VARIOUS

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Содержание

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NORTH'S SPECIMENS OF THE BRITISH CRITICS

Dryden

Poetry, according to Lord Bacon a Third Part of Learning, must be a social interest of momentous power. That Wisest of Men — so our dear friends may have heard — extols it above history and above philosophy, as the more divine in its origin, the more immediately and intimately salutary and sanative in its use. Are not Shakspeare and Milton two of our greatest moral teachers? Criticism opens to us the poetry we possess; and, like a magnanimous kingly protector, shelters and fosters all its springing growths. What is criticism as a science? Essentially this — FEELING KNOWN — that is, affections of the heart

and imagination become understood subject-matter to the self-conscious intelligence. Must feeling perish because intelligence sounds its depths? Quite the reverse. Greatest minds are those in which, in and out of poetry, the understanding contemplates the will. Then first the soul has its proper strength. Disorderly passions are then tamed, and become the massy pillars of high-built virtue. Criticism? It is a shape of self-intuition. Confession and penitence, in the church, are a moral and a religious criticism. The imagination is less august and solemn, but of the same character. The first age of the world lived by divine instincts; the later must by reason. How, then, shall we possess the poetry of our being, unless we guard and arm it? If it be a benign, holy, potent faculty, nevertheless it cannot, the most delicate of all our faculties, sustain itself in the strife of opinions raging and thundering around. Then, if it should rightly hold dominion over us, let legislative opinion acknowledge, establish, and fortify that impaled territory. The temper of the times is in sundry respects favourable, notwithstanding its too frequent possession by an incensed political spirit. Has there not been for half a century a spontaneous, an ardent, a loving return in literature, of our own and all countries, to the old and great in the productions of the human mind — to nature, with all her fountains? Does not the spirit of man, in the great civilized nations at this day, travail with desire of knowing itself, its laws, its conditions, its means, its powers, its hopes? It studies with irregular, often blind and perverted, efforts; but still it studies — itself. And

is not criticism, when it speaks, much bolder, more glowing and generous, ampler-spirited, more inspiring, and withal more enquiring and philosophical? During the whole period we speak of, poetry and criticism — in nature near akin — with occasional complaints and quarrels, have flourished amicably together, side by side. Both have been strong, healthy, and good. Prigs of both kinds — the pert and the pompous — will keep prating about the shallowness and superficiality of periodical criticism — deep enough to drown the whole tribe in its very fords. They call for systems. Why will they not be contented with the system of the universe? — of which they know not that periodical criticism is a conspicuous part. Every other year the nations without telescopes see the rising of some new, bright, particular star. Comets, with tails like O'Connell, are so common as to lose attraction, and blaze by weekly into indiscoverable realms. We have constructed an Orrery of Ebony, which we mean to exhibit at the next great cattle-show, displaying, in their luminous order, the orbs and orbits of all the heavenly bodies. In the centre — but this is not the time for such high revelations. We have now another purpose; and, leaving all those golden urns to yield light at their leisure, we desire you to take a look along with us at the choice critics of other days, waked by our potent voice from the long-gathering dust. In our plainer style, we beg, ladies and gentlemen, to draw your attention to a series of articles in *Blackwood*, of which this is Alpha. Omega is intended for a Christmas present to your great-grandchildren.

Ay, there were giants in those days, as well as in these — also much dwarfs. But we shall not lose ourselves with you in the darkness of antiquity — one longish stride backwards of some hundred and fifty years or so, and then let us leisurely look about us for the Critics. Who comes here? A grenadier — Glorious John. Him Scott, Hallam, Macaulay, have pronounced, each in his own peculiar and admirable way, to have been, in criticism, "a light to his people." Him Samuel Johnson called "a man whom every English generation must mention with reverence as a critic and a poet."

"Dryden," says the sage, in a splendid eulogium on his prose writings, "may be properly considered as the father of English criticism — as the writer who first taught us to determine, upon principles, the merit of composition. Of our former poets, the greatest dramatist wrote without rules, conducted through life and nature by a genius that rarely misled, and never deserted him. Of the rest, those who knew the laws of propriety had neglected to teach them." And he adds wisely — "To judge rightly of an author, we must transport ourselves to his time, and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries, and what were his means of supplying them. That which is easy at one time was difficult at another." Let us, then, examine some of Dryden's expositions of principles; and first, those on which he defends Heroic Verse in Rhyme, as the best language of the tragic drama.

This can be done effectually only by following him wherever he has treated the subject, and by condensing all his opinions into

one consecutive argument.

His first play, (a comedy,) "The Wild Gallant," was brought on the stage in February 1662-3, and with indifferent success, though he has told us that it was more than once the divertisement of Charles II. by his own command, and a favourite with "the Castlemain." "The Rival Ladies" (a tragi-comedy) was acted and published in the year following, and the serious scenes are executed in rhyme. Of its success we know nothing in particular; but Sir Walter thinks that the flowing verse into which some part of the dialogue is thrown, with the strong point and antithesis which all along distinguished his style, especially his argumentative poetry, tended to redeem the credit of the author of the "Wild Gallant." Up to this time Dryden, now in his thirty-third year, had not written much; but in his "Heroic Stanzas on the death of Oliver Cromwell," "Astrea Redux, or Poem on the Happy Restoration and Return of his Sacred Majesty," and "A Panegyric on his Coronation," he had not only shown his measureless superiority to the Sprats and Wallers — poetasters of the same class after all, though Sprat was always but a small fish, while Waller was long thought like a whale — but manifested a vigour of thought and expression that gave assurance of a veritable poet. In those noble compositions he exults in his conscious power of numerous verse; and, like an eagle in the middle element, sweeps along majestically on easy wings. In "The Rival Ladies," the rhymed dialogue is exceedingly graceful, the blank verse somewhat cumbrous; and,

in his dedication to the Earl of Orrery, he justifies himself "for following the new way; I mean, of writing scenes *in verse*." It may here, once for all, be remarked, that in all his disquisitions, by "verse" he usually means rhyme as opposed to blank verse. "To speak properly," he says, "it is not so much a new way amongst us, as an old way revived; for many years before Shakspeare's plays was the tragedy of 'Queen Gorboduc,' in English verse, written by that famous Lord Buckhurst, afterwards Earl of Dorset." Dryden here shows how little conversant he then was with the old English drama. For the tragedy of "Ferrex and Porrex" was first surreptitiously published under the title of "Gorboduc," who is not Queen, but King of England; and it is not written in rhyme, but, excepting the choruses, in blank verse; while Sackville's part of the play comprehends only the two last acts, of themselves sufficient to place him in the highest order of Noble Authors. "But supposing," he continues, "our countrymen had not received this writing till of late, shall we oppose ourselves to the most polished and civilized nations of Europe? * * * All the Spanish and Italian tragedies I have yet seen are writ in rhyme. * * * Shakspeare (who, with some errors not to be avoided in that age, *had undoubtedly a larger soul of poesy than ever any of our nation*,) was the first who, to shun the pains of continual rhyming, invented that kind of writing which we call blank verse, but the French more properly *prose mesurée*; into which the English tongue so naturally glides, that in writing prose it is hardly to be avoided." Here again, it is hardly indeed worth while to remark,

is another mistake; Marlow and several other dramatists having used blank verse (but how inferior to the divine man's!) before Shakspeare. Coleridge somewhere quotes a verse or two forming itself in prose composition as a rarity and a fault; but, though it had better perhaps be avoided, and though its frequent recurrence would be offensive, yet, when words in their natural order do form a verse, it might be difficult to give a good reason why they may not be permitted to do so, more especially if they are not felt to be a verse insulated among the circumfluent prose. From the very best prose we could pick out thousands of single verses, which are to be found only when you seek for them; and not from rich prose only like Coleridge's own or Jeremy Taylor's, but from the poorest, like Dr Blair's or Gerald's of Aberdeen. Dryden says he cannot "but admire how some men should perpetually stumble in a way so easy" — that is, as blank verse — "into which the English tongue so naturally glides," and should strive to attain it by inverting the order of the words, to make the "blanks" sound more heroically — as, for example, instead of "Sir, I ask your pardon," "Sir, I your pardon ask." And adds — "I should judge him to have little command of English, when the necessity of a rhyme should force often upon this rock; though sometimes it cannot easily be avoided; *and, indeed, this is the only inconvenience with which rhyme can be charged*." In this lively style does he pursue his argument in favour of rhyme. For this it is which makes its adversaries say *rhyme is not natural*! But the fault lies with the poet who is not master of his art, and either makes

a vicious choice of words, or places them, for rhyme's sake, so unnaturally as no man would in ordinary speech. But when it is so judiciously ordered that the first word in the verse seems to beget the second, and that again the next, till that becomes the last word in the line, which, in the negligence of prose, would be so; it must then be granted, that rhyme has all the advantages of prose —*besides its own*.

"Glorious John" (who must have been laughing in his sleeve) then declares, that the "excellence and dignity of it were never fully known till Mr Waller taught it;" that it was afterwards "followed in the epic by Sir John Denham, in his 'Cooper's Hill,' a poem which your lordship knows, for the majesty of the style, is, and ever will be, the exact standard of good writing;" and that we are "acknowledging for the noblest use of it to Sir William D'Avenant, who at once brought it upon the stage, *and made it perfect in the Siege of Rhodes*!"

Having thus carried things all his own way, he triumphantly declares, that the advantages which rhyme has over blank verse are so many, that "it were lost time to name them." And then, with fresh vigour, he sets himself to name some of the chief — and first, that one illustrated by Sir Philip Sidney in his "Defence of Poesy," "the help it brings to memory, which rhyme so knits up by the affinity of sound, that by remembering the last word in one line, we often call to mind both the verses." Then, in the quickness of repartees (which in discoursive scenes fall very often) it has, he says, so particular a grace, and is so aptly

united to them, that the sudden smartness of the answer, and the exactness of the rhyme, set off the beauty of each other.

But its greatest benefit of all, according to Dryden, is, that it bounds and circumscribes the fancy. The great easiness of blank verse renders the poet too luxuriant; he is tempted to say many things which might be better omitted, or at least shut up in fewer words. But when the difficulty of artificial rhyming is interposed; where the poet commonly confines his verse to his couplet, and must continue that verse in such words that the rhyme shall naturally follow them, not they the rhyme, the fancy then gives leisure to the judgment to come in; which, seeing so heavy a task imposed, is ready to cut off all unnecessary expenses. And this furnishes a complete answer, he maintains, to the ordinary objection, that rhyme is only an embroidery of verse, to make that which is ordinary in itself pass for excellent with less examination. For that which most regulates the fancy, and gives the judgment its busiest employment, is like to bring forth the richest and clearest thoughts. The poet examines that most which he produces with the greatest leisure, and which he knows must pass the severest test of the audience, because they are aptest to have it ever in the memory. In conclusion, he winds up skilfully by applying all he has said to "a fit subject" — that is, an Heroic Play. For neither must the argument alone, but the characters and persons, be great and noble, otherwise rhymed verse would be out of place, which, for the reasons assigned, is manifestly suited for the utterance of lofty sentiments, and for occasions of dignity

and importance. Heroic Plays were then all the rage, and Dryden was meditating to enter on that career which for many years occupied his genius, not essentially dramatic, to the exclusion of other kinds of poetry in which he afterwards excelled all competitors.

