

The Poetical Works of John Dryden, Vol II by John Dryden

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POETICAL WORKS

OF

JOHN DRYDEN.

With Life, Critical Dissertation, and Explanatory Notes,

BY THE

REV. GEORGE GILFILLAN.

VOL. II.

M. DCCC. LV.

CRITICAL ESTIMATE

OF THE

GENIUS AND POETICAL WORKS OF JOHN DRYDEN.

In our Life of Dryden we promised to say something about the question, how far is a poet, particularly in the moral tendency and taste of his writings, to be tried--and either condemned or justified--by the character and spirit of his age? To a rapid consideration of this question we now proceed, before examining the constituent elements or the varied fruits of the poet's genius.

And here, unquestionably, there are extremes, which every critic should avoid. Some imagine that a writer of a former century should be tried, either by the standard which prevails in the cultured and civilised nineteenth, or by the exposition of moral principles and practice which is to be found in the Scriptures. Now, it is obviously, so far as taste is concerned, as unjust to judge a book written in the style and manner of one age by the merely arbitrary and conventional rules established in another, as to judge the dress of our ancestors by the fashions of the present day. And in respect of morality, it is as unfair to visit with

the same measure of condemnation offences against decorum or decency, committed by writers living before or living after the promulgation of the Christian code, as it would be to class the Satyrs, Priapi, and Bacchantes of an antique sculptor, with their imitations, by inferior and coarser artists, in later times. There must be a certain measure of allowance made for the errors of Genius when it was working as the galley-slave of its tradition and period, and when it had not yet received the Divine Light which, shining into the world from above, has supplied men with higher aesthetic as well as spiritual models of principles, and revealed man's body to be the temple of the Holy Ghost. To look for our modern philanthropy in that "Greek Gazette," the Iliad of Homer--to expect that reverence for the Supreme Being which the Bible has taught us in the Metamorphoses of Ovid--or to seek that refinement of manners and language which has only of late prevailed amongst us, in the plays of Aristophanes and Plautus--were very foolish and very vain. In ages not so ancient, and which have revolved since the dawn of Christianity, a certain coarseness of thought and language has been prevalent; and for it still larger allowance should be made, because it has been applied to simplicity rather than to sensuality--to rustic barbarism, not to civilised corruption--and carries along with it a rough raciness, and a reference to the sturdy aboriginal beast--just as acorns in the trough suggest the immemorial forests where they grew, and the rich greenswards on which they fell.

In two cases, it thus appears, should the severest censor be prepared to modify his condemnation of the bad taste or the impurity to be found in writers of genius--first, in that of a civilization, perfect in its

kind, but destitute of the refining and sublimating element which a revelation only can supply; and, secondly, in that of those ages in which the lights of knowledge and religion are contending with the gloom of barbarian rudeness. Perhaps there are still two other cases capable of palliation--that of a mind so constituted as to be nothing, if not a mirror of its age, and faithfully and irresistibly reflecting even its vices and pollutions; or that of a mind morbidly in love with the morbidities and the vile passages of human nature. But suppose the case of a writer, sitting under the full blaze of Gospel truth, professedly a believer in the Gospel, and intimately acquainted with its oracles, living in a late and dissipated, not a rude and simple age--possessed of varied and splendid talents, which qualified him to make as well as to mirror, and with a taste naturally sound and manly, who should yet seek to shock the feelings of the pious, to gratify the low tendencies, and fire to frenzy the evil passions of his period--he is not to be shielded by the apology that he has only conformed to the bad age on which he was so unfortunate as to fall. Prejudice may, indeed, put in such a plea in his defence; but the inevitable eye of common sense, distinguishing between necessity and choice, between coarseness and corruption, between a man's passively yielding to and actively inviting and encouraging the currents of false taste and immorality which he must encounter, will find that plea nugatory, and bring in against the author a verdict of guilty.

Now this, we fear, is exactly the case of Dryden. He was neither a "barbarian" nor a "Scythian." He was a conscious artist, not a high though helpless reflector of his age. He had not, we think, like his

relative, Swift, originally any diseased delight in filth for its own sake; was not--shall we say?--a natural, but an artificial _Yahoo_. He wielded a power over the public mind, approaching the absolute, and which he could have turned to virtuous, instead of vicious account--at first, it might have been amidst considerable resistance and obloquy, but ultimately with triumphant success. This, however, he never attempted, and must therefore be classed, in this respect, with such writers as Byron, whose powers gilded their pollutions, less than their pollutions degraded and defiled their powers; nay, perhaps he should be ranked even lower than the noble bard, whose obscenities are not so gross, and who had, besides, to account for them the double palliations of passion and of despair.

In these remarks we refer principally to Dryden's plays; for his poems, as we remarked in the Life, are (with the exception of a few of the Prologues, which we print under protest) in a great measure free from impurity. We pass gladly to consider him in his genius and his poetical works. The most obvious, and among the most remarkable characteristics of his poetic style, are its wondrous elasticity and ease of movement. There is never for an instant any real or apparent effort, any straining for effect, any of that "double, double, toil and trouble," by which many even of the weird cauldrons in which Genius forms her creations are disturbed and bedimmed. That power of doing everything with perfect and _conscious_ ease, which Dugald Stewart has ascribed to Barrow and to Horsley in prose, distinguished Dryden in poetry. Whether he discusses the deep questions of fate and foreknowledge in "Religio Laici," or lashes Shaftesbury in the "Medal," or pours a torrent of

contempt on Shadwell in "MacFlecknoe," or describes the fire of London in the "Annus Mirabilis," or soars into lyric enthusiasm in his "Ode on the Death of Mrs Killigrew," and "Alexander's Feast," or paints a tournament in "Palamon and Arcite," or a fairy dance in the "Flower and the Leaf,"--he is always at home, and always aware that he is. His consciousness of his own powers amounts to exultation. He is like the steed who glories in that tremendous gallop which affects the spectator with fear. Indeed, we never can separate our conception of Dryden's vigorous and vaulting style from the image of a noble horse, devouring the dust of the field, clearing obstacles at a bound, taking up long leagues as a little thing, and the very strength and speed of whose motion give it at a distance the appearance of smoothness. Pope speaks of his

"Long resounding march, and energy divine."

Perhaps "_ease_ divine" had been words more characteristic of that almost superhuman power of language by which he makes the most obstinate materials pliant, melts down difficulties as if by the touch of magic, and, to resume the former figure, comes into the goal without a hair turned on his mane, or a single sweat-drop confessing effort or extraordinary exertion. We know no poet since Homer who can be compared to Dryden in this respect, except Scott, who occasionally, in "Marmion," and the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," exhibits the same impetuous ease and fiery fluent movement. Scott does not, however, in general, carry the same weight as the other; and the species of verse he uses, in comparison to the heroic rhyme of Dryden, gives you often the impression

of a hard trot, rather than of a "long-resounding" and magnificent gallop. Scott exhibits in his poetry the soul of a warrior; but it is of a warrior of the Border--somewhat savage and coarse. Dryden can, for the nonce at least, assume the appearance, and display the spirit, of a knight of ancient chivalry--gallant, accomplished, elegant, and gay.

Next to this poet's astonishing ease, spirit, and elastic vigour, may be ranked his clear, sharp intellect. He may be called more a logician than a poet. He reasons often, and always acutely, and his rhyme, instead of shackling, strengthens the movement of his argumentation. Parts of his "Religio Laici" and the "Hind and Panther" resemble portions of Duns Scotus or Aquinas set on fire. Indeed, keen, strong intellect, inflamed with passion, and inspirited by that "ardour and impetuosity of mind" which Wordsworth is compelled to allow to him, rather than creative or original genius, is the differentia of Dryden. We have compared him to a courser, but he was not one of those coursers of Achilles, who fed on no earthly food, but on the golden barley of heaven, having sprung from the gods--

[Greek: Xanthon kai Balion, to ama pnoiaesi, petesthaen.

Tous eteke Zephuro anemo Arpua Podargae.]

Dryden resembled rather the mortal steed which was yoked with these immortal twain, the brood of Zephyr and the Harpy Podarga; only we can hardly say of the poet what Homer says of Pedasus--

[Greek: Os kai thnaetos eon, epeth ippois athanatoisi.]

He was not, although a mortal, able to keep up with the immortal coursers. His path was on the plains or table-lands of earth--never or seldom in "cloudland, gorgeous land," or through the aerial altitudes which stretch away and above the clouds to the gates of heaven. He can hardly be said to have possessed the power of sublimity, in the high sense of that term, as the power of sympathising with the feeling of the Infinite. Often he gives us the impression of the picturesque, of the beautiful, of the heroic, of the nobly disdainful--but never (when writing, at least, entirely from his own mind) of that infinite and nameless grandeur which the imaginative soul feels shed on it from the multitudinous waves of ocean--from the cataract leaping from his rock, as if to consummate an act of prayer to God--from the hum of great assemblies of men--from the sight of far-extended wastes and wildernesses--and from the awful silence, and the still more mysterious sparkle of the midnight stars. This sense of the presence of the shadow of immensity--immensity itself cannot be felt any more than measured--this sight like that vouchsafed to Moses of the "backparts" of the Divine--the Divine itself cannot be seen--has been the inspiration of all the highest poetry of the world--of the "Paradise Lost," of the "Divina Commedia," of the "Night Thoughts," of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of "Festus," and, highest far, of the Hebrew Prophets, as they cry, "Whither can we go from Thy presence? whither can we flee from Thy Spirit?" Such poets have resembled a blind man, who feels, although he cannot see, that a stranger of commanding air is in the room beside him; so they stand awe-struck in the "wind of the going" of a majestic and

unseen Being. This feeling differs from mysticism, inasmuch as it is connected with a reality, while the mystic dreams a vague and unsupported dream, and the poetry it produces is simply the irresistible cry springing from the perception of this wondrous Some One who is actually near them. The feeling is connected, in general, with a lofty moral and religious nature; and yet not always, since, while wanting in Dryden, we find it intensely discovered, although in an imperfect and perverted shape, in Byron and Rousseau.

In Dryden certainly it exists not. We do not--and in this we have Jeffrey's opinion to back us--remember a single line in his poetry that can be called sublime, or, which is the same thing, that gives us a thrilling shudder, as if a god or a ghost were passing by. Pleasure, high excitement,--rapture even, he often produces; but such a feeling as is created by that line of Milton,

"To bellow through the vast and boundless deep,"

never. Compare, in proof of this, the description of the tournament in "Palamon and Arcite"--amazingly spirited as it is--to the description of the war-horse in Job; or, if that appear too high a test, to the contest of Achilles with the rivers in Homer; to the war of the Angels, and the interrupted preparations for contest between Gabriel and Satan in Milton; to the contest between Apollyon and Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress;" to some of the combats in Spenser; and to that wonderful one of the Princess and the Magician in midair in the "Arabian

Nights," in order to understand the distinction between the most animated literal pictures of battle and those into which the element of imagination is strongly injected by the poet, who can, to the inevitable shiver of human nature at the sight of struggle and carnage, add the far more profound and terrible shiver, only created by a vision of the concomitants, the consequences--the UNSEEN BORDERS of the bloody scene.

Take these lines, for instance:--

"They look anew: the beauteous form of fight
Is changed, and war appears a grisly sight;
Two troops in fair array one moment showed--
The next, a field with fallen bodies strowed;
Not half the number in their seats are found,
But men and steeds lie grovelling on the ground.
The points of spears are stuck within the shield,
The steeds without their riders scour the field;
The knights, unhorsed, on foot renew the fight--
The glittering faulchions cast a gleaming light;
Hauberks and helms are hew'd with many a wound,
Out-spins the streaming blood, and dyes the ground."

This is vigorous and vivid, but is not imaginative or suggestive. It does not carry away the mind from the field to bring back thoughts and images, which shall, so to speak, brood over, and aggravate the general horror. It is, in a word, plain, good painting, but it is not poetry.

There is not a metaphor, such as "he laugheth at the shaking of a spear," in it all.

In connexion with this defect in imagination is the lack of natural imagery in Dryden's poetry. Wordsworth, indeed, greatly overcharges the case, when he says (in a letter to Scott), "that there is not a single image from nature in the whole body of his poetry." We have this minute taken up the "Hind and the Panther," and find two images from nature in one page:--

"As where in fields the fairy rounds are seen,
A rank sour herbage rises on the green;
So," &c.

And a few lines down:--

"As where the lightning runs along the ground,
No husbandry can heal the blasting wound."

And some pages farther on occurs a description of Spring, not unworthy of Wordsworth himself; beginning--

"New blossoms flourish and new flowers arise,
As _God had been abroad_, and walking there,
Had left his footsteps, and reform'd the year."

Still it is true, that, taking his writings as a whole, they are thin in natural images; and even those which occur, are often rather the echoes of his reading, than the results of his observation. And what Wordsworth adds is, we fear, true; in his translation of Virgil, where Virgil can be fairly said to have his eye upon his object, Dryden always spoils the passage. The reason of this, apart from his want of high imaginative sympathy, may be found in his long residence in London; and his lack of that intimate daily familiarity with natural scenes, which can alone supply thorough knowledge, or enkindle thorough love. Nature is not like the majority of other mistresses. Her charms deepen the longer she is known; and he that loves her most warmly, has watched her with the narrowest inspection. She can bear the keenest glances of the microscope, and to see all her glory would exhaust an antediluvian life. The appetite, in her case, "grows with what it feeds on;" but such an appetite was not Dryden's.

Another of his great defects is, in true tenderness of feeling. He has very few passages which can be called pathetic. His Elegies and funeral Odes, such as those on "Mrs Killigrew" and "Eleonora," are eloquent; but they move you to admiration, not to tears. Dryden's long immersion in the pollutions of the playhouses, had combined, with his long course of domestic infelicity, and his employments as a hack author, a party scribe, and a satirist, to harden his heart, to brush away whatever fine bloom of feeling there had been originally on his mind, and to render him incapable of even simulating the softer emotions of the soul. But for the discovered fact, that he was in early life a lover of his relative, Honor Driden, you would have judged him from his works

incapable of a pure passion. "Lust hard by Hate," being his twin idols, how could he represent human, far less ethereal love; and how could he touch those springs of holy tears, which lie deep in man's heart, and which are connected with all that is dignified, and all that is divine in man's nature? What could the author of "Limberham" know of love, or the author of "MacFlecknoe" of pity?

Wordsworth, in that admirable letter to which we have repeatedly referred, says, "Whenever his language is poetically impassioned, it is mostly upon unpleasing subjects, such as the follies, vices, and crimes of classes of men, or individuals." This is unquestionable. He never so nearly reaches the sublime, as when he is expressing contempt. He never rises so high, as in the act of trampling. He is a "good hater," and expresses his hatred with a mixture of *_animus_* and ease, of fierceness and of trenchant rapidity, which makes it very formidable. He only, as it were, waves off his adversaries disdainfully, but the very wave of his hand cuts like a sabre. His satire is not savage and furious, like Juvenal's; not cool, collected, and infernal, like that of Junius; not rabid and reckless, like that of Swift; and never darkens into the unearthly grandeur of Byron's: but it is strong, swift, dashing, and decisive. Nor does it want deep and subtle touches. His pictures of Shaftesbury and Buckingham are as delicately finished, as they are powerfully conceived. He flies best at the highest game; but even in dealing with Settles and Shadwells, he can be as felicitous as he is fierce. No satire in the world contains lines more exquisitely inverted, more ingeniously burlesqued, more artfully turned out of their apparently proper course, like rays at once refracted and cooled, than

those which thus ominously panegyrised Shadwell:--

"His brows thick fogs, instead of glories grace,
And _lambent dulness_ play'd about his face.
As Hannibal did to the altar come,
Sworn by his sire, a mortal foe to Rome;
So Shadwell swore, nor should his vow be vain,
That he till death true dulness would maintain."

Better still the following picture, in imitation of the Homeric or
Miltonic manner:--

"The Sire then shook the honours of his head,
And from his brows damps of oblivion shed
Full on the _filial dulness_--long he stood
Repelling from his breast the _raging_ God."

What inimitable irony in this epithet! The God of dulness _raging_! A
stagnant pool in a passion; a canal insane; a _mouton enrage_ , as the
French says; or a snail in a tumultuous state of excitement, were but
types of the satirical ideas implied in these words. What a description
of labouring nonsense--of the Pythonic genius of absurdity, panting and
heaving on his solemnly ridiculous tripod!

The language and versification of Dryden have been praised, and justly.

His style is worthy of a still more powerful and original vein of genius than his own. It is a masculine, clear, elastic, and varied diction, fitted to express all feelings, save the deepest; all fancies, save the subtlest; all passions, save the loftiest; all moods of mind, save the most disinterested and rapt; to represent incidents, however strange; characters, however contradictory to each other; shades of meaning, however evasive: and to do all this, as if it were doing nothing, in point of ease, and as if it were doing everything in point of felt and rejoicing energy. No poetic style since can, in such respects, be compared to Dryden's. Pope's to his is feeble--and Byron's forced. He can say the strongest things in the swiftest way, and the most felicitous expressions seem to fall unconsciously from his lips. Had his matter, you say, but been equal to his manner, his thought in originality and imaginative power but commensurate with the boundless quantity, and no less admirable quality, of his words! His versification deserves a commendation scarcely inferior. It is "all ear," if we may so apply an expression of Shakspeare's. No studied rules,--no elaborate complication of harmonies,--it is the mere sinking and swelling of the wave of his thought as it moves onward to the shore of his purpose. And, as in the sea, there are no furrows absolutely isolated from each other, but each leans on, or melts into each, and the subsidence of the one is the rise of the other--so with the versification of his better poetry.

The beginning of the "Hind and Panther," we need not quote; but it will be remembered, as a good specimen of that peculiar style of running the lines into one another, and thereby producing a certain free and noble effect, which the uniform tinkle of Pope and his school is altogether unable to reach; a style which has since been copied by some of our poets--by Churchill, by Cowper, and by Shelley. The lines of the

artificial school, on the other hand, may be compared to _rollers_, each distinct from each other,--each being in itself a whole,--but altogether forming none. Pope, says Hazlitt, has turned Pegasus into a rocking-horse.

We are, perhaps, nearly right when we call Dryden the most _eloquent_ and _rhetorical_ of English poets. He bears in this respect an analogy to Lucretius among the Romans, who, inferior in polish to Virgil, was incomparably more animated and energetic in style; who exhibited, besides, traits of lofty imagination rarely met with in Virgil, and never in Dryden; and who equalled the English poet in the power of reasoning in verse, and setting the severe abstractions of metaphysical thought to music. With the Shakspeares, Chaucers, Spensers, Miltons, Byrons, Wordsworths, and Coleridges, the _Dii majorum gentium_ of the Poetic Pantheon of Britain, Dryden ranks not, although towering far above the Moores, Goldsmiths, Gays, and Priors. He may be classed with a middle, but still high order, in which we find the names of Scott, as a _poet_, Johnson, Pope, Cowper, Southey, Crabbe, and two or three others, who, while all excelling Dryden in some qualities, are all excelled by him in others, and bulk on the whole about as largely as he on the public eye.

We come to make a few remarks, in addition to some we have already incidentally made, on Dryden's separate works. And first of his Lyrics. His songs, properly so called, are lively, buoyant, and elastic; yet, compared to those of Shakspeare, they are of "the earth, earthy." They are the down of the thistle, carried on a light breeze upwards.

Shakspeare's resemble aerial notes--snatches of superhuman melody--descending from above. Compared to the warm-gushing songs of Burns, Dryden's are cold. Better than his songs are his Odes. That on the death of Mrs Killigrew has much divided the opinion of critics--Dr Johnson calling it magnificent, and Warton denying it any merit. We incline to a mediate view. It has bold passages; the first and the last stanzas are very powerful, and the whole is full of that rushing torrent-movement characteristic of the poet. But the sinkings are as deep as the swellings, and the inequality disturbs the general effect. This is still more true of "Threnodia Augustalis," the ode on the death of Charles II. Not only is its spirit fulsome, and its statement of facts grossly partial, but many of its lines are feeble, and the whole is wire-spun. Yet what can be nobler in thought and language than the following, descriptive of the joy at the king's partial recovery!--

"Men met each other with erected look,
The steps were higher that they took;
Each to congratulate his friend made haste,
And long inveterate foes saluted as they pass'd."

How admirably this last line describes that sudden solution of the hostile elements in human nature--that swift sense of unity in society, produced by some glad tidings or great public enthusiasm, when for an hour the Millennium is anticipated, and the poet's wish, that

"Man wi' man, the world o'er,

Shall brithers be, for a' that,"

is fulfilled!

The two odes on St Cecilia's Day are both admirable in different ways.

"Alexander's Feast," like Burns's "Tam o' Shanter," seems to come out at

once "as from a mould." It is pure inspiration, but of the second

order--rather that of the Greek Pythoness than of the Hebrew prophet.

Coleridge or Wordsworth makes the objection to it, that the Bacchus it

describes is the mere vulgar deity of drink--

"Flush'd with a purple grace,

He shows his honest face"--

not the ideal Bacchus, clad in vine-leaves, returning from the conquest

of India, and attended by a procession of the lions and tigers he had

tamed. But this, although a more imaginative representation of the god

of wine, had not been so suitably sung at an entertainment presided over

by an Alexander and a Thais, a drunk conqueror and a courtesan. Dryden

himself, we have seen, thought this the best ode that ever was or would

be written in the English language. In a certain sense he was right. For

vivacity, freedom of movement, and eloquence, it has never been

equalled. But there are some odes--such as Coleridge's "Ode to France"

and Wordsworth's "Power of Sound"--which as certainly excel it in

strength of imagination, grandeur of conception, and unity of execution

and effect.

Of Dryden's Satires we have already spoken in a general way. "Absalom and Achitophel" is of course the masterpiece, and cannot be too highly praised as a gallery of portraits, and for the daring force and felicity of its style. Why enlarge on a poem, almost every line of which has become a proverb? "The Medal" is inferior only in condensation--in spirit and energy it is quite equal. In "MacFlecknoe," the mock-heroic is sustained with unparalleled vigour from the first line to the last.

Shadwell is a favourite of Dryden's ire. He fancies him, and loves to empty out on his head all the riches of his wrath. What can be more terrible than the words occurring in the second part of "Absalom and Achitophel"--

"When wine hath given him courage to blaspheme,
He curses God--but God before curst him!"

He has written two pieces, which may be called didactic or controversial poems--"Religio Laici" and "The Hind and Panther." The chief power of the former is in its admirable combination of two things, often dissociated--reason and rhyme; and its chief interest lies in the light it casts upon Dryden's uncertainty of religious view. The thought has little originality, the versification less varied music than is his wont, and no passage of transcendent power occurs. Far more faulty in plan, and far more unequal, is "The Hind and Panther;" but it has, on the other hand, many passages of amazing eloquence--some satirical pictures equal to anything in "Absalom and Achitophel"--some vivid

natural descriptions; and even the absurdities of the fable, and the sophistries of the argument add to its character as the most exquisitely perverted piece of ingenuity in the language. Nothing but high genius, very vigorously exerted, could reconcile us to a story so monstrous, and to reasoning so palpably one-sided and weak.

His Epistles are of divers merit, but all discover Dryden's usual sense, sarcastic observation, and sweeping force of style. The best are that to Sir Godfrey Kneller--remarkable for its knowledge of, and graceful tribute to, the "serene and silent art" of painting; and the very noble epistle addressed to Congreve, which reminds you of one giant hand of genius held out to welcome and embrace another. Gross flatterer as Dryden often was, there is something in this epistle that rings true, and the emotion in it you feel even all his powers could never have enabled him to counterfeit. Such generous patronage of rising, by acknowledged merit, was as rare then as it is still. The envy of the literary man too often crowns his gray hairs with a chaplet of nightshade, and pours its dark poison into the latest cup of existence.

His "Annus Mirabilis" is another instance of perverted power, and ingenuity astray. Written in that bad style he found prevalent in his early days--the style of the metaphysical poets, Cowley, Donne, and Drayton--the author ever and anon soars out of his trammels into strong and simple poetry, fervid description, and in one passage--that about the future fortunes of London--into eloquent prophecy. The fire of London is vigorously pictured, but its breath of flame should have burned up petty conceit and tawdry ornament. He should have sternly

daguerreotypied the spectacle of the capital of the civilised world burning--a spectacle awful, not only in the sight of men, but, as Hall says of the French Revolution, in that of superior beings. We need not dwell on the far-famed absurdities which the poem contains--about God turning a "crystal pyramid into a broad extinguisher" to put out the fire--of the ship compared to a sea-wasp floating on the waves--and of men in the fight killed by "aromatic splinters" from the Spice Islands! Criticism has long ago said its best and its worst about these early escapades of a writer whose taste, to the last, was never commensurate with his genius.

His Translations we have not included in this edition, as we reserve them, along with other masterpieces of translated verse, for a separate issue afterwards. That of the "Art of Poetry," sometimes included in editions of his works, was not his, but only revised by him. We may say here, in general, however, that although there are more learned and more correct translators than Dryden, there are few who have produced versions so vigorous, so full of exuberant life, and, in those parts of the authors suitable to the peculiarities of the translator's own genius, so faithful to their spirit and soul, if not to their letter and their body, as he. Parts of Virgil he does not translate well; he has no sympathy with Maro's elegance, *_concinnitas_*, chaste grandeur, and minute knowledge of nature; but wherever Virgil begins to glow and gallop, Dryden glows and gallops with him; and wherever Virgil is nearest Homer, Dryden is nearest him.

We have reserved to the close his Fables, as, on the whole, forming the

culmination of Dryden the artist, if not, perhaps, of Dryden the poet. In preparing his poems for publication, how refreshing we found it to pass from a needful although cursory perusal of his plays, and a revision of his prologues, to these comparatively pure, right-manly, and eloquent compositions--the fables of Dryden! We do not, because it would be hardly fair, with Wordsworth, seek to compare them with the Chaucerian originals--a comparison under which they would be infallibly crushed. We prefer looking at them as bearing only the relation to Chaucer which Macpherson's, did to the original, Ossian. And regarding them in this light, as adaptations, where the original author furnishes only the ground-work, they are surely masterpieces and models of composition, if not exemplars of creative power and genius. How free and majestic their numbers! How bold and buoyant their language! How interesting the stories they tell! How perfect the preservation, and artful the presentment, of the various characters! What a fine chivalrous spirit breathes in "Palamon and Arcite!" What a soft yet purple, pure yet gorgeous, light of love hovers over the "Flower and the Leaf!"--the only poem of Dryden's in which--thanks perhaps to his master, Chaucer--the poet discovers the slightest perception of that

"Love which spirits feel

In climes where all is equable and pure."

What gay and gallant badinage, exquisite irony, and interesting narrative, in the story of "The Cock and Fox!" And what knowledge of human nature and skilful construction in "The Wife of Bath's Tale!" We are half inclined, with George Ellis, to call these fables the "noblest

specimen of versification to be found in any modern language." We gather, too, from them a notion about Dryden's capabilities, which we may state. It is, that had Dryden lived in a novel and romance-writing age, and turned his great powers in that direction, he might have easily become the best fictionist--next to Cervantes and Scott--that ever lived, possessing, as he did, most of the qualities of a good novelist--vigorous and facile diction; dramatic skill; an eye for character; the power of graphic description, and rapid changeful narrative; the command of the grave and the gay, the severe and the lively; and a sympathy both with the bustling activities and the wild romance of human life, if not with its more solemn aspects, its transcendental references, and its aerial heights and giddy abysses of imagination and poetry.

[We have followed the judicious example of Warton and Mitford in excluding several Prologues which appear in some editions, but which reflect no honour on their author.

Dryden's Translations will be published in the separate series of "Translations," which it is the intention of the Publisher to issue, independent of the "Poetical Works" of the various authors.]

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DRYDEN'S POEMS.

EPISTLES.

EPISTLE I.

TO MY HONOURED FRIEND SIR ROBERT HOWARD,[1] ON HIS EXCELLENT POEMS.

As there is music uninform'd by art
In those wild notes, which, with a merry heart,
The birds in unfrequented shades express,
Who, better taught at home, yet please us less:
So in your verse a native sweetness dwells,
Which shames composure, and its art excels.
Singing no more can your soft numbers grace,
Than paint adds charms unto a beauteous face.
Yet as, when mighty rivers gently creep,
Their even calmness does suppose them deep; 10
Such is your muse: no metaphor swell'd high
With dangerous boldness lifts her to the sky:
Those mounting fancies, when they fall again,
Show sand and dirt at bottom do remain.
So firm a strength, and yet withal so sweet,

Did never but in Samson's riddle meet.
'Tis strange each line so great a weight should bear,
And yet no sign of toil, no sweat appear.
Either your art hides art, as Stoics feign
Then least to feel when most they suffer pain; 20
And we, dull souls, admire, but cannot see
What hidden springs within the engine be:
Or 'tis some happiness that still pursues
Each act and motion of your graceful muse.
Or is it fortune's work, that in your head
The curious net,[2] that is for fancies spread,
Lets through its meshes every meaner thought,
While rich ideas there are only caught?
Sure that's not all; this is a piece too fair
To be the child of chance, and not of care. 30
No atoms casually together hurl'd
Could e'er produce so beautiful a world.
Nor dare I such a doctrine here admit,
As would destroy the providence of wit.
'Tis your strong genius, then, which does not feel
Those weights would make a weaker spirit reel.
To carry weight, and run so lightly too,
Is what alone your Pegasus can do.
Great Hercules himself could ne'er do more,
Than not to feel those heavens and gods he bore. 40
Your easier odes, which for delight were penn'd,
Yet our instruction make their second end:
We're both enrich'd and pleased, like them that woo

At once a beauty and a fortune too.
Of moral knowledge poesy was queen,
And still she might, had wanton wits not been;
Who, like ill guardians, lived themselves at large,
And, not content with that, debauch'd their charge.
Like some brave captain, your successful pen
Restores the exiled to her crown again: 50
And gives us hope, that having seen the days
When nothing flourish'd but fanatic bays,
All will at length in this opinion rest,--
"A sober prince's government is best."
This is not all: your art the way has found
To make the improvement of the richest ground;
That soil which those immortal laurels bore,
That once the sacred Maro's temples wore.
Eliza's griefs are so express'd by you,
They are too eloquent to have been true. 60
Had she so spoke, AEneas had obey'd
What Dido, rather than what Jove had said.
If funeral rites can give a ghost repose,
Your Muse so justly has discharged those;
Eliza's shade may now its wandering cease,
And claim a title to the fields of peace.
But if AEneas be oblig'd, no less
Your kindness great Achilles doth confess;
Who, dress'd by Statius[3] in too bold a look,
Did ill become those virgin robes he took. 70
To understand how much we owe to you,

We must your numbers, with your author's, view:
Then we shall see his work was lamely rough,
Each figure stiff, as if design'd in buff:
His colours laid so thick on every place,
As only show'd the paint, but hid the face.
But as in perspective we beauties see,
Which in the glass, not in the picture, be;
So here our sight obligingly mistakes
That wealth, which his your bounty only makes. 80
Thus vulgar dishes are by cooks disguised,
More for their dressing than their substance prized.
Your curious notes so search into that age,
When all was fable but the sacred page,
That, since in that dark night we needs must stray,
We are at least misled in pleasant way.
But what we most admire, your verse no less
The prophet than the poet doth confess.
Ere our weak eyes discern'd the doubtful streak
Of light, you saw great Charles his morning break. 90
So skilful seamen ken the land from far,
Which shows like mists to the dull passenger.
To Charles your Muse first pays her duteous love,
As still the ancients did begin from Jove;
With Monk you end,[4] whose name preserved shall be,
As Rome recorded Rufus' [5] memory,
Who thought it greater honour to obey
His country's interest, than the world to sway.
But to write worthy things of worthy men,

Is the peculiar talent of your pen: 100
Yet let me take your mantle up, and I
Will venture in your right to prophesy--
"This work, by merit first of fame secure,
Is likewise happy in its geniture:
For, since 'tis born when Charles ascends the throne,
It shares at once his fortune and its own."

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 1: 'Sir Robert Howard:' brother to Dryden's wife.]

[Footnote 2: 'The curious net,' &c.: a compliment to a poem of Sir Robert's, called 'Rete Mirabile.']

[Footnote 3: 'Statius:' author of 'Thebaid' and the 'Achilleid;' the latter translated by Sir Robert Howard.]

[Footnote 4: 'With Monk you end,' &c.: alluding to a poem of this gentleman's on General Monk.]

[Footnote 5: 'Rufus:' a Roman consul, banished to Smyrna through

intrigues, but greatly respected.]LE II.

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EPISTLE II

TO MY HONOURED FRIEND DR CHARLETON, ON HIS LEARNED AND USEFUL WORKS; BUT
MORE PARTICULARLY HIS TREATISE OF STONEHENGE,[6] BY HIM RESTORED TO THE
TRUE FOUNDER.

The longest tyranny that ever sway'd,
Was that wherein our ancestors betray'd
Their free-born reason to the Stagyrite,
And made his torch their universal light.
So truth, while only one supplied the state,
Grew scarce, and dear, and yet sophisticate.
Still it was bought, like empiric wares, or charms,
Hard words seal'd up with Aristototele's arms.
Columbus was the first that shook his throne,
And found a temperate in a torrid zone, 10
The feverish air fann'd by a cooling breeze,
The fruitful vales set round with shady trees:
And guiltless men, who danced away their time,
Fresh as their groves, and happy as their clime.
Had we still paid that homage to a name,
Which only God and nature justly claim,

The western seas had been our utmost bound,
Where poets still might dream the sun was drown'd:
And all the stars that shine in southern skies,
Had been admired by none but savage eyes. 20

Among the asserters of free reason's claim,
Our nation's not the least in worth or fame.
The world to Bacon does not only owe
Its present knowledge, but its future too.
Gilbert[7] shall live, till loadstones cease to draw,
Our British fleets the boundless ocean awe.
And noble Boyle, not less in nature seen,
Than his great brother read in states and men.
The circling streams, once thought but pools, of blood
(Whether life's fuel, or the body's food) 30
From dark oblivion Harvey's[8] name shall save;
While Ent[9] keeps all the honour that he gave.
Nor are you, learned friend, the least renown'd,
Whose fame, not circumscribed with English ground,
Flies like the nimble journeys of the light;
And is, like that, unspent too in its flight.
Whatever truths have been, by art or chance,
Redeem'd from error, or from ignorance,
Thin in their authors, like rich veins of ore,
Your works unite, and still discover more. 40
Such is the healing virtue of your pen,
To perfect cures on books, as well as men.

Nor is this work the least: you well may give
To men new vigour, who make stones to live.
Through you, the Danes, their short dominion lost,
A longer conquest than the Saxons boast.
Stonehenge, once thought a temple, you have found
A throne, where kings, our earthly gods, were crown'd;
Where by their wondering subjects they were seen,
Joy'd with their stature, and their princely mien. 50
Our sovereign here above the rest might stand,
And here be chose again to rule the land.

These ruins[10] shelter'd once his sacred head,
When he from Worcester's fatal battle fled;
Watch'd by the genius of this royal place,
And mighty visions of the Danish race.
His refuge then was for a temple shown:
But, he restored, 'tis now become a throne.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 6: 'Treatise of Stonehenge:' Charleton wrote a book proving,
against Inigo Jones, that Stonehenge was built by the Danes.]

[Footnote 7: 'Gilbert:' Dr William Gilbert, a physician both to Queen Elizabeth and King James, and author of a treatise on the magnet.]

[Footnote 8: 'Harvey:' discoverer of the circulation of the blood.]

[Footnote 9: 'Ent:' a physician of the day.]

[Footnote 10: 'These ruins,' &c.: in the dedication of this book to Charles II. is the following passage, which gave occasion to the last six lines of this poem:--'I have had the honour to hear from your majesty's own mouth, that you were pleased to visit this monument, and entertain yourself with the delightful view thereof, after the defeat of your army at Worcester.']

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EPISTLE III.

TO THE LADY CASTLEMALIN,[11] UPON HER ENCOURAGING HIS FIRST PLAY.

As seamen, shipwreck'd on some happy shore,
Discover wealth in lands unknown before;
And, what their art had labour'd long in vain,
By their misfortunes happily obtain:

So my much-envied Muse, by storms long tost,
Is thrown upon your hospitable coast,
And finds more favour by her ill success,
Than she could hope for by her happiness.
Once Cato's virtue did the gods oppose;
While they the victor, he the vanquish'd chose: 10
But you have done what Cato could not do,
To choose the vanquish'd, and restore him too.
Let others triumph still, and gain their cause
By their deserts, or by the world's applause;
Let merit crowns, and justice laurels give,
But let me happy by your pity live.
True poets empty fame and praise despise;
Fame is the trumpet, but your smile the prize.
You sit above, and see vain men below
Contend for what you only can bestow: 20
But those great actions others do by chance,
Are, like your beauty, your inheritance;
So great a soul, such sweetness join'd in one,
Could only spring from noble Grandison.[12]
You, like the stars, not by reflection bright,
Are born to your own heaven, and your own light;
Like them are good, but from a nobler cause,
From your own knowledge, not from nature's laws.
Your power you never use, but for defence,
To guard your own, or other's innocence: 30
Your foes are such as they, not you, have made,
And virtue may repel, though not invade.

Such courage did the ancient heroes show,
Who, when they might prevent, would wait the blow:
With such assurance as they meant to say,
We will o'ercome, but scorn the safest way.
What further fear of danger can there be?
Beauty, which captives all things, sets me free.
Posterity will judge by my success.
I had the Grecian poet's happiness, 40
Who, waving plots, found out a better way;
Some god descended, and preserved the play.
When first the triumphs of your sex were sung
By those old poets, beauty was but young,
And few admired the native red and white,
Till poets dress'd them up to charm the sight;
So beauty took on trust, and did engage
For sums of praises till she came to age.
But this long-growing debt to poetry
You justly, madam, have discharged to me, 50
When your applause and favour did infuse
New life to my condemn'd and dying Muse.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 11: 'Lady Castlemain' this lady was for many years a favourite

mistress of Charles II., and was afterwards created Duchess of
Cleveland.]

[Footnote 12: 'Grandison:' her father, killed at Edgehill.]

* * * * *

EPISTLE IV.

TO MR LEE, ON HIS "ALEXANDER."

The blast of common censure could I fear,
Before your play my name should not appear;
For 'twill be thought, and with some colour too,
I pay the bribe I first received from you;
That mutual vouchers for our fame we stand,
And play the game into each other's hand;
And as cheap pen'orths to ourselves afford,
As Bessus^[13] and the brothers of the sword.
Such libels private men may well endure,
When states and kings themselves are not secure: 10
For ill men, conscious of their inward guilt,
Think the best actions on by-ends are built.
And yet my silence had not 'scaped their spite;
Then, envy had not suffer'd me to write;

For, since I could not ignorance pretend,
Such merit I must envy or commend.
So many candidates there stand for wit,
A place at court is scarce so hard to get:
In vain they crowd each other at the door;
For even reversions are all begg'd before: 20
Desert, how known soe'er, is long delay'd;
And then, too, fools and knaves are better paid.
Yet, as some actions bear so great a name,
That courts themselves are just, for fear of shame;
So has the mighty merit of your play
Extorted praise, and forced itself away.
'Tis here as 'tis at sea; who farthest goes,
Or dares the most, makes all the rest his foes.
Yet when some virtue much outgrows the rest,
It shoots too fast and high to be express'd; 30
As his heroic worth struck envy dumb,
Who took the Dutchman, and who cut the boom.
Such praise is yours, while you the passions move,
That 'tis no longer feign'd, 'tis real love,
Where nature triumphs over wretched art;
We only warm the head, but you the heart.
Always you warm; and if the rising year,
As in hot regions, brings the sun too near,
'Tis but to make your fragrant spices blow,
Which in our cooler climates will not grow. 40
They only think you animate your theme
With too much fire, who are themselves all phlegm.

Prizes would be for lags of slowest pace,
Were cripples made the judges of the race.
Despise those drones, who praise, while they accuse
The too much vigour of your youthful Muse.
That humble style which they your virtue make,
Is in your power; you need but stoop and take.
Your beauteous images must be allow'd
By all, but some vile poets of the crowd. 50
But how should any sign-post dauber know
The worth of Titian or of Angelo?
Hard features every bungler can command;
To draw true beauty shows a master's hand.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 13: 'Bessus:' a cowardly character in Beaumont and Fletcher's
comedy of 'A King and no King.']

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EPISTLE V.

TO THE EARL OF ROSCOMMON, ON HIS EXCELLENT ESSAY ON TRANSLATED VERSE.

Whether the fruitful Nile, or Tyrian shore,
The seeds of arts and infant science bore,
'Tis sure the noble plant, translated first,
Advanced its head in Grecian gardens nursed.
The Grecians added verse: their tuneful tongue
Made Nature first, and Nature's God their song.
Nor stopp'd translation here: for conquering Rome,
With Grecian spoils, brought Grecian numbers home;
Enrich'd by those Athenian Muses more,
Than all the vanquish'd world could yield before. 10
Till barbarous nations, and more barbarous times,
Debased the majesty of verse to rhymes:
Those rude at first; a kind of hobbling prose,
That limp'd along, and tinkled in the close.
But Italy, reviving from the trance
Of Vandal, Goth, and Monkish ignorance,
With pauses, cadence, and well-vowell'd words,
And all the graces a good ear affords,
Made rhyme an art, and Dante's polish'd page
Restored a silver, not a golden age. 20
Then Petrarch follow'd, and in him we see
What rhyme improved in all its height can be:
At best a pleasing sound, and fair barbarity.
The French pursued their steps; and Britain, last,
In manly sweetness all the rest surpass'd.
The wit of Greece, the gravity of Rome,

Appear exalted in the British loom:
The Muses' empire is restored again,
In Charles' reign, and by Roscommon's pen.
Yet modestly he does his work survey, 30
And calls a finish'd Poem an Essay;
For all the needful rules are scatter'd here;
Truth smoothly told, and pleasantly severe;
So well is art disguised, for nature to appear.
Nor need those rules to give translation light:
His own example is a flame so bright,
That he who but arrives to copy well
Unguided will advance, unknowing will excel.
Scarce his own Horace could such rules ordain,
Or his own Virgil sing a nobler strain. 40
How much in him may rising Ireland boast--
How much in gaining him has Britain lost!
Their island in revenge has ours reclaim'd;
The more instructed we, the more we still are shamed.
'Tis well for us his generous blood did flow,
Derived from British channels long ago,
That here his conquering ancestors were nursed;
And Ireland but translated England first:
By this reprisal we regain our right,
Else must the two contending nations fight; 50
A nobler quarrel for his native earth,
Than what divided Greece for Homer's birth.
To what perfection will our tongue arrive,
How will invention and translation thrive,

When authors nobly born will bear their part,
And not disdain the inglorious praise of art!
Great generals thus, descending from command,
With their own toil provoke the soldier's hand.
How will sweet Ovid's ghost be pleased to hear
His fame augmented by an English peer;[14] 60
How he embellishes his Helen's loves,
Outdoes his softness, and his sense improves;
When these translate, and teach translators too,
Nor firstling kid, nor any vulgar vow,
Should at Apollo's grateful altar stand.
Roscommon writes; to that auspicious hand,
Muse, feed the bull that spurns the yellow sand.
Roscommon, whom both court and camps commend,
True to his prince, and faithful to his friend;
Roscommon first in fields of honour known, 70
First in the peaceful triumphs of the gown;
Who both Minervas justly makes his own.
Now let the few beloved by Jove, and they
Whom infused Titan form'd of better clay,
On equal terms with ancient wit engage,
Nor mighty Homer fear, nor sacred Virgil's page:
Our English palace opens wide in state;
And without stooping they may pass the gate.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 14: 'An English peer:' the Earl of Mulgrave.]

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EPISTLE VI.

TO THE DUCHESS OF YORK, ON HER RETURN FROM SCOTLAND IN THE YEAR 1682.

When factious rage to cruel exile drove
The queen of beauty,[15] and the court of love,
The Muses droop'd, with their forsaken arts,
And the sad Cupids broke their useless darts:
Our fruitful plains to wilds and deserts turn'd
Like Eden's face, when banish'd man it mourn'd,
Love was no more, when loyalty was gone,
The great supporter of his awful throne.
Love could no longer after beauty stay,
But wander'd northward to the verge of day, 10
As if the sun and he had lost their way.
But now the illustrious nymph, return'd again,
Brings every grace triumphant in her train.
The wondering Nereids, though they raised no storm,
Foreflow'd her passage, to behold her form:

Some cried, A Venus; some, A Thetis, pass'd;
But this was not so fair, nor that so chaste.
Far from her sight flew Faction, Strife, and Pride;
And Envy did but look on her, and died.
Whate'er we suffer'd from our sullen fate, 20
Her sight is purchased at an easy rate.
Three gloomy years against this day were set,
But this one mighty sum has clear'd the debt:
Like Joseph's dream, but with a better doom,
The famine past, the plenty still to come.
For her the weeping heavens become serene;
For her the ground is clad in cheerful green:
For her the nightingales are taught to sing,
And Nature has for her delay'd the spring.
The Muse resumes her long-forgotten lays; 30
And Love, restored his ancient realm surveys,
Recalls our beauties, and revives our plays;
His waste dominions peoples once again,
And from her presence dates his second reign.
But awful charms on her fair forehead sit,
Dispensing what she never will admit:
Pleasing, yet cold, like Cynthia's silver beam,
The people's wonder, and the poet's theme.
Distemper'd Zeal, Sedition, canker'd Hate,
No more shall vex the Church, and tear the State: 40
No more shall Faction civil discords move,
Or only discords of too tender love:
Discord, like that of music's various parts;

Discord, that makes the harmony of hearts;
Discord, that only this dispute shall bring,
Who best should love the Duke, and serve the King.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 15: 'Queen of beauty:' Mary D'Este, the beautiful second wife
of the Duke of York; she had been banished to Scotland.]

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EPISTLE VII.

A LETTER TO SIR GEORGE ETHEREGE.[16]

To you who live in chill degree,
As map informs, of fifty-three,
And do not much for cold atone,
By bringing thither fifty-one,
Methinks all climes should be alike,
From tropic e'en to pole arctique;
Since you have such a constitution

As nowhere suffers diminution.
You can be old in grave debate,
And young in love-affairs of state; 10
And both to wives and husbands show
The vigour of a plenipo.
Like mighty missioner you come
"Ad Partes Infidelium."
A work of wondrous merit sure,
So far to go, so much t' endure;
And all to preach to German dame,
Where sound of Cupid never came.
Less had you done, had you been sent
As far as Drake or Pinto went, 20
For cloves or nutmegs to the line-a,
Or even for oranges to China.
That had indeed been charity;
Where love-sick ladies helpless lie,
Chapt, and for want of liquor dry.
But you have made your zeal appear
Within the circle of the Bear.
What region of the earth's so dull
That is not of your labours full?
Triptolemus (so sung the Nine) 30
Strew'd plenty from his cart divine,
But spite of all these fable-makers,
He never sow'd on Almain acres:
No; that was left by Fate's decree,
To be perform'd and sung by thee.

Thou break'st through forms with as much ease

As the French king through articles.

In grand affairs thy days are spent,

In waging weighty compliment,

With such as monarchs represent. 40

They, whom such vast fatigues attend,

Want some soft minutes to unbend,

To show the world that now and then

Great ministers are mortal men.

Then Rhenish rammers walk the round;

In bumpers every king is crown'd;

Besides three holy mitred Hectors,

And the whole college of Electors,

No health of potentate is sunk,

That pays to make his envoy drunk. 50

These Dutch delights I mention'd last

Suit not, I know, your English taste:

For wine to leave a whore or play

Was ne'er your Excellency's way.

Nor need this title give offence,

For here you were your Excellence,

For gaming, writing, speaking, keeping,

His Excellence for all but sleeping.

Now if you tope in form, and treat,

'Tis the sour sauce to the sweet meat, 60

The fine you pay for being great.

Nay, here's a harder imposition,

Which is indeed the court's petition,

That setting worldly pomp aside,
Which poet has at font denied,
You would be pleased in humble way
To write a trifle call'd a play.
This truly is a degradation,
But would oblige the crown and nation
Next to your wise negotiation. 70
If you pretend, as well you may,
Your high degree, your friends will say,
The Duke St Aignon made a play.
If Gallic wit convince you scarce,
His Grace of Bucks has made a farce,
And you, whose comic wit is terse all,
Can hardly fall below rehearsal.
Then finish what you have began;
But scribble faster, if you can:
For yet no George, to our discerning, 80
Has writ without a ten years' warning.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 16: Written to Etherege, then at Ratisbon, in reply to one from Sir George to the Earl of Middleton, at the Earl's request.]

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EPISTLE VIII.

TO MR SOUTHERNE, ON HIS COMEDY CALLED "THE WIVES' EXCUSE."

Sure there's a fate in plays, and 'tis in vain
To write, while these malignant planets reign.
Some very foolish influence rules the pit,
Not always kind to sense, or just to wit:
And whilst it lasts, let buffoonry succeed
To make us laugh; for never was more need.
Farce, in itself, is of a nasty scent;
But the gain smells not of the excrement.
The Spanish nymph, a wit and beauty too,
With all her charms, bore but a single show: 10
But let a monster Muscovite appear,
He draws a crowded audience round the year.
May be thou hast not pleased the box and pit;
Yet those who blame thy tale applaud thy wit:
So Terence plotted, but so Terence writ.
Like his thy thoughts are true, thy language clean
Even lewdness is made moral in thy scene.
The hearers may for want of Nokes repine;
But rest secure, the readers will be thine.
Nor was thy labour'd drama damn'd or hiss'd, 20

But with a kind civility dismiss'd;
With such good manners, as the Wife[17] did use,
Who, not accepting, did but just refuse.
There was a glance at parting; such a look,
As bids thee not give o'er, for one rebuke.
But if thou wouldst be seen, as well as read,
Copy one living author, and one dead:
The standard of thy style let Etherege be;
For wit, the immortal spring of Wycherly:
Learn, after both, to draw some just design, 30
And the next age will learn to copy thine.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 17: 'Wife:' the wife in the play, Mrs Friendall.]

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EPISTLE IX.

TO HENRY HIGDEN,[18] ESQ., ON HIS TRANSLATION OF THE TENTH SATIRE OF
JUVENAL.

The Grecian wits, who Satire first began,
Were pleasant Pasquins on the life of man;
At mighty villains, who the state oppress'd,
They durst not rail, perhaps; they lash'd, at least,
And turn'd them out of office with a jest.
No fool could peep abroad, but ready stand
The drolls to clap a bauble in his hand.
Wise legislators never yet could draw
A fop within the reach of common law;
For posture, dress, grimace, and affectation, 10
Though foes to sense, are harmless to the nation.
Our last redress is dint of verse to try,
And Satire is our Court of Chancery.
This way took Horace to reform an age,
Not bad enough to need an author's rage:
But yours,[19] who lived in more degenerate times,
Was forced to fasten deep, and worry crimes.
Yet you, my friend, have temper'd him so well,
You make him smile in spite of all his zeal:
An art peculiar to yourself alone, 20
To join the virtues of two styles in one.

Oh! were your author's principle received,
Half of the labouring world would be relieved:
For not to wish is not to be deceived.
Revenge would into charity be changed,

Because it costs too dear to be revenged:
It costs our quiet and content of mind,
And when 'tis compass'd leaves a sting behind.
Suppose I had the better end o' the staff,
Why should I help the ill-natured world to laugh? 30
'Tis all alike to them, who get the day;
They love the spite and mischief of the fray.
No; I have cured myself of that disease;
Nor will I be provoked, but when I please:
But let me half that cure to you restore;
You gave the salve, I laid it to the sore.

Our kind relief against a rainy day,
Beyond a tavern, or a tedious play,
We take your book, and laugh our spleen away.
If all your tribe, too studious of debate, 40
Would cease false hopes and titles to create,
Led by the rare example you begun,
Clients would fail, and lawyers be undone.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 18: 'Higden:' author of a bad comedy, which was condemned.]

[Footnote 19: 'Yours:' Juvenal, the tenth satire of whom Higden had translated.]

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EPISTLE X.

TO MY DEAR FRIEND MR CONGREVE, ON HIS COMEDY CALLED "THE DOUBLE-DEALER."

Well, then, the promised hour is come at last,
The present age of wit obscures the past:
Strong were our sires, and as they fought they writ,
Conquering with force of arms, and dint of wit:
Theirs was the giant race, before the flood;
And thus, when Charles return'd, our empire stood.
Like Janus he the stubborn soil manured,
With rules of husbandry the rankness cured;
Tamed us to manners, when the stage was rude;
And boisterous English wit with art endued. 10
Our age was cultivated thus at length;
But what we gain'd in skill we lost in strength.
Our builders were with want of genius cursed;
The second temple was not like the first:
Till you, the best Vitruvius, come at length;
Our beauties equal, but excel our strength.

Firm Doric pillars found your solid base:
The fair Corinthian crowns the higher space:
Thus all below is strength, and all above is grace.
In easy dialogue is Fletcher's praise; 20
He moved the mind, but had not power to raise.
Great Jonson did by strength of judgment please;
Yet, doubling Fletcher's force, he wants his ease.
In differing talents both adorn'd their age;
One for the study, the other for the stage.
But both to Congreve justly shall submit--
One match'd in judgment, both o'ermatch'd in wit.
In him all beauties of this age we see,
Etherege's courtship, Southerne's purity,
The satire, wit, and strength of manly Wycherly. 30
All this in blooming youth you have achieved:
Nor are your foil'd contemporaries grieved.
So much the sweetness of your manners move,
We cannot envy you, because we love.
Fabius might joy in Scipio, when he saw
A beardless consul made against the law,
And join his suffrage to the votes of Rome;
Though he with Hannibal was overcome.
Thus old Romano bow'd to Raphael's fame,
And scholar to the youth he taught became. 40

O that your brows my laurel had sustain'd!
Well had I been deposed, if you had reign'd:

The father had descended for the son;
For only you are lineal to the throne.
Thus, when the state one Edward did depose,
A greater Edward in his room arose:
But now, not I, but poetry is cursed;
For Tom the second reigns like Tom the first.
But let them not mistake my patron's part,
Nor call his charity their own desert. 50
Yet this I prophesy: Thou shalt be seen
(Though with some short parenthesis between)
High on the throne of wit, and, seated there,
Not mine, that's little, but thy laurel wear.
Thy first attempt an early promise made;
That early promise this has more than paid.
So bold, yet so judiciously you dare,
That your least praise is to be regular.
Time, place, and action, may with pains be wrought;
But genius must be born, and never can be taught, 60
This is your portion; this your native store;
Heaven, that but once was prodigal before,
To Shakspeare gave as much; she could not give him more.

Maintain your post: that's all the fame you need;
For 'tis impossible you should proceed.
Already I am worn with cares and age,
And just abandoning the ungrateful stage:
Unprofitably kept at Heaven's expense,

I live a rent-charge on his providence:
But you, whom every muse and grace adorn, 70
Whom I foresee to better fortune born,
Be kind to my remains; and O defend,
Against your judgment, your departed friend!
Let not the insulting foe my fame pursue,
But shade those laurels which descend to you:
And take for tribute what these lines express:
You merit more; nor could my love do less.

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EPISTLE XI.

TO MR GRANVILLE,[20] ON HIS EXCELLENT TRAGEDY CALLED "HEROIC LOVE."

Auspicious poet, wert thou not my friend,
How could I envy, what I must commend!
But since 'tis nature's law, in love and wit,
That youth should reign, and withering age submit,
With less regret those laurels I resign,
Which, dying on my brows, revive on thine.
With better grace an ancient chief may yield
The long-contended honours of the field,
Than venture all his fortune at a cast,
And fight, like Hannibal, to lose at last. 10

Young princes, obstinate to win the prize,
Though yearly beaten, yearly yet they rise:
Old monarchs, though successful, still in doubt,
Catch at a peace, and wisely turn devout.
Thine be the laurel, then; thy blooming age
Can best, if any can, support the stage;
Which so declines, that shortly we may see
Players and plays reduced to second infancy.
Sharp to the world, but thoughtless of renown,
They plot not on the stage, but on the town, 20
And, in despair, their empty pit to fill,
Set up some foreign monster in a bill.
Thus they jog on, still tricking, never thriving,
And murdering plays, which they miscall reviving.
Our sense is nonsense, through their pipes convey'd:
Scarce can a poet know the play he made;
'Tis so disguised in death; nor thinks 'tis he
That suffers in the mangled tragedy.
Thus Itys first was kill'd, and after dress'd
For his own sire, the chief invited guest. 30
I say not this of thy successful scenes,
Where thine was all the glory, theirs the gains.
With length of time, much judgment, and more toil,
Not ill they acted, what they could not spoil.
Their setting sun[21] still shoots a glimmering ray,
Like ancient Rome majestic in decay:
And better gleanings their worn soil can boast,
Than the crab-vintage of the neighbouring coast.[22]

This difference yet the judging world will see;

Thou copiest Homer, and they copy thee. 40

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 20: 'Mr Granville:' Lord Lansdowne.]

[Footnote 21: 'Setting sun,' &c.: Betterton, who had mustered up a company, and played in Lincoln's-Inn Fields.]

[Footnote 22: 'Neighbouring coast:' Drury Lane play-house.]

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EPISTLE XII.

TO MY FRIEND MR MOTTEUX,[23] ON HIS TRAGEDY CALLED "BEAUTY IN DISTRESS."

'Tis hard, my friend, to write in such an age,

As damns, not only poets, but the stage.

That sacred art, by Heaven itself infused,

Which Moses, David, Solomon have used,
Is now to be no more: the Muses' foes
Would sink their Maker's praises into prose.
Were they content to prune the lavish vine
Of straggling branches, and improve the wine,
Who but a madman would his thoughts defend?
All would submit; for all but fools will mend. 10
But when to common sense they give the lie,
And turn distorted words to blasphemy,
They give the scandal; and the wise discern,
Their glosses teach an age, too apt to learn.
What I have loosely, or profanely, writ,
Let them to fires, their due desert, commit:
Nor, when accused by me, let them complain:
Their faults, and not their function, I arraign.
Rebellion, worse than witchcraft, they pursued;
The pulpit preach'd the crime, the people rued. 20
The stage was silenced; for the saints would see
In fields perform'd their plotted tragedy.
But let us first reform, and then so live,
That we may teach our teachers to forgive:
Our desk be placed below their lofty chairs;
Ours be the practice, as the precept theirs.
The moral part, at least, we may divide,
Humility reward, and punish pride;
Ambition, interest, avarice, accuse:
These are the province of a tragic Muse. 30
These hast thou chosen; and the public voice

Has equall'd thy performance with thy choice.
Time, action, place, are so preserved by thee,
That even Corneille might with envy see
The alliance of his tripled Unity.
Thy incidents, perhaps, too thick are sown;
But too much plenty is thy fault alone.
At least but two can that good crime commit,
Thou in design, and Wycherly in wit.
Let thy own Gauls condemn thee, if they dare; 40
Contented to be thinly regular:
Born there, but not for them, our fruitful soil
With more increase rewards thy happy toil.
Their tongue, enfeebled, is refined too much;
And, like pure gold, it bends at every touch:
Our sturdy Teuton yet will art obey,
More fit for manly thought, and strengthen'd with allay.
But whence art thou inspired, and thou alone,
To flourish in an idiom not thy own?
It moves our wonder, that a foreign guest 50
Should over-match the most, and match the best.
In under-praising thy deserts, I wrong;
Here find the first deficiency of our tongue:
Words, once my stock, are wanting, to commend
So great a poet, and so good a friend.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 23: 'Motteux:' an exiled Frenchman, translator of 'Don Quixote,' and a play-wright. Dryden alludes here to Collier's attacks on himself.]

