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JOHNSON'S
LIVES OF THE POETS.

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LIVES OF THE POETS.

EDITED, WITH NOTES, BY
MRS. ALEXANDER NAPIER.

AND AN INTRODUCTION BY
J. W. HALES, M.A.,
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON, AND
CLARK LECTURER AT TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

VOL. I.

LONDON: GEORGE BELL AND SONS, YORK STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

1890.

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1899.

TO THE MEMORY OF

ALEXANDER NAPIER, M.A.,

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, VICAR OF HOLKHAM, NORFOLK, EDITOR OF THE
CAMBRIDGE EDITION OF BARROW'S WORKS, AND BOSWELL'S JOHNSON.

THIS ATTEMPT TO COMPLETE THE WORK HE

DESIGNED AND COMMENCED IS

DEDICATED BY THE

EDITOR.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE first thing to be desired in the new edition of a standard work, is, by common consent, the acquisition of a genuine text. This has been attained in the present case by printing from the edition of 1783, which was revised by Johnson himself. Mr. Peter Cunningham, the last Editor, professed to do this, but he did not scruple to correct, in the text itself, what he considered Johnson's mistakes, altering names and dates, inserting matter deliberately omitted by Johnson, and even re-arranging paragraphs in accordance with information obtained since Johnson's time.

Any such proceeding produces a feeling of uncertainty and want of confidence, and has been carefully avoided. Our text is absolutely as Johnson left it, the necessary corrections being made in footnotes, for which when unsigned the Editor is responsible.

A pure text thus secured, all diligence has been used to correct mis-statements by the light of modern research, to supply the references too often omitted by Johnson, and to verify his quotations. But this has not always been possible. The wonderful memory to which Johnson trusted so implicitly sometimes deceived him, and he permitted himself a latitude in quotation which makes him often difficult, sometimes impossible, to follow.

An attempt has been made to elucidate the text by short notes, biographical or explanatory. For these the indulgence of some readers is requested for the sake of other readers, whose studies have led them in different

directions, and who, in this age of hurry, lack the time or opportunity to hunt up information for themselves.

To accomplish her task, however imperfectly, the Editor has not hesitated to avail herself of all the material within her reach, though always with due acknowledgment. She has adopted many notes from Mr. Cunningham, and some from Mr. Arnold, Mr. Milnes, and Mr. Firth.

With such a mass of notes and references, the difficulty arose of distinguishing the few notes inserted by Johnson himself. To prevent confusion, and avoid the offensive recurrence of "Editor," the only alternative seemed to be to sign his own notes with his name. This is, however, an indignity offered to the great author, in his own book, and has been adopted, with hesitation and apology, as the least of two evils.

It is now the Editor's pleasing duty to offer her most grateful thanks to those who have so kindly and courteously aided her.

To Dr. Isidor Kopernicki and M. Pauli of the Jagolonienne University at Cracow, for the very curious and important information regarding the Scotch settlers in Poland, and the tax called by Johnson a "contribution."

To Professor David Masson, for his note on the Metaphysical Poets.

To the Historiographer Royal of Scotland, for permission to give particulars relating to the family of Skene, and to the Rev. A. C. Hallen for assistance on this subject.

To the Rev. H. S. Fagan, for his notes on the connection of Swift with the affairs of Ireland.

To E. Maunde Thompson, Esq., for his interesting note on the British Museum in Gray's time.

To Dr. H. R. Luard, Registrar at Cambridge, and the Rev. T. Vere Beyne, Keeper of the Archives at Oxford, for their forbearance with persistent and troublesome inquiries.

To Dr. S. R. Gardiner, Dr. Jessopp, Dr. E. Moore, and

the Rev. Ronald Bayne, for information on various details most readily granted.

To Dr. Garnett, for his friendly and opportune guidance to some treasures in the British Museum.

And above all to her friend, R. F. Sketchley, Esq., of the Dyce and Forster Library, South Kensington, whose invaluable assistance has been most generously and constantly rendered, and to her brother, the Rev. Joseph Cotterill, whose patient and accurate research has saved her from many a blunder and supplied many a deficiency.

ROBINA NAPIER.

BROMLEY COLLEGE, *Dec.* 22, 1889.

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INTRODUCTION.

JOHNSON'S "Lives of the Poets" was written towards the close of his life, and first published partly in 1779, and partly in 1781. The faithful Boswell describes it as "that admirable performance . . . which is the richest, most beautiful, and indeed most perfect production of Johnson's pen." And Boswell's contemporaries received it with profound submission and reverence. The oracle had spoken, and men duly adored the majestic utterances. To us of to-day the work appears of much less intrinsic importance than when it first came out. Many of the judgments pronounced have not found final acceptance; some have been wholly reversed. But yet for us too it is a work of great value—a work exhibiting much acuteness and vigour of mind, and that contains many suggestions of permanent use as well as much information not elsewhere preserved, and, to mention its greatest interest, a work that recalls the intellectual tone and temper of its age with a fidelity and fulness that make it of inestimable service to anyone who will thoroughly study the eighteenth century.

The facts as to its undertaking are given in a letter from Edward Dilly, a "bookseller" living in the Poultry, to Boswell, dated Sept. 20, 1777. In the early years of George the Third's reign there was beginning to be felt, through the spread of education and learning, a need of a Collection of English Poetry. An Edinburgh firm of publishers, the Martins, made the first attempt to satisfy this growing de-

mand. The London "booksellers," or publishers, as we should say, not to be outdone, and jealous of "an invasion of what we call our Literary Property," formed a rival scheme. "A select number of the most respectable" of them "met on the occasion; and, on consulting together, agreed that all the proprietors of copyright in the various poets should be summoned together; and, when their opinions were given, to proceed immediately on the business. Accordingly, a meeting was held, consisting of about forty of the most respectable booksellers of London, when it was agreed that an elegant and uniform edition of 'the English Poets' should be immediately printed, with a concise account of the life of each author by Dr. Samuel Johnson; and that three persons should be deputed to wait upon Dr. Johnson, to solicit him to undertake the 'Lives,' viz., T. Davies, Strahan, and Cadell. The Doctor very politely undertook it, and seemed exceedingly pleased with the proposal. As to the terms, it was left entirely to the Doctor to name his own; he mentioned two hundred guineas; it was immediately agreed to [no wonder!]; and a further compliment I believe will be made him. A committee was likewise appointed to engage the best engravers, viz., Bartolozzi, Sherwin, Hall, etc. Likewise, another committee for giving directions about the paper, printing, etc.; so that the whole will be conducted with spirit, and in the best manner, with respect to authorship, editorship, engravings, etc. My brother [Charles, Edward's business partner] will give you a list of the poets we mean to give, many of which are within the time of the Act of Queen Anne, which Martin and Bell [Bell was to sell the Edinburgh Collection in London—was a kind of London agent to the Martins] cannot give, as they have no property in them. The proprietors are almost all the booksellers in London of consequence."

There was much in this undertaking to delight Johnson,

and much that he could do with the utmost ease. The choice of the poets to be represented he seems to have left mainly to his employers, except that he suggested the admission of Blackmore, Pomfret, Yalden and Watts. Nowadays we should scarcely tolerate a collection of English poetry that recognized nobody before Cowley—that wholly ignored Chaucer and Spenser, to say nothing of Drayton, of Daniel, of Sackville and many other Elizabethans, and yet could find a place for such poetasters as Messrs. Yalden, Stepney, Duke, Fenton. Indeed, the starting-point of this memorable compilation is significant of the time that produced it. We must certainly not blame only the publishers for its beginning where it does. An age had arisen that had but scanty knowledge of the great Elizabethan Period, and even less of what literature preceded it. And we can scarcely separate Johnson from the publishers in this respect. In his Dictionary his familiarity with our older authors is for the most part conspicuous by its absence; and again and again in the "Lives" itself we observe this same unacquaintance. Thus, in the Life of Rowe, he seems to have no idea of Rowe's indebtedness in his "Fair Penitent" to Massinger's "Fatal Dowry." So Southey hardly puts the matter too strongly when he observes that the poets before the Restoration were to Johnson what the world before the flood is (that is, used to be) to historians; and therefore, so far as Johnson is concerned, we need not regret that he was not called upon to discuss poets and poetry, of whom and of which he had such a meagre knowledge and intelligence. All ages are apt to be extremely well-satisfied with themselves; the eighteenth century was eminently so. It believed that poetry properly began with Waller, and had gone on improving ever since. Evidently it had its own idea of what should be called "poetry," and it was a different idea from ours. Thus the "booksellers" of Johnson's time acted

according to their lights in starting from the middle of the seventeenth century; and Johnson's lights were much the same as theirs, and so he could co-operate without dissension, and at his best. He sent the Life of Cowley to press in December, 1777. Then quickly followed those of Waller, Denham, and Butler. In August, 1778, he finished what, long years before it had been in his mind to compose, the Life of Dryden. "When I was a young fellow," he said in 1776, "I wanted to write the Life of Dryden." This certainly he wrote *con amore*. In the beginning of 1779 he disposed of Milton. And in the following March appeared the first part of the collection, containing twenty-two Lives out of the fifty-two that were to be given. In April, 1780, we find him advancing, but not rapidly, with the second part. "I have not quite neglected my 'Lives,'" he writes to Mrs. Thrale on April 6th; "Addison is a long one, but it is done. Prior is not short, and that is done too. I am upon Rowe, which cannot fill much paper. Seward called on me to-day, and read Spence." April 11th: "You are at all places of high resort, and bring home hearts by dozens, while I am seeking for something to say of men about whom I know nothing but their verses, and sometimes very little of them. Now I have begun, however, I do not despair of making an end." April 15th: "I thought to have finished Rowe's Life to-day, but I have had five or six visitors who hindered me, and I have not been quite well. Next week I hope to dispatch four or five of them." May 9th: "My 'Lives' creep on. I have done Addison, Prior, Rowe, Granville, Sheffield, Collins, Pit, and almost Fenton." May 25th: "Congreve, whom I despatched at the Borough election, is one of the best of the little Lives, but then I had your conversation."

The work had now lost its novelty; and also some minor writers of whom he knew little had to be considered. "

have sat at home in Bolt Court all the summer," he writes to Boswell, Aug. 21, 1780, "thinking to write the 'Lives,' and a great part of the time only thinking. Several of them, however, are done, and I still think to do the rest." But the toil was by this time greater than the pleasure. He was not unready to receive assistance. The Life of Young "was written at my request by a gentleman [Mr., afterwards Sir, Herbert Croft], who had better information than I could easily have obtained; and the public will perhaps wish that I had solicited and obtained more such favours from him." In the case of Savage he made use of the Life which he had written nearly forty years before, just after his friend's death. Its length and minuteness put it altogether out of the proper proportion to the other biographies; but as a picture of the wild Bohemianism that marked the literary life about the time Johnson came up to London, we would not wish it shorter, to use Johnson's own way of speaking. At last the labour was accomplished. "Some time in March," he notes in his review of the past year made at Easter, 1781, "I finished the 'Lives of the Poets,' which I wrote in my usual way, dilatorily and hastily, unwilling to work and working with vigour and haste."