Sir Robert Howard's Heroic Play, the "Indian Queen," "part of which was written by Dryden," and the whole revised and corrected no doubt, especially in the article of versification, was acted in 1664 with great applause. "It presented," says Sir Walter, "battles and sacrifices on the stage, aërial demons singing in the air, and the god of dreams ascending through a trap, the least of which has often saved a worse tragedy." Evelyn, in his Memoirs, has recorded, that the scenes were the richest ever seen in England, or perhaps elsewhere, upon a public stage. Dryden, by its reception, was encouraged to engraft on it another drama called the "Indian Emperor" — a continuation of the tale — which had the most ample success, and, till a revolution in the public taste, retained possession of the stage. Soon after its publication, Sir Robert Howard, in a peevish Preface to some plays of his, chose to answer what Dryden had said in behalf of verse in his Epistle Dedicatory to his "Rival Ladies," and not only without any mention of his name, but without any allusion to the "Indian Emperor," while he bestowed the most extravagant eulogies on the heroic plays of my Lord of Orrery — "in whose verse the greatness of the majesty seems unsullied with the cares, and the inimitable fancy descends to us in such easy expressions,

that they seem as if neither had ever been added to the other, but both together flowing from a height, like birds so high that use no balancing wings, but only with an easy care preserve a steadiness in motion. But this particular happiness among those multitudes which that excellent person is an owner of, does not convince my reason but employ my wonder; yet I am glad that such verse has been written for the stage, since it has so happily exceeded those whom we seemed to imitate. But while I give these arguments against verse, I may seem faulty that I have not only written ill ones, but written any; but since it was the fashion, I was resolved, as in all indifferent things, not to appear singular — the danger of the vanity being greater than the error; and therefore I followed it as a fashion, though very far off." Sir Robert appears to have been in the sulks, for some cause not now known, with his great brother-in-law; and was pleased to punish him by thus publicly pretending ignorance of his existence as an heroic play-wright. Yet the "Annus Mirabilis" was about this time dedicated to Sir Robert; and only about a year before, John had had a helping hand with the "Indian Queen." My Lord of Orrery must have been a proud man to have his gouty too so fervently kissed by the jealous rivals. "The muses," Dryden had said in his dedication to that nobleman, "have seldom employed your thoughts but when some violent fit of the gout has snatched you from affairs of state; and, like the priestess of Apollo, you never come to deliver your oracles but unwillingly and in torments. So we are obliged to your lordship's misery for our delight. You treat us with the cruel

pleasure of a Turkish triumph, where those who cut and wound their bodies, sing songs of victory as they pass, and divert others with their own sufferings. Other men endure their diseases — your lordship only can enjoy them." Dryden, however, was not disposed to stomach Sir Robert's supercilious silence, and took a noble revenge in his "Essay on Dramatic Poesy."

This celebrated Essay was first published at the close of 1668; and the writing of it, Dryden tells us, in a dedication, many years afterwards, to the Earl of Dorset, "served as an amusement to me in the country, when the violence of the last plague had driven me from the town. Seeing, then, our theatres shut up, I was engaged in these kind of thoughts with the same delight with which men think upon their absent mistresses." It is in the form of dialogue; under the feigned appellations of Lisideius, Crites, Eugenius, and Neander, the speakers are Sir Charles Sedley, Sir Robert Howard, Lord Buckhurst, and Dryden. Nothing can exceed the grace with which the dialogue is conducted — the choice of scene is most happy — and the description of it in the highest degree striking and poetical.

> "It was that memorable day, in the first summer of the late war, when our navy engaged the Dutch; a day wherein the two most mighty and best appointed fleets which any age had ever seen, disputed the command of the greater half of the globe, the commerce of nations, and the riches of the universe. While these vast floating bodies, on either side, moved against each other in parallel lines, and our countrymen, under the happy conduct of his Royal

Highness, went breaking, little by little, into the line of the enemies, the noise of the cannon from both navies reached our ears about the city; so that all men being alarmed with it, and in a dreadful suspense of the event which they knew was then deciding, every one went following the sound as his fancy led him; and leaving the town almost empty, some took towards the Park, some cross the river, some down it, all seeking the noise in the depth of silence.

"Amongst the rest, it was the fortune of Eugenius, Crites, Lisideius, and Neander, to be in company together, three of them persons whom their wit and quality have made known to all the town, and whom I have chose to hide under these borrowed names, that they may not suffer by so ill a narration as I am going to make of their discourse.

"Taking, then, a barge, which a servant of Lisideius had provided for them, they made haste to shoot the bridge, and left behind them that great fall of waters which hindered them from hearing what they desired; after which, having disengaged themselves from many vessels which rode at anchor in the Thames, and almost blocked up the passage towards Greenwich, they ordered the watermen to let fall their oars more gently; and then every one favouring his own curiosity with a strict silence, it was not long ere they perceived the air to break about them like the noise of distant thunder, or of swallows in a chimney — those little undulations of sound, though almost vanishing before they reached them, yet still seeming to retain somewhat of their first horror which they had betwixt the fleets. After they had attentively listened till such time as the sound, by little and

little, went from them, Eugenius, lifting up his head, and taking notice of it, was the first who congratulated to the rest that happy omen of our nation's victory; adding, that we had but this to desire in confirmation of it, that we might hear no more of that noise which was now leaving the English coast. When the rest had concurred in the same opinion, Crites, a person of sharp judgment, and somewhat too delicate a taste in wit, which the world hath mistaken in him for ill-nature, said, smiling to us, that if the concernment of this battle had not been so exceeding great, he could scarce have wished the victory at the price he knew he must pay for it, in being subject to the reading and hearing of so many ill verses as he was sure would be made on that subject; adding, that no argument could 'scape some of these eternal rhymers, who watch a battle with more diligence than the ravens and birds of prey, and the worst of them surest to be first in upon the quarry; while the better able, either out of modesty writ not at all, or set that due value upon their poems, as to let them be often desired and long expected. There are some of those impertinent people of whom you speak, answered Lisideius, who, to my knowledge, are already so provided either way, that they can produce not only a panegyric upon the victory, but, if need be, a funeral elegy upon the Duke, wherein, after they have crowned his valour with many laurels, they will at last deplore the odds under which he fell, concluding that his courage deserved a better destiny. All the company smiled at the conceit of Lisideius; but Crites, more eager than before, began to make particular exceptions against some writers, and said the public magistrates ought to send

betimes to forbid them; and that it concerned the peace and quiet of all honest people that ill poets should be as well silenced as seditious preachers."

We may perhaps have occasion, by and by, to notice other important topics spiritedly and eloquently discussed by these choice spirits in the barge; meanwhile our business is with the argument, "rhyme *versus* blank verse," between Crites and Neander. Crites maintains, sometimes in the very words, Sir Robert's views in the Preface to his plays, in which he had animadverted on Dryden's dedication to the "Rival Ladies," while Neander combats them; and it may be observed, that the worthy Baronet is made to speak forcibly and well — much better indeed, on the whole, than he does in his own preface. From beginning to end there cannot be imagined a more fair and gentlemanly dialogue. But first, we cannot resist giving the very beautiful close.

"Neander was pursuing this discussion so eagerly, that Eugenius had called to him twice or thrice ere he took notice that the barge stood still, and that they were at the foot of Somerset stairs, where they had appointed it to land. The company were all sorry to separate so soon, though a great part of the evening was already spent; and stood awhile looking back on the water, upon which the moonbeams played, and made it appear like floating quicksilver. At last they went up through a crowd of French people, who were merrily dancing in the open air, and nothing concerned for the noise of guns which had alarmed the

town that afternoon. Walking three together to the Piazza, they parted there; Eugenius and Lisideius to some pleasant appointment they had made, Crites and Neander to their several lodgings."

But now to the argument. Crites, who is not more long-winded than may be permitted to a polite proser, at least on the Thames of a summer evening, somewhat condensed, reasoneth thus.

A play being the imitation of nature, dialogue is there presented as the effect of sudden thought; and since no man without premeditation speaks in rhyme, neither ought he to do it on the stage. The fancy may be elevated to a higher pitch of thought than it is in ordinary discourse, for men of excellent and quick parts may speak noble things extempore; but surely not when fettered with rhyme, for what more unnatural than to present the most free way of speaking in that which is the most constrained? The Greek tragedians, therefore, wrote in iambics, the kind of verse nearest to prose, which with us is blank verse.

The champions of rhyme say that the quickness of repartees receives an ornament from it in argumentative scenes. But do men not only light on a sudden upon the wit but the rhyme too? Then must they be born poets. If they do not seem in the dialogue to make rhymes whether they will or no, it will look rather like the design of two than the answer of one — as if your actors hold intelligence together, and perform their tricks like fortune-tellers by confederacy. The hand of art will be too visible. Neither is it any answer to say that, however you manage it, 'tis still known to

be a play; for a play is still an imitation of nature, and one can be deceived only with a probability of truth. The mind of man does naturally tend to truth, and the nearer any thing comes to the imitation of it, the more readily will the imagination believe.

Rhyme, it is said, circumscribes a quick and luxuriant fancy, which would extend itself too far on every subject, did not the labour which is required to well-turned and polished rhyme set bounds to it. But he who wants judgment to confine his fancy in blank verse, may want it as much in rhyme; and he who has it will avoid errors in both kinds. Latin verse was as great a confinement to the imagination as rhyme; yet Ovid's fancy was not limited by it, and Virgil needed it not to bind his. In our own language, Ben Jonson confined himself to what ought to be said, even in the liberty of blank verse; and Corneille, the most judicious of the French poets, is still varying the same sense a hundred ways, and dwelling eternally on the same subject, though confined by rhyme.

Such is the substance of Crites' answer to Dryden's Defence of Rhyme; and Neander, before replying, begs it to be understood that he excludes all comedy from his defence, and that he does not deny that blank verse may be also used; but he asserts that, in Serious Plays, where the subject and characters are great, and the plot unmixed with mirth, which might allay or divert those concernments which are produced, rhyme is there as natural, and more effective, than blank verse — for what other conditions, he asks, are required to make rhyme natural in itself, besides an

election of apt words, and a right disposition of them? The due choice of your words expresses your sense naturally, and the due placing them adapts the rhyme to it. If both the words and rhyme be apt, one verse cannot be made merely for sake of the other, as Crites had urged; for supposing there be a dependence of sense betwixt the first line and the second, then, in the natural position of the words, the latter line must of necessity flow from the former; and if there be no dependence, yet still the due ordering of words makes the last line as natural in itself as the other. A good poet, he affirms, never establishes the first line till he has sought out such a rhyme as may fit the verse, already prepared to heighten the second. Many times the close of the sense falls into the middle of the next verse, or further off; and he may often avail himself of the same advantages in English which Virgil had in Latin — he may break off in the hemistich, and begin another line. The not observing these two last things, makes plays which are writ in verse so tedious; for though most commonly the sense is to be confined to the couplet, yet nothing that does run in the same channel can please always. 'Tis like the murmuring of a stream, which, not varying in the fall, causes at first attention, at last drowsiness. Variety of cadence is the best rule, the greatest help to the actor and refreshment of the audience.

If, then, verse may be made natural in itself, how becomes it unnatural in a play? The stage, you say, is the representation of nature, and no man in ordinary conversation speaks in rhyme. True; but neither does he in blank verse. All the difference

between them, when they are both good, is the sound in one which the other wants; and if so, the sweetness of it, and other advantages, handled in the Preface to the "Rival Ladies," all stand good.

The dialogue of plays, you say, is presented as the effect of sudden thought; but that no man speaks *extempore* in rhyme, which cannot therefore be proper in dramatic poesy, unless we could suppose all men born so much more than poets. But it must not be forgotten that the question regards the nature of a Serious Play, which is indeed the representation of nature, but nature wrought up to an high pitch. The plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimility. Tragedy is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons; and to portray these exactly, heroic rhyme is nearest nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse. Verse, it is true, is not the effect of sudden thought; but this hinders not that sudden thought may be represented in verse, since these thoughts are such as must be higher than nature can raise them without premeditation, especially to a continuance of them, even out of verse; and consequently you cannot imagine them to have been sudden, either in the poet or the actors. A play to be like nature is to be set above it; as statues which are placed on high are made greater than the life, that they may descend to the sight in their just proportion.

But rhyme, it has been argued, appears most unnatural in repartees or short replies, when he who answers (it being presumed he knew not what the other would say, yet) makes up that part of the verse which was left incomplete, and supplies both the sound and the measure of it. This, 'tis said, looks rather like the confederacy of two than the answer of one. But suppose the repartee were made in blank verse, is not the measure as often supplied there as in rhyme? — the latter half of the hemistich as commonly made up, or a second line subjoined, as a reply to the former? But suppose it allowed to look like a confederacy. What more beautiful than a well-contrived dance? You see there the united design of many persons to make up one figure: after they have separated themselves in many petty divisions, they rejoin one by one into a group: the confederacy is plain among them, for chance could never produce any thing so beautiful, and yet there is nothing in it that shocks your sight. True, then, the hand of wit appears in repartee, as it must in all kinds of verse. When, with the quiet and poignant brevity of it, there mingles the cadency and sweetness of verse — "the soul of the hearer has nothing more to desire."

