afford only a specimen of his language; it exhibits likewise his power of description and his vigour of sentiment, employed in the praise and defence of virtue. A work more truly poetical is rarely found; allusions, images, and descriptive epithets, embellish almost every period with lavish decoration. As a series of lines, therefore, it may be considered as worthy of all the admiration with which the votaries have received it.

As a drama it is deficient. The action is not probable. A mask, in those parts where supernatural intervention is admitted, must indeed be given up to all the freaks of imagination, but so far as the action is merely human, it ought to be reasonable, which can hardly be said of the conduct of the two brothers; who, when their sister sinks with fatigue in a pathless wilderness, wander both away together in search of berries too far to find their way back, and leave a helpless lady to all the sadness and danger of solitude. This, however, is a defect over-balanced by its convenience.

What deserves more reprehension is, that the prologue spoken in the wild wood by the attendant Spirit is addressed to the audience; a mode of communication so contrary to the nature of dramatic representation, that no precedents can support it.

The discourse of the Spirit is too long; an objection that may be made to almost all the following speeches; they have not the sprightliness of a dialogue animated by reciprocal contention, but seem rather declamations deliberately composed, and formally repeated, on a moral question. The auditor therefore listens as to a lecture, without passion, without anxiety.

The song of Comus has airiness and jollity; but, what may recommend Milton's morals as well as his poetry, the invitations to pleasure are so general, that they excite no distinct images of corrupt enjoyment, and take no dangerous hold on the fancy.

The following soliloquies of Comus and the Lady are elegant but tedious. The song must owe much to the voice if it ever can delight. At last the Brothers enter with too much tranquillity; and, when they have feared lest their Sister should be in danger, and hoped that she is not in danger, the elder makes a speech in praise of chastity, and the younger finds how fine it is to be a philosopher.

Then descends the Spirit in form of a shepherd; and the Brother, instead of being in haste to ask his help, praises his singing, and inquires his business in that place. It is remarkable, that at this interview the Brother is taken with a short fit of rhyming, The Spirit relates that the Lady is in the power of Comus; the Brother moralises again; and the Spirit makes a long narration, of no use because it is false, and therefore unsuitable to a good being.

In all these parts the language is poetical, and the sentiments are generous; but there is something wanting to allure attention.

The dispute between the Lady and Comus is the most animated and affecting scene of the drama, and wants nothing but a brisker reciprocation of objections and replies to invite attention, and detain it.

The songs are vigorous and full of imagery; but they are harsh in their diction, and not very musical in their numbers.

Throughout the whole the figures are too bold, and the language too luxuriant for dialogue. It is a drama in the epic style, inelegantly splendid, and tediously instructive.

The sonnets were written in different parts of Milton's life, upon different occasions. They deserve not any particular criticism; for of the best it can only be said, that they are not bad; and perhaps only the eighth and twenty-first are truly entitled to this slender commendation. The fabric of a sonnet, however adapted to the Italian language, has never succeeded in ours, which, having greater variety of termination, requires the rhymes to be often changed.

Those little pieces may be despatched without much anxiety; a greater work calls for greater care. I am now to examine "Paradise Lost;" a poem which, considered with respect to design, may claim the first place, and with respect to performance, the second, among the productions of the human mind.

By the general consent of critics the first praise of genius is due to the writer of an epic poem, as it requires an assemblage of all the powers which are singly sufficient for other compositions. Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason. Epic poetry undertakes to teach the most important truths by the most pleasing precepts, and

therefore relates some great event in the most affecting manner. History must supply the writer with the rudiments of narration, which he must improve and exalt by a nobler art, must animate by dramatic energy, and diversify by retrospection and anticipation; morality must teach him the exact bounds, and different shades, of vice and virtue; from policy, and the practice of life, he has to learn the discriminations of character, and the tendency of the passions, either single or combined; and physiology must supply him with illustrations and images. To put those materials to poetical use, is required an imagination capable of painting nature and realising fiction. Nor is he yet a poet till he has attained the whole extension of his language, distinguished all the delicacies of phrase, and all the colours of words, and learned to adjust their different sounds to all the varieties of metrical modulation.

Bossu is of opinion, that the poet's first work is to find a *moral*, which his fable is afterwards to illustrate and establish. This seems to have been the process only of Milton; the moral of other poems is incidental and consequent; in Milton's only it is essential and intrinsic. His purpose was the most useful and the most arduous: "to vindicate the ways of God to man;" to show the reasonableness of religion, and the necessity of obedience to the Divine Law.

To convey this moral there must be a *fable*, a narration artfully constructed, so as to excite curiosity and surprise expectation. In this part of his work Milton must be confessed to have equalled every other poet. He has involved in his account of the Fall of Man the events which preceded and those that were to follow it: he has interwoven the whole system of theology with such propriety, that every part appears to be necessary; and scarcely any recital is wished shorter for the sake of quickening the progress of the main action.

The subject of an epic poem is naturally an event of great importance. That of Milton is not the destruction of a city, the conduct of a colony, or the foundation of an empire. His subject is the fate of worlds, the revolutions of heaven and of earth; rebellion against the Supreme King, raised by the highest order of created beings; the overthrow of their host, and the punishment of their crime; the creation of a new race of reasonable creatures; their original happiness and innocence, their forfeiture of immortality, and their restoration to hope and peace.

Great events can be hastened or retarded only by persons of elevated dignity. Before the greatness displayed in Milton's poem, all other greatness shrinks away. The weakest of his agents are the highest and noblest of human beings, the original parents of mankind; with whose actions the elements consented; on whose rectitude or deviation of will, depended the state of terrestrial nature, and the condition of all the future inhabitants of the globe.

Of the other agents in the poem, the chief are such as it is irreverence to name on slight occasions. The rest were lower powers—

> Of which the least could wield
> Those elements, and arm him with the force
> Of all their regions;

powers, which only the control of Omnipotence restrains from laying creation waste, and filling the vast expanse of space with ruin and confusion. To display the motives and actions of beings thus superior, so far as human reason can examine them, or human imagination represent them, is the task which this mighty poet has undertaken and performed.

In the examination of epic poems much speculation is commonly employed upon the *characters*. The characters in the "Paradise Lost," which admit of examination, are those of angels and of man; of angels good and evil; of man in his innocent and sinful state.

Among the angels, the virtue of Raphael is mild and placid, of easy condescension and free communication; that of Michael is regal and lofty, and, as may seem, attentive to the dignity of his own nature. Abdiel and Gabriel appear occasionally, and act as every incident requires; the solitary fidelity of Abdiel is very amiably painted.

Of the evil angels the characters are more diversified. To Satan, as Addison observes, such sentiments are given as suit "the most exalted and most depraved being." Milton has been censured by Clarke, for the impiety which sometimes breaks from Satan's mouth; for there are thoughts, as he justly remarks, which no observation of character can justify, because no good man would willingly permit them to pass, however transiently, through his own mind. To make Satan speak as a rebel, without any such expression as might taint the reader's imagination, was indeed one of the great difficulties in Milton's undertaking; and I cannot but think that he has extricated himself with great happiness. There is in Satan's speeches little that can give pain to a pious ear. The language of rebellion cannot be the same with that of obedience. The malignity of Satan foams in haughtiness and obstinacy; but his expressions are commonly general, and no otherwise offensive than as they are wicked.

The other chiefs of the celestial rebellion are very judiciously discriminated in the first and second books; and the ferocious character of Moloch appears, both in the battle and the council, with exact consistency.

To Adam and to Eve are given, during their innocence, such sentiments as innocence can generate and utter. Their love is pure benevolence and mutual veneration; their repasts are without luxury, and their diligence without toil. Their addresses to their Maker have little more than the voice of admiration and gratitude. Fruition left them nothing to ask; and innocence left them nothing to fear.

But with guilt enter distrust and discord, mutual accusation, and stubborn self-defence; they regard each other with alienated minds, and dread their Creator as the avenger of their transgression. At last they seek shelter in His mercy, soften to repentance, and melt in supplication. Both before and after the fall, the superiority of Adam is diligently sustained.

Of the *probable* and the *marvellous*, two parts of a vulgar epic poem which immerge the critic in deep consideration, the "Paradise Lost" requires little to be said. It contains the history of a miracle, of creation and redemption; it displays the power and the mercy of the Supreme Being; the probable therefore is marvellous, and the marvellous is probable. The substance of the narrative is truth; and, as truth allows no choice, it is, like necessity, superior to rule. To the accidental or adventitious parts, as to everything human, some slight exceptions may be made; but the main fabric is immovably supported.

It is justly remarked by Addison, that this poem has, by the nature of its subject, the advantage above all others, that it is universally and perpetually interesting. All mankind will, through all ages, bear the same relation to Adam and to Eve, and must partake of that good and evil which extend to themselves.

Of the *machinery*, so called from Θεὸς ἀπὸ μηχανης, by which is meant the occasional interposition of supernatural power, another fertile topic of critical remarks, here is no room to speak, because everything is done under the immediate and visible direction of Heaven; but the rule is so far observed, that no part of the action could have been accomplished by any other means.

Of *episodes*, I think there are only two—contained in Raphael's relation of the war in Heaven, and Michael's prophetic account of the changes to happen in this world. Both are closely connected with the great action; one was necessary to Adam as a warning, the other as a consolation.

To the completeness or *integrity* of the design nothing can be objected; it has distinctly and clearly what Aristotle requires—a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is perhaps no poem, of the same length, from which so little can be taken without apparent mutilation. Here are no funeral games, nor is there any long description of a shield. The short digressions at the beginning of the third, seventh, and ninth books, might doubtless be spared, but superfluities so beautiful who would take away? or who does not wish that the author of the "Iliad" had gratified succeeding ages with a little knowledge of himself? Perhaps no passages are more attentively read than those extrinsic paragraphs; and, since the end of poetry is pleasure, that cannot be unpoetical with which all are pleased.

The questions, whether the action of the poem be strictly *one*, whether the poem can be properly termed *heroic*, and who is the hero, are raised by such readers as draw their principles of judgment rather from books than from reason. Milton, though he entitled "Paradise Lost" only a "poem," yet calls it himself "heroic song." Dryden petulantly and indecently denies the heroism of Adam, because he was overcome; but there is no reason why the hero should not be unfortunate, except established practice, since success and virtue do not go necessarily together. Cato is the hero of Lucan; but Lucan's authority will not be suffered by Quintilian to decide. However, if success be necessary, Adam's deceiver was at last crushed; Adam was restored to his Maker's favour, and therefore may securely resume his human rank.

After the scheme and fabric of the poem, must be considered its component parts, the sentiments and the diction.

The *sentiments*, as expressive of manners, or appropriated to characters, are, for the greater part, unexceptionably just.

Splendid passages, containing lessons of morality, or precepts of prudence, occur seldom. Such is the original formation of this poem, that, as it admits no human manners till the Fall, it can give little assistance to human conduct. Its end is to raise the thoughts above sublunary cares or pleasures. Yet the praise of that fortitude, with which Abdiel maintained his singularity of virtue against the scorn of multitudes, may be accommodated to all times; and Raphael's reproof of Adam's curiosity after the planetary motions, with the answer returned by Adam, may be confidently opposed to any rule of life which any poet has delivered.

The thoughts which are occasionally called forth in the progress are such as could only be produced by an imagination in the highest degree fervid and active, to which materials were supplied by incessant study and unlimited curiosity. The heat of Milton's mind may be said to sublimate his learning, to throw off into his work the spirit of science, unmingled with its grosser parts.

He had considered creation in its whole extent, and his descriptions are therefore learned. He had accustomed his imagination to unrestrained indulgence, and his conceptions therefore were extensive. The characteristic quality of his poem is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural port is gigantic loftiness. He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish.

He seems to have been well acquainted with his own genius, and to know what it was that Nature had bestowed upon him more bountifully than upon others—the power of displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful; he therefore chose a subject on which too much could not be said, on which he might

tire his fancy without the censure of extravagance.

The appearances of nature, and the occurrences of life, did not satiate his appetite of greatness. To paint things as they are requires a minute attention, and employs the memory rather than the fancy. Milton's delight was to sport in the wide regions of possibility; reality was a scene too narrow for his mind. He sent his faculties out upon discovery, into worlds where only imagination can travel, and delighted to form new modes of existence, and furnish sentiment and action to superior beings; to trace the counsels of hell, or accompany the choirs of heaven.

But he could not be always in other worlds; he must sometimes revisit earth, and tell of things visible and known. When he cannot raise wonder by the sublimity of his mind, he gives delight by its fertility.

Whatever be his subject, he never fails to fill the imagination. But his images and descriptions of the scenes or operations of nature do not seem to be always copied from original form, nor to have the freshness, raciness, and energy of immediate observation. He saw nature, as Dryden expresses it, "through the spectacles of books;" and on most occasions calls learning to his assistance. The garden of Eden brings to his mind the vale of Enna, where Proserpine was gathering flowers. Satan makes his way through fighting elements, like Argo between the Cyanean rocks, or Ulysses between the two Sicilian whirlpools, when he shunned Charybdis on the larboard. The mythological allusions have been justly censured, as not being always used with notice of their vanity; but they contribute variety to the narration, and produce an alternate exercise of the memory and the fancy.