The result may be described as a biographical history of English poetry from the Restoration to just before the first French Revolution, written by one of the most able and distinguished representatives of that very definitely marked period. And assuredly no one was more competent than Johnson to write such a history, if such a history was to be written. For a third of all the years included in his work he had himself been an author of note, and a well-known and prominent figure in the literary circles of the day. Thus in many cases he could speak on the strength of direct and immediate knowledge; in some on the strength of close intimacy. "Nobody can write the life of

a man," he once said to Boswell, "but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him." Of course, such relations with his subjects were not altogether advantageous. They were indeed pernicious, if it was hoped to produce critical estimates of any lasting value; and no doubt it was so hoped, however vainly. But such relations provided Johnson with a store of information which was invaluable for his purpose, and which must always make his work, however defective in other ways, indispensable to the careful explorer of our literary history. They, to a large extent, gave it the value of a contemporary chronicle. Much of this information he gathered easily without effort, as he moved to and fro in the society of his day, as he sat on that "throne of human felicity," a tavern chair, or, at the tables of Mrs. Thrale and Mrs. Montagu, conversed with authorities who were only too proud to gratify, so far as they could, any curiosity he cared to show. It is to be regretted that he did not trouble himself to extend or augment it by other and severer researches. But with all his wonderful mental energy, he was a man of indolent habits. He was never weary of exercising his mind in conversation, but alone in his study he soon relaxed his exertions—he soon "remitted," as he would have said, and become gloomy and despondent and inert. "To adjust the minute events of literary history," he remarks in his *Life of Dryden*, "is tedious and troublesome. It requires indeed no great force of understanding, but often depends upon enquiries which there is no opportunity of making, or is to be fetched from books and pamphlets not always at hand." Of course, he did make some inquiries; but on the whole he relied on his memory rather than on his industry. His memory was amazingly powerful; but it needed support. "Regarded as collections of facts," says Mr. Milnes in his valuable *Introduction to the volume of Johnson's "Select Works,"* published

by the Clarendon Press, "these 'Lives' are full of errors. Few of the dates are accurately given, and many of the incidents are founded upon mere hearsay evidence, and do not bear a moment's examination . . . It is enough, as an example, to call attention here to the strange story of Dryden's funeral, and the obvious falsehood of the incident about Voltaire narrated by Pope and handed on by Johnson." Mr. Cunningham, in the Preface to his edition of the "Lives" gives a long list of errors, some not trivial, committed by the author. "In the first written of the 'Lives,' that of Cowley, he tells us in one place that Cowley's unfinished Epic is in three books, and in another place (a few pages on) that it is in four. We may safely suspect that he had never read Cowley's 'Comedy,' for he mistakes its title. In his 'Waller,' he finds fault with Fenton for an error made by himself from confounding two poems. In the same life he calls Hampden the uncle of Waller, instead of the cousin. In his 'Life of Milton' he cites Philips (Milton's nephew) for a remarkable statement not to be found in Philips, and attributes to Ellwood (Milton's Quaker friend) the preservation of a doubtful story, said to have come from Milton's own lips, which is certainly not in Ellwood . . . He says of Dryden's 'King Arthur' what is true of 'Albion and Albanius;' mistakes the origin of 'Mac Flecknoe,' and the date of its appearance; informs his readers that King James and not King Charles made Dryden historiographer. . . . He is altogether wrong about Cowley's parentage. He makes Lord Roscommon live into King James's reign; calls Lord Rochester's daughter his sister; refers to Palaprat's 'Alcibiade,' when there is no such production; makes 'Venice Preserved' the last of Otway's plays, which it was far from being; . . . confounds Sir Richard Steele with Dicky Norris the actor; attributes a discovery to Congreve—that Pindaric odes are regular—when the discovery is to be found in

Ben Jonson and Philips's 'Theatrum Poetarum;' taxes Warburton with making an arrangement of Pope's 'Epistles,' which Pope himself had made; . . . while he is wrong in the years of birth of Savage, Somerville, Yalden, and Collins, he is equally incorrect respecting the dates of death of Dryden, Garth, Parnell, and Collins."

But such inaccuracies and carelessnesses can, for the most part, be very easily corrected. And if the work has real merits, its value is not seriously impaired by them.

" Ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis
Offendar maculis quos aut incuria fudit,
Aut humana parum cavit natura."

It may seem a much more damaging admission that the critical verdicts given by Johnson are such as we think often inadequate, and sometimes entirely perverse and wrong. In the eyes of the present century three of the truest and finest poets of all Johnson's catalogue are Milton, Collins and Gray. Johnson's criticisms of these spirits, so "finely touched," and to so "fine issues," appear beyond blame. We read them at first with mere amazement; presently we perceive that he has no ear at all for what seem to us voices of incomparable sweetness and of immortal power. Johnson's remarks on 'Lycidas' are truly memorable for their want of insight and appreciation. He says "the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing. There is no nature, for there is nothing new What image of tenderness can be excited by these lines :

• We drove a field, and both together heard
What time the grey fly winds her sultry horn,
Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night?'

We know that they never drove a field, and that they had no flocks to batten; and though it be allowed that the re-

presentation may be allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote that it is never sought because it cannot be known when it is found. . . . Surely,"—thus he concludes his suicidal observations—"No man could have fancied that he read 'Lycidas' with pleasure, had he not known its author." We seem to be in the midst of Philistia as we read these sentences—to be perusing some journal published at Gath, or listening to some professor with a chair at Askalon. And so, when we are assured that Milton's "Sonnets" "deserve not very particular criticism; for the best it can only be said that they are not bad; and perhaps only the eighth ["Captain or colonel," etc.] and twenty-first ["Cyriack, whose grand-sire," &c.] are truly entitled to this slender commendation." Again, he pronounces "Cato" to be "unquestionably the noblest production of Addison's genius." What would now be Addison's measure of fame, if it depended on his "Cato?" Of the story of Prior's "Henry and Emma," which is the story of "The Nut-brown Maid," he writes in this wise: "The example of Emma, who resolves to follow an outlawed murderer, wherever fear and guilt shall drive him, deserves no imitation; and the experiment by which Henry tries the lady's constancy is such as must end either in infamy to her, or in disappointment to himself." We might be ready enough to ridicule such a version, or perversion, of a simple old story as the artificial Prior produces; but this is just what Johnson does not and will not do. What irritates him is the tale itself, the old romantic tale of passionate devotion. He stands firm and solid in his eighteenth century, and has no sympathy with the ages of romance. How significant a fact that in his day the word enthusiasm had a bad meaning. For him the golden light that surrounds those lovers "fades into the light of common day;" out of the land of poetry with its heights and its free air, he hales them, so to speak, into the close courts of

prose. But "The Nut-brown Maid" is not to be judged in this spirit, she is outside such jurisdiction. "No; he doth but mistake the truth totally." He does not understand her language. It sounds to him like mere wantonness. He cannot imagine the situation. To him it presents itself as a mere vulgar intrigue, at which all respectable people must frown and be disgusted. Again, his attitude towards our old ballad poetry is always supercilious and scornful. In his *Life of Addison* he mentions, not without sympathy, the ridicule which Wagstaff and Dennis heaped upon Addison's "Chevy Chase" papers. "In 'Chevy Chase,'" he concludes, echoing Dennis' words with full approval, "there is not much of either bombast or affectation, but there is chill and lifeless imbecility. The story cannot possibly be told in a manner that shall make less impression on the mind." Could the dullest reader show less discernment, or express the opposite of the fact with superior stolidity?

These critical heresies and perversenesses, as most people nowadays would undoubtedly pronounce them, cannot be removed from Johnson's work as can the inaccuracies to which attention has been called above. They belong to the main tissue of it. And the modern reader might be tempted to fling aside volumes that contain judgments so mistaken and so blind. And, if "The Lives of the Poets," by Dr. Johnson is studied in the hope of there finding worthy and final criticisms of our best poetry, the reader may well throw it aside. But it should not be studied with any such hope. It should be studied as the best extant exposition of the critical ideas current in the last century. Criticism is yet but an infant science—yet but a nascent art. We may be quite certain that many literary tastes and views now prevailing will strike posterity as curiously ludicrous. What, for instance, will be thought of many of Macaulay's conclusions? But, if our age could

provide posterity with such an admirable record of its mind as is Johnson's "Lives," certainly it would be of infinite value to the future historian of our times. Johnson, for all his seeming originality and independence, is essentially the offspring of his age.

"So free we seem, so fettered fast we are."

He cannot be said, as we do sometimes say of men of genius, to be before his age, at least as a critic. He is in it and of it. And we should, before all things, understand that he speaks to us with the voice of his age, and that the value of his criticisms is historical rather than absolute, and that their value in this respect can scarcely be exaggerated. His critical point of view is very different from ours, and so what he sees and cares to see is often not in the least what we see and care to see. He thought that criticism, like poetry, had greatly "improved" by his time. "Addison," he writes, "is now to be considered as a critic—a name which the present generation is scarcely willing to allow him. His criticism is condemned as tentative, as experimental rather than scientific; and he is considered as deciding by taste rather than by principles." So that his age believed it had attained to a criticism that deserved the title of scientific. This was one of the many mistakes that age made about itself—one of the many overratings of its own merits and achievements. We are yet far from having reached such a critical system. But just as Johnson's age had no doubt made some progress, visible enough if we compare his remarks on "Paradise Lost" with those in the well-known "Spectator" papers, so certainly there has been some advance since Dr. Johnson's age, and especially, perhaps, in this respect, viz., in our broader, if less distinct, conception of what is meant by art. To use a much abused term, but one of real meaning and value, æsthetic criticism had not yet arisen

in England in the days when "The Lives" were written. Art was regarded rather as the handmaid of morality than of beauty. Johnson's dominant thought, when he looks at a poem, is not so much what pleasure and delight does it give? what phase or form of beauty does it embody? but rather what lesson does it convey? Certainly this is always his ultimate test. Art for him is didactic rather than æsthetic. His Apollo, it seems, is "ordained"—is "in holy orders." Apollo of the golden locks and of the free forest,

" Qui rore puro Castaliæ lavit
Crines solutos, qui Lyciæ tenet
Dumeta natalemque silvam,"

receives the tonsure, so to speak, and abandons his wild woodland ways. On the parterres of Parnassus we see rising churches, built in the style of the day, when perhaps our architecture was at its lowest point. Johnson is a moralist, first and last. This is one reason why, as we have seen, he cannot endure "The Nut-brown Maid." Her loveliness does not fascinate him at all, because her principles seem to him so unsatisfactory. He can only cry out, as with justice, perhaps, Ulysses cries out when he sees Cressida in all her beauty, and with all her wiles:

" Fie, fie upon her !
There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Nay, her foot speaks ; her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body."

"But I will no longer look for particular faults," he writes after much carping at Gray's "Bard ;" "yet let it be observed that the Ode might have been concluded with an action of better example ; but suicide is always to be had without expense of thought." Could an ethical intrusion be more impertinent? Only a confirmed and hardened moralizer, so to say, could have injected such a remark on

such an occasion. Would Johnson soberly maintain that the result of Gray's "Bard" is to encourage suicide? Indeed, he is moral in season and out of season; he has a perpetual tendency towards the pulpit; there is ever a sermon ready in his head.

We repeat that in these critical short-comings he represents his age; he is both a product and a producer of it, both its servant and its master. And no one who wishes to understand that age can afford to neglect "The Lives of the Poets."

But we must not leave the impression that Johnson's criticisms are always ill-directed and futile. Most of the poets whom he discusses were well within his range and reach; and he discusses them with the most extensive knowledge, with a thoroughly intelligent sympathy, and with an acuteness and a shrewdness that perpetually surprise and enlighten. He is best on Dryden and Pope; and, if he has not said the last words on those subjects, he has said words that cannot be forgotten, whenever the poets are discussed.

And if we cannot exactly apply to him his own generous phrase about Goldsmith, we may certainly say that, what he touched, he placed in a new light and aspect, and often invested with a fresh interest and attraction. His activity of mind was wonderful, and his was a mind of power. To the utmost he resolved to think for himself,

"Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri,"

and to give his thoughts precise and vigorous expression. The inscription on his monument in St. Paul's well describes him as a man "singularis exempli." So certainly he was both intellectually and morally. It is impossible to be in his society, as in a sense we may be in reading his writings, without being both instructed and invigorated. Whatever weakness and faults may be confessed, it remains

that Johnson was a great man. "He was a great man," says one of the finest critics of our own day, so recently gone from us, "and great men are always instructive. The more we study him, the higher will be our esteem for the power of his mind, the width of his interests, the largeness of his knowledge, the freshness, fearlessness, and strength of his judgments. The higher too will be our esteem of his character." Perhaps we may invert the Latin phrase Bacon quotes, viz.: "Studia abeunt in mores," that is, "A man's studies pass into his character," and read "Mores abeunt in studia," that is, "A man's character passes into his studies," expresses itself inevitably in his writings. And certainly it is not easy to overstate the respect and reverence that an acquaintance with Johnson's life inspires. He was not only a great but a good man. Whatever his insight into the highest and best poetry, he lived a life that Milton would have recognized to be a poem—a life of splendid fortitude, of unostentatious but most bountiful charity, of rare sincerity and truthfulness. How inexpressibly trivial his faults of manner and breaches of etiquette by the side of these transcendent virtues! It is good to sit at the feet of such a man, whether we agree with his utterances, or disagree. Let him be endowed also in large measure, as Johnson was endowed, with the excellent gifts of wit and humour, and we have before us one of the most interesting and entertaining, as well as one of the most well-informed, shrewd and wise companions and masters.