Rhyme was said by its defender to be a help to the poet's judgment, by putting bounds to a wild overflowing fancy. And it was answered by the admirer of blank verse, that he who wants judgment in the liberty of his poesy, may as well show the defect of it when he is confined to verse; for he who has judgment will avoid errors, and he who has it not will commit them in all kind of

writing. Granted that he who has judgment so profound, strong, and infallible that he needs no help to keep it always poised and right, will commit no faults in rhyme or out of it. But where is that judgment to be found? Take it, therefore, as it is found in the best poets. Judgment is indeed the master workman in a play; but he requires many subordinate hands, many tools to his assistance, and rhyme is one of them — it is a rule and line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwise lawless imagination would raise loosely and irregularly — it is, in short, a slow and painful but the surest kind of working. Second thoughts being usually the best, as receiving the maturest digestion from judgment, and the last and most mature product of these thoughts being artful and laboured verse, it may well be inferred that verse is a great help to a luxuriant fancy, and that is what the argument opposed was to evince.

Sir Robert, though always made to speak well in the Dialogue, was yet made to speak on the losing side; and in an address to the reader, prefixed to "The Great Favourite, or the Duke of Lerma," a tragedy published soon after, having, by way of retaliation, sharply criticised some of Neander's dogmas about the drama, brought down on himself a cool but cutting castigation — more severe than was merited by so small an offence. His retort, in as far as the question of rhyme or blank verse is concerned, was, however, to say the best of it, very feeble. "I cannot, therefore, but beg leave of the reader to take a little notice of the great pains the author of an Essay of Dramatic Poetry has taken to prove

rhyme as natural in a Serious Play, and more effectual, than blank verse: Thus he states the question but pursues that which he calls natural in a wrong application; for 'tis not the question, whether rhyme or not rhyme be best or most natural for a grave or serious subject; but what is nearest the nature of that which it presents. Now, after all the endeavours of that ingenious person, a play will still be supposed to be a composition of several persons speaking *extempore*, and it is as certain, that good verses are the hardest things that can be imagined to be so spoken; so that if any will be pleased to impose the rule of measuring things to be the best by being nearest to nature, it is proved, by consequence, that which is most remote from the thing supposed, must needs be most improper; and therefore I may justly say, that both I and the question were equally mistaken, for I do own, I had rather read good than either blank verse or prose, and therefore the author did himself injury, if he like verse so well in plays, to lay down rules and raise arguments only unanswerable against himself."

We had rather that Dryden should answer this than we; for much of it eludes our comprehension. In his "Defence of the Essay on Dramatic Poesy" he replies thus: — "A play will still be supposed to be a composition of several persons speaking extempore," quoth Sir Robert; "I must move leave to dissent from his opinion," requoth John; "for if I am not deceived, a play is supposed to be the work of the poet, imitating or representing the conversation of several persons; and this I think to be as clear as he thinks the contrary." There he has the baronet on the hip;

and gives him a throw. He then makes bold to prove this paradox — that one great reason why prose is not to be used in Serious Plays is, "because it is too near the nature of converse." Thus, in "Bartholomew Fair," or the lowest kind of comedy, where he was not to go out of prose, Ben does yet so raise his matter, in that prose, as to render it delightful, which he could never have performed had he only said or done those very things that are daily spoken or practised in the fair; for then the fair itself would be as full of pleasure to an enquiring person as the play, which we manifestly see it is not. "But he hath made an excellent lazar of it. The copy is of price, though the original be vile." Even in the lowest prose comedy, then, the matter and the wording must be lifted out of nature — as *we* should now say, idealized. In "Catiline" and "Sejanus" again, where the argument is great, Ben sometimes ascends into rhyme; and had his genius been proper for rhyme — which Dryden more than once asserts it was not — "it is probable he would have adorned those subjects with that kind of writing. Thus prose," he finely says, "though the rightful prince, yet is by common consent deposed as too weak for the government of Serious Plays; and he failing, there now start up two competitors, one the nearer in blood, which is blank verse; the other more fit for the ends of government, which is rhyme. Blank verse is, indeed, the nearer prose, but he is blemished with the weakness of his predecessor. Rhyme (for I will deal clearly) has somewhat of the usurper in him, but he is brave and generous, and his dominion pleasing."

It was then, "for the reason of delight," that the ancients wrote all their tragedies in verse — and not in prose; because it was most remote from conversation. Rhyme had not then been invented. But again he reminds his adversary, that it seems to have been adopted by the general consent of poets in all modern languages — and that almost all their Serious Plays are written in it, which, though it be no demonstration that therefore they ought to be so, yet at least the practice first, and the continuation of it, shows that it attained the end, which was to please. It is thus that Dryden deals with Sir Robert, as if blank verse in Serious Plays had not a leg to stand on. Yet throughout he preserves a wonderful air of candour and moderation, as most becoming the victorious champion of rhyme. As, for example, where he allows that, whether it be natural or not in plays, is a problem not demonstrable on either side. But in reference to Sir Robert's acknowledgment, that he had rather read good verse than prose, he adds triumphantly, "that is enough for me; for if all the enemies of verse will confess as much, I shall not need to prove that it is natural. I am satisfied if it cause delight; for delight is the chief, if not the only end of poesy; instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights. It is true, that to imitate well is a poet's work; but to affect the soul, and to excite the passions, and, above all, to move admiration, (which is the delight of Serious Plays,) a bare imitation will not serve. The converse, therefore, which a poet is to imitate, must be heightened with all the arts and ornaments of

poesy; and must be such as, strictly considered, could never be supposed spoken by any without premeditation."

In his various argument in defence of the use of rhyme on the stage, Dryden, we have seen, always speaks of its peculiar adaptation to "Serious Plays," or "Heroic Plays." In an essay thereon, prefixed to the "Conquest of Grenada," in the pride of success he says, "whether heroic verse ought to be admitted into Serious Plays, is not now to be disputed." And he again takes up the obstinate objection to rhyme, which he had not yet, it seems, battered to death, that it is not so near conversation as prose, and therefore not so natural. But it is very clear to all who understand poetry, that Serious Plays ought not to imitate conversation too nearly. If nothing were to be traced above that level, the foundation of poetry would be destroyed. Once grant that thoughts may be exalted, and that images and actions may be raised above the life, and described in measure without rhyme, and that leads you insensibly from your principles; admit some latitude, and having forsaken the imitation of ordinary converse, where are you now? "You are gone beyond it, and to continue where you are, is to lodge in the open fields between two inns." You have lost that which you call natural, and have not acquired the last perfection of art. It was only custom, he says, which cozened us so long; we thought because Shakspeare and Fletcher went no further, that there the pillars of poetry were to be erected; that because they excellently described passion without rhyme, therefore rhyme was not capable of describing it. *"But*

time has since convinced most men of that error."

What, then, according to Dryden's idea of it, was a serious or heroic play? An heroic play, he says, ought to be an imitation, in little, of an heroic poem; and, consequently, Love and Valour ought to be the subject of it. D'Avenant's astonishing "Siege of Rhodes" — formerly declared to be the *beau-idéal* of an heroic play — was after all, it seems, wanting in fulness of plot, variety of character, and even beauty of style. Above all, it was not sufficiently great and majestic. He knew not, honest man, that, in a true heroic play, you ought to draw all things as far above the ordinary proportion of the stage, as that is beyond the common words and actions of human life. The play that imitates mere nature as she walks in this world, may be written in suitable language; but, as in epic poetry all poets have agreed that we shall behold the highest pattern of human life, so in the heroic play, modelled by the rules of an heroic poem, we must be shown only correspondent characters. Gods and spirits, too, are privileged to appear on such a stage, and so are drums and trumpets. But Dryden himself denies that he was the first to introduce representations of battles on the English stage, Shakspeare having set him the example; while Jonson, though he shows no battle, lets you hear in "Catiline," from behind the scenes, the shouts of fighting armies. Warlike instruments, and some fighting on the stage, are indeed necessary to produce the effects of a heroic play. They help the imagination to gain absolute dominion over the mind of an audience.

Were we to believe Dryden, his heroic plays were dramatic imitations of such epic poems as the Iliad and the Æneid. And he has the brazen-faced assurance to say, that the first image he had of Almanzor, in the "Conquest of Grenada," was from the Achilles of Homer! The next was from Tasso's Rinaldo, and the third —*risum teneatis amici — from the Artaban of Monsieur Calpranede*! Unquestionably our English heroic plays were borrowed from the French — as these were the legitimate offspring of the dramas of Calpranede and Scuderi. But Dryden's compositions are unparalleled in any literature. Nature is systematically outraged in one and all — from beginning to end. Never was such mouthing seen and heard beneath moon and stars. Through the whole range of rant he rages like a man inspired. He is the emperor of bombast. Yet these plays contain many passages of powerful declamation — not a few of high eloquence; some that in their argumentative amplitude, if they do not reach, border on the sublime. Nor are their wanting outbreaks of genuine passion among the utmost extravagances of false sentiment — when momentarily heroes and heroines warm into men and women, and for a few sentences confabulate like flesh and blood.

But it is with Dryden as a critic, not as a poet, that we have now to do; and we have said these few words about his heroic plays only in connexion with our account of his argument in support of his doctrine with regard to heroic verse in rhyme. That blank verse is better adapted than any other for the drama, has

been settled by Shakspeare. But though Dryden has driven his argument too far, till his doctrine, as he promulgates it, becomes untenable, as little do we doubt that he has made good this position, that there may be good plays in rhyme. His heroic plays are bad, not because they are in rhyme, but because they are absurd; the rhyme is their chief merit; 'tis not possible to dream what they had been in blank verse. True, that "All for Love" and "Don Sebastian" are in blank verse, and may be said, after a fashion, to be fine plays. But they are constructed on rational principles, and in them he was doing his best to write like Shakspeare. What reason is there for believing that those plays, in many respects excellent, are the better for not being in rhyme? None whatever. Rhyme, in our opinion, would have given them both a superior charm. In his heroic plays, it often carries us along with absurdities which we know not whether we should call tame or wild; it gives an air of originality to trivial commonplaces; it embellishes what is vigorous, and invigorates what is beautiful; and among events and characters alike unnatural, its music sustains our flagging interest, and enables us to read on. There can be no doubt, that in representations on the stage, the same cause must have been most effective on audiences accustomed to that kind of pleasure, and who delighted in rhyme, to them at once a necessary and a luxury of life. "Aurengzebe," the last of his rhyming plays, is, to our mind, little if at all inferior to "All for Love," or "Don Sebastian;" and we know that it was most successful on the stage.

Sir Walter says, "that during the space which occurred between the writing of the 'Conquest of Grenada,' and 'Aurengzebe,' Dryden's researches into the nature and causes of harmony of versification, led him to conclude that the Drama ought to be emancipated from the fetters of rhyme — and that the perusal of Shakspeare, on whom Dryden had now turned his attention, led him to feel that something further might be attained in tragedy than the expression of exaggerated sentiment in smooth verse, and that the scene ought to represent, not a fanciful set of agents exerting their superhuman faculties in a fairyland of the poet's own creation, but human characters acting from the direct and energetic influence of human passions, with whose emotions the audience might sympathize, because akin to the feelings of their own hearts. When Dryden had once discovered that fear and pity were more likely to be excited by other causes than the logic of metaphysical love, or the dictates of fantastic honour, he must have found that rhyme sounded as unnatural in the dialogue of characters drawn upon the usual scale of humanity, as the plate and mail of chivalry would have appeared on the persons of the actors." All this is finely said; but does it not assume the point in question? Dryden may have learned at last from the study of Shakspeare, (in whom, however, he was well read many years before, as witness his Essay on Dramatic Poesy,) that "something further might be attained in tragedy than the expression of exaggerated sentiment in smooth verse." But we do not see the necessity of

the inference, "that rhyme sounded unnatural in the dialogue of characters drawn upon the usual scale of humanity." Is rhyme self-evidently unnatural in the expression, in verse, of strong and deep human passion? To that question, put thus generally, the right answer is — NO. And is it, then, necessarily unnatural in the drama?