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EPISTLE XIII.

TO MY HONOURED KINSMAN, JOHN DRYDEN,[24] OF CHESTERTON, IN THE COUNTY OF HUNTINGDON, ESQ.

How bless'd is he who leads a country life,
Unvex'd with anxious cares, and void of strife!
Who studying peace, and shunning civil rage,
Enjoy'd his youth, and now enjoys his age:
All who deserve his love, he makes his own;
And, to be loved himself, needs only to be known.

Just, good, and wise, contending neighbours come,
From your award to wait their final doom;
And, foes before, return in friendship home.
Without their cost, you terminate the cause; 10

And save the expense of long litigious laws:
Where suits are traversed; and so little won,
That he who conquers, is but last undone:
Such are not your decrees; but so design'd,
The sanction leaves a lasting peace behind;
Like your own soul, serene; a pattern of your mind.

Promoting concord, and composing strife,
Lord of yourself, uncumber'd with a wife;
Where, for a year, a month, perhaps a night,
Long penitence succeeds a short delight: 20
Minds are so hardly match'd, that even the first,
Though pair'd by Heaven, in Paradise were cursed.
For man and woman, though in one they grow,
Yet, first or last, return again to two.
He to God's image, she to his was made;
So farther from the fount the stream at random stray'd.

How could he stand, when, put to double pain,
He must a weaker than himself sustain!
Each might have stood perhaps; but each alone;
Two wrestlers help to pull each other down. 30

Not that my verse would blemish all the fair;
But yet, if some be bad, 'tis wisdom to beware;
And better shun the bait, than struggle in the snare.

Thus have you shunn'd, and shun the married state,
Trusting as little as you can to fate.

No porter guards the passage of your door,
To admit the wealthy, and exclude the poor;
For God, who gave the riches, gave the heart,
To sanctify the whole, by giving part;
Heaven, who foresaw the will, the means has wrought, 40
And to the second son a blessing brought;
The first-begotten had his father's share:
But you, like Jacob, are Rebecca's heir.[25]

So may your stores and fruitful fields increase;
And ever be you bless'd, who live to bless.
As Ceres sow'd, where'er her chariot flew;
As Heaven in deserts rain'd the bread of dew;
So free to many, to relations most,
You feed with manna your own Israel host.

With crowds attended of your ancient race, 50
You seek the champion sports, or sylvan chase:
With well-breath'd beagles you surround the wood,
Even then, industrious of the common good:
And often have you brought the wily fox
To suffer for the firstlings of the flocks;
Chased even amid the folds; and made to bleed,

Like felons, where they did the murderous deed.
This fiery game your active youth maintain'd;
Not yet by years extinguish'd, though restrain'd:
You season still with sports your serious hours: 60
For age but tastes of pleasures youth devours.
The hare in pastures or in plains is found,
Emblem of human life, who runs the round;
And, after all his wandering ways are done,
His circle fills, and ends where he begun--
Just as the setting meets the rising sun.

Thus princes ease their cares; but happier he,
Who seeks not pleasure through necessity,
Than such as once on slippery thrones were placed;
And chasing, sigh to think themselves are chased. 70

So lived our sires, ere doctors learn'd to kill,
And multiplied with theirs the weekly bill.
The first physicians by debauch were made:
Excess began, and sloth sustains the trade,
Pity the generous kind their cares bestow
To search forbidden truths (a sin to know),
To which, if human science could attain,
The doom of death, pronounced by God, were vain.
In vain the leech would interpose delay;
Fate fastens first, and vindicates the prey. 80
What help from art's endeavours can we have?

Gibbons[26] but guesses, nor is sure to save:
But Maurus[27] sweeps whole parishes, and peoples every grave;
And no more mercy to mankind will use,
Than when he robb'd and murder'd Maro's Muse.
Wouldst thou be soon despatch'd, and perish whole,
Trust Maurus with thy life, and Milbourn[28] with thy soul.

By chase our long-lived fathers earn'd their food;
Toil strung the nerves, and purified the blood:
But we their sons, a pamper'd race of men, 90
Are dwindled down to threescore years and ten.
Better to hunt in fields for health unbought,
Than fee the doctor for a nauseous draught.
The wise, for cure, on exercise depend;
God never made his work for man to mend.

The tree of knowledge, once in Eden placed,
Was easy found, but was forbid the taste:
Oh, had our grandsire walk'd without his wife,
He first had sought the better plant of life!
Now both are lost: yet, wandering in the dark, 100
Physicians, for the tree, have found the bark:
They, labouring for relief of human kind,
With sharpen'd sight some remedies may find;
The apothecary-train is wholly blind,
From files a random recipe they take,
And many deaths of one prescription make.

Garth,[29] generous as his Muse, prescribes and gives;

The shopman sells; and by destruction lives:

Ungrateful tribe! who, like the viper's brood,

From medicine issuing, suck their mother's blood! 110

Let these obey; and let the learn'd prescribe;

That men may die, without a double bribe:

Let them, but under their superiors, kill;

When doctors first have sign'd the bloody bill;

He 'scapes the best, who, nature to repair,

Draws physic from the fields, in draughts of vital air.

You hoard not health, for your own private use;

But on the public spend the rich produce.

When, often urged, unwilling to be great,

Your country calls you from your loved retreat, 120

And sends to senates, charged with common care,

Which none more shuns, and none can better bear;

Where could they find another form'd so fit,

To poise, with solid sense, a sprightly wit?

Were these both wanting, as they both abound,

Where could so firm integrity be found?

Well born, and wealthy, wanting no support,

You steer betwixt the country and the court:

Nor gratify whate'er the great desire,

Nor grudging give what public needs require. 130

Part must be left, a fund when foes invade;

And part employ'd to roll the watery trade:

Even Canaan's happy land, when worn with toil,
Required a sabbath-year to mend the meagre soil.

Good senators (and such as you) so give,
That kings may be supplied, the people thrive.
And he, when want requires, is truly wise,
Who slights not foreign aids, nor over-buys;
But on our native strength, in time of need, relies.
Munster was bought, we boast not the success; 140
Who fights for gain, for greater makes his peace.

Our foes, compell'd by need, have peace embraced:
The peace both parties want, is like to last:
Which, if secure, securely we may trade;
Or, not secure, should never have been made.
Safe in ourselves, while on ourselves we stand,
The sea is ours, and that defends the land.
Be then the naval stores the nation's care,
New ships to build, and batter'd to repair.

Observe the war, in every annual course; 150
What has been done, was done with British force:
Namur subdued,[30] is England's palm alone;
The rest besieged, but we constrain'd the town;
We saw the event that follow'd our success;
France, though pretending arms, pursued the peace;

Obliged, by one sole treaty,[31] to restore
What twenty years of war had won before.
Enough for Europe has our Albion fought:
Let us enjoy the peace our blood has bought.
When once the Persian king was put to flight, 160
The weary Macedons refused to fight:
Themselves their own mortality confess'd:
And left the son of Jove to quarrel for the rest.

Even victors are by victories undone;
Thus Hannibal, with foreign laurels won,
To Carthage was recall'd, too late to keep his own.
While sore of battle, while our wounds are green,
Why should we tempt the doubtful die again?
In wars renew'd, uncertain of success;
Sure of a share, as umpires of the peace. 170

A patriot both the king and country serves:
Prerogative and privilege preserves:
Of each our laws the certain limit show;
One must not ebb, nor the other overflow:
Betwixt the prince and parliament we stand;
The barriers of the state on either hand:
May neither overflow, for then they drown the land.
When both are full, they feed our bless'd abode;
Like those that water'd once the paradise of God.

Some overpoise of sway, by turns, they share; 180

In peace the people, and the prince in war:

Consuls of moderate power in calms were made;

When the Gauls came, one sole dictator sway'd.

Patriots, in peace, assert the people's right;

With noble stubbornness resisting might:

No lawless mandates from the court receive,

Nor lend by force, but in a body give.

Such was your generous grandsire; free to grant

In parliaments, that weigh'd their prince's want:

But so tenacious of the common cause, 190

As not to lend the king against his laws;

And, in a loathsome dungeon doom'd to lie,

In bonds retain'd his birthright liberty,

And shamed oppression, till it set him free.

O true descendant of a patriot line,

Who, while thou shar'st their lustre, lend'st them thine!

Vouchsafe this picture of thy soul to see;

'Tis so far good, as it resembles thee:

The beauties to the original I owe;

Which when I miss, my own defects I show: 200

Nor think the kindred Muses thy disgrace:

A poet is not born in every race.
Two of a house few ages can afford;
One to perform, another to record.
Praiseworthy actions are by thee embraced;
And 'tis my praise, to make thy praises last.
For even when death dissolves our human frame,
The soul returns to heaven from whence it came;
Earth keeps the body--verse preserves the fame.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 24: 'John Dryden:' this poem was written in 1699; the person to whom it is addressed was cousin-german to the poet, and a younger brother of the baronet. He repaid this poem by a 'noble present' to his kinsman.]

[Footnote 25: 'Rebecca's heir:' he inherited his mother's fortune.]

[Footnote 26: 'Gibbons:' Dr Gibbons, physician.]

[Footnote 27: 'Maurus:' Sir Richard Blackmore.]

[Footnote 28: 'Milbourn:' the foe of Dryden's 'Virgil,' and a clergyman.]

[Footnote 29: 'Garth:' author of 'The Dispensary.']

[Footnote 30: 'Namur subdued:' in 1695, King William took Namur, after a siege of one month.]

[Footnote 31: 'Treaty:' the treaty of Ryswick, concluded in September 1697.]

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EPISTLE XIV.[32]

TO SIR GODFREY KNELLER, PRINCIPAL PAINTER TO HIS MAJESTY.

Once I beheld the fairest of her kind,
And still the sweet idea charms my mind:
True, she was dumb; for Nature gazed so long,
Pleased with her work, that she forgot her tongue;
But, smiling, said, She still shall gain the prize;
I only have transferr'd it to her eyes.
Such are thy pictures, Kneller: such thy skill,

That Nature seems obedient to thy will;
Comes out and meets thy pencil in the draught;
Lives there, and wants but words to speak her thought. 10
At least thy pictures look a voice; and we
Imagine sounds, deceived to that degree,
We think 'tis somewhat more than just to see.

Shadows are but privations of the light;
Yet, when we walk, they shoot before the sight;
With us approach, retire, arise, and fall;
Nothing themselves, and yet expressing all.
Such are thy pieces, imitating life
So near, they almost conquer in the strife;
And from their animated canvas came, 20
Demanding souls, and loosen'd from the frame.

Prometheus, were he here, would cast away
His Adam, and refuse a soul to clay;
And either would thy noble work inspire,
Or think it warm enough, without his fire.

But vulgar hands may vulgar likeness raise;
This is the least attendant on thy praise:
From hence the rudiments of art began;
A coal, or chalk, first imitated man:
Perhaps the shadow, taken on a wall, 30

Gave outlines to the rude original;
Ere canvas yet was strain'd, before the grace
Of blended colours found their use and place,
Or cypress tablets first received a face.

By slow degrees the godlike art advanced;
As man grew polish'd, picture was enhanced:
Greece added posture, shade, and perspective;
And then the mimic piece began to live.
Yet perspective was lame, no distance true,
But all came forward in one common view: 40
No point of light was known, no bounds of art;
When light was there, it knew not to depart,
But glaring on remoter objects play'd;
Not languish'd, and insensibly decay'd.

Rome raised not art, but barely kept alive,
And with old Greece unequally did strive:
Till Goths, and Vandals, a rude northern race,
Did all the matchless monuments deface.
Then all the Muses in one ruin be,
And rhyme began to enervate poetry. 50
Thus, in a stupid military state,
The pen and pencil find an equal fate.
Flat faces, such as would disgrace a screen,
Such as in Bantam's embassy were seen,
Unraised, unrounded, were the rude delight

Of brutal nations only born to fight.

Long time, the sister arts, in iron sleep,

A heavy sabbath did supinely keep:

At length, in Raphael's age, at once they rise,

Stretch all their limbs, and open all their eyes. 60

Thence rose the Roman, and the Lombard line:

One colour'd best, and one did best design.

Raphael's, like Homer's, was the nobler part,

But Titian's painting look'd like Virgil's art.

Thy genius gives thee both; where true design,

Postures unforced, and lively colours join.

Likeness is ever there; but still the best,

Like proper thoughts in lofty language dress'd:

Where light, to shades descending, plays, not strives,

Dies by degrees, and by degrees revives. 70

Of various parts a perfect whole is wrought:

Thy pictures think, and we divine their thought.

Shakspeare, thy gift, I place before my sight;

With awe, I ask his blessing ere I write;

With reverence look on his majestic face;

Proud to be less, but of his godlike race.

His soul inspires me, while thy praise I write,

And I, like Teucer, under Ajax fight:
Bids thee, through me, be bold; with dauntless breast
Contemn the bad, and emulate the best. 80
Like his, thy critics in the attempt are lost:
When most they rail, know then, they envy most.
In vain they snarl aloof; a noisy crowd,
Like women's anger, impotent and loud.
While they their barren industry deplore,
Pass on secure, and mind the goal before.
Old as she is, my Muse shall march behind,
Bear off the blast, and intercept the wind.
Our arts are sisters, though not twins in birth;
For hymns were sung in Eden's happy earth: 90

But oh! the painter Muse, though last in place,
Has seized the blessing first, like Jacob's race.
Apelles' art an Alexander found;
And Raphael did with Leo's gold abound;
But Homer was with barren laurel crown'd.
Thou hadst thy Charles a while, and so had I;
But pass we that unpleasing image by.
Rich in thyself, and of thyself divine,
All pilgrims come and offer at thy shrine.
A graceful truth thy pencil can command; 100
The fair themselves go mended from thy hand.
Likeness appears in every lineament;
But likeness in thy work is eloquent.

Though nature there her true resemblance bears,
A nobler beauty in thy peace appears.
So warm thy work, so glows the generous frame,
Flesh looks less living in the lovely dame.
Thou paint'st as we describe, improving still,
When on wild nature we ingraft our skill;
But not creating beauties at our will. 110

But poets are confined in narrower space,
To speak the language of their native place:
The painter widely stretches his command;
Thy pencil speaks the tongue of every land.
From hence, my friend, all climates are your own,
Nor can you forfeit, for you hold of none.
All nations all immunities will give
To make you theirs, where'er you please to live;
And not seven cities, but the world would strive.

Sure some propitious planet, then, did smile, 120
When first you were conducted to this isle:
Our genius brought you here to enlarge our fame;
For your good stars are everywhere the same.
Thy matchless hand, of every region free,
Adopts our climate, not our climate thee.

Great Rome and Venice early did impart

To thee the examples of their wondrous art.
Those masters then, but seen, not understood,
With generous emulation fired thy blood:
For what in nature's dawn the child admired, 130
The youth endeavour'd, and the man acquired.

If yet thou hast not reach'd their high degree,
'Tis only wanting to this age, not thee.
Thy genius, bounded by the times, like mine,
Drudges on petty draughts, nor dare design
A more exalted work, and more divine.
For what a song, or senseless opera
Is to the living labour of a play;
Or what a play to Virgil's work would be,
Such is a single piece to history. 140

But we, who life bestow, ourselves must live:
Kings cannot reign, unless their subjects give;
And they who pay the taxes, bear the rule:
Thus thou, sometimes, art forced to draw a fool:
But so his follies in thy posture sink,
The senseless idiot seems at last to think.

Good heaven! that sots and knaves should be so vain,
To wish their vile resemblance may remain!
And stand recorded, at their own request,

To future days, a libel or a jest! 150

Else should we see your noble pencil trace

Our unities of action, time, and place:

A whole composed of parts, and those the best,

With every various character express'd;

Heroes at large, and at a nearer view,

Less, and at distance, an ignobler crew.

While all the figures in one action join,

As tending to complete the main design.

More cannot be by mortal art express'd;

But venerable age shall add the rest: 160

For time shall with his ready pencil stand;

Retouch your fingers with his ripening hand;

Mellow your colours, and embrown the tint;

Add every grace, which time alone can grant;

To future ages shall your fame convey,

And give more beauties than he takes away.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 32: Supposed to be an acknowledgment of a copy of the Chandos

portrait of Shakspeare given to Dryden by Kneller.]

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EPISTLE XV.

TO HIS FRIEND THE AUTHOR, JOHN HODDESDON, ON HIS DIVINE EPIGRAMS.

Thou hast inspired me with thy soul, and I
Who ne'er before could ken of poetry,
Am grown so good proficient, I can lend
A line in commendation of my friend.
Yet 'tis but of the second hand; if ought
There be in this, 'tis from thy fancy brought.
Good thief, who dar'st, Prometheus-like, aspire,
And fill thy poems with celestial fire:
Enliven'd by these sparks divine, their rays
Add a bright lustre to thy crown of bays. 10
Young eaglet, who thy nest thus soon forsook,
So lofty and divine a course hast took
As all admire, before the down begin
To peep, as yet, upon thy smoother chin;
And, making heaven thy aim, hast had the grace
To look the Sun of righteousness i' the face.
What may we hope, if thou go'st on thus fast,
Scriptures at first; enthusiasms at last!

Thou hast commenced, betimes, a saint; go on,
Mingling diviner streams with Helicon; 20
That they who view what epigrams here be,
May learn to make like, in just praise of thee.

Reader, I've done, nor longer will withhold
Thy greedy eyes; looking on this pure gold
Thou'lt know adulterate copper, which, like this,
Will only serve to be a foil to his.

* * * * *

EPISTLE XVI.

TO MY FRIEND MR J. NORTHLEIGH, AUTHOR OF "THE
PARALLEL," ON HIS "TRIUMPH OF THE BRITISH
MONARCHY."

So Joseph, yet a youth, expounded well
The boding dream, and did the event foretell;
Judged by the past, and drew the Parallel.
Thus early Solomon the truth explored,
The right awarded, and the babe restored.
Thus Daniel, ere to prophecy he grew,
The perjured Presbyters did first subdue,

And freed Susanna from the canting crew.
Well may our monarchy triumphant stand,
While warlike James protects both sea and land; 10
And, under covert of his sevenfold shield,
Thou send'st thy shafts to scour the distant field.
By law thy powerful pen has set us free;
Thou studiest that, and that may study thee.

* * * * *

ELEGIES AND EPITAPHS.

I.

TO THE MEMORY OF MR OLDHAM.[33]

Farewell, too little, and too lately known,
Whom I began to think, and call my own:
For sure our souls were near allied, and thine
Cast in the same poetic mould with mine!
One common note on either lyre did strike,
And knaves and fools we both abhorr'd alike.
To the same goal did both our studies drive;
The last set out, the soonest did arrive.
Thus Nisus fell upon the slippery place,

Whilst his young friend performed, and won the race. 10

O early ripe! to thy abundant store

What could advancing age have added more?

It might (what nature never gives the young)

Have taught the smoothness of thy native tongue.

But satire needs not those, and wit will shine

Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.

A noble error, and but seldom made,

When poets are by too much force betray'd.

Thy generous fruits, though gather'd ere their prime,

Still show'd a quickness; and maturing time 20

But mellows what we write, to the dull sweets of rhyme.

Once more, hail! and farewell, farewell, thou young,

But, ah! too short, Marcellus of our tongue!

Thy brows with ivy, and with laurels bound;

But fate and gloomy night encompass thee around.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 33: 'Mr Oldham:' John Oldham, the satirist, died of the small-pox in his 30th year, 1683.]

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II.

TO THE PIOUS MEMORY OF THE ACCOMPLISHED YOUNG LADY MRS ANNE
KILLIGREW,[34] EXCELLENT IN THE TWO SISTER ARTS OF POESY AND PAINTING.
AN ODE. 1685.

I.

Thou youngest virgin-daughter of the skies,
Made in the last promotion of the blest;
Whose palms, new pluck'd from Paradise,
In spreading branches more sublimely rise,
Rich with immortal green above the rest:
Whether, adopted to some neighbouring star,
Thou roll'st above us, in thy wandering race,
Or, in procession fix'd and regular,
Mov'st with the heavens' majestic pace;
Or, call'd to more superior bliss,
Thou tread'st, with seraphims, the vast abyss:

Whatever happy region is thy place,
Cease thy celestial song a little space;
Thou wilt have time enough for hymns divine,
Since Heaven's eternal year is thine.
Hear then a mortal Muse thy praise rehearse,

In no ignoble verse;
But such as thy own voice did practise here,
When thy first fruits of Poesy were given;
To make thyself a welcome inmate there:
While yet a young probationer,
And candidate of heaven.

II.

If by traduction came thy mind,
Our wonder is the less to find
A soul so charming from a stock so good;
Thy father was transfused into thy blood:
So wert thou born into a tuneful strain,
An early, rich, and inexhausted vein.
But if thy pre-existing soul
Was form'd, at first, with myriads more,
It did through all the mighty poets roll,
Who Greek or Latin laurels wore,
And was that Sappho last, which once it was before.
If so, then cease thy flight, O heaven-born mind!
Thou hast no dross to purge from thy rich ore:
Nor can thy soul a fairer mansion find,
Than was the beauteous frame she left behind:
Return to fill or mend the choir of thy celestial kind.

III.

May we presume to say, that, at thy birth,
New joy was sprung in heaven, as well as here on earth?

For sure the milder planets did combine
On thy auspicious horoscope to shine,
And even the most malicious were in trine.
Thy brother angels at thy birth
Strung each his lyre, and tuned it high,
That all the people of the sky
Might know a poetess was born on earth.
And then, if ever, mortal ears
Had heard the music of the spheres,
And if no clustering swarm of bees
On thy sweet mouth distill'd their golden dew,
'Twas that such vulgar miracles
Heaven had not leisure to renew:
For all thy blest fraternity of love
Solemnized there thy birth, and kept thy holiday above.

IV.

O gracious God! how far have we
Profaned thy heavenly gift of Poesy!
Made prostitute and profligate the Muse,

Debased to each obscene and impious use,
Whose harmony was first ordain'd above
For tongues of angels, and for hymns of love!
O wretched we! why were we hurried down
This lubrique and adulterate age,
(Nay added fat pollutions of our own,)
To increase the streaming ordures of the stage?
What can we say to excuse our second fall?
Let this thy vestal, Heaven, atone for all:
Her Arethusian stream remains unsoil'd,
Unmix'd with foreign filth, and undefiled:
Her wit was more than man, her innocence a child.

V.

Art she had none, yet wanted none;
For nature did that want supply:
So rich in treasures of her own,
She might our boasted stores defy:
Such noble vigour did her verse adorn,
That it seem'd borrow'd where 'twas only born.
Her morals too were in her bosom bred.
By great examples daily fed,
What in the best of books, her father's life, she read:
And to be read herself she need not fear;
Each test, and every light, her Muse will bear,
Though Epictetus with his lamp were there.

Even love (for love sometimes her Muse express'd)
Was but a lambent flame which play'd about her breast:
Light as the vapours of a morning dream,
So cold herself, whilst she such warmth express'd,
'Twas Cupid bathing in Diana's stream.

VI.

Born to the spacious empire of the Nine,
One would have thought she should have been content
To manage well that mighty government;
But what can young ambitious souls confine?
To the next realm she stretch'd her sway,
For Painture near adjoining lay,
A plenteous province, and alluring prey.
A Chamber of Dependencies was framed,
(As conquerors will never want pretence,
When arm'd, to justify the offence)
And the whole fief, in right of poetry, she claim'd.
The country open lay without defence:

For poets frequent inroads there had made,
And perfectly could represent
The shape, the face, with every lineament,
And all the large domains which the Dumb Sister sway'd;
All bow'd beneath her government,

Received in triumph wheresoe'er she went.
Her pencil drew whate'er her soul design'd,
And oft the happy draft surpass'd the image in her mind.
The sylvan scenes of herds and flocks,
And fruitful plains and barren rocks,
Of shallow brooks that flow'd so clear,
The bottom did the top appear:
Of deeper, too, and ampler floods,
Which, as in mirrors, show'd the woods;
Of lofty trees, with sacred shades,
And perspectives of pleasant glades,
Where nymphs of brightest form appear,
And shaggy satyrs standing near,
Which them at once admire and fear.
The ruins, too, of some majestic piece,
Boasting the power of ancient Rome or Greece,
Whose statues, friezes, columns broken lie,
And, though defaced, the wonder of the eye;
What nature, art, bold fiction e'er durst frame,
Her forming hand gave feature to the name.
So strange a concourse ne'er was seen before,
But when the peopled ark the whole creation bore.

VII.

The scene then changed: with bold erected look
Our martial king the sight with reverence strook:

For not content to express his outward part,

Her hand call'd out the image of his heart:

His warlike mind, his soul devoid of fear,

His high-designing thoughts were figured there,

As when, by magic, ghosts are made appear.

Our phoenix queen was portray'd too so bright,

Beauty alone could beauty take so right;

Her dress, her shape, her matchless grace,

Were all observed, as well as heavenly face.

With such a peerless majesty she stands,

As in that day she took the crown from sacred hands:

Before a train of heroines was seen,

In beauty foremost, as in rank, the queen.

Thus nothing to her genius was denied,

But like a ball of fire the further thrown,

Still with a greater blaze she shone,

And her bright soul broke out on every side.

What next she had design'd Heaven only knows:

To such immoderate growth her conquest rose,

That fate alone its progress could oppose.

VIII.

Now all those charms, that blooming grace,

The well-proportion'd shape, and beauteous face,

Shall never more be seen by mortal eyes;

In earth the much lamented virgin lies.

Not wit, nor piety could Fate prevent;

Nor was the cruel destiny content

To finish all the murder at a blow,

To sweep at once her life, and beauty too;

But, like a harden'd felon, took a pride

To work more mischievously slow,

And plunder'd first, and then destroy'd.

Oh, double sacrilege on things divine,

To rob the relic, and deface the shrine!

But thus Orinda^[35] died:

Heaven, by the same disease, did both translate:

As equal were their souls, so equal was their fate.

IX.

Meantime her warlike brother on the seas

His waving streamers to the wind displays,

And vows for his return, with vain devotion, pays.

Ah, generous youth! that wish forbear,

The winds too soon will waft thee here:

Slack all thy sails, and fear to come,

Alas, thou know'st not thou art wreck'd at home!

No more shalt thou behold thy sister's face,

Thou hast already had her last embrace.
But look aloft, and if thou ken'st from far
Among the Pleiads a new-kindled star,
If any sparkles than the rest more bright,
'Tis she that shines in that propitious light.

X.

When in mid-air the golden trump shall sound,
To raise the nations under ground:
When in the Valley of Jehoshaphat,
The judging God shall close the book of fate:
And there the last assizes keep,
For those who wake, and those who sleep;
When rattling bones together fly,
From the four corners of the sky;
When sinews o'er the skeletons are spread,
Those clothed with flesh, and life inspires the dead;

The sacred poets first shall hear the sound,
And foremost from the tomb shall bound,
For they are cover'd with the lightest ground;
And straight, with inborn vigour, on the wing,
Like mounting larks, to the new morning sing.
There thou, sweet saint, before the quire shalt go,
As harbinger of heaven, the way to show,

The way which thou so well hast learn'd below.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 34: 'Killigrew:' a lady of remarkable promise alike in painting and poetry; maid of honour to the Duchess of York; died at the age of 25, in 1685; her father an eminent clergyman, her brother a wit.]

[Footnote 35: 'Orinda:' Mrs Catherine Philips, author of a book of poems, died, like Mrs Killigrew, of the small-pox, in 1664, being only thirty-two years of age.]

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III.

UPON THE DEATH OF

THE EARL OF DUNDEE.[36]

Oh, last and best of Scots! who didst maintain

Thy country's freedom from a foreign reign;
New people fill the land now thou art gone,
New gods the temples, and new kings the throne.
Scotland and thee did each in other live;
Nor wouldst thou her, nor could she thee survive.
Farewell! who dying didst support the state,
And couldst not fall but with thy country's fate.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 36: This is translated from a Latin elegy by Dr Pitcairn.]

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IV.

ELEONORA:

A PANEGYRICAL POEM, DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE COUNTESS OF
ABINGDON.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE EARL OF ABINGDON, &c.

MY LORD,--The commands, with which you honoured me some months ago, are now performed: they had been sooner; but betwixt ill health, some business, and many troubles, I was forced to defer them till this time. Ovid, going to his banishment, and writing from on shipboard to his friends, excused the faults of his poetry by his misfortunes; and told them, that good verses never flow but from a serene and composed spirit. Wit, which is a kind of Mercury, with wings fastened to his head and heels, can fly but slowly in a damp air. I therefore chose rather to obey you late than ill: if at least I am capable of writing anything, at any time, which is worthy your perusal and your patronage. I cannot say that I have escaped from a shipwreck; but have only gained a rock by hard swimming, where I may pant a while and gather breath: for the doctors give me a sad assurance, that my disease never took its leave of any man, but with a purpose to return. However, my lord, I have laid hold on the interval, and managed the small stock, which age has left me, to the best advantage, in performing this inconsiderable service to my lady's memory. We, who are priests of Apollo, have not the inspiration when we please; but must wait until the god comes rushing on us, and invades us with a fury which we are not able to resist: which gives us double strength while the fit continues, and leaves us languishing and spent at its departure. Let me not seem to boast, my lord, for I have really felt it on this occasion, and prophesied beyond my natural power. Let me add, and hope to be believed, that the excellency of the subject contributed much to the happiness of the execution; and that the weight of thirty years was taken off me while I was writing. I swam with the tide, and the water under me was buoyant.

The reader will easily observe that I was transported by the multitude and variety of my similitudes; which are generally the product of a luxuriant fancy, and the wantonness of wit. Had I called in my judgment to my assistance, I had certainly retrenched many of them. But I defend them not; let them pass for beautiful faults amongst the better sort of critics: for the whole poem, though written in that which they call Heroic verse, is of the Pindaric nature, as well in the thought as the expression; and, as such, requires the same grains of allowance for it. It was intended, as your lordship sees in the title, not for an elegy, but a panegyric: a kind of apotheosis, indeed, if a heathen word may be applied to a Christian use. And on all occasions of praise, if we take the ancients for our patterns, we are bound by prescription to employ the magnificence of words, and the force of figures, to adorn the sublimity of thoughts. Isocrates amongst the Grecian orators, and Cicero, and the younger Pliny, amongst the Romans, have left us their precedents for our security; for I think I need not mention the inimitable Pindar, who stretches on these pinions out of sight, and is carried upward, as it were, into another world.

This, at least, my lord, I may justly plead, that if I have not performed so well as I think I have, yet I have used my best endeavours to excel myself. One disadvantage I have had; which is, never to have known or seen my lady: and to draw the lineaments of her mind, from the description which I have received from others, is for a painter to set himself at work without the living original before him: which, the more beautiful it is, will be so much the more difficult for him to conceive, when he has only a relation given him of such and such features by an

acquaintance or a friend, without the nice touches, which give the best resemblance, and make the graces of the picture. Every artist is apt enough to flatter himself (and I amongst the rest) that their own ocular observations would have discovered more perfections, at least others, than have been delivered to them: though I have received mine from the best hands, that is, from persons who neither want a just understanding of my lady's worth, nor a due veneration for her memory.

Dr Donne, the greatest wit, though not the greatest poet of our nation, acknowledges, that he had never seen Mrs Drury, whom he has made immortal in his admirable "Anniversaries." I have had the same fortune, though I have not succeeded to the same genius. However, I have followed his footsteps in the design of his panegyric; which was to raise an emulation in the living, to copy out the example of the dead. And therefore it was, that I once intended to have called this poem "The Pattern:" and though, on a second consideration, I changed the title into the name of the illustrious person, yet the design continues, and Eleonora is still the pattern of charity, devotion, and humility; of the best wife, the best mother, and the best of friends.

And now, my lord, though I have endeavoured to answer your commands; yet I could not answer it to the world, nor to my conscience, if I gave not your lordship my testimony of being the best husband now living: I say my testimony only; for the praise of it is given you by yourself. They who despise the rules of virtue both in their practice and their morals, will think this a very trivial commendation. But I think it the peculiar happiness of the Countess of Abingdon to have been so truly loved by you

while she was living, and so gratefully honoured after she was dead. Few there are who have either had, or could have, such a loss; and yet fewer who carried their love and constancy beyond the grave. The exteriors of mourning, a decent funeral, and black habits, are the usual stints of common husbands: and perhaps their wives deserve no better than to be mourned with hypocrisy, and forgot with ease. But you have distinguished yourself from ordinary lovers, by a real and lasting grief for the deceased; and by endeavouring to raise for her the most durable monument, which is that of verse. And so it would have proved, if the workman had been equal to the work, and your choice of the artificer as happy as your design. Yet, as Phidias, when he had made the statue of Minerva, could not forbear to engrave his own name, as author of the piece: so give me leave to hope, that, by subscribing mine to this poem, I may live by the goddess, and transmit my name to posterity by the memory of hers. It is no flattery to assure your lordship, that she is remembered, in the present age, by all who have had the honour of her conversation and acquaintance; and that I have never been in any company since the news of her death was first brought me, where they have not extolled her virtues, and even spoken the same things of her in prose, which I have done in verse.

I therefore think myself obliged to thank your lordship for the commission which you have given me: how I have acquitted myself of it, must be left to the opinion of the world, in spite of any protestation which I can enter against the present age, as incompetent or corrupt judges. For my comfort, they are but Englishmen, and, as such, if they think ill of me to-day, they are inconstant enough to think well of me

to-morrow. And after all, I have not much to thank my fortune that I was born amongst them. The good of both sexes are so few, in England, that they stand like exceptions against general rules: and though one of them has deserved a greater commendation than I could give her, they have taken care that I should not tire my pen with frequent exercise on the like subjects; that praises, like taxes, should be appropriated, and left almost as individual as the person. They say, my talent is satire: if it be so, it is a fruitful age, and there is an extraordinary crop to gather. But a single hand is insufficient for such a harvest: they have sown the dragons' teeth themselves, and it is but just they should reap each other in lampoons. You, my lord, who have the character of honour, though it is not my happiness to know you, may stand aside, with the small remainders of the English nobility, truly such, and, unhurt yourselves, behold the mad combat. If I have pleased you and some few others, I have obtained my end. You see I have disabled myself, like an elected speaker of the house: yet like him I have undertaken the charge, and find the burden sufficiently recompensed by the honour. Be pleased to accept of these my unworthy labours, this paper-monument; and let her pious memory, which I am sure is sacred to you, not only plead the pardon of my many faults, but gain me your protection, which is ambitiously sought by, my lord, your lordship's most obedient servant,

JOHN DRYDEN.

* * * * *

As when some great and gracious monarch dies,
Soft whispers, first, and mournful murmurs rise
Among the sad attendants; then the sound
Soon gathers voice, and spreads the news around,
Through town and country, till the dreadful blast
Is blown to distant colonies at last;
Who then, perhaps, were offering vows in vain,
For his long life, and for his happy reign:
So slowly, by degrees, unwilling fame
Did matchless Eleonora's fate proclaim, 10
Till public as the loss the news became.

The nation felt it in the extremest parts,
With eyes o'erflowing, and with bleeding hearts;
But most the poor, whom daily she supplied,
Beginning to be such, but when she died.
For, while she lived, they slept in peace by night,
Secure of bread, as of returning light;
And with such firm dependence on the day,
That need grew pamper'd, and forgot to pray:
So sure the doll, so ready at their call, 20
They stood prepared to see the manna fall.

Such multitudes she fed, she clothed, she nursed,
That she herself might fear her wanting first.
Of her five talents, other five she made;
Heaven, that had largely given, was largely paid:

And in few lives, in wondrous few, we find
A fortune better fitted to the mind.
Nor did her alms from ostentation fall,
Or proud desire of praise; the soul gave all:
Unbribed it gave; or, if a bribe appear, 30
No less than heaven--to heap huge treasures there.

Want pass'd for merit at her open door;
Heaven saw, He safely might increase His poor,
And trust their sustenance with her so well,
As not to be at charge of miracle.
None could be needy, whom she saw, or knew;
All in the compass of her sphere she drew:
He, who could touch her garment, was as sure,
As the first Christians of the apostles' cure.
The distant heard, by fame, her pious deeds, 40
And laid her up for their extremest needs;
A future cordial for a fainting mind;
For, what was ne'er refused, all hoped to find,
Each in his turn; the rich might freely come,
As to a friend; but to the poor 'twas home.
As to some holy house the afflicted came,
The hunger-starved, the naked and the lame;
Want and diseases fled before her name.
For zeal like her's her servants were too slow;
She was the first, where need required, to go; 50
Herself the foundress and attendant too.

Sure she had guests sometimes to entertain,
Guests in disguise, of her great Master's train:
Her Lord himself might come, for aught we know;
Since in a servant's form He lived below:
Beneath her roof He might be pleased to stay;
Or some benighted angel, in his way,
Might ease his wings, and, seeing heaven appear
In its best work of mercy, think it there:
Where all the deeds of charity and love 60
Were, in as constant method as above,
All carried on; all of a piece with theirs;
As free her alms, as diligent her cares;
As loud her praises, and as warm her prayers.

Yet was she not profuse; but feared to waste,
And wisely managed, that the stock might last;
That all might be supplied, and she not grieve,
When crowds appear'd, she had not to relieve:
Which to prevent, she still increased her store;
Laid up, and spared, that she might give the more. 70
So Pharaoh, or some greater king than he,
Provided for the seventh necessity:
Taught from above his magazines to frame,
That famine was prevented ere it came.
Thus Heaven, though all-sufficient, shows a thrift
In His economy, and bounds His gift:

Creating, for our day, one single light;
And his reflection, too, supplies the night.
Perhaps a thousand other worlds, that lie
Remote from us, and latent in the sky, 80
Are lighten'd by his beams, and kindly nursed;
Of which our earthly dunghill is the worst.

Now, as all virtues keep the middle line,
Yet somewhat more to one extreme incline,
Such was her soul; abhorring avarice,
Bounteous, but almost bounteous to a vice:
Had she given more, it had profusion been,
And turn'd the excess of goodness into sin.

These virtues raised her fabric to the sky;
For that, which is next heaven, is Charity. 90
But, as high turrets, for their airy steep,
Require foundations in proportion deep;
And lofty cedars as far upward shoot,
As to the nether heavens they drive the root:
So low did her secure foundation lie,
She was not humble, but Humility.
Scarcely she knew that she was great, or fair,
Or wise, beyond what other women are;
Or, which is better, knew, but never durst compare:
For to be conscious of what all admire, 100
And not be vain, advances virtue higher.

But still she found, or rather thought she found,
Her own worth wanting, others' to abound;
Ascribed above their due to every one--
Unjust and scanty to herself alone.

Such her devotion was, as might give rules
Of speculation to disputing schools,
And teach us equally the scales to hold
Betwixt the two extremes of hot and cold;
That pious heat may moderately prevail, 110
And we be warm'd, but not be scorch'd with zeal:
Business might shorten, not disturb, her prayer;
Heaven had the best, if not the greater share.
An active life long orisons forbids;
Yet still she pray'd, for still she pray'd by deeds.

Her every day was Sabbath; only free
From hours of prayer, for hours of charity:
Such as the Jews from servile toil released;
Where works of mercy were a part of rest;
Such as blest angels exercise above, 120
Varied with sacred hymns and acts of love:
Such Sabbaths as that one she now enjoys,
Even that perpetual one, which she employs
(For such vicissitudes in heaven there are)
In praise alternate, and alternate prayer.
All this she practised here; that when she sprung

Amidst the choirs, at the first sight she sung:
Sung, and was sung herself in angels' lays;
For, praising her, they did her Maker praise.
All offices of heaven so well she knew, 130
Before she came, that nothing there was new:
And she was so familiarly received,
As one returning, not as one arrived.

Muse, down again precipitate thy flight!
For how can mortal eyes sustain immortal light?
But as the sun in water we can bear--
Yet not the sun, but his reflection there,
So let us view her, here, in what she was,
And take her image in this watery glass:
Yet look not every lineament to see; 140
Some will be cast in shades, and some will be
So lamely drawn, you'll scarcely know 'tis she.
For where such various virtues we recite,
'Tis like the milky-way, all over bright,
But sown so thick with stars, 'tis undistinguish'd light.

Her virtue, not her virtues, let us call;
For one heroic comprehends them all:
One, as a constellation is but one,
Though 'tis a train of stars, that, rolling on,
Rise in their turn, and in the zodiac run: 150
Ever in motion; now 'tis faith ascends,

Now hope, now charity, that upward tends,
And downwards with diffusive good descends.

As in perfumes composed with art and cost,
'Tis hard to say what scent is uppermost;
Nor this part musk or civet can we call,
Or amber, but a rich result of all;
So she was all a sweet, whose every part,
In due proportion mix'd, proclaim'd the Maker's art.
No single virtue we could most commend, 160
Whether the wife, the mother, or the friend;
For she was all, in that supreme degree,
That as no one prevail'd, so all was she.
The several parts lay hidden in the piece;
The occasion but exerted that, or this.

A wife as tender, and as true withal,
As the first woman was before her fall:
Made for the man, of whom she was a part;
Made to attract his eyes, and keep his heart.
A second Eve, but by no crime accursed; 170
As beauteous, not as brittle, as the first:
Had she been first, still Paradise had been,
And Death had found no entrance by her sin:
So she not only had preserved from ill
Her sex and ours, but lived their pattern still.

Love and obedience to her lord she bore;
She much obey'd him, but she loved him more:
Not awed to duty by superior sway,
But taught by his indulgence to obey.
Thus we love God, as author of our good; 180
So subjects love just kings, or so they should.
Nor was it with ingratitude return'd;
In equal fires the blissful couple burn'd;
One joy possess'd them both, and in one grief they mourn'd.
His passion still improved; he loved so fast
As if he fear'd each day would be her last.
Too true a prophet to foresee the fate
That should so soon divide their happy state;
When he to heaven entirely must restore
That love, that heart, where he went halves before. 190
Yet as the soul is all in every part,
So God and he might each have all her heart.

So had her children too; for charity
Was not more fruitful, or more kind than she:
Each under other by degrees they grew;
A goodly perspective of distant view.
Anchises look'd not with so pleased a face,
In numbering o'er his future Roman race,
And marshalling the heroes of his name,
As, in their order, next to light they came. 200

Nor Cybele, with half so kind an eye,
Survey'd her sons and daughters of the sky;
Proud, shall I say, of her immortal fruit?
As far as pride with heavenly minds may suit.
Her pious love excell'd to all she bore;
New objects only multiplied it more.
And as the chosen found the pearly grain
As much as every vessel could contain;
As in the blissful vision each shall share
As much of glory as his soul can bear; 210
So did she love, and so dispense her care.
Her eldest thus, by consequence, was best,
As longer cultivated than the rest.
The babe had all that infant care beguiles,
And early knew his mother in her smiles:
But when dilated organs let in day
To the young soul, and gave it room to play,
At his first aptness, the maternal love
Those rudiments of reason did improve:
The tender age was pliant to command; 220
Like wax it yielded to the forming hand:
True to the artificer, the labour'd mind
With ease was pious, generous, just, and kind;
Soft for impression, from the first prepared,
Till virtue with long exercise grew hard:
With every act confirm'd, and made at last
So durable as not to be effaced,
It turn'd to habit; and, from vices free,

Goodness resolved into necessity.

Thus fix'd she virtue's image, that's her own, 230

Till the whole mother in the children shone;

For that was their perfection: she was such,

They never could express her mind too much.

So unexhausted her perfections were,

That, for more children, she had more to spare;

For souls unborn, whom her untimely death

Deprived of bodies, and of mortal breath;

And (could they take the impressions of her mind)

Enough still left to sanctify her kind.

Then wonder not to see this soul extend 240

The bounds, and seek some other self, a friend:

As swelling seas to gentle rivers glide,

To seek repose, and empty out the tide;

So this full soul, in narrow limits pent,

Unable to contain her, sought a vent

To issue out, and in some friendly breast

Discharge her treasures, and securely rest:

To unbosom all the secrets of her heart,

Take good advice, but better to impart:

For 'tis the bliss of friendship's holy state, 250

To mix their minds, and to communicate;

Though bodies cannot, souls can penetrate.

Fix'd to her choice, inviolably true,

And wisely choosing, for she chose but few.
Some she must have; but in no one could find
A tally fitted for so large a mind.

The souls of friends, like kings in progress, are
Still in their own, though from the palace far:
Thus her friend's heart her country dwelling was
A sweet retirement to a coarser place; 260
Where pomp and ceremonies enter'd not,
Where greatness was shut out, and business well forgot.

This is the imperfect draught; but short as far
As the true height and bigness of a star
Exceeds the measures of the astronomer.
She shines above, we know; but in what place,
How near the throne, and Heaven's imperial face,
By our weak optics is but vainly guess'd;
Distance and altitude conceal the rest.

Though all these rare endowments of the mind 270
Were in a narrow space of life confined,
The figure was with full perfection crown'd;
Though not so large an orb, as truly round.

As when in glory, through the public place,
The spoils of conquer'd nations were to pass,

And but one day for triumph was allow'd,
The consul was constrain'd his pomp to crowd;
And so the swift procession hurried on,
That all, though not distinctly, might be shown:
So in the straiten'd bounds of life confined, 280
She gave but glimpses of her glorious mind:
And multitudes of virtues pass'd along;
Each pressing foremost in the mighty throng,
Ambitious to be seen, and then make room
For greater multitudes that were to come.

Yet unemploy'd no minute slipp'd away;
Moments were precious in so short a stay.
The haste of heaven to have her was so great,
That some were single acts, though each complete;
But every act stood ready to repeat. 290

Her fellow-saints with busy care will look
For her bless'd name in Fate's eternal book;
And, pleas'd to be outdone, with joy will see
Numberless virtues, endless charity:
But more will wonder at so short an age,
To find a blank beyond the thirtieth page;
And with a pious fear begin to doubt
The piece imperfect, and the rest torn out.
But 'twas her Saviour's time; and, could there be
A copy near the Original, 'twas she. 300

As precious gums are not for lasting fire,
They but perfume the temple, and expire:
So was she soon exhaled, and vanish'd hence;
A short sweet odour, of a vast expense.
She vanish'd, we can scarcely say she died;
For but a now did heaven and earth divide:
She pass'd serenely with a single breath;
This moment perfect health, the next was death:
One sigh did her eternal bliss assure;
So little penance needs, when souls are almost pure. 310
As gentle dreams our waking thoughts pursue;
Or, one dream pass'd, we slide into a new;
So close they follow, such wild order keep,
We think ourselves awake, and are asleep:
So softly death succeeded life in her,
She did but dream of heaven, and she was there.

No pains she suffer'd, nor expired with noise;
Her soul was whisper'd out with God's still voice;
As an old friend is beckon'd to a feast,
And treated like a long-familiar guest. 320
He took her as He found, but found her so,
As one in hourly readiness to go:
Even on that day, in all her trim prepared;
As early notice she from heaven had heard,
And some descending courier from above

Had given her timely warning to remove;
Or counsell'd her to dress the nuptial room,
For on that night the Bridegroom was to come.
He kept His hour, and found her where she lay
Clothed all in white, the livery of the day. 330
Scarce had she sinn'd in thought, or word, or act;
Unless omissions were to pass for fact:
That hardly death a consequence could draw,
To make her liable to nature's law:
And, that she died, we only have to show
The mortal part of her she left below:
The rest, so smooth, so suddenly she went,
Look'd like translation through the firmament;
Or, like the fiery car, on the third errand[37] sent.

O happy soul! if thou canst view from high, 340
Where thou art all intelligence, all eye;
If, looking up to God, or down to us,
Thou find'st that any way be pervious,
Survey the ruins of thy house, and see
Thy widow'd, and thy orphan family:
Look on thy tender pledges left behind;
And, if thou canst a vacant minute find
From heavenly joys, that interval afford
To thy sad children, and thy mourning lord.
See how they grieve, mistaken in their love, 350
And shed a beam of comfort from above;

Give them, as much as mortal eyes can bear,
A transient view of thy full glories there;
That they with moderate sorrow may sustain
And mollify their losses in thy gain:
Or else divide the grief; for such thou wert,
That should not all relations bear a part,
It were enough to break a single heart.

Let this suffice: nor thou, great saint, refuse
This humble tribute of no vulgar Muse: 360
Who, not by cares, or wants, or age depress'd,
Stems a wild deluge with a dauntless breast;
And dares to sing thy praises in a clime
Where vice triumphs, and virtue is a crime;
Where even to draw the picture of thy mind,
Is satire on the most of human kind:
Take it, while yet 'tis praise; before my rage,
Unsafely just, break loose on this bad age;
So bad, that thou thyself hadst no defence
From vice, but barely by departing hence. 370

Be what, and where thou art: to wish thy place,
Were, in the best, presumption more than grace.
Thy relics (such thy works of mercy are)
Have, in this poem, been my holy care.
As earth thy body keeps, thy soul the sky,
So shall this verse preserve thy memory;

For thou shalt make it live, because it sings of thee.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 37: 'Third errand:' Enoch and Elias were the first two.]

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V.

ON THE DEATH OF AMYNTAS.

A PASTORAL ELEGY.

'Twas on a joyless and a gloomy morn,
Wet was the grass, and hung with pearls the thorn;
When Damon, who design'd to pass the day
With hounds and horns, and chase the flying prey,
Rose early from his bed; but soon he found
The welkin pitch'd with sullen clouds around,
An eastern wind, and dew upon the ground.
Thus while he stood, and, sighing, did survey

The fields, and cursed the ill omens of the day,
He saw Menalcas come with heavy pace; 10
Wet were his eyes, and cheerless was his face:
He wrung his hands, distracted with his care,
And sent his voice before him from afar.
Return, he cried, return, unhappy swain!
The spongy clouds are fill'd with gathering rain:
The promise of the day not only cross'd,
But even the spring, the spring itself is lost.
Amyntas--oh!--he could not speak the rest,
Nor needed, for presaging Damon guess'd.
Equal with heaven young Damon loved the boy, 20
The boast of nature, both his parents' joy,
His graceful form revolving in his mind;
So great a genius, and a soul so kind,
Gave sad assurance that his fears were true;
Too well the envy of the gods he knew:
For when their gifts too lavishly are placed,
Soon they repent, and will not make them last.
For sure it was too bountiful a dole,
The mother's features, and the father's soul.
Then thus he cried; the morn bespoke the news: 30
The morning did her cheerful light diffuse:
But see how suddenly she changed her face,
And brought on clouds and rain, the day's disgrace!
Just such, Amyntas, was thy promised race:
What charms adorn'd thy youth, where nature smiled,
And more than man was given us in a child!

His infancy was ripe: a soul sublime
In years so tender that prevented time:
Heaven gave him all at once; then snatch'd away,
Ere mortals all his beauties could survey: 40
Just like the flower that buds and withers in a day.

MENALCAS.

The mother, lovely, though with grief oppress'd,
Reclined his dying head upon her breast.
The mournful family stood all around;
One groan was heard, one universal sound:
All were in floods of tears and endless sorrow drown'd.
So dire a sadness sat on every look,
Even Death repented he had given the stroke.
He grieved his fatal work had been ordain'd
But promised length of life to those who yet remain'd. 50
The mother's and her eldest daughter's grace,
It seems, had bribed him to prolong their space.
The father bore it with undaunted soul,
Like one who durst his destiny control:
Yet with becoming grief he bore his part,
Resign'd his son, but not resign'd his heart:
Patient as Job; and may he live to see,
Like him, a new increasing family!

DAMON.

Such is my wish, and such my prophecy.

For yet, my friend, the beauteous mould remains; 60

Long may she exercise her fruitful pains!

But, ah! with better hap, and bring a race

More lasting, and endued with equal grace!

Equal she may, but further none can go:

For he was all that was exact below.

MENALCAS.

Damon! behold yon breaking purple cloud;

Hear'st thou not hymns and songs divinely loud?

There mounts Amyntas; the young cherubs play

About their godlike mate, and sing him on his way!

He cleaves the liquid air, behold he flies, 70

And every moment gains upon the skies!

The new-come guest admires the ethereal state,

The sapphire portal, and the golden gate;

And now admitted in the shining throng,

He shows the passport which he brought along:

His passport is his innocence and grace,

Well known to all the natives of the place.

Now sing, ye joyful angels, and admire

Your brother's voice that conies to mend your quire

Sing you,--while endless tears our eyes bestow: 80

For like Amyntas none is left below.

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VI.

ON THE DEATH OF A VERY YOUNG GENTLEMAN.

He who could view the book of destiny,
And read whatever there was writ of thee,
O charming youth, in the first opening page,
So many graces in so green an age,
Such wit, such modesty, such strength of mind,
A soul at once so manly and so kind;
Would wonder, when he turn'd the volume o'er,
And after some few leaves should find no more,
Nought but a blank remain, a dead void space,
A step of life that promised such a race. 10
We must not, dare not think, that Heaven began
A child, and could not finish him a man;
Reflecting what a mighty store was laid
Of rich materials, and a model made:
The cost already furnish'd; so bestow'd,
As more was never to one soul allow'd:
Yet after this profusion spent in vain,

Nothing but mouldering ashes to remain,
I guess not, lest I split upon the shelf,
Yet durst I guess, Heaven kept it for himself; 20
And giving us the use, did soon recall,
Ere we could spare, the mighty principal.

Thus then he disappeared, was rarified;
For 'tis improper speech to say he died:
He was exhaled; his great Creator drew
His spirit, as the sun the morning dew.
'Tis sin produces death; and he had none,
But the taint Adam left on every son.
He added not, he was so pure, so good,
'Twas but the original forfeit of his blood: 30
And that so little, that the river ran
More clear than the corrupted fount began.
Nothing remain'd of the first muddy clay;
The length of course had wash'd it in the way:
So deep, and yet so clear, we might behold
The gravel bottom, and that bottom gold.

As such we loved, admired, almost adored,
Gave all the tribute mortals could afford.
Perhaps we gave so much, the powers above
Grew angry at our superstitious love: 40
For when we more than human homage pay,
The charming cause is justly snatch'd away.

Thus was the crime not his, but ours alone:
And yet we murmur that he went so soon;
Though miracles are short and rarely shown.

Learn, then, ye mournful parents, and divide
That love in many, which in one was tied.
That individual blessing is no more,
But multiplied in your remaining store.
The flame's dispersed, but does not all expire; 50
The sparkles blaze, though not the globe of fire.
Love him by parts, in all your numerous race,
And from those parts form one collected grace:
Then, when you have refined to that degree,
Imagine all in one, and think that one is he.

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VII.

UPON YOUNG MR ROGERS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

Of gentle blood, his parents' only treasure,
Their lasting sorrow, and their vanish'd pleasure,
Adorn'd with features, virtues, wit, and grace,

A large provision for so short a race;
More moderate gifts might have prolong'd his date,
Too early fitted for a better state;
But, knowing heaven his home, to shun delay,
He leap'd o'er age, and took the shortest way.

* * * * *

VIII.

ON THE DEATH OF MR PURCELL.

SET TO MUSIC BY DR BLOW.

1 Mark how the lark and linnet sing;
With rival notes
They strain their warbling throats,
To welcome in the spring.
But in the close of night,
When Philomel begins her heavenly lay,
They cease their mutual spite,
Drink in her music with delight,
And, listening, silently obey.

2 So ceased the rival crew, when Purcell came;

They sung no more, or only sung his fame:
Struck dumb, they all admired the godlike man:
The godlike man,
Alas! too soon retired,
As he too late began.
We beg not hell our Orpheus to restore:
Had he been there,
Their sovereign's fear
Had sent him back before.
The power of harmony too well they knew:
He long ere this had tuned their jarring sphere,
And left no hell below.

3 The heavenly choir, who heard his notes from high,
Let down the scale of music from the sky:
They handed him along,
And all the way he taught, and all the way they sung
Ye brethren of the lyre, and tuneful voice,
Lament his lot; but at your own rejoice:
Now live secure, and linger out your days;
The gods are pleased alone with Purcell's lays,
Nor know to mend their choice.

* * * * *

IX.

EPITAPH ON THE LADY WHITMORE.

Fair, kind, and true, a treasure each alone,
A wife, a mistress, and a friend in one,
Rest in this tomb, raised at thy husband's cost,
Here sadly summing what he had, and lost.
Come, virgins, ere in equal bands ye join,
Come first, and offer at her sacred shrine;
Pray but for half the virtues of this wife,
Compound for all the rest, with longer life;
And wish your vows, like hers, may be return'd,
So loved when living, and when dead so mourn'd.

* * * * *

X.

EPITAPH ON SIR PALMES FAIRBONE'S TOMB IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

SACRED TO THE IMMORTAL MEMORY OF SIR PALMES FAIRBONE, KNIGHT, GOVERNOR
OF TANGIER; IN EXECUTION OF WHICH COMMAND, HE WAS MORTALLY WOUNDED BY A
SHOT FROM THE MOORS, THEN BESIEGING THE TOWN, IN THE FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF
HIS AGE. OCTOBER 24, 1680.

Ye sacred relics, which your marble keep,
Here, undisturb'd by wars, in quiet sleep:
Discharge the trust, which, when it was below,
Pairbone's undaunted soul did undergo,
And be the town's Palladium from the foe.
Alive and dead these walls he will defend:
Great actions great examples must attend.
The Candian siege his early valour knew,
Where Turkish blood did his young hands imbrue.
From thence returning with deserved applause, 10
Against the Moors his well-flesh'd sword he draws;
The same the courage, and the same the cause.
His youth and age, his life and death, combine,
As in some great and regular design,
All of a piece throughout, and all divine.
Still nearer heaven his virtues shone more bright,
Like rising flames expanding in their height;
The martyr's glory crown'd the soldier's fight.
More bravely British general never fell,
Nor general's death was e'er revenged so well; 20
Which his pleased eyes beheld before their close,
Follow'd by thousand victims of his foes.
To his lamented loss for time to come
His pious widow consecrates this tomb.

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XI.

UNDER MR MILTON'S PICTURE, BEFORE HIS
PARADISE LOST.[38]

Three Poets, in three distant ages born,
Greece, Italy, and England, did adorn.
The first, in loftiness of thought surpass'd;
The next, in majesty; in both the last.
The force of nature could no further go;
To make a third, she join'd the former two.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 38: In Tonson's folio edition.]

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XII

ON THE MONUMENT OF A FAIR MAIDEN LADY[39], WHO DIED AT BATH, AND IS
THERE INTERRED.