JOHN W. HALES.

KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

August 3, 1889.

THE
L I V E S
OF THE MOST EMINENT
ENGLISH POETS;
WITH
CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS
ON THEIR
W O R K S.

By SAMUEL JOHNSON.
IN FOUR VOLUMES.
A NEW EDITION, CORRECTED.

THE FIRST VOLUME.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR C. BATHURST, J. BUCKLAND, W. STRAHAN, J. RIVING-
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MDCCLXXXIII.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Booksellers having determined to publish a Body of English Poetry, I was persuaded to promise them a Preface to the Works of each Author; an undertaking, as it was then presented to my mind, not very extensive or difficult.

My purpose was only to have allotted to every Poet an Advertisement, like those which we find in the French Miscellanies, containing a few dates and a general character; but I have been led beyond my intention, I hope, by the honest desire of giving useful pleasure.

In this minute kind of History, the succession of facts is not easily discovered; and I am not without suspicion that some of Dryden's works are placed in wrong years. I have followed Langbaine, as the best authority for his plays: and if I shall hereafter obtain a more correct chronology, will publish it; but I do not yet know that my account is erroneous.

Dryden's "Remarks on Rymer" have been somewhere printed before. The former edition I have not seen. This was transcribed for the press from his own manuscript.

As this undertaking was occasional and unforeseen, I must be supposed to have engaged in it with less provision of materials than might have been accumulated by longer premeditation. Of the later writers at least I might, by attention and enquiry, have gleaned many par-

ticulars, which would have diversified and enlivened my Biography. These omissions, which it is now useless to lament, have been often supplied by the kindness of Mr. Steevens and other friends; and great assistance has been given me by Mr. Spence's Collections, of which I consider the communication as a favour worthy of publick acknowledgement.

COWLEY.

PREFATORY NOTE.

[Cowley himself published his *Poems*, 1656, folio. Dean Sprat in 1668 brought out Cowley's *Latin Poems* with a Life, also in Latin. This Life he translated and prefixed to an edition of *Cowley's Works*, 1669, folio. Reprints followed as new editions in 1674, 1678, 1681, 1684, 1700, 1707, all in folio, and in 1710, first in 3 vols. 8vo. In 1772 Bishop Hurd published an edition with notes, and Aikin in 1802. The grand edition of *Cowley's Works*, with *Memorial Introduction* by Grosart, 1881, in the Chertsey Worthies Library, is exhaustive, and probably contains all that can now be discovered. Extracts from Cowley's Poems are accessible in Ward's *Select Eng. Poets*, vol. ii. p. 244.

The edition of Cowley's Poems here used for reference is the reprint from Sprat's edition, 1710, 3 vols. 8vo. Grosart's edition is referred to as *C. W. L.* Saintsbury's *Scott's Dryden* as *S. S. D.* The Boswell's *Johnson* used is Napier's edition, 1884.

The details of Cowley's Westminster and University career are now for the first time clearly stated from the college books.]

LIVES OF THE POETS.

COWLEY.

THE Life of Cowley, notwithstanding the penury of English biography, has been written by Dr. Sprat,¹ an author whose pregnancy of imagination and elegance of language have deservedly set him high in the ranks of literature; but his zeal of friendship, or ambition of eloquence, has produced a funeral oration rather than a history: he has given the character, not the life of Cowley; for he writes with so little detail, that scarcely anything is distinctly known, but all is shewn confused and enlarged through the mist of panegyrick.

Abraham Cowley² was born in the year one thousand six hundred and eighteen. His father was a grocer, whose condition Dr. Sprat conceals under the general appellation of a citizen; and, what would probably not have been less

¹ Thomas Sprat, D.D. (1636-1713), Canon of Windsor, Dean of Westminster, and afterwards Bishop of Rochester. In his Poems, which are not numerous, he followed Cowley as his model; and one of his chief works is the *Life of Cowley*, written first in Latin, prefixed to an edition (1668) of Cowley's Latin Poems, and afterwards (1669) in English, before his English works.

² "The Life of Cowley he (Johnson) himself considered as the best of the whole, on account of the dissertation on the metaphysical poets." Boswell's *Johnson*, vol. iv. p. 4, where a few Readings in this Life are also given.

carefully suppressed, the omission of his name in the register of St. Dunstan's parish gives reason to suspect that his father was a sectary.¹ Whoever he was, he died before the birth of his son, and consequently left him to the care of his mother; whom Wood² represents as struggling earnestly to procure him a literary education, and who, as she lived to the age of eighty, had her solicitude rewarded by seeing her son eminent, and, I hope, by seeing him fortunate, and partaking his prosperity. We know at least, from Sprat's account, that he always acknowledged her care, and justly paid the dues of filial gratitude.

In the window of his mother's apartment lay Spenser's *Fairy Queen*; ³ in which he very early took delight to read, till, by feeling the charms of verse, he became, as he relates, irrecoverably a poet. Such are the accidents, which, sometimes remembered, and perhaps sometimes forgotten, produce that particular designation of mind, and propensity for some certain science or employment, which is commonly called Genius. The true Genius is a mind of large general powers, accidentally determined to some particular direction. Sir Joshua Reynolds, the great Painter of the present age, had the first fondness for his art excited by the perusal of Richardson's treatise.⁴

By his mother's solicitation he was admitted into Westminster school, where he was soon distinguished.⁵ He was wont, says Sprat, to relate, "That he had this defect in

¹ The father's will, quoted by Mr. P. Cunningham, shows that he was a citizen and stationer of the parish of St. Michael-le-Querne.

² *Fasti Oxonienses*, part ii. vol. iv. p. 209.

³ The second folio edition of the *Faerie Queen* was re-issued with a new title-page in 1617, the year before Cowley was born.

⁴ *Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715), and *Two Discourses on the Art of Criticism, as it relates to Painting, and the Science of a Connoisseur*, 1719, by Jonathan Richardson.

⁵ Cowley was entered for a scholarship, 21st April, 1636, but was not elected.

his memory at that time, that his teachers never could bring it to retain the ordinary rules of grammar.”¹

This is an instance of the natural desire of man to propagate a wonder. It is surely very difficult to tell anything as it was heard, when Sprat could not refrain from amplifying a commodious incident, though the book to which he prefixed his narrative contained its confutation. A memory admitting some things, and rejecting others, an intellectual digestion that concocted the pulp of learning, but refused the husks, had the appearance of an instinctive elegance, of a particular provision made by Nature for literary politeness. But in the author's own honest relation,² the marvel vanishes: he was, he says, such “an enemy to all constraint, that his master never could prevail on him to learn the rules without book.” He does not tell that he could not learn the rules, but that, being able to perform his exercises without them, and being an “enemy to constraint,” he spared himself the labour.

Among the English poets, Cowley, Milton, and Pope, might be said “to lisp in numbers;” and have given such early proofs, not only of powers of language, but of comprehension of things, as to more tardy minds seems scarcely credible. But of the learned puerilities of Cowley there is no doubt, since a volume of his poems was not only written but printed in his thirteenth year;³ containing, with other poetical compositions, “The tragical History of

¹ *Life of Cowley*, p. 6.

² *On Myself*, Essay XI.

³ *Poetical Blossomes*, by A. C. Lond. 4to, pp. 62, 1633. Cowley therefore was in his fifteenth year. On its appearance Richard Crashaw addressed to the youthful author the beautiful little poem, “On two greene Apricockes sent to Cowley by Sir Crashaw” (afterwards published in his *Delights*, 1648), in which he acknowledges “How much my Summer waites upon thy Spring.”—Works of Richard Crashaw in *Fuller Worthies' Library*, vol. i. p. 269, ed. Grosart.

Vaughan's portrait of Cowley at the age of thirteen prefixed to the *Poetical Blossomes* probably led to the mistake in his age.

Pyramus and Thisbe," written when he was ten years old; and "Constantia and Philetus," written two years after.

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

In 1636, he was removed to Cambridge;¹ where he continued his studies with great intensesness; for he is said to have written, while he was yet a young student, the greater part of his *Davideis*; a work of which the materials could not have been collected without the study of many years, but by a mind of the greatest vigour and activity.

Two years after his settlement at Cambridge he published "Love's Riddle,"² with a poetical dedication to Sir Kenelm Digby;³ of whose acquaintance all his contempo-

¹ Cowley came from Westminster, but not as a scholar. In the Conclusion Book we find: "Junii 14, 1637, Cowley chosen and admitted scholler by the King's letters dispensatory." He matriculated as a pensioner of Trinity College, July 7, 1636; took his B.A. as Eleventh Wrangler, 1639-40; M.A. 1643. He was elected Fellow of Trinity in 1640, and held his fellowship till death. The vacancy caused by his death was filled up when Sir Isaac Newton was elected fellow.

² *Love's Riddle, A Pastorall Comedie, written at the time of his being King's scholler in Westminster Schoole*, by A. Cowley. London. 12mo. 1638.

³ Sir Kenelm Digby (1603-1665), author, naval commander, and diplomatist; son of the Sir Everard Digby who was executed for his share in the Gunpowder Plot. He commanded a squadron against the Venetians in 1628. He was Chancellor to Queen Henrietta Maria, and was one of the Council of the Royal Society when first incorporated. He "wrangled" with Hobbes, was intimate with Descartes, the friend of Ben Jonson, and altogether one of the foremost men of his time.

raries seem to have been ambitious; and "Naufragium Joculare,"¹ a comedy written in Latin, but without due attention to the ancient models: for it is not loose verse, but mere prose. It was printed, with a dedication in verse to Dr. Comber,² master of the college; but having neither the facility of a popular nor the accuracy of a learned work, it seems to be now universally neglected.

At the beginning of the civil war, as the Prince³ passed through Cambridge in his way to York, he was entertained with the representation of the "Guardian," a comedy, which Cowley says was neither written nor acted, but rough-drawn by him, and repeated by the scholars. That this comedy was printed⁴ during his absence from his country, he appears to have considered as injurious to his reputation; though, during the suppression of the theatres, it was sometimes privately acted with sufficient approbation.

In 1643, being now master of arts, he was, by the prevalence of the parliament, ejected from Cambridge,⁵ and sheltered himself at St. John's College in Oxford; where, as is said by Wood,⁶ he published a satire called "The Puritan and Papist," which was only inserted in the last

¹ *Naufragium jocularis, Comoedia.* Lond. 1638. 8vo.

² Thomas Comber, D.D. (1575-1654), Dean of Carlisle, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and twice Vice-Chancellor. He was ejected from all his preferments, and imprisoned for sending the University Plate to the King, and refusing the Covenant. For an account of the Cambridge University at this time, see Whewell's *Barrow and his Academical Times*, in Barrow's Works, vol. ix. pp. 1-55, ed. Napier.

³ Prince Charles, afterwards Charles II. passed through Cambridge in 1641.

⁴ In 1650.

⁵ See Cowley's beautiful poem, *A Dedicatory Elegy to the Most Illustrious University of Cambridge*, translated by the Rev. R. Wilton, in Grosart's *Chertsey Worthies' Library*, part 295, p. xix.

⁶ *Fasti Oxonienses*, part ii. vol. iv. p. 209.

collection of his works; ¹ and so distinguished himself by the warmth of his loyalty, and the elegance of his conversation, that he gained the kindness and confidence of those who attended the King, and amongst others of Lord Falkland, whose notice cast a lustre on all to whom it was extended.