Like all great powers, that of rhyme is a secret past finding out. In itself a mere barbarous jingle, it yet gives perfection to speech. The music of versification has endless varieties of measures, and rhyme lends enchantment to them all. Not an affection, emotion, or passion of the soul that may not be soothed by its syllablings, enkindled, or raised to rapture. Pity and terror, joy and grief, love and devotion, are all alike sensible of its influence; as the sweet similarities keep echoing through some artful strain, that all the while is thought by them who listen to come in simplicity from the unpremeditating heart. Songs, hymns, elegies, epicedia, epithalamia — rhyme rules alike all the shadowy tribes. The triumphant ode — the penitential psalm — wisdom's moral lesson — the philosophic strain "that vindicates the ways of God to man;" such is the range of rhyme, down all the depths of the pathetic, up all the heights of the sublime. It is yet unlimited. Where shall we find its bounds? Let us try.

In the Epos, the poet in person is the relater. But he hides his own personality in that of the Muse he invokes; and offers himself to his auditors as the Voice only by which she speaks. She, the Muse, is thought to be throughout a faithful

recorder; for she is supposed to have access to know all; and however marvellous may be the narrations, they are accepted with undoubting faith. Since she speaks, or rather sings, and the auditor only listens, the commonest and the most uncommon events are, in one respect, upon an even footing. For the hearer must picture them for himself. All are alike acted absent from the senses, and before the imagination alone. Hence the Epic Poet has an extraordinary facility afforded him for introducing into his work that order of representation which is called the marvellous. For it is just as easy to the hearer to set before his fancy a giant or a pigmy, as a man; the one-eyed monster Polyphemus, as the beautiful, the graceful, the swift, the strong, the sublime, the terrible Achilles. It is just as easy for him to transport himself in fancy to the summit of Olympus, to the palace of Jupiter, and to the Council or to the Banquet of the Gods, or to the deep sea-caves where Thetis sits with her companion nymphs in the hall of her father, the sea-god Nereus — as it is to remove himself from the festal hall, where the poet is singing to him and to the other guests, away to the camp of the Greeks, or to the court of Priam, or to the bower of Andromache. He has no more difficulty to think of Minerva darting, in the likeness of a hawk, from the snowy crest of Olympus to the shore of the Hellespont — or to imagine the Thunderer in his celestial car, lashing on his golden-maned steeds that pace the clouds and the air, and waft him at the speed almost of a wish from the unfolding portals of heaven to the summit of Mount Ida — than when he

is called upon, in the midst of some totally different scene, to figure to himself a mortal hero, with waving crest, glittering in polished brass, advancing erect in his war-chariot, hurling his lance that misses his foe; and in return transpierced by that of his antagonist, falling backwards to the ground in his resounding arms, and groaning out his soul in the bloody dust. The truth is, that when you are called upon to see and to hear *within the mind*, you rejoice in the capacities of seeing and hearing that are thus unfolded in you, infinitely surpassing similar capacities which you possess in your bodily eye and ear; and therefore the stronger the demands that are made, the more readily even do you comply with them; and in this way, in part, we must understand the character that is impressed upon the *Iliad*, and the temper of mind in the hearer answering to the character. It is one of infinite liberty. The mind of the poet seems to be released from all bonds and from all bounds; and the temper in the hearer is the same. Another character, proper to Epic poetry, judging after its great model, the *Iliad*— is *universality*. In the direct narrative, we have gods and men, heaven, earth, sea, for seats of action — and, for a moment, a glimpse of hell. Recollect whilst the conflagration of war is raging, how the poet has found a moment, at the Scæan Gate, for the touching picture of an heroic father, a noble mother, and a babe in arms, scared at his father's dazzling and overshadowing helmet, who smiles, puts it from his head upon the ground, and lifts up the boy, with a prayer to Jove. Sacrifices to the gods, games, funeral rites, come in the course of

the relation; and because the scene of the poem is distracted with warfare, the great poet has found, in the Vulcanian sculptures on the shield of Achilles, place for images of peace — the labours of the husbandman; the mirthful gathering in of the vintage with dance and song; the hymeneal pomp led along the streets. And in the similes, what pictures from animal life and manners! And then our enchantment is heightened by a prevailing duplication. Throughout, or nearly so, the transactions that are presented in the natural, are also presented in the supernatural. Thus we have earthly councils, heavenly councils; warring men, warring gods; kings of men, kings of gods; mortal husbands and wives, and sons and daughters; immortal husbands and wives, and sons and daughters. Palaces in heaven as on earth. The sea, in a manner, triplicates. Terrestrial steeds — celestial steeds — marine steeds! The natural and supernatural are united — when Achilles is half of mortal, half of immortal derivation; when heavenly coursers are yoked in the chariots of men; when Juno, for a moment, grants voice to the horse of Achilles; and the horse, whom Achilles has unjustly reproved, answers prophesying the death of the hero.

Why Homer made the *Iliad* in hexameters, no man can tell; but having done so, he thereby constituted for ever the proper metre of Greek — and Latin — Epic poetry. But what a multitude of subjects, how different from one another does that, and every other Epic poem, comprehend! Glory to the hexameter! it suits them all. Now, in every Epic poem, and in

few more than in the *Iliad*, there are many dramatic scenes. But in the Greek tragic drama, the dialogue is mainly in iambics; for this reason, that iambics are naturally suited for the language of conversation. Be it so. Yet here in the Epic, the dialogue is felt to be as natural in hexameters as the heart of man can desire. Hear Agamemnon and Achilles. Call to mind that colloquy in Pelides' tent.

Rhyme is unknown in Greek; and it is of rhyme that we are treating, though you may not see our drift. From Homer, then, pass on to Ariosto and Tasso. They, too, are Epic poets who have charmed the world. Their poems may not have such a sweep as the *Iliad*, still their sweep is great. Rich in rhyme is their language — rich the stanza they delighted in —*ottava rima*, how rich the name! Is rhyme unnatural from the lips of their peers and paladins? No — an inspired speech. Is hexameter blank verse alone fit for the mouths of Greek heroes — eight-line stanzas of oft-recurring rhymes for the mouths of Italian? Gentle shepherd, tell me why.

But the "Paradise Lost" is in blank verse. It is. The fallen angels speak not in rhyme — nor Eve nor Adam. So Milton willed. But Dante's Purgatory, and Hell, and Heaven, are in rhyme — ay, and in difficult rhyme, too —*terza rima*. Yet the damned speak it naturally — so do the blessed. How dreadful from Ugolino, how beautiful from Beatrice!

But the drama — the drama — the drama — is your cry — what say we to the drama? Listen, and you shall hear —

The Tragic Drama rose at Athens. The splendid and inexhaustible mythology of gods and heroes, which had supplied the Epic Muse with the materials of her magnificent relations, furnished the matter of a new species of poetry. A palace — or a temple — or a cave by the wild sea-shore, was painted; actors, representing by their attire, and their majestic demeanour, heroes and heroines of the old departed world; nay, upon high occasions, celestial gods and goddesses — trod the Stage and spoke, in measured recitation, before assembled thousands of spectators, seated in wonder and awe-stricken expectation. The change to the poet in the manner of communicating with his hearers, alters the character of the composition. The stage trodden by living feet, the scenery, voices from human tongues varying with all the changes of emotion, impassioned gestures, and events no longer spoken of, but transacted in presence, before the eyes of the audience, are elements full of power, that claim for tragedy and impose upon it a character of its own. The heart is more interested, and the imagination less. Persons who accompany the whole business that is to be done, with speaking — a poem consisting of incessant dialogue — must disclose, with more precise and profounder discovery, the minds represented as engaged. Motives are produced and debated — the sudden turns of thought — the violent fluctuations of the passions — the gentle variations of the feelings, appear. Time is given for this internal display — and a species of poetry arises, distinguished for the fulness and the decision with which the springs of action

in the human bosom are shown as breaking forth into, and determining, human action. Meanwhile, the means that are thus afforded to the poet of a more energetic representation, curb in him the flights of imagination. To represent Neptune as at three strides from his seat on a mountain-top descending the slope, that with all its woods quakes under the immortal feet, and as reaching at the fourth step his wave-covered palace — this, which was easy between the epic poet and his hearer, becomes out of place and impossible for tragedy, simply because no actors and no stage can represent a god so stepping and the hills so trembling. We know what the pathetically sublime literature was which the drama gave to Athens; how poets of profound and capacious spirits, who had looked into themselves — and, so enlightened, had observed human life — were able, by taking for their subjects the strongly portrayed characters and the stern situations of the old Greek fable, to unite in their lofty and impressive scenes the truth of nature and the tender interests which endear our familiar homes, to the grandeur of heroic recollections, to the awe of religion, and to the pomp, the magnificence, and the beauty of a gorgeous yet intellectual art.

The Greek Tragic drama is from end to end in verse; and unavoidably, because 'tis a part of a splendid religious celebration. It is involved in the solemn pomp of a festival. Therefore it dons its own solemn festival robes. The musical form is our key to the spirit. And in that varying musical form there are three degrees — first, the Iambic, nearest real speech —

second, the Lyrical dialogue, farther off — third, the full Chorus — utmost removal. Pray, do not talk to us of the naturalness of the language. You never heard the like spoken in all your days. Natural it was on that stage — and over the roofless theatre the tutelary deities of Athens leant listening from the sky.

The model, or law, or self of the English drama, is *Shakspeare*. The character of his drama is, the imaging of nature. A foremost characteristic of nature is infinite and infinitely various production, expressing or intimating an indefatigably and inexhaustibly active spirit. But such a spirit of life, so acting and producing, appears to us as a fountain, ever freshly flowing from the very hand of God. All *that* Shakspeare's drama images; and thus his art appears to us, as always the highest art appears to us to be, a Divine thing. The musical forms of his language should answer; and they do. They are; first, prose; second, loose blank verse; third, tied blank verse; fourth, rhyme.[1] This unbounded variety of the musical form really seems to answer to the premised idea; seems really to clothe infinite and infinitely varied intellectual production. Observe, we beseech you, what varieties of music! The rhyme — ay, the rhyme — has a dozen at least; — couplets — interlaced rhyme — single rhyme and double — anapests — diverse lyrical measures. Observe, too, that speakers of all orders and characters use all the forms. Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Coriolanus, Lance, use prose; Leontes

[1] The prose even is, in its music, rude in ordinary folks — or *artful*, as in Hamlet's admiration of the world.

and his little boy, Lear, Coriolanus, and his domestics — to say nothing of the Steward — Macbeth and his murderlings, use blank verse. Even Falstaff, now and then, a verse. All, high and low, wise, merry, and sad, *rhyme*. Fools, witches, fairies — we know not who else — use lyrical measures. Upon the whole, the *uttermost*— that is, the musical form — answers herein to the *innermost* spirit. The spirit, endlessly-varying, creates endlessly-varying musical form. The total character is accordingly self-lawed, irrepressible creation.

Blank verse, then, is the predominating musical form of Shakspeare's comedies, histories, and tragedies. To such a degree as that *all* the other forms often slip from one's recollection; and, to speak strictly, blank verse must be called the rule; while all other forms are diverse exceptions.

Only one comedy, the homely and English "Merry Wives of Windsor," has, for its rule, prose. Even here the two true lovers hold their few short colloquies in blank verse. And when the concluding fairy masque is toward, blank verse rages. Page and Ford catch it. The merry wife, Mrs Page, turns poetess to describe and project the superstitions to be used. In the fairy-scene Sir John himself, Shakspeare's most dogged observer of prose, is quelled by the spirit of the hour, and RHYMES. You would think that the soul of Shakspeare has been held chained through the play, and breaks loose for a moment ere ending it. All this being said, it may be asked: — "Why is blank verse the ordinary musical form of Shakspeare's Dramas?" And the

obvious answer appears to be: — "Because it has a *middle removedness* or *estrangement* from the ordinary speech of men: — raising the language into imagination, and yet not out of sympathy."

