

**RICHARD  
GARNETT**

THE AGE OF  
DRYDEN

Richard Garnett  
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# Richard Garnett

## The Age of Dryden

### PREFACE

The plan of a general history of English literature in a series of introductory manuals, each dealing with a well-defined period and individually complete, as set forth in the preface to Mr. Dennis's *Age of Pope*, is advanced a stage further by the present volume.

The period described, from its chief literary figure, as *The Age of Dryden*, and which might with equal propriety have been entitled *The Age of the Restoration*, extends from 1660 to 1700. Some very important writers, such as Milton and Clarendon, the composition or publication of whose principal works falls within this epoch, have been passed over as belonging in style and spirit to the preceding age; and in a few instances this procedure has been reversed. In the main, however, the last forty years of the seventeenth century constitute the period of literary activity represented, and will be found to be demarcated with unusual precision from both the preceding and the ensuing era.

The writer of a literary history embracing works on a great variety of topics will soon discover that he is expected to impart more information than he possesses. If in any measure endowed with the grace of modesty, he will frequently feel compelled to acknowledge with Mr. Edward Gibbon Wakefield, when, after having overcome every other difficulty in the foundation of his colony, he came to provide it with a bishop: 'I fear I do not very well understand this part of the subject myself.' Trusty guides, however, fortunately are not wanting. The author's warmest acknowledgments are due for the assistance he has derived from personal communication with Professor Hales, and from the writings of Macaulay, Matthew Arnold, Mr. Gosse, Professor Saintsbury, Mr. Churton Collins, and Dr. Fowler. He is indebted for the Index to Mr. J. P. Anderson, of the Reading Room of the British Museum.

R. G.

October, 1895.

## INTRODUCTION

The accession of Charles II. as king *de facto*, which in the political history of England marks a Restoration, in her literary history marks a Revolution. Not that the transition from one mode of writing and thinking to another was instantaneous, or enjoined by legislative or academical decree. It had long been slowly progressing, and its unequivocal triumph would probably have come to pass sooner but for the obstruction to the intellectual life of the nation occasioned by twenty years of civil commotion. The magnitude of this impediment appears from the fact that all the writings of even so great a scholar and poet as Milton, produced during this interval, were of a polemical nature. When at last society found sufficient stability to allow its members to write for fame, emolument, or the extension of knowledge, it quickly became manifest how wide a gulf yawned between the men of that day and the men of twenty years ago. The new influence, indeed, had long been at work. A comparison, for example, of the last of the old dramatists, Massinger and Shirley, with their predecessors, evinces how much even in their day the stage was losing in poetry, in imagination, and in the charm of musical metre; how rapidly its personages were degenerating from vital individualities into conventional types; how much, on the other hand, always excepting Shakespeare's pieces from the comparison, it was gaining in logic and construction. An examination of other forms of literature would reveal a similar clarifying process, a steady discouragement of the quaint affectation which was the bane of Elizabethan literature, combined, unfortunately, with increasing sterility of fancy, and growing insensibility to the noble harmonies of which English prose is capable. An Elizabethan poet, indeed, Samuel Daniel, had in some of his works almost anticipated the style of the eighteenth century; in general, however, writers during the period of the Civil War seem to our apprehension more or less encrusted with the mellow patina of antiquity, conspicuously absent from nearly everyone who wrote under Charles II. Hence the accession of this monarch, in whose person the new taste might be said to be enthroned, is justly regarded as the commencement of the new era. Charles's personal influence on letters was not insignificant. 'The king,' says a contemporary, Burnet, 'had little or no literature, but true and good sense, and had got a right notion of style, for he was in France at a time when they were much set on reforming their language. It soon appeared that he had a true taste. So this helped to raise the value of these men [Tillotson and others], when the king approved the style their discourses generally ran in, which was clear, plain, and short.' Burnet, therefore, had no doubt that correct principles of taste had been established in England in Charles II.'s time, and partly by the king's instrumentality – a dictum equivalent to the condemnation of all preceding English literature as barbarous. Such was also the opinion of one of the masters of English style in the succeeding century, David Hume.

Charles II. was not a man who could under any circumstances have sympathized greatly with the poetry of Spenser, or the prose of Raleigh or Hooker. The native bent of his mind was, moreover, strengthened by contingencies, among which Burnet justly gives a foremost place to his residence in France. It must be added that this influence coincided with a movement which, if for the time disadvantageous to English literature, was, nevertheless, essential if it was to cease to be merely insular. Until the time of Charles I. this literature, in so far as it owed anything to external patterns of modern date, had been chiefly dependent upon Italy. This might have long continued but for the decay of Italian letters consequent upon the triumph of foreign oppression and spiritual despotism throughout the peninsula. France stepped into the vacant place, and developed a literature qualified to impress other nations no less by its defects than by its virtues, by its want of elevation as well as by its sprightliness and lucidity. Ere long French ideas of style had pervaded Europe, and approximation to French modes was the inevitable qualification for the great mission of human enlightenment which was to devolve upon Britain in the succeeding century. Up to this time the literature of England had resembled that of Spain, original and racy of the soil, grander and more noble than the less dignified