His similes are less numerous, and more various, than those of his predecessors. But he does not confine himself within the limits of rigorous comparison: his great excellence is amplitude; and he expands the adventitious image beyond the dimensions which the occasion required. Thus, comparing the shield of Satan to the orb of the moon, he crowds the imagination with the discovery of the telescope, and all the wonders which the telescope discovers.

Of his moral sentiments it is hardly praise to affirm that they excel those of all other poets; for this superiority he was indebted to his acquaintance with the sacred writings. The ancient epic poets, wanting the light of Revelation, were very unskilful teachers of virtue; their principal characters may be great, but they are not amiable. The reader may rise from their works with a greater degree of active or passive fortitude, and sometimes of prudence; but he will be able to carry away few precepts of justice, and none of mercy.

From the Italian writers it appears that the advantages of even Christian knowledge may be possessed in vain. Ariosto's pravity is generally known; and, though the "Deliverance of Jerusalem" may be considered as a sacred subject, the poet has been very sparing of moral instruction.

In Milton every line breathes sanctity of thought, and purity of manners, except when the train of the narration requires the introduction of the rebellious spirits; and even they are compelled to acknowledge their subjection to God, in such a manner as excites reverence and confirms piety.

Of human beings there are but two; but those two are the parents of mankind, venerable before their fall for dignity and innocence, and amiable after it for repentance and submission. In the first state their affection is tender without weakness, and their piety sublime without presumption. When they have sinned, they show how discord begins in mutual frailty, and how it ought to cease in mutual forbearance; how confidence of the Divine favour is forfeited by sin, and how hope of pardon may be obtained by penitence and prayer. A state of innocence we can only conceive, if indeed, in our present misery, it be possible to conceive it; but the sentiments and worship proper to a fallen and offending being, we have all to learn, as we have all to practise.

The poet, whatever be done, is always great. Our progenitors in their first state conversed with angels; even when folly and sin had degraded them, they had not in their humiliation "the port of mean suitors;" and they rise again to reverential regard, when we find that their prayers were heard.

As human passions did not enter the world before the Fall, there is in the "Paradise Lost" little opportunity for the pathetic; but what little there is has not been lost. That passion, which is peculiar to rational nature, the anguish arising from the consciousness of transgression, and the horrors attending the sense of the Divine displeasure, are very justly described and forcibly impressed. But the passions are moved only on one occasion; sublimity is the general and prevailing quality in this poem; sublimity variously modified—sometimes descriptive, sometimes argumentative.

The defects and faults of "Paradise Lost"—for faults and defects every work of man must have—it is the business of impartial criticism to discover. As, in displaying the excellence of Milton, I have not made long quotations, because of selecting beauties there had been no end, I shall in the same general manner mention that which seems to deserve censure; for what Englishman can take delight in transcribing passages, which, if they lessen the reputation of Milton, diminish in some degree the honour of our country?

The generality of my scheme does not admit the frequent notice of verbal inaccuracies; which Bentley, perhaps better skilled in grammar and poetry, has often found, though he sometimes made them, and which he imputed to the obtrusions of a reviser, whom the author's blindness obliged him to employ; a supposition rash and groundless, if he thought it true; and vile and

pernicious, if, as is said, he in private allowed it to be false.

The plan of “Paradise Lost” has this inconvenience, that it comprises neither human actions nor human manners. The man and woman who act and suffer are in a state which no other man or woman can ever know. The reader finds no transaction in which he can be engaged—beholds no condition in which he can by any effort of imagination place himself; he has, therefore, little natural curiosity or sympathy.

We all, indeed, feel the effects of Adam’s disobedience; we all sin like Adam, and like him must all bewail our offences; we have restless and insidious enemies in the fallen angels, and in the blessed spirits we have guardians and friends; in the redemption of mankind we hope to be included; in the description of heaven and hell we are surely interested, as we are all to reside hereafter either in the regions of horror or bliss.

But these truths are too important to be new; they have been taught to our infancy; they have mingled with our solitary thoughts and familiar conversations, and are habitually interwoven with the whole texture of life. Being therefore not new, they raise no unaccustomed emotion in the mind; what we knew before, we cannot learn; what is not unexpected, cannot surprise.

Of the ideas suggested by these awful scenes, from some we recede with reverence, except when stated hours require their association; and from others we shrink with horror, or admit them only as salutary inflictions, as counterpoises to our interests and passions. Such images rather obstruct the career of fancy than incite it.

Pleasure and terror are indeed the genuine sources of poetry; but poetical pleasure must be such as human imagination can at least conceive, and poetical terrors such as human strength and fortitude may combat. The good and evil of eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit; the mind sinks under them in passive helplessness, content with calm belief and humble adoration.

Known truths, however, may take a different appearance, and be conveyed to the mind by a new train of intermediate images. This Milton has undertaken and performed with pregnancy and vigour of mind peculiar to himself. Whoever considers the few radical positions which the Scriptures afforded him, will wonder by what energetic operation he expanded them to such extent, and ramified them to so much variety, restrained as he was by religious reverence from licentiousness of fiction.

Here is a full display of the united force of study and genius—of a great accumulation of materials, with judgment to digest and fancy to combine them: Milton was able to select from nature or from story, from an ancient fable or from modern science, whatever could illustrate or adorn his thoughts. An accumulation of knowledge impregnated his mind, fermented by study and exalted by imagination.

It has been therefore said, without an indecent hyperbole, by one of his encomiasts, that in reading “Paradise Lost” we read a book of universal knowledge.

But original deficiency cannot be supplied. The want of human interest is always felt. “Paradise Lost” is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. None ever wished it longer than it is. Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure. We read Milton for instruction, retire harassed and overburdened, and look elsewhere for recreation; we desert our master, and seek for companions.

Another inconvenience of Milton’s design is, that it requires the description of what cannot be described, the agency of spirits. He saw that immateriality supplied no images, and that he could not show angels acting but by instruments of action; he therefore invested them with form and matter. This, being necessary, was therefore defensible; and he should have secured the consistency of his system, by keeping immateriality out of sight, and enticing his reader to drop it from his thoughts. But he has unhappily perplexed his poetry with his philosophy. His infernal and celestial powers are sometimes pure spirit, and sometimes animated body. When Satan walks with his lance upon the “burning marl,” he has a body; when, in his passage between hell and the new world, he is in danger of sinking in the vacuity, and is supported by a gust of rising vapours, he has a body; when he animates the toad, he seems to be more spirit, that can penetrate matter at pleasure; when he “starts up in his own shape,” he has at least a determined form; and when he is brought before Gabriel, he has “a spear and a shield,” which he had the power of hiding in the toad, though the arms of the contending angels are evidently material.

The vulgar inhabitants of Pandæmonium, being “incorporeal spirits,” are “at large, though without number,” in a limited space: yet in the battle, when they were overwhelmed by mountains, their armour hurt them, “crushed in upon their substance, now grown gross by sinning.” This likewise happened to the uncorrupted angels, who were overthrown the “sooner for their arms, for unarmed they might easily as spirits have evaded by contraction or remove.” Even as spirits they are hardly spiritual: for “contraction” and “remove” are images of matter; but if they could have escaped without their armour, they might have escaped from it, and left only the empty cover to be battered. Uriel, when he rides on a sunbeam, is material; Satan is material when he is afraid of the prowess of Adam.

The confusion of spirit and matter, which pervades the whole narration of the war of heaven, fills it with incongruity; and the book in which it is related is, I believe, the favourite of children, and gradually neglected as knowledge is increased.

After the operation of immaterial agents, which cannot be explained, may be considered that of allegorical persons which have no real existence. To exalt causes into agents, to invest abstract ideas with form, and animate them with activity, has always been the right of poetry. But such airy beings are, for the most part, suffered only to do their natural office, and retire. Thus Fame tells a tale, and Victory hovers over a general, or perches on a standard; but Fame and Victory can do no more. To give them any real employment, or ascribe to them any material agency, is to make them allegorical no longer, but to shock the mind by ascribing effects to nonentity. In the "Prometheus" of Æschylus, we see Violence and Strength, and in the "Alcestis" of Euripides we see Death, brought upon the stage, all as active persons of the drama; but no precedents can justify absurdity.

Milton's allegory of Sin and Death is undoubtedly faulty. Sin is indeed the mother of Death, and may be allowed to be the portress of hell; but when they stop the journey of Satan, a journey described as real, and when Death offers him battle, the allegory is broken. That Sin and Death should have shown the way to hell, might have been allowed; but they cannot facilitate the passage by building a bridge, because the difficulty of Satan's passage is described as real and sensible, and the bridge ought to be only figurative. The hell assigned to the rebellious spirits is described as not less local than the residence of man. It is placed in some distant part of space, separated from the regions of harmony and order by a chaotic waste and an unoccupied vacuity; but Sin and Death worked up a "mole of aggravated soil" cemented with *asphaltus*, a work too bulky for ideal architects.

This unskilful allegory appears to me one of the greatest faults of the poem; and to this there was no temptation but the author's opinion of its beauty.

To the conduct of the narrative some objections may be made. Satan is with great expectation brought before Gabriel in Paradise, and is suffered to go away unmolested. The creation of man is represented as the consequence of the vacuity left in heaven by the expulsion of the rebels; yet Satan mentions it as a report "rife in Heaven" before his departure.

To find sentiments for the state of innocence was very difficult; and something of anticipation perhaps is now and then discovered. Adam's discourse of dreams seems not to be the speculation of a new-created being. I know not whether his answer to the angel's reproof for curiosity does not want something of propriety; it is the speech of a man acquainted with many other men. Some philosophical notions, especially when the philosophy is false, might have been better omitted. The angel, in a comparison, speaks of "timorous deer," before deer were yet timorous, and before Adam could understand the comparison.

Dryden remarks, that Milton has some flats among his elevations. This is only to say, that all the parts are not equal. In every work, one part must be for the sake of others; a palace must have passages; a poem must have transitions. It is no more to be required that wit should always be blazing, than that the sun should always stand at noon. In a great work there is a vicissitude of luminous and opaque parts, as there is in the world a succession of day and night. Milton, when he has expatiated in the sky, may be allowed sometimes to revisit earth; for what other author ever soared so high, or sustained his flight so long?

Milton, being well versed in the Italian poets, appears to have borrowed often from them; and, as every man catches something from his companions, his desire of imitating Ariosto's levity has disgraced his work with the Paradise of Fools; a fiction not in itself ill-imagined, but too ludicrous for its place.

His play on words, in which he delights too often; his equivocations, which Bentley endeavours to defend by the example of the ancients; his unnecessary and ungraceful use of terms of art; it is not necessary to mention, because they are easily remarked, and generally censured; and at last bear so little proportion to the whole, that they scarcely deserve the attention of a critic.

Such are the faults of that wonderful performance "Paradise Lost;" which he who can put in balance with its beauties must be considered not as nice but as dull, as less to be censured for want of candour than pitied for want of sensibility.

Of "Paradise Regained," the general judgment seems now to be right, that it is in many parts elegant, and everywhere instructive. It was not to be supposed that the writer of "Paradise Lost" could ever write without great effusions of fancy, and exalted precepts of wisdom. The basis of "Paradise Regained" is narrow; a dialogue without action can never please like a union of the narrative and dramatic powers. Had this poem been written not by Milton, but by some imitator, it would have claimed and received universal praise.

If "Paradise Regained" has been too much depreciated, "Samson Agonistes" has, in requital, been too much admired. It could only be by long prejudice, and the bigotry of learning, that Milton could prefer the ancient tragedies, with their encumbrance of a chorus, to the exhibitions of the French and English stages; and it is only by a blind confidence in the reputation of Milton that a drama can be praised in which the intermediate parts have neither cause nor consequence, neither hasten nor retard the catastrophe.

In this tragedy are, however, many particular beauties, many just sentiments and striking lines; but it wants that power of attracting the attention which a well connected plan produces.

Milton would not have excelled in dramatic writing; he knew human nature only in the gross, and had never studied the shades of character, nor the combinations of concurring, or the perplexity

of contending passions. He had read much, and knew what books could teach; but had mingled little in the world, and was deficient in the knowledge which experience must confer.

Through all his greater works there prevails a uniform peculiarity of *diction*, a mode and cast of expression which bears little resemblance to that of any former writer; and which is so far removed from common use, that an unlearned reader, when he first opens his book, finds himself surprised by a new language.

This novelty has been, by those who can find nothing wrong in Milton, imputed to his laborious endeavours after words suitable to the grandeur of his ideas. "Our language," says Addison, "sank under him." But the truth is, that, both in prose and verse, he had formed his style by a perverse and pedantic principle. He was desirous to use English words with a foreign idiom. This, in all his prose, is discovered and condemned; for there judgment operates freely, neither softened by the beauty, nor awed by the dignity of his thoughts; but such is the power of his poetry, that his call is obeyed without resistance, the reader feels himself in captivity to a higher and a nobler mind, and criticism sinks in admiration.

Milton's style was not modified by his subject; what is shown with greater extent in "Paradise Lost" may be found in "Comus." One source of his peculiarity was his familiarity with the Tuscan poets; the disposition of his words is, I think, frequently Italian; perhaps sometimes combined with other tongues. Of him, at last, may be said what Jonson says of Spenser, that "he wrote no language," but has formed what Butler calls a "Babylonish dialect," in itself harsh and barbarous, but made by exalted genius and extensive learning the vehicle of so much instruction and so much pleasure, that, like other lovers, we find grace in its deformity.