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

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

This obligation to amorous ditties owes, I believe, its original to the fame of Petrarch, who, in an age rude and uncultivated, by his tuneful homage to his Laura, refined the manners of the lettered world, and filled Europe with love and poetry. But the basis of all excellence is truth: he that professes love ought to feel its power. Petrarch

¹ The Collection, that is, for which these Lives were written. Boswell, writing in April, 1777, inquires: "Pray tell me about this edition of 'English Poets, with a Preface, biographical and critical, to each Author, by Samuel Johnson, D.D.' which I see advertised." And in May of the same year, Johnson replies: "I am engaged to write little Lives, and little Prefaces, to a little edition of English Poets." For details of the work which began so modestly, and expanded so liberally, see Boswell's *Johnson*, vol. iii. pp. 142-145, 169, 382; vol. iv. pp. 1-60.

was a real lover, and Laura doubtless deserved his tenderness. Of Cowley, we are told by Barnes,¹ who had means enough of information, that, whatever he may talk of his own inflammability, and the variety of characters by which his heart was divided, he in reality was in love but once, and then never had resolution to tell his passion.

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

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

· V. Barnesii Anacreontem.—JOHNSON.

At Paris, as secretary to Lord Jermin,¹ he was engaged in transacting things of real importance with real men and real women, and at that time did not much employ his thoughts upon phantoms of gallantry. Some of his letters to Mr. Bennet, afterwards Earl of Arlington,² from April to December in 1650, are preserved in "Miscellanea Au-lica," a collection of papers published by Brown.³ These letters, being written like those of other men whose mind is more on things than words, contribute no otherwise to his reputation than as they shew him to have been above the affectation of unseasonable elegance, and to have known that the business of a statesman can be little forwarded by flowers of rhetorick.

One passage, however, seems not unworthy of some notice. Speaking of the Scotch treaty⁴ then in agitation:

"The Scotch treaty," says he, "is the only thing now in which we are vitally concerned; I am one of the last hopers, and yet cannot now abstain from believing, that an agreement will be made: all people upon the place incline to that of union.⁵ The Scotch will moderate something of the rigour of their demands; the mutual necessity of an accord is visible, the King is persuaded of it. And to

¹ Wood states that Cowley was introduced to the notice of Lord Jermyn by Dr. Stephen Goffe, a Brother of the Oratory (*Fasti Oxonienses*, part ii. vol. iv. p. 210); but as the mother of the Mr. Hervey, whose elegy he wrote, was related to Lord Jermyn, Sprat's opinion, that the introduction came through the Herveys, seems most probable.

² A member of the Cabal ministry, born 1618, died 1685.

³ In 1702. These letters, fourteen in number, are reproduced in Grosart's *Chertsey Worthies' Library*, part 305 (Cowley, part 47), p. 345. The last is dated "Paris, September, 1653."

⁴ This was the treaty signed by Charles, May 13th, 1650, when the Royalists were desirous that he should go in person to Scotland. By it he promised to sign the solemn league and covenant, to govern in civil matters by the advice of the parliament, and in religious affairs by that of the Kirk.

⁵ A misprint; Cowley wrote not "of union," but "opinion."

tell you the truth (which I take to be an argument above all the rest), Virgil has told the same¹ thing to that purpose."

This expression from a secretary of the present time would be considered as merely ludicrous, or at most as an ostentatious display of scholarship; but the manners of that time were so tinged with superstition, that I cannot but suspect Cowley of having consulted on this great occasion the Virgilian lots,² and to have given some credit to the answer of his oracle.

¹ A misprint; Cowley wrote not "*the same*," but "*me some*."

² "Wee proceeded to mention the King's (Charles I.) readinesse in foretelling events, and from this to his Sors Virgiliana, which hapned at Oxford in the time of the late war, and whilst the parliament sate there; viz. that his majesty being tired out with businesse and afflictions, resolv'd to recreate himselfe with some young noblemen who were students there, by pricking in Virgile for his fortune, which he did, and lighted upon Dido's curse to Æneas when hee left her—

' At bello audacis populi vexatus et armis,
Finibus extorris, complexu avulsus Iuli,
Auxilium imploret, videatque indigna suorum
Funera; nec, cum se sub leges pacis iniquæ
Tradiderit, regno aut optata luce fruatur:
Sed cadat ante diem, mediaque inhumatus arena.'

Æneid, v. 615-20.

Whereat his majesty seem'd much concern'd, but sent it by Mr. German, now Earle of St. Alban's, to Mr. Cowley, then student of Christechurche, to translate them into English, with a command not to acquaint him whose Sors it was, which Mr. Cowley did thus:

By a bold people's stubborn arms opprest,
Forc'd to forsake the land which he possest,
Torn from his dearest son, let him in vain
Seek help, and see his friends unjustly slain,
Let him to bold unequall terms submitt,
In hopes to save his crown, yet loose both it
And life at once; untimely let him dye,
And on an open stage unburyed lye."

Diary of Dr. Edward Lake, Jan. 29, 1677-8.

"The known story" of Mr. Cowley, and the Sortes Virgilianæ, is

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

Soon after his return to London, he was seized by some messengers of the usurping powers, who were sent out in quest of another man; and, being examined, was put into confinement, from which he was not dismissed without the security of a thousand pounds given by Dr. Scarborough.¹

This year² he published his poems, with a preface, in which he seems to have inserted something,³ suppressed in subsequent editions, which was interpreted to denote some relaxation of his loyalty. In this preface he declares, that "his desire had been for some days past, and did still very vehemently continue, to retire himself to some of the American plantations,⁴ and to forsake this world for ever."

alluded to by Dr. Knightly Chetwood in his *Life of Virgil*, prefixed to Dryden's translation, and commonly, but erroneously, attributed to Walsh.—*P. Cunningham.*

¹ Scarborough, afterwards Sir Charles, physician and mathematician, 1616-1696. His anatomical lectures were highly celebrated. He was the author of various mathematical works, and an *Elegy on Cowley*.

² 1656.

³ The suppressed page is given in Grosart's *Introduction to Cowley's Works*, part 295, C. W. L. p. xvii.

⁴ A similar desire to escape from the known evils of the Old World to unknown happiness in the New led to the establishment of many of the Colonies or Plantations, as they were then styled. When Parliament met in Jan. 1620-21, the "decay of money" was greatly deplored. It was remarked that Spain, which had been a fountain of treasure, was now dried up, and a proposal was made to divert this unprofitable current by causing it to flow from Virginia and the Somers Isles. Urged by liberal

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

He then took upon himself the character of Physician, still, according to Sprat, with intention "to dissemble the main design of his coming over," and as Mr. Wood¹ relates, "complying with the men then in power (which was much taken notice of by the royal party), he obtained an order to be created Doctor of Physick, which being done to his mind (whereby he gained the ill-will of some of his friends), he went into France again, having made a copy of verses on Oliver's death."

This is no favourable representation, yet even in this not much wrong can be discovered. How far he complied with the men in power, is to be enquired before he can be blamed. It is not said that he told them any secrets, or assisted them by intelligence, or any other act. If he only promised to be quiet, that they in whose hands he was

encouragement, 3,500 persons left their homes in 1621-22 for Virginia. Later on, in the reign of George II. Georgia was colonized, principally for the relief of imprisoned debtors in England. For an account of the establishment of the different colonies, see Chalmers's Introduction to the *History of the Revolt of the Colonies*, Lond. 1780, reprinted Boston, 1845, and Lucas's *Charters of Old English Colonies*.

¹ *Fasti Oxonienses*, part ii. vol. iv. p. 210.

might free him from confinement, he did what no law of society prohibits.

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

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

“He continued,” says his biographer,¹ “under these bonds till the general deliverance;” it is therefore to be supposed, that he did not go to France, and act again for the King, without the consent of his bondsman; that he did not shew his loyalty at the hazard of his friend, but by his friend’s permission.

Of the verses on Oliver’s death, in which Wood’s narrative² seems to imply something encomiastick, there has been no appearance. There is a discourse concerning his government, indeed, with verses intermixed, but such as certainly gained its author no friends among the abettors of usurpation.

¹ Sprat’s expression is, “the general Redemption.”—Cowley’s Works, Lond. Tonson, 1707, i. ix.

² *Fasti Oxonienses*, part ii. vol. iv. p. 210.

A doctor of physick however he was made at Oxford, in December 1657; and in the commencement of the Royal Society, of which an account has been published by Dr. Birch,¹ he appears busy among the experimental philosophers with the title of Doctor Cowley.

There is no reason for supposing that he ever attempted practice; but his preparatory studies have contributed something to the honour of his country. Considering Botany as necessary to a physician, he retired into Kent to gather plants; and as the predominance of a favourite study affects all subordinate operations of the intellect, Botany in the mind of Cowley turned into poetry. He composed in Latin several books on Plants,² of which the first and second display the qualities of Herbs, in elegiac verse; the third and fourth the beauties of Flowers in various measures; and in the fifth and sixth, the uses of Trees in heroick numbers.

At the same time were produced from the same university, the two great Poets, Cowley and Milton,³ of dissimilar genius, of opposite principles; but concurring in the cultivation of Latin poetry, in which the English, till their works and May's poem appeared,⁴ seemed unable to contest the palm with any other of the lettered nations.

¹ Birch, Thomas, D.D. (1705-1766), historian and biographer, fellow and secretary of the Royal Society. He bequeathed his very numerous and valuable books and MSS. to the British Museum. Johnson said of him: "Tom Birch is as brisk as a bee in conversation; but no sooner does he take a pen in his hand, than it becomes a torpedo to him, and benumbs all his faculties."—Boswell's *Johnson*, vol. i. p. 116.

² Cowley's Works, vol. iii. pp. 241-495.

³ Milton took his M.A. degree in 1632, Cowley in 1643.

⁴ *Supplementum Lucani*, 1640. This was a translation into Latin of *A Continuation of Lucan's Historical Poem till the Death of Julius Cæsar*, in seven books, pub. 1630, by Thomas May. See Hallam's praise of this poem, *Lit. Eur.* iii. 54, and of May's *Hist. of the Parliament*, as "a good model of genuine English." *Ibid.* p. 151.

If the Latin performances of Cowley and Milton¹ be compared, for May I hold to be superior to both, the advantage seems to lie on the side of Cowley. Milton is generally content to express the thoughts of the ancients in their language; Cowley, without much loss of purity or elegance, accommodates the diction of Rome to his own conceptions.

At the Restoration, after all the diligence of his long service, and with consciousness not only of the merit of fidelity, but of the dignity of great abilities, he naturally expected ample preferments; and, that he might not be forgotten by his own fault, wrote a Song of Triumph. But this was a time of such general hope, that great numbers were inevitably disappointed; and Cowley found his reward very tediously delayed. He had been promised by both Charles the first and second the Mastership of the Savoy;² but "he lost it," says Wood,³ "by certain persons, enemies to the Muses."

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

¹ See Hallam, *Lit. Eur.* iii. 33, on Milton's Latin Poems.

² The Savoy, of which nothing now remains but the Chapel, was, in 1246, the town house of Count Peter of Savoy, uncle by marriage to Henry III. About 1351 it became the headquarters, so to speak, of the Duchy Palatine of Lancaster. Here, in 1357, the captive French king was lodged by Edward III. Here John of Gaunt kept a kind of royal court, and here was signed and dated the grant of Chaucer's annuity. In the insurrection of 1381 the Palace was destroyed; and, on the duke's death in 1399, the manor was annexed to the Crown by Henry VII. who in his will provided for the building on it of a hospital for the poor. This institution seems to have resembled a monastery, and was provided with a master, chaplains, and brethren. The new buildings were magnificent, forming one of the sights of London; and the mastership was a much-coveted post. But in 1661 the buildings were partially destroyed by fire, and the hospital gradually deteriorated, till in 1702 it was formally dissolved. See Loftie's *Memorials of the Savoy*, 12mo, 1878.

³ *Fasti Oxonienses*, part ii. vol. iv. p. 210.

old Comedy of "The Guardian"¹ for the stage, he produced it² to the publick under the title of "The Cutter of Coleman-street."³ It was treated on the stage with great severity, and was afterwards censured as a satire on the king's party.