literature whose statutes it was to keep and whose laws it was to observe for a season, but on this very account comparatively out of touch with the common needs of men. Had British writers continued to indite the prose of Hooker and Milton, their ideas would have found no entrance into the Continent; and grievous as was the declension from the poetry and music of these great writers to the *sermo pedestris* of their successors, this was more than counterbalanced by the acquisition of lucidity, logic, and cogency. The loss was but temporary, the gain was everlasting; for the nineteenth century has found it possible to restore much of the solemn pomp and musical and pictorial charm of Elizabethan English, without parting with the clearness and coherence which are indispensable for a literature that would deeply affect the world. In becoming for a moment French, English literature first became European – happy that the new influence did not, as elsewhere, penetrate too far, and that when all of good that the foreigner could proffer had been assimilated, speech and style regained their nationality. They did not, however, thus revert to their old channel. ‘The Restoration,’ says Matthew Arnold with justice, ‘marks the real moment of birth of our modern English prose.’ This prose, indeed, has since been vastly enriched by recurrence to antique models, but gains from this source have always been felt to partake of the nature of importation. The vital point of Restoration practice is accepted by all who do not deliberately aim at the composition of poems in prose. ‘It is,’ says Arnold, ‘by its organism – an organism opposed to length and involvement, and enabling us to be clear, plain, and short – that English style after the Restoration breaks with the style of the times preceding it, finds the true law of prose, and becomes modern; becomes, in spite of superficial differences, the style of our own day.’

This age of metamorphosis, therefore, is one of the most important in the history of English literature, and if the men of the Restoration could have beheld themselves in their relation, not only to their predecessors, but also to their successors, their complacency would not have been unjustifiable. Their inability to apprehend their true relation to either was a failing by no means peculiar to them, but it has exposed them to a double measure of the ridicule of posterity, who roar with laughter over Pepys’s dictum that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* ‘seems but a mean thing’ after Sir Samuel Tuke’s *Adventures of Five Hours*, and are hardly more merciful to Dryden’s conversion of *Paradise Lost* into an opera. It must be owned that the conception of poetry as something awful, spiritual, and divine, became for a time extinct. Shelley’s Defence of Poetry, could such a work have existed, would have seemed even more absurd to that age than Mr. Pepys’s critical deliverances do to ours. The excuse is that the particular work assigned to the period was incompatible with a very high standard of poetry. This work, as we have seen, was the regeneration of English prose by the elimination of those elements which unfitted it for clear precise reasoning and practical business, and the making English a tongue in which Bunyan and Cobbett might be classics equally with Bacon and Sir Thomas Browne. Such an achievement implies a prosaic age. If the latter part of the seventeenth century could have produced Miltons, these would have continued to write as Milton did: it was therefore fortunate for the language in the long run that supreme genius should have for the time died out, and have been replaced by a vigorous, terrestrial, unideal genius that, having no oracle, required no tripod. For a time, no doubt, the contrast must have seemed very dismal to any who yet retained a perception of the richness and glory of the Elizabethan epoch. But we, if we compare, not to say the letters of Cromwell, but those of Charles I., with the despatches of Wellington, cannot but be sensible of an enormous advance, not merely in the effectiveness of speech, but in its dignity and simplicity, and of a great enrichment of the language by the newly acquired power to deal with common things. For this the men of the Restoration are to be thanked: and it must be added that their work could not have been done if they had not thoroughly believed in it; and that this belief necessitated, except in such superior minds as Dryden’s, contempt for their predecessors and a genuine preference of their sorry foreign models to Shakespeare. The revolution which they effected in matters of taste may be compared to the contemporary revolution in politics. The Restoration government was a sad decline from the enthusiastic visions of Milton and Vane, or even from the wise and sturdy sway of Cromwell. Nevertheless the English nation accepted and maintained it as the best arrangement

which the circumstances of the time admitted. So the new style in literature was universally accepted because the old style was for a time effete; because tasks had been imposed and needs had arisen to which it was unable to respond; because, in short, a prosaic age craved a prosaic literature. We look, therefore, on the Restoration period as anything but an ideal epoch, but at the same time as a most momentous one; as one to which we are indebted for much of our present command over the resources of our language; and to which Britain owes very much of her present power over the world. Acquaintance with its leading representatives also proves that, if less picturesque figures than their predecessors, they were not inferior in mental power. And, although the age is justly regarded as in the main an age of prose; yet, as poets respond most readily to the influences of their time, and are usually in the van of intellectual revolutions, so the leading figure in the literary history even of this epoch of prose is a poet – Dryden, doubtless the most prosaic of all our great poets, but inferior to none in intellectual force; and one whose poverty and pliability made him the mirror of the less worthy tendencies of his time on the one hand, while his higher aspirations and the force of his genius rendered him no less the representative of its better qualities on the other. With Dryden, therefore, we commence our survey.