Whatever be the faults of his diction, he cannot want the praise of copiousness and variety. He was master of his language in its full extent; and has selected the melodious words with such diligence, that from his book alone the Art of English Poetry might be learned.

After his diction something must be said of his *versification*. The *measure*, he says, "is the English heroic verse without rhyme." Of this mode he had many examples among the Italians, and some in his own country. The Earl of Surrey is said to have translated one of Virgil's books without rhyme; and, beside our tragedies, a few short poems had appeared in blank verse, particularly one tending to reconcile the nation to Raleigh's wild attempt upon Guiana, and probably written by Raleigh himself. These petty performances cannot be supposed to have much influenced Milton, who more probably took his hint from Trissino's "Italia Liberata;" and, finding blank verse easier than rhyme, was desirous of persuading himself that it is better.

"Rhyme," he says, and says truly, "is no necessary adjunct of true poetry." But, perhaps, of poetry, as a mental operation, metre or music is no necessary adjunct: it is, however, by the music of metre that poetry has been discriminated in all languages; and, in languages melodiously constructed with a due proportion of long and short syllables, metre is sufficient. But one language cannot communicate its rules to another; where metre is scanty and imperfect, some help is necessary. The music of the English heroic lines strikes the ear so faintly, that it is easily lost, unless all the syllables of every line co-operate together; this co-operation can only be obtained by the preservation of every verse unmingled with another as a distinct system of sounds; and this distinctness is obtained and preserved by the artifice of rhyme. The variety of pauses, so much boasted by the lovers of blank verse, changes the measures of an English poet to the periods of a declaimer; and there are only a few skilful and happy readers of Milton, who enable their audience to perceive where the lines end or begin. "Blank verse," said an ingenious critic, "seems to be verse only to the eye."

Poetry may subsist without rhyme, but English poetry will not often please; nor can rhyme ever be safely spared but where the subject is able to support itself. Blank verse makes some approach to that which is called the "lapidary style;" has neither the easiness of prose, nor the melody of numbers, and therefore tires by long continuance. Of the Italian writers without rhyme, whom Milton alleges as precedents, not one is popular; what reason could urge in its defence has been confuted by the ear.

But, whatever be the advantages of rhyme, I cannot prevail on myself to wish that Milton had been a rhymer; for I cannot wish his work to be other than it is; yet like other heroes, he is to be admired rather than imitated. He that thinks himself capable of astonishing may write blank verse; but those that hope only to please must condescend to rhyme.

The highest praise of genius is original invention. Milton cannot be said to have contrived the structure of an epic poem, and therefore owes reverence to that vigour and amplitude of mind to which all generations must be indebted for the art of poetical narration, for the texture of the fable, the variation of incidents, the interposition of dialogue, and all the stratagems that surprise and enchain attention. But, of all the borrowers from Homer, Milton is perhaps the least indebted. He was naturally a thinker for himself, confident of his own abilities, and disdainful of help or hindrance: he did not refuse admission to the thoughts or images of his predecessors, but he did not seek them. From his contemporaries he neither courted nor received support; there is in his writings nothing by which the pride of other authors might be gratified, or favour gained; no exchange of praise, nor solicitation of support. His great works were performed under discountenance and in blindness; but difficulties vanished at his touch; he was born for whatever is arduous; and his work is not the greatest of heroic poems, only because it is not the first.

COWLEY.

The Life of Cowley, notwithstanding the penury of English biography, has been written by Dr. Sprat, an author whose pregnancy of imagination and elegance of language have deservedly set him high in the ranks of literature; but his zeal of friendship, or ambition of eloquence, has produced a funeral oration rather than a history: he has given the character, not the life, of Cowley; for he writes with so little detail, that scarcely anything is distinctly known, but all is shown confused and enlarged through the mist of panegyric.

Abraham Cowley was born in the year one thousand sir hundred and eighteen. His father was a grocer, whose condition Dr. Sprat conceals under the general appellation of a citizen; and, what would probably not have been less carefully suppressed, the omission of his name in the register of St. Dunstan's parish gives reason to suspect that his father was a sectary. Whoever he was, he died before the birth of his son, and consequently left him to the care of his mother: whom Wood represents as struggling earnestly to procure him a literary education, and who, as she lived to the age of eighty, had her solicitude rewarded by seeing her son eminent, and, I hope, by seeing him fortunate, and partaking his prosperity. We know at least, from Sprat's account, that he always acknowledged her care, and justly paid the dues of filial gratitude.

In the window of his mother's apartment lay Spenser's "Fairy Queen," in which he very early took delight to read, till by feeling the charms of verse, he became, as he relates, irrecoverably a poet. Such are the accidents which, sometimes remembered, and perhaps sometimes forgotten, produce that particular designation of mind, and propensity for some certain science or employment, which is commonly called Genius. The true Genius is a mind of large general powers, accidentally determined to some particular direction. Sir Joshua Reynolds, the great painter of the present age, had the first fondness for his art excited by the perusal of Richardson's treatise.

By his mother's solicitation he was admitted into Westminster school, where he was soon distinguished. He was wont, says Sprat, to relate, "that he had this defect in his memory at that time, that his teachers never could bring it to retain the ordinary rules of grammar."

This is an instance of the natural desire of man to propagate a wonder. It is surely very difficult to tell anything as it was heard, when Sprat could not refrain from amplifying a commodious incident, though the book to which he prefixed his narrative contained its confutation. A memory admitting some things, and rejecting others, an intellectual digestion that concocted the pulp of learning, but refused the husks, had the appearance of an instinctive elegance, of a particular provision made by nature for literary politeness. But in the author's own honest relation, the marvel vanishes: he was, he says, such "an enemy to all constraint, that his master never could prevail on him to learn the rules without book." He does not tell that he could not learn the rules; but that, being able to perform his exercises without them, and being an "enemy to constraint," he spared himself the labour.

Among the English poets, Cowley, Milton, and Pope might be said "to lisp in numbers;" and have given such early proofs, not only of powers of language, but of comprehension of things, as to more tardy minds seems scarcely credible. But of the learned puerilities of Cowley there is no doubt, since a volume of his poems was not only written, but printed in his thirteenth year; containing, with other poetical compositions, "The tragical History of Pyramus and Thisbe," written when he was ten years old; and "Constantia and Philetus," written two years after.

While he was yet at school he produced a comedy called "Love's Riddle," though it was not published till he had been some time at Cambridge. This comedy is of the pastoral kind, which requires no acquaintance with the living world, and therefore the time at which it was composed adds little to the wonders of Cowley's minority.

In 1636 he was removed to Cambridge, where he continued his studies with great intenseness; for he is said to have written, while he was yet a young student, the greater part of his "Davideis;" a work of which the materials could not have been collected without the study of many years, but by a mind of the greatest vigour and activity.

Two years after his settlement at Cambridge, he published "Love's Riddle," with a poetical dedication to Sir Kenelm Digby, of whose acquaintance all his contemporaries seem to have been ambitious; and "Naufragium Joculare," a comedy written in Latin, but without due attention to the ancient models; for it is not loose verse, but mere prose. It was printed, with a dedication in verse to Dr. Comber, master of the college; but having neither the facility of a popular, nor the accuracy of a learned work, it seems to be now universally neglected.

At the beginning of the civil war, as the prince passed through Cambridge in his way to York, he was entertained with the representation of "The Guardian," a comedy which Cowley says was neither written nor acted, but rough-drawn by him, and repeated by the scholars. That this comedy was printed during his absence from his country he appears to have considered as injurious to his reputation; though, during the suppression of the theatres, it was sometimes privately acted with sufficient approbation.

In 1643, being now master of arts, he was, by the prevalence of the Parliament, ejected from

Cambridge, and sheltered himself at St. John's College in Oxford; where, as is said by Wood, he published a satire, called "The Puritan and Papist," which was only inserted in the last collection of his works; and so distinguished himself by the warmth of his loyalty, and the elegance of his conversation, that he gained the kindness and confidence of those who attended the king, and amongst others of Lord Falkland, whose notice cast a lustre on all to whom it was extended.

About the time when Oxford was surrendered to the Parliament, he followed the Queen to Paris, where he became secretary to the Lord Jermyn, afterwards Earl of St. Albans, and was employed in such correspondence as the royal cause required, and particularly in ciphering and deciphering the letters that passed between the king and queen; an employment of the highest confidence and honour. So wide was his province of intelligence, that for several years it filled all his days and two or three nights in the week.

In the year 1647, his "Mistress" was published; for he imagined, as he declared in his preface to a subsequent edition, that "poets are scarcely thought freemen of their company, without paying some duties, or obliging themselves to be true to love."

This obligation to amorous ditties owes, I believe, its original to the fame of Petrarch, who, in an age rude and uncultivated, by his tuneful homage to his Laura refined the manners of the lettered world, and filled Europe with love and poetry. But the basis of all excellence is truth: he that professes love ought to feel its power. Petrarch was a real lover, and Laura doubtless deserved his tenderness. Of Cowley, we are told by Barnes, who had means enough of information, that, whatever he may talk of his own inflammability, and the variety of characters by which his heart was divided, he in reality was in love but once, and then never had resolution to tell his passion.

This consideration cannot but abate in some measure the reader's esteem for the works and the author. To love excellence is natural; it is natural likewise for the lover to solicit reciprocal regard by an elaborate display of his own qualifications. The desire of pleasing has in different men produced actions of heroism, and effusions of wit; but it seems as reasonable to appear the champion as the poet of an airy "nothing," and to quarrel as to write for what Cowley might have learned from his master Pindar to call "the dream of a shadow."

It is surely not difficult, in the solitude of a college, or in the bustle of the world, to find useful studies and serious employment. No man needs to be so burdened with life as to squander it in voluntary dreams of fictitious occurrences. The man that sits down to suppose himself charged with treason or peculation, and heats his mind to an elaborate purgation of his character from crimes which he was never within the possibility of committing, differs only by the infrequency of his folly from him who praises beauty which he never saw; complains of jealousy which he never felt; supposes himself sometimes invited, and sometimes forsaken; fatigues his fancy, and ransacks his memory for images which may exhibit the gaiety of hope or the gloominess of despair; and dresses his imaginary Chloris or Phyllis sometimes in flowers fading as her beauty, and sometimes in gems lasting as her virtues.

At Paris, as secretary to Lord Jermyn, he was engaged in transacting things of real importance with real men and real women, and at that time did not much employ his thoughts upon phantoms of gallantry. Some of his letters to Mr. Bennet, afterwards Earl of Arlington, from April to December, in 1650, are preserved in "Miscellanea Aulica," a collection of papers published by Brown. These letters, being written like those of other men whose minds are more on things than words, contribute no otherwise to his reputation, than as they show him to have been above the affectation of unseasonable elegance, and to have known that the business of a statesman can be little forwarded by flowers of rhetoric.

One passage, however, seems not unworthy of some notice. Speaking of the Scotch treaty then in agitation:

"The Scotch treaty," says he, "is the only thing now in which we are vitally concerned; I am one of the last hopers, and yet cannot now abstain from believing that an agreement will be made; all people upon the place incline to that opinion. The Scotch will moderate something of the rigour of their demands; the mutual necessity of an accord is visible; the king is persuaded of it. And to tell you the truth (which I take to be an argument above all the rest), Virgil has told me something to that purpose."

This expression, from a secretary of the present time, would be considered as merely ludicrous, or at most as an ostentatious display of scholarship; but the manners of that time were so tinged with superstition, that I cannot but suspect Cowley of having consulted on this great occasion the Virgilian lots, and to have given some credit to the answer of his oracle.

Some years afterwards, "business," says Sprat, "passed of course into other hands;" and Cowley, being no longer useful at Paris, was in 1656 sent back into England, that, "under pretence of privacy and retirement, he might take occasion of giving notice of the posture of things in this nation."

Soon after his return to London, he was seized by some messengers of the usurping powers, who were sent out in quest of another man; and being examined, was put into confinement, from which he was not dismissed without the security of a thousand pounds given by Dr. Scarborough.

This year he published his poems, with a preface, in which he seems to have inserted something suppressed in subsequent editions, which was interpreted to denote some relaxation of his

loyalty. In this preface he declares, that “his desire had been for some days past, and did still very vehemently continue, to retire himself to some of the American plantations, and to forsake this world for ever.”

From the obloquy which the appearance of submission to the usurpers brought upon him, his biographer has been very diligent to clear him, and indeed it does not seem to have lessened his reputation. His wish for retirement we can easily believe to be undissembled; a man harassed in one kingdom, and persecuted in another, who, after a course of business that employed all his days and half his nights, in ciphering and deciphering, comes to his own country and steps into a prison, will be willing enough to retire to some place of quiet and of safety. Yet let neither our reverence for a genius, nor our pity for a sufferer, dispose us to forget, that, if his activity was virtue, his retreat was cowardice.

He then took upon him the character of physician, still, according to Sprat, with intention “to dissemble the main design of his coming over;” and, as Mr. Wood relates, “complying with the men then in power (which was much taken notice of by the royal party), he obtained an order to be created doctor of physic; which being done to his mind (whereby he gained the ill-will of some of his friends), he went into France again, having made a copy of verses on Oliver’s death.”

This is no favourable representation; yet even in this not much wrong can be discovered. How far he complied with the men in power is to be inquired before he can be blamed. It is not said that he told them any secrets, or assisted them by intelligence or any other act. If he only promised to be quiet, that they in whose hands he was might free him from confinement, he did what no law of society prohibits.