Below this marble monument is laid
All that heaven wants of this celestial maid.
Preserve, O sacred tomb! thy trust consign'd;
The mould was made on purpose for the mind:
And she would lose, if, at the latter day,
One atom could be mix'd of other clay.
Such were the features of her heavenly face,
Her limbs were form'd with such harmonious grace:
So faultless was the frame, as if the whole
Had been an emanation of the soul: 10
Which her own inward symmetry reveal'd
And like a picture shone, in glass anneal'd.
Or like the sun eclipsed, with shaded light:
Too piercing, else, to be sustain'd by sight.
Each thought was visible that roll'd within:
As through a crystal case the figured hours are seen.
And Heaven did this transparent veil provide,
Because she had no guilty thought to hide.
All white, a virgin-saint, she sought the skies:
For marriage, though it sullies not, it dyes. 20
High though her wit, yet humble was her mind:
As if she could not, or she would not find
How much her worth transcended all her kind.
Yet she had learn'd so much of heaven below,

That, when arrived, she scarce had more to know:

But only to refresh the former hint,

And read her Maker in a fairer print.

So pious, as she had no time to spare

For human thoughts, but was confined to prayer.

Yet in such charities she pass'd the day, 30

'Twas wondrous how she found an hour to pray.

A soul so calm, it knew not ebbs or flows,

Which passion could but curl, not discompose.

A female softness, with a manly mind:

A daughter duteous, and a sister kind:

In sickness patient, and in death resign'd.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 39: This Lady is interred in the Abbey-church. Her name was
Mary Frampton. She died in 1698.]

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XIII.

EPITAPH ON MRS MARGARET PASTON, OF BURNINGHAM IN NORFOLK.

So fair, so young, so innocent, so sweet,
So ripe a judgment, and so rare a wit,
Require at least an age in one to meet.
In her they met; but long they could not stay,
'Twas gold too fine to mix without allay.
Heaven's image was in her so well express'd,
Her very sight upbraided all the rest;
Too justly ravish'd from an age like this,
Now she is gone, the world is of a piece.

* * * * *

XIV.

ON THE MONUMENT OF THE MARQUIS OF WINCHESTER.[40]

He who in impious times undaunted stood,
And 'midst rebellion durst be just and good;
Whose arms asserted, and whose sufferings more
Confirm'd the cause for which he sought before,
Rests here, rewarded by an heavenly prince,
For what his earthly could not recompense.
Pray, reader, that such times no more appear:
Or, if they happen, learn true honour here.

Ask of this age's faith and loyalty,
Which, to preserve them, Heaven confined in thee.
Few subjects could a king like thine deserve;
And fewer such a king so well could serve.
Blest king, blest subject, whose exalted state
By sufferings rose, and gave the law to fate!
Such souls are rare, but mighty patterns given
To earth, and meant for ornaments to heaven.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 40: Winchester, a staunch royalist, besieged two years in his castle of Basing, died in 1674.]

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SONGS, ODES, AND A MASQUE

I.

THE FAIR STRANGER.[41]

A SONG.

1 Happy and free, securely blest,
No beauty could disturb my rest;
My amorous heart was in despair,
To find a new victorious fair.

2 Till you descending on our plains,
With foreign force renew my chains:
Where now you rule without control
The mighty sovereign of my soul.

3 Your smiles have more of conquering charms,
Than all your native country arms;
Their troops we can expel with ease,
Who vanquish only when we please.

4 But in your eyes, oh! there's the spell,
Who can see them, and not rebel?
You make us captives by your stay,
Yet kill us if you go away.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 41: This song is a compliment to the Duchess of Portsmouth, Charles's mistress, on her first coming to England.]

* * * * *

II

ON THE YOUNG STATESMEN.

WRITTEN IN 1680.

1 CLARENDON had law and sense,
Clifford was fierce and brave;
Bennet's grave look was a pretence,
And Danby's matchless impudence
Help'd to support the knave.

2 But Sunderland, Godolphin, Lory[42],
These will appear such chits in story,
'Twill turn all politics to jests,
To be repeated like John Dory,
When fiddlers sing at feasts.

3 Protect us, mighty Providence!

What would these madmen have?

First, they would bribe us without pence,

Deceive us without common sense,

And without power enslave.

4 Shall free-torn men, in humble awe,

Submit to servile shame;

Who from consent and custom draw

The same right to be ruled by law,

Which kings pretend to reign?

5 The duke shall wield his conquering sword,

The chancellor make a speech,

The king shall pass his honest word,

The pawn'd revenue sums afford,

And then, come kiss my breech.

6 So have I seen a king on chess

(His rooks and knights withdrawn,

His queen and bishops in distress)

Shifting about, grow less and less,

With here and there a pawn.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 42: 'Laurence Hyde,' afterwards Earl of Rochester, is the person here called Lory.]

* * * * *

III.

A SONG FOR ST CECILIA'S DAY,[43]1687.

1 FROM harmony, from heavenly harmony

This universal frame began:

When nature underneath a heap

Of jarring atoms lay,

And could not heave her head,

The tuneful voice was heard from high,

Arise, ye more than dead.

Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,

In order to their stations leap,

And Music's power obey.

From harmony, from heavenly harmony

This universal frame began:

From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it rail,
The diapason closing full in Man.

2 What passion cannot Music raise and quell?

When Jubal struck the chorded shell,
His listening brethren stood around,
And, wondering, on their faces fell
To worship that celestial sound.
Less than a God they thought there could not dwell
Within the hollow of that shell,
That spoke so sweetly and so well.
What passion cannot Music raise and quell?

3 The trumpet's loud clangour

Excites us to arms,
With shrill notes of anger,
And mortal alarms.
The double double double beat
Of the thundering drum
Cries, hark! the foes come;
Charge, charge!'tis too late to retreat.

4 The soft complaining flute

In dying notes discovers
The woes of hopeless lovers,

Whose dirge is whisper'd by the warbling lute.

5 Sharp violins proclaim

Their jealous pangs, and desperation,

Fury, frantic indignation,

Depth of pains, and height of passion,

For the fair, disdainful dame.

6 But oh! what art can teach,

What human voice can reach,

The sacred organ's praise?

Notes inspiring holy love,

Notes that wing their heavenly ways

To mend the choirs above.

7 Orpheus could lead the savage race;

And trees uprooted left their place,

Sequacious of the lyre:

But bright Cecilia raised the wonder higher:

When to her organ vocal breath was given,

An angel heard, and straight appear'd,

Mistaking earth for heaven.

GRAND CHORUS.

As from the power of sacred lays
The spheres began to move,
And sung the great Creator's praise
To all the bless'd above;
So when the last and dreadful hour
This crumbling pageant shall devour,
The trumpet shall be heard on high,
The dead shall live, the living die,
And Music shall untune the sky.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 43: 'St Cecilia's Day': 22d November-birthday of St Cecilia,
the patron saint of music-a Roman lady martyred in the third century,
said to have been taught music by an angel.]

* * * * *

IV.

THE TEARS OF AMYNTA, FOR THE DEATH OF DAMON.

A SONG.

1 On a bank, beside a willow,
Heaven her covering, earth her pillow,
Sad Amynta sigh'd alone:
From the cheerless dawn of morning
Till the dews of night returning,
Singing thus she made her moan:
Hope is banish'd,
Joys are vanish'd,
Damon, my beloved, is gone!

2 Time, I dare thee to discover
Such a youth and such a lover;
Oh, so true, so kind was he!
Damon was the pride of nature,
Charming in his every feature;
Damon lived alone for me;
Melting kisses,
Murmuring blisses:
Who so lived and loved as we?

3 Never shall we curse the morning.
Never bless the night returning,
Sweet embraces to restore:
Never shall we both lie dying,

Nature failing, Love supplying

All the joys he drain'd before:

Death come end me,

To befriend me:

Love and Damon are no more.

* * * * *

V.

THE LADY'S SONG.[44]

1 A Choir of bright beauties in spring did appear,
To choose a May-lady to govern the year;
All the nymphs were in white, and the shepherds in green;
The garland was given, and Phyllis was queen:
But Phyllis refused it, and sighing did say,
I'll not wear a garland while Pan is away.

2 While Pan and fair Syrinx are fled from our shore,
The Graces are banish'd, and Love is no more:
The soft god of pleasure, that warm'd our desires,
Has broken his bow, and extinguish'd his fires;
And vows that himself and his mother will mourn,

Till Pan and fair Syrinx in triumph return.

3 Forbear your addresses, and court us no more;

For we will perform what the Deity swore:

But if you dare think of deserving our charms,

Away with your sheepphooks, and take to your arms;

Then laurels and myrtles your brows shall adorn,

When Pan, and his son, and fair Syrinx return.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 44: Intended to apply to the banishment of King James and his wife, Mary of Este.]

* * * * *

VI.

A SONG.

1 Fair, sweet, and young, receive a prize

Reserved for your victorious eyes:

From crowds, whom at your feet you see,

O pity, and distinguish me!

As I from thousand beauties more

Distinguish you, and only you adore.

2 Your face for conquest was design'd,

Your every motion charms my mind;

Angels, when you your silence break,

Forget their hymns, to hear you speak;

But when at once they hear and view,

Are loth to mount, and long to stay with you.

3 No graces can your form improve,

But all are lost, unless you love;

While that sweet passion you disdain,

Your veil and beauty are in vain:

In pity then prevent my fate,

For after dying all reprieve's too late.

* * * * *

VII.

A SONG.

High state and honours to others impart,

But give me your heart:

That treasure, that treasure alone,

I beg for my own.

So gentle a love, so fervent a fire,

My soul does inspire;

That treasure, that treasure alone,

I beg for my own.

Your love let me crave;

Give me in possessing

So matchless a blessing;

That empire is all I would have.

Love's my petition,

All my ambition;

If e'er you discover

So faithful a lover,

So real a flame,

I'll die, I'll die,

So give up my game.

* * * * *

VIII.

RONDELAY.

1 Chloe found Amyntas lying,
All in tears upon the plain;
Sighing to himself, and crying,
Wretched I, to love in vain!
Kiss me, dear, before my dying;
Kiss me once, and ease my pain!

2 Sighing to himself, and crying,
Wretched I, to love in vain!
Ever scorning and denying
To reward your faithful swain:
Kiss me, dear, before my dying;
Kiss me once, and ease my pain:

3 Ever scorning, and denying
To reward your faithful swain:
Chloe, laughing at his crying,
Told him, that he loved in vain:
Kiss me, dear, before my dying;
Kiss me once, and ease my pain!

4 Chloe, laughing at his crying,
Told him, that he loved in vain:
But repenting, and complying,
When he kiss'd, she kiss'd again:

Kiss'd him up before his dying;
Kiss'd him up, and eased his pain.

* * * * *

IX.

A SONG.

1 Go tell Amynta, gentle swain,
I would not die, nor dare complain:
Thy tuneful voice with numbers join,
Thy words will more prevail than mine.
To souls oppress'd and dumb with grief,
The gods ordain this kind relief;
That music should in sounds convey,
What dying lovers dare not say.

2 A sigh or tear perhaps she'll give,
But love on pity cannot live.
Tell her that hearts for hearts were made,
And love with love is only paid.
Tell her my pains so fast increase,
That soon they will be past redress;
But ah! the wretch that speechless lies,

Attends but death to close his eyes.

* * * * *

X.

A SONG TO A FAIR YOUNG LADY, GOING OUT OF TOWN IN THE SPRING.

1 Ask not the cause, why sullen Spring

So long delays her flowers to bear;

Why warbling birds forget to sing,

And winter storms invert the year:

Chloris is gone, and fate provides

To make it Spring, where she resides.

2 Chloris is gone, the cruel fair;

She cast not back a pitying eye;

But left her lover in despair,

To sigh, to languish, and to die:

Ah, how can those fair eyes endure

To give the wounds they will not cure?

3 Great God of love, why hast thou made

A face that can all hearts command,

That all religions can evade,

And change the laws of every land?
Where thou hadst placed such power before,
Thou shouldst have made her mercy more.

4 When Chloris to the temple comes,
Adoring crowds before her fall;
She can restore the dead from tombs,
And every life but mine recall.
I only am by Love design'd
To be the victim for mankind.

* * * * *

XI.

SONGS IN THE "INDIAN EMPEROR."

I.

Ah, fading joy! how quickly art thou past!
Yet we thy ruin haste.
As if the cares of human life were few,
We seek out new:
And follow Fate, which would too fast pursue.
See how on every bough the birds express,

In their sweet notes, their happiness.
They all enjoy, and nothing spare;
But on their mother Nature lay their care:
Why then should man, the lord of all below,
Such troubles choose to know,
As none of all his subjects undergo?
Hark, hark, the waters fall, fall, fall,
And with a murmuring sound
Dash, dash upon the ground,
To gentle slumbers call.

II.

I look'd, and saw within the book of fate,
When many days did lour,
When lo! one happy hour
Leap'd up, and smiled to save the sinking state;
A day shall come when in thy power
Thy cruel foes shall be;
Then shall thy land be free:
And then in peace shall reign;
But take, O take that opportunity,
Which, once refused, will never come again.

* * * * *

XII.

SONG IN THE "MAIDEN QUEEN."

I feed a flame within, which so torments me,
That it both pains my heart, and yet contents me:
'Tis such a pleasing smart, and I so love it,
That I had rather die than once remove it.

Yet he for whom I grieve shall never know it:
My tongue does not betray, nor my eyes show it.
Not a sigh, not a tear, my pain discloses,
But they fall silently, like dew on roses.

Thus, to prevent my love from being cruel,
My heart's the sacrifice, as 'tis the fuel:
And while I suffer this to give him quiet,
My faith rewards my love, though he deny it.

On his eyes will I gaze, and there delight me;
Where I conceal my love no frown can fright me:
To be more happy, I dare not aspire;
Nor can I fall more low, mounting no higher.

* * * * *

XIII.

SONGS IN "THE CONQUEST OF GRANADA."

I.

Wherever I am, and whatever I do,
My Phyllis is still in my mind;
When angry, I mean not to Phyllis to go,
My feet, of themselves, the way find:
Unknown to myself I am just at her door,
And when I would rail, I can bring out no more,
Than, Phyllis too fair and unkind!

When Phyllis I see, my heart bounds in my breast,
And the love I would stifle is shown;
But asleep or awake I am never at rest,
When from my eyes Phyllis is gone.
Sometimes a sad dream does delude my sad mind;
But, alas! when I wake, and no Phyllis I find,
How I sigh to myself all alone!

Should a king be my rival in her I adore,

He should offer his treasure in vain:

Oh, let me alone to be happy and poor,

And give me my Phyllis again!

Let Phyllis be mine, and but ever be kind,

I could to a desert with her be confined,

And envy no monarch his reign.

Alas! I discover too much of my love,

And she too well knows her own power!

She makes me each day a new martyrdom prove,

And makes me grow jealous each hour:

But let her each minute torment my poor mind,

I had rather love Phyllis, both false and unkind,

Than ever be freed from her power.

II.

HE. How unhappy a lover am I,

While I sigh for my Phyllis in vain:

All my hopes of delight

Are another man's right,

Who is happy, while I am in pain!

SHE. Since her honour allows no relief,

But to pity the pains which you bear,

'Tis the best of your fate,

In a hopeless estate,
To give o'er, and betimes to despair.

HE. I have tried the false medicine in vain;
For I wish what I hope not to win:
From without, my desire
Has no food to its fire;
But it burns and consumes me within.

SHE. Yet, at least, 'tis a pleasure to know
That you are not unhappy alone:
For the nymph you adore
Is as wretched, and more;
And counts all your sufferings her own.

HE. O ye gods, let me suffer for both;
At the feet of my Phyllis I'll lie:
I'll resign up my breath,
And take pleasure in death,
To be pitied by her when I die.

SHE. What her honour denied you in life,
In her death she will give to your love.
Such a flame as is true
After fate will renew,
For the souls to meet closer above.

* * * * *

XIV.

SONG OF THE SEA-FIGHT, IN AMBOYNA.

Who ever saw a noble sight,
That never view'd a brave sea-fight!
Hang up your bloody colours in the air,
Up with your fights, and your nettings prepare;
Your merry mates cheer, with a lusty bold spright.
Now each man his brindace, and then to the fight.
St George, St George, we cry,
The shouting Turks reply.
Oh, now it begins, and the gun-room grows hot,
Ply it with culverin and with small shot;

Hark, does it not thunder? no, 'tis the guns' roar,
The neighbouring billows are turn'd into gore;
Now each man must resolve to die,
For here the coward cannot fly.
Drums and trumpets toll the knell,
And culverins the passing bell.
Now, now they grapple, and now board amain;

Blow up the hatches, they're off all again:
Give them a broadside, the dice run at all,
Down comes the mast and yard, and tacklings fall;
She grows giddy now, like blind Fortune's wheel,
She sinks there, she sinks, she turns up her keel.
Who ever beheld so noble a sight,
As this so brave, so bloody sea-fight!

* * * * *

XV.

INCANTATION IN OEDIPUS.

TIR. Choose the darkest part o' th' grove,
Such as ghosts at noonday love.
Dig a trench, and dig it nigh
Where the bones of Laius lie;
Altars raised, of turf or stone,
Will th' infernal powers have none,
Answer me, if this be done?

ALL PR. 'Tis done.

TIR. Is the sacrifice made fit?

Draw her backward to the pit:

Draw the barren heifer back;

Barren let her be, and black.

Cut the curl'd hair that grows

Full betwixt her horns and brows:

And turn your faces from the sun,

Answer me, if this be done?

ALL PR. 'Tis done.

TIR. Pour in blood, and blood-like wine,

To Mother Earth and Proserpine:

Mingle milk into the stream;

Feast the ghosts that love the steam:

Snatch a brand from funeral pile:

Toss it in to make them boil;

And turn your faces from the sun,

Answer me, if this be done?

ALL PR. 'Tis done.

* * * * *

XVI.

SONGS IN ALBION AND ALBANIUS.

I.

Cease, Augusta! cease thy mourning,
Happy days appear,
Godlike Albion is returning,
Loyal hearts to cheer!
Every grace his youth adorning,
Glorious as the star of morning,
Or the planet of the year.

II.

Albion, by the nymph attended,
Was to Neptune recommended,
Peace and plenty spread the sails:
Venus, in her shell before him,
From the sands in safety bore him,
And supplied Etesian gales.
Archon on the shore commanding,
Lowly met him at his landing,
Crowds of people swarm'd around;
Welcome, rang like peals of thunder,

Welcome, rent the skies asunder,
Welcome, heaven and earth resound.

III.

Infernal offspring of the Night,
Debarr'd of heaven your native right,
And from the glorious fields of light,
Condemn'd in shades to drag the chain,
And fill with groans the gloomy plain;
Since pleasures here are none below,
Be ill our good, our joy be woe;
Our work t' embroil the worlds above,
Disturb their union, disunite their love,
And blast the beauteous frame of our victorious foe.

IV.

See the god of seas attends thee,
Nymphs divine, a beauteous train:
All the calmer gales befriend thee
In thy passage o'er the main:
Every maid her locks is binding,
Every Triton's horn is winding,
Welcome to the watery plain.

V.

Albion, loved of gods and men,
Prince of Peace too mildly reigning,
Cease thy sorrow and complaining,
Thou shalt be restored again:
Albion, loved of gods and men.

Still thou art the care of heaven,
In thy youth to exile driven:
Heaven thy ruin then prevented,
Till the guilty land repented:
In thy age, when none could aid thee,
Foes conspired, and friends betray'd thee.
To the brink of danger driven,
Still thou art the care of heaven.

* * * * *

XVII.

SONGS IN KING ARTHUR.

Where a battle is supposed to be given behind the scenes, with drums,

trumpets, and military shouts and excursions; after which, the Britons,
expressing their joy for the victory, sing this song of triumph.

I.

Come, if you dare, our trumpets sound;

Come, if you dare, the foes rebound:

We come, we come, we come, we come,

Says the double, double, double beat of the thundering drum.

Now they charge on amain,

Now they rally again:

The gods from above the mad labour behold,

And pity mankind, that will perish for gold.

The fainting Saxons quit their ground,

Their trumpets languish in the sound:

They fly, they fly, they fly, they fly;

Victoria, Victoria, the bold Britons cry.

Now the victory's won,

To the plunder we run:

We return to our lasses like fortunate traders,

Triumphant with spoils of the vanquish'd invaders.

II.

MAN SINGS.

O sight, the mother of desires,
What charming objects dost thou yield!
'Tis sweet, when tedious night expires,
To see the rosy morning gild
The mountain-tops, and paint the field!
But when Clarinda comes in sight,
She makes the summer's day more bright;
And when she goes away, 'tis night.

CHORUS.

When fair Clarinda comes in sight, &c.

WOMAN SINGS.

'Tis sweet the blushing morn to view;
And plains adorn'd with pearly dew:
But such cheap delights to see,
Heaven and nature
Give each creature;
They have eyes, as well as we;

This is the joy, all joys above,
To see, to see,

That only she,

That only she we love!

CHORUS.

This is the joy, all joys above, &c.

III.

Two daughters of this aged stream are we;

And both our sea-green locks have comb'd for thee;

Come bathe with us an hour or two,

Come naked in, for we are so:

What danger from a naked foe?

Come bathe with us, come bathe, and share

What pleasures in the floods appear;

We'll beat the waters till they bound,

And circle round, around, around,

And circle round, around.

IV.

Ye blustering brethren of the skies,

Whose breath has ruffled all the watery plain,

Retire, and let Britannia rise,

In triumph o'er the main.
Serene and calm, and void of fear,
The Queen of Islands must appear:
Serene and calm, as when the Spring
The new-created world began,
And birds on boughs did softly sing
Their peaceful homage paid to man;
While Eurus did his blasts forbear,
In favour of the tender year.
Retreat, rude winds, retreat
To hollow rocks, your stormy seat;
There swell your lungs, and vainly, vainly threat.

V.

Foe folded flocks, on fruitful plains,
The shepherd's and the farmer's gains,
Fair Britain all the world outvies;
And Pan, as in Arcadia, reigns,
Where pleasure mix'd with profit lies.

Though Jason's fleece was famed of old,
The British wool is growing gold;
No mines can more of wealth supply;
It keeps the peasant from the cold,
And takes for kings the Tyrian dye.

VI.

Fairest isle, all isles excelling,
Seat of pleasures and of loves;
Venus here will choose her dwelling,
And forsake her Cyprian groves.

Cupid from his favourite nation
Care and envy will remove;
Jealousy, that poisons passion,
And despair, that dies for love,

Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining,
Sighs, that blow the fire of love;
Soft repulses, kind disdainings,
Shall be all the pains you prove.

Every swain shall pay his duty,
Grateful every nymph shall prove;
And as these excel in beauty,
Those shall be renown'd for love.

* * * * *

XVIII.

SONG OF JEALOUSY, IN LOVE TRIUMPHANT.

What state of life can be so blest

As love, that warms a lover's breast?

Two souls in one, the same desire

To grant the bliss, and to require!

But if in heaven a hell we find,

'Tis all from thee,

O Jealousy!

'Tis all from thee,

O Jealousy!

Thou tyrant, tyrant Jealousy,

Thou tyrant of the mind!

All other ills, though sharp they prove,

Serve to refine, and perfect love:

In absence, or unkind disdain,

Sweet hope relieves the lover's pain.

But, ah! no cure but death we find,

To set us free

From Jealousy:

O Jealousy!

Thou tyrant, tyrant Jealousy,

Thou tyrant of the mind!

False in thy glass all objects are,
Some set too near, and some too far;
Thou art the fire of endless night,
The fire that burns, and gives no light.
All torments of the damn'd we find
In only thee,
O Jealousy!
Thou tyrant, tyrant Jealousy,
Thou tyrant of the mind!

* * * * *

XIX.

SONG. FAREWELL, FAIR ARMIDA.

Farewell, fair Armida, my joy and my grief,
In vain I have loved you, and hope no relief;
Undone by your virtue, too strict and severe,
Your eyes gave me love, and you gave me despair;
Now call'd by my honour, I seek with content
The fate which in pity you would not prevent:
To languish in love, were to find by delay
A death that's more welcome the speediest way.
On seas and in battles, in bullets and fire,

The danger is less than in hopeless desire; 10
My death's-wound you give, though far off I bear
My fall from your sight--not to cost you a tear:
But if the kind flood on a wave should convey,
And under your window my body should lay,
The wound on my breast when you happen to see,
You'll say with a sigh--it was given by me.

* * * * *

XX.

ALEXANDER'S FEAST; OR, THE POWER OF MUSIC.

AN ODE, IN HONOUR OF ST CECILIA'S DAY.

1 'Twas at the royal feast, for Persia won
By Philip's warlike son:
Aloft in awful state
The godlike hero sate
On his imperial throne:
His valiant peers were placed around;
Their brows with roses and with myrtles bound
(So should desert in arms be crown'd).
The lovely Thais, by his side,

Sate like a blooming Eastern bride
In flower of youth and beauty's pride.
Happy, happy, happy pair!
None but the brave,
None but the brave,
None but the brave deserves the fair.

CHORUS.

Happy, happy, happy pair!
None but the brave,
None but the brave,
None but the brave deserves the fair.

2 Timotheus, placed on high
Amid the tuneful quire,
With flying fingers touch'd the lyre:
The trembling notes ascend the sky,
And heavenly joys inspire.
The song began from Jove,
Who left his blissful seats above
(Such is the power of mighty love).
A dragon's fiery form belied the god:
Sublime on radiant spires he rode,
When he to fair Olympia press'd:
And while he sought her snowy breast:

Then, round her slender waist he curl'd,
And stamp'd an image of himself, a sovereign of the world.
The listening crowd admire the lofty sound,
A present deity, they shout around,
A present deity, the vaulted roofs rebound:
With ravish'd ears
The monarch hears,
Assumes the god,
Affects to nod,
And seems to shake the spheres.

CHORUS.

With ravish'd ears
The monarch hears,
Assumes the god,
Affects to nod,
And seems to shake the spheres.

3 The praise of Bacchus then, the sweet musician sung;
Of Bacchus ever fair and ever young:
The jolly god in triumph comes;
Sound the trumpets; beat the drums;
Flush'd with a purple grace
He shows his honest face:
Now give the hautboys breath; he comes, he comes.

Bacchus, ever fair and young,
Drinking joys did first ordain;
Bacchus' blessings are a treasure,
Drinking is the soldier's pleasure:
Rich the treasure,
Sweet the pleasure;
Sweet is pleasure after pain.

CHORUS.

Bacchus' blessings are a treasure,
Drinking is the soldier's pleasure:
Rich the treasure,
Sweet the pleasure;
Sweet is pleasure after pain.

4 Soothed with the sound the king grew vain;
Fought all his battles o'er again;
And thrice he routed all his foes; and thrice he slew the slain.
The master saw the madness rise;
His glowing cheeks, his ardent eyes;
And while he heaven and earth defied,
Changed his hand, and check'd his pride.
He chose a mournful muse
Soft pity to infuse:
He sung Darius great and good,

By too severe a fate,
Fallen, fallen, fallen, fallen,
Fallen from his high estate,
And weltering in his blood;
Deserted, at his utmost need,
By those his former bounty fed;
On the bare earth exposed he lies,
With not a friend to close his eyes.
With downcast looks the joyless victor sate,
Revolving in his alter'd soul
The various turns of chance below;
And now and then a sigh he stole;
And tears began to flow.

CHORUS.

Revolving in his alter'd soul
The various turns of chance below;
And now and then a sigh he stole;
And tears began to flow.

5 The mighty master smiled, to see
That love was in the next degree:
'Twas but a kindred sound to move,
For pity melts the mind to love.
Softly sweet, in Lydian measures,

Soon he soothed his soul to pleasures.
War, he sung, is toil and trouble;
Honour, but an empty bubble;
Never ending, still beginning,
Fighting still, and still destroying:
If the world be worth thy winning,
Think, O think it worth enjoying:
Lovely Thais sits beside thee,
Take the good the gods provide thee.
The many rend the skies with loud applause;
So Love was crown'd, but Music won the cause.
The prince, unable to conceal his pain,
Gazed on the fair
Who caused his care,
And sigh'd and look'd, sigh'd and look'd,
Sigh'd and look'd, and sigh'd again:
At length, with love and wine at once oppress'd,
The vanquish'd victor sunk upon her breast.

CHORUS.

The prince, unable to conceal his pain,
Gazed on the fair
Who caused his care,
And sigh'd and look'd, sigh'd and look'd,
Sigh'd and look'd, and sigh'd again:
At length, with love and wine at once oppress'd,

The vanquish'd victor sunk upon her breast.

6 Now strike the golden lyre again:

A louder yet, and yet a louder strain.

Break his bands of sleep asunder,

And rouse him, like a rattling peal of thunder.

Hark, hark, the horrid sound

Has raised up his head:

As awaked from the dead,

And amazed, he stares around.

Revenge, Revenge, Timotheus cries,

See the Furies arise:

See the snakes that they rear,

How they hiss in their hair,

And the sparkles that flash from their eyes!

Behold a ghastly band,

Each a torch in his hand!

Those are Grecian ghosts, that in battle were slain,

And unburied remain

Inglorious on the plain:

Give the vengeance due

To the valiant crew.

Behold how they toss their torches on high,

How they point to the Persian abodes,

And glittering temples of their hostile gods.

The princes applaud, with a furious joy;

And the king seized a flambeau with zeal to destroy;

Thais led the way,
To light him to his prey,
And, like another Helen, fired another Troy.

CHORUS.

And the king seized a flambeau with zeal to destroy;
Thais led the way,
To light him to his prey,
And, like another Helen, fired another Troy.

Thus, long ago,
Ere heaving bellows learn'd to blow,
While organs yet were mute;
Timotheus, to his breathing flute,
And sounding lyre,
Could swell the soul to rage, or kindle soft desire.
At last divine Cecilia came,
Inventress of the vocal frame;
The sweet enthusiast, from her sacred store,
Enlarged the former narrow bounds,
And added length to solemn sounds,
With nature's mother-wit, and arts unknown before.
Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Or both divide the crown;
He raised a mortal to the skies;

She drew an angel down.

GRAND CHORUS.

At last, divine Cecilia came,
Inventress of the vocal frame;
The sweet enthusiast, from her sacred store,
Enlarged the former narrow bounds,
And added length to solemn sounds,
With nature's mother-wit, and arts unknown before.
Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Or both divide the crown;
He raised a mortal to the skies;
She drew an angel down.

* * * * *

XXI

THE SECULAR MASQUE.[45]

Enter JANUS.

Janus. Chronos, Chronos, mend thy pace;

An hundred times the rolling sun
Around the radiant belt has run
In his revolving race.
Behold, behold the goal in sight,
Spread thy fans, and wing thy flight.

Enter CHRONOS, _with a scythe in his hand, and a globe
on his back; which he sets down at his entrance_.

Chronos. Weary, weary of my weight,
Let me, let me drop my freight,
And leave the world behind.
I could not bear, 10
Another year,
The load of human kind.

Enter MOMUS, _laughing_.

Momus. Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! well hast thou done
To lay down thy pack,
And lighten thy back.
The world was a fool, ere since it begun,
And since neither Janus nor Chronos, nor I,
Can hinder the crimes,
Or mend the bad times,
'Tis better to laugh than to cry. 20

Chorus of all three. 'Tis better to laugh than to cry.

Janus. Since Momus comes to laugh below,
Old time begin the show,
That he may see, in every scene,
What changes in this age have been.

Chronos. Then goddess of the silver bow begin.

[_Horns, or hunting-music within._]

Enter DIANA.

Diana. With horns and with hounds, I waken the day,
And hie to the woodland walks away;
I tuck up my robe, and am buskin'd soon,
And tie to my forehead a waxing moon; 30
I course the fleet stag, unkennel the fox,
And chase the wild goats o'er summits of rocks;
With shouting and hooting we pierce through the sky,
And Echo turns hunter, and doubles the cry.

Chorus of all. With shouting and hooting we pierce through the sky,

And Echo turns hunter, and doubles the cry.

Janus. Then our age was in its prime:

Chronos. Free from rage:

Diana.--And free from crime.

Momus. A very merry, dancing, drinking, 40
Laughing, quaffing, and unthinking time.

Chorus of all. Then our age was in its prime,
Free from rage, and free from crime,
A very merry, dancing, drinking,
Laughing, quaffing, and unthinking time.

[_Dance of Diana's attendants_.]

Enter MARS.

Mars. Inspire the vocal brass, inspire;

The world is past its infant age:

Arms and honour,

Arms and honour,

Set the martial mind on fire, 50
And kindle manly rage.
Mars has look'd the sky to red;
And Peace, the lazy god, is fled.
Plenty, peace, and pleasure fly;
The sprightly green,
In woodland walks, no more is seen;
The sprightly green has drunk the Tyrian dye.

Chorus of all. Plenty, peace, &c.

Mars. Sound the trumpet, beat the drum;
Through all the world around, 60
Sound a reveillie, sound, sound,
The warrior god is come.

Chorus of all. Sound the trumpet, &c.

Momus. Thy sword within the scabbard keep,
And let mankind agree;
Better the world were fast asleep,
Than kept awake by thee.
The fools are only thinner,
With all our cost and care:

But neither side a winner, 70

For things are as they were.

Chorus of all. The fools are only, &c.

Enter VENUS.

Venus. Calms appear when storms are past;

Love will have his hour at last:

Nature is my kindly care;

Mars destroys, and I repair;

Take me, take me, while you may,

Venus comes not every day.

Chorus of all. Take her, take her, &c.

Chronos. The world was then so light, 80

I scarcely felt the weight;

Joy ruled the day, and Love the night.

But, since the queen of pleasure left the ground,

I faint, I lag,

And feebly drag

The ponderous orb around.

Momus. All, all of a piece throughout;

[_Pointing to Diana_] Thy chase had a beast in view;

[_To Mars_] Thy wars brought nothing about;

[_To Venus_] Thy lovers were all untrue. 90

Janus. 'Tis well an old age is out.

Chronos. And time to begin a new.

Cho. of all. All, all of a piece throughout;

Thy chase had a beast in view:

Thy wars brought nothing about;

Thy lovers were all untrue.

'Tis well an old age is out,

And time to begin a new.

Dance of huntsmen, nymphs, warriors, and lovers.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 45: This Masque, with the song of a scholar and his mistress, was performed in 1700, for the author's benefit, with the play of the Pilgrim, altered by Sir John Vanbrugh, his fortune and health being at

that time in a declining state.]

* * * * *

XXII.

SONG OF A SCHOLAR AND HIS MISTRESS,

WHO, BEING CROSSED BY THEIR FRIENDS, FELL MAD FOR ONE ANOTHER; AND NOW
FIRST MEET IN BEDLAM.

[Music within.]

The Lovers enter at opposite doors, each held by a keeper.

Phyllis. Look, look I see--I see my love appear!

'Tis he--'Tis he alone;

For, like him, there is none:

'Tis the dear, dear man, 'tis thee, dear.

Amyntas. Hark! the winds war;

The foamy waves roar;

I see a ship afar:

Tossing and tossing, and making to the shore:

But what's that I view,
So radiant of hue,
St Hermo, St Hermo, that sits upon the sails?
Ah! No, no, no.
St Hermo never, never shone so bright;
'Tis Phillis, only Phillis, can shoot so fair a light;
'Tis Phillis, 'tis Phillis, that saves the ship alone,
For all the winds are hush'd, and the storm is overblown.

Phillis. Let me go, let me run, let me fly to his arms.

Amyntas. If all the fates combine,
And all the furies join,
I'll force my way to Phillis, and break through the charm.

[_Here they break from their keepers, run to each other,
and embrace_.]

Phillis. Shall I marry the man I love?
And shall I conclude my pains?
Now bless'd be the powers above,
I feel the blood bound in my veins;
With a lively leap it began to move,
And the vapours leave my brains.

Amyntas. Body join'd to body, and heart join'd to heart,
To make sure of the cure,
Go call the man in black, to mumble o'er his part.

Phillis. But suppose he should stay--

Amyntas. At worst if he delay,
'Tis a work must be done,
We'll borrow but a day,
And the better, the sooner begun.

Cho. of both. At worst if he delay, &c.

[_They run out together hand in hand._]

* * * * *

PROLOGUES AND EPILOGUES.

I.

PROLOGUE TO THE RIVAL LADIES.

'Tis much desired, you judges of the town
Would pass a vote to put all prologues down:
For who can show me, since they first were writ,
They e'er converted one hard-hearted wit?
Yet the world's mended well; in former days
Good prologues were as scarce as now good plays.
For the reforming poets of our age,
In this first charge, spend their poetic rage:
Expect no more when once the prologue's done:
The wit is ended ere the play's begun. 10
You now have habits, dances, scenes, and rhymes;
High language often; ay, and sense, sometimes.
As for a clear contrivance, doubt it now;
They blow out candles to give light to the plot.
And for surprise, two bloody-minded men
Fight till they die, then rise and dance again,
Such deep intrigues you're welcome to this day:
But blame yourselves, not him who writ the play;
Though his plot's dull, as can be well desired,
Wit stiff as any you have e'er admired: 20
He's bound to please, not to write well; and knows
There is a mode in plays as well as clothes;
Therefore, kind judges....

A SECOND PROLOGUE ENTERS.

2. Hold; would you admit

For judges all you see within the pit?

1. Whom would he then except, or on what score?

2. All who (like him) have writ ill plays before;

For they, like thieves condemn'd, are hangmen made,

To execute the members of their trade.

All that are writing now he would disown,

But then he must except--even all the town;

All choleric, losing gamesters, who, in spite,

Will damn to-day, because they lost last night;

All servants, whom their mistress' scorn upbraids;

All maudlin lovers, and all slighted maids;

All who are out of humour, all severe;

All that want wit, or hope to find it here.

* * * * *

II.

PROLOGUE TO THE INDIAN QUEEN.

As the music plays a soft air, the curtain rises slowly and discovers an Indian boy and girl sleeping under two plantain-trees; and, when the curtain is almost up, the music turns into a tune expressing an alarm,

at which the boy awakes, and speaks:

BOY. Wake, wake, Quevira! our soft rest must cease,
And fly together with our country's peace!
No more must we sleep under plantain shade,
Which neither heat could pierce, nor cold invade;
Where bounteous nature never feels decay,
And opening buds drive falling fruits away.

QUE. Why should men quarrel here, where all possess
As much as they can hope for by success?--
None can have most, where nature is so kind,
As to exceed man's use, though not his mind. 10

BOY. By ancient prophecies we have been told,
Our world shall be subdued by one more old;--
And, see, that world already's hither come.

QUE. If these be they, we welcome then our doom!
Their loots are such, that mercy flows from thence,
More gentle than our native innocence.

BOY. Why should we then fear these, our enemies,
That rather seem to us like deities?

QUE. By their protection, let us beg to live;
They came not here to conquer, but forgive. 20
If so, your goodness may your power express,
And we shall judge both best by our success.

* * * * *

III.

EPILOGUE TO THE INDIAN QUEEN.

SPOKEN BY MONTEZUMA.

You see what shifts we are enforced to try,
To help out wit with some variety;
Shows may be found that never yet were seen,
'Tis hard to find such wit as ne'er has been:
You have seen all that this old world can do,
We therefore try the fortune of the new,
And hope it is below your aim to hit
At untaught nature with your practised wit:
Our naked Indians, then, when wits appear,
Would as soon choose to have the Spaniards here. 10
'Tis true, you have marks enough, the plot, the show,
The poet's scenes, nay, more, the painter's too;

If all this fail, considering the cost,
'Tis a true voyage to the Indies lost:
But if you smile on all, then these designs,
Like the imperfect treasure of our minds,
Will pass for current wheresoe'er they go,
When to your bounteous hands their stamps they owe.

* * * * *

IV.

EPILOGUE TO THE INDIAN EMPEROR,

BY A MERCURY.

To all and singular in this full meeting,
Ladies and gallants, Phoebus sends ye greeting.
To all his sons, by whate'er title known,
Whether of court, or coffee-house, or town;
From his most mighty sons, whose confidence
Is placed in lofty sound, and humble sense,
Even to his little infants of the time,
Who write new songs, and trust in tune and rhyme
Be 't known, that Phoebus (being daily grieved
To see good plays condemn'd, and bad received) 10

Ordains your judgment upon every cause,
Henceforth, be limited by wholesome laws.
He first thinks fit no sonneteer advance
His censure farther than the song or dance,
Your wit burlesque may one step higher climb,
And in his sphere may judge all doggrel rhyme;
All proves, and moves, and loves, and honours too;
All that appears high sense, and scarce is low.
As for the coffee wits, he says not much;
Their proper business is to damn the Dutch: 20
For the great dons of wit--
Phoebus gives them full privilege alone,
To damn all others, and cry up their own.
Last, for the ladies, 'tis Apollo's will,
They should have power to save, but not to kill:
For love and he long since have thought it fit,
Wit live by beauty, beauty reign by wit.

* * * * *

V.

PROLOGUE TO SIR MARTIN MARR-ALL.

Fools, which each man meets in his dish each day,
Are yet the great regalios of a play;

In which to poets you but just appear,
To prize that highest, which cost them so dear:
Fops in the town more easily will pass;
One story makes a statutable ass:
But such in plays must be much thicker sown,
Like yolks of eggs, a dozen beat to one.
Observing poets all their walks invade,
As men watch woodcocks gliding through a glade:
And when they have enough for comedy,
They stow their several bodies in a pie:
The poet's but the cook to fashion it,
For, gallants, you yourselves have found the wit.
To bid you welcome, would your bounty wrong;
None welcome those who bring their cheer along.

* * * * *

VI.

PROLOGUE TO THE TEMPEST.

As when a tree's cut down, the secret root
Lives under ground, and thence new branches shoot;
So from old Shakspeare's honour'd dust, this day
Springs up and buds a new reviving play:
Shakspeare, who (taught by none) did first impart

To Fletcher wit, to labouring Jonson art.
He, monarch like, gave those, his subjects, law;
And is that nature which they paint and draw.
Fletcher reach'd that which on his heights did grow,
While Jonson crept, and gather'd all below. 10
This did his love, and this his mirth digest:
One imitates him most, the other best.
If they have since outwrit all other men,
'Tis with the drops which fell from Shakspeare's pen.
The storm, which vanish'd on the neighbouring shore,
Was taught by Shakspeare's Tempest first to roar.
That innocence and beauty, which did smile
In Fletcher, grew on this enchanted isle.
But Shakspeare's magic could not copied be;
Within that circle none durst walk but he. 20
I must confess 'twas bold, nor would you now
That liberty to vulgar wits allow,
Which works by magic supernatural things:
But Shakspeare's power is sacred as a king's.
Those legends from old priesthood were received,
And he then writ, as people then believed.
But if for Shakspeare we your grace implore,
We for our theatre shall want it more:
Who, by our dearth of youths, are forced to employ
One of our women to present a boy; 30
And that's a transformation, you will say,
Exceeding all the magic in the play.
Let none expect in the last act to find,

Her sex transform'd from man to womankind.

Whate'er she was before the play began,

All you shall see of her is perfect man.

Or, if your fancy will be further led

To find her woman--it must be a-bed.

* * * * *

VII.

PROLOGUE TO TYRANNIC LOVE.

Self-love, which, never rightly understood,
Makes poets still conclude their plays are good,
And malice in all critics reigns so high,
That for small errors, they whole plays decry;
So that to see this fondness, and that spite,
You'd think that none but madmen judge or write,
Therefore our poet, as he thinks not fit
To impose upon you what he writes for wit;
So hopes, that, leaving you your censures free,
You equal judges of the whole will be: 10
They judge but half, who only faults will see.
Poets, like lovers, should be bold and dare,
They spoil their business with an over care;
And he, who servilely creeps after sense,

Is safe, but ne'er will reach an excellence.
Hence 'tis, our poet, in his conjuring,
Allow'd his fancy the full scope and swing.
But when a tyrant for his theme he had,
He loosed the reins, and bid his muse run mad:
And though he stumbles in a full career, 20
Yet rashness is a better fault than fear.
He saw his way; but in so swift a pace,
To choose the ground might be to lose the race.
They, then, who of each trip the advantage take,
Find but those faults, which they want wit to make.

* * * * *

VIII.

EPILOGUE TO THE WILD GALLANT,

WHEN REVIVED.

Of all dramatic writing, comic wit,
As 'tis the best, so 'tis most hard to hit,
For it lies all in level to the eye,
Where all may judge, and each defect may spy.
Humour is that which every day we meet,

And therefore known as every public street;
In which, if e'er the poet go astray,
You all can point, 'twas there he lost his way.
But, what's so common, to make pleasant too,
Is more than any wit can always do. 10
For 'tis like Turks, with hen and rice to treat;
To make regalios out of common meat.
But, in your diet, you grow savages:
Nothing but human flesh your taste can please;
And, as their feasts with slaughter'd slaves began,
So you, at each new play, must have a man.
Hither you come, as to see prizes fought;
If no blood's drawn, you cry, the prize is nought.
But fools grow wary now: and, when they see
A poet eyeing round the company, 20
Straight each man for himself begins to doubt;
They shrink like seamen when a press comes out.
Few of them will be found for public use,
Except you charge an oaf upon each house,
Like the train bands, and every man engage
For a sufficient fool, to serve the stage,
And when, with much ado, you get him there,
Where he in all his glory should appear.
Your poets make him such rare things to say,
That he's more wit than any man i' th' play: 30
But of so ill a mingle with the rest,
As when a parrot's taught to break a jest.
Thus, aiming to be fine, they make a show,

As tawdry squires in country churches do.
Things well consider'd, 'tis so hard to make
A comedy, which should the knowing take,
That our dull poet, in despair to please,
Does humbly beg, by me, his writ of ease.
'Tis a land-tax, which he's too poor to pay;
You therefore must some other impost lay. 40
Would you but change, for serious plot and verse,
This motley garniture of fool and farce,
Nor scorn a mode, because 'tis taught at home,
Which does, like vests, our gravity become,
Our poet yields you should this play refuse:
As tradesmen, by the change of fashions, lose,
With some content, their fripperies of France,
In hope it may their staple trade advance.

* * * * *

IX.

PROLOGUE.

SPOKEN THE FIRST DAY OF THE KING'S HOUSE ACTING AFTER THE FIRE OF
LONDON.

So shipwreck'd passengers escape to land,
So look they, when on the bare beach they stand,
Dropping and cold, and their first fear scarce o'er,
Expecting famine on a desert shore.
From that hard climate we must wait for bread,
Whence even the natives, forced by hunger, fled.
Our stage does human chance present to view,
But ne'er before was seen so sadly true:
You are changed too, and your pretence to see
Is but a nobler name for charity. 10
Your own provisions furnish out our feasts,
While you the founders make yourselves the guests.
Of all mankind beside fate had some care,
But for poor Wit no portion did prepare,
'Tis left a rent-charge to the brave and fair.
You cherish'd it, and now its fall you mourn,
Which blind unmanner'd zealots make their scorn,
Who think that fire a judgment on the stage,
Which spared not temples in its furious rage.
But as our new-built city rises higher, 20
So from old theatres may new aspire,
Since fate contrives magnificence by fire.
Our great metropolis does far surpass
Whate'er is now, and equals all that was:
Our wit as far does foreign wit excel,
And, like a king, should in a palace dwell.
But we with golden hopes are vainly fed,
Talk high, and entertain you in a shed:

Your presence here, for which we humbly sue,
Will grace old theatres, and build up new. 30

* * * * *

X.

EPILOGUE TO THE SECOND PART OF THE CONQUEST OF GRANADA.

They who have best succeeded on the stage,
Have still conform'd their genius to their age.
Thus Jonson did mechanic humour show,
When men were dull, and conversation low.
Then comedy was faultless, but 'twas coarse:
Cobb's tankard was a jest, and Otter's horse.
And, as their comedy, their love was mean;
Except, by chance, in some one labour'd scene,
Which must atone for an ill-written play.
They rose, but at their height could seldom stay. 10
Fame then was cheap, and the first comer sped;
And they have kept it since, by being dead.
But, were they now to write, when critics weigh
Each line, and every word, throughout a play,
None of them, no not Jonson in his height,
Could pass, without allowing grains for weight.
Think it not envy, that these truths are told:

Our poet's not malicious, though he's bold.
'Tis not to brand them, that their faults are shown,
But, by their errors, to excuse his own. 20
If love and honour now are higher raised,
'Tis not the poet, but the age is praised.
Wit's now arrived to a more high degree:
Our native language more refined and free.
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit
In conversation, than those poets writ.
Then, one of these is, consequently, true:
That what this poet writes comes short of you,
And imitates you ill (which most he fears),
Or else his writing is not worse than theirs. 30
Yet though you judge (as sure the critics will),
That some before him writ with greater skill,
In this one praise he has their fame surpass'd,
To please an age more gallant than the last.

* * * * *

XI.

PROLOGUE TO AMBOYNA.[46]

As needy gallants in the scrivener's hands,
Court the rich knave that gripes their mortgaged lands,

The first fat buck of all the season's sent,
And keeper takes no fee in compliment:
The dotage of some Englishmen is such,
To fawn on those who ruin them--the Dutch.
They shall have all, rather than make a war
With those who of the same religion are.
The Straits, the Guinea trade, the herrings too,
Nay, to keep friendship, they shall pickle you. 10
Some are resolved not to find out the cheat,
But, cuckold-like, love him who does the feat:
What injuries soe'er upon us fall,
Yet, still the same religion answers all:
Religion wheedled you to civil war,
Drew English blood, and Dutchmen's now would spare:
Be gull'd no longer, for you'll find it true,
They have no more religion, faith--than you;
Interest's the god they worship in their state;
And you, I take it, have not much of that. 20
Well, monarchies may own religion's name,
But states are atheists in their very frame.
They share a sin, and such proportions fall,
That, like a stink, 'tis nothing to them all.
How they love England, you shall see this day;
No map shows Holland truer than our play:
Their pictures and inscriptions well we know;
We may be bold one medal sure to show.
View then their falsehoods, rapine, cruelty;
And think what once they were, they still would be: 30

But hope not either language, plot, or art;
'Twas writ in haste, but with an English heart:
And least hope wit; in Dutchmen that would be
As much improper, as would honesty.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 46: 'Amboyna:' a play written against the Dutch.]

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XII.

EPILOGUE TO AMBOYNA.

A Poet once the Spartans led to fight,
And made them conquer in the muse's right;
So would our poet lead you on this day,
Showing your tortured fathers in his play.
To one well born the affront is worse, and more,
When he's abused and baffled by a boor:
With an ill grace the Dutch their mischiefs do,

They've both ill nature and ill manners too.
Well may they boast themselves an ancient nation,
For they were bred ere manners were in fashion,
And their new commonwealth has set them free,
Only from honour and civility.
Venetians do not more uncouthly ride,
Than did their lubber state mankind bestride;
Their sway became them with as ill a mien,
As their own paunches swell above their chin:
Yet is their empire no true growth, but humour,
And only two kings' touch can cure the tumour.
As Cato did his Afric fruits display,
So we before your eyes their Indies lay:
All loyal English will, like him, conclude,
Let Caesar live, and Carthage be subdued!

* * * * *

XIII.

PROLOGUE.

SPOKEN AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW HOUSE, MARCH 26, 1674.

A plain-built^[47] house, after so long a stay,

Will send you half unsatisfied away;
When, fallen from your expected pomp, you find
A bare convenience only is design'd.
You, who each day can theatres behold,
Like Nero's palace, shining all with gold,
Our mean ungilded stage will scorn, we fear,
And, for the homely room, disdain the cheer.
Yet now cheap druggets to a mode are grown,
And a plain suit, since we can make but one, 10
Is better than to be by tarnish'd gawdry known.
They, who are by your favours wealthy made,
With mighty sums may carry on the trade:
We, broken bankers, half destroy'd by fire,
With our small stock to humble roofs retire:
Pity our loss, while you their pomp admire.
For fame and honour we no longer strive,
We yield in both, and only beg to live:
Unable to support their vast expense,
Who build and treat with such magnificence; 20
That, like the ambitious monarchs of the age,
They give the law to our provincial stage.
Great neighbours enviously promote excess,
While they impose their splendour on the less.
But only fools, and they of vast estate,
The extremity of modes will imitate,
The dangling knee-fringe, and the bib-cravat.
Yet if some pride with want may be allow'd,
We in our plainness may be justly proud:

Our royal master will'd it should be so; 30
Whate'er he's pleased to own, can need no show:
That sacred name gives ornament and grace,
And, like his stamp, makes basest metals pass.
'Twere folly now a stately[48] pile to raise,
To build a playhouse, while you throw down plays;
While scenes, machines, and empty operas reign,
And for the pencil you the pen disdain:
While troops of famish'd Frenchmen hither drive,
And laugh at those upon whose alms they live:
Old English authors vanish, and give place 40
To these new conquerors of the Norman race.
More tamely than your fathers you submit;
You're now grown vassals to them in your wit.
Mark, when they play, how our fine fops advance
The mighty merits of their men of France,
Keep time, cry _Bon_, and humour the cadence.
Well, please yourselves; but sure 'tis understood,
That French machines have ne'er done England good.
I would not prophesy our house's fate:
But while vain shows and scenes you over-rate, 50
Tis to be fear'd--
That as a fire the former house o'erthrew,
Machines and tempests will destroy the new.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 47: This Prologue was written for the King's company, who had just opened their house in Drury-lane.]

[Footnote 48: The reflection on the taste of the town in these four lines is levelled at the Duke's company, who had exhibited the siege of Rhodes, and other expensive operas, and were now getting up the operas of Psyche, Circe, &c.]

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XIV.

PROLOGUE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, 1674.

SPOKEN BY MR HART.

Poets, your subjects have their parts assign'd
To unbend, and to divert their sovereign's mind:
When tired with following nature, you think fit
To seek repose in the cool shades of wit,
And, from the sweet retreat, with joy survey
What rests, and what is conquer'd, of the way.

Here, free yourselves from envy, care, and strife
You view the various turns of human life:
Safe in our scene, through dangerous courts you go,
And, undebauch'd, the vice of cities know. 10
Your theories are here to practice brought,
As in mechanic operations wrought;
And man, the little world, before you set,
As once the sphere^[49] of crystal show'd the great.
Blest, sure, are you above all mortal kind,
If to your fortunes you can suit your mind:
Content to see, and shun, those ills we show,
And crimes on theatres alone to know.
With joy we bring what our dead authors writ,
And beg from you the value of their wit: 20
That Shakspeare's, Fletcher's, and great Jonson's claim,
May be renew'd from those who gave them fame.
None of our living poets dare appear;
For Muses so severe are worshipp'd here,
That, conscious of their faults, they shun the eye,
And, as profane, from sacred places fly,
Rather than see the offended God, and die.
We bring no imperfections but our own;
Such faults as made are by the makers shown:
And you have been so kind, that we may boast, 30
The greatest judges still can pardon most.
Poets must stoop, when they would please our pit,
Debased even to the level of their wit;
Disdaining that, which yet they know will take,

Hating themselves what their applause must make.
But when to praise from you they would aspire,
Though they like eagles mount, your Jove is higher.
So far your knowledge all their power transcends,
As what _should be_ beyond what _is_ extends.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 49: 'Sphere,' &c.: referring to the macrocosm--the universe;
and the microcosm--man]

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XV.

PROLOGUE TO "CIRCE," A TRAGIC OPERA;

BY DR DAVENANT,[50] 1675.

Were you but half so wise as you're severe,
Our youthful poet should not need to fear:
To his green years your censures you would suit,

Not blast the blossom, but expect the fruit.
The sex, the best does pleasure understand,
Will always choose to err on the other hand.
They check not him that's awkward in delight,
But clap the young rogue's cheek, and set him right.
Thus hearten'd well, and flesh'd upon his prey,
The youth may prove a man another day. 10
Your Ben and Fletcher, in their first young flight,
Did no Volpone, nor Arbaces write;
But hopp'd about, and short excursions made
From bough to bough, as if they were afraid,
And each was guilty of some Slighted Maid.
Shakspeare's own muse her Pericles first bore;
The Prince of Tyre was elder than the Moor:
'Tis miracle to see a first good play;
All hawthorns do not bloom on Christmas-day.
A slender poet must have time to grow, 20
And spread and burnish, as his brothers do.
Who still looks lean, sure with some pox is cursed:
But no man can be Falstaff-fat at first.
Then damn not, but indulge his rude essays;
Encourage him, and bloat him up with praise,
That he may get more bulk before he dies:
He's not yet fed enough for sacrifice.
Perhaps, if now your grace you will not grudge,
He may grow up to write, and you to judge.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 50: Son of Sir William Davenant, and author of several political pieces, much esteemed.]

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XVI.

EPILOGUE,

INTENDED TO HAVE BEEN SPOKEN BY THE LADY HEN. MAR. WENTWORTH, WHEN
"CALISTO"[51] WAS ACTED AT COURT.

As Jupiter I made my court in vain;

I'll now assume my native shape again.

I'm weary to be so unkindly used,

And would not be a god to be refused.

State grows uneasy when it hinders love;

A glorious burden, which the wise remove.

Now, as a nymph I need not sue, nor try

The force of any lightning but the eye.

Beauty and youth more than a god command;
No Jove could e'er the force of these withstand. 10
'Tis here that sovereign power admits dispute;
Beauty sometimes is justly absolute.
Our sullen Catos, whatsoever they say,
Even while they frown, and dictate laws, obey.
You, mighty sir,[52] our bonds more easy make,
And gracefully, what all must suffer, take:
Above those forms the grave affect to wear;
For 'tis not to be wise to be severe.
True wisdom may some gallantry admit,
And soften business with the charms of wit. 20
These peaceful triumphs with your cares you bought,
And from the midst of fighting nations brought.
You only hear it thunder from afar,
And sit in peace the arbiter of war:
Peace, the loathed manna, which hot brains despise.
You knew its worth, and made it early prize:
And in its happy leisure sit and see
The promises of more felicity:
Two glorious nymphs,[53] of your own godlike line,
Whose morning rays like noontide strike and shine: 30
Whom you to suppliant monarchs shall dispose,
To bind your friends, and to disarm your foes.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 51: 'Calisto:' a Masque, written by Crowne, Dryden's rival and Rochester's protege; this Epilogue was through Rochester's influence rejected.]

[Footnote 52: This part of the Epilogue is addressed to the King.]

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XVII.

PROLOGUE TO "AURENGZEBE."

Our author, by experience, finds it true,
'Tis much more hard to please himself than you;
And out of no feign'd modesty, this day
Damns his laborious trifle of a play;
Not that it's worse than what before he writ,
But he has now another taste of wit;
And, to confess a truth, though out of time,
Grows weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme.
Passion's too fierce to be in fetters bound,
And nature flies him like enchanted ground: 10

What verse can do, he has perform'd in this,
Which he presumes the most correct of his;
But spite of all his pride, a secret shame
Invades his breast at Shakspeare's sacred name:
Awed when he hears his godlike Romans rage,
He, in a just despair, would quit the stage;
And to an age less polish'd, more unskill'd,
Does, with disdain, the foremost honours yield.
As with the greater dead he dares not strive,
He would not match his verse with those who live: 20
Let him retire, betwixt two ages cast,
The first of this, and hindmost of the last.
A losing gamester, let him sneak away;
He bears no ready money from the play.
The fate which governs poets, thought it fit
He should not raise his fortunes by his wit.
The clergy thrive, and the litigious bar;
Dull heroes fatten with the spoils of war:
All southern vices, heaven be praised, are here;
But wit's a luxury you think too dear. 30
When you to cultivate the plant are loth,
'Tis a shrewd sign, 'twas never of your growth;
And wit in northern climates will not blow,
Except, like orange trees, 'tis housed with snow.
There needs no care to put a playhouse down,
'Tis the most desert place of all the town:
We, and our neighbours, to speak proudly, are,
Like monarchs, ruin'd with expensive war;

While, likewise English, unconcern'd you sit,
And see us play the tragedy of wit. 40

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 53: The Duke of York's two daughters, Mary and Ann.]