Shakspeare and Sophocles agree in truth and strength, in life, passion, and imagination. They differ inwardly herein — Shakspeare founds in the power of nature. Under his hand nature brings forth art. The Attic tragedy begins from art. Its first condition is order, since it is part of a religious ceremonial. It resorts to nature, to quicken, strengthen, bear up art. Nature enters upon the Athenian stage, under a previous recognition of art as dominant.

From all that has been now said — and it is more than we at first intended to say — this conclusion follows, that there may be English rhymed dramas. There are French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian ones — and fine ones too; and nothing in nature forbids that there may be infinitely finer. That which universally affects off the stage, in all kinds of poetry, would, in the work of a great master, affect on it. The delusion of the theatre overcomes far greater difficulties carried with us thither in the constitution of our habitual life, than the use of rhyme by the visionary beings in the mimic scene. Beyond all doubt there might arise in rhyme a most beautiful romantic drama. Unreal infused into real, turns real at once into poetry. But this is of all degrees. In the lowest prose of life there is an infusion which we overlook. We should drop down dead without it. Let the unreal a little predominate;

and now we become sensible to its presence, and now we *call* the compound poetry. Let it be an affair of words, and we require verse as the fitting form. Our stage and language have settled upon blank verse as the proper metrical form for the proper measure of the unreal upon the ordinary tragic stage. Rhymed verse has a more marked separation, or is more distant from prose than blank verse is. Hence, you might suppose that it will be fitted on the stage for a surcharge of the unreal. Dryden's heroic tragedies are a proof, as far as one authority goes; and even they had great power over audiences willing to be charmed, and accustomed to what we should think a wide and continued departure from nature. But imagine a romantic play, full of beautiful and tender imagination, exquisitely written in rhyme, and modelled to some suitable mould invented by a happy genius. Why, the "Gentle Shepherd," idealizing modern Scottish pastoral life, was, in its humble way, an achievement; and, within our memory, critics of the old school looked on it well pleased when acted by lads and lasses of high degree, delighting to deem themselves for an evening the simple dwellers in huts around Habbie's How.

Let us now collect together all that Dryden has, in different moods of his unsettled and unsteady mind, written about Shakspeare. In the Dialogue formerly spoken of, comparisons are made between the modern English and the modern French drama. "If you consider the plots," says Neander, "our own are fuller of variety, if the writing, ours are more quick and fuller

of spirit." And he denies — like a bold man as he was — that the English have in aught imitated or borrowed from the French. He says our plots are weaved in English looms; we endeavour therein to follow the variety and greatness of characters, which are derived to us from Shakspeare and Fletcher; the copiousness and well-knitting of the intrigues we have from Jonson. These two things he dares affirm of the English drama, that with more variety of plot and character, it has equal regularity; and that in most of the irregular plays of Shakspeare and Fletcher, (for Ben Jonson's are for the most part regular,) there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing, than there is in any of the French. For a pattern of a perfect play, he is proposing to examine "the Silent Woman" of Jonson, the most careful and learned observer of the dramatic laws, when he is requested by Eugenius to give in full Ben's character. He agrees to do so, but says it will first be necessary to speak somewhat of Shakspeare and Fletcher; "his rivals in poesy, and one of them, in my opinion, at least his equal, perhaps his superior." Malone observes, that the caution observed in this decision, proves the miserable taste of the age; and Sir Walter, that Jonson, "by dint of learning and arrogance, fairly bullied the age into receiving his own character of his merits, and that he was not the only person of the name that has done so." This is coming it rather too strong; yet to stand well with others there is nothing like having a good opinion of one's-self, and proclaiming it with the sound of a trumpet.

"To begin, then, with Shakspeare. He was the man who,

of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul; all the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously but luckily; when he describes any thing, you more than see it — you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned, he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature, he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say he is every where alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him — no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

'Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.'

"The consideration of this made Mr Hales of Eton say, that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in Shakspeare: and, however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him, Fletcher, and Jonson, never equalled them to him in their esteem; and in the last king's court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling, and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set our Shakspeare far above him.

"Beaumont and Fletcher, of whom I am next to speak, had, with the advantage of Shakspeare's wit, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improved by study.

Beaumont, especially, being so accurate a judge of plays, that Ben Jonson while he lived submitted all his writings to his censure, and, 'tis thought, used his judgment in correcting, if not contriving, all his plots. What value he had for him appeared by the verses he writ to him, and therefore I need speak no further of it. The first play that brought Fletcher and him into esteem was their 'Philaster;' for before that they had written two or three very unsuccessfully, as the like is reported of Ben Jonson before he writ 'Every Man in his Humour.' Their plots were generally more regular than Shakspeare's, especially those which were made before Beaumont's death; and they understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better, whose wild debaucheries and quickness of wit in repartee no poet before them could paint as they have done. Humour, which Ben Jonson derived from particular persons, they made it not their business to describe; they represented all the passions very lively, but, above all, love. I am apt to believe the English language in them arrived to the highest perfection — what words have since been taken in are rather superfluous than ornamental. Their plays are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage, two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakspeare's or Jonson's; the reason is, because there is a certain gaiety in their comedies, and pathos in their more serious plays, which suits generally with all men's humours. Shakspeare's language is likewise a little obsolete, and Ben Jonson's wit comes short of theirs.

"As for Jonson, to whose character I am now arrived,

if we look upon him while he was himself, (for his last plays were but his dotages,) I think him the most learned and judicious writer which any theatre ever had. He was a most severe judge; of himself as well as others. One cannot say he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it in his works; you find little to retouch or alter. Wit and language, and humour also, in some measure, we had before him; but something of art was wanting to the drama till he came. He managed his strength to more advantage than any who succeeded him. You seldom find him making love in any of his scenes, or endeavouring to move the passions; his genius was too sullen and saturnine to do it gracefully, especially when he knew he came after those who had performed both to such an height. Humour was his proper sphere, and in that he delighted most to represent mechanic people. He was deeply conversant in the ancients, both Greek and Latin, and he borrowed boldly from them. There is scarce a poet or historian among the Roman authors of those times, whom he has not translated in 'Sejanus' and 'Catiline.' But he has done his robberies so openly, that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any law. He invades authors like a monarch; and what would be theft in other poets is only victory in him. With the spoils of those writers he so represents old Rome to us, in its rites, ceremonies, and customs, that, if one of their poets had written either of his tragedies, we had seen less of it than in him. If there was any fault in his language it was, that he weaved it too closely and laboriously, in his comedies especially. Perhaps, too, he did a little too much Romanize our tongue, leaving the words, which he

translated, almost as much Latin as he found them; wherein, though he learnedly followed their language, he did not enough follow with the idiom of ours. If I would compare him with Shakspeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakspeare the greater wit. Shakspeare was the Homer, or father, of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing. I admire him, but I love Shakspeare. To conclude of him, as he has given us the most correct plays, so, in the precepts which he has laid down in his 'Discoveries,' we have as many and profitable rules for perfecting the stage as any wherewith the French can furnish us."

Samuel Johnson truly says of the Dialogue, "that it will not be easy to find, in all the opulence of our language, a treatise so artfully variegated with successive representations of opposite probabilities, so enlivened with imagery, and heightened with illustration." But we have some difficulty in going along with him when he adds — "The account of Shakspeare may stand as a perpetual model of encomiastic criticism, exact without minuteness, and lofty without exaggeration. The praise lavished by Longinus on the attestation of the heroes of Marathon by Demosthenes, fades away before it. In a few lines is exhibited a character, so sublime in its comprehension, and so curious in its limitations, that nothing can be added, diminished, or reformed; nor can the editors and admirers of Shakspeare, in all their emulation of reverence, boast of much more than of having diffused and paraphrased his epitome of excellence; of

having changed Dryden's gold for baser metal, of lower value, though of greater bulk." Since this great critic's day — ay, with all his defects and perversities, Samuel was a great critic — what a blaze of illumination has been brought to bear on the genius of Shakspeare! Nevertheless, all honour to Glorious John! Next comes the famous prologue: —

> As when a tree's cut down, the secret root
> Lives under ground, and thence new branches shoot;
> So, from old Shakspeare's honour'd dust, this day
> Springs up the buds, a new reviving play.
> Shakspeare, who (taught by none) did first impart
> To Fletcher wit, to labouring Jonson art;
> He, monarch-like, gave those, his subjects, law,
> And is that nature which they paint and draw.
> Fletcher reach'd that which on his heights did grow,
> While Jonson crept and gather'd all below.
> This did his love, and this his mirth digest;
> One imitates him most, the other best.
> If they have since outwrit all other men,
> 'Tis with the drops which fell from Shakspeare's pen.
> The storm which vanish'd on the neighbouring shore,
> Was taught by Shakspeare's 'Tempest' first to roar.
> That innocence and beauty which did smile
> In Fletcher, grew on this enchanted isle.
> But Shakspeare's magic could not copied be —
> Within that circle none durst walk but he.
> I must confess 'twas bold, nor would you now

That liberty to vulgar wits allow,
Which works by magic supernatural things;
But Shakspeare's power is sacred as a king's.
Those legends from old priesthood were received,
And he them writ as people them believed."

Strange that he who could write so nobly about Shakspeare, could commit such an outrage on his divine genius as the play to which this is the prologue — "The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island," a Comedy. It was — Dryden tells us, and we must believe him — "originally Shakspeare's; a poet for whom Sir William D'Avenant had particularly a high veneration, and whom he first taught me to admire." So the two together, to show their joint and judicious admiration, set about altering "The Tempest." Fletcher had imitated it all in vain in his "Sea Voyage;" "the storm, the desert island, and the woman who had never seen a man, are all implicit testimonies of it." Few more delightful poets than Fletcher; but in an evil hour, and deserted by his good genius, did he then hoist his sail. But now cover your face with your hands — and then shut your ears. "*Sir John Suckling, a professed admirer of our author, has followed his footsteps* in his '*Goblins*;' his Regmella being an open imitation of Shakspeare's Miranda, and his spirits, *though counterfeit*, yet are copied from Ariel." But Sir William D'Avenant, "as he was a man of quick and piercing imagination, soon found that somewhat might be added to the design of Shakspeare, of which neither Fletcher nor Suckling had ever thought;" "and this excellent contrivance," he was pleased,

says Dryden with looks of liveliest gratitude, "to communicate to me, and to desire my assistance in it." You probably knew what was the "excellent contrivance" by which "the last hand" — the hand after Suckling's — "was put to it;" so that thenceforth the "Tempest" was to be let alone in its glory. "The counterpart to Shakspeare's plot, namely, that of a man who had never seen a woman, that by this means these two characters of innocence and love might the more illustrate and commend each other. *I confess that from the very first moment it so pleased me, that I never writ* any thing with more delight." Sir Walter says it seems to have been undertaken chiefly with a view to give room for scenical decoration, and that Dryden's share in the alteration was probably little more than the care of adapting it to the stage. But Dryden's own words contradict that supposition, and he further tells us that his writings received D'Avenant's daily amendments; "and that is the reason why it is not so faulty as the rest, which I have done without the help and correction of so judicious a friend." They wrote together at the same desk. And Dryden found D'Avenant of "so quick a fancy, that nothing was proposed to him on which he would not suddenly produce a thought, extremely pleasant and surprising. * * His imagination was such as could not easily enter into any other man." It had been easy enough, he adds, to have arrogated more to himself than was his due in the writing of the play; but "besides the worthlessness of the action, which deterred me from it, (there being nothing so base as to rob the dead of his reputation,) I am satisfied I could never have received so much

honour in being thought the author of any poem, how excellent soever — as I shall from the joining of my imperfections with the merit and name of Shakspeare and Sir William D'Avenant." From all this, and more of the same sort, 'tis plain that Dryden's share in the composition was at least equal to — we should say, much greater than — D'Avenant's.

You must not meddle with Miranda — for she is all our own. Yet we cheerfully introduce you to her sister, Dorinda, and leave you all alone by yourselves for an hour's flirtation. Hush! she is describing the ship!