The man whose miscarriage in a just cause has put him in the power of his enemy, may, without any breach of his integrity, regain his liberty, or preserve his life, by a promise of neutrality: for the stipulation gives the enemy nothing which he had not before. The neutrality of a captive may be always secured by his imprisonment or death. He that is at the disposal of another may not promise to aid him in any injurious act, because no power can compel active obedience. He may engage to do nothing, but not to do ill.

There is reason to think that Cowley promised little. It does not appear that his compliance gained him confidence enough to be trusted without security, for the bond of his bail was never cancelled; nor that it made him think himself secure, for, at that dissolution of government which followed the death of Oliver, he returned into France, where he resumed his former station, and stayed till the restoration.

“He continued,” says his biographer, “under these bonds till the general deliverance;” it is therefore to be supposed that he did not go to France, and act again for the king, without the consent of his bondsman: that he did not show his loyalty at the hazard of his friend, but by his friend’s permission.

Of the verses on Oliver’s death, in which Wood’s narrative seems to imply something encomiastic, there has been no appearance. There is a discourse concerning his government, indeed, with verses intermixed, but such as certainly gained its author no friends among the abettors of usurpation.

A doctor of physic, however, he was made at Oxford in December, 1657; and in the commencement of the Royal Society, of which an account has been published by Dr. Birch, he appears busy among the experimental philosophers with the title of Doctor Cowley.

There is no reason for supposing that he ever attempted practice: but his preparatory studies have contributed something to the honour of his country. Considering botany as necessary to a physician, he retired into Kent to gather plants; and as the predominance of a favourite study affects all subordinate operations of the intellect, botany in the mind of Cowley turned into poetry. He composed, in Latin, several books on plants, of which the first and second display the qualities of herbs, in elegiac verse; the third and fourth, the beauties of flowers, in various measures; and the fifth and sixth, the use of trees, in heroic numbers.

At the same time were produced, from the same university, the two great poets, Cowley and Milton, of dissimilar genius, of opposite principles, but concurring in the cultivation of Latin poetry; in which the English, till their works and May’s poem appeared, seemed unable to contest the palm with any other of the lettered nations.

If the Latin performances of Cowley and Milton be compared (for May I hold to be superior to both), the advantage seems to lie on the side of Cowley. Milton is generally content to express the thoughts of the ancients in their language; Cowley, without much loss of purity or elegance, accommodates the diction of Rome to his own conceptions.

At the Restoration, after all the diligence of his long service, and with consciousness, not only of the merit of fidelity, but of the dignity of great abilities, he naturally expected ample preferments; and, that he might not be forgotten by his own fault, wrote a song of triumph. But this was a time of such general hope, that great numbers were inevitably disappointed; and Cowley found his reward very tediously delayed. He had been promised, by both Charles the First and Second, the mastership of the Savoy; “but he lost it,” says Wood, “by certain persons, enemies to the Muses.”

The neglect of the court was not his only mortification; having by such alteration as he thought

proper, fitted his old comedy of “The Guardian” for the stage, he produced it under the title of “The Cutter of Coleman Street.” It was treated on the stage with great severity, and was afterwards censured as a satire on the king’s party.

Mr. Dryden, who went with Mr. Sprat to the first exhibition, related to Mr. Dennis, “that, when they told Cowley how little favour had been shown him, he received the news of his ill success, not with so much firmness as might have been expected from so great a man.”

What firmness they expected, or what weakness Cowley discovered, cannot be known. He that misses his end will never be as much pleased as he that attains it, even when he can impute no part of his failure to himself; and when the end is to please the multitude, no man perhaps has a right, in things admitting of gradation and comparison, to throw the whole blame upon his judges, and totally to exclude diffidence and shame, by a haughty consciousness of his own excellence.

For the rejection of this play it is difficult now to find the reason: it certainly has, in a very great degree, the power of fixing attention and exciting merriment. From the charge of disaffection he exculpates himself in his preface, by observing how unlikely it is, that, having followed the royal family through all their distresses, “he should choose the time of their restoration to begin a quarrel with them.” It appears, however, from the theatrical register of Downes the prompter, to have been popularly considered as a satire on the royalists.

That he might shorten this tedious suspense, he published his pretensions and his discontent in an ode called “The Complaint;” in which he styles himself the *melancholy* Cowley. This met with the usual fortune of complaints, and seems to have excited more contempt than pity.

These unlucky incidents are brought, maliciously enough, together in some stanzas, written about that time on the choice of a laureate; a mode of satire, by which, since it was first introduced by Suckling, perhaps every generation of poets has been teased.

Savoy-missing Cowley came into the court,
  Making apologies for his bad play;
Every one gave him so good a report,
  That Apollo gave heed to all he could say:

Nor would he have had, ’tis thought, a rebuke,
  Unless he had done some notable folly;
Writ verses unjustly in praise of Sam Tuke,
  Or printed his pitiful Melancholy.

His vehement desire of retirement now came again upon him. “Not finding,” says the morose Wood, “that preferment conferred upon him which he expected, while others for their money carried away most places, he retired discontented into Surrey.”

“He was now,” says the courtly Sprat, “weary of the vexations and formalities of an active condition. He had been perplexed with a long compliance to foreign manners. He was satiated with the arts of a court; which sort of life, though his virtue made it innocent to him, yet nothing could make it quiet. Those were the reasons that moved him to follow the violent inclination of his own mind, which, in the greatest throng of his former business, had still called upon him, and represented to him the true delights of solitary studies, of temperate pleasures, and a moderate revenue below the malice and flatteries of fortune.”

So differently are things seen! and so differently are they shown! But actions are visible, though motives are secret. Cowley certainly retired; first to Barn Elms, and afterwards to Chertsey, in Surrey. He seems, however, to have lost part of his dread of the *hum of men*. He thought himself now safe enough from intrusion, without the defence of mountains and oceans; and, instead of seeking shelter in America, wisely went only so far from the bustle of life as that he might easily find his way back when solitude should grow tedious. His retreat was at first but slenderly accommodated; yet he soon obtained, by the interest of the Earl of St. Alban’s, and the Duke of Buckingham, such lease of the queen’s lands as afforded him an ample income.

By the lovers of virtue and of wit it will be solicitously asked, if he now was happy. Let them peruse one of his letters accidentally preserved by Peck, which I recommend to the consideration of all that may hereafter pant for solitude.

“To Dr. Thomas Sprat,

“*Chertsey*, *May* 21, 1665.

“The first night that I came hither I caught so great a cold, with a defluxion of rheum, as made me keep my chamber ten days. And, two after, had such a bruise on my ribs with a fall, that I am yet unable to move or turn myself in my bed. This is my personal fortune here to begin with. And, besides, I can get no money from my tenants, and have my meadows eaten up every night by cattle put in by my neighbours. What this signifies, or may come to in time, God knows; if it be ominous, it can end in nothing less than hanging. Another misfortune has been, and stranger than all the rest, that you have broke your word with me and failed to come, even though you told Mr. Bois that you would. This is what they call *monstri simile*. I do hope to recover my late hurt so far within five or six days (though it be uncertain yet whether I shall ever recover it) as

to walk about again. And then, methinks, you and I and the dean might be very merry upon St. Ann's Hill. You might very conveniently come hither the way of Hampton Town, lying there one night. I write this in pain, and can say no more: *verbum sapienti*."

He did not long enjoy the pleasure or suffer the uneasiness of solitude; for he died at the Porch-house in Chertsey, in 1667 [28th July], in the forty-ninth year of his age.

He was buried with great pomp near Chaucer and Spenser; and King Charles pronounced, "That Mr. Cowley had not left behind him a better man in England." He is represented by Dr. Sprat as the most amiable of mankind; and this posthumous praise may safely be credited, as it has never been contradicted by envy or by faction.

Such are the remarks and memorials which I have been able to add to the narrative of Dr. Sprat; who, writing when the feuds of civil war were yet recent, and the minds of either party were easily irritated, was obliged to pass over many transactions in general expressions, and to leave curiosity often unsatisfied. What he did not tell cannot, however, now be known; I must therefore recommend the perusal of his work, to which my narration can be considered only as a slender supplement.

Cowley, like other poets who have written with narrow views, and, instead of tracing intellectual pleasure to its natural sources in the minds of men, paid their court to temporary prejudices, has been at one time too much praised, and too much neglected at another.

Wit, like all other things subject by their nature to the choice of man, has its changes and fashions, and at different times takes different forms. About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets; of whom, in a criticism on the works of Cowley, it is not improper to give some account.

The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour; but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.

If the father of criticism had rightly denominated poetry τέχνη μιμητικὴ, *an imitative art*, these writers will, without great wrong, lose their right to the name of poets; for they cannot be said to have imitated anything; they neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter, nor represented the operations of intellect.

Those, however, who deny them to be poets, allow them to be wits. Dryden confesses of himself and his contemporaries, that they fall below Donne in wit; but maintains that they surpass him in poetry.

If wit be well described by Pope, as being "that which has been often thought, but was never before so well expressed," they certainly never attained, nor ever sought it; for they endeavoured to be singular in their thoughts, and were careless of their diction. But Pope's account of wit is undoubtedly erroneous; he depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language.

If by a more noble and more adequate conception, that be considered as wit which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just; if it be that which he that never found it, wonders how he missed; to wit of this kind the metaphysical poets have seldom risen. Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were ever found.

But wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.

From this account of their compositions it will be readily inferred that they were not successful in representing or moving the affections. As they were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising, they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasure of other minds: they never inquired what, on any occasion, they should have said or done; but wrote rather as beholders than partakers of human nature; as beings looking upon good and evil, impassive and at leisure; as epicurean deities, making remarks on the actions of men, and the vicissitudes of life, without interest and without emotion. Their courtship was void of fondness, and their lamentation of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had been never said before.

Nor was the sublime more within their reach than the pathetic; for they never attempted that comprehension and expanse of thought which at once fills the whole mind, and of which the first effect is sudden astonishment, and the second rational admiration. Sublimity is produced by aggregation, and littleness by dispersion. Great thoughts are always general, and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness. It is with

great propriety that subtlety, which in its original import means exility of particles, is taken in its metaphorical meaning for nicety of distinction. Those writers who lay on the watch for novelty, could have little hope of greatness; for great things cannot have escaped former observation. Their attempts were always analytic; they broke every image into fragments; and could no more represent, by their slender conceits and laboured particularities, the prospects of nature, or the scenes of life, than he who dissects a sunbeam with a prism can exhibit the wide effulgence of a summer noon.

What they wanted, however, of the sublime they endeavoured to supply by hyperbole; their amplifications had no limits; they left not only reason but fancy behind them; and produced combinations of confused magnificence, that not only could not be credited, but could not be imagined.

Yet great labour, directed by great abilities, is never wholly lost; if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth; if their conceits were far fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write on their plan, it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume the dignity of a writer, by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery, and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme, and volubility of syllables.

In perusing the works of this race of authors, the mind is exercised either by recollection or inquiry; something already learned is to be retrieved, or something new is to be examined. If their greatness seldom elevates, their acuteness often surprises; if the imagination is not always gratified, at least the powers of reflection and comparison are employed; and in the mass of materials which ingenious absurdity has thrown together, genuine wit and useful knowledge may be sometimes found buried perhaps in grossness of expression, but useful to those who know their value; and such as, when they are expanded to perspicuity and polished to elegance, may give lustre to works which have more propriety though less copiousness of sentiment.

This kind of writing, which was, I believe, borrowed from Marino and his followers, had been recommended by the example of Donne, a man of very extensive and various knowledge, and by Jonson, whose manner resembled that of Donne more in the ruggedness of his lines than in the cast of his sentiments.

When their reputation was high, they had undoubtedly more imitators than time has left behind. Their immediate successors, of whom any remembrance can be said to remain, were Suckling, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Clieveland, and Milton. Denham and Waller sought another way to fame, by improving the harmony of our members. Milton tried the metaphysic style only in his lines upon Hobson the carrier. Cowley adopted it, and excelled his predecessors, having as much sentiment and more music. Suckling neither improved versification nor abounded in conceits. The fashionable style remained chiefly with Cowley; Suckling could not reach it, and Milton disdained it.

Critical remarks are not easily understood without examples; and I have therefore collected instances of the modes of writing by which this species of poets (for poets they were called by themselves and their admirers) was eminently distinguished.

As the authors of this race were perhaps more desirous of being admired than understood, they sometimes drew their conceits from recesses of learning not very much frequented by common readers of poetry. Thus, Cowley on Knowledge:

> The sacred tree ’midst the fair orchard grew;
> The phœnix truth did on it rest,
> And built his perfumed nest,
> That right Porphyrian tree which did true logic show.
> Each leaf did learned notions give,
> And the apples were demonstrative;
> So clear their colour and divine,
> The very shads they cast did other lights outshine.

On Anacreon continuing a lover in his old age:

> Love was with thy life entwined,
> Close as heat with fire is join’d;
> A powerful brand prescribed the date
> Of thine, like Meleager’s fate.
> Th’ antiperistasis of age
> More enflam’d thy amorous rage.

In the following verses we have an allusion to a rabbinical opinion concerning manna:

> Variety I ask not: give me one
> To live perpetually upon.
> The person Love does to us fit,
> Like manna, has the taste of all in it.