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XVIII.

EPILOGUE TO "THE MAN OF MODE; OR, SIR FOPLING FLUTTER;"

BY SIR GEORGE ETHEREGE, 1676.

Most modern wits such monstrous fools have shown,
They seem not of Heaven's making, but their own.
Those nauseous harlequins in farce may pass;
But there goes more to a substantial ass:
Something of man must be exposed to view,
That, gallants, they may more resemble you.
Sir Fopling is a fool so nicely writ,

The ladies would mistake him for a wit;
And, when he sings, talks loud, and cocks, would cry,
I vow, methinks, he's pretty company: 10
So brisk, so gay, so travell'd, so refined,
As he took pains to graff upon his kind.
True fops help nature's work, and go to school
To file and finish God Almighty's fool.
Yet none Sir Fopling him, or him can call;
He's knight o' the shire, and represents ye all.
From each he meets he culls whate'er he can;
Legion's his name, a people in a man.
His bulky folly gathers as it goes,
And, rolling o'er you, like a snow-ball grows. 20
His various modes from various fathers follow;
One taught the toss, and one the new French wallow:
His sword-knot this, his cravat that design'd;
And this the yard-long snake he twirls behind.
From one the sacred periwig he gain'd,
Which wind ne'er blew, nor touch of hat profaned.
Another's diving bow he did adore,
Which with a shog casts all the hair before,
Till he, with full decorum, brings it back,
And rises with a water-spaniel shake. 30
As for his songs, the ladies' dear delight,
These sure he took from most of you who write.
Yet every man is safe from what he fear'd;
For no one fool is hunted from the herd.

* * * * *

XIX.

EPILOGUE TO "ALL FOR LOVE."

Poets, like disputants, when reasons fail,
Have one sure refuge left--and that's to rail.
Fop, coxcomb, fool, are thunder'd through the pit;
And this is all their equipage of wit.
We wonder how the devil this difference grows,
Betwixt our fools in verse, and yours in prose:
For, 'faith, the quarrel rightly understood,
'Tis civil war with their own flesh and blood.
The threadbare author hates the gaudy coat;
And swears at the gilt coach, but swears afoot: 10
For 'tis observed of every scribbling man,
He grows a fop as fast as e'er he can;
Prunes up, and asks his oracle, the glass,
If pink and purple best become his face.
For our poor wretch, he neither rails nor prays;
Nor likes your wit, just as you like his plays;
He has not yet so much of Mr Bayes.
He does his best; and if he cannot please,
Would quietly sue out his writ of ease.

Yet, if he might his own grand jury call, 20
By the fair sex he begs to stand or fall.
Let Caesar's power the men's ambition move,
But grace you him who lost the world for love!
Yet if some antiquated lady say,
The last age is not copied in his play;
Heaven help the man who for that face must drudge,
Which only has the wrinkles of a judge.
Let not the young and beauteous join with those;
For should you raise such numerous hosts of foes,
Young wits and sparks he to his aid must call; 30
'Tis more than one man's work to please you all.

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XX.

PROLOGUE TO "LIMBERHAM."

True wit has seen its best days long ago;
It ne'er look'd up, since we were dipp'd in show:
When sense in doggerel rhymes and clouds was lost,
And dulness flourish'd at the actors' cost.
Nor stopp'd it here; when tragedy was done,
Satire and humour the same fate have run,
And comedy is sunk to trick and pun.

Now our machining lumber will not sell,
And you no longer care for heaven or hell;
What stuff can please you next, the Lord can tell. 10
Let them, who the rebellion first began
To wit restore the monarch, if they can;
Our author dares not be the first bold man.
He, like the prudent citizen, takes care
To keep for better marts his staple ware;
His toys are good enough for Sturbridge fair.
Tricks were the fashion; if it now be spent,
'Tis time enough at Easter to invent;
No man will make up a new suit for Lent.
If now and then he takes a small pretence, 20
To forage for a little wit and sense,
Pray pardon him, he meant you no offence.
Next summer, Nostradamus tells, they say,
That all the critics shall be shipp'd away,
And not enow be left to damn a play.
To every sail beside, good heaven, be kind:
But drive away that swarm with such a wind,
That not one locust may be left behind!

* * * * *

XXI.

EPILOGUE TO "MITHRIDATES, KING OF PONTUS;"

BY NATHAN LEE, 1678.

You've seen a pair of faithful lovers die:

And much you care; for most of you will cry,

'Twas a just judgment on their constancy.

For, heaven be thank'd, we live in such an age,

When no man dies for love, but on the stage:

And even those martyrs are but rare in plays;

A cursed sign how much true faith decays.

Love is no more a violent desire;

'Tis a mere metaphor, a painted fire.

In all our sex, the name examined well, 10

Tis pride to gain, and vanity to tell.

In woman, 'tis of subtle interest made:

Curse on the punk that made it first a trade!

She first did wit's prerogative remove,

And made a fool presume to prate of love.

Let honour and preferment go for gold;

But glorious beauty is not to be sold:

Or, if it be, 'tis at a rate so high,

That nothing but adoring it should buy.

Yet the rich cullies may their boasting spare; 20

They purchase but sophisticated ware.

'Tis prodigality that buys deceit,

Where both the giver and the taker cheat.

Men but refine on the old half-crown way;

And women fight, like Swissers, for their pay.

* * * * *

XXII.

PROLOGUE TO "OEDIPUS."

When Athens all the Grecian state did guide,

And Greece gave laws to all the world beside;

Then Sophocles with Socrates did sit,

Supreme in wisdom one, and one in wit:

And wit from wisdom differ'd not in those,

But as 'twas sung in verse, or said in prose.

Then, Oedipus, on crowded theatres,

Drew all admiring eyes and listening ears:

The pleased spectator shouted every line,

The noblest, manliest, and the best design! 10

And every critic of each learned age,

By this just model has reform'd the stage.

Now, should it fail (as Heaven avert our fear),

Damn it in silence, lest the world should hear.

For were it known this poem did not please,

You might set up for perfect savages:

Your neighbours would not look on you as men,

But think the nation all turn'd Picts again.

Faith, as you manage matters, 'tis not fit
You should suspect yourselves of too much wit: 20
Drive not the jest too far, but spare this piece;
And, for this once, be not more wise than Greece.
See twice: do not pellmell to damning fall,
Like true-born Britons, who ne'er think at all:
Pray be advised; and though at Mons you won,
On pointed cannon do not always run.
With some respect to ancient wit proceed;
You take the four first councils for your creed.
But, when you lay tradition wholly by,
And on the private spirit alone rely, 30
You turn fanatics in your poetry.
If, notwithstanding all that we can say,
You needs will have your penn'orths of the play,
And come resolved to damn, because you pay,
Record it, in memorial of the fact,
The first play buried since the woollen act.

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XXIII.

EPILOGUE TO "OEDIPUS."

What Sophocles could undertake alone,

Our poets found a work for more than one;
And therefore two lay tugging at the piece,
With all their force, to draw the ponderous mass from Greece;
A weight that bent e'en Seneca's strong Muse,
And which Corneille's shoulders did refuse:
So hard it is the Athenian harp to string!
So much two consuls yield to one just king!
Terror and pity this whole poem sway;
The mightiest machines that can mount a play. 10
How heavy will those vulgar souls be found,
Whom two such engines cannot move from ground!
When Greece and Rome have smiled upon this birth,
You can but damn for one poor spot of earth:
And when your children find your judgment such,
They'll scorn their sires, and wish themselves born Dutch;
Each haughty poet will infer, with ease,
How much his wit must underwrite to please.
As some strong churl would, brandishing, advance
The monumental sword that conquer'd France; 20
So you, by judging this, your judgment teach,
Thus far you like, that is, thus far you reach.
Since, then, the vote of full two thousand years
Has crown'd this plot, and all the dead are theirs,
Think it a debt you pay, not alms you give,
And, in your own defence, let this play live.
Think them not vain, when Sophocles is shown,
To praise his worth they humbly doubt their own.
Yet as weak states each other's power assure,

Weak poets by conjunction are secure. 30
Their treat is what your palates relish most,
Charm! song! and show! a murder and a ghost!
We know not what you can desire or hope
To please you more, but burning of a Pope.

* * * * *

XXIV.

PROLOGUE TO "TROILUS AND CRESSIDA."

SPOKEN BY MR BETTERTON, REPRESENTING THE GHOST OF SHAKSPEARE.

See, my loved Britons, see your Shakspeare rise,
An awful ghost, confess'd, to human eyes!
Unnamed, methinks, distinguish'd I had been
From other shades, by this eternal green,
About whose wreaths the vulgar poets strive,
And with a touch their wither'd bays revive.
Untaught, unpractised in a barbarous age,
I found not, but created first the stage.
And, if I drain'd no Greek or Latin store,
'Twas that my own abundance gave me more. 10
On foreign trade I needed not rely,

Like fruitful Britain, rich without supply.
In this my rough-drawn play you shall behold
Some master strokes, so manly and so bold,
That he who meant to alter, found 'em such,
He shook, and thought it sacrilege to touch.
Now, where are the successors to my name?
What bring they to fill out a poet's fame?
Weak, short-lived issues of a feeble age;
Scarce living to be christen'd on the stage! 20
For humour, farce--for love they rhyme dispense,
That tolls the knell for their departed sense.
Dulness might thrive in any trade, but this
'Twould recommend to some fat benefice:
Dulness, that in a playhouse meets disgrace,
Might meet with reverence in its proper place.
The fulsome clench, that nauseates the town,
Would from a judge or alderman go down;
Such virtue is there in a robe and gown!
And that insipid stuff, which here you hate, 30
Might somewhere else be call'd a grave debate:
Dulness is decent in the church and state.
But I forget that still 'tis understood,
Bad plays are best decried by showing good.
Sit silent, then, that my pleased soul may see
A judging audience once, and worthy me;
My faithful scene from true records shall tell,
How Trojan valour did the Greek excel;
Your great forefathers shall their fame regain,

And Homer's angry ghost repine in vain. 40

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XXV.

PROLOGUE TO "CAESAR BORGIA;"[54]

BY NATHAN LEE, 1680.

The unhappy man, who once has trail'd a pen,
Lives not to please himself, but other men;
Is always drudging, wastes his life and blood,
Yet only eats and drinks what you think good.
What praise soe'er the poetry deserve,
Yet every fool can bid the poet starve.
That fumbling lecher to revenge is bent,
Because he thinks himself or whore is meant:
Name but a cuckold, all the city swarms;
From Leadenhall to Ludgate is in arms: 10
Were there no fear of Antichrist, or France,
In the bless'd time poor poets live by chance.
Either you come not here, or, as you grace
Some old acquaintance, drop into the place,
Careless and qualmish, with a yawning face:

You sleep o'er wit, and, by my troth, you may;
Most of your talents lie another way.
You love to hear of some prodigious tale,
The bell that toll'd alone, or Irish whale.
News is your food, and you enough provide, 20
Both for yourselves, and all the world beside;
One theatre there is of vast resort,
Which whilome of Requests was called the Court;
But now the great Exchange of News 'tis hight,
And full of hum and buzz from noon till night.
Up stairs and down you run, as for a race,
And each man wears three nations in his face.
So big you look, though claret you retrench,
That, arm'd with bottled ale, you huff the French.
But all your entertainment still is fed 30
By villains in your own dull island bred.
Would you return to us, we dare engage
To show you better rogues upon the stage.
You know no poison but plain ratsbane here;
Death's more refined, and better bred elsewhere.
They have a civil way in Italy,
By smelling a perfume to make you die:
A trick would make you lay your snuff-box by.
Murder's a trade, so known and practised there,
That 'tis infallible as is the Chair. 40
But mark their feast, you shall behold such pranks;
The Pope says grace, but 'tis the Devil gives thanks.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 54: 'Caesar Borgia:' a play produced about the time of the
Popish Plot.]

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XXVI.

PROLOGUE TO "SOPHONISBA,"

ACTED AT OXFORD, 1680.

WRITTEN BY NATHAN LEE.

Thespis,[55] the first professor of our art,
At country wakes sung ballads from a cart.
To prove this true, if Latin be no trespass,
"Dicitur et plaustris vexisse poemata Thespis."
But AEschylus, says Horace in some page,
Was the first mountebank that trod the stage:

Yet Athens never knew your learned sport
Of tossing poets in a tennis-court.
But 'tis the talent of our English nation,
Still to be plotting some new reformation: 10
And few years hence, if anarchy goes on,
Jack Presbyter shall here erect his throne,
Knock out a tub with preaching once a day,
And every prayer be longer than a play.
Then all your heathen wits shall go to pot,
For disbelieving of a Popish plot:
Your poets shall be used like infidels,
And worst, the author of the Oxford bells:
Nor should we 'scape the sentence, to depart,
Even in our first original, a cart. 20
No zealous brother there would want a stone
To maul us cardinals, and pelt Pope Joan:
Religion, learning, wit, would be suppress'd--
Rags of the whore, and trappings of the beast:
Scot, Suarez, Tom of Aquin, must go down,
As chief supporters of the triple crown;
And Aristotle's for destruction ripe;
Some say he call'd the soul an organ-pipe,
Which by some little help of derivation,
Shall then be proved a pipe of inspiration. 30

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 55: 'Thespis:' the inventor of tragedy.]

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XXVII.

PROLOGUE TO "THE LOYAL GENERAL;"

BY MR TATE, 1680.

If yet there be a few that take delight
In that which reasonable men should write;
To them alone we dedicate this night.
The rest may satisfy their curious itch
With city-gazettes, or some factious speech,
Or whate'er libel, for the public good,
Stirs up the shrove-tide crew to fire and blood.
Remove your benches, you apostate pit,
And take, above, twelve pennyworth of wit;
Go back to your dear dancing on the rope, 10
Or see, what's worse, the Devil and the Pope.
The plays that take on our corrupted stage,

Methinks, resemble the distracted age;
Noise, madness, all unreasonable things,
That strike at sense, as rebels do at kings.
The style of forty-one our poets write,
And you are grown to judge like forty-eight,[56]
Such censures our mistaking audience make,
That 'tis almost grown scandalous to take.
They talk of fevers that infect the brains; 20
But nonsense is the new disease that reigns.
Weak stomachs, with a long disease oppress'd,
Cannot the cordials of strong wit digest.
Therefore thin nourishment of farce ye choose,
Decoctions of a barley-water Muse:
A meal of tragedy would make ye sick,
Unless it were a very tender chick.
Some scenes in sippets would be worth our time;
Those would go down; some love that's poach'd in rhyme:
If these should fail-- 30
We must lie down, and, after all our cost,
Keep holiday, like watermen in frost;
While you turn players on the world's great stage,
And act yourselves the farce of your own age.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 56: 'Forty-one, forty-eight:' referring to the Puritan era,
which some were then seeking to revive.]

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XXVIII.

PROLOGUE[57] TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

1681.

The famed Italian Muse, whose rhymes advance
Orlando and the Paladins of France,
Records, that, when our wit and sense is flown,
'Tis lodged within the circle of the moon,
In earthen jars, which one, who thither soar'd,
Set to his nose, snuff'd up, and was restored.
Whate'er the story be, the moral's true;
The wit we lost in town, we find in you.
Our poets their fled parts may draw from hence,
And fill their windy heads with sober sense. 10
When London votes with Southwark's disagree,
Here may they find their long-lost loyalty.
Here busy senates, to the old cause inclined,

May snuff the votes their fellows left behind:
Your country neighbours, when their grain grows dear,
May come, and find their last provision here:
Whereas we cannot much lament our loss,
Who neither carried back, nor brought one cross.
We look'd what representatives would bring;
But they help'd us, just as they did the king. 20
Yet we despair not; for we now lay forth
The Sibyl's books to those who know their worth;
And though the first was sacrificed before,
These volumes doubly will the price restore.
Our poet bade us hope this grace to find,
To whom by long prescription you are kind.
He whose undaunted Muse, with loyal rage,
Has never spared the vices of the age,
Here finding nothing that his spleen can raise,
Is forced to turn his satire into praise. 30

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 57: 'Prologue:' spoken during the sitting of Parliament there.

See Macaulay's History.]

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XXIX.

PROLOGUE[58] TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS,

UPON HIS FIRST APPEARANCE AT THE DUKE'S THEATRE, AFTER HIS RETURN FROM
SCOTLAND, 1682.

In those cold regions which no summers cheer,
Where brooding darkness covers half the year,
To hollow caves the shivering natives go;
Bears range abroad, and hunt in tracks of snow:
But when the tedious twilight wears away,
And stars grow paler at the approach of day,
The longing crowds to frozen mountains run;
Happy who first can see the glimmering sun:
The surly savage offspring disappear,
And curse the bright successor of the year. 10
Yet, though rough bears in covert seek defence,
White foxes stay, with seeming innocence:
That crafty kind with daylight can dispense.
Still we are throng'd so full with Reynard's race,
That loyal subjects scarce can find a place:
Thus modest truth is cast behind the crowd:
Truth speaks too low: hypocrisy too loud.
Let them be first to flatter in success;

Duty can stay, but guilt has need to press.
Once, when true zeal the sons of God did call, 20
To make their solemn show at heaven's Whitehall,
The fawning Devil appear'd among the rest,
And made as good a courtier as the best.
The friends of Job, who rail'd at him before,
Came, cap in hand, when he had three times more.
Yet late repentance may, perhaps, be true;
Kings can forgive, if rebels can but sue:
A tyrant's power in rigour is express'd;
The father yearns in the true prince's breast.
We grant, an o'ergrown Whig no grace can mend; 30
But most are babes, that know not they offend.
The crowd, to restless motion still inclined,
Are clouds, that tack according to the wind.
Driven by their chiefs, they storms of hailstones pour;
Then mourn, and soften to a silent shower.
O welcome to this much-offending land,
The prince that brings forgiveness in his hand!
Thus angels on glad messages appear:
Their first salute commands us not to fear.
Thus Heaven, that could constrain us to obey, 40
(With reverence if we might presume to say)
Seems to relax the rights of sovereign sway:
Permits to man the choice of good and ill,
And makes us happy by our own free will.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 58: 'Prologue:' spoken when the Duke of York returned from Scotland in triumph. He went to the theatre in Dorset Gardens, when this was uttered as the Prologue to "Venice Preserved."]

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XXX.

PROLOGUE TO "THE EARL OF ESSEX; OR, THE UNHAPPY FAVOURITE;"

BY MR J. BANKS, 1682.

SPOKEN TO THE KING AND QUEEN AT THEIR COMING TO THE HOUSE.

When first the ark was landed on the shore,
And Heaven had vow'd to curse the ground no more;
When tops of hills the longing patriarch saw,
And the new scene of earth began to draw;
The dove was sent to view the waves' decrease,
And first brought back to man the pledge of peace.

'Tis needless to apply, when those appear,
Who bring the olive, and who plant it here.
We have before our eyes the royal dove,
Still innocent, as harbinger of love: 10
The ark is open'd to dismiss the train,
And people with a better race the plain.
Tell me, ye Powers! why should vain man pursue,
With endless toil, each object that is new,
And for the seeming substance leave the true?
Why should he quit for hopes his certain good,
And loathe the manna of his daily food?
Must England still the scene of changes be,
Tost and tempestuous, like our ambient sea?
Must still our weather and our wills agree? 20
Without our blood our liberties we have:
Who that is free would fight to be a slave?
Or, what can wars to after-times assure,
Of which our present age is not secure?
All that our monarch would for us ordain,
Is but to enjoy the blessings of his reign.
Our land's an Eden, and the main's our fence,
While we preserve our state of innocence:
That lost, then beasts their brutal force employ,
And first their lord, and then themselves destroy. 30
What civil broils have cost, we know too well;
Oh! let it be enough that once we fell!
And every heart conspire, and every tongue,
Still to have such a king, and this king long.

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XXXI.

EPILOGUE FOR "THE KING'S HOUSE." [59]

We act by fits and starts, like drowning men,
But just peep up, and then pop down again.
Let those who call us wicked change their sense;
For never men lived more on Providence.
Not lottery cavaliers are half so poor,
Nor broken cits, nor a vacation whore;
Not courts, nor courtiers living on the rents
Of the three last ungriving parliaments:
So wretched, that, if Pharaoh could divine,
He might have spared his dream of seven lean kine, 10
And changed his vision for the Muses Nine.
The comet that, they say, portends a dearth,
Was but a vapour drawn from play-house earth:
Pent there since our last fire, and, Lilly says,
Foreshows our change of state, and thin third-days.
'Tis not our want of wit that keeps us poor;
For then the printer's press would suffer more.
Their pamphleteers each day their venom spit;
They thrive by treason, and we starve by wit.

Confess the truth, which of you has not laid 20
Four farthings out to buy the Hatfield maid?
Or, which is duller yet, and more would spite us,
Democritus his wars with Heraclitus?
Such are the authors who have run us down,
And exercised you critics of the town.
Yet these are pearls to your lampooning rhymes,
Ye abuse yourselves more dully than the times.
Scandal, the glory of the English nation,
Is worn to rags, and scribbled out of fashion.
Such harmless thrusts, as if, like fencers wise, 30
They had agreed their play before their prize.
Faith! they may hang their harps upon the willows;
'Tis just like children when they box with pillows.
Then put an end to civil wars for shame;
Let each knight-errant, who has wrong'd a dame,
Throw down his pen, and give her, as he can,
The satisfaction of a gentleman.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 59: Epilogue spoken in 1682; and full of temporary allusions
now of no earthly interest.]

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XXXII.

PROLOGUE TO "THE LOYAL BROTHER; OR, THE PERSIAN PRINCE;"[60]

BY MR SOUTHERN, 1682.

POETS, like lawful monarchs, ruled the stage,
Till critics, like damn'd Whigs, debauch'd our age.
Mark how they jump: critics would regulate
Our theatres, and Whigs reform our state:
Both pretend love, and both (plague rot them!) hate.
The critic humbly seems advice to bring;
The fawning Whig petitions to the king:
But one's advice into a satire slides;
The other's petition a remonstrance hides.
These will no taxes give, and those no pence; 10
Critics would starve the poet, Whigs the prince.
The critic all our troops of friends discards;
Just so the Whig would fain pull down the guards.
Guards are illegal, that drive foes away,
As watchful shepherds, that fright beasts of prey.
Kings, who disband such needless aids as these,
Are safe--as long as e'er their subjects please:

And that would be till next Queen Bess's night: [61]
Which thus grave penny chroniclers indite.
Sir Edmondbury first, in woful wise, 20
Leads up the show, and milks their maudlin eyes.
There's not a butcher's wife but dribs her part,
And pities the poor pageant from her heart;
Who, to provoke revenge, rides round the fire,
And, with a civil conge, does retire:
But guiltless blood to ground must never fall;
There's Antichrist behind, to pay for all.
The punk of Babylon in pomp appears,
A lewd old gentleman of seventy years:
Whose age in vain our mercy would implore; 30
For few take pity on an old cast whore.
The Devil, who brought him to the shame, takes part;
Sits cheek by jowl, in black, to cheer his heart;
Like thief and parson in a Tyburn-cart.
The word is given, and with a loud huzza
The mitred puppet from his chair they draw:
On the slain corpse contending nations fall:
Alas! what's one poor Pope among them all!
He burns; now all true hearts your triumphs ring:
And, next, for fashion, cry, God save the king! 40
A needful cry in midst of such alarms,
When forty thousand men are up in arms.
But after he's once saved, to make amends,
In each succeeding health they damn his friends:
So God begins, but still the Devil ends.

What if some one, inspired with zeal, should call,
Come, let's go cry, God save him at Whitehall?
His best friends would not like this over-care,
Or think him ere the safer for this prayer.
Five praying saints are by an act allow'd;^[62] 50
But not the whole church-militant in crowd.
Yet, should Heaven all the true petitions drain
Of Presbyterians, who would kings maintain,
Of forty thousand, five would scarce remain.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 60: 'The Loyal Brother; or, the Persian Prince,' Mr Southern's first play, acted at Drury-Lane in 1682. The Loyal Brother was intended for the Duke of York.]

[Footnote 61: 'Queen Bess's night:' alluding to a procession of the Whigs, carrying party effigies, and a representation of the dead body of Sir E. Godfrey, on the 17th of November, the birthday of Queen Elizabeth.]

[Footnote 62: By the Bartholomew Act not more than five Dissenters were allowed to commune together at one time.]

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XXXIII.

PROLOGUE TO "THE KING AND QUEEN." [63]

UPON THE UNION OF THE TWO COMPANIES IN 1686.

1 Since faction ebbs, and rogues grow out of fashion,
Their penny scribes take care to inform the nation,
How well men thrive in this or that plantation:

2 How Pennsylvania's air agrees with Quakers,
And Carolina's with Associators:
Both even too good for madmen and for traitors.

3 Truth is, our land with saints is so run o'er,
And every age produces such a store,
That now there's need of two New-Englands more.

4 What's this, you'll say, to us and our vocation?
Only thus much, that we have left our station,
And made this theatre our new plantation.

5 The factious natives never could agree;
But aiming, as they call'd it, to be free,
Those playhouse Whigs set up for property.

6 Some say, they no obedience paid of late;
But would new fears and jealousies create;
Till topsy-turvy they had turn'd the state.

7 Plain sense, without the talent of foretelling,
Might guess 'twould end in downright knocks and quelling:
For seldom comes there better of rebelling.

8 When men will, needlessly, their freedom barter
For lawless power, sometimes they catch a Tartar;
There's a damn'd word that rhymes to this call'd Charter.

9 But, since the victory with us remains,
You shall be call'd to twelve in all our gains;
If you'll not think us saucy for our pains.

10 Old men shall have good old plays to delight them
And you, fair ladies and gallants, that slight them,
We'll treat with good new plays; if our new wits can write them.

11 We'll take no blundering verse, no fustian tumour,
No dribbling love, from this or that presumer;
No dull fat fool shamm'd on the stage for humour.

12 For, faith, some of them such vile stuff have made,
As none but fools or fairies ever play'd;
But 'twas, as shopmen say, to force a trade.

13 We've given you tragedies, all sense defying,
And singing men, in woful metre dying;
This 'tis when heavy lubbers will be flying.

14 All these disasters we well hope to weather;
We bring you none of our old lumber hither;
Whig poets and Whig sheriffs may hang together.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 63: Two theatrical companies: the Duke's and the King's Houses--both full of every species of abomination--at last united in 1686, and the most profligate poet of the age was fitly chosen to proclaim the banns.]

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XXXIV.

PROLOGUE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

SPOKEN BY MR HART, AT THE ACTING OF "THE SILENT WOMAN."

What Greece, when learning flourish'd, only knew,
Athenian judges, you this day renew;
Here too are annual rites to Pallas done,
And here poetic prizes lost or won.
Methinks I see you, crown'd with olives, sit,
And strike a sacred horror from the pit.
A day of doom is this of your decree,
Where even the best are but by mercy free:
A day, which none but Jonson durst have wish'd to see.
Here they, who long have known the useful stage, 10
Come to be taught themselves to teach the age.
As your commissioners our poets go,
To cultivate the virtue which you sow;
In your Lycaeum first themselves refined,
And delegated thence to human-kind.
But as ambassadors, when long from home,

For new instructions to their princes come;
So poets, who your precepts have forgot,
Return, and beg they may be better taught:
Follies and faults elsewhere by them are shown, 20
But by your manners they correct their own.
The illiterate writer, empiric-like, applies
To minds diseased unsafe, chance remedies:
The learn'd in schools, where knowledge first began,
Studies with care the anatomy of man;
Sees virtue, vice, and passions in their cause,
And fame from science, not from fortune, draws.
So Poetry, which is in Oxford made
An art, in London only is a trade.
There haughty dunces, whose unlearned pen 30
Could ne'er spell grammar, would be reading men.
Such build their poems the Lucretian way;
So many huddled atoms make a play;
And if they hit in order, by some chance,
They call that nature, which is ignorance.
To such a fame let mere town wits aspire,
And their gay nonsense their own cits admire.
Our poet, could he find forgiveness here,
Would wish it rather than a plaudit there.
He owns no crown from those Praetorian bands, 40
But knows that right is in the senate's hands;
Not impudent enough to hope your praise,
Low at the Muses' feet his wreath he lays,
And, where he took it up, resigns his bays.

Kings make their poets whom themselves think fit,
But 'tis your suffrage makes authentic wit.

* * * * *

XXXV.

EPILOGUE,

SPOKEN BY THE SAME.

No poor Dutch peasant, wing'd with all his fear,
Flies with more haste, when the French arms draw near,
Than we with our poetic train come down,
For refuge hither, from the infected town:
Heaven, for our sins, this summer has thought fit
To visit us with all the plagues of wit.
A French troop first swept all things in its way;
But those hot Monsieurs were too quick to stay:
Yet, to our cost, in that short time, we find
They left their itch of novelty behind. 10
The Italian Merry-Andrews took their place,
And quite debauch'd the stage with lewd grimace:
Instead of wit and humours, your delight
Was there to see two hobby-horses fight;

Stout Scaramoucha with rush-lance rode in,
And ran a tilt at centaur Arlequin.
For love you heard how amorous asses bray'd,
And cats in gutters gave their serenade.
Nature was out of countenance, and each day
Some new-born monster shown you for a play. 20
But when all fail'd, to strike the stage quite dumb,
Those wicked engines call'd machines are come.
Thunder and lightning now for wit are play'd,
And shortly scenes in Lapland will be laid:
Art magic is for poetry profess'd;
And cats and dogs, and each obscener beast,
To which Egyptian dotards once did bow,
Upon our English stage are worshipp'd now.
Witchcraft reigns there, and raises to renown
Macbeth and Simon Magus of the town, 30
Fletcher's despised, your Jonson's out of fashion,
And wit the only drug in all the nation.
In this low ebb our wares to you are shown;
By you those staple authors' worth is known;
For wit's a manufacture of your own.
When you, who only can, their scenes have praised,
We'll boldly back, and say, their price is raised.

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XXXVI.

EPILOGUE,

SPOKEN AT OXFORD, BY MRS MARSHALL.

Oft has our poet wish'd, this happy seat
 Might prove his fading Muse's last retreat:
 I wonder'd at his wish, but now I find
 He sought for quiet, and content of mind;
 Which noiseful towns, and courts can never know,
 And only in the shades like laurels grow.
 Youth, ere it sees the world, here studies rest,
 And age returning thence concludes it best.
 What wonder if we court that happiness
 Yearly to share, which hourly you possess; 10
 Teaching even you, while the vex'd world we show,
 Your peace to value more, and better know?
 'Tis all we can return for favours past,
 Whose holy memory shall ever last;
 For patronage from him whose care presides
 O'er every noble art, and every science guides:
 Bathurst,[64] a name the learn'd with reverence know,
 And scarcely more to his own Virgil owe;
 Whose age enjoys but what his youth deserved,
 To rule those Muses whom before he served. 20
 His learning, and untainted manners too,

We find, Athenians, are derived to you:
Such ancient hospitality there rests
In yours, as dwelt in the first Grecian breasts,
Whose kindness was religion to their guests.
Such modesty did to our sex appear,
As, had there been no laws, we need not fear,
Since each of you was our protector here.
Converse so chaste, and so strict virtue shown,
As might Apollo with the Muses own. 30
Till our return, we must despair to find
Judges so just, so knowing, and so kind.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 64: Dr Ralph Bathurst, President of Trinity College, Oxford.]

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XXXVII.

PROLOGUE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

Discord and plots, which have undone our age,
With the same ruin have o'erwhelm'd the stage.
Our house has suffer'd in the common woe,
We have been troubled with Scotch rebels too.
Our brethren are from Thames to Tweed departed,
And of our sisters, all the kinder-hearted,
To Edinburgh gone, or coach'd, or carted.
With bonny bluecap there they act all night
For Scotch half-crown, in English three-pence hight.
One nymph, to whom fat Sir John Falstaff's lean, 10
There with her single person fills the scene.
Another, with long use and age decay'd,
Dived here old woman, and rose there a maid.
Our trusty doorkeepers of former time
There strut and swagger in heroic rhyme.
Tack but a copper-lace to drugget suit,
And there's a hero made without dispute:
And that, which was a capon's tail before,
Becomes a plume for Indian emperor.
But all his subjects, to express the care 20
Of imitation, go, like Indians, bare:
Laced linen there would be a dangerous thing;
It might perhaps a new rebellion bring;
The Scot, who wore it, would be chosen king.
But why should I these renegades describe,
When you yourselves have seen a lewder tribe?
Teague has been here, and, to this learned pit,
With Irish action slander'd English wit:

You have beheld such barbarous Macs appear,
As merited a second massacre: 30
Such as, like Cain, were branded with disgrace,
And had their country stamp'd upon their face.
When strollers durst presume to pick your purse,
We humbly thought our broken troop not worse.
How ill soe'er our action may deserve,
Oxford's a place where wit can never starve.

* * * * *

XXXVIII.

PROLOGUE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

Though actors cannot much of learning boast,
Of all who want it, we admire it most:
We love the praises of a learned pit,
As we remotely are allied to wit.
We speak our poet's wit, and trade in ore,
Like those who touch upon the golden shore:
Betwixt our judges can destinction make,
Discern how much, and why, our poems take:
Mark if the fools, or men of sense, rejoice;
Whether the applause be only sound or voice. 10
When our fop gallants, or our city folly,

Clap over-loud, it makes us melancholy:
We doubt that scene which does their wonder raise,
And, for their ignorance, condemn their praise.
Judge then, if we who act, and they who write,
Should not be proud of giving you delight.
London likes grossly; but this nicer pit
Examines, fathoms all the depths of wit;
The ready finger lays on every blot;
Knows what should justly please, and what should not. 20
Nature herself lies open to your view;
You judge by her, what draught of her is true,
Where outlines false, and colours seem too faint,
Where bunglers daub, and where true poets paint.
But by the sacred genius of this place,
By every Muse, by each domestic grace,
Be kind to wit, which but endeavours well,
And, where you judge, presumes not to excel.
Our poets hither for adoption come,
As nations sued to be made free of Rome: 30
Not in the suffragating tribes to stand,
But in your utmost, last, provincial band.
If his ambition may those hopes pursue,
Who with religion loves your arts and you,
Oxford to him a dearer name shall be,
Than his own mother university.
Thebes did his green, unknowing youth engage;
He chooses Athens in his riper age.

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XXXIX.

PROLOGUE TO "ALBION AND ALBANIUS."

Full twenty years and more, our labouring stage
Has lost on this incorrigible age:
Our poets, the John Ketches of the nation,
Have seem'd to lash ye, even to excoriation:
But still no sign remains; which plainly notes,
You bore like heroes, or you bribed like Oates.
What can we do, when mimicking a fop,
Like beating nut-trees, makes a larger crop?
Faith, we'll e'en spare our pains! and, to content you,
Will fairly leave you what your Maker meant you. 10
Satire was once your physic, wit your food:
One nourish'd not, and t'other drew no blood:
We now prescribe, like doctors in despair,
The diet your weak appetites can bear.
Since hearty beef and mutton will not do,
Here's julep-dance, ptisan of song and show:
Give you strong sense, the liquor is too heady:
You're come to farce,--that's asses' milk,--already.
Some hopeful youths there are, of callow wit,

Who one day may be men, if Heaven think fit: 20
Sound may serve such, ere they to sense are grown,
Like leading-strings till they can walk alone.
But yet, to keep our friends in countenance, know,
The wise Italians first invented show:
Thence into France the noble pageant pass'd:
'Tis England's credit to be cozen'd last.
Freedom and zeal have choused you o'er and o'er:
Pray give us leave to bubble you once more;
You never were so cheaply fool'd before:

We bring you change, to humour your disease; 30
Change for the worse has ever used to please:
Then, 'tis the mode of France; without whose rules
None must presume to set up here for fools.
In France, the oldest man is always young,
Sees operas daily, learns the tunes so long,
Till foot, hand, head keep time with every song:
Each sings his part, echoing from pit and box,
With his hoarse voice, half harmony, half pox:
Le plus grand roi du monde is always ringing,
They show themselves good subjects by their singing: 40
On that condition, set up every throat:
You Whigs may sing, for you have changed your note.
Cits and citesses raise a joyful strain,
'Tis a good omen to begin a reign:
Voices may help your charter to restoring,

And get by singing what you lost by roaring.

* * * * *

XL.

EPILOGUE TO "ALBION AND ALBANIUS."

After our AEsop's fable shown to-day,
I come to give the moral of the play.
Feign'd Zeal, you saw, set out the speedier pace:
But the last heat, Plain Dealing won the race:
Plain Dealing for a jewel has been known;
But ne'er till now the jewel of a crown.
When Heaven made man, to show the work divine,
Truth was His image stamp'd upon the coin:
And when a king is to a god refined,
On all he says and does he stamps his mind: 10
This proves a soul without alloy, and pure;
Kings, like their gold, should every touch endure.
To dare in fields is valour; but how few
Dare be so thoroughly valiant,--to be true!
The name of great let other kings affect:
He's great indeed, the prince that is direct.
His subjects know him now, and trust him more
Than all their kings, and all their laws before.

What safety could their public acts afford?
Those he can break; but cannot break his word. 20
So great a trust to him alone was due;
Well have they trusted whom so well they knew.
The saint, who walk'd on waves, securely trod,
While he believed the beckoning of his God:
But when his faith no longer bore him out,
Began to sink, as he began to doubt.
Let us our native character maintain;
'Tis of our growth to be sincerely plain.
To excel in truth we loyally may strive,
Set privilege against prerogative: 30
He plights his faith, and we believe him just;
His honour is to promise, ours to trust.
Thus Britain's basis on a word is laid,
As by a word the world itself was made.

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XLI.

PROLOGUE TO "ARVIRGUS AND PHILICIA REVIVED."

BY LODOWICK CARLELL, ESQ., 1690.

SPOKEN BY MR HART.

With sickly actors and an old house too,
We're match'd with glorious theatres and new;
And with our alehouse scenes, and clothes bare worn,
Can neither raise old plays, nor new adorn.
If all these ills could not undo us quite,
A brisk French troop is grown your dear delight;
Who with broad bloody bills call you each day
To laugh and break your buttons at their play;
Or see some serious piece, which we presume
Is fallen from some incomparable plume; 10
And therefore, Messieurs, if you'll do us grace,
Send lackeys early to preserve your place.
We dare not on your privilege intrench,
Or ask you why you like them? they are French.
Therefore some go, with courtesy exceeding,
Neither to hear nor see, but show their breeding:
Each lady striving to out-laugh the rest;
To make it seem they understood the jest.
Their countrymen come in, and nothing pay,
To teach us English where to clap the play: 20
Civil, egad! our hospitable land
Bears all the charge, for them to understand:
Mean time we languish and neglected lie,
Like wives, while you keep better company;
And wish for your own sakes, without a satire,

You'd less good breeding, or had more good nature.

* * * * *

XLII.

PROLOGUE TO "DON SEBASTIAN."

SPOKEN BY A WOMAN.

The judge removed, though he's no more my lord,

May plead at bar, or at the council board:

So may cast poets write; there's no pretension

To argue loss of wit from loss of pension.

Your looks are cheerful; and in all this place

I see not one that wears a damning face.

The British nation is too brave to show

Ignoble vengeance on a vanquish'd foe.

At last be civil to the wretch imploring;

And lay your paws upon him without roaring. 10

Suppose our poet was your foe before,

Yet now, the business of the field is o'er;

'Tis time to let your civil wars alone,

When troops are into winter quarters gone.

Jove was alike to Latian and to Phrygian;

And you well know, a play's of no religion.
Take good advice, and please yourselves this day;
No matter from what hands you have the play.
Among good fellows every health will pass,
That serves to carry round another glass: 20
When with full bowls of Burgundy you dine,
Though at the mighty monarch you repine,
You grant him still Most Christian in his wine.

Thus far the poet; but his brains grow addle,
And all the rest is purely from his noddle.
You have seen young ladies at the senate door
Prefer petitions, and your grace implore;
However grave the legislators were,
Their cause went ne'er the worse for being fair.
Reasons as weak as theirs, perhaps, I bring; 30
But I could bribe you with as good a thing.
I heard him make advances of good nature;
That he, for once, would sheath his cutting satire.
Sign but his peace, he vows he'll ne'er again
The sacred names of fops and beaux profane.
Strike up the bargain quickly; for I swear,
As times go now, he offers very fair.
Be not too hard on him with statutes neither;
Be kind; and do not set your teeth together,
To stretch the laws, as cobblers do their leather. 40
Horses by Papists are not to be ridden,

But sure the Muses' horse was ne'er forbidden;
For in no rate-book it was ever found
That Pegasus was valued at five pound;
Fine him to daily drudging and inditing:
And let him pay his taxes out in writing.

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XLIII.

PROLOGUE TO "THE PROPHETESS." [65]

BY BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

SPOKEN BY MR BETTERTON. 1690.

What Nostradame, with all his art, can guess
The fate of our approaching Prophetess?
A play which, like a perspective set right,
Presents our vast expenses close to sight;
But turn the tube, and there we sadly view
Our distant gains; and those uncertain too:
A sweeping tax, which on ourselves we raise,
And all, like you, in hopes of better days;
When will our losses warn us to be wise?

Our wealth decreases, and our charges rise. 10
Money, the sweet allurer of our hopes,
Ebbs out in oceans, and comes in by drops;
We raise new objects to provoke delight,
But you grow sated ere the second sight.
False men, e'en so you serve your mistresses:
They rise three storeys in their towering dress;
And, after all, you love not long enough
To pay the rigging, ere you leave them off.
Never content with what you had before,
But true to change, and Englishmen all o'er. 20
Now honour calls you hence; and all your care
Is to provide the horrid pomp of war.
In plume and scarf, jack-boots, and Bilbo blade,
Your silver goes, that should support our trade.
Go, unkind heroes![66] leave our stage to mourn,
Till rich from vanquished rebels you return;
And the fat spoils of Teague in triumph draw,
His firkin-butter, and his usquebaugh.
Go, conquerors of your male and female foes!
Men without hearts, and women without hose: 30
Each bring his love a Bogland captive home;
Such proper pages will long trains become;
With copper collars, and with brawny backs,
Quite to put down the fashion of our blacks.
Then shall the pious Muses pay their vows,
And furnish all their laurels for your brows;
Their tuneful voice shall raise for your delights;

We want not poets fit to sing your flights.
But you, bright beauties! for whose only sake
Those doughty knights such dangers undertake, 40
When they with happy gales are gone away,
With your propitious presence grace our play;
And with a sigh their empty seats survey:
Then think, on that bare bench my servant sat;
I see him ogle still, and hear him chat;
Selling facetious bargains, and propounding
That witty recreation, call'd dumfounding.
Their loss with patience we will try to bear;
And would do more, to see you often here;
That our dead stage, revived by your fair eyes, 50
Under a female regency may rise.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 65: This prologue was forbid by the Earl of Dorset, then Lord Chamberlain, after the first day of its being spoken.]

[Footnote 66: King William was at this time prosecuting the war in Ireland.]

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XLIV.

PROLOGUE TO "THE MISTAKES."

BY JOSEPH HARRIS, COMEDIAN, 1690. (WRITTEN BY SOME OTHER.)

Enter Mr Bright.

Gentlemen, we must beg your pardon; here's no Prologue to be had to-day; our new play is like to come on, without a frontispiece; as bald as one of you young beaux, without your periwig. I left our young poet, snivelling and sobbing behind the scenes, and cursing somebody that has deceived him.

Enter Mr Bowen.

Hold your prating to the audience: here is honest Mr Williams, just come in, half mellow, from the Rose Tavern. He swears he is inspired with claret, and will come on, and that extempore too, either with a prologue of his own or something like one. Oh, here he comes to his trial, at all adventures: for my part I wish him a good deliverance.

[_Exeunt Mr Bright and Mr Bowen._]

Enter Mr Williams.

Save ye, sirs, save ye! I am in a hopeful way.

I should speak something in rhyme, now, for the play:

But the deuce take me, if I know what to say.

I'll stick to my friend the author, that I can tell ye,

To the last drop of claret in my belly.

So far I'm sure 'tis rhyme--that needs no granting:

And, if my verses' feet stumble--you see my own are wanting.

Our young poet has brought a piece of work,

In which, though much of art there does not lurk,

It may hold out three days--and that's as long as Cork. 10

But for this play (which till I have done, we show not)

What may be its fortune--by the Lord! I know not.

This I dare swear, no malice here is writ:

'Tis innocent of all things--even of wit.

He's no highflier--he makes no sky-rockets,

His squibs are only levell'd at your pockets.

And if his crackers light among your pelf,

You are blown up; if not, then he's blown up himself.

By this time, I'm something recover'd of my fluster'd madness:

And now, a word or two in sober sadness. 20

Ours is a common play; and you pay down

A common harlot's price--just half-a-crown.
You'll say, I play the pimp, on my friend's score;
But since 'tis for a friend your gibes give o'er:
For many a mother has done that before.
How's this? you cry; an actor write?--we know it;
But Shakspeare was an actor, and a poet.
Has not great Jonson's learning often fail'd?
But Shakspeare's greater genius still prevail'd.
Have not some writing actors, in this age, 30
Deserved and found success upon the stage?
To tell the truth, when our old wits are tired,
Not one of us but means to be inspired.
Let your kind presence grace our homely cheer;
Peace and the butt is all our business here:
So much for that;--and the devil take small beer.

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XLV.

PROLOGUE TO "KING ARTHUR."

SPOKEN BY MR BETTERTON.

Sure there's a dearth of wit in this dull town,

When silly plays so savourily go down;
As, when clipt money passes, 'tis a sign
A nation is not over-stock'd with coin.
Happy is he who, in his own defence,
Can write just level to your humble sense;
Who higher than your pitch can never go;
And, doubtless, he must creep, who writes below.
So have I seen, in hall of knight, or lord,
A weak arm throw on a long shovel-board; 10
He barely lays his piece, bar rubs and knocks,
Secured by weakness not to reach the box.
A feeble poet will his business do,
Who, straining all he can, comes up to you:
For, if you like yourselves, you like him too.
An ape his own dear image will embrace;
An ugly beau adores a hatchet face:
So, some of you, on pure instinct of nature,
Are led, by kind, to admire your fellow-creature.
In fear of which, our house has sent this day, 20
To insure our new-built vessel, call'd a play;
No sooner named, than one cries out, These stagers
Come in good time, to make more work for wagers.
The town divides, if it will take or no:
The courtiers bet, the cits, the merchants too;
A sign they have but little else to do.
Bets, at the first, were fool-traps; where the wise,
Like spiders, lay in ambush for the flies:
But now they're grown a common trade for all,

And actions by the new book rise and fall; 30
Wits, cheats, and fops, are free of wager-hall.
One policy as far as Lyons carries;
Another, nearer home, sets up for Paris.
Our bets, at last, would e'en to Rome extend,
But that the pope has proved our trusty friend.
Indeed, it were a bargain worth our money,
Could we insure another Ottoboni.
Among the rest there are a sharpening set,
That pray for us, and yet against us bet.
Sure Heaven itself is at a loss to know 40
If these would have their prayers be heard, or no:
For, in great stakes, we piously suppose,
Men pray but very faintly they may lose.
Leave off these wagers; for, in conscience speaking,
The city needs not your new tricks for breaking:
And if you gallants lose, to all appearing,
You'll want an equipage for volunteering;
While thus, no spark of honour left within ye,
When you should draw the sword, you draw the guinea.

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XLVI.

PROLOGUE TO "ALBUMAZAR." [67]

To say, this comedy pleased long ago,
Is not enough to make it pass you now.
Yet, gentlemen, your ancestors had wit;
When few men censured, and when fewer writ.
And Jonson, of those few the best, chose this
As the best model of his masterpiece.
Subtle was got by our Albumazar,
That Alchymist by this Astrologer;
Here he was fashion'd, and we may suppose
He liked the fashion well, who wore the clothes. 10
But Ben made nobly his what he did mould;
What was another's lead becomes his gold:
Like an unrighteous conqueror he reigns,
Yet rules that well which he unjustly gains.
By this our age such authors does afford,
As make whole plays, and yet scarce write one word:
Who, in his anarchy of wit, rob all,
And what's their plunder, their possession call:
Who, like bold padders, scorn by night to prey,
But rob by sunshine, in the face of day: 20
Nay, scarce the common ceremony use
Of, Stand, sir, and deliver up your Muse;
But knock the Poet down, and, with a grace,
Mount Pegasus before the owner's face.
Faith, if you have such country Toms abroad,
'Tis time for all true men to leave that road.

Yet it were modest, could it but be said,
They strip the living, but these rob the dead;
Dare with the mummies of the Muses play,
And make love to them the Egyptian way; 30
Or, as a rhyming author would have said,
Join the dead living to the living dead.
Such men in poetry may claim some part:
They have the licence, though they want the art;
And might, where theft was praised, for Laureates stand,--
Poets, not of the head, but of the hand.
They make the benefits of others' studying,
Much like the meals of politic Jack-Pudding,
Whose dish to challenge no man has the courage;
'Tis all his own, when once he has spit in the porridge. 40
But, gentlemen, you're all concern'd in this;
You are in fault for what they do amiss:
For they their thefts still undiscover'd think,
And durst not steal unless you please to wink.
Perhaps you may award, by your decree,
They should refund; but that can never be.
For should your letters of reprisal seal,
These men write that which no man else would steal.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 67: An old play written by one Tomkins, four years, however,
after Jonson's "Alchymist," and resuscitated in 1668.]

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XLVII.

AN EPILOGUE.

You saw our wife was chaste, yet thoroughly tried,
And, without doubt, ye are hugely edified;
For, like our hero, whom we show'd to-day,
You think no woman true, but in a play.
Love once did make a pretty kind of show:
Esteem and kindness in one breast would grow:
But 'twas Heaven knows how many years ago.
Now some small chat, and guinea expectation,
Gets all the pretty creatures in the nation:
In comedy your little selves you meet; 10
'Tis Covent Garden drawn in Bridges Street.
Smile on our author then, if he has shown
A jolly nut-brown bastard of your own.
Ah! happy you, with ease and with delight,
Who act those follies, Poets toil to write!
The sweating Muse does almost leave the chase;

She puffs, and hardly keeps your Protean vices pace.

Pinch you but in one vice, away you fly

To some new frisk of contrariety.

You roll like snow-balls, gathering as you run, 20

And get seven devils, when dispossess'd of one.

Your Venus once was a Platonic queen;

Nothing of love beside the face was seen;

But every inch of her you now uncase,

And clap a vizard-mask upon the face.

For sins like these, the zealous of the land,

With little hair, and little or no band,

Declare how circulating pestilences

Watch, every twenty years, to snap offences.

Saturn, even now, takes doctoral degrees; 30

He'll do your work this summer without fees.

Let all the boxes, Phoebus, find thy grace,

And, ah! preserve the eighteen-penny place!

But for the pit confounders, let 'em go,

And find as little mercy as they show:

The Actors thus, and thus thy Poets pray;

For every critic saved, thou damn'st a play.

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XLVIII.

EPILOGUE TO "THE HUSBAND HIS OWN CUCKOLD."

BY MR JOHN DRYDEN, JUN., 1696.[68]

Like some raw sophister that mounts the pulpit,
So trembles a young Poet at a full pit.
Unused to crowds, the parson quakes for fear,
And wonders how the devil he durst come there;
Wanting three talents needful for the place--
Some beard, some learning, and some little grace.
Nor is the puny Poet void of care;
For authors, such as our new authors are,
Have not much learning, nor much wit to spare:
And as for grace, to tell the truth, there's scarce one 10
But has as little as the very Parson:
Both say, they preach and write for your instruction:
But 'tis for a third day, and for induction.
The difference is, that though you like the play,
The Poet's gain is ne'er beyond his day.
But with the Parson 'tis another case,
He, without holiness, may rise to grace.
The Poet has one disadvantage more,
That if his play be dull, he's damn'd all o'er,
Not only a damn'd blockhead, but damn'd poor. 20
But dulness well becomes the sable garment;
I warrant that ne'er spoil'd a Priest's perferment:
Wit's not his business, and as wit now goes,

Sirs, 'tis not so much yours as you suppose,
For you like nothing now but nauseous beaux.
You laugh not, gallants, as by proof appears,
At what his beauship says, but what he wears;
So 'tis your eyes are tickled, not your ears.
The tailor and the furrier find the stuff,
The wit lies in the dress, and monstrous muff. 30
The truth on 't is, the payment of the pit
Is like for like, clipt money for clipt wit.
You cannot from our absent author hope
He should equip the stage with such a fop:
Fools change in England, and new fools arise,
For though the immortal species never dies,
Yet every year new maggots make new flies;
But where he lives abroad, he scarce can find
One fool for millions that he left behind.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 68: 'John Dryden, jun.': second son of the poet, who was at Rome when this play was brought out.]

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XLIX.

PROLOGUE TO "THE PILGRIM."

BY BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

REVIVED FOR OUR AUTHOR'S BENEFIT, ANNO 1700.

How wretched is the fate of those who write!
Brought muzzled to the stage, for fear they bite.
Where, like Tom Dove, they stand the common foe;
Lugg'd by the critic, baited by the beau.
Yet worse, their brother poets damn the play,
And roar the loudest, though they never pay.
The fops are proud of scandal, for they cry,
At every lewd, low character,--That's I.
He who writes letters to himself would swear,
The world forgot him, if he was not there. 10
What should a poet do? 'Tis hard for one
To pleasure all the fools that would be shown:
And yet not two in ten will pass the town.
Most coxcombs are not of the laughing kind;
More goes to make a fop, than fops can find.

Quack Maurus,[69] though he never took degrees
In either of our universities,
Yet to be shown by some kind wit he looks,
Because he play'd the fool, and writ three books.
But, if he would be worth a Poet's pen, 20
He must be more a fool, and write again:
For all the former fustian stuff he wrote
Was dead-born doggerel, or is quite forgot:
His man of Uz, stript of his Hebrew robe,
Is just the proverb, and as poor as Job.
One would have thought he could no longer jog;
But Arthur was a level, Job's a bog.
There, though he crept, yet still he kept in sight;
But here, he founders in, and sinks down right,
Had he prepared us, and been dull by rule, 30
Tobit had first been turn'd to ridicule:
But our bold Briton, without fear or awe,
O'erleaps at once the whole Apocrypha;
Invades the Psalms with rhymes, and leaves no room
For any Vandal Hopkins yet to come.

But when if, after all, this godly gear
Is not so senseless as it would appear;
Our mountebank has laid a deeper train,
His cant, like Merry-Andrew's noble vein,
Cat-calls the sects to draw them in again. 40
At leisure hours, in epic song he deals,

Writes to the rumbling of his coach's wheels,
Prescribes in haste, and seldom kills by rule,
But rides triumphant between stool and stool.

Well, let him go; 'tis yet too early day,
To get himself a place in farce or play.
We know not by what name we should arraign him,
For no one category can contain him;
A pedant, canting preacher, and a quack,
Are load enough to break one ass's back: 50
At last, grown wanton, he presumed to write,
Traduced two kings, their kindness to requite;
One made the doctor, and one dubb'd the knight.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 69: 'Quack Maurus:' Sir Richard Blackmore.]

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L.

EPILOGUE TO "THE PILGRIM."

Perhaps the parson^[70] stretch'd a point too far,
When with our Theatres he waged a war.
He tells you, that this very moral age
Received the first infection from the stage.
But sure, a banish'd court, with lewdness fraught,
The seeds of open vice, returning, brought.
Thus lodged (as vice by great example thrives)
It first debauch'd the daughters and the wives.
London, a fruitful soil, yet never bore
So plentiful a crop of horns before. 10
The poets, who must live by courts, or starve,
Were proud so good a government to serve:
And, mixing with buffoons and pimps profane,
Tainted the stage, for some small snip of gain.
For they, like harlots under bawds profess'd,
Took all the ungodly pains, and got the least.
Thus did the thriving malady prevail:
The court, its head, the poets but the tail.
The sin was of our native growth, 'tis true;
The scandal of the sin was wholly new. 20
Misses they were, but modestly conceal'd;
Whitehall the naked Venus first reveal'd,
Who, standing as at Cyprus, in her shrine,
The strumpet was adored with rites divine.
Ere this, if saints had any secret motion,

'Twas chamber-practice all, and close devotion.
I pass the peccadilloes of their time;
Nothing but open lewdness was a crime.
A monarch's blood was venial to the nation,
Compared with one foul act of fornication. 30
Now, they would silence us, and shut the door,
That let in all the barefaced vice before.
As for reforming us, which some pretend,
That work in England is without an end:
Well may we change, but we shall never mend.
Yet, if you can but bear the present Stage,
We hope much better of the coming age.
What would you say, if we should first begin
To stop the trade of love behind the scene,
Where actresses make bold with married men? 40
For while abroad so prodigal the dolt is,
Poor spouse at home as ragged as a colt is.
In short, we'll grow as moral as we can,
Save here and there a woman or a man:
But neither you, nor we, with all our pains,
Can make clean work; there will be some remains,
While you have still your Oates, and we our Haines.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 70: 'Parson:' Jeremy Collier.]

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TALES FROM CHAUCER.

TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF ORMOND.

Anno 1699.

My Lord,--Some estates are held in England by paying a fine at the change of every lord: I have enjoyed the patronage of your family, from the time of your excellent grandfather to this present day. I have dedicated the translation of the "Lives of Plutarch" to the first Duke; and have celebrated the memory of your heroic father. Though I am very short of the age of Nestor, yet I have lived to a third generation of your house; and by your Grace's favour am admitted still to hold from you by the same tenure.

I am not vain enough to boast that I have deserved the value of so illustrious a line; but my fortune is the greater, that for three descents they have been pleased to distinguish my poems from those of other men; and have accordingly made me their peculiar care. May it be permitted me to say, that, as your grandfather and father were cherished

and adorned with honours by two successive monarchs, so I have been esteemed and patronised by the grandfather, the father, and the son, descended from one of the most ancient, most conspicuous, and most deserving families in Europe?

It is true, that by delaying the payment of my last fine, when it was due by your Grace's accession to the titles and patrimonies of your house, I may seem, in rigour of law, to have made a forfeiture of my claim; yet my heart has always been devoted to your service; and since you have been graciously pleased, by your permission of this address, to accept the tender of my duty, it is not yet too late to lay these poems at your feet.