## CHAPTER I. JOHN DRYDEN AS A POET

John Dryden was born August 9, 1631, at Aldwinkle All Saints, between Thrapston and Oundle, in Northamptonshire. He was the grandson of Sir Erasmus Dryden, baronet, of Canons Ashby, in the same county; and his father possessed a small landed property, which he transmitted to the poet. Dryden maintained a connection with his native county all his life, but it was never close; of the rest of the world, outside London and Cambridge, he only occasionally saw anything. Few of our great writers have been so thoroughly identified with the metropolis, of which he became an inhabitant at an early age by his entry at Westminster School, the precise date of which is unknown. Locke and South were among his schoolfellows. He must have distinguished himself, having been elected to Cambridge in 1650. Before leaving Westminster he had made his first appearance as an author by the publication of a copy of verses on the death from smallpox of his schoolfellow Lord Hastings, an unintentional *reductio ad absurdum* of the reigning fashion of extravagant conceits in the style of Marino and Gongora. This composition, otherwise worthless, foreshadows in a manner the whole of Dryden's career. He was not one of the writers who themselves form the taste by which they are ultimately judged, but rather one of those who achieve fame by doing best what all desire to be done; the representatives of their age, not its reformers. Little is known of his career at Cambridge except that he was on one occasion 'discommoded and gated' for some irregularity, that he took his degree in 1654, and, though obtaining no fellowship, continued to reside until about 1657, when he removed to London, with what precise plans or expectations is uncertain.<sup>1</sup> The general knowledge displayed in his critical writings (he scarcely ever, says Johnson, appears to want book-learning but when he mentions books) justifies the conclusion that his time had been employed in study: how greatly his mind had matured was attested by his verses on the death of Cromwell (1658), which, if disfigured by some conceits, exhibit a more sustained elevation than any contemporary except Milton or Marvell could have attained. They were rivalled by his congratulatory verses on the Restoration (1660), which naturally exposed him to the reproach of inconsistency, but, as Johnson remarks, 'If he changed, he changed with the nation.' There can, indeed, be no doubt that the establishment of a settled government was approved by the good sense as well as by the loyalty of the country, and although circumstances were to make Dryden the most formidable of political controversialists upon paper, his temperament was not that of a polemic, and, save when he had committed himself too far to retreat, he was always ready to acquiesce in what commended itself to the general sentiment of his countrymen. The Restoration was also a joyful event to men of letters, if for no other reason than that it re-opened the stage, which, while as yet the periodical press was not, afforded the best market and the readiest opportunity for literary talent. Dryden is said to have had a play ready soon after the Restoration, and it is difficult to understand, except from a certain inertness in his constitution, ever most readily responsive to the spur of necessity, why he should have so long delayed his appearance as a dramatist. The determining motive may ultimately have been his marriage (not, apparently, a very fortunate one) to Lady Elizabeth Howard, eldest daughter of the Earl of Berkshire, in December, 1663; for in that year he produced his first play, *The Wild Gallant*, and from that time we find him, for many years, sedulously at work to earn money by a description of literary activity notoriously uncongenial to him. Only one of his numerous plays, he tells us, was written to please himself. The long list includes, *The Indian Emperor* (1665), in which, instead of reforming the weak blank verse of his day, which would have been a most important service, he fell in with the prevalent fashion of

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<sup>1</sup> He was an ungrateful son of his *alma mater*, having pointedly declared his preference for Oxford. Perhaps this disloyalty may be connected with the appearance at Cambridge of a pamphlet against him, in the form of a mock defence against "the censure of the Rota," in the same year (1673).

rhymed tragedy; *Tyrannic Love* (1669), and *The Conquest of Granada* (1672), in which he carries rhymed bombast as far as it would go, but at the same time displays surprising energy and vigour; *Aurengzebe* (1675), also a rhyming play, but a great improvement; *All for Love* (1678), and *Don Sebastian* (1690), examples of a purer taste; and *The Spanish Friar* (1683), and *Amphitryon* (1690), his best comedies. These pieces, the chief landmarks of his dramatic career, will be subsequently considered.

Returning to the incidents of Dryden's life, we find little to chronicle for several years except the births of three children, his elevation to the laureateship in 1670, and various literary controversies of no interest at this day except as they served to call forth the admirable critical prefaces by which he did more for English prose style than his poetry was at that time effecting for English verse. It is remarkable how late his genius flowered, and how long he was in discovering his proper path. He might never have found it at all but for the accidental coincidence of the political controversies of his time with his official position as poet laureate. This seemed to impose on Dryden the duty of coming to the assistance of the Court, and his recognition of the obligation produced (1681) *Absalom and Achitophel*, which at once gave him the distinction of the greatest satirist our literature had yet produced, the most consummate artist in the heroic couplet, and the most cogent reasoner in rhyme. *The Medal*, occasioned by a medal struck by the City in honour of the failure of the indictment of Shaftesbury, was suggested as the subject of a poem by Charles II. The fact has been doubted, and does not rest upon very strong external authority, but is confirmed by a letter from Dryden to the Treasurer, Hyde, now in the British Museum, shown by internal evidence to have been written after the publication of *Absalom and Achitophel*, and consequently after the striking of the medal on occasion of Shaftesbury's acquittal. In this, after speaking of his expense in the education of his children, complaining of the irregular receipt of his pension, and remarking that even a quarter in advance 'is but the Jesuits' powder to my disease, the fit will return a fortnight hence,' he adds, 'I am going to write somewhat by his Majesty's command, and cannot stir into the country for my health and studies till I secure my family from want.' This can hardly have been anything but *The Medal*.<sup>2</sup> The appeal, after some delay, brought Dryden an addition to his pension and a sinecure office in the Customs.