Thus Donne shows his medicinal knowledge in some encomiastic verses:

In everything there naturally grows
A balsamum to keep it fresh and new,
If ’twere not injured by extrinsic blows:
Your youth and beauty are this balm in you.
But you, of learning and religion,
And virtue and such ingredients, have made
A mithridate, whose operation
Keeps off, or cures what can be done or said.

Though the following lines of Donne, on the last night of the year, have something in them too scholastic, they are not inelegant:

This twilight of two years, not past nor next,
Some emblem is of me, or I of this,
Who, meteor-like, of stuff and form perplext,
Whose what and where in disputation is,
If I should call me anything, should miss.
I sum the years and me, and find me not
Debtor to th’ old, nor creditor to th’ new.
That cannot say, my thanks I have forget,
Nor trust I this with hopes; and yet scarce true
This bravery is, since these times show’d me you.—Donne.

Yet more abstruse and profound is Donne’s reflection upon man as a microcosm:

If men be worlds, there is in every one
Something to answer in some proportion;
All the world’s riches; and in good men, this
Virtue, our form’s form, and our soul’s soul, is

Of thoughts so far-fetched, as to be not only unexpected, but unnatural, all their books are full.

To a lady, who wrote posies for rings:

They, who above do various circles find,
Say, like a ring, th’ equator Heaven does bind
When Heaven shall be adorned by thee,
(Which then more Heaven than ’tis will be)
’Tis thou must write the poesy there,
For it wanteth one as yet,
Then the sun pass through’t twice a year,
The sun, which is esteem’d the god of wit.—Cowley.

The difficulties which have been raised about identity in philosophy are by Cowley, with still more perplexity applied to love:

Five years ago (says story) I loved you,
For which you call me most inconstant now;
Pardon me, madam, you mistake the man;
For I am not the same that I was then:
No flesh is now the same ’twas then in me,
And that my mind is changed yourself may see.
The same thoughts to retain still, and intents
Were more inconstant far; for accidents
Must of all things most strangely inconstant prove,
If from one subject they t’ another move;
My members then the father members were,
From whence these take their birth, which now are here
If then this body love what th’ other did,
’Twere incest, which by nature is forbid.

The love of different women is, in geographical poetry, compared to travels through different countries:

Hast thou not found each woman’s breast
(The land where thou hast travelled)
Either by savages possest,
Or wild, and uninhabited?
What joy could’st take, or what repose,
In countries so uncivilis’d as those?
Lust, the scorching dog-star, here
Rages with immoderate heat;
Whilst Pride, the ragged northern bear,
In others makes the cold too great.
And where these are temperate known,
The soil’s all barren sand, or rocky stone.—Cowley.

A lover, burnt up by his affection, is compared to Egypt:

> The fate of Egypt I sustain,
> And never feel the dew of rain,
> From clouds which in the head appear;
> But all my too-much moisture ewe
> To overflowings of the heart below.—Cowley.

The lover supposes his lady acquainted with the ancient laws of augury and rites of sacrifice:

> And yet this death of mine, I fear,
> Will ominous to her appear:
> When, sound in every other part,
> Her sacrifice is found without an heart.
> For the last tempest of my death
> Shall sigh out that too, with my breath.

That the chaos was harmonised, has been recited of old; but whence the different sounds arose remained for a modern to discover:

> Th' ungovern'd parts no correspondence knew;
> An artless war from thwarting motions grew;
> Till they to number and fixed rules were brought.
> Water and air he for the tenor chose,
> Earth made the base; the treble flame arose.—Cowley.

The tears of lovers are always of great poetical account; but Donne has extended them into worlds. If the lines are not easily understood, they may be read again:

> On a round ball
> A workman, that hath copies by, can lay
> An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,
> And quickly make that which was nothing, all.
> So doth each tear,
> Which thee doth wear,
> A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,
> Till thy tears mixed with mine do overflow
> This world, by waters sent from thee my heaven dissolved so.

On reading the following lines, the reader may perhaps cry out "Confusion worse confounded."

> Hers lies a she sun, and a he moon here,
> She gives the best light to his sphere,
> Or each is both, and all, and so,
> They unto one another nothing owe.—Donne.

Who but Donne would have thought that a good man is a telescope?

> Though God be our true glass through which we see
> All, since the being of all things is He,
> Yet are the trunks, which do to us derive
> Things in proportion fit, by perspective
> Deeds of good men; for by their living here,
> Virtues, indeed remote, seem to be near.

Who would imagine it possible that in a very few lines so many remote ideas could be brought together?

> Since 'tis my doom, love's undershrieve,
> Why this reprieve?
> Why doth my she advowson fly
> Incumbency?
> To sell thyself dust thou intend
> By candles end,
> And hold the contract thus in doubt,
> Life's taper out?
> Think but how soon the market fails,
> Your sex lives faster than the males;
> And if to measure age's span,
> The sober Julian were th' account of man,
> Whilst you live by the fleet Gregorian.—Cleveland.

Of enormous and disgusting hyperboles, these may be examples:

> By every wind that comes this way,
> Send me at least a sigh or two,
> Such and so many I'll repay

As shall themselves make winds to get to you.—Cowley.

In tears I'll waste these eyes,
By love so vainly fed:
So lust of old the deluge punished.—Cowley.

All arm'd in brass, the richest dress of war,
(A dismal glorious sight!) he shone afar.
The sun himself started with sudden fright,
To see his beams return so dismal bright.—Cowley.

A universal consternation:

His bloody eyes he hurls round, his sharp paws
Tear up the ground; then runs he wild about,
Lashing his angry tail and roaring out.
Beasts creep into their dens, and tremble there;
Trees, though no wind is stirring, shake with fear;
Silence and horror fill the place around;
Echo itself dares scarce repeat the sound.—Cowley.

Their fictions were often violent and unnatural.

Of his mistress bathing:

The fish around her crowded, as they do
To the false light that treacherous fishers show,
And all with as much ease might taken be,
As she at first took me;
For ne'er did light so clear
Among the waves appear,
Though every night the sun himself set there.—Cowley.

The poetical effect of a lover's name upon glass:

My name engraved herein
Both contribute my firmness to this glass:
Which, ever since that charm, hath been
As hard as that which graved it was.—Donne.

Their conceits were sometimes slight and trifling. On an inconstant woman:

He enjoys the calmy sunshine now,
And no breath stirring hears,
In the clear heaven of thy brow
No smallest cloud appears.
He sees thee gentle, fair and gay,
And trusts the faithless April of thy May.—Cowley.

Upon a paper written with the juice of lemon, and read by the fire:

Nothing yet in thee is seen,
But when a genial heat warms thee within,
A new-born wood of various lines there grows;
Hers buds an L, and there a B,
Here sprouts a V, and there a T,
And all the flourishing letters stand in rows.—Cowley.

As they sought only for novelty, they did not much inquire whether their allusions were to things high or low, elegant or gross; whether they compared the little to the great, or the great to the little.

Physic and chirurgery for a lover:

Gently, ah gently, madam, touch
The wound, which you yourself have made;
That pain must needs be very much
Which makes me of your hand afraid.
Cordials of pity give me now,
For I too weak of purgings grow.—Cowley.

The world and a clock

Mahol th' inferior world's fantastic face
Through all the turns of matter's maze did trace;
Great Nature's well-set clock in pieces took;
On all the springs and smallest wheels did look
Of life and motion, and with equal art

Made up the whole again of every part.—Cowley.

A coal-pit has not often found its poet; but, that it may not want its due honour, Cleveland has paralleled it with the sun:

The moderate value of our guiltless ore
Makes no man atheist, and no woman whore;
Yet why should hallow'd vestal's sacred shrine
Deserve more honour than a flaming mine?
These pregnant wombs of heat would fitter be,
Than a few embers, for a deity.
Had he our pits, the Persian would admire
No sun, but warm's devotion at our fire:
He'd leave the trotting whipster, and prefer
Our profound Vulcan 'bove that waggoner.
For wants he heat, or light? or would have store
Of both? 'tis here: and what can suns give more?
Nay, what's the sun but, in a different name,
A coal-pit rampant, or a mine on flame?
Then let this truth reciprocally run,
The sun's heaven's coalery, and coals our sun.

Death, a voyage:

No family
E'er rigg'd a soul for Heaven's discovery,
With whom more venturers might boldly dare
Venture their stakes with him in joy to share.—Donne.

Their thoughts and expressions were sometimes grossly absurd, and such as no figures or licence can reconcile to the understanding.

A lover neither dead nor alive:

Then down I laid my head
Down on cold earth; and for a while was dead,
And my freed soul to a strange somewhere fled.

Ah, sottish soul, said I,
When back to its cage again I saw it fly;
Fool to resume her broken chain,
And row her galley here again!
Fool, to that body to return
Where it condemned and destined is to burn!
Once dead, how can it be,
Death should a thing so pleasant seem to thee,
That thou should'st come to live it o'er again in me?—Cowley.

A lover's heart, a hand grenado:

Woe to her stubborn heart, if once mine come
Into the self same room;
'Twill tear and blow up all within,
Like a grenade shot into a magazine.
Then shall Love keep the ashes and torn parts,
Of both our broken hearts;
Shalt out of both one new one make;
From hers th' allay, from mine the metal take.—Cowley.

The poetical propagation of light:

The prince's favour is diffused o'er all,
From which all fortunes names, and natures fall:
Then from those wombs of stars, the Bride's bright eyes,
At every glance a constellation flies,
And sows the court with stars, and doth prevent
In light and power, the all-ey'd firmament:
First her eye kindles other ladies' eyes,
Then from their beams their jewels' lustres rise;
And from their jewels torches do take fire,
And all is warmth, and light, and good desire.—Donne.

They were in very little care to clothe their notions with elegance of dress, and therefore miss the notice and the praise which are often gained by those who think less, but are more diligent to adorn their thoughts.

That a mistress beloved is fairer in idea than in reality is by Cowley thus expressed:

Thou in my fancy dost much higher stand
Than woman can be placed by Nature's hand;
And I must needs, I'm sure, a loser be,
To change thee as thou'rt there, for very thee.

That prayer and labour should co-operate are thus taught by Donne:

In none but us are such mix'd engines found,
As hands of double office; for the ground
We till with them; and them to heaven we raise
Who prayerless labours, or, without this, prays,
Doth but one half, that's none.

By the same author, a common topic, the danger of procrastination, is thus illustrated:

That which I should have begun
In my youth's morning, now late must be done;
And I, as giddy travellers must do,
Which stray or sleep all day, and having lost
Light and strength, dark and tired, must then ride post.

All that man has to do is to live and die; the sum of humanity is comprehended by Donne in the following lines:

Think in how poor a prison thou didst lie
After enabled but to suck and cry.
Think, when 'twas grown to most, 'twas a poor inn,
A province pack'd up in two yards of skin,
And that usurp'd, or threaten'd with a rage
Of sicknesses or their true mother, age.
But think that death hath now enfranchised thee;
Thou hast thy expansion now, and liberty;
Think, that a rusty piece discharged is flown
In pieces, and the bullet is his own,
And freely flies: this to thy soul allow,
Think thy shell broke, think thy soul hatch'd but now.

They were sometimes indelicate and disgusting. Cowley thus apostrophises beauty:

Thou tyrant which leav'st no man free!
Thou subtle thief, from whom nought safe can be!
Thou murtherer, which has kill'd, and devil, which would'st damn me!

Thus he addresses his mistress:

Thou who, in many a propriety,
So truly art the sun to me,
Add one more likeness, which I'm sure you can,
And let me and my sun beget a man.

Thus he represents the meditations of a lover:

Though in thy thoughts scarce any tracts have been
So much as of original sin,
Such charms thy beauty wears, as might
Desires in dying confest saints excite.
Thou with strange adultery
Dost in each breast a brothel keep;
Awake all men do lust for thee,
And some enjoy thee when they sleep.

The true taste of tears:

Hither with crystal vials, lovers, come,
And take my tears, which are love's wine,
And try your mistress' tears at home;
For all are false, that taste not just like mine.—Donne.

This is yet more indelicate:

As the sweet sweat of roses in a still,
As that which from chas'd musk-cat's pores doth trill,
As th' almighty balm of th' early east;
Such are the sweet drops of my mistress' breast.
And on her neck her skin such lustre sets,
They seem no sweat drops, but pearl coronets:
Rank, sweaty froth thy mistress' brow defiles.—Donne.

Their expressions sometimes raise horror, when they intend perhaps to be pathetic:

> As men in hell are from diseases free,
> So from all other ills am I,
> Free from their known formality:
> But all pains eminently lie in thee.—Cowley.

They were not always strictly curious, whether the opinions from which they drew their illustrations were true; it was enough that they were popular. Bacon remarks, that some falsehoods are continued by tradition, because they supply commodious allusions.

> It gave a piteous groan, and so it broke:
> In vain it something would have spoke;
> The love within too strong for't was,
> Like poison put into a Venice-glass.—Cowley.

In forming descriptions, they looked out not for images, but for conceits. Night has been a common subject, which poets have contended to adorn. Dryden's Night is well known; Donne's is as follows:

> Thou seest me here at midnight, now all rest:
> Time's dead low-water; when all minds divest
> To-morrow's business; when the labourers have
> Such rest in bed, that their last church-yard grave,
> Subject to change, will scarce be a type of this;
> Now when the client, whose last hearing is
> To-morrow, sleeps; when the condemned man,
> Who, when he opes his eyes, must shut them the
> Again by death, although sad watch he keep;
> Doth practise dying by a little sleep:
> Thou at this midnight seest me.