Mr. Dryden, who went with Mr. Sprat to the first exhibition, related to Mr. Dennis,⁴ "that when they told Cowley how little favour had been shewn him, he received the news of his ill success, not with so much firmness as might have been expected from so great a man."

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

For the rejection of this play, it is difficult now to find the reason: it certainly has, in a very great degree, the power of fixing attention and exciting merriment. From the charge of disaffection he exculpates himself in his preface,⁵ by observing how unlikely it is that, having fol-

¹ *The Guardian, a Comedie.* Lond. 1650. 4to.

² "Dec. 16th, 1661. After dinner to the Opera, where there was a new play (*Cutter of Coleman Street*), made in the year 1658, with reflections upon the late times; and it being the first time, the pay was doubled, and so to save money, my wife and I went into the gallery, and there sat and saw very well; and a very good play it is—it seems of Cowley's making."—*Pepys's Diary*, ed. Ld. Braybrooke, 1848, vol. i. p. 305.

³ *Cutter of Coleman Street, a Comedy.* Lond. 1663.

⁴ Mr. P. Cunningham gives a reference here to *Letters to and from Dryden*, &c. ed. John Dennis, 12mo, 1696. But the quotation is not to be found in that volume, which contains only one letter from Dryden.

⁵ *Works*, vol. ii. p. 795. Cowley uses the word "restitution" where Johnson gives "restoration."

lowed the royal family through all their distresses, "he should chuse the time of their restoration to begin a quarrel with them." It appears, however, from the "Theatrical Register" of Downes¹ the prompter, to have been popularly considered as a satire on the Royalists.

That he might shorten this tedious suspense, he published his pretensions and his discontent, in an ode called "The Complaint;" in which he styles himself the *melancholy* Cowley.² This met with the usual fortune of complaints, and seems to have excited more contempt than pity.

These unlucky incidents are brought, maliciously enough, together in some stanzas, written about that time, on the choice of a laureat; a mode of satire, by which, since it was first introduced by Suckling,³ perhaps every generation of poets has been teased:

"Savoy-missing Cowley came into the court,
 Making apologies for his bad play;
 Every one gave him so good a report,
 That Apollo gave heed to all he could say;
 Nor would he have had, 'tis thought a rebuke,
 Unless he had done some notable folly;
 Writ verses⁴ unjustly in praise of Sam Tuke,⁵
 Or printed his pitiful Melancholy."⁶

His vehement desire of retirement now came again upon him. "Not finding," says the morose Wood,⁷ "that pre-

¹ "This comedy being acted so perfectly well and exact, it was performed a whole week with a full audience. *Note.* This play was not a little injurious to the Cavalier indigent officers, especially the characters of Cutter and Worm."—Downes's *Roscius Anglicanus*, 1708, p. 25.

² *The Complaint.* Works, vol. ii. p. 584.

³ *A Session of the Poets*, vol. i. p. 7, of Poems, Plays, &c. of Sir John Suckling, 1874, ed. by W. C. Hazlitt; Life, by Rev. A. Suckling prefixed.

⁴ Cowley's Works, vol. ii. p. 190.

⁵ Author of *The Adventures of Five Hours, a tragi-comedy*, Lond. 1663, 4to.

⁶ *The Complaint.* Cowley's Works, vol. ii. p. 584.

⁷ *Fasti Oxonienses*, part ii. vol. iv. p. 210.

ferment conferred upon him which he expected, while others for their money carried away most places, he retired discontented into Surrey."

"He was now," says the courtly Sprat,¹ "weary of the vexations and formalities of an active condition. He had been perplexed with a long compliance to foreign manners. He was satiated with the arts of a court; which sort of life, though his virtue made it innocent to him, yet nothing could make it quiet. Those were the reasons that moved him to follow the violent inclination of his own mind, which, in the greatest throng of his former business, had still called upon him, and represented to him the true delights of solitary studies, of temperate pleasures, and a moderate revenue below the malice and flatteries of fortune."

So differently are things seen, and so differently are they shown; but actions are visible, though motives are secret. Cowley certainly retired; first to Barn-elms, and afterwards to Chertsey,² in Surrey. He seems, however, to have lost part of his dread of the *hum of men*.³ He thought himself now safe enough from intrusion, without the defence of mountains and oceans; and, instead of seeking shelter in America, wisely went only so far from the bustle of life as that he might easily find his way back, when solitude should grow tedious. His retreat was at first but slenderly accommodated; yet he soon obtained, by the interest of the Earl of St. Albans and the duke of Buckingham, such a lease of the Queen's lands as afforded him an ample income.

By the lover of virtue and of wit it will be solicitously

¹ Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. xiii.

² The house, which is still called by his name, stands on the west side of Guildford Street, near the railway station. The porch, from which it was originally named, was pulled down in 1786 by Mr. Clark, "for the safety and accommodation of the public," as it projected ten feet into the highway.—Thorne's *Environs of London*.

³ *L'Allegro* of Milton.—JOHNSON.

asked, if he now was happy. Let him peruse one of his letters accidentally preserved by Peck,¹ which I recommend to the consideration of all that may hereafter pant for solitude.²

“TO DR. THOMAS SPRAT.

“Chertsey, 21 May, 1665.

“The first night that I came hither I caught so great a cold, with a defluxion of rheum, as made me keep my chamber ten days. And, two after, had such a bruise on my ribs with a fall, that I am yet unable to move or turn myself in my bed. This is my personal fortune here to begin with. And, besides, I can get no money from my tenants, and have my meadows eaten up every night by cattle put in by my neighbours. What this signifies, or may come to in time, God knows; if it be ominous, it can end in nothing less than hanging. Another misfortune has been, and stranger than all the rest, that you have broke your word with me, and failed to come, even though you told Mr. Bois that you would. This is what they call *Monstri simile*. I do hope to recover my late hurt so farre within five or six days (though it be uncertain yet whether I shall ever recover it) as to walk about again. And then, methinks, you and I and *the Dean* might be very merry upon S. Anne's Hill. You might very conveniently come hither the way of Hampton Town, lying there one night. I write this in pain, and can say no more: *Verbum sapienti.*”

He did not long enjoy the pleasure or suffer the uneasiness of solitude; for he died³ at the Porch-

¹ In the Appendix to *Memoirs of the Life and Actions of Oliver Cromwell*, by Francis Peck, 1740, p. 81.

² See Cowley's Essay, *The Dangers of an Honest Man in much Company*, No. VIII. vol. ii. p. 762; Johnson, *Idler*, No. 71, and *Rambler*, No. 6.

³ “August 10th, 1667. Cowley, he tells me, is dead: who it seems, was a mighty civil, serious man, which I did not know before”—Pepys's *Diary*, vol. i. p. 153. Lord Braybrooke remarks on this as a striking instance of the slow communication of intelligence, that Pepys could remain ignorant for a fortnight (Cowley died July 28th) of the death of so

house¹ in Chertsey in 1667, in the 49th year of his age.

He was buried with great pomp near Chaucer and Spenser;² and king Charles pronounced, "That Mr. Cowley had not left a better man behind him in England."³ He is represented by Dr. Sprat⁴ as the most amiable of mankind; and this posthumous praise may be safely credited, as it has never been contradicted by envy or by faction.

Such are the remarks and memorials which I have been able to add to the narrative of Dr. Sprat; who, writing when the feuds of the civil war were yet recent, and the minds of either party easily irritated, was obliged to pass eminent a man, though he was buried in Westminster Abbey with every mark of respect.

¹ Now in the possession of Mr. Clarke, Alderman of London.—
JOHNSON.

Richard Clarke (1739-1831). He was elected Chamberlain of London on the death of Wilkes, and held that post for thirty-three years. Introduced to Johnson by Hawkins, he frequently attended his suppers at the Mitre Tavern, and was proposed by Johnson himself as a member of the Essex Head Club. See a letter from Johnson to Clarke in Boswell's Johnson, vol. iv. p. 186. The crayon portrait of Cowley in the master's lodge at Trinity was presented by him in 1824.

² Cowley's monument was erected in 1675 by Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, with whom he had been at Trinity, and to whom Cowley was "best man" at his marriage with Mary Fairfax (immortalized by Marvell), at Bolton Percy Church, Sept. 15th, 1657.

³ We have several authentic portraits of Cowley. The original of Faithorne's engraving is in the Bodleian Gallery; that which belonged to Clarendon is at Bothwell Castle; Lely's, formerly at Drayton Manor, is now in the Peel Collection in the National Gallery. A crayon drawing of him is in the master's lodge at Trinity College, Cambridge, which was presented by Richard Clarke, Esq. Chamberlain of the City of London in 1824, and of this a facsimile is given by Grosart. There is also a full-length portrait in the hall of Trinity College.

⁴ In his epitaph on Cowley, which Johnson mentions in his *Essay on Epitaphs*, published in the Gentleman's Magazine, in 1740, "as always reading," on account of the style, "with indignation or contempt." See Works, ed. Murphy, 1810, vol. ii. p. 330.

over many transactions in general expressions, and to leave curiosity often unsatisfied. What he did not tell, cannot however now be known.¹ I must therefore recommend the perusal of his work, to which my narration can be considered only as a slender supplement.

Cowley,² like other poets who have written with narrow views, and, instead of tracing intellectual pleasure to its natural sources in the mind of man, paid their court to temporary prejudices, has been at one time too much praised, and too much neglected at another.

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

The metaphysical poets³ were men of learning, and to

¹ See Appendix A. for Cowley's will, first printed by Mr. Cunningham in the Shakespeare Society's Papers.

² See Boswell on Johnson's *Life of Cowley* and the Metaphysical Poets, vol. iv. p. 4.

³ Professor Masson's remarks on the Metaphysical Poets are too important to be omitted here. After stating that, "collectively they might be described as *the Poets of Metrical Exposition and Metrical Intellection*," he proceeds: "It was mainly for poets practising this process of metrical intellection, though with some inclusion, also, of poets of metrical exposition, that Dr. Johnson invented or adopted from Dryden, the designation, METAPHYSICAL POETS. That, however, was a singularly unhappy choice of a name, vitiating as it did the true and specific meaning of the word 'metaphysical,' and pandering to the vulgar Georgian use of the word, which made it an adjective for anything that seemed hard, abstract, or bewildering."—Masson's *Life of Milton*, vol. i. p. 484, ed. 1881. And the learned Professor elsewhere adds:—"The proper sense of *Metaphysical* is simply supernatural, as in Shakespeare's phrase, 'Fate and metaphysical aid,' and *Metaphysics* as a science, though it is certainly abstract and abstruse, is properly that variety of abstruse and abstract

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

If the father of criticism has rightly denominated poetry *τέχνη μιμητική*,¹ an imitative art, these writers will, without great wrong, lose their right to the name of poets; for they cannot be said to have imitated any thing; they neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter, nor represented the operations of intellect.

Those however who deny them to be poets, allow them to be wits. Dryden² confesses of himself and his contemporaries, that they fall below Donne in wit, but maintains that they surpass him in poetry.

If Wit be well described by Pope,³ as being, "that which has been often thought, but was never before so well expressed," they certainly never attained, nor ever sought it;

science which deals with the relations of the human mind to the supernatural, or with the ultimate validity of all man's highest beliefs and conceptions. Actually, *the Physical Poets* would, in some respects, have been a fitter name for the poets in question, than the one chosen,—one characteristic of those poets, especially of Donne, being their habit of expressing spiritual and philosophical meanings by forced physical images and analogies."

¹ Johnson probably does not here mean to imply that he was giving the *ipsissima verba* of the Aristotelian definition, for Aristotle does not actually use this term: his usual expression is that poetry is a *μίμησις*, but he also describes it as an *art*; so that it would not be incorrect to term it an "imitative art."

² Essay on Satire, prefixed to Dryden's translations of Juvenal.—Saintsbury's Scott's Dryden, 1882, vol. xiii. p. 6.

³ Essay on Criticism—

"True wit is nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;"

Pope's Works, Ald. ed. vol. ii. p. 14.

for they endeavoured to be singular in their thoughts, and were careless of their diction. But Pope's account of wit is undoubtedly erroneous: he depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language.