> "This floating Ram did bear his horns above,
> And tied with ribands, ruffling in the wind:
> Sometimes he nodded down his head awhile,
> And then the waves did heave him to the moon,
> He climbing to the top of all the billows;
> And then again he curtsied down so low
> I could not see him. Till at last, all sidelong
> With a great crack, his belly burst in pieces."

We had but once before handled this performance — some threescore and ten years ago, when a man of middle age. We dimly remember being amused in our astonishment. Now that we are beginning to get a little old, we are, perhaps, growing too fastidious; yet surely it is something very shocking. Portsmouth Poll and Plymouth Sall — sisters originating at Yarmouth — when brought into comparison with Miranda and Dorinda of the

enchanted island, to our imagination seem idealized into Vestal virgins. True, they were famous — when not half seas over — for keeping a quiet tongue in their mouths: with them mum was the word. Only when drunk as blazes, poor things, did they, by word or gesture, offend modesty's most sacred laws. But D'Avenant's and Dryden's daughters are such leering and lascivious drabs, so dreadfully addicted to innuendoes and *doubles entendres* of the most alarming character, that, high as is our opinion of the intrepidity of British seamen, we should not fear to back the two at odds against a full-manned jolly-boat from a frigate in the offing sent in to fill her water-casks. Caliban himself — and what a Caliban he has become! — fights shy of the plenireps. Why — if it must be so — we give our arm to his sister Sycorax, a "fearsome dear" no doubt, but what better could one expect in a misbegotten monster? Oh, the confounding mysteries of self-degrading genius!

In the preface to "An Evening's Love; or, the Mock Astrologer," we again meet with some criticism on Shakspeare. We learn from it that Dryden had formed the ambitious design of writing on the difference betwixt the plays of his own age and those of his predecessors on the English stage, in order to show in what parts of "dramatic poesy we were excelled by Ben Jonson — I mean, humour and contrivance of comedy; and *in what we may justly claim precedence of Shakspeare and Fletcher*! namely, in heroic plays." He had, moreover, proposed to treat "of the improvement of our language since Fletcher's and Jonson's

days, and, consequently, of our refining the courtship, raillery, and conversation of plays." In great attempts 'tis glorious even to fail; and assuredly had Dryden essayed all this, his failure would have been complete. "I would," said he, with his usual ignorance of his own and his age's worst sins and defects, "have the characters well chosen, and kept distant from interfering with each other, which is more than Fletcher *or Shakspeare did*! * * I think there is no folly so great in any part of our age, as the superfluity and waste of wit was in some of our predecessors, particularly Fletcher *and Shakspeare*." Refining the courtship, raillery, and conversation of plays! We cannot, perhaps, truly say very much in praise of those qualities in Ben's comedies, admirable as they are, and superior, in all respects, a thousand times over to the best of Dryden's and of his contemporaries'; but wilfully blind indeed, or worse, must the man who could thus write have been to the matchless grace, vivacity, delicacy, prodigality, and poetry of Shakspeare's comedy, which as far transcends all the happiest creations of other men's wit, as the pervading pathos and sublimity of his tragedy all their happiest inspirations from the holy fountain of ennobling or pitying tears.

In its day, the following Epilogue caused a great hubbub —

"They, who have best succeeded on the stage,
Have still conform'd their genius to their age.
Thus Jonson did mechanic humours show,
When men were dull, and conversation low.
Then comedy was faultless, but 'twas coarse:

Cobb's tankard was a jest, and Otter's horse.
And, as their comedy, their love was mean;
Except by chance, in some one labour'd scene,
Which must atone for an ill-written play.
They rose, but at their height could seldom stay:
Fame then was cheap, and the first comer sped;
And they have kept it since by being dead.
But, were they now to write, when critics weigh
Each line, and every word, throughout a play,
None of them, no not Jonson in his height,
Could pass without allowing grains for weight.
Think it not envy that these truths are told —
Our poet's not malicious, though he's bold.
'Tis not to brand them that their faults are shown,
But by their errors, to excuse his own.
If love and honour now are higher raised,
'Tis not the poet, but the age is praised.
Wit's now arrived to a more high degree;
Our native language more refined and free;
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit,
In conversation, than those poets writ.
Then, one of these is, consequently, true;
That what this poet writes comes short of you,
And imitates you ill (which most he fears,)
Or else his writing is not worse than theirs.
Yet, though you judge (as sure the critics will)
That some before him writ with greater skill,
In this one praise he has their fame surpast,
To please an age more gallant than the last."

Dryden was called over the coals for this sacrilegious Epilogue by persons ill qualified for censors — among others, by my Lord Rochester — and was instantly ready with his defence — an "Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age." In it he repeats the senseless assertion, "that the language, wit, and conversation of our age are improved and refined above the last;" and he takes care to include among the writers of the last age, *Shakspeare*, Fletcher, and Jonson. "In what," he asks "does the refinement of a language principally consist?"

> "Either in rejecting such old words or phrases which are ill sounding or improper, or in admitting new, which are more proper, more sounding, and more luxuriant. * * * Malice and partiality set apart, let any man who understands English, read diligently the works of *Shakspeare* and Fletcher, and I dare undertake that he will find in every page either some solecism of speech, or some notorious flaw in sense; yet these men are reverenced, when we are not forgiven. That their wit is great, and many times their expressions noble, envy itself cannot deny. But the times were ignorant in which they lived. Poetry was then, if not in its infancy among us, at least not arrived to its vigour and maturity. Witness the lameness of their plots, many of which, especially those they writ first, (for even that age refined itself in some measure,) were made up of some ridiculous, incoherent story, which in one play many times took up the business of an age. I suppose I need not name 'Pericles, Prince of Tyre,' *nor the historical plays*

of Shakspeare, besides many of the rest, as the 'Winter's Tale,' 'Love's Labour Lost,' 'Measure for Measure,' which were either founded on impossibilities, or at least so meanly written, that the comedy neither caused your mirth, nor the serious part your concernment."

In all this this rash and wretched folly, Dryden shows his ignorance of the order in which Shakspeare wrote his plays; and Sir Walter kindly says, that there will be charity in believing that he was not intimately acquainted with those he so summarily and unjustly condemns. But unluckily this nonsense was written during the very time he was said by Sir Walter to have been "engaged in a closer and more critical examination of the ancient English poets than he had before bestowed upon them;" and, from the perusal of Shakspeare, learning that the sole staple of the drama was "human characters acting from the direct and energetic influence of human passions." Yet Sir Walter was right; only Dryden's opinions and judgments kept fluctuating all his life long, too much obedient to the gusts of whim and caprice, or oftener still to the irregular influences of an impatient spirit, that could not brook any opposition from any quarter to its domineering self-will. For in not many months after, in the Prologue to "Aurengzebe," are these noble lines —

"But spite of all his pride, a secret shame
Invades his heart at Shakspeare's sacred name;
Awed when he hears his godlike Romans rage,
He, in a just despair, would quit the stage,

And to an age less polish'd, more unskill'd,
Does, with disdain, the foremost honours yield."

Less polished — more unskilled! Here, too, he is possessed with the same foolish fancy as when he said, in the "Defence of the Epilogue," — "But these absurdities which those poets committed, may more properly be called the age's fault than theirs. For besides the want of education and learning, (which was their particular unhappiness,) they wanted the benefit of converse. Their audiences were no better, and therefore were satisfied with what they brought. Those who call theirs the golden age of poetry, have only this reason for it, that they were then content with acorns before they knew the use of bread!" Then, after a somewhat hasty and unconvincing examination of certain incorrectnesses and meannesses of expression even in Ben Jonson, learned as he was, he asks, "What correctness after this can be expected from *Shakspeare* or Fletcher, who wanted that learning and care which Jonson had? I will therefore spare myself the trouble of enquiring into their faults, who, had they lived now, had doubtless written more correctly." Since Shakspeare's days, too, the English language had been refined, he says, by receiving new words and phrases, and becoming the richer for them, as it would be "by importation of bullion." It is admitted, however, that Shakspeare, Fletcher, and Jonson did indeed beautify our tongue by their *curiosa felicitas* in the use of old words, to which it often gave a rare meaning; but in that they

were followed by "Sir John Suckling and Mr Waller, *who refined upon them*!" But the greatest improvement and refinement of all, "in this age," is said to have been in wit. Pure wit, and without alloy, was the wit of the court of Charles the Second, and of the Clubs. It shines like gold, yea much fine gold, in the works of all the master play-wrights. Whereas, "Shakspeare, who many times has written better than any poet in any language, is yet so far from writing wit always, or expressing that wit according to the dignity of the subject, that he writes, in many places, below the dullest writers of ours, or any preceding age. Never did any author precipitate himself from such height of thought to so low expressions, as he often does. He is the very Janus of poets; he wears almost every where two faces; and you have scarce begun to admire the one ere you despise the other." That the wit "of this age" is much more courtly, may, Dryden thinks, be easily proved by viewing the characters of gentlemen which were written in the last. For example — who do you think? Why, Mercutio. "Shakspeare showed the best of his skill in Mercutio; and he said himself that he was forced to kill him in the third act, to prevent being killed by him. But for my part I cannot find he was so dangerous a person: I see nothing in him but what was so exceedingly harmless, that he might have lived to the end of the play and died in his bed, without offence to any man." Wit Shakspeare had in common with his ingenious contemporaries; but theirs, to speak out plainly, "was not that of gentlemen; there was ever somewhat that was ill-natured and clownish in

it, and which confessed the conversation of the authors." "In this age," Dryden declares the last and greatest advantage of writing proceeds from conversation. "In that age" there was "less gallantry;" and "neither did they (Shakspeare, Ben, and the rest) keep the best company of theirs." But let the illustrious time-server speak at large.

> "Now, if they ask me, whence it is that our conversation is so much refined? I must freely, and without flattery, ascribe it to the court; and in it, particularly to the king, whose example gives a law to it. His own misfortunes, and the nation's, afforded him an opportunity, which is rarely allowed to sovereign princes — I mean of travelling, and being conversant in the most polished courts of Europe; and, thereby, of cultivating a spirit which was formed by nature to receive the impressions of a gallant and generous education. At his return, he found a nation lost as much in barbarism as in rebellion; and, as the excellency of his nature forgave the one, so the excellency of his manners reformed the other. The desire of imitating so great a pattern, first awakened the dull and heavy spirits of the English from their natural reservedness; loosened them from their stiff forms of conversation, and made them easy and pliant to each other in discourse. Thus, insensibly, our way of living became more free; and the fire of the English wit, which was before stifled under a constrained, melancholy way of breeding, began first to display its force by mixing the solidity of our nation with the air and gaiety of our neighbours. This being granted to be true, it would

be a wonder if the poets, whose work is imitation, should be the only persons in three kingdoms who should not receive advantage by it; or, if they should not more easily imitate the wit and conversation of the present age than of the past.

"Let us, therefore, admire the beauties and the heights of Shakspeare, without falling after him into a carelessness, and, as I may call it, a lethargy of thought, for whole scenes together."

Shakspeare lethargic — comatose!

Sir Walter's admiration of "glorious John" was so much part of his very nature, that he says, "it is a bold, perhaps presumptuous, task to attempt to separate the true from the false criticism in the foregoing essay: for who is qualified to be umpire betwixt Shakspeare and Dryden?" None that ever breathed, better than his own great and good self. Yet surely he was wrong in saying, that when Shakspeare wrote for the stage, "wit was not required." Required or not, there it was in perfection, of which Dryden, with all his endowments, had no idea. The question is not as he puts it, were those "audiences incapable of receiving the delights which a cultivated mind derives from the gradual development of a story, the just dependence of its parts upon each other, the minute beauties of language, and the absence of every thing incongruous or indecorous?" They may have been so, though we do not believe they were. But the question is, are Shakspeare's Plays, beyond all that ever were written, distinguished for those very excellences, and free from almost all those very defects? That they are, few if any will now

dare to deny. While the best of Dryden's own Plays, and still more those of his forgotten contemporaries, infinitely inferior to Shakspeare's in all those very excellences, are choke-full of all manner of faults and flagrant sins against decorum and congruity, in the eyes of mere taste; and with a few exceptions, according to no rules can be rated high as works of art. The truth of all this manifestly forced itself upon Sir Walter's seldom erring judgment, as he proceeded in the composition of the elaborate note, in which he would fain have justified Dryden even at the expense of Shakspeare. And, as it now stands, though beautifully written, it swarms with *non-sequiturs*, and perplexing half-truths.