It must be, however, confessed of these writers, that if they are upon common subjects often unnecessarily and unpoetically subtle; yet, where scholastic speculation can be properly admitted, their copiousness and acuteness may justly be admired. What Cowley has written upon Hope shows an unequalled fertility of invention:

> Hops, whose weak being mind is,
> Alike if it succeed and if it miss;
> Whom good or ill does equally confound,
> And both the horns of fate's dilemma wound;
> Vain shadow! which dust vanish quite,
> Both at full noon and perfect night!
> The stars have not a possibility
> Of blessing thee;
> If things then from their end we happy call
> 'Tis Hope is the most hopeless thing of all.
> Hope, thou bold tester of delight,
> Who, whilst thou shouldst but taste, devour'st it quite!
> Thou bring'st us an estate, yet leav'st us poor
> By clogging it with legacies before!
> The joys, which we entire should wed,
> Come deflowr'd virgins to our bed;
> Good fortunes without gain imported be,
> Such mighty custom's paid to thee:
> For joy, like wine kept close, does better taste
> If it take air before its spirits waste.

To the following comparison of a man that travels, and his wife that stays at home, with a pair of compasses, it may be doubted whether absurdity or ingenuity has the better claim:

> Our two souls, therefore, which are one,
> Though I must go, endure not yet
> A breach, but an expansion,
> Like gold to airy thinness beat.
> If they be two, they are two so
> As stiff twin compasses are two;
> Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth if th' other do.
> And, though it in the centre sit,
> Yet, when the other far doth roam,
> It leans and hearkens after it,
> And grows erect as that comes home.
> Such wilt thou be to me, who must
> Like th' other foot obliquely run.
> Thy firmness makes my circle just,

And makes me end where I begun.—DONNE.

In all these examples it is apparent, that whatever is improper or vicious, is produced by a voluntary deviation from nature in pursuit of something new and strange; and that the writers fail to give delight, by their desire of exciting admiration.

Having thus endeavoured to exhibit a general representation of the style and sentiments of the metaphysical poets, it is now proper to examine particularly the works of Cowley, who was almost the last of that race, and undoubtedly the best.

His Miscellanies contain a collection of short compositions, written some as they were dictated by a mind at leisure, and some as they were called forth by different occasions; with great variety of style and sentiment, from burlesque levity to awful grandeur. Such an assemblage of diversified excellence no other poet has hitherto afforded. To choose the best, among many good, is one of the most hazardous attempts of criticism. I know not whether Scaliger himself has persuaded many readers to join with him in his preference of the two favourite odes, which he estimates in his raptures at the value of a kingdom. I will, however, venture to recommend Cowley's first piece, which ought to be inscribed "To my Muse," for want of which the second couplet is without reference. When the title is added, there wills till remain a defect; for every piece ought to contain in itself whatever is necessary to make it intelligible. Pope has some epitaphs without names; which are therefore epitaphs to be let, occupied indeed for the present, but hardly appropriated.

The "Ode on Wit" is almost without a rival. It was about the time of Cowley that *wit*, which had been till then used for *intellection*, in contradistinction to *will*, took the meaning, whatever it be, which it now bears.

Of all the passages in which poets have exemplified their own precepts, none will easily be found of greater excellence than that in which Cowley condemns exuberance of wit:—

Yet 'tis not to adorn and gild each part,
  That shows more cost than art.
Jewels at nose and lips but ill appear;
  Rather than all things wit, let none be there.
Several lights will not be seen,
  If there be nothing else between.
Men doubt, because they stand so thick i' th' sky,
If those be stars which paint the galaxy.

In his verses to Lord Falkland, whom every man of his time was proud to praise, there are, as there must be in all Cowley's compositions, some striking thoughts, but they are not well wrought. His "Elegy on Sir Henry Wotton" is vigorous and happy; the series of thoughts is easy and natural; and the conclusion, though a little weakened by the intrusion of Alexander, is elegant and forcible.

It may be remarked, that in this elegy, and in most of his encomiastic poems, he has forgotten or neglected to name his heroes.

In his poem on the death of Hervey, there is much praise, but little passion; a very just and ample delineation of such virtues as a studious privacy admits, and such intellectual excellence as a mind not yet called forth to action can display. He knew how to distinguish, and how to commend, the qualities of his companion; but, when he wishes to make us weep, he forgets to weep himself, and diverts his sorrow by imagining how his crown of bays, if he had it, would crackle in the fire. It is the odd fate of this thought to be the worse for being true. The bay-leaf crackles remarkably as it burns; as therefore this property was not assigned it by chance, the mind must be thought sufficiently at ease that could attend to such minuteness of physiology. But the power of Cowley is not so much to move the affections, as to exercise the understanding.

The "Chronicle" is a composition unrivalled and alone: such gaiety of fancy, such facility of expression, such varied similitude, such a succession of images, and such a dance of words, it is in vain to expect except from Cowley. His strength always appears in his agility; his volatility is not the flutter of a light, but the bound of an elastic mind. His levity never leaves his learning behind it; the moralist, the politician, and the critic, mingle their influence even in this airy frolic of genius. To such a performance Suckling could have brought the gaiety, but not the knowledge; Dryden could have supplied the knowledge, but not the gaiety.

The verses to Davenant, which are vigorously begun, and happily concluded, contain some hints of criticism very justly conceived and happily expressed. Cowley's critical abilities have not been sufficiently observed: the few decisions and remarks, which his prefaces and his notes on the "Davideis" supply, were at that time accessions to English literature, and show such skill as raises our wish for more examples.

The lines from Jersey are a very curious and pleasing specimen of the familiar descending to the burlesque.

His two metrical disquisitions *for* and *against* Reason are no mean specimens of metaphysical poetry. The stanzas against knowledge produce little conviction. In those which are intended to exalt the human faculties, Reason has its proper task assigned it; that of judging, not of things revealed, but of the reality of revelation. In the verses *for* Reason is a passage which Bentley, in

the only English verses which he is known to have written, seems to have copied, though with the inferiority of an imitator.

> The Holy Book like the eighth sphere doth shine
> With thousand lights of truth divine,
> So numberless the stars, that to our eye
> It makes all but one galaxy.
> Yet Reason must assist too; for, in seas
> So vast and dangerous as these,
> Our course by stars above we cannot know
> Without the compass too below.

After this says Bentley:

> Who travels in religious jars,
> Truth mix'd with error, shade with rays
> Like Whiston wanting pyx or stars,
> In ocean wide or sinks or strays.

Cowley seems to have had what Milton is believed to have wanted, the skill to rate his own performances by their just value, and has therefore closed his Miscellanies with the verses upon Crashaw, which apparently excel all that have gone before them, and in which there are beauties which common authors may justly think not only above their attainment, but above their ambition.

To the Miscellanies succeed the Anacreontics, or paraphrastical translations of some little poems, which pass, however justly, under the name of Anacreon. Of those songs dedicated to festivity and gaiety, in which even the morality is voluptuous, and which teach nothing but the enjoyment of the present day, he has given rather a pleasing than a faithful representation, having retained their sprightliness, but lost their simplicity. The Anacreon of Cowley, like the Homer of Pope, has admitted the decoration of some modern graces, by which he is undoubtedly made more amiable to common readers, and perhaps, if they would honestly declare their own perceptions, to far the greater part of those whom courtesy and ignorance are content to style the learned.

These little pieces will be found more finished in their kind than any other of Cowley's works. The diction shows nothing of the mould of time, and the sentiments are at no great distance from our present habitudes of thought. Real mirth must always be natural, and nature is uniform. Men have been wise in very different modes; but they have always laughed the same way.

Levity of thought naturally produces familiarity of language, and the familiar part of language continues long the same; the dialogue of comedy when it is transcribed from popular manners and real life, is read from age to age with equal pleasure. The artifices of inversion by which the established order of words is changed, or of innovation, by which new words, or new meanings of words, are introduced, is practised, not by those who talk to be understood, but by those who write to be admired.

The Anacreontics, therefore, of Cowley, give now all the pleasure which they ever gave. If he was formed by nature for one kind of writing more than for another, his power seems to have been greatest in the familiar and the festive.

The next class of his poems is called "The Mistress," of which it is not necessary to select any particular pieces for praise or censure. They have all the same beauties and faults, and nearly in the same proportion. They are written with exuberance of wit, and with copiousness of learning; and it is truly asserted by Sprat, that the plenitude of the writer's knowledge flows in upon his page, so that the reader is commonly surprised into some improvement. But, considered as the verses of a lover, no man that has ever loved will much commend them. They are neither courtly nor pathetic, have neither gallantry nor fondness. His praises are too far sought, and too hyperbolical, either to express love, or to excite it; every stanza is crowded with darts and flames, with wounds and death, with mingled souls and with broken hearts.

The principal artifice by which "The Mistress" is filled with conceits is very copiously displayed by Addison. Love is by Cowley, as by other poets, expressed metaphorically by flame and fire; and that which is true of real fire is said of love, or figurative fire, the same word in the same sentence retaining both significations. Thus "observing the cold regard of his mistress's eyes, and at the same time their power of producing love in him, he considers them as burning-glasses made of ice. Finding himself able to live in the greatest extremities of love, he concludes the torrid zone to be habitable. Upon the dying of a tree, on which he had cut his loves, he observes that his flames had burnt up and withered the tree."

These conceits Addison calls mixed wit; that is, wit which consists of thoughts true in one sense of the expression, and false in the other. Addison's representation is sufficiently indulgent: that confusion of images may entertain for a moment; but being unnatural it soon grows wearisome. Cowley delighted in it, as much as if he had invented it; but, not to mention the ancients, he might have found it full-blown in modern Italy. Thus Sannazaro:

> Aspice quam variis distringar Lesbia curis!
> Uror, et heu! nostro manat ab igne liquor:
> Sum Nilus, sumque Ætna simul; restringite flammas

O lacrimæ, aut lacrimas ebibe flamma meas.

One of the severe theologians of that time censured him as having published a book of profane and lascivious verses. From the charge of profaneness, the constant tenor of his life, which seems to have been eminently virtuous, and the general tendency of his opinions, which discover no irreverence of religion, must defend him; but that the accusation of lasciviousness is unjust, the perusal of his works will sufficiently evince.

Cowley's "Mistress" has no power of seduction: she "plays round the head, but comes not at the heart." Her beauty and absence, her kindness and cruelty, her disdain and inconstancy, produce no correspondence of emotion. His poetical accounts of the virtues of plants, and colours of flowers, is not perused with more sluggish frigidity. The compositions are such as might have been written for penance by a hermit, or for hire by a philosophical rhymer who had only heard of another sex; for they turn the mind only on the writer, whom, without thinking on a woman but as the subject for his task, we sometimes esteem as learned, and sometimes despise as trifling, always admire as ingenious, and always condemn as unnatural.

The Pindaric Odes are now to be considered; a species of composition, which Cowley thinks Pancirolus might have counted in his list of the lost inventions of antiquity, and which he has made a bold and vigorous attempt to recover.

The purpose with which he has paraphrased an Olympic and Nemæan Ode is by himself sufficiently explained. His endeavour was, not to show precisely what Pindar spoke, but his manner of speaking. He was therefore not at all restrained to his expressions, nor much to his sentiments; nothing was required of him, but not to write as Pindar would not have written.

Of the Olympic Ode the beginning is, I think, above the original in elegance, and the conclusion below it in strength. The connection is supplied with great perspicuity; and the thoughts, which to a reader of less skill seem thrown together by chance, are concatenated without any abruption. Though the English ode cannot be called a translation, it may be very properly consulted as a commentary.

The spirit of Pindar is indeed not everywhere equally preserved. The following pretty lines are not such as his "deep mouth" was used to pour:

> Great Rhea's son,
> If in Olympus' top, where thou
> Sitt'st to behold thy sacred show,
> If in Alpheus' silver flight,
> If in my verse thou take delight,
> My verse, great Rhea's son, which is
> Lofty as that and smooth as this.

In the Nemæan Ode, the reader must, in mere justice to Pindar, observe, whatever is said of the original new moon, her tender forehead and her horns, is superadded by his paraphrast, who has many other plays of words and fancy unsuitable to the original, as,

> The table, free for ev'ry guest,
> No doubt will thee admit,
> And feast more upon thee, than thou on it

He sometimes extends his author's thoughts without improving them. In the Olympionic an oath is mentioned in a single word, and Cowley spends three lines in swearing by the Castalian Stream. We are told of Theron's bounty, with a hint that he had enemies, which Cowley thus enlarges in rhyming prose:

> But in this thankless world the giver
> Is envied even by the receiver;
> 'Tis now the cheap and frugal fashion
> Rather to hide than own the obligation:
> Nay, 'tis much worse than so;
> It now an artifice does grow
> Wrongs and injuries to do,
> Lest men should think we owe.

It is hard to conceive that a man of the first rank in learning and wit, when he was dealing out such minute morality in such feeble diction, could imagine, either waking or dreaming, that he imitated Pindar.