If by a more noble and more adequate conception that be considered as Wit, which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just; ¹ if it be that, which he that never found it, wonders how he missed; to wit of this kind the metaphysical poets have seldom risen. Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were ever found.

But Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by

¹ Barrow's discourse on Wit is known to all; a fine extract from it is to be found, vol. iv. p. 58, of Boswell's Johnson. It may be interesting to compare with this a passage from Sydney Smith's Lecture on Wit and Humour: "But when wit is combined with sense and information; when it is softened by benevolence, and restrained by principle; when it is in the hands of a man who can use it and despise it; who can be witty, and something more than witty; who loves honour, justice, decency, good nature, morality, and religion ten thousand times better than wit, wit is then a beautiful and delightful part of our nature. Genuine and innocent wit like this is surely the flavour of the mind. Man could direct his ways by plain reason, and support his life by tasteless food; but God has given us wit, and flavour, and brightness, and laughter, and perfumes, to enliven the days of our pilgrimage, and to charm our pained steps over the burning marle."—*Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith*, by his daughter, Lady Holland, vol. i. p. 40.

violence together ; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions ; their learning instructs, and their subtilty surprises ; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.

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

Nor was the sublime more within their reach than the pathetick ; for they never attempted that comprehension and expanse of thought which at once fills the whole mind, and of which the first effect is sudden astonishment, and the second rational admiration. Sublimity is produced by aggregation, and littleness by dispersion. Great thoughts are always general, and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness. It is with great propriety that Subtlety, which in its original import means exility of particles, is taken in its metaphorical meaning for nicety of distinction. Those writers who lay on the watch for novelty could have little hope of greatness ; for great things cannot have escaped former observation. Their attempts were always analytick ; they broke every image into fragments : and could no

more represent, by their slender conceits and laboured particularities, the prospects of nature, or the scenes of life, than he, who dissects a sun-beam with a prism, can exhibit the wide effulgence of a summer noon.

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

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

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

This kind of writing, which was, I believe, borrowed from Marina¹ and his followers, had been recommended by the example of Donne, a man of very extensive and various knowledge; and by Jonson, whose manner resembled that of Donne more in the ruggedness of his lines than in the cast of his sentiments.

When their reputation was high, they had undoubtedly more imitators, than time has left behind. Their immediate successors, of whom any remembrance can be said to remain, were Suckling, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Cleiveland, and Milton. Denham and Waller sought another way to fame, by improving the harmony of our numbers. Milton tried the metaphysick style only in his lines upon Hobson the Carrier.² Cowley adopted it, and excelled his predecessors, having as much sentiment, and more musick. Suckling neither improved versification, nor abounded in conceits. The fashionable style remained chiefly with Cowley; Suckling could not reach it, and Milton disdained it.

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

As the authors of this race were perhaps more desirous of being admired than understood, they sometimes drew their conceits from recesses of learning not very much frequented by common readers of poetry. Thus Cowley on "Knowledge":³

¹ Marini, G. B. a once celebrated Italian poet (1569-1625). His *Adone* (1623) was one of the most popular poems in the Italian language, little less so than the *Aminta* of Tasso, and the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini. For an account of Marini and of his *Adone*, the longest poem in the world, see Hallam's *Lit. Europe*, vol. iii. pp. 4-7.

² Ald. Milton, vol. iii. p. 188.

³ Poems, vol. i. p. 41.

“The sacred tree midst the fair orchard grew ;
 The phœnix Truth did on it rest,
 And built his perfum'd nest,
 That right Porphyrian tree which did true logick shew.
 Each leaf did learned notions give,
 And th' apples were demonstrative :
 So clear their colour and divine,
 The very shade they cast did other lights outshine.”

On Anacreon continuing a lover in his old age :

“Love was with thy life entwin'd,
 Close as heat with fire is join'd,
 A powerful brand prescrib'd the date
 Of thine, like Meleager's fate.
 Th' antiperistasis of age
 More enflam'd thy amorous rage.”¹

In the following verses we have an allusion to a Rabbinical opinion concerning Manna :

“Variety I ask not : give me one
 To live perpetually upon.
 The person Love does to us fit,
 Like manna, has the taste of all in it.”²

Thus *Donne* shews his medicinal knowledge in some encomiastic verses :

“In every thing there naturally grows
 A Balsamum to keep it fresh and new,
 If 'twere not injur'd by extrinsique blows ;
 Your youth and beauty are this balm in you.
 But you, of learning and religion,
 And virtue and such ingredients, have made
 A mithridate, whose operation
 Keeps off, or cures what can be done or said.”³

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

¹ Poems, p. 59.

² *Ibid.* p. 106.

³ *Donne's Poems*, p. 137.

“ This twilight of two years, not past nor next,
 Some emblem is of me, or I of this,
 Who, meteor-like, of stuff and form perplext,
 Whose what and where, in disputation is,
 If I should call me any thing, should miss.

“ I sum the years and me, and find me not
 Debtor to th' old, nor creditor to th' new,
 That cannot say, my thanks I have forgot,
 Nor trust I this with hopes ; and yet scarce true
 This bravery is, since these times shew'd me you.”

DONNE.¹

Yet more abstruse and profound is *Donne's* reflection upon Man as a Microcosm :

“ If men be worlds, there is in every one
 Something to answer in some proportion
 All the world's riches : and in good men, this
 Virtue, our form's form, and our soul's soul is.”²

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

To a lady, who wrote poesies for rings.

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

COWLEY.³

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

“ Five years ago (says story) I lov'd you,
 For which you call me most inconstant now ;

¹ Donne's Poems, p. 144.

² *Ibid.* p. 154.

³ Poems, vol. i. p. 21.

Pardon me, madam, you mistake the man ;
 For I am not the same that I was then ;
 No flesh is now the same 'twas then in me,
 And that my mind is chang'd yourself may see.

“ The same thoughts to retain still, and intents,
 Were more inconstant far ; for accidents
 Must of all things most strangely inconstant prove,
 If from one subject they t'another move :
 My members then, the father members were
 From whence these take their birth, which now are here.
 If then this body love what th' other did,
 'Twere incest, which by nature is forbid.”¹

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

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

COWLEY.²

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

“ The fate of Egypt I sustain,
 And never feel the dew of rain,
 From clouds which in the head appear ;
 But all my too much moisture owe
 To overflowings of the heart below.”

COWLEY.³

¹ Poems, vol. i. p. 76.

² *The Mistress*, vol. i. p. 116.

³ *Ibid.* p. 130.

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

“ And yet this death of mine, I fear,
Will ominous to her appear :
When found in every other part,
Her sacrifice is found without an heart.
For the last tempest of my death
Shall sigh out that too, with my breath.”¹

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

“ Th’ ungovern’d parts no correspondence knew,
An artless war from thwarting motions grew ;
Till they to number and fixt rules were brought.
Water and air he for the Tenor chose,
Earth made the Base, the Treble flame arose.”
COWLEY.²

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

“ On a round ball
A workman, that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, all.
So doth each tear,
Which thee doth wear,
A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,
Till thy tears mixt with mine do overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee my heaven dissolved so.”³

¹ *The Mistress*, vol. i. p. 136.

² *Davidis*, book i. vol. i. p. 306. One line—

“ By the eternal Mind’s Poetic thought,”

is omitted from the middle of this quotation, after “*brought.*”

³ Donne’s Poems, p. 17.

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

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

DONNE.¹

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

“ Though God be our true glass, through which we see
 All, since the being of all things is he,
 Yet are the trunks, which do to us derive
 Things, in proportion fit, by perspective
 Deeds of good men; for by their living here,
 Virtues, indeed remote, seem to be near.”²

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

“ Since 'tis my doom, Love's undershrieve,
 Why this reprieve?
 Why doth my She Advowson fly
 Incumbency?
 To sell thyself dost thou intend
 By candle's end,
 And hold the contrast thus in doubt,
 Life's taper out?
 Think but how soon the market fails,
 Your sex lives faster than the males;
 As if to measure age's span,
 The sober Julian were th' account of man,
 Whilst you live by the fleet Gregorian.”

CLEIVELAND.³

Of enormous and disgusting hyberboles, these may be examples:—

¹ Donne's Poems, p. 94.

² *Ibid.* p. 216.

³ Cleiveland's Poems, ed. 1687, p. 6.

“By every wind, that comes this way,
Send me at least a sigh or two,
Such and so many I'll repay
As shall themselves make winds to get to you.”
COWLEY.¹

“In tears I'll waste these eyes,
By Love so vainly fed;
So lust of old the Deluge punished.”
COWLEY.²

“All arm'd in brass the richest dress of war,
(A dismal glorious sight) he shone afar.
The sun himself started with sudden fright,
To see his beams return so dismal bright.”
COWLEY.³

An universal consternation :

“His bloody eyes he hurls round, his sharp paws
Tear up the ground; then runs he wild about,
Lashing his angry tail and roaring out.

“Beasts creep into their dens, and tremble there;
Trees, though no wind is stirring, shake with fear;
Silence and horror fill the place around:
Echo itself dares scarce repeat the sound.”
COWLEY.⁴

Their fictions were often violent and unnatural.

Of his Mistress bathing :

“The fish around her crouded, as they do
To the false light that treacherous fishers shew,
And all with as much ease might taken be,
As she at first took me:
For ne'er did light so clear
Among the waves appear,
Though every night the sun himself set there.”
COWLEY.⁵

¹ *On Friendship in Absence*, vol. i. p. 88.

² *Despair*, vol. i. p. 93.

³ *Davideis*, book iii. Cowley's Works, vol. ii. p. 408.

⁴ *Ibid.* book i. vol. i. p. 313.

⁵ *Ibid.* 176.

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

“ My name engrav'd herein
Doth contribute my firmness to this glass ;
Which, ever since that charm, hath been
As hard as that which grav'd it was.”

DONNE.¹

Their conceits were sometimes slight and trifling.

On an inconstant woman :

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

COWLEY.²

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

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

COWLEY.³

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

Physick and Chirurgery for a Lover.

“ Gently, ah gently, madam, touch
The wound, which you yourself have made ;
That pain must needs be very much,
Which makes me of your hand afraid.

¹ Donne's Poems, p. 17.

² *Ode in Imitation of Horace*, Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 31.

³ *The Mistress*, *ibid.* vol. i. p. 75.

Cordials of pity give me now,
For I too weak for purgings grow."

COWLEY.¹

The World and a Clock.

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

COWLEY.²

A coal-pit has not often found its poet ; but, that it may
not want its due honour, Cleiveland has paralleled it with
the Sun :³

"The moderate value of our guiltless ore
Makes no man atheist, and no woman whore ;
Yet why should hallow'd vestal's sacred shrine
Deserve more honour than a flaming mine ?
These pregnant wombs of heat would fitter be
Than a few embers, for a deity.

Had he our pits, the Persian would admire
No sun, but warm's devotion at our fire :
He'd leave the trotting whipster, and prefer
Our profound Vulcan 'bove that waggoner.
For wants he heat, or light ? or would have store
Of both ? 'tis here : and what can suns give more ?
Nay, what's the sun but, in a different name,
A coal-pit rampant, or a mine on flame !
Then let this truth reciprocally run,
The sun's heaven's coalery, and coals our sun."

Death, a Voyage :

"No family
Ere rigg'd a soul for heaven's discovery,

¹ *The Mistress*, Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 103.

² *Davideis*, book i. *ibid.* p. 316.

³ *Cleiveland*, Poems, p. 287.

With whom more venturers might boldly dare
 Venture their stakes, with him in joy to share."
 DONNE.¹

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

A Lover neither dead nor alive :

"Then down I laid my head,
 Down on cold earth ; and for a while was dead,
 And my freed soul to a strange somewhere fled :
 Ah, sottish soul, said I,
 When back to its cage again I saw it fly :
 Fool to resume her broken chain !
 And row her galley here again !
 Fool, to that body to return
 Where it condemn'd and destin'd is to burn !
 Once dead, how can it be,
 Death should a thing so pleasant seem to thee,
 That thou should'st come to live it o'er again in me ?"
 COWLEY.²

A Lover's heart, a hand grenado.