This was the most active period of Dryden's life as a poet. A personal altercation occasioned by an attack on *The Medal* by Thomas Shadwell produced *MacFlecknoe*, the bitterest of his satires, and in the same year of 1682 appeared the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, chiefly by Nahum Tate, but containing upwards of two hundred lines from Dryden's own pen, dealing with his literary antagonists in a style of sovereign mastery. Almost simultaneously appeared *Religio Laici*, 'a serious argument in verse on the credibility of the Christian religion and the merits of the Anglican form of doctrine and church government.' Dryden's mastery over metrical ratiocination made the subject attractive; but the Church of England had hardly done rejoicing in her champion when she was scandalized by his exodus to the Church of Rome. It is not likely that he was altogether insincere; but it can hardly be doubted that the death of a monarch of taste and parts, who valued him for his genius, and the accession of a successor who valued men only for their theology, and gently hinted the fact by docking his salary of a hundred pounds, had more to do with his resolution than he quite acknowledged to himself. The position of the Protestant laureate of a Popish sovereign called upon to bid Protestants rejoice over the birth of a Popish Prince of Wales, generally in that age believed to have been smuggled into the palace in a warming-pan, would assuredly have presented difficulties even to those who found none in extolling George II.'s patronage of the arts. Dryden was too deeply committed to expect anything from the other side. The apology for his conversion was given to the world in his *Hind and Panther* (1687), a poem displaying even augmented power of reasoning in

<sup>2</sup> Malone thinks that it was the translation of *The History of the League*, but Dryden can have hardly deemed country retirement necessary for a work of this nature.

rhyme, and which might have ranked with his best but for the absurdity of the machinery. Soon afterwards the unsoundness of the foundation on which he had built his fortunes was demonstrated by the Revolution, which deprived him of the laureateship and swept away all official sources of income. But for his change of religion he might have taken the oaths to the new government without censure, but he had broken down the bridges behind him, and seemed for a moment to have left himself no alternative between want and infamy. A third nevertheless remained, hard labour for the booksellers. To his great honour, Dryden grappled with the situation with all the sturdy tenacity of his lymphatic temperament, and in the same spirit which Scott afterwards displayed under similar circumstances. He may probably have reformed his system of living, which can hardly have been other than extravagant; certain it is that if he could not keep entirely out of debt, he at least kept out of disgrace, and that the years which followed his apparent ruin, if not the most brilliant part of his life, were the most honourable and honoured. It should be added that he appears to have been largely assisted by the generosity of friends, especially Dorset.

The work which Dryden now found to do, for which he possessed extraordinary qualifications, and for which there was a genuine demand in the age, was that of translation from the Latin classics. The derivative character of Latin literature was not then recognized, and Roman authors received the veneration due of right only to the greatest of the Greeks. No one doubted that they gave unsurpassable models of style in their respective branches, and not many among Dryden's contemporaries questioned that he had given a definite and durable form to English poetry. In 1667, a few days before the publication of *Paradise Lost*, Pepys had overheard men saying that there would never be such another English poet as Cowley, and Dryden now stood in Cowley's place. It seemed then a highly desirable thing to bring these two classics together, and Dryden was perfectly competent to do whatever was expected of him. He would hardly have succeeded so well with the Greek writers, even had his knowledge of the language been more extensive; but he was well qualified to reproduce the more distinctive qualities of Roman poetry, its dignity, sometimes rising into majesty, its manly sense, its vehemence, pregnancy, and terseness. By 1693 he had rendered all Persius, much of Juvenal (the remainder was supplied by his sons), considerable portions of Ovid, the first book of Homer, and something from Theocritus, Horace, and Lucretius. In this year he commenced a more ambitious work, a complete version of Virgil. Of the merits of these works we shall speak hereafter; it is sufficient to observe here that they for a long time prescribed the laws of metrical translation in English. It is pleasant to notice how many of them were executed at the country seats of friends, where the old man, discharged from the strife of faction and the noise and glare of theatres, relieved his intellectual toil by the simple amusements of a country life. Virgil was published in 1697, and remained, in the judgment of the age, at the head of all English translations until Pope's *Homer* came to dethrone it. It was immediately succeeded by a greater work still, his *Fables* from Chaucer and Boccaccio. Though the representative of the literary taste of his time, Dryden was by no means the representative of its prejudices. He saw much more in Chaucer than his contemporaries were capable of seeing, and, rightly judging that the antiquated style of the old poet (who, however, appeared to him much more uncouth than he really was) would effectually keep him out of readers' hands, he determined to modernize and adapt some of his stories, to which narrative poems founded on Boccaccio were afterwards added. The undertaking precisely suited the genius of Dryden, which lay more in expressing and adorning what he found ready to hand than in original invention, and his *Fables*, published in 1699, are deservedly placed at the head of his works. It is of course impossible that they should exhibit the same intellectual strength as his argumentative and satirical poems, but this is more than compensated by their superior attractiveness, the additional scope offered for the display of art, and their comparative freedom from everything that can repel. The same volume contained his greatest lyrical effort, the universally known *Alexander's Feast*. He received forty pounds for it; the Virgil is said to have brought him twelve hundred; for the *Fables* he got only three hundred. From a private letter of about this date it appears that there was some idea