The world is sensible that you worthily succeed, not only to the honours of your ancestors, but also to their virtues. The long chain of magnanimity, courage, easiness of access, and desire of doing good even to the prejudice of your fortune, is so far from being broken in your Grace, that the precious metal yet runs pure to the newest link of it; which I will not call the last, because I hope and pray it may descend to late posterity: and your flourishing youth, and that of your excellent Duchess, are happy omens of my wish. It is observed by Livy and by others, that some of the noblest Roman families retained a resemblance of their ancestry, not only in their shapes and features, but also in their manners, their qualities, and the distinguishing characters of their minds. Some lines were noted for a stern, rigid virtue, savage, haughty, parsimonious, and unpopular: others were more sweet and affable, made of a more pliant paste, humble, courteous, and

obliging, studious of doing charitable offices, and diffusive of the goods which they enjoyed. The last of these is the proper and indelible character of your Grace's family. God Almighty has endued you with a softness, a beneficence, an attractive behaviour winning on the hearts of others; and so sensible of their misery, that the wounds of fortune seem not inflicted on them, but on yourself. You are so ready to redress, that you almost prevent their wishes, and always exceed their expectations; as if what was yours, was not your own, and not given you to possess, but to bestow on wanting merit. But this is a topic which I must cast in shades, lest I offend your modesty, which is so far from being ostentatious of the good you do, that it blushes even to have it known; and therefore I must leave you to the satisfaction and testimony of your own conscience, which, though it be a silent panegyric, is yet the best.

You are so easy of access, that Poplicola was not more, whose doors were opened on the outside to save the people even the common civility of asking entrance; where all were equally admitted--where nothing that was reasonable was denied--where misfortune was a powerful recommendation, and where (I can scarce forbear saying) that want itself was a powerful mediator, and was next to merit.

The history of Peru assures us, that their Incas, above all their titles esteemed that the highest which called them Lovers of the Poor--a name more glorious than the Felix, Pius, and Augustus of the Roman emperors, which were epithets of flattery, deserved by few of them, and not running in a blood like the perpetual gentleness and inherent goodness

of the Ormond family.

Gold, as it is the purest, so it is the softest and most ductile of all metals. Iron, which is the hardest, gathers rust, corrodes itself, and is therefore subject to corruption; it was never intended for coins and medals, or to bear the faces and inscriptions of the great. Indeed, it is fit for armour, to bear off insults, and preserve the wearer in the day of battle; but the danger once repelled, it is laid aside by the brave, as a garment too rough for civil conversation; a necessary guard in war, but too harsh and cumbersome in peace, and which keeps off the embraces of a more humane life.

For this reason, my Lord, though you have courage in an heroic degree, yet I ascribe it to you but as your second attribute: mercy, beneficence, and compassion claim precedence, as they are first in the Divine nature. An intrepid courage, which is inherent in your Grace, is at best but a holiday kind of virtue, to be seldom exercised, and never but in cases of necessity: affability, mildness, tenderness, and a word which I would fain bring back to its original signification of virtue, I mean good-nature, are of daily use: they are the bread of mankind, and staff of life; neither sighs, nor tears, nor groans, nor curses of the vanquished, follow acts of compassion and of charity, but a sincere pleasure and serenity of mind, in him who performs an action of mercy, which cannot suffer the misfortunes of another without redress, lest they should bring a kind of contagion along with them, and pollute the happiness which he enjoys.

Yet since the perverse tempers of mankind, since oppression on one side, and ambition on the other, are sometimes the unavoidable occasions of war; that courage, that magnanimity, and resolution, which is born with you, cannot be too much commended. And here it grieves me that I am scanted in the pleasure of dwelling on many of your actions; but [Greek: aideomai Troas] is an expression which Tully often uses, when he would do what he dares not, and fears the censure of the Romans.

I have sometimes been forced to amplify on others; but here, where the subject is so fruitful that the harvest overcomes the reaper, I am shortened by my chain, and can only see what is forbidden me to reach, since it is not permitted me to commend you, according to the extent of my wishes, and much less is it in my power to make my commendations equal to your merits. Yet in this frugality of your praises there are some things which I cannot omit without detracting from your character. You have so formed your own education, as enables you to pay the debt you owe your country; or, more properly speaking, both your countries, because you were born, I may almost say, in purple, at the castle of Dublin, when your grandfather was Lord-Lieutenant, and have since been bred in the court of England.

If this address had been in verse, I might have called you, as Claudian calls Mercury, *_Numen commune, gemino faciens commercia mundo_*. The better to satisfy this double obligation, you have early cultivated the genius you have to arms, that when the service of Britain or Ireland shall require your courage and your conduct, you may exert them both to

the benefit of either country. You began in the Cabinet what you afterwards practised in the Camp; and thus both Lucullus and Caesar (to omit a crowd of shining Romans) formed themselves to war by the study of history, and by the examples of the greatest captains, both of Greece and Italy, before their time. I name those two commanders in particular, because they were better read in chronicle than any of the Roman leaders; and that Lucullus, in particular, having only the theory of war from books, was thought fit, without practice, to be sent into the field against the most formidable enemy of Rome. Tully, indeed, was called the learned consul in derision; but then he was not born a soldier--his head was turned another way; when he read the Tactics, he was thinking on the bar, which was his field of battle. The knowledge of warfare is thrown away on a general who dares not make use of what he knows. I commend it only in a man of courage and resolution: in him it will direct his martial spirit, and teach him the way to the best victories,--which are those which are least bloody, and which, though achieved by the hand, are managed by the head. Science distinguishes a man of honour from one of those athletic brutes whom undeservedly we call heroes. Cursed be the poet who first honoured with that name a mere Ajax, a man-killing idiot! The Ulysses of Ovid upbraids his ignorance, that he understood not the shield for which he pleaded: there was engraven on it plans of cities and maps of countries which Ajax could not comprehend, but looked on them as stupidly as his fellow-beast, the lion. But on the other side, your Grace has given yourself the education of his rival; you have studied every spot of ground in Flanders, which for these ten years past has been the scene of battles and of sieges. No wonder if you performed your part with such applause on a theatre which you understood so well.

If I designed this for a poetical encomium, it were easy to enlarge on so copious a subject; but, confining myself to the severity of truth, and to what is becoming me to say, I must not only pass over many instances of your military skill, but also those of your assiduous diligence in the war, and of your personal bravery, attended with an ardent thirst of honour--a long train of generosity--profuseness of doing good--a soul unsatisfied with all it has done and an unextinguished desire of doing more. But all this is matter for your own historians; I am, as Virgil says, *_Spatiis exclusus iniquis_*.

Yet not to be wholly silent of all your charities, I must stay a little on one action, which preferred the relief of others to the consideration of yourself. When, in the battle of Landen, your heat of courage (a fault only pardonable to your youth) had transported you so far before your friends, that they were unable to follow, much less to succour you; when you were not only dangerously, but in all appearance mortally wounded; when in that desperate condition you were made prisoner and carried to Namur, at that time in possession of the French: then it was, my Lord, that you took a considerable part of what was remitted to you of your own revenues, and, as a memorable instance of your heroic charity, put it into the bands of Count Guiscard, who was governor of the place, to be distributed among your fellow-prisoners. The French commander, charmed with the greatness of your soul, accordingly consigned it to the use for which it was intended by the donor; by which means the lives of so many miserable men were saved, and a comfortable provision made for their subsistence, who had otherwise perished, had

not you been the companion of their misfortune; or rather sent by Providence, like another Joseph, to keep out famine from invading those whom in humility you called your brethren. How happy was it for those poor creatures that your Grace was made their fellow-sufferer! and how glorious for you that you chose to want rather than not relieve the wants of others! The heathen poet, in commending the charity of Dido to the Trojans, spoke like a Christian: *_Non ignara mali, miseris succurrere disco_*. All men, even those of a different interest, and contrary principles, must praise this action as the most eminent for piety, not only in this degenerate age, but almost in any of the former; when men were made *_de meliore luto_*; when examples of charity were frequent, and when there were in being, *_Teucro pulcherrima proles, magnanimi heroes nati melioribus annis_*. No envy can detract from this: it will shine in history, and, like swans, grow whiter the longer it endures, and the name of ORMOND will be more celebrated in his captivity than in his greatest triumphs.

But all actions of your Grace are of a piece, as waters keep the tenor of their fountains: your compassion is general, and has the same effect as well on enemies as friends. It is so much in your nature to do good, that your life is but one continued act of placing benefits on many, as the sun is always carrying his light to some part or other of the world; and were it not that your reason guides you where to give, I might almost say that you could not help bestowing more than is consisting with the fortune of a private man or with the will of any but an Alexander.

What wonder is it, then, that being born for a blessing to mankind, your supposed death in that engagement was so generally lamented through the nation! The concernment for it was as universal as the loss; and though the gratitude might be counterfeit in some, yet the tears of all were real: where every man deplored his private part in that calamity, and even those who had not tasted of your favours, yet built so much on the fame of your beneficence, that they bemoaned the loss of their expectations.

This brought the untimely death of your great father into fresh remembrance: as if the same decree had passed on two short successive generations of the virtuous; and I repeated to myself the same verses which I had formerly applied to him: *_Ostendunt terris hunc tantum fata, nec ultra esse sinunt_*. But to the joy, not only of all good men, but of mankind in general, the unhappy omen took not place. You are still living to enjoy the blessings and applause of all the good you have performed, the prayers of multitudes whom you have obliged, for your long prosperity; and that your power of doing generous and charitable actions may be as extended as your will; which is by none more zealously desired than by your Grace's most humble, most obliged, and most obedient servant,

JOHN DRYDEN.

* * * * *

PREFACE.

It is with a poet as with a man who designs to build, and is very exact, as he supposes, in casting up the cost beforehand; but, generally speaking, he is mistaken in his account, and reckons short in the expense he first intended. He alters his mind as the work proceeds, and will have this or that convenience more, of which he had not thought when he began. So has it happened to me: I have built a house, where I intended but a lodge; yet with better success than a certain nobleman, who, beginning with a dog-kennel, never lived to finish the palace he had contrived.

From translating the first of Homer's Iliads (which I intended as an essay to the whole work) I proceeded to the translation of the twelfth book of Ovid's Metamorphoses, because it contains, among other things, the causes, the beginning, and ending of the Trojan war. Here I ought in reason to have stopped; but the speeches of Ajax and Ulysses lying next in my way, I could not baulk them. When I had compassed them, I was so taken with the former part of the fifteenth book, which is the masterpiece of the whole Metamorphoses, that I enjoined myself the pleasing task of rendering it into English. And now I found, by the number of my verses, that they began to swell into a little volume; which gave me an occasion of looking backward on some beauties of my author, in his former books. There occurred to me the hunting of the boar, Cinyras and Myrrha, the good-natured story of Baucis and Philemon, with the rest, which I hope I have translated closely enough, and given them the same turn of verse which they had in the original; and this, I may say without vanity, is not the talent of every poet. He who has

arrived the nearest to it, is the ingenious and learned Sandys, the best versifier of the former age; if I may properly call it by that name, which was the former part of this concluding century. For Spenser and Fairfax both flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth; great masters in our language; and who saw much farther into the beauties of our numbers, than those who immediately followed them. Milton was the poetical son of Spenser, and Mr Waller of Fairfax; for we have our lineal descents and clans, as well as other families. Spenser more than once insinuates, that the soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body; and that he was begotten by him two hundred years after his decease. Milton has acknowledged to me, that Spenser was his original; and many besides myself have heard our famous Waller own, that he derived the harmony of his numbers from the Godfrey of Bulloigne, which was turned into English by Mr Fairfax. But to return. Having done with Ovid for this time, it came into my mind, that our old English poet Chaucer in many things resembled him, and that with no disadvantage on the side of the modern author, as I shall endeavour to prove when I compare them. And as I am, and always have been, studious to promote the honour of my native country, so I soon resolved to put their merits to the trial, by turning some of the Canterbury tales into our language, as it is now refined; for by this means, both the poets being set in the same light, and dressed in the same English habit, story to be compared with story, a certain judgment may be made betwixt them, by the reader, without obtruding my opinion on him. Or if I seem partial to my countryman, and predecessor in the laurel, the friends of antiquity are not few; and besides many of the learned, Ovid has almost all the beaux, and the whole fair sex, his declared patrons. Perhaps I have assumed somewhat more to myself than they allow me, because I have adventured to sum up

the evidence; but the readers are the jury, and their privilege remains entire to decide according to the merits of the cause, or, if they please, to bring it to another hearing, before some other court. In the meantime, to follow the thread of my discourse (as thoughts, according to Mr Hobbs, have always some connexion), so from Chaucer I was led to think on Boccace, who was not only his contemporary, but also pursued the same studies; wrote novels in prose, and many works in verse: particularly is said to have invented the octave rhyme, or stanza of eight lines, which ever since has been maintained by the practice of all Italian writers, who are, or at least assume the title of, Heroic Poets. He and Chaucer, among other things, had this in common, that they refined their mother tongues; but with this difference, that Dante had begun to file their language, at least in verse, before the time of Boccace, who likewise received no little help from his master Petrarch. But the reformation of their prose was wholly owing to Boccace himself, who is yet the standard of purity in the Italian tongue; though many of his phrases are become obsolete, as in process of time it must needs happen. Chaucer, as you have formerly been told by our learned Mr Rymer, first adorned and amplified our barren tongue from the Provencal, which was then the most polished of all the modern languages; but this subject has been copiously treated by that great critic, who deserves no little commendation from us his countrymen. For these reasons of time, and resemblance of genius in Chaucer and Boccace, I resolved to join them in my present work; to which I have added some original papers of my own; which, whether they are equal or inferior to my other poems, an author is the most improper judge; and therefore, I leave them wholly to the mercy of the reader. I will hope the best, that they will not be condemned; but if they should, I have the excuse of an old gentleman,

who, mounting on horseback before some ladies, when I was present, got up somewhat heavily, but desired of the fair spectators that they would count fourscore and eight before they judged him. By the mercy of God, I am already come within twenty years of his number, a cripple in my limbs; but what decays are in my mind, the reader must determine. I think myself as vigorous as ever in the faculties of my soul, excepting only my memory, which is not impaired to any great degree; and if I lose not more of it, I have no great reason to complain. What judgment I had, increases rather than diminishes; and thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me, that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject; to run them into verse, or to give them the other harmony of prose. I have so long studied and practised both, that they are grown into a habit, and become familiar to me; in short, though I may lawfully plead some part of the old gentleman's excuse, yet I will reserve it till I think I have greater need, and ask no grains of allowance for the faults of this my present work, but those which are given of course to human frailty. I will not trouble my reader with the shortness of time in which I writ it, or the several intervals of sickness. They who think too well of their own performances, are apt to boast in their prefaces how little time their works have cost them, and what other business of more importance interfered; but the reader will be as apt to ask the question, why they allowed not a longer time to make their works more perfect? and why they had so despicable an opinion of their judges, as to thrust their indigested stuff upon them, as if they deserved no better?

With this account of my present undertaking, I conclude the first part

of this discourse; in the second part, as at a second sitting, though I alter not the draught, I must touch the same features over again, and change the dead colouring of the whole. In general I will only say, that I have written nothing which savours of immorality or profaneness; at least, I am not conscious to myself of any such intention. If there happen to be found an irreverent expression, or a thought too wanton, they are crept into my verses through my inadvertency; if the searchers find any in the cargo, let them be staved or forfeited, like contraband goods; at least, let their authors be answerable for them, as being but imported merchandise, and not of my own manufacture. On the other side, I have endeavoured to choose such fables, both ancient and modern, as contain in each of them some instructive moral, which I could prove by induction; but the way is tedious, and they leap foremost into sight, without the reader's trouble of looking after them. I wish I could affirm with a safe conscience, that I had taken the same care in all my former writings; for it must be owned, that supposing verses are never so beautiful or pleasing, yet if they contain anything which shocks religion, or good manners, they are at best, what Horace says of good numbers without good sense, *_Versus inopes rerum, nugaeque canorae_*. Thus far, I hope, I am right in court, without renouncing my other right of self-defence, where I have been wrongfully accused, and my sense withdrawn into blasphemy or bawdry, as it has often been by a religious lawyer, in a late pleading against the stage, in which he mixes truth with falsehood, and has not forgotten the old rule of calumniating strongly, that something may remain.

I resume the thread of my discourse with the first of my translation,

which was the first Iliad of Homer. If it shall please God to give me longer life, and moderate health, my intentions are to translate the whole Ilias; provided still that I meet with those encouragements from the public which may enable me to proceed in my undertaking with some cheerfulness. And this I dare assure the world beforehand, that I have found, by trial, Homer a more pleasing task than Virgil (though I say not the translation will be less laborious); for the Grecian is more according to my genius, than the Latin poet. In the works of the two authors, we may read their manners and natural inclinations, which are wholly different. Virgil was of a quiet, sedate temper; Homer was violent, impetuous, and full of fire. The chief talent of Virgil was propriety of thoughts, and ornament of words; Homer was rapid in his thoughts, and took all the liberties, both of numbers and of expressions, which his language, and the age in which he lived, allowed him: Homer's invention was more copious, Virgil's more confined; so that if Homer had not led the way, it was not in Virgil to have begun heroic poetry; for nothing can be more evident, than that the Roman poem is but the second part of the Ilias; a continuation of the same story, and the persons already formed: the manners of Aeneas are those of Hector superadded to those which Homer gave him. The adventures of Ulysses in the Odysseis are imitated in the first six books of Virgil's Aeneas, and though the accidents are not the same (which would have argued him of a servile copying, and total barrenness of invention), yet the seas were the same in which both the heroes wandered, and Dido cannot be denied to be the poetical daughter of Calypso. The six latter books of Virgil's poem are the four and twenty Iliads contracted; a quarrel occasioned by a lady, a single combat, battles fought, and a town besieged. I say not this in derogation to Virgil, neither do I contradict anything which I

have formerly said in his just praise, for his episodes are almost wholly of his own invention; and the form which he has given to the telling makes the tale his own, even though the original story had been the same. But this proves, however, that Homer taught Virgil to design; and if invention be the first virtue of an epic poet, then the Latin poem can only be allowed the second place. Mr Hobbs, in the preface to his own bald translation of the Ilias (studying poetry as he did mathematics, when it was too late), Mr Hobbs, I say, begins the praise of Homer where he should have ended it. He tells us, that the first beauty of an Epic poem consists in diction, that is, in the choice of words, and harmony of numbers. Now, the words are the colouring of the work, which in the order of nature is last to be considered: the design, the disposition, the manners, and the thoughts, are all before it; where any of those are wanting or imperfect, so much wants or is imperfect in the imitation of human life, which is in the very definition of a poem. Words indeed, like glaring colours, are the first beauties that arise, and strike the sight; but if the draught be false or lame, the figures ill-disposed, the manners obscure or inconsistent, or the thoughts unnatural, then the finest colours are but daubing, and the piece is a beautiful monster at the best. Neither Virgil nor Homer were deficient in any of the former beauties; but in this last, which is expression, the Roman poet is at least equal to the Grecian, as I have said elsewhere, supplying the poverty of his language by his musical ear, and by his diligence. But to return: our two great poets, being so different in their tempers, one choleric and sanguine, the other phlegmatic and melancholic; that which makes them excel in their several ways is, that each of them has followed his own natural inclination, as well in forming the design, as in the execution of it. The very heroes show

their authors; Achilles is hot, impatient, revengeful--_impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,_ &c.: AEneas patient, considerate, careful of his people, and merciful to his enemies; ever submissive to the will of Heaven--_quo fata trahunt, retrahuntque, sequamur_. I could please myself with enlarging on this subject, but am forced to defer it to a fitter time. From all I have said, I will only draw this inference, that the action of Homer being more full of vigour than that of Virgil, according to the temper of the writer, is of consequence more pleasing to the reader. One warms you by degrees; the other sets you on fire all at once, and never intermits his heat. 'Tis the same difference which Longinus makes betwixt the effects of eloquence in Demosthenes and Tully--one persuades; the other commands. You never cool while you read Homer, even not in the second book (a graceful flattery to his countrymen), but he hastens from the ships, and concludes not that book till he has made you an amends by the violent playing of a new machine. From thence he hurries on his action with variety of events, and ends it in less compass than two months. This vehemence of his, I confess, is more suitable to my temper; and therefore I have translated his first book with greater pleasure than any part of Virgil. But it was not a pleasure without pains; the continual agitations of the spirits must needs be a weakening of any constitution, especially in age, and many pauses are required for refreshment betwixt the heats, the Iliad of itself being a third part longer than all Virgil's works together.

This is what I thought needful in this place to say of Homer. I proceed to Ovid and Chaucer; considering the former only in relation to the latter. With Ovid ended the golden age of the Roman tongue: from Chaucer

the purity of the English tongue began. The manners of the poets were not unlike: both of them were well-bred, well-natured, amorous, and libertine, at least in their writings--it may be also in their lives. Their studies were the same--philosophy and philology. Both of them were known in astronomy, of which Ovid's books of the Roman feasts, and Chaucer's treatise of the Astrolabe, are sufficient witnesses. But Chaucer was likewise an astrologer, as were Virgil, Horace, Persius, and Manilius. Both writ with wonderful facility and clearness: neither were great inventors; for Ovid only copied the Grecian fables, and most of Chaucer's stories were taken from his Italian contemporaries, or their predecessors. Boccace's Decameron was first published; and from thence our Englishman has borrowed many of his Canterbury tales; yet that of Palamon and Arcite was written in all probability by some Italian wit, in a former age; as I shall prove hereafter. The tale of Grizzild was the invention of Petrarch; by him sent to Boccace; from whom it came to Chaucer. Troilus and Cressida was also written by a Lombard author; but much amplified by our English translator, as well as beautified; the genius of our countrymen in general being rather to improve an invention, than to invent themselves; as is evident not only in our poetry, but in many of our manufactures. I find I have anticipated already, and taken up from Boccace before I come to him; but there is so much less behind; and I am of the temper of most kings, who love to be in debt, are all for present money, no matter how they pay it afterwards: besides, the nature of a preface is rambling; never wholly out of the way, nor in it. This I have learned from the practice of honest Montaign, and return at my pleasure to Ovid and Chaucer, of whom I have little more to say. Both of them built on the inventions of other men; yet since Chancer had something of his own, as the Wife of Bath's

Tale the Cock and the Fox, which I have translated, and some others, I may justly give our countryman the precedence in that part; since I can remember nothing of Ovid which was wholly his. Both of them understood the manners, under which name I comprehend the passions, and, in a larger sense the descriptions of persons, and their very habits: for an example, I see Baucis and Philemon as perfectly before me, as if some ancient painter had drawn them; and all the pilgrims in the Canterbury tales, their humours, their features, and the very dress, as distinctly as if I had supped with them at the Tabard in Southwark: yet even there too the figures in Chaucer are much more lively, and set in a better light; which though I have not time to prove, yet I appeal to the reader, and am sure he will clear me from partiality. The thoughts and words remain to be considered in the comparison of the two poets; and I have saved myself one half of that labour, by owning that Ovid lived when the Roman tongue was in its meridian; Chaucer, in the dawning of our language: therefore that part of the comparison stands not on an equal foot, any more than the diction of Ennius and Ovid; or of Chaucer and our present English. The words are given up as a post not to be defended in our poet, because he wanted the modern art of fortifying. The thoughts remain to be considered; and they are to be measured only by their propriety; that is, as they flow more or less naturally from the persons described, on such and such occasions. The vulgar judges, which are nine parts in ten of all nations, who call conceits and jingles wit, who see Ovid full of them, and Chaucer altogether without them, will think me little less than mad for preferring the Englishman to the Roman; yet, with their leave, I must presume to say, that the things they admire are only glittering trifles, and so far from being witty, that in a serious poem they are nauseous, because they are

unnatural. Would any man, who is ready to die for love, describe his passion like Narcissus? Would he think of *_inopem me copia fecit_*, and a dozen more of such expressions, poured on the neck of one another, and signifying all the same thing? If this were wit, was this a time to be witty, when the poor wretch was in the agony of death? This is just John Littlewit in Bartholomew Fair, who had a conceit (as he tells you) left him in his misery; a miserable conceit. On these occasions the poet should endeavour to raise pity; but instead of this, Ovid is tickling you to laugh. Virgil never made use of such machines, when he was moving you to commiserate the death of Dido: he would not destroy what he was building. Chaucer makes Arcite violent in his love, and unjust in the pursuit of it; yet when he came to die, he made him think more reasonably: he repents not of his love, for that had altered his character; but acknowledges the injustice of his proceedings, and resigns Emilia to Palamon. What would Ovid have done on this occasion? He would certainly have made Arcite witty on his deathbed. He had complained he was farther off from possession by being so near, and a thousand such boyisms, which Chaucer rejected as below the dignity of the subject. They who think otherwise would, by the same reason, prefer Lucan and Ovid to Homer and Virgil, and Martial to all four of them. As for the turn of words, in which Ovid particularly excels all poets, they are sometimes a fault, and sometimes a beauty, as they are used properly or improperly; but in strong passions always to be shunned, because passions are serious, and will admit no playing. The French have a high value for them; and I confess, they are often what they call delicate, when they are introduced with judgment; but Chaucer writ with more simplicity, and followed nature more closely, than to use them. I have thus far, to the best of my knowledge, been an upright judge betwixt the

parties in competition, not meddling with the design nor the disposition of it; because the design was not their own, and in the disposing of it they were equal. It remains that I say somewhat of Chaucer in particular.

In the first place, as he is the father of English poetry, so I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil. He is a perpetual fountain of good sense; learned in all sciences, and therefore speaks properly on all subjects; as he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off--a continence which is practised by few writers, and scarcely by any of the ancients, excepting Virgil and Horace. One of our late great poets is sunk in his reputation, because he could never forgive any conceit which came in his way; but swept like a drag-net, great and small. There was plenty enough, but the dishes were ill-sorted; whole pyramids of sweetmeats, for boys and women; but little of solid meat, for men. All this proceeded not from any want of knowledge, but of judgment; neither did he want that in discerning the beauties and faults of other poets; but only indulged himself in the luxury of writing; and perhaps knew it was a fault, but hoped the reader would not find it. For this reason, though he must always be thought a great poet, he is no longer esteemed a good writer; and for ten impressions, which his works have had in so many successive years, yet at present a hundred books are scarcely purchased once a twelvemonth: for, as my last Lord Rochester said, though somewhat profanely, not being of God, he could not stand.

Chaucer followed nature everywhere; but was never so bold to go beyond

her: and there is a great difference of being *Poeta* and *nimis Poeta*, if we believe Catullus, as much as betwixt a modest behaviour and affectation. The verse of Chaucer, I confess, is not harmonious to us; but it is like the eloquence of one whom Tacitus commends, it was *auribus istius temporis accommodata*. They who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical; and it continues so even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of Lidgate and Gower, his contemporaries: there is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect. It is true, I cannot go so far as he who published the last edition of him; for he would make us believe the fault is in our ears, and that there were really ten syllables in a verse where we find but nine. But this opinion is not worth confuting; it is so gross and obvious an error, that common sense (which is a rule in every thing but matters of faith and revelation) must convince the reader, that equality of numbers in every verse which we call Heroic, was either not known, or not always practised in Chaucer's age. It were an easy matter to produce some thousands of his verses, which are lame for want of half a foot, and sometimes a whole one, and which no pronunciation can make otherwise. We can only say, that he lived in the infancy of our poetry, and that nothing is brought to perfection at the first. We must be children before we grow men. There was an Ennius, and in process of time a Lucilius, and a Lucretius, before Virgil and Horace; even after Chaucer there was a Spenser, a Harrington, a Fairfax, before Waller and Denham were in being; and our numbers were in their nonage till these last appeared. I need say little of his parentage, life and fortunes: they are to be found at large in all the editions of his works. He was employed abroad and favoured by Edward the Third, Richard the Second, and Henry the Fourth, and was

poet, as I suppose, to all three of them. In Richard's time, I doubt, he was a little dipt in the rebellion of the commons; and being brother-in-law to John of Gaunt, it was no wonder if he followed the fortunes of that family; and was well with Henry the Fourth when he had deposed his predecessor. Neither is it to be admired, that Henry, who was a wise as well as a valiant prince, who claimed by succession, and was sensible that his title was not sound, but was rightfully in Mortimer, who had married the heir of York; it was not to be admired, I say, if that great politician should be pleased to have the greatest wit of those times in his interests, and to be the trumpet of his praises. Augustus had given him the example, by the advice of Maecenas, who recommended Virgil and Horace to him; whose praises helped to make him popular while he was alive, and after his death have made him precious to posterity. As for the religion of our poet, he seems to have some little bias towards the opinions of Wickliff, after John of Gaunt his patron; somewhat of which appears in the tale of Piers Plowman: yet I cannot blame him for inveighing so sharply against the vices of the clergy in his age: their pride, their ambition, their pomp, their avarice, their worldly interest, deserved the lashes which he gave them, both in that, and in most of his Canterbury tales: neither has his contemporary Boccace spared them. Yet both those poets lived in much esteem with good and holy men in orders; for the scandal which is given by particular priests, reflects not on the sacred function. Chaucer's Monk, his Chanon, and his Fryer, took not from the character of his Good Parson. A satirical poet is the check of the laymen on bad priests. We are only to take care, that we involve not the innocent with the guilty in the same condemnation. The good cannot be too much honoured, nor the bad too coarsely used; for the corruption of the best becomes the worst.

When a clergyman is whipped, his gown is first taken off, by which the dignity of his order is secured: if he be wrongfully accused, he has his action of slander; and it is at the poet's peril, if he transgress the law. But they will tell us, that all kind of satire, though never so well deserved by particular priests, yet brings the whole order into contempt. Is then the peerage of England anything dishonoured, when a peer suffers for his treason? If he be libelled, or any way defamed, he has his *_Scandalum Magnatum_* to punish the offender. They who use this kind of argument, seem to be conscious to themselves of somewhat which has deserved the poet's lash; and are less concerned for their public capacity, than for their private; at least there is pride at the bottom of their reasoning. If the faults of men in orders are only to be judged among themselves, they are all in some sort parties; for, since they say the honour of their order is concerned in every member of it, how can we be sure that they will be impartial judges? How far I may be allowed to speak my opinion in this case, I know not; but I am sure a dispute of this nature caused mischief in abundance betwixt a king of England and an archbishop of Canterbury; one standing up for the laws of his land, and the other for the honour (as he called it) of God's Church; which ended in the murder of the prelate, and in the whipping of his majesty from post to pillar for his penance. The learned and ingenious Dr Drake has saved me the labour of inquiring into the esteem and reverence which the priests have, had of old; and I would rather extend than diminish any part of it; yet I must needs say, that when a priest provokes me without any occasion given him, I have no reason, unless it be the charity of a Christian, to forgive him. *_Prior laesit_* is justification sufficient in the civil law. If I answer him in his own language, self-defence, I am sure, must be allowed me; and if I carry it farther,

even to a sharp recrimination, somewhat may be indulged to human frailty. Yet my resentment has not wrought as far, but that I have followed Chaucer in his character of a holy man, and have enlarged on that subject with some pleasure, reserving to myself the right, if I shall think fit hereafter, to describe another sort of priests, such as are more easily to be found than the Good Parson; such as have given the last blow to Christianity in this age, by a practice so contrary to their doctrine. But this will keep cold till another time. In the meanwhile, I take up Chaucer where I left him. He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his Canterbury tales the various manners and humours (as we now call them) of the whole English nation, in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations, but in their very physiognomies and persons. Baptista Porta could not have described their natures better, than by the marks which the poet gives them. The matter and manner of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humours, and callings, that each of them would be improper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious characters are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity: their discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling, and their breeding; such as are becoming of them, and of them only. Some of his persons are vicious, and some virtuous; some are unlearned, or (as Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learned. Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different. The Reeve, the Miller, and the Cook, are several men, and distinguished from each other, as much as the mincing Lady Prioress, and the broad-speaking gap-toothed Wife of Bath. But enough of this: there

is such a variety of game springing up before me, that I am distracted in my choice, and know not which to follow. 'Tis sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty. We have our forefathers and great-granddames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days: their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England, though they are called by other names than those of monks and friars, and chanons, and lady abbesses, and nuns: for mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of nature, though every thing is altered. May I have leave to do myself the justice, (since my enemies will do me none, and are so far from granting me to be a good poet, that they will not allow me so much as to be a Christian, or a moral man); may I have leave, I say, to inform my reader, that I have confined my choice to such tales of Chaucer as savour nothing of immodesty. If I had desired more to please than to instruct, the Reeve, the Miller, the Shipman, the Merchants, the Sumner, and above all the Wife of Bath, in the prologue to her tale, would have procured me as many friends and readers as there are beaux and ladies of pleasure in the town. But I will no more offend against good manners. I am sensible, as I ought to be, of the scandal I have given by my loose writings; and make what reparation I am able by this public acknowledgment. If any thing of this nature, or of profaneness, be crept into these poems, I am so far from defending it, that I disown it. *_Totum hoc indicium volo._* Chaucer makes another manner of apology for his broad-speaking, and Boccace makes the like; but I will follow neither of them. Our countryman, in the end of his characters, before the Canterbury tales, thus excuses the ribaldry, which is very gross in many of his novels.

"But first, I pray you of your courtesy,
That ye ne arrettee it nought my villainy,
Though that I plainly speak in this mattere,
To tellen you her words, and eke her chere:
Ne though I speak her words properly,
For this ye knowen as well as I,
Who shall tellen a tale after a man,
He mote rehearse as nye as ever he can:
Everich word of it been in his charge,
All speke he, never so rudely, ne large.
Or else he mote tellen his tale untrue,
Or feine things, or find words new:
He may not spare, although he were his brother,
He mote as well say o word as another,
Christ spake himself full broad in holy writ,
And well I wote no villainy is it;
Eke Plato saith, who so can him rede,
the words mote been cousin to the dede."

Yet, if a man should have inquired of Boccace or of Chaucer what need they had of introducing such characters, where obscene words were proper in their mouths, but very indecent to be heard,--I know not what answer they could have made; for that reason, such tale shall be left untold by me. You have here a specimen of Chaucer's language, which is so obsolete, that his sense is scarce to be understood; and you have likewise more than one example of his unequal numbers, which were mentioned before. Yet many of his verses consist of ten syllables, and

the words not much behind our present English; as, for example, these two lines in the description of the carpenter's young wife:

"Wincing she was, as is a jolly colt,
Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt."

I have almost done with Chaucer when I have answered some objections relating to my present work. I find some people are offended that I have turned these tales into modern English, because they think them unworthy of my pains, and look on Chaucer as a dry, old-fashioned wit not worth reviving. I have often heard the late Earl of Leicester say that Mr Cowley himself was of that opinion, who, having read him over at my lord's request declared he had no taste of him. I dare not advance my opinion against the judgment of so great an author, but I think it fair, however, to leave the decision to the public. Mr Cowley was too modest to set up for a dictator, and being shocked, perhaps, with his old style, never examined into the depth of his good sense. Chaucer, I confess, is a rough diamond, and must first be polished ere he shines. I deny not, likewise, that, living in our early days of poetry, he writes not always of a piece, but sometimes mingles trivial things with those of greater moment. Sometimes also, though not often, he runs riot, like Ovid, and knows not when he has said enough. But there are more great wits besides Chaucer, whose fault is their excess of conceits, and those ill sorted. An author is not to write all he can, but only all he ought. Having observed this redundancy in Chaucer (as it is an easy matter for a man of ordinary parts to find a fault in one of greater), I have not tied myself to a literal translation, but have often omitted

what I judged unnecessary, or not of dignity enough to appear in the company of better thoughts. I have presumed farther, in some places, and added somewhat of my own where I thought my author was deficient, and had not given his thoughts their true lustre, for want of words in the beginning of our language. And to this I was the more emboldened, because (if I may be permitted to say it of myself) I found I had a soul congenial to his, and that I had been conversant in the same studies. Another poet, in another age, may take the same liberty with my writings, if, at least, they live long enough to deserve correction. It was also necessary sometimes to restore the sense of Chaucer, which was lost or mangled in the errors of the press. Let this example suffice at present. In the story of Palamon and Arcite, where the temple of Diana is described, you find these verses in all the editions of our author:--

"There saw I Dane turned into a tree,
I mean not the goddess Diane,
But Venus' daughter, which that hight Dane:"

Which, after a little consideration, I knew was to be reformed into this sense, that Daphne, the daughter of Peneus, was turned into a tree. I durst not make thus bold with Ovid, lest some future Milbourn should arise, and say I varied from my author because I understood him not.

But there are other judges who think I ought not to have translated Chaucer into English, out of a quite contrary notion. They suppose there is a certain veneration due to his old language, and that it is little

less than profanation and sacrilege to alter it. They are farther of opinion, that somewhat of his good sense will suffer in this transfusion, and much of the beauty of his thoughts will infallibly be lost, which appear with more grace in their old habit. Of this opinion was that excellent person whom I mentioned, the late Earl of Leicester, who valued Chaucer as much as Mr Cowley despised him. My lord dissuaded me from this attempt (for I was thinking of it some years before his death), and his authority prevailed so far with me, as to defer my undertaking while he lived, in deference to him; yet my reason was not convinced with what he urged against it. If the first end of a writer be to be understood, then, as his language grows obsolete, his thoughts must grow obscure: *_multa renascentur quae nunc cecidere, cadentque, quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus, quem penes arbitrium est et jus et norma loquendi._* When an ancient word for its sound and significancy deserves to be revived, I have that reasonable veneration for antiquity to restore it. All beyond this is superstition. Words are not like landmarks, so sacred as never to be removed; customs are changed, and even statutes are silently repealed, when the reason ceases for which they were enacted. As for the other part of the argument, that his thoughts will lose their original beauty by the innovation of words; in the first place, not only their beauty, but their being is lost, where they are no longer understood, which is the present case. I grant that something must be lost in all transfusion, that is, in all translations; but the sense will remain, which would otherwise be lost, or at least be maimed, when it is scarce intelligible, and that but to a few. How few are there who can read Chaucer, so as to understand him perfectly! And if imperfectly, then with less profit and no pleasure. 'Tis not for the use of some old Saxon friends that I have taken these

pains with him: let them neglect my version, because they have no need of it. I made it for their sakes who understand sense and poetry as well as they, when that poetry and sense is put into words which they understand. I will go further, and dare to add, that what beauties I lose in some places, I give to others which had them not originally; but in this I may be partial to myself; let the reader judge, and I submit to his decision. Yet I think I have just occasion to complain of them, who, because they understand Chaucer, would deprive the greater part of their countrymen of the same advantage, and hoard him up, as misers do their grandam, gold, only to look on it themselves, and hinder others from making use of it. In sum, I seriously protest that no man ever had, or can have, a greater veneration for Chaucer than myself. I have translated some part of his works, only that I might perpetuate his memory, or at least refresh it, amongst my countrymen. If I have altered him anywhere for the better, I must at the same time acknowledge that I could have done nothing without him: *_Facile est inventis addere_* is no great commendation, and I am not so vain to think I have deserved a greater. I will conclude what I have to say of him singly, with this one remark: a lady of my acquaintance, who keeps a kind of correspondence with some authors of the fair sex in France, has been informed by them that Mademoiselle de Scudery, who is as old as Sibyl, and inspired like her by the same god of poetry, is at this time translating Chaucer into modern French; from which I gather that he has been formerly translated into the old Provençal, (for how she should come to understand old English I know not). But the matter of fact being true, it makes me think that there is something in it like fatality; that, after certain periods of time, the fame and memory of great wits should be renewed, as Chaucer is both in France and England. If this be wholly chance, 'tis

extraordinary, and I dare not call it more for fear of being taxed with superstition.

Boccace comes last to be considered, who, living in the same age with Chaucer, had the same genius, and followed the same studies. Both writ novels, and each of them cultivated his mother tongue. But the greatest resemblance of our two modern authors being in their familiar style, and pleasing way of relating comical adventures, I may pass it over, because I have translated nothing from Boccace of that nature. In the serious part of poetry, the advantage is wholly on Chaucer's side; for though the Englishman has borrowed many tales from the Italian, yet it appears that those of Boccace were not generally of his own making, but taken from authors of former ages, and by him only modelled; so that what there was of invention in either of them may be judged equal. But Chaucer has refined on Boccace, and has mended the stories which he has borrowed, in his way of telling; though prose allows more liberty of thought, and the expression is more easy when unconfined by numbers. Our countryman carries weight, and yet wins the race at disadvantage. I desire not the reader should take my word, and, therefore, I will set two of their discourses on the same subject, in the same light, for every man to judge betwixt them. I translated Chaucer first, and, amongst the rest, pitched on the Wife of Bath's tale, not daring, as I have said, to adventure on her prologue, because it is too licentious. There Chaucer introduces an old woman of mean parentage, whom a youthful knight of noble blood was forced to marry, and consequently loathed her. The crone being in bed with him on the wedding night, and finding his aversion, endeavours to win his affection by reason, and speaks a good

word for herself, (as who could blame her?) in hope to mollify the sullen bridegroom. She takes her topics from the benefits of poverty, the advantages of old age and ugliness, the vanity of youth, and the silly pride of ancestry and titles without inherent virtue, which is the true nobility. When I had closed Chaucer I returned to Ovid and translated some more of his fables, and by this time had so far forgotten the Wife of Bath's tale, that, when I took up Boccace, unawares I fell on the same argument of preferring virtue to nobility of blood and titles, in the story of Sigismunda, which I had certainly avoided for the resemblance of the two discourses, if my memory had not failed me. Let the reader weigh them both, and if he thinks me partial to Chaucer, it is in him to right Boccace.

I prefer in our countryman, far above all his other stories, the noble poem of Palamon and Arcite, which is of the Epic kind, and perhaps not much inferior to the Ilias, or the AENEIS. The story is more pleasing than either of them, the manners as perfect, the diction as poetical, the learning as deep and various, and the disposition full as artful,--only it includes a greater length of time, as taking up seven years at least; but Aristotle has left undecided the duration of the action, which, yet, is easily reduced into the compass of a year by a narration of what preceded the return of Palamon to Athens. I had thought, for the honour of our nation, and more particularly for his, whose laurel, though unworthy, I have worn after him, that this story was of English growth, and Chaucer's own; but I was undeceived by Boccace, for, casually looking on the end of his seventh Giornata, I found Dioneo (under which name he shadows himself) and Fiametta (who

represents his mistress, the natural daughter of Robert king of Naples) of whom these words are spoken: *_Dioneo e la Fiametta granpezza contarono insieme d'Arcita e di Palamone_*: by which it appears that this story was written before the time of Boccace, but the name of its author being wholly lost, Chaucer is now become an original, and I question not but the poem has received many beauties by passing through his noble hands. Besides this tale, there is another of his own invention, after the manner of the Provençals, called "The Flower and the Leaf," with which I was so particularly pleased, both for the invention and the moral, that I cannot hinder myself from recommending it to the reader.

As a corollary to this preface, in which I have done justice to others, I owe somewhat to myself: not that I think it worth my time to enter the lists with one Milbourn, and one Blackmore, but barely to take notice, that such men there are, who have written scurrilously against me without any provocation. Milbourn, who is in orders, pretends, amongst the rest, this quarrel to me, that I have fallen foul on priesthood. If I have, I am only to ask pardon of good priests, and am afraid his part of the reparation will come to little. Let him be satisfied that he shall not be able to force himself upon me for an adversary. I contemn him too much to enter into competition with him. His own translations of Virgil have answered his criticisms on mine. If (as they say he has declared in print) he prefers the version of Ogilby to mine, the world has made him the same compliment: for it is agreed on all hands that he writes even below Ogilby: that, you will say, is not easily to be done; but what cannot Milbourn bring about? I am satisfied, however, that while he and I live together, I shall not be thought the worst poet of

the age. It looks as if I had desired him underhand to write so ill against me; but upon my honest word I have not bribed him to do me this service, and am wholly guiltless of his pamphlet. 'Tis true, I should be glad, if I could persuade him to continue his good offices, and write such another critique on any thing of mine; for I find by experience he has a great stroke with the reader, when he condemns any of my poems, to make the world have a better opinion of them. He has taken some pains with my poetry; but nobody will be persuaded to take the same with his. If I had taken to the church (as he affirms, but which was never in my thoughts), I should have had more sense, if not more grace, than to have turned myself out of my benefice by writing libels on my parishioners. But his account of my manners and my principles are of a piece with his cavils and his poetry; and so I have done with him for ever.

As for the City Bard, or Knight Physician, I hear his quarrel to me is, that I was the author of Absalom and Achitophel, which he thinks is a little hard on his fanatic patrons in London.

But I will deal the more civilly with his two poems, because nothing ill is to be spoken of the dead; and therefore peace be to the manes of his Arthurs! I will only say, that it was not for this noble knight that I drew the plan of an Epic poem on King Arthur, in my preface to the translation of Juvenal. The guardian angels of kingdoms were machines too ponderous for him to manage; and therefore he rejected them, as Dares did the whirlbats of Eryx, when they were thrown before him by Entellus. Yet from that preface he plainly took his hint; for he began immediately upon the story, though he had the baseness not to

acknowledge his benefactor, but instead of it, to traduce me in a libel.

I shall say the less of Mr Collier, because in many things he has taxed me justly; and I have pleaded guilty to all thoughts and expressions of mine, which can be truly argued of obscenity, profaneness, or immorality; and retract them. If he be my enemy, let him triumph; if he be my friend, as I have given him no personal occasion to be otherwise, he will be glad of my repentance. It becomes me not to draw my pen in the defence of a bad cause, when I have so often drawn it for a good one. Yet it were not difficult to prove, that in many places he has perverted my meaning by his glosses; and interpreted my words into blasphemy and bawdry, of which they were not guilty; besides that he is too much given to horse-play in his raillery; and comes to battle like a dictator from the plough. I will not say, the zeal of God's house has eaten him up; but I am sure it has devoured some part of his good-manners and civility. It might also be doubted whether it were altogether zeal which prompted him to this rough manner of proceeding: perhaps it became not one of his function to rake into the rubbish of ancient and modern plays: a divine might have employed his pains to better purpose than in the nastiness of Plautus and Aristophanes; whose examples, as they excuse not me, so it might be possibly supposed that he read them not without some pleasure. They who have written commentaries on those poets, or on Horace, Juvenal, and Martial, have explained some vices, which without their interpretation had been unknown to modern times. Neither has he judged impartially betwixt the former age and us.

There is more bawdry in one play of Fletcher's, called "The Custom of the Country," than in all ours together. Yet this has been often acted on the stage in my remembrance. Are the times so much more reformed now, than they were five-and-twenty years ago? If they are, I congratulate the amendment of our morals. But I am not to prejudice the cause of my fellow-poets, though I abandon my own defence. They have some of them answered for themselves, and neither they nor I can think Mr Collier so formidable an enemy that we should shun him. He has lost ground at the latter end of the day, by pursuing his point too far, like the Prince of Conde at the battle of Senneffe: from immoral plays, to no plays; *_abusu ad usum non valet consequentia_*. But being a party, I am not to erect myself into a judge. As for the rest of those who have written against me, they are such scoundrels, that they deserve not the least notice to be taken of them. Blackmore and Milbourn are only distinguished from the crowd, by being remembered to their infamy.

--Demetri, teque Tigelli

Discipulorum inter jubeo plorare cathedras.

* * * * *

TO HER GRACE THE DUCHESS OF ORMOND,[71]

WITH THE FOLLOWING POEM OF PALAMON AND ARCITE.

MADAM,

The bard who first adorn'd our native tongue,
Tuned to his British lyre this ancient song:
Which Homer might without a blush rehearse,
And leaves a doubtful palm in Virgil's verse:
He match'd their beauties, where they most excel;
Of love sung better, and of arms as well.

Vouchsafe, illustrious Ormond! to behold
What power the charms of beauty had of old;
Nor wonder if such deeds of arms were done,
Inspired by two fair eyes that sparkled like your own. 10

If Chaucer by the best idea wrought,
And poets can divine each other's thought,
The fairest nymph before his eyes he set;
And then the fairest was Plantagenet;
Who three contending princes made her prize,
And ruled the rival nations with her eyes:
Who left immortal trophies of her fame,
And to the noblest order gave the name.

Like her, of equal kindred to the throne,
You keep her conquests, and extend your own: 20

As when the stars in their ethereal race,
At length have roll'd around the liquid space,
At certain periods they resume their place;
From the same point of heaven their course advance,
And move in measures of their former dance;
Thus, after length of ages, she returns,
Restored in you, and the same place adorns;
Or you perform her office in the sphere,
Born of her blood, and make a new Platonic year.

O true Plantagenet! O race divine! 30

(For beauty still is fatal to the line)

Had Chaucer lived that angel-face to view,
Sure he had drawn his Emily from you;
Or had you lived to judge the doubtful right,
Your noble Palamon had been the knight;
And conquering Theseus from his side had sent
Your generous lord, to guide the Theban government.

Time shall accomplish that; and I shall see

A Palamon in him, in you an Emily.

Already have the Fates your path prepared, 40

And sure presage your future sway declared:

When westward, like the sun, you took your way,

And from benighted Britain bore the day,

Blue Triton gave the signal from the shore,

The ready Nereids heard, and swam before,

To smooth the seas; a soft Etesian gale

But just inspired, and gently swell'd the sail;

Portunus took his turn, whose ample hand

Heaved up his lighten'd keel, and sunk the sand,
And steer'd the sacred vessel safe to land. 50
The land, if not restrain'd, had met your way,
Projected out a neck, and jutted to the sea.
Hibernia, prostrate at your feet, adored
In you the pledge of her expected lord;
Due to her isle; a venerable name;
His father and his grandsire known to fame;
Awed by that house, accustom'd to command,
The sturdy kerns in due subjection stand;
Nor bear the reins in any foreign hand.
At your approach, they crowded to the port; 60
And scarcely landed, you create a court:
As Ormond's harbinger, to you they run;
For Venus is the promise of the sun.
The waste of civil wars, their towns destroy'd,
Pales unhonour'd, Ceres unemploy'd,
Were all forgot; and one triumphant day
Wiped all the tears of three campaigns away.
Blood, rapines, massacres, were cheaply bought,
So mighty recompence your beauty brought.
As when the dove returning bore the mark 70
Of earth restored to the long labouring ark,
The relics of mankind, secure of rest,
Oped every window to receive the guest,
And the fair bearer of the message bless'd;
So, when you came, with loud repeated cries,
The nation took an omen from your eyes,

And God advanced his rainbow in the skies,
To sign inviolable peace restored;
The saints, with solemn shouts, proclaim'd the new accord.
When at your second coming you appear, 80
(For I foretell that millenary year)
The sharpen'd share shall vex the soil no more,
But earth unbidden shall produce her store;
The land shall laugh, the circling ocean smile,
And Heaven's indulgence bless the holy isle.
Heaven from all ages has reserved for you
That happy clime, which venom never knew;
Or if it had been there, your eyes alone
Have power to chase all poison, but their own.

Now in this interval, which Fate has cast 90
Betwixt your future glories, and your past,
This pause of power, 'tis Ireland's hour to mourn;
While England celebrates your safe return,
By which you seem the seasons to command,
And bring our summers back to their forsaken land.

The vanquish'd isle our leisure must attend,
Till the fair blessing we vouchsafe to send;
Nor can we spare you long, though often we may lend.
The dove was twice employ'd abroad, before
The world was dried, and she return'd no more. 100

Nor dare we trust so soft a messenger,
New from her sickness, to that northern air:
Rest here a while, your lustre to restore,
That they may see you as you shone before;
For yet the eclipse not wholly past, you wade
Through some remains, and dimness of a shade.

A subject in his prince may claim a right,
Nor suffer him with strength impair'd to fight;
Till force returns, his ardour we restrain,
And curb his warlike wish to cross the main. 110

Now past the danger, let the learn'd begin
The inquiry where disease could enter in;
How those malignant atoms forced their way;
What in the faultless frame they found to make their prey,
Where every element was weigh'd so well,
That Heaven alone, who mix'd the mass, could tell
Which of the four ingredients could rebel;
And where, imprison'd in so sweet a cage,
A soul might well be pleased to pass an age.

And yet the fine materials made it weak: 120
Porcelain, by being pure, is apt to break:
Even to your breast the sickness durst aspire;

And, forced from that fair temple to retire,
Profanely set the holy place on fire.
In vain your lord, like young Vespasian, mourn'd
When the fierce flames the sanctuary burn'd:
And I prepared to pay in verses rude
A most detested act of gratitude:
Even this had been your elegy, which now
Is offer'd for your health, the table of my vow. 130

Your angel sure our Morley's mind inspired,
To find the remedy your ill required;
As once the Macedon, by Jove's decree,
Was taught to dream an herb for Ptolemy:
Or Heaven, which had such over-cost bestow'd,
As scarce it could afford to flesh and blood,
So liked the frame, he would not work anew,
To save the charges of another you.
Or by his middle science did he steer,
And saw some great contingent good appear, 140
Well worth a miracle to keep you here:
And for that end preserved the precious mould,
Which all the future Ormonds was to hold;
And meditated in his better mind
An heir from you, which may redeem the failing kind.

Blest be the Power which has at once restored
The hopes of lost succession to your lord!

Joy to the first and last of each degree--
Virtue to courts, and, what I long'd to see,
To you the Graces, and the Muse to me! 150
O daughter of the rose! whose cheeks unite
The differing titles of the red and white;
Who Heaven's alternate beauty well display,
The blush of morning, and the milky way;
Whose face is Paradise, but fenced from sin:
For God in either eye has placed a cherubin.

All is your lord's alone; even absent, he
Employs the care of chaste Penelope.
For him you waste in tears your widow'd hours,
For him your curious needle paints the flowers; 160
Such works of old imperial dames were taught;
Such, for Ascanius, fair Eliza wrought.
The soft recesses of your hours improve
The three fair pledges of your happy love:
All other parts of pious duty done,
You owe your Ormond nothing but a son;
To fill in future times his father's place,
And wear the garter of his mother's race.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 71: 'Duchess of Ormond:' daughter of Duke of Bedford,
afterwards Lieutenant of Ireland, and who had recently visited it.]

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PALAMON AND ARCITE:

OR, THE KNIGHT'S TALE.

BOOK I.

In days of old, there lived, of mighty fame,
A valiant prince, and Theseus was his name:
A chief, who more in feats of arms excell'd,
The rising nor the setting sun beheld.
Of Athens he was lord; much land he won,
And added foreign countries to his crown.
In Scythia with the warrior queen he strove,
Whom first by force he conquer'd, then by love;
He brought in triumph back the beauteous dame,
With whom her sister, fair Emilia, came. 10
With honour to his home let Theseus ride,
With love to friend, and fortune for his guide,
And his victorious army at his side.

I pass their warlike pomp, their proud array,
Their shouts, their songs, their welcome on the way.
But, were it not too long, I would recite
The feats of Amazons, the fatal fight
Betwixt the hardy queen and hero knight;
The town besieged, and how much blood it cost
The female army, and the Athenian host; 20
The spousals of Hippolita the queen;
What tilts and tourneys at the feast were seen;
The storm at their return, the ladies' fear:
But these, and other things, I must forbear.
The field is spacious I design to sow,
With oxen far unfit to draw the plough:
The remnant of my tale is of a length
To tire your patience, and to waste my strength;
And trivial accidents shall be forborne,
That others may have time to take their turn; 30
As was at first enjoin'd us by mine host:
That he whose tale is best, and pleases most,
Should win his supper at our common cost.

And therefore where I left, I will pursue
This ancient story, whether false or true,
In hope it may be mended with a new.
The prince I mention'd, full of high renown,
In this array drew near the Athenian town;
When in his pomp and utmost of his pride,

Marching he chanced to cast his eye aside, 40
And saw a choir of mourning dames, who lay
By two and two across the common way:
At his approach they raised a rueful cry,
And beat their breasts, and held their hands on high,
Creeping and crying, till they seized at last
His courser's bridle, and his feet embraced.
Tell me, said Theseus, what and whence you are,
And why this funeral pageant you prepare?
Is this the welcome of my worthy deeds,
To meet my triumph in ill-omen'd weeds? 50
Or envy you my praise, and would destroy
With grief my pleasures, and pollute my joy?
Or are you injured, and demand relief?
Name your request, and I will ease your grief.

The most in years of all the mourning train
Began; but swooned first away for pain,
Then scarce recover'd spoke: Nor envy we
Thy great renown, nor grudge thy victory;
'Tis thine, O king, the afflicted to redress,
And fame has fill'd the world with thy success: 60
We wretched women sue for that alone,
Which of thy goodness is refused to none;
Let fall some drops of pity on our grief,
If what we beg be just, and we deserve relief:
For none of us, who now thy grace implore,

But held the rank of sovereign queen before;
Till, thanks to giddy chance, which never bears,
That mortal bliss should last for length of years,
She cast us headlong from our high estate,
And here in hope of thy return we wait: 70
And long have waited in the temple nigh,
Built to the gracious goddess Clemency.
But reverence thou the Power whose name it bears,
Relieve the oppress'd, and wipe the widow's tears.
I, wretched I, have other fortune seen,
The wife of Capaneus, and once a queen:
At Thebes he fell; cursed be the fatal day!
And all the rest thou seest in this array,
To make their moan, their lords in battle lost
Before that town besieged by our confederate host: 80
But Creon, old and impious, who commands
The Theban city, and usurps the lands,
Denies the rites of funeral fires to those
Whose breathless bodies yet he calls his foes.
Unburn'd, unburied, on a heap they lie;
Such is their fate, and such his tyranny;
No friend has leave to bear away the dead,
But with their lifeless limbs his hounds are fed.
At this she shriek'd aloud; the mournful train
Echoed her grief, and grovelling on the plain, 90
With groans, and hands upheld, to move his mind,
Besought his pity to their helpless kind!

The prince was touch'd, his tears began to flow,
And, as his tender heart would break in two,
He sigh'd, and could not but their fate deplore,
So wretched now, so fortunate before.
Then lightly from his lofty steed he flew,
And, raising one by one the suppliant crew,
To comfort each full solemnly he swore,
That by the faith which knights to knighthood bore, 100
And whate'er else to chivalry belongs,
He would not cease, till he revenged their wrongs:
That Greece should see perform'd what he declared;
And cruel Creon find his just reward.
He said no more, but, shunning all delay,
Rode on; nor enter'd Athens on his way:
But left his sister and his queen behind,
And waved his royal banner in the wind:
Where in an argent field the god of war
Was drawn triumphant on his iron car; 110
Red was his sword, and shield, and whole attire,
And all the godhead seem'd to glow with fire;
Even the ground glitter'd where the standard flew,
And the green grass was dyed to sanguine hue.
High on his pointed lance his pennon bore
His Cretan fight, the conquer'd Minotaur:
The soldiers shout around with generous rage,
And in that victory their own presage.
He praised their ardour: inly pleased to see

His host the flower of Grecian chivalry, 120
All day he march'd, and all the ensuing night,
And saw the city with returning light.
The process of the war I need not tell,
How Theseus conquer'd, and how Creon fell:
Or after, how by storm the walls were won,
Or how the victor sack'd and burn'd the town:
How to the ladies he restored again
The bodies of their lords in battle slain:
And with what ancient rites they were interr'd;
All these to fitter times shall be deferr'd. 130
I spare the widows' tears, their woeful cries,
And howling at their husbands' obsequies;
How Theseus at these funerals did assist,
And with what gifts the mourning dames dismiss'd.

Thus when the victor chief had Creon slain,
And conquer'd Thebes, he pitch'd upon the plain
His mighty camp, and, when the day return'd,
The country wasted, and the hamlets burn'd,
And left the pillagers, to rapine bred,
Without control to strip and spoil the dead. 140

There, in a heap of slain, among the rest
Two youthful knights they found beneath a load oppress'd
Of slaughter'd foes, whom first to death they sent--
The trophies of their strength, a bloody monument.