"Wo to her stubborn heart, if once mine come
 Into the self-same room,
 'Twill tear and blow up all within,
 Like a grenado shot into a magazin.
 Then shall Love keep the ashes, and torn parts,
 Of both our broken hearts :
 Shall out of both one new one make ;
 From her's th' allay ; from mine, the metal take."
 COWLEY.³

The poetical Propagation of Light :

"The Prince's favour is diffus'd o'er all,
 From which all fortunes, names, and natures fall ;

¹ Donne's Poems, p. 130.

² *The Mistress*, Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 94.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i. pp. 111-112.

Then from those wombs of stars, the Bride's bright eyes,
 At every glance a constellation flies,
 And sows the court with stars, and doth prevent
 In light and power, the all-ey'd firmament :
 First her eye kindles other ladies' eyes,
 Then from their beams their jewels lustres rise ;
 And from their jewels torches do take fire,
 And all is warmth, and light, and good desire."

DONNE.¹

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

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

"Thou in my fancy dost much higher stand,
 Than women can be plac'd by Nature's hand ;
 And I must needs, I'm sure, a loser be,
 To change thee, as thou'rt there, for very thee." ²

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

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

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

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

¹ Donne's Poems, p. 96.

² *The Mistress*, Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 109.

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

“ Think in how poor a prison thou didst lie ;
 After, enabled but to suck and cry.
 Think, when 'twas grown to most, 'twas a poor inn,
 A province pack'd up in two yards of skin,
 And that usurp'd, or threaten'd with a rage
 Of sicknesses, or their true mother, age.
 But think that death hath now enfranchis'd thee ;
 Thou hast thy expansion now, and liberty ;
 Think, that a rusty piece discharg'd is flown
 In pieces, and the bullet is his own,
 And freely flies ; this to thy soul allow,
 Think thy shell broke, think thy soul hatched but now.”¹

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

“ —Thou tyrant, which leav'st no man free !
 Thou subtle thief, from whom nought safe can be !
 Thou murderer, which hast kill'd, and devil, which would'st
 damn me.”²

Thus he addresses his Mistress :

“ Thou who, in many a propriety,
 So truly art the sun to me,
 Add one more likeness, which I'm sure you can,
 And let me and my sun beget a man.”³

Thus he represents the meditations of a Lover :

“ Though in thy thoughts scarce any tracts have been
 So much as of original sin,
 Such charms thy beauty wears as might
 Desires in dying confest saints excite.
 Thou with strange adultery
 Dost in each breast a brothel keep ;
 Awake, all men do lust for thee,
 And some enjoy thee when they sleep.”⁴

¹ Donne's Poems, p. 202.

² *The Mistress*, Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 133.

³ *Ibid.* p. 134.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 170.

The true taste of Tears :

“ Hither with crystal vials, lovers, come,
 And take my tears, which are Love’s wine,
 And try your mistress’ tears at home ;
 For all are false, that taste not just like mine.”
 DONNE.¹

This is yet more indelicate :

“ As the sweet sweat of roses in a still,
 As that which from chaf’d musk-cat’s pores doth trill,
 As the almighty balm of th’ early East,
 Such are the sweet drops of my mistress’ breast.
 And on her neck her skin such lustre sets,
 They seem no sweat-drops, but pearl coronets :
 Rank sweaty froth thy mistress’ brow defiles.”
 DONNE.²

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

“ As men in hell are from diseases free,
 So from all other ills am I,
 Free from their known formality :
 But all pains eminently lie in thee.”
 COWLEY.³

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

“ It gave a piteous groan, and so it broke ;
 In vain it something would have spoke :
 The love within too strong for ’t was,
 Like poison put into a Venice-glass.”
 COWLEY.⁴

¹ Donne’s Poems, p. 10.

² *Ibid.* p. 69.

³ *The Mistress*, Cowley’s Works, vol. i. p. 146.

⁴ “ *The heart breaking*,” *The Mistress*, vol. i. p. 145.

In forming descriptions, they looked out not for images, but for conceits. Night has been a common subject, which poets have contended to adorn. Dryden's Night¹ is well known; Donne's is as follows:

“Thou seest me here at midnight, now all rest:
Time's dead low-water; when all minds divest
To-morrow's business, when the labourers have
Such rest in bed, that their last church-yard grave,
Subject to change, will scarce be a type of this,
Now when the client, whose last hearing is
To-morrow, sleeps; when the condemned man,
Who when he opes his eyes, must shut them then
Again by death, although sad watch he keep,
Doth practise dying by a little sleep,
Thou at this midnight seest me.”²

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

“Hope, whose weak being ruin'd is,
Alike if it succeed, and if it miss;
Whom good or ill does equally confound,
And both the horns of Fate's dilemma wound.
Vain shadow, which dost vanish quite,
Both at full moon and perfect night!
The stars have not a possibility
Of blessing thee;
If things then from their end we happy call,
'Tis Hope is the most hopeless thing of all.
“Hope, thou bold taster of delight,
Who, whilst thou should'st but taste, devour'st it quite!

¹ *The Indian Emperor*, act iii. scene 2. S. S. D. vol. ii. p. 360.

² Donne's Poems, p. 215.

Thou bring'st us an estate, yet leav'st us poor,
 By clogging it with legacies before!
 The joys which we entire should wed,
 Come deflower'd virgins to our bed;
 Good fortunes without gain imported be,
 Such mighty custom's paid to thee:
 For joy, like wine, kept close does better taste;
 If it take air before, its spirits waste.¹

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

“Our two souls therefore, which are one,
 Though I must go, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
 As stiff twin-compasses are two,
 Thy soul the fixt foot, makes no show
 To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the centre sit,
 Yet when the other far doth roam,
 It leans, and hearkens after it,
 And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must
 Like th' other foot, obliquely run.
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,
 And makes me end where I begun.”

DONNE.²

In all these examples it is apparent, that whatever is improper or vicious, is produced by a voluntary deviation

¹ *The Mistress*, Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 122.

² Donne's Poems, p. 36.

from nature in pursuit of something new and strange; and that the writers fail to give delight, by their desire of exciting admiration.

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

His *Miscellanies*¹ contain a collection of short compositions, written some as they were dictated by a mind at leisure, and some as they were called forth by different occasions; with great variety of style and sentiment, from burlesque levity to awful grandeur. Such an assemblage of diversified excellence no other poet has hitherto afforded. To choose the best, among many good, is one of the most hazardous attempts of criticism. I know not whether Scaliger² himself has persuaded many readers to join with him in his preference of the two favourite odes, which he estimates in his raptures at the value of a kingdom. I will however venture to recommend Cowley's first piece, which ought to be inscribed *To my muse*, for want of which the second couplet is without reference. When the title is added, there will still remain a defect; for every piece ought to contain in itself whatever is necessary to make it intelligible. Pope has some epitaphs without names; which are therefore epitaphs to be let, occupied indeed for the present, but hardly appropriated.

The ode on Wit³ is almost without a rival. It was about the time of Cowley that *Wit*, which had been till

¹ Cowley's Works, vol. i. pp. 1-46.

² The Odes referred to are by Horace, book iv. Ode 3, p. 158 of Sir T. Martin's translation, and the Amœbean Ode, book iii. Ode 9, *ibid.* p. 118. Julius Scaliger said of these that he would rather have written them than be King of Aragon.

³ Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 3.

then used for *Intellection*, in contradistinction to *Will*, took the meaning, whatever it be, which it now bears.

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

“ Yet 'tis not to adorn and gild each part,
That shews more cost than art.
Jewels at nose and lips but ill appear ;
Rather than all things wit, let none be there.
Several lights will not be seen,
If there be nothing else between.
Men doubt, because they stand so thick i' th' sky,
If those be stars which paint the galaxy.”¹

In his verses to lord Falkland,² whom every man of his time was proud to praise, there are, as there must be in all Cowley's compositions, some striking thoughts ; but they are not well wrought. His elegy on Sir Henry Wotton³ is vigorous and happy, the series of thoughts is easy and natural, and the conclusion, though a little weakened by the intrusion of Alexander, is elegant and forcible.

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

In his poem on the death of Hervey,⁴ there is much praise, but little passion, a very just and ample delineation of such virtues as a studious privacy admits, and such intellectual excellence as a mind not yet called forth to action can display. He knew how to distinguish, and how to commend the qualities of his companion ; but when he

¹ Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 4.

² For his safe return from the Northern Expedition against the Scots, Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 6.

³ Elegy on Sir Henry Wotton. Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 7, see post, p. 65.

⁴ Mr. William Harvey. Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 25.

wishes to make us weep, he forgets to weep himself, and diverts his sorrow by imagining how his crown of bays, if he had it, would *crackle* in the *fire*.¹ It is the odd fate of this thought to be worse for being true. The bay-leaf crackles remarkably as it burns; as therefore this property was not assigned it by chance, the mind must be thought sufficiently at ease that could attend to such minuteness of physiology. But the power of Cowley is not so much to move the affections, as to exercise the understanding.

The "Chronicle"² is a composition unrivalled and alone: such gaiety of fancy, such facility of expression, such varied similitude, such a succession of images, and such a dance of words, it is vain to expect except from Cowley. His strength always appears in his agility; his volatility is not the flutter of a light, but the bound of an elastic mind. His levity never leaves his learning behind it; the moralist, the politician, and the critick, mingle their influence even in this airy frolick of genius. To such a performance Suckling could have brought the gaiety, but not the knowledge; Dryden could have supplied the knowledge, but not the gaiety.

The verses to Davenant,³ which are vigorously begun, and happily concluded, contain some hints of criticism very justly conceived and happily expressed. Cowley's critical abilities have not been sufficiently observed: the few decisions and remarks which his prefaces and his notes⁴ on the *Davideis* supply, were at that time accessions to English literature, and shew such skill as raises our wish for more examples.

¹ Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 27.

² *Ibid.* p. 34.

³ *To Sir William D'Avenant*, p. 37.

⁴ *The Davideis* in four books, with notes after each, *ibid.* vol. i. p. 287; vol. ii. p. 497.

The lines from Jersey¹ are a very curious and pleasing specimen of the familiar descending to the burlesque.

His two metrical disquisitions *for* and *against* Reason,² are no mean specimens of metaphysical poetry. The stanzas against knowledge produce little conviction. In those which are intended to exalt the human faculties, Reason has its proper task assigned it; that of judging, not of things revealed, but of the reality of revelation. In the verses *for* Reason is a passage which Bentley,³ in the only English verses which he is known to have written, seems to have copied, though with the inferiority of an imitator.

“The holy Book like the eighth sphere does shine
 With thousand lights of truth divine,
 So numberless the stars that to our eye
 It makes all but one galaxy :
 Yet Reason must assist too ; for in seas
 So vast and dangerous as these,
 Our course by stars above we cannot know
 Without the compass too below.”⁴

After this says Bentley :

“Who travels in religious jars,
 Truth mix'd with error, clouds with rays,
 With Whiston wanting pyx and stars,
 In the wide ocean sinks or strays.”⁵

¹ *An answer to a copy of verses sent me to Jersey, ibid.* vol. i. p. 39.

² *Ibid.* vol. i. pp. 41-44.

³ Dr. Richard Bentley (1662-1742). The famous scholar and critic. See *Tour to the Hebrides*, pp. 142, 235. The verse here quoted is from the *Parody on Titled's Imitation of Horace*, book iii. Ode ii. “Who strives to mount Parnassus' hill.” The whole poem is given in *Monk's Life of Bentley*, vol. ii. p. 174, and in *Boswell's Johnson*, vol. iii. p. 443.

⁴ Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 44.

⁵ Boswell's version is slightly different.

Cowley seems to have had, what Milton is believed to have wanted, the skill to rate his own performances by their just value, and has therefore closed his *Miscellanies* with the verses upon Crashaw,¹ which apparently excel all that have gone before them, and in which there are beauties which common authors may justly think not only above their attainment, but above their ambition.