of his receiving assistance from the government, which he seems not unwilling to accept, provided that it proves to require no sacrifice of principle. It is not likely that he would have been allowed to die in want; and indeed, early in 1700, a dramatic performance was got up for his benefit. He died shortly afterwards (May 1st, 1700) in narrow pecuniary circumstances, but in the enjoyment of a more unquestioned literary supremacy among his contemporaries than any Englishman had held before him. The cause of his death was the mortification of a toe inflamed by gout. He was buried in Westminster Abbey. The funeral, for the splendour of which Farquhar vouches in a contemporary letter, is said to have been accompanied by tumultuary scenes, but the absence of any reference to these in a malevolent contemporary libel, ascribed to Thomas Brown, is sufficient evidence that they did not occur.

There are few English writers of eminence whom it is so difficult to realize satisfactorily to the mind's eye as Dryden. Personal enough in one respect, his writings are singularly impersonal in another; he never paints, and seldom reveals himself, and the aid which letters or reminiscences might have afforded is almost entirely wanting. No one noted his conversation; his enemies' attacks and his friends' panegyrics are equally devoid of those traits of character which might have invested a shadowy outline with life and substance. The nearest approach to a portrait is Congreve's, which leaves most of the character in the shade, and even this is somewhat suspicious, for Congreve was Dryden's debtor for noble praise, and the vindication of Dryden's repute had been imposed upon him by the poet himself. The qualities, however, which he commends are such as seem entirely reconcilable with the lymphatic temperament which, partly on his own authority ('my conversation,' he says, 'is slow and dull, my humour saturnine and reserved'), we have seen reason to attribute to Dryden. We are told of his humanity and compassion, of his readiness to forgive injuries, of a friendship that exceeded his professions, of his diffidence in general society and horror of intrusiveness, of his patience in accepting corrections of his own errors, of which he must be allowed to have given a remarkable instance in his submission to Jeremy Collier. All these traits give the impression of one who, though by no means pedantic, was only a wit when he had the pen in his hand, and entirely correspond with his apparent aversion to intellectual labour, except under the pressure of want or the stimulus of Court favour. When at length he did warm to his work, we know from himself that thoughts crowded so rapidly upon him that his only difficulty was to decide what to reject. Such a man may well have appeared a negative character to his contemporaries, and the events of his life were not of a nature to force his virtues or his failings into notice. We can only say that there is no proof of his having been a bad husband; that there is clear evidence of his having been a good father; and that, although he took the wrong side in the political and religious controversies of his day, this is no reason why he may not, according to his light, have been a good citizen. His references to illustrious predecessors like Shakespeare and Milton, and promising young men like Congreve, indicate a real generosity of character. The moral defects of his writings, coarse licentiousness, unmeasured invective, and equally unmeasured adulation, belong to the age rather than to the man. On the whole, we may say that he was one whom we should probably have esteemed if we could have known him; but in whom, apart from his writings, we should not have discovered the first literary figure of his generation.

Dryden's early poems, the *Heroic Stanzas* on the death of Cromwell, the *Astraea Redux* on the Restoration, the panegyric of Clarendon, and the verses on the Coronation, are greatly marred for modern readers by extravagant conceits, but are sobriety itself compared to the exploits of contemporary poets, especially the Pindaric. In a more important particular, Dryden, as Scott remarks, has observed a singular and happy delicacy. The topic of the Civil War is but slightly dwelt on; and, although Cromwell is extolled, his eulogist abstains from any reflections against those through whom he cut his way to greatness. Isolated couplets in the other poems occasionally display that perfection of condensed and pointed expression which Dryden habitually attained in his later poems:

‘Spain to your gift alone her Indies owes;

For what the powerful takes not, he bestows:  
 And France, that did an exile's presence fear,  
 May justly apprehend you still too near.' —*Astraea Redux*.