Both fair, and both of royal blood they seem'd,
Whom kinsmen to the crown the heralds deem'd;
That day in equal arms they fought for fame;
Their swords, their shields, their surcoats were the same.
Close by each other laid, they press'd the ground,
Their manly bosoms pierced with many a grisly wound; 150
Nor well alive, nor wholly dead they were,
But some faint signs of feeble life appear:
The wandering breath was on the wing to part,
Weak was the pulse, and hardly heaved the heart.
These two were sisters' sons; and Arcite one
Much famed in fields, with valiant Palamon.
From these their costly arms the spoilers rent,
And softly both convey'd to Theseus' tent:
Whom, known of Creon's line, and cured with care,
He to his city sent as prisoners of the war, 160
Hopeless of ransom, and condemn'd to lie
In durance, doom'd a lingering death to die.
This done, he march'd away with warlike sound,
And to his Athens turn'd, with laurels crown'd,
Where happy long he lived, much loved, and more renown'd.
But in a tower, and never to be loosed,
The woful captive kinsmen are enclosed.

Thus year by year they pass, and day by day,
Till once, 'twas on the morn of cheerful May,
The young Emilia, fairer to be seen 170

Than the fair lily on the flowery green,
More fresh than May herself in blossoms new,
For with the rosy colour strove her hue,
Waked, as her custom was, before the day,
To do the observance due to sprightly May:
For sprightly May commands our youth to keep
The vigils of her night, and breaks their sluggard sleep;
Each gentle breast with kindly warmth she moves;
Inspires new flames, revives extinguish'd loves.
In this remembrance, Emily, ere day, 180
Arose, and dress'd herself in rich array;
Fresh as the month, and as the morning fair:
Adown her shoulders fell her length of hair:
A riband did the braided tresses bind,
The rest was loose and wanton'd in the wind.
Aurora had but newly chased the night,
And purpled o'er the sky with blushing light,
When to the garden walk she took her way,
To sport and trip along in cool of day,
And offer maiden vows in honour of the May. 190

At every turn, she made a little stand,
And thrust among the thorns her lily hand
To draw the rose, and every rose she drew
She shook the stalk, and brush'd away the dew:
Then party-colour'd flowers of white and red
She wove, to make a garland for her head:

This done, she sung and caroll'd out so clear,
That men and angels might rejoice to hear:
Even wondering Philomel forgot to sing;
And learn'd from her to welcome in the spring. 200
The tower, of which before was mention made,
Within whose keep the captive knights were laid,
Built of a large extent, and strong withal,
Was one partition of the palace wall;
The garden was enclosed within the square
Where young Emilia took the morning air.

It happen'd Palamon, the prisoner knight,
Restless for woe, arose before the light,
And with his jailer's leave desired to breathe
An air more wholesome than the damps beneath. 210
This granted, to the tower he took his way,
Cheer'd with the promise of a glorious day:
Then cast a languishing regard around,
And saw, with hateful eyes, the temples crown'd
With golden spires, and all the hostile ground.
He sigh'd, and turn'd his eyes, because he knew
'Twas but a larger jail he had in view:
Then look'd below, and from the castle's height
Beheld a nearer and more pleasing sight:
The garden, which before he had not seen, 220
In spring's new livery clad of white and green,
Fresh flowers in wide parterres, and shady walks between.

This view'd, but not enjoy'd, with arms across
He stood, reflecting on his country's loss;
Himself an object of the public scorn,
And often wish'd he never had been born.
At last, for so his destiny required,
With walking giddy, and with thinking tired,
He through a little window cast his sight,
Though thick of bars, that gave a scanty light: 230
But even that glimmering served him to descry
The inevitable charms of Emily.

Scarce had he seen, but seized with sudden smart,
Stung to the quick, he felt it at his heart;
Struck blind with overpowering light he stood,
Then started back amazed, and cried aloud.

Young Arcite heard; and up he ran with haste,
To help his friend, and in his arms embraced;
And ask'd him why he look'd so deadly wan,
And whence and how his change of cheer began? 240
Or who had done the offence? But if, said he,
Your grief alone is hard captivity;
For love of Heaven, with patience undergo
A cureless ill, since Fate will have it so:
So stood our horoscope in chains to lie,
And Saturn in the dungeon of the sky,
Or other baleful aspect, ruled our birth,

When all the friendly stars were under earth:
Whate'er betides, by Destiny 'tis done;
And better bear like men, than vainly seek to shun. 250
Nor of my bonds, said Palamon again,
Nor of unhappy planets I complain;
But when my mortal anguish caused my cry,
That moment I was hurt through either eye;
Pierced with a random shaft, I faint away,
And perish with insensible decay;
A glance of some new goddess gave the wound,
Whom, like Actaeon, unaware I found.
Look how she walks along yon shady space!
Not Juno moves with more majestic grace; 260
And all the Cyprian queen is in her face.
If thou art Venus (for thy charms confess
That face was form'd in heaven, nor art thou less
Disguised in habit, undisguised in shape),
Oh, help us captives from our chains to 'scape!
But if our doom be past in bonds to lie
For life, and in a loathsome dungeon die,
Then be thy wrath appeased with our disgrace,
And show compassion to the Theban race,
Oppress'd by tyrant power! While yet he spoke, 270
Arcite on Emily had fix'd his look;
The fatal dart a ready passage found,
And deep within his heart infix'd the wound:
So that if Palamon were wounded sore,
Arcite was hurt as much as he, or more:

Then from his inmost soul he sigh'd, and said,
The beauty I behold has struck me dead:
Unknowingly she strikes; and kills by chance;
Poison is in her eyes, and death in every glance.
Oh, I must ask; nor ask alone, but move 280
Her mind to mercy, or must die for love!
Thus Arcite: and thus Palamon replies,
(Eager his tone and ardent were his eyes):
Speak'st thou in earnest, or in jesting vein?
Jesting, said Arcite, suits but ill with pain.
It suits far worse (said Palamon again,
And bent his brows) with men who honour weigh,
Their faith to break, their friendship to betray;
But worst with thee, of noble lineage born,
My kinsman, and in arms my brother sworn. 290
Have we not plighted each our holy oath,
That one should be the common good of both;
One soul should both inspire, and neither prove
His fellow's hindrance in pursuit of love?
To this before the gods we gave our hands,
And nothing but our death can break the bands.
This binds thee, then, to further my design,
As I am bound by vow to further thine:
Nor canst, nor dar'st thou, traitor, on the plain
Appeach my honour, or thine own maintain, 300
Since thou art of my council, and the friend
Whose faith I trust, and on whose care depend:
And would'st thou court my lady's love, which I

Much rather than release would choose to die?
But thou, false Arcite, never shall obtain
Thy bad pretence; I told thee first my pain;
For first my love began ere thine was born:
Thou as my council, and my brother sworn,
Art bound to assist my eldership of right,
Or justly to be deem'd a perjured knight. 310

Thus Palamon: but Arcite with disdain
In haughty language thus replied again:
Forsworn thyself: the traitor's odious name
I first return, and then disprove thy claim.
If love be passion, and that passion nursed
With strong desires, I loved the lady first.
Canst thou pretend desire, whom zeal inflamed
To worship, and a power celestial named?
Thine was devotion to the blest above,
I saw the woman and desired her love; 320
First own'd my passion, and to thee commend
The important secret, as my chosen friend.
Suppose (which yet I grant not) thy desire
A moment elder than my rival fire;
Can chance of seeing first thy title prove?
And know'st thou not, no law is made for love?
Law is to things which to free choice relate;
Love is not in our choice, but in our fate;
Laws are but positive; love's power, we see,

Is Nature's sanction, and her first decree. 330
Each day we break the bond of human laws
For love, and vindicate the common cause.
Laws for defence of civil rights are placed,
Love throws the fences down, and makes a general waste;
Maids, widows, wives, without distinction fall;
The sweeping deluge, love, comes on, and covers all.
If, then, the laws of friendship I transgress,
I keep the greater, while I break the less;
And both are mad alike, since neither can possess.
Both hopeless to be ransom'd, never more 340
To see the sun, but as he passes o'er.

Like AEsop's hounds contending for the bone,
Each pleaded right, and would be lord alone:
The fruitless fight continued all the day;
A cur came by, and snatch'd the prize away.
As courtiers, therefore, jostle for a grant,
And when they break their friendship, plead their want;
So thou, if fortune will thy suit advance,
Love on, nor envy me my equal chance;
For I must love, and am resolved to try 350
My fate, or, failing in the adventure, die.

Great was their strife, which hourly was renew'd,
Till each with mortal hate his rival view'd;
Now friends no more, nor walking hand in hand;

But when they met, they made a surly stand;
And glared like angry lions as they pass'd,
And wish'd that every look might be their last.

It chanced at length, Pirithous came to attend
This worthy Theseus, his familiar friend:
Their love in early infancy began, 360
And rose as childhood ripen'd into man.
Companions of the war; and loved so well,
That when one died, as ancient stories tell,
His fellow to redeem him went to Hell.

But to pursue my tale; to welcome home
His warlike brother is Pirithous come:
Arcite of Thebes was known in arms long since,
And honour'd by this young Thessalian prince.
Theseus, to gratify his friend and guest,
Who made our Arcite's freedom his request, 370
Restored to liberty the captive knight,
But on these hard conditions I recite:
That if hereafter Arcite should be found
Within the compass of Athenian ground,
By day or night, or on whate'er pretence,
His head should pay the forfeit of the offence.
To this Pirithous for his friend agreed,
And on his promise was the prisoner freed.

Unpleas'd and pensive hence he takes his way,
At his own peril; for his life must pay. 380
Who now but Arcite mourns his bitter fate,
Finds his dear purchase, and repents too late?
What have I gain'd, he said, in prison pent,
If I but change my bonds for banishment?
And banish'd from her sight, I suffer more
In freedom than I felt in bonds before;
Forced from her presence, and condemn'd to live:
Unwelcome freedom, and unthank'd reprieve!
Heaven is not, but where Emily abides,
And where she's absent, all is hell besides. 390
Next to my day of birth, was that accurs'd,
Which bound my friendship to Pirithous first:
Had I not known that prince, I still had been
In bondage, and had still Emilia seen:
For though I never can her grace deserve,
'Tis recompence enough to see and serve.
O Palamon, my kinsman and my friend,
How much more happy fates thy love attend!
Thine is the adventure; thine the victory:
Well has thy fortune turn'd the dice for thee: 400
Thou on that angel's face may'st feed thine eyes,
In prison, no; but blissful paradise!
Thou daily seest that sun of beauty shine,
And lovest at least in love's extremest line.
I mourn in absence, love's eternal night;

And who can tell but since thou hast her sight,
And art a comely, young, and valiant knight,
Fortune (a various power) may cease to frown,
And by some ways unknown thy wishes crown?
But I, the most forlorn of human kind, 410
Nor help can hope, nor remedy can find;
But doom'd to drag my loathsome life in care,
For my reward, must end it in despair.
Fire, water, air, and earth, and force of fates,
That governs all, and Heaven that all creates,
Nor art, nor nature's hand can ease my grief;
Nothing but death, the wretch's last relief:
Then farewell youth, and all the joys that dwell,
With youth and life, and life itself farewell!

But why, alas! do mortal men in vain 420
Of fortune, fate, or Providence complain?
God gives us what he knows our wants require,
And better things than those which we desire:
Some pray for riches; riches they obtain;
But, watch'd by robbers, for their wealth are slain:
Some pray from prison to be freed; and come,
When guilty of their vows, to fall at home;
Murder'd by those they trusted with their life,
A favour'd servant, or a bosom wife.
Such dear-bought blessings happen every day, 430
Because we know not for what things to pray.

Like drunken sots about the street we roam;
Well knows the sot he has a certain home;
Yet knows not how to find the uncertain place,
And blunders on, and staggers every pace.
Thus all seek happiness; but few can find.
For far the greater part of men are blind.
This is my case, who thought our utmost good
Was in one word of freedom understood:
The fatal blessing came: from prison free, 440
I starve abroad, and lose the sight of Emily.

Thus Arcite; but if Arcite thus deplore
His sufferings, Palamon yet suffers more.
For when he knew his rival freed and gone,
He swells with wrath; he makes outrageous moan:
He frets, he fumes, he stares, he stamps the ground;
The hollow tower with clamours rings around:
With briny tears he bathed his fetter'd feet,
And dropp'd all o'er with agony of sweat.
Alas! he cried, I wretch in prison pine, 450
Too happy rival, while the fruit is thine:
Thou livest at large, thou draw'st thy native air,
Pleased with thy freedom, proud of my despair:
Thou may'st, since thou hast youth and courage join'd,
A sweet behaviour and a solid mind,
Assemble ours, and all the Theban race,
To vindicate on Athens thy disgrace;

And after, by some treaty made, possess
Fair Emily, the pledge of lasting peace.
So thine shall be the beauteous prize, while I 460
Must languish in despair, in prison die.
Thus all the advantage of the strife is thine,
Thy portion double joys, and double sorrows mine.

The rage of jealousy then fired his soul,
And his face kindled like a burning coal:
Now cold despair, succeeding in her stead,
To livid paleness turns the glowing red.
His blood, scarce liquid, creeps within his veins,
Like water which the freezing wind constrains.
Then thus he said: Eternal Deities, 470
Who rule the world with absolute decrees,
And write whatever time shall bring to pass,
With pens of adamant on plates of brass;
What! is the race of human kind your care,
Beyond what all his fellow-creatures are?
He with the rest is liable to pain,
And like the sheep, his brother-beast, is slain;
Cold, hunger, prisons, ills without a cure,
All these he must, and guiltless, oft endure.
Or does your justice, power, or prescience fail, 480
When the good suffer, and the bad prevail?
What worse to wretched virtue could befall,
If fate or giddy fortune govern'd all?

Nay, worse than other beasts is our estate;
Them, to pursue their pleasures, you create;
We, bound by harder laws, must curb our will,
And your commands, not our desires, fulfil;
Then when the creature is unjustly slain,
Yet after death, at least, he feels no pain;
But man, in life surcharged with woe before, 490
Not freed when dead, is doom'd to suffer more.
A serpent shoots his sting at unaware;
An ambush'd thief forelays a traveller:
The man lies murder'd, while the thief and snake,
One gains the thickets, and one threads the brake.
This let divines decide; but well I know,
Just, or unjust, I have my share of woe,
Through Saturn seated in a luckless place,
And Juno's wrath, that persecutes my race;
Or Mars and Venus, in a quartile, move 500
My pangs of jealousy for Arcite's love.

Let Palamon oppress'd in bondage mourn,
While to his exiled rival we return.
By this, the sun, declining from his height,
The day had shorten'd to prolong the night;
The lengthen'd night gave length of misery
Both to the captive lover and the free.
For Palamon in endless prison mourns,
And Arcite forfeits life if he returns:

The banish'd never hopes his love to see, 510
Nor hopes the captive lord his liberty.
'Tis hard to say who suffers greater pains:
One sees his love, but cannot break his chains:
One free, and all his motions uncontroll'd,
Beholds whate'er he would, but what he would behold.
Judge as you please, for I will haste to tell
What fortune to the banish'd knight befell.

When Arcite was to Thebes return'd again,
The loss of her he loved renew'd his pain;
What could be worse, than never more to see 520
His life, his soul, his charming Emily?
He raved with all the madness of despair,
He roar'd, he beat his breast, he tore his hair.
Dry sorrow in his stupid eyes appears,
For, wanting nourishment, he wanted tears:
His eye-balls in their hollow sockets sink,
Bereft of sleep, he loathes his meat and drink.
He withers at his heart, and looks as wan
As the pale spectre of a murder'd man:
That pale turns yellow, and his face receives 530
The faded hue of sapless boxen leaves:
In solitary groves he makes his moan,
Walks early out, and ever is alone:
Nor, mix'd in mirth, in youthful pleasures shares,
But sighs when songs and instruments he hears.

His spirits are so low, his voice is drown'd,
He hears as from afar, or in a swoond,
Like the deaf murmurs of a distant sound:
Uncomb'd his locks and squalid his attire,
Unlike the trim of love and gay desire; 540
But full of museful mopings, which presage
The loss of reason, and conclude in rage.

This when he had endured a year and more,
Now wholly changed from what he was before,
It happen'd once, that, slumbering as he lay,
He dream'd (his dream began at break of day)
That Hermes o'er his head in air appear'd,
And with soft words his drooping spirits cheer'd:
His hat, adorn'd with wings, disclosed the god,
And in his hand he bore the sleep-compelling rod: 550
Such as he seem'd, when, at his sire's command,
On Argus' head he laid the snaky wand.
Arise, he said, to conquering Athens go,
There fate appoints an end to all thy woe.
The fright awaken'd Arcite with a start,
Against his bosom bounced his heaving heart;
But soon he said, with scarce-recover'd breath,
And thither will I go, to meet my death.
Sure to be slain; but death is my desire,
Since in Emilia's sight I shall expire. 560
By chance he spied a mirror while he spoke,

And gazing there, beheld his alter'd look;
Wondering, he saw his features and his hue
So much were changed, that scarce himself he knew.
A sudden thought then starting in his mind,
Since I in Arcite cannot Arcite find,
The world may search in vain with all their eyes,
But never penetrate through this disguise.
Thanks to the change which grief and sickness give,
In low estate I may securely live, 570
And see unknown my mistress day by day.
He said; and clothed himself in coarse array:
A labouring hind in show; then forth he went,
And to the Athenian towers his journey bent:
One squire attended in the same disguise,
Made conscious of his master's enterprise.
Arrived at Athens, soon he came to court,
Unknown, unquestion'd in that thick resort:
Proffering for hire his service at the gate,
To drudge, draw water, and to run or wait. 580

So fair befell him, that for little gain
He served at first Emilia's chamberlain;
And, watchful all advantages to spy,
Was still at hand, and in his master's eye;
And as his bones were big, and sinews strong,
Refused no toil that could to slaves belong;
But from deep wells with engines water drew,

And used his noble hands the wood to hew.
He pass'd a year at least attending thus
On Emily, and call'd Philostratus. 590
But never was there man of his degree
So much esteem'd, so well beloved as he.
So gentle of condition was he known,
That through the court his courtesy was blown:
All think him worthy of a greater place,
And recommend him to the royal grace;
That, exercised within a higher sphere,
His virtues more conspicuous might appear.
Thus by the general voice was Arcite praised,
And by great Theseus to high favour raised; 600
Among his menial servants first enroll'd,
And largely entertain'd with sums of gold:
Besides what secretly from Thebes was sent,
Of his own income, and his annual rent:
This well employ'd, he purchased friends and fame,
But cautiously conceal'd from whence it came.
Thus for three years he lived with large increase,
In arms of honour, and esteem in peace;
To Theseus' person he was ever near;
And Theseus for his virtues held him dear. 610

BOOK II.

While Arcite lives in bliss, the story turns

Where hopeless Palamon in prison mourns.
For six long years immured, the captive knight
Had dragg'd his chains, and scarcely seen the light:
Lost liberty and love at once he bore:
His prison pain'd him much, his passion more:
Nor dares he hope his fetters to remove,
Nor ever wishes to be free from love.

But when the sixth revolving year was run,
And May within the Twins received the sun, 10
Were it by chance, or forceful destiny,
Which forms in causes first whate'er shall be,
Assisted by a friend, one moonless night,
This Palamon from prison took his flight:
A pleasant beverage he prepared before
Of wine and honey, mix'd with added store
Of opium; to his keeper this he brought,
Who swallow'd unaware the sleepy draught,
And snored secure till morn, his senses bound
In slumber, and in long oblivion drown'd. 20
Short was the night, and careful Palamon
Sought the next covert e'er the rising sun.
A thick-spread forest near the city lay,
To this with lengthen'd strides he took his way,
(For far he could not fly, and fear'd the day).
Safe from pursuit, he meant to shun the light,
Till the brown shadows of the friendly night

To Thebes might favour his intended flight.
When to his country come, his next design
Was all the Theban race in arms to join, 30
And war on Theseus, till he lost his life,
Or won the beautiful Emily to wife.

Thus while his thoughts the lingering day beguile,
To gentle Arcite let us turn our style;
Who little dreamt how nigh he was to care,
Till treacherous fortune caught him in the snare.
The morning lark, the messenger of day,
Saluted in her song the morning gray;
And soon the sun arose with beams so bright,
That all the horizon laugh'd to see the joyous sight: 40
He with his tepid rays the rose renews,
And licks the drooping leaves, and dries the dews;
When Arcite left his bed, resolved to pay
Observance to the month of merry May:
Forth on his fiery steed betimes he rode,
That scarcely prints the turf on which he trode:
At ease he seem'd, and, prancing o'er the plains,
Turn'd only to the grove his horse's reins,
The grove I named before; and, lighted there,
A woodbine garland sought to crown his hair; 50
Then turn'd his face against the rising day,
And raised his voice to welcome in the May.

For thee, sweet month! the groves green liveries wear,
If not the first, the fairest of the year:
For thee the Graces lead the dancing hours,
And Nature's ready pencil paints the flowers:
When thy short reign is past, the feverish sun
The sultry tropic fears, and moves more slowly on.
So may thy tender blossoms fear no blight,
Nor goats with venom'd teeth thy tendrils bite, 60
As thou shalt guide my wandering feet to find
The fragrant greens I seek, my brows to bind.

His vows address'd, within the grove he stray'd,
Till Fate, or Fortune, near the place convey'd
His steps where, secret, Palamon was laid.
Full little thought of him the gentle knight,
Who, flying death, had there conceal'd his flight,
In brakes and brambles hid, and shunning mortal sight:
And less he knew him for his hated foe,
But fear'd him as a man he did not know. 70
But as it has been said of ancient years,
That fields are full of eyes, and woods have ears;
For this the wise are ever on their guard,
For, unforeseen, they say, is unprepared.
Uncautious Arcite thought himself alone,
And less than all suspected Palamon,
Who, listening, heard him, while he search'd the grove,
And loudly sung his roundelay of love:

But on the sudden stopp'd, and silent stood,
As lovers often muse, and change their mood; 80
Now high as heaven, and then as low as hell;
Now up, now down, as buckets in a well:
For Venus, like her day, will change her cheer,
And seldom shall we see a Friday clear.
Thus Arcite having sung, with alter'd hue
Sunk on the ground, and from his bosom drew
A desperate sigh, accusing Heaven and Fate,
And angry Juno's unrelenting hate.
Cursed be the day when first I did appear;
Let it be blotted from the calendar, 90
Lest it pollute the month, and poison all the year!
Still will the jealous queen pursue our race?
Cadmus is dead, the Theban city was:
Yet ceases not her hate: for all who come
From Cadmus are involved in Cadmus' doom.
I suffer for my blood: unjust decree!
That punishes another's crime on me.
In mean estate I serve my mortal foe,
The man who caused my country's overthrow.
This is not all; for Juno, to my shame, 100
Has forced me to forsake my former name;
Arcite I was, Philostratus I am.
That side of heaven is all my enemy:
Mars ruin'd Thebes: his mother ruin'd me.
Of all the royal race remains but one
Besides myself, the unhappy Palamon,

Whom Theseus holds in bonds, and will not free;
Without a crime, except his kin to me.
Yet these, and all the rest, I could endure;
But love's a malady without a cure: 110
Fierce love has pierced me with his fiery dart;
He fires within, and hisses at my heart.
Your eyes, fair Emily, my fate pursue;
I suffer for the rest, I die for you!
Of such a goddess no time leaves record,
Who burn'd the temple where she was adored:
And let it burn, I never will complain,
Pleased with my sufferings, if you knew my pain.

At this a sickly qualm his heart assail'd,
His ears ring inward, and his senses fail'd. 120
No word miss'd Palamon of all he spoke,
But soon to deadly pale he changed his look:
He trembled every limb, and felt a smart,
As if cold steel had glided through his heart;
No longer staid, but starting from his place,
Discover'd stood, and show'd his hostile face:
False traitor, Arcite! traitor to thy blood!
Bound by thy sacred oath to seek my good,
Now art thou found forsworn, for Emily;
And darest attempt her love, for whom I die. 130
So hast thou cheated Theseus with a wile,
Against thy vow, returning to beguile

Under a borrow'd name: as false to me,
So false thou art to him who set thee free.
But rest assured, that either thou shalt die,
Or else renounce thy claim in Emily:
For though unarm'd I am, and (freed by chance)
Am here without my sword, or pointed lance,
Hope not, base man, unquestioned hence to go,
For I am Palamon, thy mortal foe. 140

Arcite, who heard his tale, and knew the man,
His sword unsheath'd, and fiercely thus began:
Now by the gods who govern heaven above,
Wert thou not weak with hunger, mad with love,
That word had been thy last, or in this grove
This hand should force thee to renounce thy love.
The surety which I gave thee, I defy:
Fool, not to know that love endures no tie,
And Jove but laughs at lovers' perjury.
Know I will serve the fair in thy despite; 150
But since thou art my kinsman, and a knight,
Here, have my faith, to-morrow in this grove
Our arms shall plead the titles of our love:
And Heaven so help my right, as I alone
Will come, and keep the cause and quarrel both unknown;
With arms of proof both for myself and thee;
Choose thou the best, and leave the worst to me.
And, that at better ease thou may'st abide,

Bedding and clothes I will this night provide,
And needful sustenance, that thou may'st be 160
A conquest better won, and worthy me.
His promise Palamon accepts; but pray'd
To keep it better than the first he made.
Thus fair they parted till the morrow's dawn,
For each had laid his plighted faith to pawn.

Oh, Love! thou sternly dost thy power maintain,
And wilt not bear a rival in thy reign;
Tyrants and thou all fellowship disdain!
This was in Arcite proved, and Palamon,
Both in despair, yet each would love alone. 170
Arcite return'd, and, as in honour tied,
His foe with bedding, and with food supplied;
Then, ere the day, two suits of armour sought,
Which, borne before him on his steed, he brought:
Both were of shining steel, and wrought so pure,
As might the strokes of two such arms endure.
Now, at the time, and in the appointed place,
The challenger and challenged, face to face,
Approach; each other from afar they knew,
And from afar their hatred changed their hue. 180
So stands the Thracian herdsman with his spear,
Pull in the gap, and hopes the hunted bear,
And hears him rustling in the wood, and sees
His course at distance by the bending trees;

And thinks, Here comes my mortal enemy,
And either he must fall in fight, or I:
This while he thinks, he lifts aloft his dart;
A generous chilness seizes every part:
The veins pour back the blood, and fortify the heart.

Thus pale they meet; their eyes with fury burn; 190
None greets; for none the greeting will return:
But in dumb surliness, each arm'd with care
His foe profess'd, as brother of the war:
Then both, no moment lost, at once advance
Against each other, arm'd with sword and lance:
They lash, they foin, they pass, they strive to bore
Their corslets and the thinnest parts explore.
Thus two long hours in equal arms they stood,
And wounded, wound, till both were bathed in blood;
And not a foot of ground had either got, 200
As if the world depended on the spot.
Fell Arcite like an angry tiger fared,
And like a lion Palamon appear'd:
Or, as two boars, whom love to battle draws,
With rising bristles, and with frothy jaws,
Their adverse breasts with tusks oblique they wound;
With grunts and groans the forest rings around.
So fought the knights, and fighting must abide,
Till fate an umpire sends their difference to decide.

The power that ministers to God's decrees, 210
And executes on earth what Heaven foresees,
Call'd providence, or chance, or fatal sway,
Comes with resistless force, and finds or makes her way.
Nor kings, nor nations, nor united power,
One moment can retard the appointed hour;
And some one day, some wondrous chance appears,
Which happen'd not in centuries of years:
For sure, whate'er we mortals hate, or love,
Or hope, or fear, depends on Powers above;
They move our appetites to good or ill, 220
And by foresight necessitate the will.
In Theseus this appears; whose youthful joy
Was beasts of chase in forests to destroy:
This gentle knight, inspired by jolly May,
Forsook his easy couch at early day,
And to the wood and wilds pursued his way.
Beside him rode Hippolita the queen,
And Emily attired in lively green,
With horns, and hounds, and all the tuneful cry,
To hunt a royal hart within the covert nigh: 230
And as he follow'd Mars before, so now
He serves the goddess of the silver bow.
The way that Theseus took was to the wood
Where the two knights in cruel battle stood:
The lawn on which they fought, the appointed place
In which the uncoupled hounds began the chase.

Thither forth-right he rode to rouse the prey,
That, shaded by the fern, in harbour lay;
And thence dislodged, was wont to leave the wood
For open fields, and cross the crystal flood. 240
Approach'd, and looking underneath the sun,
He saw proud Arcite, and fierce Palamon,
In mortal battle doubling blow on blow,
Like lightning flamed their falchions to and fro,
And shot a dreadful gleam; so strong they strook,
There seem'd less force required to fell an oak:
He gazed with wonder on their equal might,
Look'd eager on, but knew not either knight:
Resolved to learn, he spurr'd his fiery steed
With goring rowels to provoke his speed. 250
The minute ended that began the race,
So soon he was betwixt them on the place;
And, with his sword unsheath'd, on pain of life
Commands both combatants to cease their strife:
Then with imperious tone pursues his threat:
What are you? why in arms together met?
How dares your pride presume against my laws,
As in a listed field to fight your cause?
Unask'd the royal grant; no marshal by,
As knightly rites require; nor judge to try? 260
Then Palamon, with scarce recover'd breath,
Thus hasty spoke: We both deserve the death,
And both would die; for look the world around,
A pair so wretched is not to be found;

Our life's a load; encumber'd with the charge,
We long to set the imprison'd soul at large.
Now, as thou art a sovereign judge, decree
The rightful doom of death to him and me;
Let neither find thy grace, for grace is cruelty.
Me first, oh, kill me first, and cure my woe; 270
Then sheath the sword of justice on my foe:
Or kill him first; for when his name is heard,
He foremost will receive his due reward.
Arcite of Thebes is he; thy mortal foe:
On whom thy grace did liberty bestow,
But first contracted, that if ever found
By day or night upon the Athenian ground,
His head should pay the forfeit; see return'd
The perjured knight, his oath and honour scorn'd.
For this is he, who, with a borrow'd name 280
And proffer'd service, to thy palace came,
Now call'd Philostratus: retain'd by thee,
A traitor trusted, and in high degree,
Aspiring to the bed of beauteous Emily.
My part remains; from Thebes my birth I own,
And call myself the unhappy Palamon.
Think me not like that man; since no disgrace
Can force me to renounce the honour of my race.
Know me for what I am: I broke my chain,
Nor promised I thy prisoner to remain: 290
The love of liberty with life is given,
And life itself the inferior gift of Heaven.

Thus without crime I fled; but further know,
I, with this Arcite, am thy mortal foe:
Then give me death, since I thy life pursue;
For safeguard of thyself, death is my due.
More would'st thou know? I love bright Emily,
And, for her sake, and in her sight will die:
But kill my rival too; for he no less
Deserves; and I thy righteous doom will bless, 300
Assured that what I lose, he never shall possess.

To this replied the stern Athenian prince,
And sourly smiled: In owning your offence
You judge yourself; and I but keep record
In place of law, while you pronounce the word.
Take your desert, the death you have decreed;
I seal your doom, and ratify the deed:
By Mars, the patron of my arms, you die!

He said; dumb sorrow seized the standers-by.
The queen above the rest, by nature good, 310
(The pattern form'd of perfect womanhood)
For tender pity wept: when she began,
Through the bright quire the infectious virtue ran.
All dropt their tears, even the contended maid;
And thus among themselves they softly said:
What eyes can suffer this unworthy sight!
Two youths of royal blood, renown'd in fight,

The mastership of Heaven in face and mind,
And lovers, far beyond their faithless kind:
See their wide streaming wounds; they neither came 300
For pride of empire, nor desire of fame:
Kings fight for kingdoms, madmen for applause;
But love for love alone; that crowns the lover's cause.
This thought, which ever bribes the beauteous kind,
Such pity wrought in every lady's mind,
They left their steeds, and, prostrate on the place,
From the fierce king implored the offenders' grace.

He paused a while, stood silent in his mood
(For yet his rage was boiling in his blood);
But soon his tender mind the impression felt, 330
(As softest metals are not slow to melt,
And pity soonest runs in softest minds):
Then reasons with himself; and first he finds
His passion cast a mist before his sense,
And either made, or magnified the offence.
Offence! of what? to whom? who judged the cause?
The prisoner freed himself by nature's laws:
Born free, he sought his right: the man he freed
Was perjured, but his love excused the deed.
Thus pondering, he look'd under with his eyes, 340
And saw the women's tears, and heard their cries;
Which moved compassion more; he shook his head,
And, softly sighing, to himself he said:

Curse on the unpardoning prince, whom tears can draw
To no remorse; who rules by lions' law;
And deaf to prayers, by no submission bow'd,
Rends all alike; the penitent, and proud!
At this, with look serene, he raised his head;
Reason resumed her place, and passion fled:
Then thus aloud he spoke: The power of love, 350
In earth, and seas, and air, and heaven above,
Rules, unresisted, with an awful nod;
By daily miracles declared a god:
He blinds the wise, gives eyesight to the blind;
And moulds and stamps anew the lover's mind.
Behold that Arcite, and this Palamon,
Freed from my fetters, and in safety gone,
What hinder'd either in their native soil
At ease to reap the harvest of their toil?
But Love, their lord, did otherwise ordain, 360
And brought them in their own despite again,
To suffer death deserved; for well they know,
'Tis in my power, and I their deadly foe.
The proverb holds, that to be wise and love,
Is hardly granted to the gods above.
See how the madmen bleed! behold the gains
With which their master, Love, rewards their pains!
For seven long years, on duty every day,
Lo, their obedience, and their monarch's pay:
Yet, as in duty bound, they serve him on; 370
And, ask the fools, they think it wisely done;

Nor ease, nor wealth, nor life itself regard,
For 'tis their maxim, Love is love's reward.
This is not all; the fair, for whom they strove,
Nor knew before, nor could suspect their love;
Nor thought, when she beheld the sight from far,
Her beauty was the occasion of the war.
But sure a general doom on man is past,
And all are fools and lovers, first or last:
This both by others and myself I know, 380
For I have served their sovereign long ago;
Oft have been caught within the winding train
Of female snares, and felt the lover's pain,
And learn'd how far the god can human hearts constrain.
To this remembrance, and the prayers of those
Who for the offending warriors interpose,
I give their forfeit lives; on this accord,
To do me homage as their sovereign lord;
And, as my vassals, to their utmost might,
Assist my person, and assert my right. 390

This freely sworn, the knights their grace obtain'd;
Then thus the king his secret thoughts explain'd:
If wealth, or honour, or a royal race,
Or each, or all, may win a lady's grace,
Then either of you knights may well deserve
A princess born; and such is she you serve:
For Emily is sister to the crown,

And but too well to both her beauty known:
But should you combat till you both were dead,
Two lovers cannot share a single bed: 400
As, therefore, both are equal in degree,
The lot of both be left to destiny.
Now hear the award, and happy may it prove
To her, and him who best deserves her love.
Depart from hence in peace, and, free as air,
Search the wide world, and where you please repair;
But on the day when this returning sun
To the same point through every sign has run,
Then each of you his hundred knights shall bring,
In royal lists, to fight before the king; 410
And then the knight, whom fate or happy chance
Shall with his friends to victory advance,
And grace his arms so far in equal fight,
From out the bars to force his opposite,
Or kill, or make him recreant on the plain,
The prize of valour and of love shall gain;
The vanquish'd party shall their claim release,
And the long jars conclude in lasting peace.
The charge be mine to adorn the chosen ground,
The theatre of war, for champions so renown'd; 420
And take the patron's place of either knight,
With eyes impartial to behold the fight;
And Heaven of me so judge as I shall judge aright.
If both are satisfied with this accord,
Swear by the laws of knighthood on my sword.

Who now but Palamon exults with joy?
And ravish'd Arcite seems to touch the sky:
The whole assembled troop was pleased as well,
Extol the award, and on their knees they fell
To bless the gracious king. The knights, with leave, 430
Departing from the place, his last commands receive;
On Emily with equal ardour look,
And from her eyes their inspiration took.
From thence to Thebes' old walls pursue their way,
Each to provide his champions for the day.

It might be deem'd, on our historian's part,
Or too much negligence, or want of art,
If he forgot the vast magnificence
Of royal Theseus, and his large expense,
He first enclosed for lists a level ground, 440
The whole circumference a mile around;
The form was circular; and all without
A trench was sunk, to moat the place about.
Within an amphitheatre appear'd,
Raised in degrees; to sixty paces rear'd:
That when a man was placed in one degree,
Height was allow'd for him above to see.

Eastward was built a gate of marble white;

The like adorn'd the western opposite.
A nobler object than this fabric was, 450
Rome never saw; nor of so vast a space.
For rich with spoils of many a conquer'd land,
All arts and artists Theseus could command;
Who sold for hire, or wrought for better fame;
The master-painters, and the carvers came.
So rose within the compass of the year
An age's work, a glorious theatre.
Then o'er its eastern gate was raised above
A temple, sacred to the Queen of Love;
An altar stood below: on either hand 460
A priest with roses crown'd, who held a myrtle wand.

The dome of Mars was on the gate opposed,
And on the north a turret was enclosed,
Within the wall, of alabaster white,
And crimson coral, for the Queen of Night,
Who takes in sylvan sports her chaste delight.

Within these oratories might you see
Rich carvings, portraitures, and imagery:
Where every figure to the life express'd
The godhead's power to whom it was address'd. 470
In Venus' temple on the sides were seen
The broken slumbers of enamour'd men;
Prayers that even spoke, and pity seem'd to call,

And issuing sighs that smoked along the wall;
Complaints, and hot desires, the lover's hell,
And scalding tears that wore a channel where they fell:
And all around were nuptial bonds, the ties,
Of love's assurance, and a train of lies,
That, made in lust, conclude in perjuries.
Beauty, and Youth, and Wealth, and Luxury, 480
And spritely Hope, and short-enduring Joy;
And Sorceries to raise the infernal powers,
And Sigils framed in planetary hours:
Expense, and After-Thought, and idle Care,
And Doubts of motley hue, and dark Despair;
Suspicious, and fantastical Surmise,
And Jealousy suffused, with jaundice in her eyes,
Discolouring all she view'd, in tawny dress'd,
Down-look'd, and with a cuckoo on her fist.
Opposed to her, on the other side advance 490
The costly feast, the carol, and the dance,
Minstrels and Music, Poetry and Play,
And balls by night, and tournaments by day.
All these were painted on the wall, and more;
With acts and monuments of times before:
And others added by prophetic doom,
And lovers yet unborn, and loves to come:
For there the Idalian mount, and Citheron,
The court of Venus, was in colours drawn:
Before the palace-gate, in careless dress, 500
And loose array, sat portress Idleness:

There, by the fount, Narcissus pined alone;
There Samson was; with wiser Solomon,
And all the mighty names by love undone.
Medea's charms were there, Circean feasts,
With bowls that turn'd enamour'd youths to beasts:
Here might be seen, that beauty, wealth, and wit,
And prowess, to the power of love submit:
The spreading snare for all mankind is laid;
And lovers all betray, and are betray'd. 510
The goddess self some noble hand had wrought;
Smiling she seem'd, and full of pleasing thought:
From ocean as she first began to rise,
And smooth'd the ruffled seas and clear'd the skies;
She trode the brine, all bare below the breast,
And the green waves but ill conceal'd the rest;
A lute she held; and on her head was seen
A wreath of roses red, and myrtles green;
Her turtles fann'd the buxom air above;
And, by his mother, stood an infant Love, 520
With wings unfledged; his eyes were banded o'er;
His hands a bow, his back a quiver bore,
Supplied with arrows bright and keen, a deadly store.

But in the dome of mighty Mars the red
With different figures all the sides were spread;
This temple, less in form, with equal grace,
Was imitative of the first in Thrace:

For that cold region was the loved abode
And sovereign mansion of the warrior god.
The landscape was a forest wide and bare; 530
Where neither beast, nor human kind repair;
The fowl, that scent afar, the borders fly,
And shun the bitter blast, and wheel about the sky.
A cake of scurf lies baking on the ground,
And prickly stubs, instead of trees, are found;
Or woods, with knots and knares, deform'd and old;
Headless the most, and hideous to behold:
A rattling tempest through the branches went,
That stripp'd them bare, and one sole way they bent.
Heaven froze above, severe, the clouds congeal, 540
And through the crystal vault appear'd the standing hail.
Such was the face without; a mountain stood
Threatening from high, and overlook'd the wood:
Beneath the lowering brow, and on a bent,
The temple stood of Mars armipotent:
The frame of burnish'd steel, that cast a glare
From far, and seem'd to thaw the freezing air.
A strait long entry to the temple led,
Blind with high walls; and horror over head:
Thence issued such a blast, and hollow roar, 550
As threaten'd from the hinge to heave the door:
In through that door, a northern light there shone;
'Twas all it had, for windows there were none.
The gate was adamant; eternal frame!
Which, hew'd by Mars himself, from Indian quarries came,

The labour of a god; and all along
Tough iron plates were clench'd to make it strong.
A tun about was every pillar there;
A polish'd mirror shone not half so clear.
There saw I how the secret felon wrought, 560
And treason labouring in the traitor's thought;
And midwife Time the ripen'd plot to murder brought.
There the red Anger dared the pallid Fear;
Next stood Hypocrisy, with holy leer,
Soft smiling, and demurely looking down,
But hid the dagger underneath the gown:
The assassinating wife, the household fiend;
And far the blackest there, the traitor-friend.
On the other side, there stood Destruction bare;
Unpunish'd Rapine, and a waste of War. 570
Contest, with sharpen'd knives, in cloisters drawn,
And all with blood bespread the holy lawn.
Loud menaces were heard, and foul disgrace,
And bawling infamy, in language base;
Till sense was lost in sound, and silence fled the place.
The slayer of himself yet saw I there,
The gore congeal'd was clotted in his hair;
With eyes half closed, and gaping mouth he lay,
And grim, as when he breathed his sullen soul away.
In midst of all the dome, Misfortune sate, 580
And gloomy Discontent, and fell Debate,
And Madness laughing in his ireful mood;
And arm'd complaint on theft; and cries of blood.

There was the murder'd corpse in covert laid,
And violent death in thousand shapes display'd:
The city to the soldiers rage resigned:
Successful wars, and poverty behind:
Ships burnt in fight, or forced on rocky shores,
And the rash hunter strangled by the boars:
The new-born babe by nurses overlaid; 590
And the cook caught within the raging fire he made.
All ills of Mars his nature, flame and steel;
The gasping charioteer, beneath the wheel
Of his own car; the ruin'd house that falls
And intercepts her lord betwixt the walls:
The whole division that to Mars pertains,
All trades of death that deal in steel for gains,
Were there: the butcher, armourer, and smith,
Whose forges sharpen'd falchions, or the scythe.
The scarlet conquest on a tower was placed, 600
With shouts, and soldiers' acclamations graced:
A pointed sword hung threatening o'er his head,
Sustain'd but by a slender twine of thread.
There saw I Mars his ides, the Capitol,
The seer in vain foretelling Caesar's fall;
The last triumvirs, and the wars they move,
And Antony, who lost the world for love.
These, and a thousand more, the fane adorn;
Their fates were painted ere the men were born,
All copied from the heavens, and ruling force 610
Of the red star, in his revolving course.

The form of Mars high on a chariot stood,
All sheath'd in arms, and gruffly look'd the god:
Two geomantic figures were display'd
Above his head, a warrior and a maid,
One when direct, and one when retrograde.

Tired with deformities of death, I haste
To the third temple of Diana chaste.
A sylvan scene with various greens was drawn,
Shades on the sides, and in the midst a lawn: 620
The silver Cynthia, with her nymphs around,
Pursued the flying deer, the woods with horns resound:
Calisto there stood manifest of shame,
And, turn'd a bear, the northern star became:
Her son was next, and, by peculiar grace,
In the cold circle held the second place:
The stag Acteon in the stream had spied
The naked huntress, and, for seeing, died:
His hounds, unknowing of his change pursue
The chase, and their mistaken master slew. 630
Peneian Daphne too was there to see,
Apollo's love before, and now his tree:
The adjoining fane the assembled Greeks express'd,
And hunting of the Caledonian beast.
Oenides' valour, and his envied prize;
The fatal power of Atalanta's eyes;
Diana's vengeance on the victor shown,

The murderess mother; and consuming son;
The Volscian queen extended on the plain;
The treason punish'd, and the traitor slain. 640
The rest were various huntings, well design'd,
And savage beasts destroy'd, of every kind.
The graceful goddess was array'd in green;
About her feet were little beagles seen,
That watch'd with upward eyes the motions of their queen.
Her legs were buskin'd, and the left before,
In act to shoot; a silver bow she bore,
And at her back a painted quiver wore.
She trod a waxing moon, that soon would wane,
And, drinking borrow'd light, be fill'd again: 650
With downcast eyes, as seeming to survey
The dark dominions, her alternate sway.
Before her stood a women in her throes,
And call'd Lucina's aid, her burden to disclose.
All these the painter drew with such command,
That Nature snatch'd the pencil from his hand,
Ashamed and angry that his art could feign
And mend the tortures of a mother's pain.
Theseus beheld the fanes of every god,
And thought his mighty cost was well bestow'd. 660
So princes now their poets should regard;
But few can write, and fewer can reward.

The theatre thus raised, the lists enclosed,

And all with vast magnificence disposed,
We leave the monarch pleased, and haste to bring
The knights to combat, and their arms to sing.

BOOK III.

The day approach'd when Fortune should decide
The important enterprise, and give the bride;
For now, the rivals round the world had sought,
And each his number, well appointed, brought.
The nations, far and near, contend in choice,
And send the flower of war by public voice;
That after, or before, were never known
Such chiefs, as each an army seem'd alone:
Beside the champions, all of high degree,
Who knighthood loved, and deeds of chivalry, 10
Throng'd to the lists, and envied to behold
The names of others, not their own, enroll'd.
Nor seems it strange; for every noble knight
Who loves the fair, and is endued with might,
In such a quarrel would be proud to fight.
There breathes not scarce a man on British ground
(An isle for love and arms of old renown'd)
But would have sold his life to purchase fame,
To Palamon or Arcite sent his name:
And had the land selected of the best, 20
Half had come hence, and let the world provide the rest.

A hundred knights with Palamon there came,
Approved in fight, and men of mighty name;
Their arms were several, as their nations were,
But furnish'd all alike with sword and spear.
Some wore coat-armour, imitating scale;
And next their skins were stubborn shirts of mail.
Some wore a breastplate and a light jupon,
Their horses clothed with rich caparison:
Some for defence would leathern bucklers use, 30
Of folded hides; and others shields of pruce.
One hung a pole-axe at his saddle-bow,
And one a heavy mace to stun the foe;
One for his legs and knees provided well,
With jambeaux arm'd, and double plates of steel:
This on his helmet wore a lady's glove,
And that a sleeve embroider'd by his love.

With Palamon above the rest in place,
Lycurgus came, the surly king of Thrace;
Black was his beard, and manly was his face; 40
The balls of his broad eyes roll'd in his head,
And glared betwixt a yellow and a red:
He look'd a lion with a gloomy stare,
And o'er his eyebrows hung his matted hair:
Big-boned, and large of limbs, with sinews strong,
Broad-shoulder'd, and his arms were round and long.
Four milk-white bulls (the Thracian use of old)

Were yoked to draw his car of burnish'd gold.
Upright he stood, and bore aloft his shield,
Conspicuous from afar, and overlook'd the field. 50
His surcoat was a bear-skin on his back;
His hair hung long behind, and glossy raven black.
His ample forehead bore a coronet,
With sparkling diamonds and with rubies set:
Ten brace, and more, of greyhounds, snowy fair,
And tall as stags, ran loose, and coursed around his chair,
A match for pards in flight, in grappling for the bear:
With golden muzzles all their mouths were bound,
And collars of the same their necks surround.
Thus through the fields Lycurgus took his way; 60
His hundred knights attend in pomp and proud array.

To match this monarch, with strong Arcite came
Emetrius, king of Ind, a mighty name;
On a bay courser, goodly to behold,
The trappings of his horse adorn'd with barbarous gold.
Not Mars bestrod a steed with greater grace;
His surcoat o'er his arms was cloth of Thrace,
Adorn'd with pearls, all orient, round, and great;
His saddle was of gold, with emeralds set,
His shoulders large a mantle did attire, 70
With rubies thick, and sparkling as the fire:
His amber-colour'd locks in ringlets run,
With graceful negligence, and shone against the sun.

His nose was aquiline, his eyes were blue;
Ruddy his lips, and fresh and fair his hue:
Some sprinkled freckles on his face were seen,
Whose dusk set off the whiteness of the skin:
His awful presence did the crowd surprise,
Nor durst the rash spectator meet his eyes;
Eyes that confess'd him born for kingly sway, 80
So fierce, they flash'd intolerable day.
His age in nature's youthful prime appear'd,
And just began to bloom his yellow beard.
Whene'er he spoke, his voice was heard around,
Loud as a trumpet, with a silver sound;
A laurel wreathed his temples, fresh and green;
And myrtle sprigs, the marks of love, were mix'd between.
Upon his fist he bore, for his delight,
An eagle well reclaim'd, and lily white.

His hundred knights attend him to the war, 90
All arm'd for battle; save their heads were bare.
Words and devices blazed on every shield,
And pleasing was the terror of the field.
For kings, and dukes, and barons, you might see,
Like sparkling stars, though different in degree,
All for the increase of arms, and love of chivalry.
Before the king tame leopards led the way,
And troops of lions innocently play.
So Bacchus through the conquer'd Indies rode,

And beasts in gambols frisk'd before their honest god. 100

In this array, the war of either side
Through Athens pass'd with military pride.
At prime, they enter'd on the Sunday morn;
Rich tapestry spread the streets, and flowers the posts adorn.
The town was all a jubilee of feasts;
So Theseus will'd, in honour of his guests;
Himself with open arms the kings embraced,
Then all the rest in their degrees were graced.
No harbinger was needful for the night,
For every house was proud to lodge a knight. 110

I pass the royal treat, nor must relate
The gifts bestow'd, nor how the champions sate:
Who first, who last, or how the knights address'd
Their vows, or who was fairest at the feast;
Whose voice, whose graceful dance did most surprise;
Soft amorous sighs, and silent love of eyes.
The rivals call my Muse another way,
To sing their vigils for the ensuing day.

'Twas ebbing darkness, past the noon of night:
And Phosphor, on the confines of the light, 120
Promised the sun; ere day began to spring,
The tuneful lark already stretch'd her wing,

And flickering on her nest, made short essays to sing.

When wakeful Palamon, preventing day,

Took to the royal lists his early way,

To Venus at her fane, in her own house, to pray.

There, falling on his knees before her shrine,

He thus implored with prayers her power divine:

Creator Venus, genial power of love,

The bliss of men below, and gods above! 130

Beneath the sliding sun thou runn'st thy race,

Dost fairest shine, and best become thy place.

For thee the winds their eastern blasts forbear,

Thy month reveals the spring, and opens all the year.

Thee, goddess! thee the storms of winter fly,

Earth smiles with flowers renewing, laughs the sky,

And birds to lays of love their tuneful notes apply.

For thee the lion loathes the taste of blood,

And, roaring, hunts his female through the wood:

For thee the bulls rebellow through the groves, 140

And tempt the stream, and snuff their absent loves.

'Tis thine, whate'er is pleasant, good, or fair:

All nature is thy province, life thy care:

Thou madest the world, and dost the world repair.

Thou gladder of the mount of Cytheron,

Increase of Jove, companion of the sun!

If e'er Adonis touch'd thy tender heart,

Have pity, goddess, for thou know'st the smart!

Alas! I have not words to tell my grief;
To vent my sorrow would be some relief; 150
Light sufferings give us leisure to complain;
We groan, but cannot speak, in greater pain.
O goddess! tell thyself what I would say,
Thou know'st it, and I feel too much to pray.
So grant my suit, as I enforce my might,
In love to be thy champion, and thy knight;
A servant to thy sex, a slave to thee,
A foe profess'd to barren chastity.
Nor ask I fame or honour of the field,
Nor choose I more to vanquish than to yield: 160
In my divine Emilia make me blest;
Let Fate, or partial Chance, dispose the rest:
Find thou the manner, and the means prepare;
Possession, more than conquest, is my care.
Mars is the warrior's god; in him it lies,
On whom he favours to confer the prize;
With smiling aspect you serenely move
In your fifth orb, and rule the realm of love.
The Fates but only spin the coarser clue,
The finest of the wool is left for you; 170
Spare me but one small portion of the twine,
And let the sisters cut below your line:
The rest among the rubbish may they sweep,
Or add it to the yarn of some old miser's heap.
But, if you this ambitious prayer deny,
(A wish, I grant, beyond mortality,)

Then let me sink beneath proud Arcite's arms,
And I once dead, let him possess her charms.

Thus ended he; then with observance due
The sacred incense on her altar threw: 180
The curling smoke mounts heavy from the fires;
At length it catches flame, and in a blaze expires;
At once the gracious goddess gave the sign,
Her statue shook, and trembled all the shrine:
Pleased Palamon the tardy omen took:
For, since the flames pursued the trailing smoke,
He knew his boon was granted; but the day
To distance driven, and joy adjourn'd with long delay.

Now morn with rosy light had streak'd the sky,
Up rose the sun, and up rose Emily; 190
Address'd her early steps to Cynthia's fane,
In state attended by her maiden train,
Who bore the vests that holy rites require,
Incense, and odorous gums, and cover'd fire.
The plenteous horns with pleasant mead they crown,
Nor wanted aught besides in honour of the Moon.
Now while the temple smoked with hallow'd steam,
They wash the virgin in a living stream;
The secret ceremonies I conceal,
Uncouth, perhaps unlawful, to reveal: 200
But such they were as Pagan use required,

Perform'd by women when the men retired,
Whose eyes profane their chaste mysterious rites
Might turn to scandal, or obscene delights.
Well-meaners think no harm; but for the rest,
Things sacred they pervert, and silence is the best.
Her shining hair, uncomb'd, was loosely spread,
A crown of mastless oak adorn'd her head:
When to the shrine approach'd, the spotless maid
Had kindling fires on either altar laid: 210
(The rites were such as were observed of old,
By Statius in his Theban story told.)
Then kneeling with her hands across her breast,
Thus lowly she preferr'd her chaste request:
Oh, goddess, haunter of the woodland green,
To whom both heaven and earth and seas are seen;
Queen of the nether skies, where half the year
Thy silver beams descend, and light the gloomy sphere!
Goddess of maids, and conscious of our hearts,
So keep me from the vengeance of thy darts, 220
Which Niobe's devoted issue felt,
When hissing through the skies the feather'd deaths were dealt;
As I desire to live a virgin life,
Nor know the name of mother or of wife.
Thy votress from my tender years I am,
And love, like thee, the woods and sylvan game.
Like death, thou know'st, I loathe the nuptial state,
And man, the tyrant of our sex, I hate,
A lowly servant, but a lofty mate:

Where love is duty on the female side; 230
On theirs, mere sensual gust, and sought with surly pride.
Now by thy triple shape, as thou art seen
In heaven, earth, hell, and everywhere a queen,
Grant this my first desire; let discord cease,
And make betwixt the rivals lasting peace:
Quench their hot fire, or far from me remove
The flame, and turn it on some other love;
Or, if my frowning stars have so decreed,
That one must be rejected, one succeed,
Make him my lord, within whose faithful breast 240
Is fix'd my image, and who loves me best.
But, oh! even that avert! I choose it not,
But take it as the least unhappy lot.
A maid I am, and of thy virgin train;
Oh, let me still that spotless name retain!
Frequent the forests, thy chaste will obey,
And only make the beasts of chase my prey!

The flames ascend on either altar clear,
While thus the blameless maid address'd her prayer.
When, lo! the burning fire that shone so bright, 250
Flew off all sudden, with extinguish'd light,
And left one altar dark, a little space;
Which turn'd self-kindled, and renew'd the blaze:
The other victor-flame a moment stood,
Then fell, and lifeless left the extinguish'd wood;

For ever lost, the irrevocable light
Forsook the blackening coals, and sunk to night:
At either end it whistled as it flew,
And as the brands were green, so dropp'd the dew;
Infected as it fell with sweat of sanguine hue. 260

The maid from that ill omen turn'd her eyes,
And with loud shrieks and clamours rent the skies,
Nor knew what signified the boding sign,
But found the Powers displeas'd, and fear'd the wrath divine.

Then shook the sacred shrine, and sudden light
Sprung through the vaulted roof, and made the temple bright.

The Power, behold! the Power in glory shone,
By her bent bow, and her keen arrows known;
The rest, a huntress issuing from the wood,
Reclining on her cornel spear she stood. 270
Then gracious thus began: Dismiss thy fear,
And Heaven's unchanged decrees attentive hear:
More powerful gods have torn thee from my side,
Unwilling to resign, and doom'd a bride:
The two contending knights are weigh'd above;
One Mars protects, and one the Queen of Love:
But which the man, is in the Thunderer's breast;
This he pronounced, 'Tis he who loves thee best.

The fire that, once extinct, revived again,
Foreshows the love allotted to remain: 280
Farewell! she said, and vanish'd from the place;
The sheaf of arrows shook, and rattled in the case.
Aghast at this, the royal virgin stood,
Disclaim'd, and now no more a sister of the wood:
But to the parting goddess thus she pray'd:
Propitious still be present to my aid,
Nor quite abandon your once favour'd maid.
Then sighing she return'd; but smiled betwixt,
With hopes and fears, and joys with sorrows mix'd.

The next returning planetary hour 290
Of Mars, who shared the heptarchy of power,
His steps bold Arcite to the temple bent,
To adore with Pagan rites the power omnipotent:
Then prostrate, low before his altar lay,
And raised his manly voice, and thus began to pray:

Strong God of arms, whose iron sceptre sways
The freezing North, and Hyperborean seas,
And Scythian colds, and Thracia's wintry coast,
Where stand thy steeds, and thou art honour'd most!
There most; but everywhere thy power is known, 300
The fortune of the fight is all thy own:
Terror is thine, and wild amazement, flung
From out thy chariot, withers even the strong:

And disarray and shameful rout ensue,
And force is added to the fainting crew.
Acknowledged as thou art, accept my prayer,
If aught I have achieved deserve thy care:
If to my utmost power, with sword and shield,
I dared the death, unknowing how to yield,
And falling in my rank, still kept the field: 310
Then let my arms prevail, by thee sustain'd,
That Emily by conquest may be gain'd.
Have pity on my pains; nor those unknown
To Mars, which, when a lover, were his own.
Venus, the public care of all above,
Thy stubborn heart has soften'd into love:
Now, by her blandishments and powerful charms,
When yielded she lay curling in thy arms,
Even by thy shame, if shame it may be call'd,
When Vulcan had thee in his net enthrall'd; 320
(Oh, envied ignominy, sweet disgrace,
When every god that saw thee wish'd thy place!)
By those dear pleasures, aid my arms in fight,
And make me conquer in my patron's right:
For I am young, a novice in the trade,
The fool of love, unpractised to persuade:
And want the soothing arts that catch the fair,
But, caught myself, lie struggling in the snare:
And she I love, or laughs at all my pain,
Or knows her worth too well; and pays me with disdain. 330
For sure I am, unless I win in arms,

To stand excluded from Emilia's charms:
Nor can my strength avail, unless by thee
Endued with force, I gain the victory!
Then for the fire which warm'd thy generous heart,
Pity thy subject's pains, and equal smart.
So be the morrow's sweat and labour mine,
The palm and honour of the conquest thine:
Then shall the war, and stern debate, and strife
Immortal, be the business of my life; 340
And in thy fane, the dusty spoils among,
High on the burnish'd roof, my banner shall be hung:
Rank'd with my champions' bucklers, and below,
With arms reversed, the achievements of my foe:
And while these limbs the vital spirit feeds,
While day to night, and night to day succeeds,
Thy smoking altar shall be fat with food
Of incense, and the grateful steam of blood;
Burnt-offerings morn and evening shall be thine;
And fires eternal in thy temple shine. 350
The bush of yellow beard, this length of hair,
Which from my birth inviolate I bear,
Guiltless of steel, and from the razor free,
Shall fall a plenteous crop, reserved for thee.
So may my arms with victory be blest,
I ask no more; let Fate dispose the rest.