In the Preface to "Troilus and Cressida," (1679,) Dryden again — and for the last time — descants, in the same unsatisfactory strain, on Shakspeare. Æschylus, he tells us, was held in the same veneration by the Athenians of after ages as Shakspeare by his countrymen. But in the age of that poet, the Greek tongue had arrived at its full perfection, and they had among them an exact standard of writing and speaking; whereas the English language, even in his (Dryden's) own age, was wanting in the very foundation of certainty, "a perfect grammar: " so, what must it have been in Shakspeare's time?

> "The tongue in general is so much refined since then, that many of his words, and more of his phrases, are scarce intelligible. And of those which we understand, some are ungrammatical, others coarse; and his whole style is so pestered with figurative expressions, that it is as affected

as it is obscure. It is true that, in his latter plays, he had worn off somewhat of the rust; but the tragedy which I have undertaken to correct was in all probability one of his first endeavours on the stage... So lamely is it left to us, that it is not divided into acts. For the play itself, the author seems to have begun it with some fire. The characters of Pandarus and Thersites are promising enough; but, as if he grew weary of his task, after an entrance or two, he lets them fall; and the latter part of the tragedy is nothing but a confusion of drums and trumpets, excursions, and alarms. The persons who give name to the tragedy are left alive. Cressida is false, and is not punished. Yet, after all, because the play was Shakspeare's, and that there appeared in some places of it the admirable genius of the author, I undertook to remove that heap of rubbish, under which many excellent thoughts lay wholly buried. Accordingly, I have remodelled the plot, threw out many unnecessary persons, improved those which were begun and left unfinished, as Hector, Troilus, Pandarus, and Thersites, and added that of Andromache. After that, I made, with no small trouble, an order and connexion of all the scenes, removing them from the place where they were inartificially set; and though it was impossible to keep them all unbroken, because the scene must be sometimes in the city and sometimes in the court, yet I have so ordered them, that there is a coherence of them with one another, and a dependence on the main design: no leaping from Troy to the Grecian tents, and thence back again, in the same act, but a due proportion of time allowed for every motion. I

need not say that I have refined the language, which before was obsolete; but I am willing to acknowledge, that as I have often drawn his English nearer to our times, so I have sometimes conformed my own to his; and consequently, the language is not altogether so pure as it is significant."

John Dryden and Samuel Johnson resemble one another very strongly in their treatment of Shakspeare. Both of them seem at times to have perfectly understood and felt his greatness, and both of them have indited glorious things in its exaltation. Their praise is the utterance of worship. You might believe them on their knees before an idol. But theirs is a strange kind of reverence. It alternates with derision, and is compatible with contempt. The god sinks into the man and the man is a barbarian, babbling uncouth speech. "Coarse," "ungrammatical," "obscure," "affected," "unintelligible," "rusty!" The words distilled from the lips of Cordelia, Desdemona, Juliet, Imogen!

Dryden informs us, that ages after the death of Æschylus, the Athenians ordained an equal reward to the poets who could alter his plays to be acted in the theatre, with those whose productions were wholly new, and of their own. But the case, he laments, is not the same in England, though the difficulties are greater. Æschylus wrote good Greek, Shakspeare bad English; and to make it intelligible to a refined audience was a hard job. Sorely "pestered with figurative expressions" must have been the transmogrifier; and he had to look for wages, not to a nation's

gratitude, but a manager's greed. It was, indeed, a desperate expedient for raising the funds. In his judgment the Play itself was but a poor affair — an attempt by an apprentice, that, to be producible, required the shaping of a master's hand. "Lamely left" it had to be set on its feet ere it could tread the stage. With what *nonchalance* does he throw out "unnecessary persons," and improve "unfinished!" Hector, Troilus, Pandarus, and Thersites, skilless Shakspeare had but begun — artful Dryden made an end of them; Cressida, who was false as she was fair, yet left alive to deceive more men, became a paragon of truth, chastity, and suicide; and by an amazing stretch of invention, far beyond the Swan's, was added Andromache. Dryden proudly announces that "the scenes of Pandarus and Cressida, of Troilus and Pandarus, of Andromache with Hector and the Trojans, in the second act, are wholly new; together with that of Nestor and Ulysses with Thersites, and that of Thersites with Ajax and Achilles. I will not weary my reader with the scenes which are added of Pandarus and the lovers in the third, and those of Thersites, which are wholly altered; but I cannot omit the last scene in it, which is almost half the act, betwixt Troilus and Hector. I have been so tedious in three acts, that I shall contract myself in the two last. The beginning scenes of the fourth act are either added, or changed wholly by me; the middle of it is Shakspeare's, altered and mingled with my own; three or four of the last scenes are altogether new; and the whole fifth act, both the plot and the writing, are my own additions." O heavens! why was it not all

"my own?"

No human being can have a right to use another in such a way as this. Shakspeare's plays were then, and are now, as much his own property as the property of the public — or rather, the public holds them in trust. Dryden was a delinquent towards the dead. His crime was sacrilege. In reading *his* "Troilus and Cressida," you ever and anon fear you have lost your senses. Bits of veritable Shakspearean gold, burnished star-bright, embossed in pewter! Diamonds set in dirt! Sentences illuminated with words of power, suddenly rising and sinking, through a flare of fustian! Here Apollo's lute — there hurdy-gurdy.

"For the play itself," said Dryden insolently, "the author seems to have begun it with some fire;" and here it is continued with much smoke. "The characters of Pandarus and Thersites are promising enough;" here we shudder at their performance. Such a monstrous Pandarus would have been blackballed at the Pimp. Thersites — Shakspeare's Thersites — for Homer's was another Thersites quite — finely called by Coleridge, "the Caliban of demagogic life" — loses all individuality, and is but a brutal buffoon grossly caricatured. The scene between Ulysses and Achilles, with its wondrous wisdomful speech, is omitted! of itself, worth all the poetry written between the Restoration and the Revolution.

Spirit of Glorious John! forgive, we beseech thee, truth-telling Christopher — but angels and ministers of grace defend us! WHO ART THOU? Shakspeare's ghost.

Prologue, spoken by Mr Betterton, representing the Ghost of Shakspeare

"See, my loved Britons, see your Shakspeare rise,
An awful ghost confess'd to human eyes!
Unnamed, methinks, distinguish'd I had been
From other shades, by this eternal green,
About whose wreaths the vulgar poets strive,
And, with a touch, their wither'd bays revive.
Untaught, unpractised, in a barbarous age,
I found not, but created first the stage;
And if I drain'd no Greek or Latin store,
'Twas that my own abundance gave me more.
On foreign trade I needed not rely,
Like fruitful Britain, rich without supply.
In this my rough-drawn play you shall behold
Some master-strokes, so manly and so bold,
That he who meant to alter, found 'em such,
He shook, and thought it sacrilege to touch.
Now, where are the successors to my name?
What bring they to fill out a poet's fame?
Weak, short-lived issues of a feeble age;
Scarce living to be christen'd on the stage!
For humour farce, for love they rhyme dispense,
That tolls the knell for their departed sense.
Dulness, that in a playhouse meets disgrace,

Might meet with reverence in its proper place.
The fulsome clench that nauseates the town,
Would from a judge or alderman go down —
Such virtue is there in a robe and gown!
And that insipid stuff which here you hate,
Might somewhere else be call'd a grave debate:
Dulness is decent in the church and state.
But I forget that still 'tis understood
Bad plays are best decried by showing good.
Sit silent, then, that my pleased soul may see
A judging audience once, and worthy me.
My faithful scene from true records shall tell,
How Trojan valour did the Greek excel;
Your great forefathers shall their fame regain,
And Homer's angry ghost repine in vain."

The best hand of any man that ever lived, at prologue and epilogue, was Dryden. And here he showed himself to be the boldest too; and above fear of ghosts. For though it was but a make-believe, it must have required courage in Shakspeare's murderer to look on its mealy face. The ghost speaks well — nobly — for six lines — though more like Dryden's than Shakspeare's. *That* was not his style when alive. The seventh line would have choked him, had he been a mere light-and-shadow ghost. But in death never would he thus have given the lie to his life. "Untaught," he might have truly said — for he had no master. "Unpractised!" Nay, "Troilus and Cressida" sprang from a brain that had teemed with many a birth. "A barbarous age!"

Read — "Great Eliza's golden time," when the sun of England's genius was at meridian. "Sacrilege to touch!" Prologue had not read Preface. Little did the "injured ghost" suspect the spectacle that was to ensue. Much of what follows is, in worse degree, Drydenish all over. Sweetest Shakspeare scoffed not so!

Suppose Shakspeare's ghost to have slipped quietly into the manager's box to witness the performance. Poets after death do not lose all memory of their own earthly visions. Thoughts of the fairest are with them in Paradise. At first sight of Dorinda he would have bolted.

Dryden says, that "he knew not to distinguish the blown puffy style from true sublimity." He would then have done so, and no mistake. "The fury of his fancy often transported him beyond the bounds of judgment, either in coining of new words and phrases, or racking words which were in use, into the violence of catachresis." His ears would have been jarred by Prospero's "polite conversation," so unlike what he, who had not "kept the best society," was confined to "in a barbarous age." Yet Dryden confessed that he "understood the nature of the passions," and "made his characters distinct;" so that "his failings were not so much in the passions themselves, as in his manner of expression." Unfortunately, his vocabulary was neither choice nor extensive, and he "often obscured his meaning by his words, and sometimes made it unintelligible."

> "To speak justly of this whole matter: it is neither height of thought that is discommended, nor pathetic vehemence,

nor any nobleness of expression in its proper place; but it is a false measure of all these, something which is like them, and is not them; it is the Bristol stone, which appears like a diamond; it is an extravagant thought instead of a sublime one; it is a roaring madness instead of vehemence; a sound of words instead of sense. If Shakspeare were stripped of all the bombasts in his passions, and dressed in the most vulgar words, we should find the beauties of his thoughts remaining; if his embroideries were burnt down, there would still be silver at the bottom of the melting-pot, but I fear (at least let me fear it for myself) that we, who ape his sounding words, have nothing of his thought, but are all outside; there is not so much as dwarf within our giant's clothes. Therefore, let not Shakspeare suffer for our sakes; it is our fault, who succeed him in an age that is more refined, if we imitate him so ill that we copy his failings only, and make a virtue of that in our writings which in his was an imperfection.

"For what remains, the excellency of that poet was, as I have said, in the more manly passions; Fletcher's in the softer. Shakspeare writ better betwixt man and man; Fletcher betwixt man and woman: consequently the one described friendship better — the other love. Yet Shakspeare taught Fletcher to write love; and Juliet and Desdemona are originals. It is true, the scholar had the softer soul, but the master had the kinder. Friendship is both a virtue and a passion essentially; love is passion only in its nature, and is not a virtue but by accident: good-nature makes friendship, but effeminacy love. Shakspeare

had an universal mind, which comprehended all characters and passions; Fletcher, a more confined and limited: for though he treated love in perfection, yet honour, ambition, revenge, and generally all the stronger passions, he either touched not, or not masterly. To conclude all he was a limb of Shakspeare."

THE TOWER OF LONDON. — A POEM

By Thomas Roscoe

Part I

Proud Julian towers! ye whose grey turrets rise
In hoary grandeur, mingling with the skies —
Whose name — thought — image — every spot are rife
With startling legends — themes of death in life!
Recall the voices of wrong'd spirits fled —
Echoes of life that long survived their dead;
And let them tell the history of thy crimes,
The present teach, and warn all future times.

Time's veil withdrawn, what tragedies of woe
Loom in the distance, fill the ghastly show!
Oh, tell what hearts, torn from light's cheering ray,
Within thy death-shades bled their lives away;
What anxious hopes, strifes, agonies, and fears,
In thy dread walls have linger'd years on years —
Still mock'd the patient prisoner as he pray'd
That death would shroud his woes — too long delay'd!