These early attempts, however, were completely thrown into the shade by the *Annus Mirabilis*, a poem on the memorable events of 1666, written at Charlton, near Malmesbury, the seat of Lord Berkeley, where Dryden and his family had resorted in 1665 to escape the plague, and published in February, 1667. The author was then thirty-five, and, judged in the light of his subsequent celebrity, had as yet achieved surprisingly little either in quantity or quality. Youth is generally the most affluent season of poetical activity; and those poets whose claim to inspiration is the most unimpeachable – Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley – have irradiated their early writings with flashes of genius which their maturer skill hardly enabled them to eclipse. This cannot be said of Dryden, who of our great poets, unless Pope be an exception, probably owed least to inspiration and most to pains and practice. Even Pope at this age had produced *The Rape of the Lock*, *The Temple of Fame*, *Eloisa to Abelard*, and his translation of the *Iliad*, enough to have given him a high place among English poets. The *Annus Mirabilis* was the first production of Dryden that could have insured him remembrance with posterity, and even this is sadly disfigured with conceits. After all, the poet finds only two marvels of his wonderful year worthy of record – the Dutch war, which had been going on for two years, and which produced a much greater wonder in the year ensuing, when the Dutch sailed up to Gravesend and burned the English fleet; and the Great Fire of London. The treatment of the former is very tedious and dragging; there are many striking lines, but more conceits like the following, descriptive of the English attack upon the Dutch East Indiamen:

'Amidst whole heaps of spices lights a ball,  
 And now their odours armed against them fly;  
 Some preciously by shattered porcelain fall,  
 And some by aromatic splinters die.'

The second part, treating of the Fire of London, is infinitely better. Dryden exhibits one of the most certain marks of a good writer, he rises with his subject. Yet there is no lack of absurdities. The Deity extinguishes the conflagration precisely in the manner in which Dryden would have put out his own candle:

'An hollow crystal pyramid he takes,  
 In firmamental waters dipt above;  
 Of it a broad extinguisher he makes,  
 And hoods the flames that to their quarry drove.'

Nothing in Dryden is more amazing than his inequality. This stanza is succeeded by the following:

'The vanquished fires withdraw from every place,  
 Or, full with feeding, sink into a sleep;  
 Each household genius shows again his face,  
 And from the hearths the little Lares creep.'

Other quatrains are still better, as, for instance, this on the burning of St. Paul's:

'The daring flames peeped in, and saw from far

The awful beauties of the sacred quire;  
But since it was profaned by civil war,  
Heaven thought it fit to have it purged by fire.'

A thought so striking, that the reader does not pause to reflect that the celestial sentence would have been equally applicable to every cathedral in the country. Perhaps the following stanzas compose the passage of most sustained excellence. In them, as in the apostrophe to the Royal Society, in an earlier part of the poem, Dryden appears truly the *vates sacer*, and his poetry becomes prophecy:

'Methinks already from this chymic flame  
I see a city of more precious mould;  
Rich as the town which gives the Indies name,  
With silver paved, and all divine with gold.

'Already labouring with a mighty fate  
She shakes the rubbish from her mounting brow,  
And seems to have renewed her charter's date,  
Which heaven will to the death of Time allow.

'More great than human now, and more august,  
Now deified she from her fires doth rise;  
Her widening streets on new foundations trust,  
And opening into larger parts she flies.

'Before, she like some shepherdess did show,  
Who sat to bathe her by a river's side;  
Not answering to her fame, but rude and low,  
Nor taught the beauteous arts of modern pride.

'Now like a Maiden Queen she will behold  
From her high turrets hourly suitors come;  
The East with incense and the West with gold  
Will stand like suppliants to receive her doom.

'The silver Thames, her own domestic flood,  
Shall bear her vessels like a sweeping train;  
And often wind, as of his mistress proud,  
With longing eyes to meet her face again.

'The wealthy Tagus, and the wealthier Rhine,  
The glory of their towns no more shall boast;  
And Seine, that would with Belgian rivers join,  
Shall find her lustre stained and traffic lost.

'The venturous merchant, who designed more far,  
And touches on our hospitable shore,  
Charmed with the splendour of this northern star,  
Shall here unlade him, and depart no more.'