The champion ceased; there follow'd in the close

A hollow groan: a murmuring wind arose;
The rings of iron, that on the doors were hung,
Sent out a jarring sound, and harshly rung: 360
The bolted gates flew open at the blast,
The storm rush'd in, and Arcite stood aghast:
The flames were blown aside, yet shone they bright,
Fann'd by the wind, and gave a ruffled light.
Then from the ground a scent began to rise,
Sweet smelling, as accepted sacrifice:
This omen pleased, and as the flames aspire
With odorous incense Arcite heaps the fire:
Nor wanted hymns to Mars, or heathen charms:
At length the nodding statue clash'd his arms, 370
And with a sullen sound and feeble cry,
Half sunk, and half pronounced the word of victory.
For this, with soul devout, he thank'd the god,
And, of success secure, return'd to his abode.

These vows thus granted, raised a strife above,
Betwixt the God of War and Queen of Love.
She, granting first, had right of time to plead;
But he had granted too, nor would recede.
Jove was for Venus; but he fear'd his wife,
And seem'd unwilling to decide the strife; 380
Till Saturn from his leaden throne arose,
And found a way the difference to compose:
Though sparing of his grace, to mischief bent,

He seldom does a good with good intent.
Wayward, but wise; by long experience taught,
To please both parties, for ill ends, he sought:
For this advantage age from youth has won,
As not to be outridden, though outrun.
By fortune he was now to Venus trined,
And with stern Mars in Capricorn was join'd: 390
Of him disposing in his own abode,
He soothed the goddess, while he gull'd the god:
Cease, daughter, to complain, and stint the strife;
Thy Palamon shall have his promised wife:
And Mars, the lord of conquest, in the fight
With palm and laurel shall adorn his knight.
Wide is my course, nor turn I to my place,
Till length of time, and move with tardy pace.
Man feels me, when I press the ethereal plains,
My hand is heavy, and the wound remains. 400
Mine is the shipwreck, in a watery sign;
And in an earthy, the dark dungeon mine.
Cold shivering agues, melancholy care,
And bitter blasting winds, and poison'd air,
Are mine, and wilful death, resulting from despair.
The throttling quinsey 'tis my star appoints,
And rheumatism ascend to rack the joints:
When churls rebel against their native prince,
I arm their hands, and furnish the pretence;
And housing in the lion's hateful sign, 410
Bought senates, and deserting troops are mine.

Mine is the privy poisoning; I command
Unkindly seasons, and ungrateful land.
By me kings' palaces are push'd to ground.
And miners crush'd beneath their mines are found.
'Twas I slew Samson, when the pillar'd hall
Fell down, and crush'd the many with the fall.
My looking is the sire of pestilence,
That sweeps at once the people and the prince.
Now weep no more, but trust thy grandsire's art, 420
Mars shall be pleased, and thou perform thy part.
'Tis ill, though different your complexions are,
The family of heaven for men should war.
The expedient pleased, where neither lost his right;
Mars had the day, and Venus had the night.
The management they left to Chronos' care;
Now turn we to the effect, and sing the war.

In Athens all was pleasure, mirth, and play,
All proper to the spring, and spritely May:
Which every soul inspired with such delight, 430
'Twas jesting all the day, and love at night.
Heaven smiled, and gladdened was the heart of man;
And Venus had the world as when it first began.
At length in sleep their bodies they compose,
And dreamt the future fight, and early rose.

Now scarce the dawning day began to spring,

As at a signal given, the streets with clamours ring:
At once the crowd arose; confused and high,
Even from the heaven, was heard a shouting cry;
For Mars was early up, and roused the sky. 440
The gods came downward to behold the wars,
Sharpening their sights, and leaning from their stars.
The neighing of the generous horse was heard,
For battle by the busy groom prepared:
Rustling of harness, rattling of the shield,
Clattering of armour, furbish'd for the field.
Crowds to the castle mounted up the street,
Battering the pavement with their coursers' feet:
The greedy sight might there devour the gold
Of glittering arms, too dazzling to behold: 450
And polish'd steel, that cast the view aside,
And crested morions, with their plummy pride.
Knights, with a long retinue of their squires,
In gaudy liveries march, and quaint attires.
One laced the helm, another held the lance:
A third the shining buckler did advance.
The courser paw'd the ground with restless feet,
And snorting foam'd, and champ'd the golden bit.
The smiths and armourers on palfreys ride,
Files in their hands, and hammers at their side, 460
And nails for loosen'd spears, and thongs for shields provide.
The yeomen guard the streets, in seemly bands;
And clowns come crowding on, with cudgels in their hands.

The trumpets, next the gate, in order placed,
Attend the sign to sound the martial blast;
The palace-yard is fill'd with floating tides,
And the last comers bear the former to the sides.

The throng is in the midst: the common crew
Shut out, the hall admits the better few;
In knots they stand, or in a rank they walk, 470
Serious in aspect, earnest in their talk;

Factious, and favouring this or the other side,
As their strong fancy or weak reason guide:

Their wagers back their wishes; numbers hold
With the fair freckled king, and beard of gold:
So vigorous are his eyes, such rays they cast,
So prominent his eagle's beak is placed.

But most their looks on the black monarch bend,
His rising muscles, and his brawn commend;
His double-biting axe, and beamy spear, 480
Each asking a gigantic force to rear.

All spoke as partial favour moved the mind;
And, safe themselves, at others' cost divined.

Waked by the cries, the Athenian chief arose,
The knightly forms of combat to dispose;
And passing through the obsequious guards, he sate
Conspicuous on a throne, sublime in state;
There, for the two contending knights he sent;

Arm'd cap-a-pie, with reverence low they bent;
He smiled on both, and with superior look 490
Alike their offer'd adoration took.
The people press on every side to see
Their awful prince, and hear his high decree.
Then signing to their heralds with his hand,
They gave his orders from their lofty stand.
Silence is thrice enjoin'd; then thus aloud
The king-at-arms bespeaks the knights and listening crowd:

Our sovereign lord has ponder'd in his mind
The means to spare the blood of gentle kind;
And of his grace, and inborn clemency, 500
He modifies his first severe decree!
The keener edge of battle to rebate,
The troops for honour fighting, not for hate:
He wills, not death should terminate their strife,
And wounds, if wounds ensue, be short of life:
But issues, ere the fight, his dread command,
That slings afar, and poniards hand to hand,
Be banish'd from the field; that none shall dare
With shorten'd sword to stab in closer war;
But in fair combat fight with manly strength, 510
Nor push with biting point, but strike at length;
The tourney is allow'd but one career,
Of the tough ash, with the sharp-grinded spear;
But knights unhorsed may rise from off the plain,

And fight on foot their honour to regain;
Nor, if at mischief taken, on the ground
Be slain, but prisoners to the pillar bound,
At either barrier placed; nor (captives made),
Be freed, or arm'd anew the fight invade.
The chief of either side, bereft of life, 520
Or yielded to his foe, concludes the strife.
Thus dooms the lord: now, valiant knights and young,
Fight each his fill with swords and maces long.

The herald ends: the vaulted firmament
With loud acclaims and vast applause is rent:
Heaven guard a prince so gracious and so good,
So just, and yet so provident of blood!
This was the general cry. The trumpets sound,
And warlike symphony is heard around.
The marching troops through Athens take their way, 530
The great earl-marshal orders their array.
The fair from high the passing pomp behold;
A rain of flowers is from the windows roll'd.
The casements are with golden tissue spread,
And horses' hoofs, for earth, on silken tapestry tread.
The king goes midmost, and the rivals ride
In equal rank, and close his either side.
Next after these, there rode the royal wife,
With Emily, the cause, and the reward of strife.
The following cavalcade, by three and three, 540

Proceed by titles marshall'd in degree.
Thus through the southern gate they take their way,
And at the list arrived ere prime of day.
There, parting from the king, the chiefs divide,
And wheeling east and west, before their many ride.
The Athenian monarch mounts his throne on high,
And after him the queen and Emily:
Next these, the kindred of the crown are graced
With nearer seats, and lords by ladies placed.
Scarce were they seated, when with clamours loud 550
In rush'd at once a rude promiscuous crowd;
The guards, and then each other overbear,
And in a moment throng the spacious theatre.
Now changed the jarring noise to whispers low,
As winds forsaking seas more softly blow;
When at the western gate, on which the car
Is placed aloft, that bears the god of war,
Proud Arcite entering arm'd before his train,
Stops at the barrier, and divides the plain.
Red was his banner, and display'd abroad 560
The bloody colours of his patron god.

At that self moment enters Palamon
The gate of Venus, and the rising Sun;
Waved by the wanton winds, his banner flies,
All maiden white, and shares the people's eyes.
From east to west, look all the world around,

Two troops so match'd were never to be found;
Such bodies built for strength, of equal age,
In stature sized; so proud in equipage:
The nicest eye could no distinction make, 570
Where lay the advantage, or what side to take.

Thus ranged, the herald for the last proclaims
A silence, while they answer'd to their names:
For so the king decreed, to shun the care,
The fraud of musters false, the common bane of war.
The tale was just, and then the gates were closed;
And chief to chief, and troop to troop opposed.
The heralds last retired, and loudly cried--
The fortune of the field be fairly tried!

At this, the challenger with fierce defy 580
His trumpet sounds; the challenged makes reply;
With clangour rings the field, resounds the vaulted sky.
Their vizors closed, their lances in the rest,
Or at the helmet pointed, or the crest,
They vanish from the barrier, speed the race,
And spurring see decrease the middle space.
A cloud of smoke envelops either host,
And all at once the combatants are lost:
Darkling they join adverse, and shock unseen,
Coursers with coursers jostling, men with men: 590
As labouring in eclipse, a while they stay,

Till the next blast of wind restores the day.
They look anew: the beauteous form of fight
Is changed, and war appears a grisly sight.
Two troops in fair array one moment show'd,
The next, a field with fallen bodies strow'd:
Not half the number in their seats are found;
But men and steeds lie grovelling on the ground.
The points of spears are stuck within the shield,
The steeds without their riders scour the field. 600
The knights, unhorsed, on foot renew the fight;
The glittering falchions cast a gleaming light:
Hauberks and helms are hew'd with many a wound,
Out spins the streaming blood and dyes the ground.
The mighty maces with such haste descend,
They break the bones, and make the solid armour bend.
This thrusts amid the throng with furious force;
Down goes, at once, the horseman and the horse:
That courser stumbles on the fallen steed,
And floundering throws the rider o'er his head. 610
One rolls along, a foot-ball to his foes;
One with a broken truncheon deals his blows.
This halting, this disabled with his wound,
In triumph led, is to the pillar bound,
Where by the king's award he must abide:
There goes a captive led on the other side.
By fits they cease; and leaning on the lance,
Take breath a while, and to new fight advance.

Full oft the rivals met, and neither spared
His utmost force, and each forgot to ward. 620
The head of this was to the saddle bent,
The other backward to the crupper sent:
Both were by turns unhorsed; the jealous blows
Fall thick and heavy, when on foot they close.
So deep their falchions bite, that every stroke
Pierced to the quick; and equal wounds they gave and took.
Borne far asunder by the tides of men,
Like adamant and steel they meet again.

So when a tiger sucks the bullock's blood,
A famish'd lion issuing from the wood 630
Roars lordly fierce, and challenges the food:
Each claims possession, neither will obey,
But both their paws are fasten'd on the prey;
They bite, they tear; and while in vain they strive,
The swains come arm'd between, and both to distance drive.

At length, as Fate foredoom'd, and all things tend
By course of time to their appointed end;
So when the sun to west was far declined,
And both afresh in mortal battle join'd,
The strong Emetrius came in Arcite's aid, 640
And Palamon with odds was overlaid:
For turning short, he struck with all his might

Full on the helmet of the unwary knight.
Deep was the wound; he stagger'd with the blow,
And turn'd him to his unexpected foe;
Whom with such force he struck, he fell'd him down,
And cleft the circle of his golden crown.
But Arcite's men, who now prevail'd in fight,
Twice ten at once surround the single knight:
O'erpower'd, at length, they force him to the ground, 650
Unyielded as he was, and to the pillar bound;
And King Lycurgus, while he fought in vain
His friend to free, was tumbled on the plain.

Who now laments but Palamon, compell'd
No more to try the fortune of the field!
And, worse than death, to view with hateful eyes
His rival's conquest, and renounce the prize!

The royal judge, on his tribunal placed,
Who had beheld the fight from first to last,
Bade cease the war; pronouncing from on high, 660
Arcite of Thebes had won the beauteous Emily.
The sound of trumpets to the voice replied,
And round the royal lists the heralds cried,
Arcite of Thebes has won the beauteous bride!

The people rend the skies with vast applause;

All own the chief, when Fortune owns the cause.
Arcite is own'd even by the gods above,
And conquering Mars insults the Queen of Love.
So laugh'd he, when the rightful Titan fail'd,
And Jove's usurping arms in heaven prevail'd. 670
Laugh'd all the powers who favour tyranny;
And all the standing army of the sky.
But Venus with dejected eyes appears,
And, weeping on the lists, distill'd her tears;
Her will refused, which grieves a woman most,
And, in her champion foil'd, the cause of Love is lost.
Till Saturn said, Fair daughter, now be still,
The blustering fool has satisfied his will;
His boon is given; his knight has gain'd the day,
But lost the prize; the arrears are yet to pay; 680
Thy hour is come, and mine the care shall be
To please thy knight, and set thy promise free.

Now while the heralds run the lists around,
And Arcite! Arcite! heaven and earth resound;
A miracle (nor less it could be call'd)
Their joy with unexpected sorrow pall'd.
The victor knight had laid his helm aside,
Part for his ease, the greater part for pride;
Bare-headed, popularly low he bow'd,
And paid the salutations of the crowd. 690
Then spurring at full speed, ran endlong on

Where Theseus sate on his imperial throne;
Furious he drove, and upward cast his eye,
Where, next the queen, was placed his Emily;
Then passing, to the saddle-bow he bent:
A sweet regard the gracious virgin lent;
(For women, to the brave an easy prey,
Still follow Fortune where she leads the way):
Just then, from earth sprung out a flashing fire,
By Pluto sent, at Saturn's bad desire: 700
The startling steed was seized with sudden fright,
And, bounding, o'er the pommel cast the knight:
Forward he flew, and pitching on his head,
He quiver'd with his feet, and lay for dead.
Black was his countenance in a little space,
For all the blood was gather'd in his face.
Help was at hand: they rear'd him from the ground,
And from his cumbrous arms his limbs unbound;
Then lanced a vein, and watch'd returning breath;
It came, but clogg'd with symptoms of his death. 710
The saddle-bow the noble parts had press'd,
All bruised and mortified his manly breast.
Him still entranced, and in a litter laid,
They bore from field, and to his bed convey'd.
At length he waked, and with a feeble cry,
The word he first pronounced was "Emily."

Mean time the king, though inwardly he mourn'd,

In pomp triumphant to the town return'd,
Attended by the chiefs, who fought the field;
(Now friendly mix'd, and in one troop compell'd.) 720
Composed his looks to counterfeited cheer,
And bade them not for Arcite's life to fear.
But that which gladdened all the warrior train,
Though most were sorely wounded, none were slain.
The surgeons soon despoil'd them of their arms,
And some with salves they cure, and some with charms;
Foment the bruises, and the pains assuage,
And heal their inward hurts with sovereign draughts of sage.
The king in person visits all around,
Comforts the sick, congratulates the sound; 730
Honours the princely chiefs, rewards the rest,
And holds for thrice three days a royal feast.
None was disgraced; for falling is no shame;
And cowardice alone is loss of fame.
The venturous knight is from the saddle thrown;
But 'tis the fault of Fortune, not his own,
If crowds and palms the conquering side adorn,
The victor under better stars was born:
The brave man seeks not popular applause,
Nor, overpower'd with arms, deserts his cause; 740
Unshamed, though foil'd, he does the best he can;
Force is of brutes, but honour is of man.

Thus Theseus smiled on all with equal grace,

And each was set according to his place;
With ease were reconciled the differing parts,
For envy never dwells in noble hearts.
At length they took their leave, the time expired,
Well pleased, and to their several homes retired.

Mean while the health of Arcite still impairs;
From bad proceeds to worse, and mocks the leech's cares 750
Swoln is his breast; his inward pains increase,
All means are used, and all without success.
The clotted blood lies heavy on his heart,
Corrupts, and there remains, in spite of art:
Nor breathing veins, nor cupping will prevail;
All outward remedies and inward fail:
The mould of nature's fabric is destroy'd,
Her vessels discomposed, her virtue void;
The bellows of his lungs begin to swell:
All out of frame is every secret cell, 760
Nor can the good receive, nor bad expel.
Those breathing organs thus within oppress'd,
With venom soon distend the sinews of his breast.
Nought profits him to save abandon'd life,
Nor vomit's upward aid, nor downward laxative.
The midmost region batter'd and destroy'd,
When nature cannot work, the effect of art is void.
For physic can but mend our crazy state,
Patch an old building, not a new create.

Arcite is doom'd to die in all his pride, 770
Must leave his youth, and yield his beauteous bride,
Gain'd hardly, against right, and unenjoy'd.
When 'twas declared all hope of life was past,
Conscience (that of all physic works the last)
Caused him to send for Emily in haste.
With her, at his desire, came Palamon;
Then on his pillow raised, he thus begun:

No language can express the smallest part
Of what I feel, and suffer in my heart
For you, whom best I love and value most; 780
But to your service I bequeath my ghost;
Which from this mortal body when untied,
Unseen, unheard, shall hover at your side;
Nor fright you waking, nor your sleep offend,
But wait officious, and your steps attend:
How I have loved, excuse my faltering tongue,
My spirit's feeble, and my pains are strong:
This I may say, I only grieve to die,
Because I lose my charming Emily:
To die, when Heaven had put you in my power, 790
Fate could not choose a more malicious hour!
What greater curse could envious Fortune give,
Than just to die, when I began to live?
Vain men! how vanishing a bliss we crave,
Now warm in love, now withering in the grave!

Never, oh never more to see the sun!
Still dark, in a damp vault, and still alone!
This fate is common; but I lose my breath;
Near bliss, and yet not bless'd before my death.
Farewell; but take me dying in your arms, 800
'Tis all I can enjoy of all your charms:
This hand I cannot but in death resign;
Ah! could I live! but while I live 'tis mine.
I feel my end approach, and thus embraced,
Am pleased to die; but hear me speak my last:
Ah! my sweet foe, for you, and you alone,
I broke my faith with injured Palamon.
But love the sense of right and wrong confounds,
Strong love and proud ambition have no bounds.
And much I doubt, should Heaven my life prolong, 810
I should return to justify my wrong:
For while my former flames remain within,
Repentance is but want of power to sin.
With mortal hatred I pursued his life,
Nor he, nor you, were guilty of the strife;
Nor I, but as I loved; yet all combined,
Your beauty, and my impotence of mind;
And his concurrent flame that blew my fire;
For still our kindred souls had one desire.
He had a moment's right in point of time; 820
Had I seen first, then his had been the crime.
Fate made it mine, and justified his right;
Nor holds this earth a more deserving knight,

For virtue, valour, and for noble blood,
Truth, honour, all that is comprised in good;
So help me Heaven, in all the world is none
So worthy to be loved as Palamon.
He loves you too, with such an holy fire,
As will not, cannot, but with life expire:
Our vow'd affections both have often tried, 830
Nor any love but yours could ours divide.
Then, by my love's inviolable band,
By my long suffering, and my short command,
If e'er you plight your vows when I am gone,
Have pity on the faithful Palamon.

This was his last; for Death came on a main,
And exercised below his iron reign;
Then upward to the seat of life he goes:
Sense fled before him, what he touch'd he froze:
Yet could he not his closing eyes withdraw, 840
Though less and less of Emily he saw;
So, speechless, for a little space he lay;
Then grasp'd the hand he held, and sigh'd his soul away.

But whither went his soul, let such relate
Who search the secrets of the future state:
Divines can say but what themselves believe;
Strong proofs they have, but not demonstrative:
For, were all plain, then all sides must agree,

And faith itself be lost in certainty.
To live uprightly, then, is sure the best, 850
To save ourselves, and not to damn the rest.
The soul of Arcite went where heathens go,
Who better live than we, though less they know.

In Palamon a manly grief appears;
Silent, he wept, ashamed to show his tears:
Emilia shriek'd but once, and then, oppress'd
With sorrow, sunk upon her lover's breast:
Till Theseus in his arms convey'd with care,
Far from so sad a sight, the swooning fair.
'Twere loss of time her sorrow to relate; 860
Ill bears the sex a youthful lover's fate,
When just approaching to the nuptial state.
But like a low-hung cloud, it rains so fast,
That all at once it falls, and cannot last.
The face of things is changed, and Athens now,
That laugh'd so late, becomes the scene of woe:
Matrons and maids, both sexes, every state,
With tears lament the knight's untimely fate.
Nor greater grief in falling Troy was seen
For Hector's death; but Hector was not then, 870
Old men with dust deform'd their hoary hair,
The women beat their breasts, their cheeks they tear.
Why wouldst thou go, with one consent they cry,
When thou hadst gold enough, and Emily?

Theseus himself, who should have cheer'd the grief
Of others, wanted now the same relief;
Old Egeus only could revive his son,
Who various changes of the world had known,
And strange vicissitudes of human fate,
Still altering, never in a steady state; 880
Good after ill, and, after pain, delight,
Alternate like the scenes of day and night:
Since every man who lives, is born to die,
And none can boast sincere felicity,
With equal mind, what happens, let us bear,
Nor joy, nor grieve too much for things beyond our care.
Like pilgrims to the appointed place we tend;
The world's an inn, and death the journey's end.
Even kings but play; and when their part is done,
Some other, worse or better, mount the throne. 890
With words like these the crowd was satisfied,
And so they would have been, had Theseus died.
But he, their king, was labouring in his mind,
A fitting place for funeral pomps to find,
Which were in honour of the dead design'd.
And after long debate, at last he found
(As love itself had mark'd the spot of ground)
That grove for ever green, that conscious laund,
Where he with Palamon fought hand to hand:
That where he fed his amorous desires 900

With soft complaints, and felt his hottest fires;
There other flames might waste his earthly part,
And burn his limbs, where love had burn'd his heart.

This once resolved, the peasants were enjoin'd
Sere-wood, and firs, and dodder'd oaks to find.
With sounding axes to the grove they go,
Fell, split, and lay the fuel on a row,
Vulcanian food: a bier is next prepared,
On which the lifeless body should be rear'd,
Cover'd with cloth of gold, on which was laid 910
The corpse of Arcite, in like robes array'd.
White gloves were on his hands, and on his head
A wreath of laurel, mix'd with myrtle spread.
A sword keen-edged within his right he held,
The warlike emblem of the conquer'd field:
Bare was his manly visage on the bier:
Menaced his countenance; even in death severe.
Then to the palace-hall they bore the knight,
To lie in solemn state, a public sight.
Groans, cries, and howlings fill the crowded place, 920
And unaffected sorrow sate on every face.
Sad Palamon above the rest appears,
In sable garments, dew'd with gushing tears:
His auburn locks on either shoulder flow'd,
Which to the funeral of his friend he vow'd:
But Emily, as chief, was next his side,

A virgin-widow, and a mourning bride.
And that the princely obsequies might be
Perform'd according to his high degree,
The steed, that bore him living to the fight, 930
Was trapp'd with polish'd steel, all shining bright,
And cover'd with the achievements of the knight.
The riders rode abreast, and one his shield,
His lance of cornel-wood another held;
The third his bow, and, glorious to behold,
The costly quiver, all of burnish'd gold.
The noblest of the Grecians next appear,
And, weeping, on their shoulders bore the bier;
With sober pace they march'd, and often stay'd,
And through the master-street the corpse convey'd. 940
The houses to their tops with black were spread,
And even the pavements were with mourning hid.
The right side of the pall old Egeus kept,
And on the left the royal Theseus wept;
Each bore a golden bowl, of work divine,
With honey fill'd, and milk, and mix'd with ruddy wine.
Then Palamon, the kinsman of the slain,
And after him appear'd the illustrious train.
To grace the pomp, came Emily the bright,
With cover'd fire, the funeral pile to light. 950
With high devotion was the service made,
And all the rites of Pagan honour paid:
So lofty was the pile, a Parthian bow,
With vigour drawn, must send the shaft below.

The bottom was full twenty fathom broad,
With crackling straw beneath in due proportion strew'd.
The fabric seem'd a wood of rising green,
With sulphur and bitumen cast between,
To feed the flames: the trees were unctuous fir,
And mountain-ash, the mother of the spear; 960
The mourner-yew, and builder oak were there;
The beech, the swimming alder, and the plane,
Hard box, and linden of a softer grain,
And laurels, which the gods for conquering chiefs ordain.
How they were rank'd, shall rest untold by me,
With nameless Nymphs that lived in every tree;
Nor how the Dryads, or the woodland train,
Disherited, ran howling o'er the plain:
Nor how the birds to foreign seats repair'd,
Or beasts, that bolted out, and saw the forest bared: 970
Nor how the ground, now clear'd, with ghastly fright
Beheld the sudden sun, a stranger to the light.

The straw, as first I said, was laid below;
Of chips and sere-wood was the second row;
The third of greens, and timber newly fell'd;
The fourth high stage the fragrant odours held,
And pearls, and precious stones, and rich array;
In midst of which, embalm'd, the body lay.
The service sung, the maid with mourning eyes
The stubble fired; the smouldering flames arise: 980

This office done, she sunk upon the ground;
But what she spoke, recover'd from her swoond,
I want the wit in moving words to dress;
But by themselves the tender sex may guess.
While the devouring fire was burning fast,
Rich jewels in the flame the wealthy cast;
And some their shields, and some their lances threw,
And gave their warrior's ghost a warrior's due.
Full bowls of wine, of honey, milk, and blood
Were pour'd upon the pile of burning wood, 990
And hissing flames receive, and hungry lick the food.
Then thrice the mounted squadrons ride around
The fire, and Arcite's name they thrice resound:
Hail, and farewell! they shouted thrice amain,
Thrice facing to the left, and thrice they turn'd again:
Still as they turn'd, they beat their clattering shields;
The women mix their cries; and clamour fills the fields.
The warlike wakes continued all the night,
And funeral games were play'd at new returning light;
Who naked wrestled best, besmear'd with oil, 1000
Or who with gauntlets gave or took the foil,
I will not tell you, nor would you attend;
But briefly haste to my long story's end.

I pass the rest; the year was fully mourn'd,
And Palamon long since to Thebes returned:
When, by the Grecians' general consent,

At Athens Theseus held his parliament:
Among the laws that pass'd, it was decreed,
That conquer'd Thebes from bondage should be freed;
Reserving homage to the Athenian throne, 1010
To which the sovereign summon'd Palamon.
Unknowing of the cause, he took his way,
Mournful in mind, and still in black array.

The monarch mounts the throne, and, placed on high,
Commands into the court the beautiful Emily:
So call'd, she came; the senate rose, and paid
Becoming reverence to the royal maid.
And first, soft whispers through the assembly went;
With silent wonder then they watch'd the event:
All hush'd, the king arose with awful grace, 1020
Deep thought was in his breast, and counsel in his face.
At length he sigh'd; and having first prepared
The attentive audience, thus his will declared:

The Cause and Spring of motion, from above,
Hung down on earth the golden chain of Love:
Great was the effect, and high was his intent,
When peace among the jarring seeds he sent.
Fire, flood, and earth, and air by this were bound,
And Love, the common link, the new creation crown'd.
The chain still holds; for though the forms decay, 1030
Eternal matter never wears away:

The same First Mover certain bounds has placed,
How long those perishable forms shall last:
Nor can they last beyond the time assign'd
By that all-seeing, and all-making mind:
Shorten their hours they may; for will is free;
But never pass the appointed destiny.
So men oppress'd, when weary of their breath,
Throw off the burden, and suborn their death.
Then since those forms begin, and have their end, 1040
On some unalter'd cause they sure depend:
Parts of the whole are we; but God the whole;
Who gives us life, and animating soul.
For nature cannot from a part derive
That being, which the whole can only give:
He perfect, stable; but imperfect we,
Subject to change, and different in degree;
Plants, beasts, and man; and as our organs are,
We more or less of his perfection share.
But by a long descent, the ethereal fire 1050
Corrupts; and forms, the mortal part, expire:
As he withdraws his virtue, so they pass,
And the same matter makes another mass:
This law the Omniscient Power was pleased to give,
That every kind should by succession live:
That individuals die, His will ordains;
The propagated species still remains.
The monarch oak, the patriarch of the trees,
Shoots rising up, and spreads by slow degrees;

Three centuries he grows, and three he stays, 1060
Supreme in state, and in three more decays:
So wears the paving pebble in the street,
And towns and towers their fatal periods meet:
So rivers, rapid once, now naked lie,
Forsaken of their springs; and leave their channels dry.
So man, at first a drop, dilates with heat,
Then, form'd, the little heart begins to beat;
Secret he feeds, unknowing in the cell;
At length, for hatching ripe, he breaks the shell,
And struggles into breath, and cries for aid; 1070
Then, helpless, in his mother's lap is laid:
He creeps, he walks, and issuing into man,
Grudges their life, from whence his own began:
Reckless of laws, affects to rule alone,
Anxious to reign, and restless on the throne:
First vegetive, then feels, and reasons last;
Rich of three souls, and lives all three to waste.
Some thus; but thousands more in flower of age:
For few arrive to run the latter stage.
Sunk in the first, in battle some are slain, 1080
And others whelm'd beneath the stormy main.
What makes all this, but Jupiter the king,
At whose command we perish, and we spring?
Then 'tis our best, since thus ordain'd to die,
To make a virtue of necessity.
Take what he gives, since to rebel is vain;
The bad grows better, which we well sustain;

And could we choose the time, and choose aright,
'Tis best to die, our honour at the height.
When we have done our ancestors no shame, 1090
But served our friends, and well secured our fame;
Then should we wish our happy life to close,
And leave no more for fortune to dispose:
So should we make our death a glad relief
From future shame, from sickness, and from grief:
Enjoying while we live the present hour,
And dying in our excellence and flower.
Then round our death-bed every friend should run,
And joyous of our conquest early won:
While the malicious world with envious tears 1100
Should grudge our happy end, and wish it theirs.
Since then our Arcite is with honour dead,
Why should we mourn, that he so soon is freed,
Or call untimely, what the gods decreed?
With grief as just, a friend may be deplored
From a foul prison to free air restored.
Ought he to thank his kinsman or his wife,
Could tears recall him into wretched life?
Their sorrow hurts themselves; on him is lost;
And worse than both, offends his happy ghost. 1110
What then remains, but, after past annoy,
To take the good vicissitude of joy?
To thank the gracious gods for what they give,
Possess our souls, and while we live, to live?
Ordain we then two sorrows to combine,

And in one point the extremes of grief to join;
That thence resulting joy may be renew'd,
As jarring notes in harmony conclude.
Then I propose that Palamon shall be
In marriage join'd with beauteous Emily; 1120
For which already I have gain'd the assent
Of my free people in full parliament.
Long love to her has borne the faithful knight,
And well deserved, had fortune done him right:
'Tis time to mend her fault; since Emily
By Arcite's death from former vows is free:
If you, fair sister, ratify the accord,
And take him for your husband, and your lord,
'Tis no dishonour to confer your grace
On one descended from a royal race: 1130
And were he less, yet years of service past,
From grateful souls exact reward at last:
Pity is Heaven's and yours; nor can she find
A throne so soft as in a woman's mind.
He said; she blush'd; and as o'er-awed by might,
Seem'd to give Theseus what she gave the knight.
Then turning to the Theban thus he said:
Small arguments are needful to persuade
Your temper to comply with my command;
And speaking thus, he gave Emilia's hand. 1140
Smiled Venus, to behold her own true knight
Obtain the conquest, though he lost the fight;
And bless'd with nuptial bliss the sweet laborious night.

Eros, and Anteros, on either side,
One fired the bridegroom, and one warm'd the bride;
And long-attending Hymen from above,
Shower'd on the bed the whole Idalian grove.
All of a tenor was their after-life,
No day discolour'd with domestic strife;
No jealousy, but mutual truth believed, 1150
Secure repose, and kindness undeceived.
Thus Heaven, beyond the compass of his thought,
Sent him the blessing he so dearly bought.

So may the Queen of Love long duty bless,
And all true lovers find the same success!

* * * * *

THE COCK AND THE FOX: OR, THE TALE OF THE NUN'S PRIEST.

There lived, as authors tell, in days of yore,
A widow somewhat old, and very poor:
Deep in a cell her cottage lonely stood,
Well thatch'd, and under covert of a wood.
This dowager, on whom my tale I found,
Since last she laid her husband in the ground,
A simple sober life, in patience, led,
And had but just enough to buy her bread:

But huswifing the little Heaven had lent,
She duly paid a groat for quarter rent; 10
And pinch'd her belly, with her daughters two,
To bring the year about with much ado.

The cattle in her homestead were three sows,
A ewe call'd Mally, and three brinded cows.
Her parlour-window stuck with herbs around,
Of savoury smell; and rushes strew'd the ground.

A mapple-dresser in her hall she had,
On which full many a slender meal she made;
For no delicious morsel pass'd her throat;
According to her cloth she cut her coat: 20

No poignant sauce she knew, nor costly treat,
Her hunger gave a relish to her meat:
A sparing diet did her health assure;
Or sick, a pepper posset was her cure.

Before the day was done, her work she sped,
And never went by candlelight to bed:

With exercise she sweat ill humours out,

Her dancing was not hindered by the gout.

Her poverty was glad; her heart content;

Nor knew she what the spleen or vapours meant. 30

Of wine she never tasted through the year,

But white and black was all her homely cheer:

Brown bread, and milk (but first she skimm'd her bowls),

And rashers of singed bacon on the coals;

On holy days, an egg or two at most;
But her ambition never reach'd to roast.

A yard she had with pales enclosed about,
Some high, some low, and a dry ditch without.
Within this homestead lived, without a peer
For crowing loud, the noble Chanticleer; 40
So hight her cock, whose singing did surpass
The merry notes of organs at the mass.
More certain was the crowing of the cock
To number hours, than is an abbey-clock;
And sooner than the matin-bell was rung,
He clapp'd his wings upon his roost, and sung:
For when degrees fifteen ascended right,
By sure instinct he knew 'twas one at night.
High was his comb, and coral-red withal,
In dents embattled like a castle wall; 50
His bill was raven-black, and shone like jet;
Blue were his legs, and orient were his feet;
White were his nails, like silver to behold,
His body glittering like the burnish'd gold.
This gentle cock, for solace of his life,
Six misses had, besides his lawful wife.
Scandal that spares no king, though ne'er so good,
Says, they were all of his own flesh and blood,
His sisters both by sire and mother's side;
And sure their likeness show'd them near allied. 60

But make the worst, the monarch did no more,
Than all the Ptolemys had done before:
When incest is for interest of a nation,
'Tis made no sin by holy dispensation.
Some lines have been maintain'd by this alone,
Which by their common ugliness are known.

But passing this, as from our tale apart,
Dame Partlet was the sovereign of his heart:
Ardent in love, outrageous in his play,
He feather'd her a hundred times a day: 70
And she, that was not only passing fair,
But was with all discreet, and debonair,
Resolved the passive doctrine to fulfil,
Though loth; and let him work his wicked will:
At board and bed was affable and kind,
According as their marriage vow did bind,
And as the Church's precept had enjoin'd.
Even since she was a se'ennight old, they say,
Was chaste and humble to her dying day,
Nor chick nor hen was known to disobey. 80

By this her husband's heart she did obtain;
What cannot beauty, join'd with virtue, gain!
She was his only joy, and he her pride,
She, when he walk'd, went pecking by his side;
If spurning up the ground, he sprung a corn,

The tribute in his bill to her was borne.
But oh! what joy it was to hear him sing
In summer, when the day began to spring,
Stretching his neck, and warbling in his throat;
Solus cum sola then was all his note. 90
For in the days of yore, the birds of parts
Were bred to speak, and sing, and learn the liberal arts.

It happ'd that, perching on the parlour-beam
Amidst his wives, he had a deadly dream,
Just at the dawn; and sigh'd, and groan'd so fast,
As every breath he drew would be his last.
Dame Partlet, ever nearest to his side,
Heard all his piteous moan, and how he cried
For help from gods and men: and sore aghast
She peck'd and pull'd, and waken'd him at last. 100
Dear heart, said she, for love of heaven declare
Your pain, and make me partner in your care!
You groan, sir, ever since the morning-light,
As something had disturb'd your noble sprite.

And, madam, well I might, said Chanticleer;
Never was shrovetide cock in such a fear.
Even still I run all over in a sweat,
My princely senses not recover'd yet.
For such a dream I had, of dire portent,
That much I fear my body will be shent: 110

It bodes I shall have wars and woful strife,
Or in a loathsome dungeon end my life.
Know, dame, I dreamt within my troubled breast,
That in our yard I saw a murderous beast,
That on my body would have made arrest.
With waking eyes I ne'er beheld his fellow;
His colour was betwixt a red and yellow:
Tipp'd was his tail, and both his pricking ears
Were black; and much unlike his other hairs:
The rest, in shape a beagle's whelp throughout, 120
With broader forehead, and a sharper snout:
Deep in his front were sunk his glowing eyes,
That yet, methinks, I see him with surprise.
Reach out your hand, I drop with clammy sweat,
And lay it to my heart, and feel it beat.
Now fie, for shame, quoth she; by Heaven above,
Thou hast for ever lost thy lady's love!
No woman can endure a recreant knight,
He must be bold by day, and free by night:
Our sex desires a husband or a friend, 130
Who can our honour and his own defend.
Wise, hardy, secret, liberal of his purse:
A fool is nauseous, but a coward worse:
No bragging coxcomb, yet no baffled knight.
How darest thou talk of love, and darest not fight?
How darest thou tell thy dame thou art affear'd?
Hast thou no manly heart, and hast a beard?

If aught from fearful dreams may be divined,
They signify a cock of dunghill kind.
All dreams, as in old Galen I have read, 140
Are from repletion and complexion bred;
From rising fumes of indigested food,
And noxious humours that infect the blood:
And sure, my lord, if I can read aright,
These foolish fancies you have had to-night
Are certain symptoms (in the canting style)
Of boiling choler, and abounding bile;
This yellow gall, that in your stomach floats,
Engenders all these visionary thoughts.
When choler overflows, then dreams are bred 150
Of flames, and all the family of red;
Red dragons, and red beasts, in sleep we view,
For humours are distinguish'd by their hue.
From hence we dream of wars and warlike things,
And wasps and hornets with their double wings.
Choler adust congeals our blood with fear,
Then black bulls toss us, and black devils tear.
In sanguine airy dreams, aloft we bound;
With rheums oppress'd, we sink in rivers drown'd.
More I could say, but thus conclude my theme, 160
The dominating humour makes the dream.
Cato was in his time accounted wise,
And he condemns them all for empty lies.
Take my advice, and when we fly to ground,

With laxatives preserve your body sound,
And purge the peccant humours that abound.
I should be loath to lay you on a bier;
And though there lives no pothecary near,
I dare for once prescribe for your disease,
And save long bills, and a damn'd doctor's fees. 170
Two sovereign herbs, which I by practice know,
And both at hand (for in our yard they grow),
On peril of my soul shall rid you wholly
Of yellow choler, and of melancholy:
You must both purge, and vomit; but obey,
And for the love of heaven make no delay.
Since hot and dry in your complexion join,
Beware the sun when in a vernal sign;
For when he mounts exalted in the Ram,
If then he finds your body in a flame, 180
Replete with choler, I dare lay a groat,
A tertian ague is at least your lot.
Perhaps a fever (which the gods forefend!)
May bring your youth to some untimely end:
And therefore, sir, as you desire to live,
A day or two before your laxative,
Take just three worms, nor under nor above,
Because the gods unequal numbers love,
These digestives prepare you for your purge;
Of fumetory, centaury, and spurge, 190
And of ground ivy add a leaf or two,--
All which within our yard or garden grow.

Eat these, and be, my lord, of better cheer;

Your father's son was never born to fear.

Madam, quoth he, gramercy for your care,

But Cato, whom you quoted, you may spare:

'Tis true, a wise and worthy man he seems,

And (as you say) gave no belief to dreams:

But other men of more authority,

And, by the immortal powers! as wise as he, 200

Maintain, with sounder sense, that dreams forebode;

For Homer plainly says they come from God.

Nor Cato said it: but some modern fool

Imposed in Cato's name on boys at school.

Believe me, madam, morning dreams foreshow

The events of things, and future weal or woe:

Some truths are not by reason to be tried,

But we have sure experience for our guide.

An ancient author, equal with the best,

Relates this tale of dreams among the rest. 210

Two friends or brothers, with devout intent,

On some far pilgrimage together went.

It happen'd so that, when the sun was down,

They just arrived by twilight at a town;

That day had been the baiting of a bull,

'Twas at a feast, and every inn so full,

That no void room in chamber, or on ground,

And but one sorry bed was to be found:
And that so little it would hold but one,
Though till this hour they never lay alone. 220
So were they forced to part; one staid behind,
His fellow sought what lodging he could find:
At last he found a stall where oxen stood,
And that he rather chose than lie abroad.
'Twas in a farther yard without a door;
But, for his ease, well litter'd was the floor.
His fellow, who the narrow bed had kept,
Was weary, and without a rocker slept:
Supine he snored; but in the dead of night
He dream'd his friend appear'd before his sight, 230
Who, with a ghastly look and doleful cry,
Said, Help me, brother, or this night I die:
Arise, and help, before all help be vain,
Or in an ox's stall I shall be slain.
Roused from his rest, he waken'd in a start,
Shivering with horror, and with aching heart;
At length to cure himself by reason tries;
'Tis but a dream, and what are dreams but lies?
So thinking, changed his side, and closed his eyes.
His dream returns; his friend appears again: 240
The murderers come, now help, or I am slain:
'Twas but a vision still, and visions are but vain.
He dream'd the third: but now his friend appear'd
Pale, naked, pierced with wounds, with blood besmear'd:
Thrice warn'd, awake, said he; relief is late,

The deed is done; but thou revenge my fate:
Tardy of aid, unseal thy heavy eyes;
Awake, and with the dawning day arise:
Take to the western gate thy ready way,
For by that passage they my corpse convey: 250
My corpse is in a tumbrel laid, among
The filth and ordure, and enclosed with dung;
That cart arrest, and raise a common cry;
For sacred hunger of my gold, I die:
Then show'd his grisly wound; and last he drew
A piteous sigh, and took a long adieu.

The frighted friend arose by break of day,
And found the stall where late his fellow lay.
Then of his impious host inquiring more,
Was answer'd that his guest was gone before: 260
Muttering he went, said he, by morning light,
And much complain'd of his ill rest by night.
This raised suspicion in the pilgrim's mind;
Because all hosts are of an evil kind,
And oft to share the spoils with robbers join'd.

His dream confirm'd his thought: with troubled look
Straight to the western gate his way he took:
There, as his dream foretold, a cart he found,
That carried compost forth to dung the ground.
This when the pilgrim saw, he stretch'd his throat, 270

And cried out murder with a yelling note.
My murder'd fellow in this cart lies dead,
Vengeance and justice on the villain's head;
You, magistrates, who sacred laws dispense,
On you I call to punish this offence.

The word thus given, within a little space
The mob came roaring out, and throng'd the place.
All in a trice they cast the cart to ground,
And in the dung the murder'd body found;
Though breathless, warm, and reeking from the wound.
Good Heaven, whose darling attribute we find
Is boundless grace and mercy to mankind, 280
Abhors the cruel; and the deeds of night
By wondrous ways reveals in open light:
Murder may pass unpunish'd for a time,
But tardy justice will o'ertake the crime.
And oft a speedier pain the guilty feels;
The hue and cry of Heaven pursues him at the heels,
Fresh from the fact; as in the present case,
The criminals are seized upon the place: 290
Carter and host confronted face to face.
Stiff in denial, as the law appoints,
On engines they distend their tortured joints:
So was confession forced, the offence was known,
And public justice on the offenders done.

Here may you see that visions are to dread;
And in the page that follows this, I read
Of two young merchants, whom the hope of gain
Induced in partnership to cross the main:
Waiting till willing winds their sails supplied, 300
Within a trading town they long abide,
Full fairly situate on a haven's side.

One evening it befell, that, looking out,
The wind they long had wish'd was come about:
Well pleased, they went to rest; and if the gale
Till morn continued, both resolved to sail.
But as together in a bed they lay,
The younger had a dream at break of day.
A man he thought stood frowning at his side:
Who warn'd him for his safety to provide, 310
Nor put to sea, but safe on shore abide.
I come, thy Genius, to command thy stay;
Trust not the winds, for fatal is the day,
And death unhoped attends the watery way.
The vision said; and vanish'd from his sight:
The dreamer waken'd in a mortal fright:
Then pull'd his drowsy neighbour, and declared
What in his slumber he had seen and heard.
His friend smiled scornful, and with proud contempt
Rejects as idle what his fellow dreamt. 320
Stay, who will stay: for me no fears restrain,

Who follow Mercury, the god of gain;
Let each man do as to his fancy seems,
I wait, not I, till you have better dreams.
Dreams are but interludes which fancy makes;
When monarch Reason sleeps, this mimic wakes:
Compounds a medley of disjointed things,
A mob of cobblers, and a court of kings:
Light fumes are merry, grosser fumes are sad:
Both are the reasonable soul run mad: 330
And many monstrous forms in sleep we see,
That neither were, nor are, nor e'er can be.
Sometimes forgotten things, long cast behind,
Rush forward in the brain, and come to mind.
The nurse's legends are for truths received,
And the man dreams but what the boy believed.

Sometimes we but rehearse a former play,
The night restores our actions done by day;
As hounds in sleep will open for their prey.
In short, the farce of dreams is of a piece: 340
Chimeras all; and more absurd, or less:
You, who believe in tales, abide alone;
Whate'er I get this voyage is my own.

Thus while he spoke, he heard the shouting crew
That call'd aboard, and took his last adieu.
The vessel went before a merry gale,

And for quick passage put on every sail:
But when least fear'd, and even in open day,
The mischief overtook her in the way:
Whether she sprung a leak, I cannot find, 350
Or whether she was overset with wind,
Or that some rock below her bottom rent;
But down at once with all her crew she went:
Her fellow ships from far her loss descried;
But only she was sunk, and all were safe beside.

By this example you are taught again,
That dreams and visions are not always vain:
But if, dear Partlet, you are still in doubt,
Another tale shall make the former out.

Kenelm, the son of Kenulph, Mercia's king, 360
Whose holy life the legends loudly sing,
Warn'd in a dream, his murder did foretell
From point to point as after it befell:
All circumstances to his nurse he told,
(A wonder from a child of seven years old):
The dream with horror heard, the good old wife
From treason counsell'd him to guard his life;
But close to keep the secret in his mind,
For a boy's vision small belief would find.
The pious child, by promise bound, obey'd, 370
Nor was the fatal murder long delay'd:

By Quenda slain, he fell before his time,
Made a young martyr by his sister's crime.
The tale is told by venerable Bede,
Which, at your better leisure, you may read.

Macrobius, too, relates the vision sent
To the great Scipio, with the famed event:
Objections makes, but after makes replies,
And adds, that dreams are often prophecies.

Of Daniel you may read in holy writ, 380
Who, when the king his vision did forget,
Could word for word the wondrous dream repeat.
Nor less of patriarch Joseph understand,
Who by a dream enslaved the Egyptian land,
The years of plenty and of dearth foretold,
When, for their bread, their liberty they sold.
Nor must the exalted butler be forgot,
Nor he whose dream presaged his hanging lot.

And did not Croesus the same death foresee,
Raised in his vision on a lofty tree? 390
The wife of Hector, in his utmost pride,
Dream'd of his death the night before he died;
Well was he warn'd from battle to refrain,
But men to death decreed are warn'd in vain:

He dared the dream, and by his fatal foe was slain.

Much more I know, which I forbear to speak,

For, see, the ruddy day begins to break;

Let this suffice, that plainly I foresee

My dream was bad, and bodes adversity:

But neither pills nor laxatives I like, 400

They only serve to make the well-man sick:

Of these his gain the sharp physician makes,

And often gives a purge, but seldom takes:

They not correct, but poison all the blood,

And ne'er did any but the doctors good.

Their tribe, trade, trinkets, I defy them all;

With every work of pothecary's hall.

These melancholy matters I forbear:

But let me tell thee, Partlet mine, and swear,

That when I view the beauties of thy face, 410

I fear not death, nor dangers, nor disgrace:

So may my soul have bliss, as when I spy

The scarlet red about thy partridge eye,

While thou art constant to thy own true knight,

While thou art mine, and I am thy delight,

All sorrows at thy presence take their flight.

For true it is, as *_in principio,*

Mulier est hominis confusio_.

Madam, the meaning of this Latin is,

That woman is to man his sovereign bliss. 420

For when by night I feel your tender side,
Though for the narrow perch I cannot ride,
Yet I have such a solace in my mind,
That all my boding cares are cast behind;
And even already I forget my dream.
He said, and downward flew from off the beam;
For daylight now began apace to spring,
The thrush to whistle, and the lark to sing;
Then, crowing, clapp'd his wings, the appointed call,
To chuck his wives together in the hall. 430

By this the widow had unbarr'd the door,
And Chanticleer went strutting out before.
With royal courage, and with heart so light,
As show'd he scorned the visions of the night.
Now roaming in the yard, he spurn'd the ground,
And gave to Partlet the first grain he found;
Then often feather'd her with wanton play,
And trod her twenty times ere prime of day;
And took by turns, and gave, so much delight,
Her sisters pined with envy at the sight. 440
He chuck'd again, when other corns he found,
And scarcely deign'd to set a foot to ground;
But swagger'd like a lord about his hall,
And his seven wives came running at his call.

'Twas now the month in which the world began,

(If March beheld the first created man):
And since the vernal equinox, the sun,
In Aries twelve degrees, or more, had run;
When, casting up his eyes against the light,
Both month, and day, and hour he measured right; 450
And told more truly than the Ephemeris:
For art may err, but nature cannot miss.
Thus numbering times and seasons in his breast,
His second crowing the third hour confess'd.
Then turning, said to Partlet, See, my dear,
How lavish nature has adorn'd the year;
How the pale primrose and blue violet spring,
And birds essay their throats disused to sing:
All these are ours; and I with pleasure see
Man strutting on two legs, and aping me: 460
An unfledged creature, of a lumpish frame,
Endow'd with fewer particles of flame;
Our dame sits cowering o'er a kitchen fire,
I draw fresh air, and nature's works admire:
And even this day in more delight abound,
Than, since I was an egg, I ever found.

The time shall come when Chanticleer shall wish
His words unsaid, and hate his boasted bliss:
The crested bird shall by experience know,
Jove made not him his masterpiece below; 470
And learn the latter end of joy is woe.

The vessel of his bliss to dregs is run,
And Heaven will have him taste his other tun.

Ye wise, draw near, and hearken to my tale,
Which proves that oft the proud by flattery fall:
The legend is as true, I undertake,
As Tristran is, and Launcelot of the lake:
Which all our ladies in such reverence hold,
As if in Book of Martyrs it were told.

A fox, full-fraught with seeming sanctity, 480
That fear'd an oath, but, like the devil, would lie;
Who look'd like Lent, and had the holy leer,
And durst not sin before he said his prayer;
This pious cheat, that never suck'd the blood,
Nor chew'd the flesh of lambs, but when he could,
Had pass'd three summers in the neighbouring wood:
And musing long, whom next to circumvent,
On Chanticleer his wicked fancy bent;
And in his high imagination cast,
By stratagem, to gratify his taste. 490

The plot contrived, before the break of day
Saint Reynard through the hedge had made his way;
The pale was next, but proudly with a bound
He leapt the fence of the forbidden ground:

Yet fearing to be seen, within a bed
Of coleworts he conceal'd his wily head;
Then skulk'd till afternoon, and watch'd his time
(As murderers use) to perpetrate his crime.

Oh, hypocrite, ingenious to destroy!
Oh, traitor, worse than Sinon was to Troy! 500
Oh, vile subverter of the Gallic reign,
More false than Gano was to Charlemagne!
Oh, Chanticleer, in an unhappy hour
Didst thou forsake the safety of thy bower!
Better for thee thou hadst believed thy dream,
And not that day descended from the beam.
But here the doctors eagerly dispute:
Some hold predestination absolute;
Some clerks maintain, that Heaven at first foresees,
And in the virtue of foresight decrees. 510
If this be so, then prescience binds the will,
And mortals are not free to good or ill;
For what he first foresaw, he must ordain,
Or its eternal prescience may be vain:
As bad for us as prescience had not been:
For first, or last, he's author of the sin.
And who says that, let the blaspheming man
Say worse even of the devil, if he can.
For how can that Eternal Power be just
To punish man, who sins because he must? 520

Or, how can he reward a virtuous deed,
Which is not done by us; but first decreed?

I cannot bolt this matter to the bran,
As Bradwardin and holy Austin can;
If prescience can determine actions so
That we must do, because he did foreknow,
Or that, foreknowing, yet our choice is free,
Not forced to sin by strict necessity;
This strict necessity they simple call,
Another sort there is conditional. 530
The first so binds the will, that things foreknown
By spontaneity, not choice, are done.
Thus galley-slaves tug willing at their oar,
Content to work, in prospect of the shore;
But would not work at all if not constrain'd before.
That other does not liberty constrain,
But man may either act, or may refrain.
Heaven made us agents free to good or ill,
And forced it not, though he foresaw the will.
Freedom was first bestow'd on human race, 540
And prescience only held the second place.

If he could make such agents wholly free,
I not dispute, the point's too high for me;
For Heaven's unfathom'd power what man can sound,
Or put to his Omnipotence a bound?

He made us to his image, all agree;
That image is the soul, and that must be,
Or not, the Maker's image, or be free.
But whether it were better man had been
By nature bound to good, not free to sin, 550
I waive, for fear of splitting on a rock,
The tale I tell is only of a cock;
Who had not run the hazard of his life,
Had he believed his dream, and not his wife:
For women, with a mischief to their kind,
Pervert with bad advice our better mind.
A woman's counsel brought us first to woe,
And made her man his paradise forego,
Where at heart's ease he lived; and might have been
As free from sorrow as he was from sin. 560
For what the devil had their sex to do,
That, born to folly, they presumed to know,
And could not see the serpent in the grass?
But I myself presume, and let it pass.

Silence in times of suffering is the best,
'Tis dangerous to disturb an hornet's nest.
In other authors you may find enough,
But all they say of dames is idle stuff: 568
Legends of lying wits together bound,
The Wife of Bath would throw them to the ground;
These are the words of Chanticleer, not mine;

I honour dames, and think their sex divine.

Now to continue what my tale begun:

Lay Madam Partlet basking in the sun,

Breast-high in sand: her sisters in a row

Enjoy'd the beams above, the warmth below;

The cock, that of his flesh was ever free,

Sung merrier than the mermaid in the sea:

And so befell, that as he cast his eye

Among the coleworts on a butterfly, 580

He saw false Reynard where he lay full low:

I need not swear he had no list to crow:

But cried _cock, cock_, and gave a sudden start,

As sore dismay'd, and frighted at his heart:

For birds and beasts, inform'd by nature, know

Kinds opposite to theirs, and fly their foe;

So Chanticleer, who never saw a fox,

Yet shunn'd him as a sailor shuns the rocks.

But the false loon, who could not work his will

But open force, employ'd his flattering skill; 590

I hope, my lord, said he, I not offend;

Are you afraid of me, that am your friend?

I were a beast indeed to do you wrong,

I, who have loved and honour'd you so long:

Stay, gentle sir, nor take a false alarm,

For, on my soul, I never meant you harm.

I come no spy, nor as a traitor press,

To learn the secrets of your soft recess:
Far be from Reynard so profane a thought,
But by the sweetness of your voice was brought: 600
For, as I bid my beads, by chance I heard
The song as of an angel in the yard;
A song that would have charm'd the infernal gods,
And banish'd horror from the dark abodes:
Had Orpheus sung it in the nether sphere,
So much the hymn had pleased the tyrant's ear,
The wife had been detain'd, to keep the husband there.

My lord, your sire familiarly I knew,
A peer deserving such a son as you:
He, with your lady-mother (whom Heaven rest!) 610
Has often graced my house, and been my guest;
To view his living features does me good,
For I am your poor neighbour in the wood;
And in my cottage should be proud to see
The worthy heir of my friend's family.
But since I speak of singing, let me say,
As with an upright heart I safely may,
That, save yourself, there breathes not on the ground
One like your father for a silver sound.
So sweetly would he wake the winter day, 620
That matrons to the church mistook their way,
And thought they heard the merry organ play.
And he, to raise his voice, with artful care,

(What will not beaux attempt to please the fair?)
On tiptoe stood to sing with greater strength,
And stretch'd his comely neck at all the length:
And while he strain'd his voice to pierce the skies,
As saints in raptures use, would shut his eyes,
That the sound striving through the narrow throat,
His winking might avail to mend the note, 630
By this, in song, he never had his peer,
From sweet Cecilia down to Chanticleer;
Nor Maro's muse, who sung the mighty Man,
Nor Pindar's heavenly lyre, nor Horace when a swan.
Your ancestors proceed from race divine:
From Brennus and Belinus is your line;
Who gave to sovereign Rome such loud alarms,
That even the priests were not excused from arms.

Besides, a famous monk of modern times
Has left of cocks recorded in his rhymes, 640
That of a parish priest the son and heir
(When sons of priests were from the proverb clear),
Affronted once a cock of noble kind,
And either lamed his legs, or struck him blind;
For which the clerk his father was disgraced,
And in his benefice another placed.
Now sing, my lord, if not for love of me,
Yet for the sake of sweet Saint Charity;
Make hills and dales, and earth and heaven rejoice,

And emulate your father's angel-voice. 650

The cock was pleased to hear him speak so fair,
And proud beside, as solar people are;
Nor could the treason from the truth descry,
So was he ravish'd with this flattery;
So much the more, as from a little elf
He had a high opinion of himself;
Though sickly, slender, and not large of limb,
Concluding all the world was made for him.