In the following odes, where Cowley chooses his own subjects, he sometimes rises to dignity truly Pindaric; and, if some deficiencies of language be forgiven, his strains are such as those of the Theban bard were to his contemporaries:

> Begin the song, and strike the living lyre:
> Lo how the years to come, a numerous and well-fitted quire,
> All hand in hand do decently advance,
> And to my song with smooth and equal measure dance;
> While the dance lasts, how long soe'er it be,

My music's voice shall bear it company;
  Till all gentle notes be drown'd
In the last trumpet's dreadful sound.

After such enthusiasm, who will not lament to find the poet conclude with lines like these:

  But stop, my Muse—
Hold thy Pindaric Pegasus closely in,
Which does to rage begin—
—'Tis an unruly and hard-mouth'd horse—
'Twill no unskilful touch endure,
But flings writer and reader too that sits not sure.

The fault of Cowley, and perhaps of all the writers of the metaphysical race, is that of pursuing his thoughts to their last ramifications, by which he loses the grandeur of generality; for of the greatest things the parts are little; what is little can be but pretty, and by claiming dignity becomes ridiculous. Thus all the power of description is destroyed by a scrupulous enumeration, and the force of metaphors is lost, when the mind by the mention of particulars is turned more upon the original than the secondary sense, more upon that from which the illustration is drawn than that to which it is applied.

Of this we have a very eminent example in the ode entitled the "Muse," who goes to "take the air" in an intellectual chariot, to which he harnesses Fancy and Judgment, Wit and Eloquence, Memory and Invention; how he distinguished Wit from Fancy, or how Memory could properly contribute to Motion, he has not explained: we are however content to suppose that he could have justified his own fiction, and wish to see the Muse begin her career; but there is yet more to be done.

Let the *postillion* Nature mount, and let
The *coachman* Art be set;
And let the airy *footmen*, running all beside,
Make a long row of goodly pride;
Figures, conceits, raptures, and sentences,
In a well-worded dress,
And innocent loves, and pleasant truths, and useful lies,
In all their gaudy *liveries*.

Every mind is now disgusted with this cumber of magnificence; yet I cannot refuse myself the four next lines:

Mount, glorious queen, thy travelling throne,
  And bid it to put on;
  For long though cheerful is the way,
And life, alas! allows but one ill winter's day.

In the same ode, celebrating the power of the Muse, he gives her prescience, or, in poetical language, the foresight of events hatching in futurity; but, once having an egg in his mind, he cannot forbear to show us that he knows what an egg contains:

Thou into the close nests of Time dost peep,
  And there with piercing eye
Through the firm shell and the thick white float spy
  Years to come a-forming lie,
Close in their sacred fecundine asleep.

The same thought is more generally, and therefore more poetically expressed by Casimir, a writer who has many of the beauties and faults of Cowley:

Omnibus mundi Dominator horis
Aptat urgendas per inane pennas,
Pars adhuc nido latet, et futuros
    Crescit in annos.

Cowley, whatever was his subject, seems to have been carried, by a kind of destiny, to the light and the familiar, or to conceits which require still more ignoble epithets. A slaughter in the Red Sea "new dyes the water's name;" and England, during the Civil War, was "Albion no more, nor to be named from white." It is surely by some fascination not easily surmounted, that a writer, professing to revive "the noblest and highest writing in verse," makes this address to the new year:

Nay, if thou lov'st me, gentle year,
Let not so much as love be there,
Vain, fruitless love I mean; for, gentle year,
  Although I fear
There's of this caution little need,
  Yet, gentle year, take heed
  How thou dost make

Such a mistake;
Such love I mean alone
As by thy cruel predecessors has been shown:
For, though I have too much cause to doubt it,
I fain would try, for once, if life can live without it.

The reader of this will be inclined to cry out with Prior—

Ye critics, say,
How poor to this was Pindar's style!

Even those who cannot perhaps find in the Isthmian or Nemæan songs what Antiquity what disposed them to expect, will at least see that they are ill represented by such puny poetry; and all will determine that, if this be the old Theban strain, it is not worthy of revival.

To the disproportion and incongruity of Cowley's sentiments must be added the uncertainty and looseness of his measures. He takes the liberty of using in any place a verse of any length, from two syllables to twelve. The verses of Pindar have, as he observes, very little harmony to a modern ear; yet by examining the syllables we perceive them to be regular, and have reason enough for supposing that the ancient audiences were delighted with the sound. The imitator ought therefore to have adopted what he found, and to have added what was wanting; to have preserved a constant return of the same numbers, and to have supplied smoothness of transition and continuity of thought.

It is urged by Dr. Sprat, that the "irregularity of numbers is the very thing" which makes "that kind of poesy fit for all manner of subjects." But he should have remembered, that what is fit for everything can fit nothing well. The great pleasure of verse arises from the known measure of the lines, and uniform structure of the stanzas, by which the voice is regulated, and the memory relieved.

If the Pindaric style be, what Cowley thinks it, "the highest and noblest kind of writing in verse," it can be adapted only to high and noble subjects; and it will not be easy to reconcile the poet with the critic, or to conceive how that can be the highest kind of writing in verse which, according to Sprat, "is chiefly to be preferred for its near affinity to prose."

This lax and lawless versification so much concealed the deficiencies of the barren, and flattered the laziness of the idle, that it immediately overspread our books of poetry; all the boys and girls caught the pleasing fashion, and they that could do nothing else could write like Pindar. The rights of antiquity were invaded, and disorder tried to break into the Latin: a poem on the Sheldonian Theatre, in which all kinds of verse are shaken together, is unhappily inserted in the "Musæ Anglicanæ." Pindarism prevailed about half a century; but at last died gradually away, and other imitations supply its place.

The Pindaric Odes have so long enjoyed the highest degree of poetical reputation, that I am not willing to dismiss them with unabated censure; and surely though the mode of their composition be erroneous, yet many parts deserve at least that admiration which is due to great comprehension of knowledge, and great fertility of fancy. The thoughts are often new, and often striking; but the greatness of one part is disgraced by the littleness of another; and total negligence of language gives the noblest conceptions the appearance of a fabric august in the plan, but mean in the materials. Yet surely those verses are not without a just claim to praise; of which it may be said with truth, that no man but Cowley could have written them.

The "Davideis" now remains to be considered; a poem which the author designed to have extended to twelve books, merely, as he makes no scruple of declaring, because the "Æneid" had that number; but he had leisure or perseverance only to write the third part. Epic poems have been left unfinished by Virgil, Statius, Spenser, and Cowley. That we have not the whole "Davideis" is, however, not much to be regretted; for in this undertaking Cowley is, tacitly at least, confessed to have miscarried. There are not many examples of so great a work produced by an author generally read, and generally praised, that has crept through a century with so little regard. Whatever is said of Cowley, is meant of his other works. Of the "Davideis" no mention is made; it never appears in books, nor emerges in conversation. By the "Spectator" it has been once quoted; by Rymer it has once been praised; and by Dryden, in "Mac Flecknoe," it has once been imitated; nor do I recollect much other notice from its publication till now in the whole succession of English literature.

Of this silence and neglect, if the reason be inquired, it will be found partly in the choice of the subject, and partly in the performance of the work.

Sacred history has been always read with submissive reverence, and an imagination overawed and controlled. We have been accustomed to acquiesce in the nakedness and simplicity of the authentic narrative, and to repose on its veracity with such humble confidence as suppresses curiosity. We go with the historian as he goes, and stop with him when he stops. All amplification is frivolous and vain; all addition to that which is already sufficient for the purposes of religion seems not only useless, but in some degree profane.

Such events as were produced by the visible interposition of Divine Power are above the power of human genius to dignify. The miracle of creation, however it may teem with images, is best described with little diffusion of language: "He spake the word, and they were made."

We are told that Saul “was troubled with an evil spirit;” from this Cowley takes an opportunity of describing hell, and telling the history of Lucifer, who was, he says,

> Once general of a gilded host of sprites,
> Like Hesper leading forth the spangled nights;
> But down like lightning, which him struck, he came
> And roar’d at his first plunge into the flame.

Lucifer makes a speech to the inferior agents of mischief, in which there is something of heathenism, and therefore of impropriety; and, to give efficacy to his words, concludes by lashing his breast with his long tail: Envy, after a pause, steps out, and among other declarations of her zeal utters these lines:

> Do thou but threat, loud storms shall make reply,
> And thunder echo to the trembling sky;
> Whilst raging seas swell to so bold an height,
> As shall the fire’s proud element affright,
> Th’ old drudging sun, from his long-beaten way,
> Shall at thy voice start, and misguide the day.
> The jocund orbs shall break their measured pace,
> And stubborn poles change their allotted place.
> Heaven’s gilded troops shall flutter here and there,
> Leaving their boasting songs tuned to a sphere.

Every reader feels himself weary with this useless talk of an allegorical being.

It is not only when the events are confessedly miraculous, that fancy and fiction lose their effect; the whole system of life, while the theocracy was yet visible, has an appearance so different from all other scenes of human action, that the reader of the sacred volume habitually considers it as the peculiar mode of existence of a distinct species of mankind, that lived and acted with manners uncommunicable; so that it is difficult even for imagination to place us in the state of them whose story is related, and by consequence their joys and griefs are not easily adopted, nor can the attention be often interested in anything that befalls them.

To the subject thus originally indisposed to the reception of poetical embellishments, the writer brought little that could reconcile impatience, or attract curiosity. Nothing can be more disgusting than a narrative spangled with conceits; and conceits are all that the “Davideis” supplies.

One of the great sources of poetical delight is description, or the power of presenting pictures to the mind. Cowley gives inferences instead of images, and shows not what may be supposed to have been seen, but what thoughts the sight might have suggested. When Virgil describes the stone which Turnus lifted against Æneas, he fixes the attention on its bulk and weight:

> Saxum circumspicit ingens,
> Saxum antiquum, ingens, campo quod forte jacebat
> Limes agro positus, litem ut discerneret arvis.

Cowley says of the stone with which Cain slew his brother,

> I saw him fling the stone, as if he meant
> At once his murther and his monument.

Of the sword taken from Goliath, he says,

> A sword so great, that it was only fit
> To cut off his great head that came with it.

Other poets describe Death by some of its common appearances. Cowley says, with a learned allusion to sepulchral lamps real or fabulous,

> ’Twixt his right ribs deep pierced the furious blade,
> And open’d wide those secret vessels where
> Life’s light goes out, when first they let in air.

But he has allusions vulgar as well as learned in a visionary succession of kings:

> Joas at first does bright and glorious show,
> In life’s fresh morn his fame does early crow.

Describing an undisciplined army, after having said with elegance,

> His forces seem’d no army, but a crowd
> Heartless, unarm’d, disorderly, and loud,

he gives them a fit of the ague.

The allusions, however, are not always to vulgar things; he offends by exaggeration as much as by diminution:

The king was placed alone, and o'er his head
A well-wrought heaven of silk and gold was spread.

Whatever he writes is always polluted with some conceit:

Where the sun's fruitful beams give metals birth,
Where he the growth of fatal gold does see,
Gold, which alone more influence has than he.

In one passage he starts a sudden question to the confusion of philosophy:

Ye learned heads, whom ivy garlands grace,
Why does that twining plant the oak embrace;
The oak for courtship most of all unfit,
And rough as are the winds that fight with it?

His expressions have sometimes a degree of meanness that surpasses expectation:

Nay, gentle guests, he cries, since now you're in,
The story of your gallant friend begin.

In a simile descriptive of the morning:

As glimmering stars just at th' approach of day,
Cashier'd by troops, at last all drop away.

The dress of Gabriel deserves attention:

He took for skin a cloud most soft and bright,
That e'er the mid-day sun pierced through with light;
Upon his cheeks a lively blush he spread,
Wash'd from the morning beauties' deepest red:
An harmless flatt'ring meteor shone for hair,
And fell adown his shoulders with loose care;
He cuts out a silk mantle from the skies,
Where the most sprightly azure pleased the eyes;
This he with starry vapours sprinkles all,
Took in their prime ere they grow ripe and fall;
Of a new rainbow ere it fret or fade,
The choicest piece cut out, a scarf is made.

This is a just specimen of Cowley's imagery; what might in general expressions be great and forcible, he weakens and makes ridiculous by branching it into small parts. That Gabriel was invested with the softest or brightest colours of the sky, we might have been told, and been dismissed to improve the idea in our different proportions of conception; but Cowley could not let us go till he had related where Gabriel got first his skin, and then his mantle, then his lace, and then his scarf, and related it in the terms of the mercer and tailor.

Sometimes he indulges himself in a digression, always conceived with his natural exuberance, and commonly, even where it is not long, continued till it is tedious:

I' th' library a few choice authors stood,
Yet 'twas well stored, for that small store was good;
Writing, man's spiritual physic, was not then
Itself, as now, grown a disease of men.
Learning (young virgin) but few suitors knew;
The common prostitute she lately grew,
And with the spurious brood loads now the press;
Laborious effects of idleness.

As the "Davideis" affords only four books, though intended to consist of twelve, there is no opportunity for such criticism as Epic poems commonly supply. The plan of the whole work is very imperfectly shown by the third part. The duration of an unfinished action cannot be known. Of characters either not yet introduced, or shown but upon few occasions, the full extent and the nice discriminations cannot be ascertained. The fable is plainly implex, formed rather from the "Odyssey" than the "Iliad;" and many artifices of diversification are employed, with the skill of a man acquainted with the beet models. The past is recalled by narration, and the future anticipated by vision: but he has been so lavish of his poetical art, that it is difficult to imagine how he could fill eight books more without practising again the same modes of disposing his matter; and perhaps the perception of this growing incumbrance inclined him to stop. By this abruption, posterity lost more instruction than delight. If the continuation of the "Davideis" can be missed, it is for the learning that had been diffused over it, and the notes in which it had been explained.