For several years after *Annus Mirabilis*, Dryden produced but little poetry apart from his dramas. Fashion, Court encouragement, and the necessity of providing for his family, had bound him to what was then the most conspicuous and lucrative form of authorship. In one point of view he committed a great error in addicting himself to the drama. He was not naturally qualified to excel in it, and could only obtain even a temporary success by condescending to the prevalent faults of the contemporary stage, its bombast and its indecency. The latter transgression was eventually so handsomely confessed by himself that but little need be said of it. Bombast is natural to two classes of writers, the ardent and the phlegmatic, and those whose emotions require the most working up are frequently the worst offenders. Such was Dryden's case, and his natural proclivity was much enhanced by his adoption of the new fashion of writing in rhyme, beloved at Court, but affording every temptation and every facility for straining after effect in the place of Nature. Mr. Saintsbury justly reminds us that Dryden was not forsaking the blank verse of Shakespeare and Fletcher, the secret of which had long been lost; nevertheless, although, as we shall see when we come to his critical writings, he pleaded very ingeniously for rhyme in 1665, his adoption of it was condemned by his maturer judgment and practice. It was, however, fortunate in the long run; his rhyming plays, of which we shall speak in another place, would not have been great successes in any metre, while practice in their composition, and the necessity of expressing the multitude of diverse sentiments required by bustling scenes and crowds of characters, gradually gave him that command of the heroic couplet which bestows such strength and brilliancy on his later writings. His 'fourteen years of dramatic practice,' as Mr. Saintsbury justly says, 'acted as a filtering reservoir for his poetical powers, so that the stream, which, when it ran into them, was the turbid and rubbish-laden current of *Annus Mirabilis*, flowed out as impetuous, as strong, but clear and without base admixture, in the splendid verse of *Absalom and Achitophel*.'<sup>3</sup>

This great poem, published in November, 1681, at the height of the contest over the Exclusion Bill and its consequences, remains to this day the finest example of political satire in English literature. The theme was skilfully selected. James II. had not yet convinced the most sceptical of the justice and wisdom of the Exclusion Bill, and its advocates laboured under the serious disadvantage of having no strong claimant for the succession if they prevailed in setting the Duke of York aside. James's son-in-law, the Prince of Orange, would not, it is safe to say, ever have been accepted by the nation as king if James's folly and tyranny had not, years afterwards, given him the opportunity of presenting himself in the character of Deliverer; and, failing him, there was no one but the popular but unfortunately illegitimate Monmouth. The character of Absalom seemed exactly made for this handsome and foolish prince. The resemblance of his royal father to David, except in matters akin to the affair of Bathsheba, was not quite so obvious. Dryden might almost have been suspected of satirizing his master when he wrote:

'When nature prompted, and no law denied  
Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;  
Then Israel's monarch after heaven's own heart  
His vigorous warmth did variously impart  
To wives and slaves; and, wide as his command,  
Scattered his Maker's image through the land.  
Of all the numerous progeny was none  
So beautiful, so brave as Absolon.'

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<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps worth remarking that, although not yet a Roman Catholic, Dryden in this name employs the orthography, not of the authorized English version, but of the Vulgate.

The management of Absalom was a difficult matter. With all his transgressions, the rebel Monmouth was still beloved by his father, and Dryden could not have ventured to treat him as his prototype is treated by Scripture. He has extricated himself from the dilemma with abundant dexterity, but at some expense to his poem. The catastrophe required by poetical justice does not come to pass, and the conclusion is tame. All such defects, however, are forgotten in the splendour of the execution. The versification is the finest in its style that English literature had yet seen, the perfection of heroic verse. The sense is weighty and massive, as befits such an organ of expression, and, whatever may be thought of Dryden's flatteries of individuals, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity with which he here expresses his political convictions. He unquestionably belonged to that class of mankind who cannot discern principles apart from persons, and his contempt for abstractions is pointedly expressed in one of his ringing couplets:

‘Thought they might ruin him they could create,  
Or melt him to that golden calf – a state.’

This is not a very high manifestation of the intellect in its application to political questions, but it bespeaks the class of persons who provide ballast for the vessel of the state in tempestuous times; and, on the whole, *Absalom and Achitophel* is a poem which the patriot as well as the admirer of genius may read with complacency. The royal side of the question could not be better put than in these lines placed in the mouth of David:

‘Thus long have I, by native mercy sway’d,  
My wrongs dissembled, my revenge delay’d;  
So willing to forgive the offending age,  
So much the father did the king assuage.  
But now so far my clemency they slight,  
The offenders question my forgiving right.  
That one was made for many, they contend;  
But ’tis to rule; for that’s a monarch’s end.  
They call my tenderness of blood, my fear;  
Though manly tempers can the longest bear.  
Yet since they will divert my native course,  
’Tis time to shew I am not good by force.  
Those heap’d affronts, that haughty subjects bring,  
Are burdens for a camel, not a king.  
Kings are the public pillars of the state,  
Born to sustain and prop the nation’s weight:  
If my young Sampson will pretend a call  
To shake the column, let him share the fall.  
But oh, that he yet would repent and live!  
How easy ’tis for parents to forgive!  
With how few tears a pardon might be won  
From nature pleading for a darling son!  
Poor, pitied youth, by my paternal care  
Raised up to all the height his frame could bear!  
Had God ordain’d his fate for empire born,  
He would have given his soul another turn:  
Gull’d with a patriot’s name, whose modern sense  
Is one that would by law supplant his prince;



The people's brave, the politician's tool;  
Never was patriot yet, but was a fool.  
Whence comes it, that religion and the laws  
Should more be Absalom's than David's cause?  
His old instructor, ere he lost his place,  
Was never thought endued with so much grace.  
Good heavens, how faction can a patriot paint!  
My rebel ever proves my people's saint.  
Would they impose an heir upon the throne?  
Let Sanhedrims be taught to give their own.  
A king's at least a part of government;  
And mine as requisite as their consent.  
Without my leave a future king to choose,  
Infers a right the present to depose.  
True, they petition me to approve their choice;  
But Esau's hands suit ill with Jacob's voice.  
My pious subjects for my safety pray;  
Which to secure, they take my power away.  
From plots and treasons heaven preserve my years,  
And save me most from my petitioners!