To the *Miscellanies* succeed the "Anacreontiques,"² or paraphrastical translations of some little poems, which pass, however justly, under the name of "Anacreon." Of those songs dedicated to festivity and gaiety, in which even the morality is voluptuous, and which teach nothing but the enjoyment of the present day, he has given rather a pleasing than a faithful representation, having retained their spriteliness, but lost their simplicity. The "Anacreon" of Cowley, like the "Homer" of Pope, has admitted the decoration of some modern graces, by which he is undoubtedly made more amiable to common readers, and perhaps, if they would honestly declare their own perceptions, to far the greater part of those whom courtesy and ignorance are content to style the Learned.

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

Levity of thought naturally produced familiarity of language, and the familiar part of language continues long the same: the dialogue of comedy, when it is transcribed from popular manners and real life, is read from age to age with equal pleasure. The artifice of inversion, by

¹ *On the Death of Mr. Crashaw*, Cowley's Works, vol. i. p. 44.

² *Ibid.* p. 47.

which the established order of words is changed, or of innovation, by which new words or new meanings of words are introduced, is practised, not by those who talk to be understood, but by those who write to be admired.

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

The next class of his poems is called "The Mistress,"¹ of which it is not necessary to select any particular pieces for praise or censure. They have all the same beauties and faults, and nearly in the same proportion. They are written with exuberance of wit, and with copiousness of learning; and it is truly asserted by Sprat,² that the plenitude of the writer's knowledge flows in upon his page, so that the reader is commonly surprised into some improvement. But, considered as the verses of a lover, no man that has ever loved will much commend them. They are neither courtly nor pathetick, have neither gallantry nor fondness. His praises are too far-sought, and too hyperbolical, either to express love, or to excite it: every stanza is crouded with darts and flames, with wounds and death, with mingled souls, and with broken hearts.

The principal artifice by which "The Mistress" is filled with conceits is very copiously displayed by Addison.³ Love is by Cowley, as by other poets, expressed metaphorically by flame and fire; and that which is true of real fire is said of love, or figurative fire, the same word in the same sentence retaining both significations. Thus, "observing the cold regard of his mistress's eyes, and at the same time their power of producing love in him, he considers them as burning-glasses made of ice. Finding

¹ Cowley's Works, vol. i. pp. 65-179.

² *Ibid.* p. xxi.

³ *Spectator*, No. 62.

himself able to live in the greatest extremities of love, he concludes the torrid zone to be habitable. Upon the dying of a tree, on which he had cut his loves, he observes, that his flames had burnt up and withered the tree.”¹

These conceits Addison calls mixed wit;² that is, wit which consists of thoughts true in one sense of the expression, and false in the other. Addison’s representation is sufficiently indulgent. That confusion of images may entertain for a moment; but being unnatural, it soon grows wearisome. Cowley delighted in it, as much as if he had invented it; but, not to mention the ancients, he might have found it full-blown in modern Italy.

“ Aspice quam variis distringar Lesbia³ curis,
Uror, & heu! nostro manat ab igne liquor;
Sum Nilus, sumque Ætna simul; restringite flammæ
O lacrimæ, aut lacrimas ebibe flamma meas.”⁴

One of the severe theologians⁵ of that time censured him as having published *a book of profane and lascivious*

¹ *Spectator*, No. 62. Hurd’s *Addison*, ed. Bohn, 1878, vol. ii. p. 359.

² *Ibid.* See also the notes to Addison’s translations from *Ovid’s Metamorphoses*. *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 150.

³ For Lesbia read Vesbia; line 3, for *flammas* read *flammam*; line 4, omit *aut*.

⁴ Sannazaro. *Epigrammaton*, Liber i. p. lxiv. In the first edition Johnson prefaced this quotation by “*thus Sannazaro.*” The mistake of “Lesbia” for “Vesbia” perhaps prevented the verification of the verse which is addressed AD VESBIAM.

⁵ Edmund Elys, Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, and Rector of East Allington, in Devon. He was the author of a *Miscellanea* in English and Latin verse, and numerous works, of which the most remarkable is his pamphlet against Tillotson’s sermons on the Incarnation. He took his B.A. degree in 1655. The work alluded to in the text was, *An Exclamation to all those that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, against an Apology, written by an ingenious person for Mr. Cowley’s lascivious and prophane verses.* By a dutiful son of the Church of England. Lond., R. Clavel, 1670.

Verses. From the charge of profaneness, the constant tenour of his life, which seems to have been eminently virtuous, and the general tendency of his opinions, which discover no irreverence of religion, must defend him; but that the accusation of lasciviousness is unjust, the perusal of his works will sufficiently evince.

Cowley's "Mistress" has no power of seduction; "she plays round the head, but comes not at the heart."¹ Her beauty and absence, her kindness and cruelty, her disdain and inconstancy, produce no correspondence of emotion. His poetical account of the virtues of plants, and colours of flowers, is not perused with more sluggish frigidity. The compositions are such as might have been written for penance by a hermit, or for hire by a philosophical rhymist who had only heard of another sex; for they turn the mind only on the writer, whom, without thinking on a woman but as the subject for his talk, we sometimes esteem as learned, and sometimes despise as trifling, always admire as ingenious, and always condemn as unnatural.

The Pindarique Odes are now to be considered; a species of composition, which Cowley² thinks Pancirolus³ might have counted *in his list of the lost inventions of antiquity*, and which he has made a bold and vigorous attempt to recover.

The purpose with which he has paraphrased an Olympick and Nemeæan Ode, is by himself sufficiently explained. His endeavour was, not to shew *precisely what Pindar spoke, but his manner of speaking*.⁴ He was therefore not at all restrained to his expressions, nor much to his sentiments;

¹ Pope's *Essay on Man*, Epistle IV. Ald. Pope, vol. ii. p. 80.

² Preface, *Pindaric Odes*, vol. i. p. 184.

³ Guido Pancirollus (1523-1599), an Italian, author of many learned works. His *Rerum Memorabilium—jam olim deperditarum, et contra recens atque ingeniose inventarum*, 1599, has been often reprinted. A translation in 2 vols. pub. London, 1715.

⁴ See note 2.

nothing was required of him, but not to write as Pindar would not have written.

Of the Olympick Ode¹ the beginning is, I think, above the original in elegance, and the conclusion below it in strength. The connection is supplied with great perspicuity, and the thoughts, which to a reader of less skill seem thrown together by chance, are concatenated without any abruptness. Though the English ode cannot be called a translation, it may be very properly consulted as a commentary.

The spirit of Pindar is indeed not every where equally preserved. The following pretty lines are not such as his *deep mouth*² was used to pour :

“ Great Rhea’s son,
If in Olympus’ top where thou
Sitt’st to behold thy sacred show,
If in Alpheus’ silver flight,
If in my verse thou take delight,
My verse, great Rhea’s son, which is
Lofty as that, and smooth as this.”³

In the Nemeæan ode the reader must, in mere justice to Pindar, observe that whatever is said of *the original new moon, her tender forehead and her horns*,⁴ is superadded by his paraphrast, who has many other plays of words and fancy unsuitable to the original, as,

“ The table, free for every guest,
No doubt will thee admit,
And feast more upon thee, than thou on it.”⁵

¹ The second Olympic Ode of Pindar.

² Addison uses this expression in his *Account of the Poets*, (Bohn’s ed. vol. i. p. 24). Probably it is derived from—

“ Fervet immensusque ruit *profundo*
Pindarus ore.” Hor. *Carm.* iv. 2.

³ Vol. i. p. 286.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 201.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 202, 203.

He sometimes extends his author's thoughts without improving them. In the Olympionick an oath is mentioned in a single word, and Cowley spends three lines in swearing by the "Castalian Stream."¹ We are told of Theron's² bounty, with a hint that he had enemies, which Cowley thus enlarges in rhyming prose:

" But in this thankless world the giver
Is envied even by the receiver ;
'Tis now the cheap and frugal fashion
Rather to hide than own the obligation :
Nay, 'tis much worse than so ;
It now an artifice does grow
Wrongs and injuries to do,
Lest men should think we owe."³

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

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

" Begin the song, and strike the living lyre :
Lo how the years to come, a numerous and well-fitted quire,
All hand in hand do decently advance,
And to my song with smooth and equal measure dance ;
While the dance lasts, how long soe'er it be,
My musick's voice shall bear it company ;
Till all gentle notes be drown'd
In the last trumpet's dreadful sound."⁴

¹ Vol. i. p. 192.

² The Tyrant of Agrigentum, B.C. 488, eulogized by Pindar.

³ Vol. i. p. 192.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 214.

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

“ But stop, my Muse—
 Hold thy Pindarick Pegasus closely in,
 Which does to rage begin—
 —’Tis an unruly and a hard-mouth’d horse—
 ’Twill no unskilful touch endure,
 But flings writer and reader too that sits not sure.”¹

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

Of this we have a very eminent example in the ode intitled “The Muse,”² who goes to *take the air* in an intellectual chariot, to which he harnesses Fancy and Judgement, Wit and Eloquence, Memory and Invention: how he distinguished Wit from Fancy, or how Memory could properly contribute to Motion, he has not explained; we are however content to suppose that he could have justified his own fiction, and wish to see the Muse begin her career; but there is yet more to be done.

“ Let the *postilion* Nature mount, and let
 The *coachman* Art be set;
 And let the airy *footmen*, running all beside,
 Make a long row of goodly pride;

¹ Vol. i. p. 215.

² *Ibid.* p. 217.

Figures, conceits, raptures, and sentences,
 In a well-worded dress,
 And innocent loves, and pleasant truths, and useful lies,
 In all their gaudy *liveries*.”¹

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

“Mount, glorious queen, thy travelling throne,
 And bid it to put on;
 For long though cheerful is the way,
 And life alas allows but one ill winter’s day.”²

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

“Thou into the close nests of Time dost peep,
 And there with piercing eye
 Through the firm shell³ and the thick white dost spy
 Years to come a-forming lie,
 Close in their sacred fecundine asleep.”⁴

The same thought is more generally, and therefore more

¹ Vol. i. p. 217.

² *Ibid.*

³ It is impossible to refrain from remarking how this thought is beautified by our own Tennyson, where he says of Faith:

She reels not in the storm of warring words,
 She brightens at the clash of ‘Yes’ and ‘No,’
 She sees the Best that glimmers through the Worst,
 She feels the Sun is hid but for a night,
 She spies the summer thro’ the winter bud,
 She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
 She hears the lark within the songless egg,
 She finds the fountain where they wailed ‘Mirage!’ *Anc. Sag.*

⁴ Vol. i. p. 218. Cowley has *Secondine*, not *fecundine*, and moreover a note to justify and explain the expression, with a quotation from the 9th Epistle of Seneca.

poetically, expressed by Casimir, a writer who has many of the beauties and faults of Cowley :

“ Omnibus mundi Dominator horis
Aptat urgendas per inane pennas,
Pars adhuc nido latet, & futuros
Crescit in annos.”¹

Cowley, whatever was his subject, seems to have been carried, by a kind of destiny, to the light and the familiar, or to conceits which require still more ignoble epithets. A slaughter in the Red Sea, *new dies the waters name*; and England, during the Civil War, was *Albion no more, nor to be named from white*.² It is surely by some fascination not easily surmounted, that a writer professing to revive *the noblest and highest writing in verse*, makes this address to the new year :

“ Nay, if thou lov'st me, gentle year,
Let not so much as love be there,
Vain fruitless love I mean; for, gentle year,
Although I fear,
There's of this caution little need,
Yet, gentle year, take heed
How thou dost make
Such a mistake;
Such love I mean alone
As by thy cruel predecessors has been shewn;
For, though I have too much cause to doubt it,
I fain would try, for once, if life can live without it.”³

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

“ ——— *Ye Criticks, say,
How poor to this was Pindar's style!* ”⁴

¹ *Carmina Lyricorum*, Lib. i. Carm. iv. by Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius, a modern Latin Poet, 1595-1640.

² *Epistle to Dr. Scarborough*, vol. i. p. 233.

³ *To the New Year*, vol. i. p. 247.

⁴ Prior's ballad on the recapture of Namur, (a parody on Boileau's Ode, *Sur la prise de Namur*.)—Ald. Prior, vol. i. p. 73.