Could the great Norman, with prophetic eye,
Have scann'd the vista of futurity,
And seen the cell-worn phantoms, one by one,
Rise and descend — the father to the son —
Whose purest blood, by treachery and guilt,

On thy polluted scaffolds has been spilt,
Methinks Ambition, with his subtle art,
Had fired his hero to a nobler part.
Yes! curst Ambition — spoiler of mankind —
That with thy trophies lur'st the dazzled mind,
That 'neath the gorgeous veil thy conquests weave,
Would'st hide thy form, and Reason's eye deceive —
By what strange spells still dost thou rule the mind
That madly worships thee, or, tamely blind,
Forbears to fathom thoughts, that at thy name
Should kindle horror, and o'erwhelm with shame.

Alas, that thus the human heart should pay
Too willing homage to thy bloody sway;
Should stoop submissive to a fiend sublime
And venerate e'en the majesty of crime!
How soon to those that tempt thee art thou near —
To prompt, direct, and steel the heart to fear!
Oh, not to such the voice of peace shall speak,
Nor placid zephyr fan their fever'd cheek;
Sleep ne'er shall seal their hot and blood-stain'd eye,
But conscious visions ever haunt them nigh;
Grandeur to them a faded flower shall be,
Wealth but a thorn, and power a fruitless tree;
And, as they near the tomb, with panting breast,
Shrink from the dread unknown, yet hope no rest!

Stern towers of strength! once bulwarks of the land,
When feudal power bore sway with sovereign hand —
Frown ye no more — the glory of the scene —
Sad, silent witness of what crimes have been!
Accurst the day when first our Norman foe
Taught Albion's high-born Saxon sons to bow
'Neath victor-pride and insolence — learn to feel
What earth's dark woes — when abject vassals kneel;
And worse the hour when his remorseless heir,
Alike uncheck'd by heaven, or earthly prayer,
With lusts ignoble, fed by martial might,
Usurp'd man's fair domains and native right.

Ye generous spirits that protect the brave,
And watch the seaman o'er the crested wave,
Cast round the fearless soul your glorious spell,
That fired a Hampden and inspired a Tell —
Why left ye Wallace, greatest of the free,
His hills' proud champion — heart of liberty —
Alone to cope with tyranny and hate,
To sink at last in ignominious fate?
Sad Scotia wept, and still on valour's shrine
Our glistening tears, like pearly dewdrops, shine,
To tell the world how Albyn's hero bled,
And treasure still the memory of her dead.
Whose prison annals speak of thrilling deeds,
How truth is tortured and how genius bleeds?
Whose eye dare trace them down the tragic stream —

Mark what fresh phantoms in the distance gleam,
As dark and darker o'er th' ensanguined page
The ruthless deed pollutes each later age?
See where the rose of Bolingbroke's rich bloom
Fades on the bed of martyr'd Richard's tomb!
Look where the spectre babes, still smiling fair,
Spring from the couch of death to realms of air!
Oh, thought accurst! that uncle, guardian, foe,
Should join in one to strike the murderous blow.
Ask we for tears from pity's sacred fount?
"Forbear!" cries vengeance — "that is my account."
There is a power — an eye whose light can span
The dark-laid schemes of the vain tyrant, man.
Lo! where it pierces through the shades of night,
And all its hideous secrets start to light —
In vain earth's puny conquerors heaven defy —
Their kingdom's dust, and but one throne on high.
See heaven's applause support the virtuous wrong'd,
And 'midst his state the despot's fears prolong'd.
Thou tyrant, yes! the declaration God
Himself hath utter'd — "I'm the avenging rod!"
Words wing'd with fate and fire! oh, not in vain
Ye cleft the air, and swept Gomorrah's plain,
When, dark idolatry unmask'd, she stood
The mark of heaven — a fiery solitude!
And still ye sped — still mark'd the varied page
In every time — through each revolving age —
Wherever man trampled his fellow man,
Unscared by crimes, ye marr'd his ruthless plan —

Still shall ye speed till time has pass'd away,
And retribution reigns o'er earth's last day.

Methinks I hear from each relentless stone
The spirits of thy martyr'd victims groan,
And eager whispers Echo round each cell
The oft repeated legend, and re-dwell,
With the same fondness that bespeaks delight
In childhood's heart, when on some winter's night,
As stormy winds low whistle through the vale,
It shuddering lists the thrilling ghostly tale.
It seems but now that blood was spilt, whose stain
Proclaims the dastard soul — the bloody reign
Of the Eighth Harry — vampire to his wife,
Who traffick'd for his divorce with her life;
So fresh, so moist, each ruddy drop appears
Indelible through centuries of years!
And who is this whose beauteous figure moves,
Onward to meet the reeking form she loves;
Whose noble mien — whose dignity of grace,
Extort compassion from each gazing face?
'Tis Dudley's bride! like some fair opening flower
Torn from its stem — she meets fate's direst hour;
Still unappall'd she views that bloody bier,
Takes her last sad farewell without a tear.

Each weeping muse hath told how Essex died,

Favourite and victim, doom'd by female pride.
How courtly Suffolk spent his latest day,
And dying Raleigh penn'd his deathless lay.
Here noble Strafford too severely taught
How dearly royal confidence is bought;
Received the warrant which demands his breath,
And with a calm composure walk'd — to death.
Nor 'mong the names that liberty holds dear,
Shall the great Russell be forgotten here;
His country's boast — each patriot's honest pride —
For them he lived — for them he wept and died.

And must we yet another page unfold,
To glean fresh moral from the deeds of old?
Ye busy spirits that pervade the air,
And still with dark intents to earth repair;
That goad the passions of the human breast,
And bear the missives of Fate's stern behest —
Say, stifle ye those thoughts that Heaven reveals —
The tears of sympathy — the glow that steals
O'er the young heart, or prompts soft pity's sigh —
The prayer to snatch from harsh captivity
The virtuous doom'd — teach but to praise — admire —
Forbid to catch one spark of generous fire?
The godlike wish of genius, man to bless,
With rank and wealth still leaguing to oppress!
Oh! when shall glory wreathe bright virtue's claim,
And both to honour give a holier fame?

Ye towers of death! — the noblest still your prey,
Here spent in solitude their sunless day;
In your wall'd graves a living doom they found;
Broke o'er their night no ray, no gladd'ning sound.
Yet the mind's splendour, with imprison'd wings,
Rose high, and shone where the pure seraph sings;
Where human thought taught conscience it was free,
And burst the shackles of the Romish See.
Oh, sweetest liberty! how dear to die!
Bound by each sacred link;, each holy tie;
To save unspotted from the spoiler's hand,
Child of our heart — our own — our native land!
And, oh! how dear life's latest drop to shed,
To free the minds by superstition led; —
To spread with holy earnest zeal abroad,
That priceless gem — freedom to worship God!
To keep unmingled with the world's vain lore,
The faith that lightens every darken'd hour;
That faith which can alone the sinner save,
Prepare for death, and raise him from the grave;
Show how, by yielding all, we surest prove,
How humbly, deeply, truly, we can love;
How much we prize that hope divinely given,
The key — the seal — the passport into heaven.

Part II

What sudden blaze spreads through the crimson skies,
And still in loftier volumes seems to rise?
What meteor gleams, that from the fiery north,
In savage grandeur fast are bursting forth,
And light your very walls? Tell me, ye Towers —
'Tis Smithfield revelling in his festal hours,
Fed with your captives: shrieks that wildly pierce
The roaring flames now undulating fierce,
And gasping struggles, mingled groans, proclaim
The power of torture o'er the writhing frame.
Dark are your dens, and deep your secret cells,
Whose silent gloom your tale of horrors tells.
Saw ye how Cranmer dared — yet fear'd to die,
Trembling 'mid hopes of immortality?
He stood alone; — a brighter band appears
Unaw'd by threats — impregnable to fears;
Who suffer'd glad the sacred truth to spread,
In mild obedience to its fountain-head.
And when at length our popish James would see
Cold superstition bend th' unhallow'd knee,
The mystic tapers on our altars burn,
And clouds of incense shade the fragrant urn,
Shone England's prelates faithful to their call,
In bonds of truth within thy massive wall.
See grace divine — see Heaven in mercy pour,

The balm of peace on Albion's boasted shore.

Once wrought by captive fingers on thy wall,
The hero's home and prison, grave and pall,
What dark lines meet the startled stranger's gaze,
Thoughts that ennoble — sentiments that raise
The iron'd captive from captivity,
How high above the power of tyranny! —
And ye that wander by the evening tide,
Where mountains swell or mossy streamlets glide;
That on fresh hills can hail morn's orient ray,
And chant with birds your grateful hymns to day;
Or seek at noon, beneath some pleasant shade,
To feel the sunbeams cool'd by leafy glade —
That free as air, morn, noon, and eve, can roam,
Where'er you list, and nature call your home;
Learn from a hopeless prisoner's words and fate,
"Virtue is valour — to be patient, great!"
When traced on prison walls, such words as these
Arrest the eye — appall e'en while they please —
"Ah! hapless he who cannot bear the weight,
With patient heart of a too partial fate,
For adverse times and fortunes do not kill,
But rash impatience of impending ill."

Yes, still they speak to bosoms that are free
Within the girdle of captivity;

Of spirits dauntless, who could spurn the chain
Of human punishment or mortal pain;
That e'en amid these precincts of despair,
Dared free themselves from thraldom's jealous care —
Bound but by ties of faith and virtue, be
Heirs of bright hopes and immortality.
Oh! great mind's proud inscriptions! Who shall tell
What hand engraved those lines within that cell?
What heart yet steadfast while around him stood
Phantoms of death to chill his curdling blood,
Could battle with despair on reason's throne,
And conquer where the fiend would reign alone?
Ah! who can tell what sorrows pierced his breast —
Ran through each vein, usurp'd his hours of rest?
What struggle nerved his trembling hand to trace
With moral courage words he dared to face
With acts that ask'd new efforts while he wrote
To man his soul and fix his every thought!
Tremble, thou tyrant! proud ambition, blush!
Hearts such as these thy power can never crush.
Are they forgotten? no, the rugged stone,
The lap of earth on which they rested lone;
The very implements of torture there —
The axe, the rack, the tyrant's jealous care;
Each mark that meets successive ages' eyes
Speaks, trumpet-tongued, a fame that never dies;
And tells the thoughtful stranger, while the tear
Unbidden starts, that freedom triumph'd here —
Plumed her immortal wings for nobler flight,

And bore her martyr'd brave to realms of light.
Nor false their faith, nor like the fleeting wind,
Their spirits fled! for theirs the unprison'd mind,
No tyrant-chains, no bonds of earth and time,
Could hold from truth and freedom's heights sublime —
From that bright heaven of science, whence they shed
Fresh glory o'er man's cause for which they bled.
Ask what is left? their names forgotten now?
Their birth, their fortune? not a trace to show
Where sleeps their dust? Go, seek the blest abode,
Their mind's pure joy, the bosom of their God!
Then tell if in the dull cold prison's air,
And wasted to a living shadow there,
Earth scarcely knew them! if they were alone
Where they were cast, to pine away unknown?
Friends, had they none? nor beam'd a wish to share
Love, friendship, and to breathe the common air.
Lost, lost to all! like some lone desert flower,
Felt they unseen Time's slow consuming power,
And hail'd each parting day with fond delight,
As the tired pilgrim greets the waning light?

No! glad bright spirits, guardians of the mind,
Were with them; as the demon-powers unbind
And lash their furies on the conscious breast
Of earth's fell tyrants who ne'er dream of rest.
Theirs, too, joy's harbinger, the thoughts aye fed
With brighter objects than of earth, that shed

A light within their narrow home, and gave
A triumph's lustre to the yawning grave.
And in that hour when the proud heart's o'erthrown,
And self all-powerless, self is truly known;
When pride no more could darken the free mind,
But all to God in firm faith was resign'd —
Then drank their souls the stream of love divine,
More richly flowing than the Eastern mine;
Felt heaven expanding in the heart renew'd,
And more than friends in desert solitude.

Peace to thy martyrs! thou art frowning now
With all the array of bold and martial show;
The same thy battlements with trophies dress'd,
Present defiance to the hostile breast;

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.