Ye princes, raised by poets to the gods,
And Alexander'd[72] up in lying odes! 660
Believe not every flattering knave's report,
There's many a Reynard lurking in the court;
And he shall be received with more regard,
And listen'd to, than modest truth is heard.

This Chanticleer, of whom the story sings,
Stood high upon his toes, and clapp'd his wings;
Then stretch'd his neck, and wink'd with both his eyes,
Ambitious as he sought the Olympic prize.
But while he pain'd himself to raise his note,
False Renyard rush'd and caught him by the throat. 670
Then on his back he laid the precious load,
And sought his wonted shelter of the wood;

Swiftly he made his way the mischief done,
Of all unheeded, and pursued by none.

Alas, what stay is there in human state!

Or who can shun inevitable fate?

The doom was written, the decree was pass'd,

Ere the foundations of the world were cast!

In Aries though the sun exalted stood,

His patron-planet, to procure his good; 680

Yet Saturn was his mortal foe, and he,

In Libra raised, opposed the same degree:

The rays both good and bad, of equal power,

Each thwarting other, made a mingled hour.

On Friday morn he dreamt this direful dream,

Cross to the worthy native, in his scheme!

Ah, blissful Venus, Goddess of delight!

How couldst thou suffer thy devoted knight

On thy own day to fall by foe oppress'd,

The wight of all the world who served thee best? 690

Who, true to love, was all for recreation,

And minded not the work of propagation.

Ganfride,[73] who couldst so well in rhyme complain

The death of Richard with an arrow slain,

Why had not I thy muse, or thou my heart,

To sing this heavy dirge with equal art?

That I, like thee, on Friday might complain;

For on that day was Coeur de Lion slain.

Not louder cries, when Ilium was in flames,
Were sent to Heaven by woful Trojan dames, 700
When Pyrrhus toss'd on high his burnish'd blade,
And offer'd Priam to his father's shade,
Than for the cock the widow'd poultry made.
Fair Partlet first, when he was borne from sight,
With sovereign shrieks bewail'd her captive knight:
Far louder than the Carthaginian wife,
When Asdrubal, her husband, lost his life;
When she beheld the smouldering flames ascend,
And all the Punic glories at an end:
Willing into the fires she plunged her head, 710
With greater ease than others seek their bed.
Not more aghast the matrons of renown,
When tyrant Nero burn'd the imperial town,
Shriek'd for the downfall in a doleful cry,
For which their guiltless lords were doom'd to die.

Now to my story I return again:

The trembling widow, and her daughters twain,
This woful cackling cry with horror heard,
Of those distracted damsels in the yard;
And starting up beheld the heavy sight, 720
How Reynard to the forest took his flight,
And 'cross his back, as in triumphant scorn,

The hope and pillar of the house was borne.

The fox! the wicked fox! was all the cry;
Out from his house ran every neighbour nigh:
The vicar first, and after him the crew,
With forks and staves the felon to pursue.
Ran Coll our dog, and Talbot with the band,
And Malkin, with her distaff in her hand:
Ran cow and calf, and family of hogs, 730
In panic horror of pursuing dogs;
With many a deadly grunt and doleful squeak,
Poor swine, as if their pretty hearts would break.
The shouts of men, the women in dismay,
With shrieks augment the terror of the day.
The ducks that heard the proclamation cried,
And fear'd a persecution might betide,
Full twenty miles from town their voyage take,
Obscure in rushes of the liquid lake.
The geese fly o'er the barn; the bees in arms 740
Drive headlong from their waxen cells in swarms.
Jack Straw at London-stone, with all his rout,
Struck not the city with so loud a shout;
Not when, with English hate, they did pursue
A Frenchman, or an unbelieving Jew:
Not when the welkin rung with 'one and all;'
And echoes bounded back from Fox's hall:
Earth seem'd to sink beneath, and heaven above to fall.

With might and main they chased the murderous fox,
With brazen trumpets, and inflated box, 750
To kindle Mars with military sounds,
Nor wanted horns to inspire sagacious hounds.

But see how Fortune can confound the wise,
And when they least expect it, turn the dice!
The captive-cock, who scarce could draw his breath,
And lay within the very jaws of death;
Yet in this agony his fancy wrought,
And fear supplied him with this happy thought:

Yours is the prize, victorious prince! said he,
The vicar my defeat, and all the village see. 760
Enjoy your friendly fortune while you may,
And bid the churls that envy you the prey
Call back their mongrel curs, and cease their cry,
See, fools, the shelter of the wood is nigh,
And Chanticleer in your despite shall die,
He shall be pluck'd and eaten to the bone.

'Tis well advised, in faith it shall be done;
This Reynard said: but as the word he spoke,
The prisoner with a spring from prison broke;
Then stretch'd his feather'd fans with all his might, 770
And to the neighbouring maple wing'd his flight;

Whom, when the traitor safe on tree beheld,
He cursed the gods, with shame and sorrow fill'd:
Shame for his folly, sorrow out of time,
For plotting an unprofitable crime;
Yet mastering both, the artificer of lies
Renews the assault, and his last battery tries.

Though I, said he, did ne'er in thought offend,
How justly may my lord suspect his friend?
The appearance is against me, I confess, 780
Who seemingly have put you in distress:
You, if your goodness does not plead my cause,
May think I broke all hospitable laws,
To bear you from your palace-yard by might,
And put your noble person in a fright:
This, since you take it ill, I must repent,
Though, Heaven can witness, with no bad intent:
I practised it, to make you taste your cheer
With double pleasure, first prepared by fear.
So loyal subjects often seize their prince, 790
Forced (for his good) to seeming violence,
Yet mean his sacred person not the least offence.
Descend; so help me Jove, as you shall find,
That Reynard comes of no dissembling kind.

Nay, quoth the Cock, but I beshrew us both,
If I believe a saint upon his oath:

An honest man may take a knave's advice,
But idiots only may be cozen'd twice:
Once warn'd is well beware'd; no nattering lies
Shall soothe me more to sing with winking eyes, 800
And open mouth, for fear of catching flies.
Who blindfold walks upon a river's brim,
When he should see, has he deserved to swim?

Better, Sir Cock, let all contention cease,
Come down, said Reynard, let us treat of peace.
A peace with all my soul, said Chanticleer;
But, with your favour, I will treat it here:
And, lest the truce with treason should be mix'd,
'Tis my concern to have the tree betwixt.

THE MORAL.

In this plain fable you the effect may see 810
Of negligence, and fond credulity:
And learn besides of flatterers to beware,
Then most pernicious when they speak too fair.
The cock and fox, the fool and knave imply;
The truth is moral, though the tale a lie.
Who spoke in parables, I dare not say;
But sure he knew it was a pleasing way,
Sound sense, by plain example, to convey.

And in a heathen author we may find,
That pleasure with instruction should be join'd; 820
So take the corn, and leave the chaff behind.

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 72: 'Alexander'd': an allusion to his famous ode.]

[Footnote 73: 'Ganfride': a mediaeval ballad-monger.]

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THE FLOWER AND THE LEAF:

OR, THE LADY IN THE ARBOUR.[74]

A VISION.

Now turning from the wintry signs, the sun,
His course exalted, through the Ram had run,
And whirling up the skies, his chariot drove

Through Taurus, and the lightsome realms of love;
Where Venus from her orb descends in showers,
To glad the ground, and paint the fields with flowers:
When first the tender blades of grass appear,
And buds, that yet the blast of Eurus fear,
Stand at the door of life, and doubt to clothe the year:
Till gentle heat, and soft repeated rains, 10
Make the green blood to dance within their veins:
Then, at their call, embolden'd out they come,
And swell the gems, and burst the narrow room;
Broader and broader yet, their blooms display,
Salute the welcome sun, and entertain the day.
Then from their breathing souls the sweets repair
To scent the skies, and purge the unwholesome air:
Joy spreads the heart, and, with a general song,
Spring issues out, and leads the jolly months along.

In that sweet season, as in bed I lay, 20
And sought in sleep to pass the night away,
I turn'd my weary side, but still in vain,
Though full of youthful health, and void of pain:
Cares I had none, to keep me from my rest,
For love had never enter'd in my breast;
I wanted nothing fortune could supply,
Nor did she slumber till that hour deny.
I wonder'd then, but after found it true,
Much joy had dried away the balmy dew:

Seas would be pools, without the brushing air 30
To curl the waves; and sure some little care
Should weary nature so, to make her want repair.

When Chanticleer the second watch had sung,
Scorning the scorner sleep, from bed I sprung;
And dressing, by the moon, in loose array,
Pass'd out in open air, preventing day,
And sought a goodly grove, as fancy led my way.
Straight as a line in beauteous order stood
Of oaks unshorn a venerable wood;
Fresh was the grass beneath, and every tree, 40
At distance planted in a due degree,
Their branching arms in air with equal space
Stretch'd to their neighbours with a long embrace:
And the new leaves on every bough were seen,
Some ruddy colour'd, some of lighter green.
The painted birds, companions of the spring,
Hopping from spray to spray, were heard to sing.
Both eyes and ears received a like delight,
Enchanting music, and a charming sight.
On Philomel I fix'd my whole desire, 50
And listen'd for the queen of all the quire;
Fain would I hear her heavenly voice to sing;
And wanted yet an omen to the spring.

Attending long in vain, I took the way

Which through a path but scarcely printed lay;
In narrow mazes oft it seem'd to meet,
And look'd as lightly press'd by fairy feet.
Wandering I walk'd alone, for still methought
To some strange end so strange a path was wrought:
At last it led me where an arbour stood, 60
The sacred receptacle of the wood:
This place unmark'd, though oft I walk'd the green,
In all my progress I had never seen:
And seized at once with wonder and delight,
Gazed all around me, new to the transporting sight.
'Twas bench'd with turf, and goodly to be seen,
The thick young grass arose in fresher green:
The mound was newly made, no sight could pass
Betwixt the nice partitions of the grass,
The well-united sods so closely lay; 70
And all around the shades defended it from day;
For sycamores with eglantine were spread,
A hedge about the sides, a covering overhead.
And so the fragrant brier was wove between,
The sycamore and flowers were mixed with green,
That nature seem'd to vary the delight,
And satisfied at once the smell and sight.
The master workman of the bower was known
Through fairy-lands, and built for Oberon;
Who twining leaves with such proportion drew, 80
They rose by measure, and by rule they grew;
No mortal tongue can half the beauty tell;

For none but hands divine could work so well.
Both roof and sides were like a parlour made,
A soft recess, and a cool summer shade;
The hedge was set so thick, no foreign eye
The persons placed within it could espy;
But all that pass'd without with ease was seen,
As if nor fence nor tree was placed between.
'Twas border'd with a field; and some was plain
With grass, and some was sow'd with rising grain.
That (now the dew with spangles deck'd the ground)
A sweeter spot of earth was never found.
I look'd, and look'd, and still with new delight;
Such joy my soul, such pleasures fill'd my sight;
And the fresh eglantine exhaled a breath,
Whose odours were of power to raise from death.
Nor sullen discontent, nor anxious care,
Even though brought thither, could inhabit there:
But thence they fled as from their mortal foe;
For this sweet place could only pleasure know.

Thus as I mused, I cast aside my eye,
And saw a medlar-tree was planted nigh.
The spreading branches made a goodly show,
And full of opening blooms was every bough:
A goldfinch there I saw, with gaudy pride
Of painted plumes, that hopp'd from side to side,
Still pecking as she pass'd; and still she drew

The sweets from every flower, and suck'd the dew:
Sufficed at length, she warbled in her throat, 110
And tuned her voice to many a merry note,
But indistinct, and neither sweet nor clear,
Yet such as soothed my soul, and pleased my ear.

Her short performance was no sooner tried,
When she I sought, the nightingale, replied:
So sweet, so shrill, so variously she sung,
That the grove echoed, and the valleys rung;
And I so ravish'd with her heavenly note,
I stood entranced, and had no room for thought,
But all o'er-power'd with ecstasy of bliss, 120
Was in a pleasing dream of paradise.
At length I waked, and looking round the bower,
Search'd every tree, and pry'd on every flower,
If any where by chance I might espy
The rural poet of the melody;
For still methought she sung not far away:
At last I found her on a laurel spray.
Close by my side she sat, and fair in sight,
Full in a line, against her opposite;
Where stood with eglantine the laurel twined; 130
And both their native sweets were well conjoin'd.

On the green bank I sat, and listen'd long;
(Sitting was more convenient for the song):

Nor till her lay was ended could I move,
But wish'd to dwell for ever in the grove.
Only methought the time too swiftly pass'd,
And every note I fear'd would be the last.
My sight and smell, and hearing were employ'd,
And all three senses in full gust enjoy'd.
And what alone did all the rest surpass, 140
The sweet possession of the fairy place;
Single, and conscious to myself alone
Of pleasures to the excluded world unknown:
Pleasures which nowhere else were to be found,
And all Elysium in a spot of ground.

Thus while I sat intent to see and hear,
And drew perfumes of more than vital air,
All suddenly I heard the approaching sound
Of vocal music on the enchanted ground:
A host of saints it seem'd, so full the quire; 150
As if the bless'd above did all conspire
To join their voices, and neglect the lyre.
At length there issued from the grove behind
A fair assembly of the female kind:
A train less fair, as ancient fathers tell,
Seduced the sons of heaven to rebel.
I pass their form, and every charming grace,
Less than an angel would their worth debase:
But their attire, like liveries of a kind,

All rich and rare, is fresh within my mind. 160
In velvet white as snow the troop was gown'd,
The seams with sparkling emeralds set around;
Their hoods and sleeves the same; and purpled o'er
With diamonds, pearls, and all the shining store
Of eastern pomp: their long descending train,
With rubies edged, and sapphires, swept the plain:
High on their heads, with jewels richly set,
Each lady wore a radiant coronet.
Beneath the circles, all the quire was graced
With chaplets green on their fair foreheads placed: 170
Of laurel some, of woodbine many more;
And wreaths of Agnus castus^[75] others bore;
These last, who with those virgin crowns were dress'd,
Appear'd in higher honour than the rest.
They danced around: but in the midst was seen
A lady of a more majestic mien;
By stature, and by beauty mark'd their sovereign queen

She in the midst began with sober grace;
Her servants' eyes were fix'd upon her face;
And as she moved or turn'd, her motions view'd, 180
Her measures kept, and step by step pursued.
Methought she trod the ground with greater grace,
With more of godhead shining in her face;
And as in beauty she surpass'd the quire,
So, nobler than the rest, was her attire.

A crown of ruddy gold enclosed her brow,
Plain without pomp, and rich without a show:
A branch of Agnus castus in her hand
She bore aloft (her sceptre of command);
Admired, adored by all the circling crowd, 190
For wheresoe'er she turn'd her face, they bow'd:
And as she danced, a roundelay she sung,
In honour of the laurel, ever young:
She raised her voice on high, and sung so clear,
The fawns came scudding from the groves to hear:
And all the bending forest lent an ear.
At every close she made, the attending throng
Replied, and bore the burden of the song:
So just, so small, yet in so sweet a note,
It seem'd the music melted in the throat. 200

Thus dancing on, and singing as they danced,
They to the middle of the mead advanced,
Till round my arbour a new ring they made,
And footed it about the sacred shade.
O'erjoy'd to see the jolly troops so near,
But somewhat awed, I shook with holy fear;
Yet not so much, but what I noted well
Who did the most in song or dance excel.

Not long I had observed, when from afar
I heard a sudden symphony of war; 210

The neighing coursers, and the soldiers cry,
And sounding trumps, that seem'd to tear the sky:
I saw soon after this, behind the grove
From whence the ladies did in order move,
Come issuing out in arms a warrior train,
That like a deluge pour'd upon the plain;
On barbed steeds they rode in proud array,
Thick as the college of the bees in May,
When swarming o'er the dusky fields they fly,
New to the flowers, and intercept the sky, 220
So fierce they drove, their coursers were so fleet,
That the turf trembled underneath their feet.

To tell their costly furniture were long,
The summer's day would end before the song:
To purchase but the tenth of all their store,
Would make the mighty Persian monarch poor.
Yet what I can, I will; before the rest
The trumpets issued, in white mantles dress'd,
A numerous troop, and all their heads around
With chaplets green of cerial-oak[76] were crown'd, 230
And at each trumpet was a banner bound;
Which, waving in the wind, displayed at large
Their master's coat of arms, and knightly charge.
Broad were the banners, and of snowy hue,
A purer web the silk-worm never drew.
The chief about their necks the scutcheons wore,

With orient pearls and jewels powder'd o'er:
Broad were their collars too, and every one
Was set about with many a costly stone.
Next these, of kings-at-arms a goodly train 240
In proud array came prancing o'er the plain:
Their cloaks were cloth of silver mix'd with gold,
And garlands green around their temples roll'd:
Rich crowns were on their royal scutcheons placed,
With sapphires, diamonds, and with rubies graced:
And as the trumpets their appearance made,
So these in habits were alike array'd;
But with a pace more sober, and more slow;
And twenty, rank in rank, they rode a-row.
The pursuivants came next, in number more; 250
And, like the heralds, each his scutcheon bore:
Clad in white velvet all their troop they led,
With each an oaken chaplet on his head.

Nine royal knights in equal rank succeed,
Each warrior mounted on a fiery steed;
In golden armour glorious to behold;
The rivets of their arms were nail'd with gold.
Their surcoats of white ermine fur were made;
With cloth of gold between, that cast a glittering shade.
The trappings of their steeds were of the same; 260
The golden fringe even set the ground on flame,
And drew a precious trail: a crown divine

Of laurel did about their temples twine.

Three henchmen were for every knight assign'd,

All in rich livery clad, and of a kind;

White velvet, but unshorn, for cloaks they wore,

And each within his hand a truncheon bore:

The foremost held a helm of rare device;

A prince's ransom would not pay the price.

The second bore the buckler of his knight, 270

The third of cornel-wood a spear upright,

Headed with piercing steel, and polish'd bright.

Like to their lords their equipage was seen,

And all their foreheads crown'd with garlands green.

And after these came, arm'd with spear and shield,

A host so great as cover'd all the field:

And all their foreheads, like the knights before,

With laurels ever-green were shaded o'er,

Or oak, or other leaves of lasting kind,

Tenacious of the stem, and firm against the wind. 280

Some in their hands, beside the lance and shield,

The boughs of woodbine, or of hawthorn held,

Or branches for their mystic emblems took,

Of palm, of laurel, and of cerial-oak.

Thus marching to the trumpet's lofty sound,

Drawn in two lines adverse they wheel'd around,

And in the middle meadow took their ground.

Among themselves the tourney they divide,
In equal squadrons ranged on either side.
Then turn'd their horses' heads, and man to man, 290
And steed to steed opposed, the jousts began.
They lightly set their lances in the rest,
And, at the sign, against each other press'd:
They met. I sitting at my ease beheld
The mix'd events, and fortunes of the field.
Some broke their spears, some tumbled horse and man,
And round the field the lighten'd coursers ran.
An hour and more, like tides, in equal sway
They rush'd, and won by turns, and lost the day:
At length the nine (who still together held) 300
Their fainting foes to shameful flight compell'd,
And with resistless force o'er-ran the field.
Thus, to their fame, when finish'd was the fight,
The victors from their lofty steeds alight:
Like them dismounted all the warlike train,
And two by two proceeded o'er the plain,
Till to the fair assembly they advanced,
Who near the secret arbour sung and danced.

The ladies left their measures at the sight,
To meet the chiefs returning from the fight, 310
And each with open arms embraced her chosen knight.
Amid the plain a spreading laurel stood,
The grace and ornament of all the wood:

That pleasing shade they sought, a soft retreat
From sudden April showers, a shelter from the heat:
Her leafy arms with such extent were spread.
So near the clouds was her aspiring head,
That hosts of birds, that wing the liquid air,
Perch'd in the boughs, had nightly lodging there:
And flocks of sheep beneath the shade from far 320
Might hear the rattling hail, and wintry war;
From heaven's inclemency here found retreat,
Enjoy'd the cool, and shunn'd the scorching heat:
A hundred knights might there at ease abide;
And every knight a lady by his side:
The trunk itself such odours did bequeath,
That a Moluccan^[77] breeze to these was common breath.
The lords and ladies here, approaching, paid
Their homage, with a low obeisance made;
And seem'd to venerate the sacred shade. 330
These rites perform'd, their pleasures they pursue,
With song of love, and mix with measures new;
Around the holy tree their dance they frame,
And every champion leads his chosen dame.

I cast my sight upon the farther field,
And a fresh object of delight beheld:
For from the region of the West I heard
New music sound, and a new troop appear'd;
Of knights and ladies mix'd, a jolly band,

But all on foot they march'd, and hand in hand. 340

The ladies dress'd in rich symars were seen
Of Florence satin, flower'd with white and green,
And for a shade betwixt the bloomy gridelin.
The borders of their petticoats below
Were guarded thick with rubies on a row;
And every damsel wore upon her head
Of flowers a garland blended white and red.
Attired in mantles all the knights were seen,
That gratified the view with cheerful green:
Their chaplets of their ladies' colours were, 350
Composed of white and red, to shade their shining hair.
Before the merry troop the minstrels play'd;
All in their masters' liveries were array'd,
And clad in green, and on their temples wore
The chaplets white and red their ladies bore.
Their instruments were various in their kind,
Some for the bow, and some for breathing wind;
The sawtry, pipe, and hautboy's noisy band,
And the soft lute trembling beneath the touching hand.
A tuft of daisies on a flowery lea 360
They saw, and thitherward they bent their way;
To this both knights and dames their homage made,
And due obeisance to the daisy paid.
And then the band of flutes began to play,
To which a lady sung a virelay:[78]

And still at every close she would repeat
The burden of the song, _The daisy is so sweet,
The daisy is so sweet_: when she begun,
The troop of knights and dames continued on.
The concert and the voice so charm'd my ear,
And soothed my soul, that it was heaven to hear. 370

But soon their pleasure pass'd: at noon of day
The sun with sultry beams began to play:
Not Sirius shoots a fiercer flame from high,
When with his poisonous breath he blasts the sky:
Then droop'd the fading flowers (their beauty fled)
And closed their sickly eyes, and hung the head;
And rivell'd up with heat, lay dying in their bed.
The ladies gasp'd, and scarcely could respire;
The breath they drew, no longer air but fire; 380
The fainty knights were scorch'd, and knew not where
To run for shelter, for no shade was near;
And after this the gathering clouds amain
Pour'd down a storm of rattling hail and rain;
And lightning flash'd betwixt: the field, and flowers,
Burnt up before, were buried in the showers.
The ladies and the knights, no shelter nigh,
Bare to the weather and the wintry sky,
Were drooping wet, disconsolate, and wan,
And through their thin array received the rain; 390
While those in white, protected by the tree,

Saw pass in vain the assault, and stood from danger free;
But as compassion moved their gentle minds,
When ceased the storm, and silent were the winds,
Displeas'd at what, not suffering they had seen,
They went to cheer the faction of the green.
The queen in white array, before her band,
Saluting, took her rival by the hand;
So did the knights and dames, with courtly grace,
And with behaviour sweet their foes embrace; 400
Then thus the queen with laurel on her brow--
Fair sister, I have suffer'd in your woe;
Nor shall be wanting aught within my power
For your relief in my refreshing bower.
That other answer'd with a lowly look,
And soon the gracious invitation took:
For ill at ease both she and all her train
The scorching sun had borne, and beating rain.
Like courtesy was used by all in white,
Each dame a dame received, and every knight a knight. 410
The laurel champions with their swords invade
The neighbouring forests, where the jousts were made,
And serewood from the rotten hedges took,
And seeds of latent fire, from flints provoke:
A cheerful blaze arose, and by the fire
They warm'd their frozen feet, and dried their wet attire.
Refresh'd with heat, the ladies sought around
For virtuous herbs, which, gather'd from the ground,
They squeezed the juice, and cooling ointment made,

Which on their sun-burnt cheeks, and their chapt skins they laid: 420

Then sought green salads, which they bade them eat,

A sovereign remedy for inward heat.

The Lady of the Leaf ordain'd a feast,

And made the Lady of the Flower her guest:

When, lo! a bower ascended on the plain,

With sudden seats ordain'd, and large for either train.

This bower was near my pleasant arbour placed,

That I could hear and see whatever pass'd:

The ladies sat with each a knight between,

Distinguish'd by their colours, white and green; 430

The vanquish'd party with the victors join'd,

Nor wanted sweet discourse, the banquet of the mind.

Meantime the minstrels play'd on either side,

Vain of their art, and for the mastery vied:

The sweet contention lasted for an hour,

And reach'd my secret arbour from the bower.

The sun was set; and Vesper, to supply

His absent beams, had lighted up the sky.

When Philomel, officious all the day

To sing the service of the ensuing May, 440

Fled from her laurel shade, and wing'd her flight

Directly to the queen array'd in white:

And, hopping, sat familiar on her hand,

A new musician, and increased the band.

The goldfinch, who, to shun the scalding heat,
Had changed the medlar for a safer seat,
And hid in bushes 'scaped the bitter shower,
Now perch'd upon the Lady of the Flower;
And either songster holding out their throats,
And folding up their wings, renew'd their notes: 450
As if all day, precluding to the fight,
They only had rehearsed, to sing by night.
The banquet ended, and the battle done,
They danced by star-light and the friendly moon:
And when they were to part, the laureate queen
Supplied with steeds the lady of the green,
Her and her train conducting on the way,
The moon to follow, and avoid the day.

This when I saw, inquisitive to know
The secret moral of the mystic show, 460
I started from my shade, in hopes to find
Some nymph to satisfy my longing mind:
And as my fair adventure fell, I found
A lady all in white, with laurel crown'd,
Who closed the rear, and softly paced along,
Repeating to herself the former song.
With due respect my body I inclined,
As to some being of superior kind,
And made my court according to the day,

Wishing her queen and her a happy May. 470
Great thanks, my daughter, with a gracious bow,
She said; and I, who much desired to know
Of whence she was, yet fearful how to break
My mind, adventured humbly thus to speak:
Madam, might I presume and not offend,
So may the stars and shining moon attend
Your nightly sports, as you vouchsafe to tell,
What nymphs they were who mortal forms excel,
And what the knights who fought in listed fields so well.
To this the dame replied: Fair daughter, know, 480
That what you saw was all a fairy show;
And all those airy shapes you now behold,
Were human bodies once, and clothed with earthly mould;
Our souls, not yet prepared for upper light,
Till doomsday wander in the shades of night;
This only holiday of all the year,
We privileged in sunshine may appear:
With songs and dance we celebrate the day,
And with due honours usher in the May.
At other times we reign by night alone, 490
And posting through the skies pursue the moon;
But when the morn arises, none are found;
For cruel Demogorgon walks the round,
And if he finds a fairy lag in light,
He drives the wretch before, and lashes into night.

All courteous are by kind; and ever proud
With friendly offices to help the good.
In every land we have a larger space
Than what is known to you of mortal race;
Where we with green adorn our fairy bowers, 500
And even this grove, unseen before, is ours.
Know farther; every lady clothed in white,
And, crown'd with oak and laurel every knight,
Are servants to the Leaf, by liveries known
Of innocence; and I myself am one.
Saw you not her, so graceful to behold,
In white attire, and crown'd with radiant gold?
The sovereign lady of our land is she,
Diana call'd, the Queen of Chastity:
And, for the spotless name of maid she bears, 510
That Agnus castus in her hand appears;
And all her train, with leafy chaplets crown'd,
Were for unblamed virginity renown'd;
But those the chief and highest in command
Who bear those holy branches in their hand:
The knights adorn'd with laurel crowns are they,
Whom death nor danger ever could dismay,
Victorious names, who made the world obey;
Who, while they lived, in deeds of arms excell'd,
And after death for deities were held. 520
But those who wear the woodbine on their brow,
Were knights of love, who never broke their vow;
Firm to their plighted faith, and ever free

From fears and fickle chance, and jealousy.
The lords and ladies, who the woodbine bear,
As true as Tristram and Isotta were.

But what are those, said I, the unconquer'd nine,
Who, crown'd with laurel-wreaths, in golden armour shine?
And who the knights in green, and what the train
Of ladies dress'd with daisies on the plain? 530
Why both the bands in worship disagree,
And some adore the flower, and some the tree?

Just is your suit, fair daughter, said the dame:
Those laurell'd chiefs were men of mighty fame;
Nine worthies were they call'd of different rites,
Three Jews, three Pagans, and three Christian knights.
These, as you see, ride foremost in the field,
As they the foremost rank of honour held,
And all in deeds of chivalry excell'd:
Their temples wreathed with leaves, that still renew; 540
For deathless laurel is the victor's due:
Who bear the bows were knights in Arthur's reign,
Twelve they, and twelve the peers of Charlemagne:
For bows the strength of brawny arms imply,
Emblems of valour, and of victory.
Behold an order yet of newer date,
Doubling their number, equal in their state;
Our England's ornament, the crown's defence,

In battle brave, protectors of their prince;
Unchanged by fortune, to their sovereign true, 550
For which their manly legs are bound with blue.
These, of the Garter call'd, of faith unstain'd,
In fighting fields the laurel have obtain'd,
And well repaid the honours which they gain'd.
The laurel wreaths were first by Cesar worn,
And still they Cesar's successors adorn:
One leaf of this is immortality,
And more of worth than all the world can buy.

One doubt remains, said I, the dames in green,
What were their qualities, and who their queen? 560
Flora commands, said she, those nymphs and knights,
Who lived in slothful ease and loose delights;
Who never acts of honour durst pursue,
The men inglorious knights, the ladies all untrue:
Who, nursed in idleness, and train'd in courts,
Pass'd all their precious hours in plays, and sports,
Till death behind came stalking on, unseen,
And wither'd (like the storm) the freshness of their green.
These, and their mates, enjoy their present hour,
And therefore pay their homage to the Flower: 570
But knights in knightly deeds should persevere,
And still continue what at first they were;
Continue, and proceed in honour's fair career.
No room for cowardice, or dull delay;

From good to better they should urge their way.
For this with golden spurs the chiefs are graced,
With pointed rowels arm'd to mend their haste;
For this with lasting leaves their brows are bound;
For laurel is the sign of labour crown'd,
Which bears the bitter blast, nor shaken falls to ground: 580
From winter winds it suffers no decay,
For ever fresh and fair, and every month is May.
Even when the vital sap retreats below,
Even when the hoary head is hid in snow,
The life is in the Leaf, and still between
The fits of falling snow appears the streaky green.
Not so the Flower, which lasts for little space,
A short-lived good, and an uncertain grace;
This way, and that, the feeble stem is driven,
Weak to sustain the storms and injuries of heaven. 590
Propp'd by the spring, it lifts aloft the head,
But of a sickly beauty, soon to shed;
In summer living, and in winter dead.
For things of tender kind, for pleasure made,
Shoot up with swift increase, and sudden are decay'd.

With humble words, the wisest I could frame,
And proffer'd service, I repaid the dame;
That, of her grace, she gave her maid to know
The secret meaning of this moral show.
And she, to prove what profit I had made 600

Of mystic truth, in fables first convey'd,
Demanded, till the next returning May,
Whether the Leaf or Flower I would obey?
I chose the Leaf; she smiled with sober cheer,
And wish'd me fair adventure for the year,
And gave me charms and sigils, for defence
Against ill tongues that scandal innocence:
But I, said she, my fellows must pursue,
Already past the plain, and out of view.

We parted thus; I homeward sped my way, 610
Bewilder'd in the wood till dawn of day;
And met the merry crew who danced about the May.
Then late refresh'd with sleep, I rose to write
The visionary vigils of the night.

Blush, as thou may'st, my little book, with shame,
Nor hope with homely verse to purchase fame;
For such thy maker chose; and so design'd
Thy simple style to suit thy lowly kind.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 74: This poem is intended to describe, in those who honour the
"Flower," the votaries of perishable beauty; and in those who honour the
"Leaf," the votaries of virtue.]

[Footnote 75: 'Agnus castus:' a flower representing chastity.]

[Footnote 76: 'Cerial-oak:' Cerrus, bitter oak.]

[Footnote 77: 'Molucca:' one of the Spice Islands.]

[Footnote 78: 'Virelay:' a poem with recurring rhymes.]

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THE WIFE OF BATH, HER TALE.

In days of old, when Arthur fill'd the throne,
Whose acts and fame to foreign lands were blown;
The king of elves and little fairy queen
Gamboll'd on heaths, and danced on every green;
And where the jolly troop had led the round,
The grass unbidden rose, and mark'd the ground:
Nor darkling did they dance, the silver light
Of Phoebe served to guide their steps aright,

And with their tripping pleased, prolong the night.
Her beams they follow'd, where at full she play'd, 10
Nor longer than she shed her horns they stay'd;
From thence with airy flight to foreign lands convey'd
Above the rest our Britain held they dear,
More solemnly they kept their sabbaths here,
And made more spacious rings, and revell'd half the year.

I speak of ancient times, for now the swain
Returning late may pass the woods in vain,
And never hope to see the nightly train:
In vain the dairy now with mints is dress'd,
The dairymaid expects no fairy guest, 20
To skim the bowls, and after pay the feast.
She sighs and shakes her empty shoes in vain,
No silver penny to reward her pain:
For priests, with prayers, and other godly gear,
Have made the merry goblins disappear;
And where they play'd their merry pranks before,
Have sprinkled holy water on the floor:
And friars, that through the wealthy regions run,
Thick as the motes that twinkle in the sun,
Resort to farmers rich, and bless their halls, 30
And exorcise the beds, and cross the walls:
This makes the fairy quires forsake the place,
When once 'tis hallow'd with the rites of grace:
But in the walks where wicked elves have been,

The learning of the parish now is seen,
The midnight parson, posting o'er the green,
With gown tuck'd up, to wakes, for Sunday next,
With humming ale encouraging his text;
Nor wants the holy leer to country girl betwixt.
From fiends and imps he sets the village free, 40
There haunts not any incubus but he.
The maids and women need no danger fear
To walk by night, and sanctity so near:
For by some haycock, or some shady thorn,
He bids his beads both even-song and morn.

It so befell, in this King Arthur's reign,
A lusty knight was pricking o'er the plain;
A bachelor he was, and of the courtly train.
It happen'd, as he rode, a damsel gay,
In russet robes, to market took her way. 50
Soon on the girl he cast an amorous eye,
So straight she walk'd, and on her pasterns high:
If, seeing her behind, he liked her pace,
Now turning short, he better likes her face.
He lights in haste, and, full of youthful fire,
By force accomplish'd his obscene desire:
This done, away he rode, not unespied,
For swarming at his back the country cried:
And once in view they never lost the sight,
But seized, and pinion'd brought to court the knight, 60

Then courts of kings were held in high renown,
Ere made the common brothels of the town:
There, virgins honourable vows received,
But chaste as maids in monasteries lived:
The king himself, to nuptial ties a slave,
No bad example to his poets gave:
And they, not bad, but in a vicious age,
Had not, to please the prince, debauch'd the stage.

Now, what should Arthur do? He loved the knight,
But sovereign monarchs are the source of right: 70
Moved by the damsel's tears and common cry,
He doom'd the brutal ravisher to die.
But fair Geneura rose in his defence,
And pray'd so hard for mercy from the prince,
That to his queen the king the offender gave,
And left it in her power to kill or save:
This gracious act the ladies all approve,
Who thought it much a man should die for love;
And with their mistress join'd in close debate,
(Covering their kindness with dissembled hate) 80
If not to free him, to prolong his fate.
At last agreed, they call him by consent
Before the queen and female parliament;
And the fair speaker, rising from the chair,
Did thus the judgment of the house declare:

Sir knight, though I have ask'd thy life, yet still
Thy destiny depends upon my will:
Nor hast thou other surety than the grace
Not due to thee from our offended race.
But as our kind is of a softer mould, 90
And cannot blood without a sigh behold,
I grant thee life; reserving still the power
To take the forfeit when I see my hour:
Unless thy answer to my next demand
Shall set thee free from our avenging hand.
The question, whose solution I require,
Is, What the sex of women most desire?
In this dispute thy judges are at strife;
Beware; for on thy wit depends thy life.
Yet (lest surprised, unknowing what to say, 100
Thou damn thyself) we give thee farther day:
A year is thine to wander at thy will,
And learn from others, if thou want'st the skill.
But, not to hold our proffer turn'd to scorn,
Good sureties will we have for thy return;
That at the time prefix'd thou shalt obey,
And at thy pledge's peril keep thy day.

Woe was the knight at this severe command;
But well he knew 'twas bootless to withstand:
The terms accepted, as the fair ordain, 110

He put in bail for his return again,
And promised answer at the day assign'd,
The best, with Heaven's assistance, he could find.

His leave thus taken, on his way he went
With heavy heart, and full of discontent,
Misdoubting much, and fearful of the event.
'Twas hard the truth of such a point to find,
As was not yet agreed among the kind.
Thus on he went; still anxious more and more,
Ask'd all he met, and knock'd at every door; 120
Inquired of men; but made his chief request,
To learn from women what they loved the best.
They answer'd each according to her mind,
To please herself, not all the female kind.
One was for wealth, another was for place;
Crones, old and ugly, wish'd a better face:
The widow's wish was oftentimes to wed;
The wanton maids were all for sport a-bed.
Some said the sex were pleased with handsome lies,
And some gross flattery loved without disguise: 130
Truth is, says one, he seldom fails to win
Who flatters well; for that's our darling sin:
But long attendance, and a duteous mind,
Will work even with the wisest of the kind.
One thought the sex's prime felicity
Was from the bonds of wedlock to be free;

Their pleasures, hours, and actions all their own,
And uncontroll'd to give account to none.
Some wish a husband-fool; but such are cursed,
For fools perverse of husbands are the worst: 140
All women would be counted chaste and wise,
Nor should our spouses see, but with our eyes;
For fools will prate; and though they want the wit
To find close faults, yet open blots will hit;
Though better for their ease to hold their tongue,
For womankind was never in the wrong.
So noise ensues, and quarrels last for life;
The wife abhors the fool, the fool the wife.
And some men say that great delight have we,
To be for truth extoll'd, and secrecy; 150
And constant in one purpose still to dwell;
And not our husbands' counsels to reveal.
But that's a fable; for our sex is frail,
Inventing rather than not tell a tale.
Like leaky sieves, no secrets we can hold:
Witness the famous tale that Ovid told.

Midas the king, as in his book appears,
By Phoebus was endow'd with ass's ears,
Which under his long locks he well conceal'd,
(As monarchs' vices must not be reveal'd) 160
For fear the people have them in the wind,
Who long ago were neither dumb nor blind:

Nor apt to think from Heaven their title springs,
Since Jove and Mars left off begetting kings.
This Midas knew; and durst communicate
To none but to his wife his ears of state:
One must be trusted, and he thought her fit,
As passing prudent, and a parlous wit.
To this sagacious confessor he went,
And told her what a gift the gods had sent: 170
But told it under matrimonial seal,
With strict injunction never to reveal.
The secret heard, she plighted him her troth,
(And sacred sure is every woman's oath)
The royal malady should rest unknown,
Both for her husband's honour and her own;
But ne'ertheless she pined with discontent;
The counsel rumbled till it found a vent.
The thing she knew she was obliged to hide;
By interest and by oath the wife was tied; 180
But if she told it not, the woman died.
Loath to betray a husband and a prince,
But she must burst, or blab; and no pretence
Of honour tied her tongue from self-defence.
A marshy ground commodiously was near,
Thither she ran, and held her breath for fear;
Lest if a word she spoke of any thing,
That word might be the secret of the king.
Thus full of counsel to the fen she went,
Griped all the way, and longing for a vent; 190

Arrived, by pure necessity compell'd,
On her majestic marrow-bones she kneel'd:
Then to the water's brink she laid her head,
And as a bittour[79] bumps within a reed,
To thee alone, O lake, she said, I tell,
(And, as thy queen, command thee to conceal!)
Beneath his locks the king, my husband wears
A goodly royal pair of ass's ears:
Now I have eased my bosom of the pain,
Till the next longing fit return again. 200

Thus through a woman was the secret known;
Tell us, and in effect you tell the town.
But to my tale; the knight with heavy cheer,
Wandering in vain, had now consumed the year:
One day was only left to solve the doubt,
Yet knew no more than when he first set out.
But home he must, and as the award had been,
Yield up his body captive to the queen.
In this despairing state he happ'd to ride,
As fortune led him, by a forest side: 210
Lonely the vale, and full of horror stood,
Brown with the shade of a religious wood!
When full before him, at the noon of night,
(The moon was up, and shot a gleamy light)
He saw a quire of ladies in a round
That featly footing seem'd to skim the ground:

Thus dancing hand in hand, so light they were,
He knew not where they trod, on earth or air.
At speed he drove, and came a sudden guest,
In hope where many women were, at least 220
Some one by chance might answer his request.
But faster than his horse the ladies flew,
And in a trice were vanish'd out of view.

One only hag remain'd; but fouler far
Than grandame apes in Indian forests are:
Against a wither'd oak she lean'd her weight,
Propp'd on her trusty staff, not half upright,
And dropp'd an awkward courtesy to the knight;
Then said, What makes you, sir, so late abroad
Without a guide, and this no beaten road? 230
Or want you aught that here you hope to find,
Or travel for some trouble in your mind?
The last I guess; and if I read aright,
Those of our sex are bound to serve a knight;
Perhaps good counsel may your grief assuage,
Then tell your pain; for wisdom is in age.

To this the knight: Good mother, would you know
The secret cause and spring of all my woe?
My life must with to-morrow's light expire,
Unless I tell what women most desire. 240
Now could you help me at this hard essay,

Or for your inborn goodness, or for pay;
Yours is my life, redeem'd by your advice,
Ask what you please, and I will pay the price;
The proudest kerchief of the court shall rest
Well satisfied of what they love the best.
Plight me thy faith, quoth she, that what I ask,
Thy danger over, and perform'd thy task,
That thou shalt give for hire of thy demand;
Here take thy oath, and seal it on my hand; 250
I warrant thee, on peril of my life,
Thy words shall please both widow, maid, and wife.

More words there needed not to move the knight
To take her offer, and his truth to plight.
With that she spread a mantle on the ground,
And, first inquiring whither he was bound,
Bade him not fear, though long and rough the way,
At court he should arrive ere break of day;
His horse should find the way without a guide.
She said: with fury they began to ride, 260
He on the midst, the beldam at his side.
The horse what devil drove I cannot tell,
But only this, they sped their journey well:
And all the way the crone inform'd the knight,
How he should answer the demand aright.

To court they came; the news was quickly spread

Of his returning to redeem his head.
The female senate was assembled soon,
With all the mob of women in the town:
The queen sat lord chief-justice of the hall, 270
And bade the crier cite the criminal.
The knight appear'd; and silence they proclaim;
Then first the culprit answer'd to his name:
And, after forms of law, was last required
To name the thing that women most desired.

The offender, taught his lesson by the way,
And by his counsel order'd what to say,
Thus bold began: My lady liege, said he,
What all your sex desire is Sovereignty.
The wife affects her husband to command; 280
All must be hers, both money, house, and land.
The maids are mistresses even in their name;
And of their servants full dominion claim.
This, at the peril of my head, I say,
A blunt plain truth, the sex aspires to sway,
You to rule all, while we, like slaves, obey.
There was not one, or widow, maid, or wife,
But said the knight had well deserved his life.
Even fair Geneura, with a blush, confess'd
The man had found what women love the best.

Upstarts the beldam, who was there unseen, 290

And, reverence made, accosted thus the queen:

My liege, said she, before the court arise,

May I, poor wretch, find favour in your eyes,

To grant my just request? 'twas I who taught

The knight this answer, and inspired his thought;

None but a woman could a man direct

To tell us women what we most affect.

But first I swore him on his knightly troth,

(And here demand performance of his oath) 300

To grant the boon that next I should desire;

He gave his faith, and I expect my hire:

My promise is fulfill'd; I saved his life,

And claim his debt, to take me for his wife.

The knight was ask'd, nor could his oath deny,

But hoped they would not force him to comply.

The women, who would rather wrest the laws,

Than let a sister-plaintiff lose the cause,

(As judges on the bench more gracious are,

And more attent to brothers of the bar) 310

Cried one and all, the suppliant should have right,

And to the grandame hag adjudged the knight.

In vain he sigh'd, and oft with tears desired

Some reasonable suit might be required.

But still the crone was constant to her note;

The more he spoke, the more she stretch'd her throat.

In vain he proffer'd all his goods, to save

His body destined to that living grave.
The liquorish hag rejects the pelf with scorn;
And nothing but the man would serve her turn. 320
Not all the wealth of eastern kings, said she,
Have power to part my plighted love, and me;
And, old and ugly as I am, and poor,
Yet never will I break the faith I swore;
For mine thou art by promise, during life,
And I thy loving and obedient wife.

My love! nay, rather, my damnation thou,
Said he: nor am I bound to keep my vow:
The fiend thy sire hath sent thee from below,
Else how couldst thou my secret sorrows know? 330
Avaunt, old witch! for I renounce thy bed:
The queen may take the forfeit of my head,
Ere any of my race so foul a crone shall wed.
Both heard, the judge pronounced against the knight;
So was he married in his own despite;
And all day after hid him as an owl,
Not able to sustain a sight so foul.
Perhaps the reader thinks I do him wrong,
To pass the marriage feast, and nuptial song:
Mirth there was none, the man was *_a-la-mort_*, 340
And little courage had to make his court.
To bed they went, the bridegroom and the bride:
Was never such an ill-pair'd couple tied,

Restless, he toss'd and tumbled to and fro,
And roll'd, and wriggled further off, for woe.
The good old wife lay smiling by his side,
And caught him in her quivering arms, and cried,
When you my ravish'd predecessor saw,
You were not then become this man of straw;
Had you been such, you might have 'scaped the law. 350
Is this the custom of King Arthur's court?
Are all round-table knights of such a sort?
Remember, I am she who saved your life,
Your loving, lawful, and complying wife:
Not thus you swore in your unhappy hour,
Nor I for this return employ'd my power.
In time of need I was your faithful friend;
Nor did I since, nor ever will offend.
Believe me, my loved lord, 'tis much unkind;
What fury has possess'd your alter'd mind? 360
Thus on my wedding night--without pretence--
Come turn this way, or tell me my offence.
If not your wife, let reason's rule persuade;
Name but my fault, amends shall soon be made.
Amends! nay, that's impossible, said he,
What change of age or ugliness can be?
Or could Medea's magic mend thy face,
Thou art descended from so mean a race,
That never knight was match'd with such disgrace.
What wonder, madam, if I move my side, 370
When, if I turn, I turn to such a bride?

And is this all that troubles you so sore?
And what the devil couldst thou wish me more?
Ah, Benedicite, replied the crone;
Then cause of just complaining have you none.
The remedy to this were soon applied,
Would you be like the bridegroom to the bride:
But, for you say a long descended race,
And wealth and dignity, and power and place,
Make gentlemen, and that your high degree 380
Is much disparaged to be match'd with me;
Know this, my lord, nobility of blood
Is but a glittering and fallacious good:
The nobleman is he, whose noble mind
Is fill'd with inborn worth, unborrow'd from his kind.
The King of Heaven was in a manger laid,
And took his earth but from an humble maid;
Then what can birth, or mortal men, bestow?
Since floods no higher than their fountains flow.
We, who for name and empty honour strive, 390
Our true nobility from him derive.
Your ancestors, who puff your mind with pride,
And vast estates to mighty titles tied,
Did not your honour, but their own, advance;
For virtue comes not by inheritance.
If you tralineate from your father's mind,
What are you else but of a bastard kind?
Do, as your great progenitors have done,
And, by their virtues, prove yourself their son.

No father can infuse or wit or grace; 400
A mother comes across, and mars the race.
A grandsire or a grandame taints the blood;
And seldom three descents continue good.
Were virtue by descent, a noble name
Could never villanise his father's fame;
But, as the first, the last of all the line,
Would, like the sun, even in descending shine;
Take fire, and bear it to the darkest house,
Betwixt King Arthur's court and Caucasus:
If you depart, the flame shall still remain, 410
And the bright blaze enlighten all the plain:
Nor, till the fuel perish, can decay,
By nature form'd on things combustible to prey.
Such is not man, who, mixing better seed
With worse, begets a base degenerate breed:
The bad corrupts the good, and leaves behind
No trace of all the great begetter's mind.
The father sinks within his son, we see,
And often rises in the third degree;
If better luck a better mother give, 420
Chance gave us being, and by chance we live.
Such as our atoms were, even such are we,
Or call it chance, or strong necessity:
Thus loaded with dead weight, the will is free.
And thus it needs must be; for seed conjoin'd
Lets into nature's work the imperfect kind;
But fire, the enlivener of the general frame,

Is one, its operation still the same.
Its principle is in itself: while ours
Works, as confederates war, with mingled powers; 430
Or man or woman, which soever fails:
And oft the vigour of the worse prevails.
Aether with sulphur blended alters hue,
And casts a dusky gleam of Sodom blue.
Thus, in a brute, their ancient honour ends,
And the fair mermaid in a fish descends:
The line is gone; no longer duke or earl;
But, by himself degraded, turns a churl.
Nobility of blood is but renown
Of thy great fathers by their virtue known, 440
And a long trail of light, to thee descending down.
If in thy smoke it ends, their glories shine;
But infamy and villanage are thine.
Then what I said before is plainly show'd,
The true nobility proceeds from God;
Nor left us by inheritance, but given
By bounty of our stars, and grace of Heaven.
Thus from a captive Servius Tullius rose,
Whom for his virtues the first Romans chose:
Fabricius from their walls repell'd the foe, 450
Whose noble hands had exercised the plough.
From hence, my lord, and love, I thus conclude,
That though my homely ancestors were rude,
Mean as I am, yet I may have the grace
To make you father of a generous race:

And noble then am I, when I begin,
In virtue clothed, to cast the rags of sin.
If poverty be my upbraided crime,
And you believe in Heaven, there was a time
When He, the great controller of our fate, 460
Deign'd to be man, and lived in low estate;
Which He who had the world at his dispose,
If poverty were vice, would never choose.
Philosophers have said, and poets sing,
That a glad poverty's an honest thing.
Content is wealth, the riches of the mind;
And happy he who can that treasure find.
But the base miser starves amidst his store,
Broods on his gold, and, griping still at more,
Sits sadly pining, and believes he's poor. 470
The ragged beggar, though he want relief,
Has not to lose, and sings before the thief.
Want is a bitter and a hateful good,
Because its virtues are not understood;
Yet many things, impossible to thought,
Have been by need to full perfection brought:
The daring of the soul proceeds from thence,
Sharpness of wit, and active diligence:
Prudence at once, and fortitude, it gives,
And, if in patience taken, mends our lives; 480
For even that indigence, that brings me low,
Makes me myself, and Him above, to know.
A good which none would challenge, few would choose,

A fair possession, which mankind refuse.
If we from wealth to poverty descend,
Want gives to know the flatterer from the friend.
If I am old and ugly, well for you,
No lewd adulterer will my love pursue;
Nor jealousy, the bane of married life,
Shall haunt you for a wither'd homely wife; 490
For age and ugliness, as all agree,
Are the best guards of female chastity.
Yet since I see your mind is worldly bent,
I'll do my best to further your content.
And therefore of two gifts in my dispose,
Think ere you speak, I grant you leave to choose:
Would you I should be still deform'd and old,
Nauseous to touch, and loathsome to behold;
On this condition to remain for life,
A careful, tender, and obedient wife, 500
In all I can contribute to your ease,
And not in deed, or word, or thought displeas:
Or would you rather have me young and fair,
And take the chance that happens to your share?
Temptations are in beauty, and in youth,
And how can you depend upon my truth?
Now weigh the danger with the doubtful bliss,
And thank yourself, if aught should fall amiss.

Sore sigh'd the knight, who this long sermon heard;

At length, considering all, his heart he cheer'd, 510

And thus replied: My lady, and my wife,

To your wise conduct I resign my life:

Choose you for me, for well you understand

The future good and ill, on either hand:

But if an humble husband may request,

Provide, and order all things for the best;

Yours be the care to profit, and to please;

And let your subject servant take his ease.

Then thus in peace, quoth she, concludes the strife,

Since I am turn'd the husband, you the wife: 520

The matrimonial victory is mine,

Which, having fairly gain'd, I will resign:

Forgive if I have said or done amiss,

And seal the bargain with a friendly kiss.

I promised you but one content to share,

But now I will become both good and fair:

No nuptial quarrel shall disturb your ease;

The business of my life shall be to please:

And for my beauty, that, as time shall try--

But draw the curtain first, and cast your eye. 530

He look'd, and saw a creature heavenly fair,

In bloom of youth, and of a charming air.

With joy he turn'd, and seized her ivory arm;

And like Pygmalion found the statue warm.

Small arguments there needed to prevail;
A storm of kisses pour'd as thick as hail.
Thus long in mutual bliss they lay embraced,
And their first love continued to the last:
One sunshine was their life, no cloud between;
Nor ever was a kinder couple seen. 540

And so may all our lives like theirs be led;
Heaven send the maids young husbands fresh in bed!
May widows wed as often as they can,
And ever for the better change their man!
And some devouring plague pursue their lives,
Who will not well be govern'd by their wives!

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 79: 'Bittour:' bittern.]

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THE CHARACTER OF A GOOD PARSON.[80]

A parish priest was of the pilgrim train;
An awful, reverend, and religious man.
His eyes diffused a venerable grace,
And charity itself was in his face.
Rich was his soul, though his attire was poor;
(As God had clothed his own ambassador;)
For such, on earth, his bless'd Redeemer bore.
Of sixty years he seem'd; and well might last
To sixty more, but that he lived too fast;
Refined himself to soul, to curb the sense; 10
And made almost a sin of abstinence,
Yet, had his aspect nothing of severe,
But such a face as promised him sincere.
Nothing reserved or sullen was to see;
But sweet regards, and pleasing sanctity:
Mild was his accent, and his action free.
With eloquence innate his tongue was arm'd;
Though harsh the precept, yet the preacher charm'd.
For letting down the golden chain from high,
He drew his audience upward to the sky; 20
And oft, with holy hymns, he charm'd their ears:
(A music more melodious than the spheres.)
For David left him, when he went to rest,
His lyre; and after him he sung the best.
He bore his great commission in his look:
But sweetly temper'd awe; and soften'd all he spoke.
He preach'd the joys of heaven, and pains of hell;
And warn'd the sinner with becoming zeal;

But on eternal mercy loved to dwell.
He taught the gospel rather than the law, 30
And forced himself to drive: but loved to draw.
For fear but freezes minds; but love, like heat,
Exhales the soul sublime, to seek her native seat.
To threats the stubborn sinner oft is hard,
Wrapp'd in his crimes, against the storm prepared;
But, when the milder beams of mercy play,
He melts, and throws his cumbrous cloak away,
Lightning and thunder (heaven's artillery)
As harbingers before the Almighty fly:
Those but proclaim his style, and disappear; 40
The stiller sound succeeds, and God is there.

The tithes, his parish freely paid, he took;
But never sued, or cursed with bell and book.
With patience bearing wrong; but offering none:
Since every man is free to lose his own.
The country churls, according to their kind,
(Who grudge their dues, and love to be behind),
The less he sought his offerings, pinch'd the more,
And praised a priest contented to be poor.

Yet of his little he had some to spare, 50
To feed the famish'd, and to clothe the bare;
For mortified he was to that degree,
A poorer than himself he would not see.

True priests, he said, and preachers of the Word,
Were only stewards of their sovereign Lord:
Nothing was theirs; but all the public store;
Intrusted riches, to relieve the poor:
Who, should they steal for want of his relief,
He judged himself accomplice with the thief.

Wide was his parish; not contracted close 60
In streets, but here and there a straggling house;
Yet still he was at hand, without request,
To serve the sick; to succour the distress'd:
Tempting, on foot, alone, without affright,
The dangers of a dark tempestuous night.

All this the good old man perform'd alone,
Nor spared his pains; for curate he had none:
Nor durst he trust another with his care;
Nor rode himself to Paul's, the public fair,
To chaffer for preferment with his gold, 70
Where bishoprics and sinecures are sold:
But duly watch'd his flock, by night and day,
And from the prowling wolf redeem'd the prey;
And hungry sent the wily fox away.

The proud he tamed, the penitent he cheer'd;
Nor to rebuke the rich offender fear'd.

His preaching much, but more his practice wrought;

(A living sermon of the truths he taught);

For this by rules severe his life he squared,

That all might see the doctrine which they heard. 80

For priests, he said, are patterns for the rest:

(The gold of heaven, who bear the God impress'd):

But when the precious coin is kept unclean,

The Sovereign's image is no longer seen.

If they be foul on whom the people trust,

Well may the baser brass contract a rust.

The prelate for his holy life he prized;

The worldly pomp of prelacy despised:

His Saviour came not with a gaudy show;

Nor was his kingdom of the world below. 90

Patience in want, and poverty of mind,

These marks of Church and Churchmen he design'd,

And living taught, and dying left behind.

The crown he wore was of the pointed thorn:

In purple he was crucified, not born.

They who contend for place and high degree,

Are not his sons, but those of Zebedee.

Not but he knew the signs of earthly power

Might well become Saint Peter's successor;

The holy father holds a double reign, 100

The prince may keep his pomp, the fisher must be plain.

Such was the saint, who shone with every grace,
Reflecting, Moses'-like, his Maker's face.
God saw his image lively was express'd;
And his own work, as in creation, bless'd.

The Tempter saw him too, with envious eye;
And, as on Job, demanded leave to try.
He took the time when Richard was deposed,
And high and low with happy Harry closed.
This prince, though great in arms, the priest withstood: 110
Near though he was, yet not the next of blood.
Had Richard, unconstrain'd, resign'd the throne,
A king can give no more than is his own:
The title stood entail'd, had Richard had a son.

Conquest, an odious name, was laid aside,
Where all submitted, none the battle tried.
The senseless plea of right by Providence
Was, by a flattering priest, invented since;
And lasts no longer than the present sway;
But justifies the next who comes in play. 120

The people's right remains; let those who dare
Dispute their power, when they the judges are.

He join'd not in their choice, because he knew
Worse might, and often did, from change ensue.
Much to himself he thought; but little spoke;
And, undeprived, his benefice forsook.

Now, through the land, his cure of souls he stretch'd;
And like a primitive apostle preach'd:
Still cheerful; ever constant to his call;
By many follow'd; loved by most, admired by all. 130
With what he begg'd, his brethren he relieved:
And gave the charities himself received.
Gave, while he taught; and edified the more,
Because he showed, by proof, 'twas easy to be poor.

He went not with the crowd to see a shrine;
But fed us, by the way, with food divine.

In deference to his virtues, I forbear
To show you what the rest in orders were:
This brilliant is so spotless and so bright,
He needs no foil, but shines by his own proper light. 140

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FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 80: This poem is intended as a palinode for some of Dryden's former misdeeds, and partly as a covert panegyric on the Nonjuring clergy.]

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THE END.