Had not his characters been depraved like every other part by improper decorations, they would have deserved uncommon praise. He gives Saul both the body and mind of a hero:

His way once chose, he forward threat outright.

Nor turned aside for danger or delight.

And the different beauties of the lofty Merah and the gentle Michal are very justly conceived and strongly painted.

Rymer has declared the “Davideis” superior to the “Jerusalem” of Tasso, “which,” says he, “the poet, with all his care, has not totally purged from pedantry.” If by pedantry is meant that minute knowledge which is derived from particular sciences and studies, in opposition to the general notions supplied by a wide survey of life and nature, Cowley certainly errs, by introducing pedantry, far more frequently than Tasso. I know not, indeed, why they should be compared; for the resemblance of Cowley’s work to Tasso’s is only that they both exhibit the agency of celestial and infernal spirits, in which, however, they differ widely; for Cowley supposes them commonly to operate upon the mind by suggestion; Tasso represents them as promoting or obstructing events by external agency.

Of particular passages that can be properly compared, I remember only the description of Heaven, in which the different manner of the two writers is sufficiently discernible. Cowley’s is scarcely description, unless it be possible to describe by negatives; for he tells us only what there is not in heaven. Tasso endeavours to represent the splendours and pleasures of the regions of happiness. Tasso affords images, and Cowley sentiments. It happens, however, that Tasso’s description affords some reason for Rymer’s censure. He says of the Supreme Being:

Hà sotto i piedi e fato e la natura
Ministri humili, e’l moto, e ch’il misura.

The second line has in it more of pedantry than perhaps can be found in any other stanza of the poem.

In the perusal of the “Davideis,” as of all Cowley’s works, we find wit and learning unprofitably squandered. Attention has no relief; the affections are never moved; we are sometimes surprised, but never delighted; and find much to admire, but little to approve. Still, however, it is the work of Cowley, of a mind capacious by nature, and replenished by study.

In the general review of Cowley’s poetry it will be found that he wrote with abundant fertility, but negligent or unskilful selection; with much thought, but with little imagery; that he is never pathetic, and rarely sublime; but always either ingenious or learned, either acute or profound.

It is said by Denham in his elegy,

To him no author was unknown,
Yet what he writ was all his own.

This wide position requires less limitation, when it is affirmed of Cowley, than perhaps of any other poet.—He read much, and yet borrowed little.

His character of writing was indeed not his own; he unhappily adopted that which was predominant. He saw a certain way to present praise; and, not sufficiently inquiring by what means the ancients have continued to delight through all the changes of human manners, he contented himself with a deciduous laurel, of which the verdure in its spring was bright and gay, but which time has been continually stealing from his brows.

He was in his own time considered as of unrivalled excellence. Clarendon represents him as having taken a flight beyond all that went before him; and Milton is said to have declared that the three greatest English poets were Spenser, Shakespeare, and Cowley.

His manner he had in common with others; but his sentiments were his own. Upon every subject he thought for himself; and such was his copiousness of knowledge, that something at once remote and applicable rushed into his mind; yet it is not likely that he always rejected a commodious idea merely because another had used it: his known wealth was so great that be might have borrowed without loss of credit, in his elegy on Sir Henry Wotton, the last lines have such resemblance to the noble epigram of Grotius on the death of Scaliger, that I cannot but think them copied from it, though they are copied by no servile hand.

One passage in his “Mistress” is so apparently borrowed from Donne, that he probably would not have written it had it not mingled with his own thoughts, so as that he did not perceive himself taking it from another:

Although I think thou never found wilt be,
  Yet I’m resolved to search for thee;
  The search itself rewards the pains.
So, though the chymic his great secret miss
(For neither it in Art or Nature is),
  Yet things well worth his toil he gains:
  And does his charge and labour pay
With good unsought experiments by the way.—Cowley.

Some that have deeper digg’d Love’s mine than I,
Say, where his centric happiness doth lie:
  I have loved, and got, and told;

But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,
I should not find that hidden mystery;
Oh, 'tis imposture all!
And as no chymic yet th' elixir got,
But glorifies his pregnant pot,
If by the way to him befal
Some odoriferous thing, or medicinal,
So lovers dream a rich and long delight,
But get a winter-seeming summer's night.

Jonson and Donne, as Dr. Hurd remarks, were then in the highest esteem.

It is related by Clarendon, that Cowley always acknowledged his obligation to the learning and industry of Jonson: but I have found no traces of Jonson in his works: to emulate Donne appears to have been his purpose.; and from Donne ~he may have learnt that familiarity with religious images, and that light allusion to sacred things, by which readers far short of sanctity are frequently offended; and which would not be borne in the present age, when devotion, perhaps not more fervent, is more delicate.

Having produced one passage taken by Cowley from Donne, I will recompense him by another which Milton seems to have borrowed from him. He says of Goliath:

His spear, the trunk was of a lofty tree,
Which Nature meant some tall ship's mast should be.

Milton of Satan:

His spear, to equal which the tallest pine
Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast
Of some great ammiral, were but a wand,
He walked with.

His diction was in his own time censured as negligent. He seems not to have known, or not to have considered, that words being arbitrary must owe their power to association, and have the influence, and that only, which custom has given them. Language is the dress of thought; and as the noblest mien, or most graceful action, would be degraded and obscured by a garb appropriated to the gross employments of rustics or mechanics; so the most heroic sentiments will lose their efficacy, and the most splendid ideas drop their magnificence, if they are conveyed by words used commonly upon low and trivial occasions, debased by vulgar mouths, and contaminated by inelegant applications.

Truth indeed is always truth, and reason is always reason; they have an intrinsic and unalterable value, and constitute that intellectual gold which defies destruction; but gold may be so concealed in baser matter, that only a chemist can recover it; sense may be so hidden in unrefined and plebeian words, that none but philosophers can distinguish it; and both may be so buried in impurities, as not to pay the cost of their extraction.

The diction, being the vehicle of the thoughts, first presents itself to the intellectual eye; and if the first appearance offends, a further knowledge is not often sought. Whatever professes to benefit by pleasing, must please at once. The pleasures of the mind imply something sudden and unexpected; that which elevates must always surprise. What is perceived by slow degrees may gratify us with the consciousness of improvement, but will never strike with the sense of pleasure.

Of all this, Cowley appears to have been without knowledge, or without care. He makes no selection of words, nor seeks any neatness of phrase: he has no elegance either lucky or elaborate; as his endeavours were rather to impress sentences upon the understanding, than images on the fancy: he has few epithets, and those scattered without peculiar propriety of nice adaptation.

It seems to follow from the necessity of the subject, rather than the care of the writer, that the diction of his heroic poem is less familiar than that of his slightest writings. He has given not the same numbers, but the same diction, to the gentle Anacreon and the tempestuous Pindar.

His versification seems to have had very little of his care; and if what he thinks be true, that his numbers are unmusical only when they are ill-read, the art of reading them is at present lost; for they are commonly harsh to modern ears. He has indeed many noble lines, such as the feeble care of Waller never could produce. The bulk of his thoughts sometimes swelled his verse to unexpected and inevitable grandeur; but his excellence of this kind is merely fortuitous: he sinks willingly down to his general carelessness, and avoids with very little care either meanness or asperity.

His contractions are often rugged and harsh:

One flings a mountain, and its rivers too
Torn up with 't.

His rhymes are very often made by pronouns, or particles, or the like unimportant words, which disappoint the ear, and destroy the energy of the line.

His combination of different measures is sometimes dissonant and unpleasing; he joins verses together, of which the former does not slide easily into the latter.

The words “do” and “did,” which so much degrade in present estimation the line that admits them, were in the time of Cowley little censured or avoided; how often he used them, and with how bad an effect, at least to our ears, will appear by a passage, in which every reader will lament to see just and noble thoughts defrauded of their praise by inelegance of language:

> Where honour or where conscience *does* not bind
> No other law shall shackle me;
> Slave to myself I ne’er will be;
> Nor shall my future actions be confined
> By my own present mind.
> Who by resolves and vows engaged *does* stand
> For days, that yet belong to fate,
> *Does* like an unthrift mortgage his estate,
> Before it falls into his hand;
> The bondman of the cloister so,
> All that he *does* receive *does* always owe.
> And still as Time comes in, it goes away,
> Not to enjoy, but debts to pay!
> Unhappy slave, and pupil to a bell!
> Which his hour’s work as well as hours *does* tell:
> Unhappy till the last, the kind releasing knell.

His heroic lines are often formed of monosyllables; but yet they are sometimes sweet and sonorous.

He says of the Messiah,

> Round the whole earth his dreaded name shall sound,
> *And reach to worlds that must not yet be found*.

In another place, of David,

> Yet bid him go securely, when he sends;
> *’Tis Saul that is his foe, and we his friends*.
> *The man who has his God, no aid can lack*;
> *And we who bid him go, will bring him back*.

Yet amidst his negligence he sometimes attempted an improved and scientific versification; of which it will be best to give his own account subjoined to this line:

> Nor can the glory contain itself in th’ endless space.

> “I am sorry that it is necessary to admonish the most part of readers, that it is not by negligence that this verse is so loose, long, and, as it were, vast; it is to paint in the number the nature of the thing which it describes, which I would have observed in divers other places of this poem, that else will pass as very careless verses: as before,
>
> *And over-runs the neighb’ring fields with violent course*.
>
> “In the second book:
>
> *Down a precipice deep, dowse he casts them all—*
>
> “And,
>
> *And fell a-down his shoulders with loose care*.
>
> “In the third,
>
> *Brass was his helmet, his boots brass, and o’er*
> *His breast a thick plate strong brass he wore*.
>
> “In the fourth,
>
> *Like some fair pine o’er-looking all the ignobler wood*.
>
> “And,
>
> *Some from the rocks cast themselves down headlong*.
>
> “And many more: but it is enough to instance in a few. The thing is, that the disposition of words and numbers should be such, as that, out of the order and sound of them, the things themselves may be represented. This the Greeks were not so accurate as to bind themselves to; neither have our English poets observed it, for aught I can find. The Latins (*qui musas colunt severiores*) sometimes did it; and their prince, Virgil, always: in whom the examples are innumerable, and taken notice of by all judicious men, so that it is superfluous to collect them.”

I know not whether he has, in many of these instances, attained the representation or resemblance that he purposes. Verse can imitate only sound and motion. A “boundless” verse, a “headlong” verse, and a verse of “brass” or of “strong brass,” seem to comprise very incongruous and unsociable ideas. What there is peculiar in the sound of the line expressing “loose care,” I cannot discover; nor why the “pine” is “taller” in an Alexandrine than in ten syllables.

But, not to defraud him of his due praise, he has given one example of representative versification, which perhaps no other English line can equal:

> Begin, be bold, and venture to be wise:
> He, who defers this work from day to day,
> Does on a river’s bank expecting stay
> Till the whole stream that stopp’d him shall be gone,
> *Which runs, and, as it runs, for ever shall run on*.

Cowley was, I believe, the first poet that mingled Alexandrines at pleasure with the common heroic of ten syllables, and from him Dryden borrowed the practice, whether ornamental or licentious. He considered the verse of twelve syllables as elevated and majestic, and has therefore deviated into that measure when he supposes the voice heard of the Supreme Being.

The author of the “Davideis” is commended by Dryden for having written it in couplets, because he discovered that any staff was too lyrical for an heroic poem; but this seems to have been known before by May and Sandys, the translators of the “Pharsalia” and the “Metamorphoses.”

In the “Davideis” are some hemistichs, or verses left imperfect by the author, in imitation of Virgil, whom he supposes not to have intended to complete them; that this opinion is erroneous, may be probably concluded, because this truncation is imitated by no subsequent Roman poet; because Virgil himself filled up one broken line in the heat of recitation; because in one the sense is now unfinished; and because all that can be done by a broken verse, a line intersected by a *cœsura*, and a full stop, will equally effect.

Of triplets in his “Davideis” he makes no use, and perhaps did not at first think them allowable; but he appears afterwards to have changed his mind, for in the verses on the government of Cromwell he inserts them liberally with great happiness.

After so much criticism on his poems, the essays which accompany them must not be forgotten. What is said by Sprat of his conversation, that no man could draw from it any suspicion of his excellence in poetry, may be applied to these compositions. No author ever kept his verse and his prose at a greater distance from each other. His thoughts are natural, and his style has a smooth and placid equability, which has never yet obtained its due commendation. Nothing is far-sought, or hard-laboured; but all is easy without feebleness, and familiar without grossness.

It has been observed by Felton, in his Essay on the Classics, that Cowley was beloved by every Muse that he courted; and that he has rivalled the ancients in every kind of poetry but tragedy.

It may be affirmed, without any encomiastic fervour, that he brought to his poetic labours a mind replete with learning, and that his pages are embellished with all the ornaments which books could supply; that he was the first who imparted to English numbers the enthusiasm of the greater ode, and the gaiety of the less; that he was equally qualified for sprightly sallies, and for lofty flights; that he was among those who freed translation from servility, and, instead of following his author at a distance, walked by his side; and that, if he left versification yet improvable, he left likewise from time to time such specimens of excellence as enabled succeeding poets to improve it.

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