It will be observed that 'the right the present to depose,' is mentioned by Dryden as something manifestly preposterous, and the derivation of it as a logical corollary from the Exclusion Bill is assumed to be a sufficient *reductio ad absurdum* of the latter. In the view of the majority of the nation, this was sound doctrine until the Revolution, which reduced Dryden's poem from the rank of a powerful political manifesto to that of a brilliant exercise of fancy and dialectic. As such, it will never cease to please and to impress. The finest passages are, no doubt, those descriptive of character, whether carefully studied portraits or strokes against particular foibles imputed to the poet's adversaries, such as this mock apology for the parsimonious kitchen of the Whig sheriff, Slingsby Bethel:

'Such frugal virtue malice may accuse,  
But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews:  
For towns, once burnt, such magistrates require,  
As dare not tempt God's providence by fire.'

The elaborate and glowing characters of Achitophel (Shaftesbury) and Zimri (Buckingham) it is needless to transcribe, as they are universally known. It may be remarked that the character of the turbulent and adventurous Shaftesbury does not match very well with that of the Ulyssean Achitophel of Scripture, but Dryden has wisely drawn from what he had before his eyes.

*The Medal*, which we have seen reason for attributing to the suggestion of Charles II. himself, appeared in March, 1682. It is a bitter invective against Shaftesbury, its theme the medal which his partisans had very naturally struck upon the occasion of his acquittal in the preceding autumn. It is entirely in a serious vein, and wants the grace and urbanity of some parts of *Absalom and Achitophel*, but is no way inferior as a piece of strong, vehement satire. Shaftesbury's conduct as a minister, before his breach with the Court, is thus described:

'Behold him now exalted into trust;  
His counsel's oft convenient, seldom just:

Even in the most sincere advice he gave  
He had a grudging still to be a knave.  
The frauds he learned in his fanatic years  
Made him uneasy in his lawful gears;  
At best, as little honest as he could,  
And, like white witches, mischievously good.'

The second part of *Absalom and Achitophel* appeared in November, 1682. It was mainly the work of Nahum Tate, who imitated his master's versification with success, but has numerous touches from the pen of Dryden, who inserted a long passage of unparalleled satire against his adversaries, especially Settle and Shadwell:

'Who by my means to all succeeding times  
Shall live in spite of their own doggrel rhymes.'

The character of Shadwell (Og) is well known, but it is impossible to avoid quoting a portion of it:

'The midwife laid her hand on his thick skull,  
With this prophetic blessing – "Be thou dull;  
Drink, swear and roar; forbear no lewd delight  
Fit for thy bulk; do any thing but write.  
Thou art of lasting make, like thoughtless men,  
A strong nativity – but for the pen;  
Eat opium, mingle arsenic in thy drink,  
Still thou mayst live, avoiding pen and ink."  
I see, I see, 'tis counsel given in vain,  
For treason, botch'd in rhyme, will be thy bane;  
Rhyme is the rock on which thou art to wreck,  
'Tis fatal to thy fame and to thy neck.  
Why should thy metre good King David blast?  
A psalm of his will surely be thy last.  
Darest thou presume in verse to meet thy foes,  
Thou, whom the penny pamphlet foil'd in prose?  
Doeg, whom God for mankind's mirth has made,  
O'ertops thy talent in thy very trade;  
Doeg, to thee, thy paintings are so coarse,  
A poet is, though he's the poet's horse.  
A double noose thou on thy neck dost pull,  
For writing treason, and for writing dull.  
To die for faction is a common evil,  
But to be hang'd for nonsense is the devil.  
Hadst thou the glories of thy king exprest,  
Thy praises had been satire at the best;  
But thou in clumsy verse, unlickt, unpointed,  
Hast shamefully defiled the Lord's anointed.  
I will not rake the dunghill of thy crimes,  
For who would read thy life that reads thy rhymes?  
But of King David's foes, be this the doom,

May all be like the young man Absalom;  
And, for my foes, may this their blessing be,  
To talk like Doeg, and to write like thee!

Only a month before the appearance of this annihilating attack, Dryden had devoted an entire poem to Shadwell, who had justly provoked him by a scandalous libel. The title of *MacFlecknoe* is derived from an Irish priest and, with the exception of some good lines pointed out by Southey and Lamb, a bad poet, already satirized by Marvell. It is a vigorous attack, but not equal to the passage in *Absalom and Achitophel*, and chiefly memorable inasmuch as the machinery evidently suggested that of Pope's *Dunciad*.

Dryden's next poetical efforts, the dramatic excepted, were of quite another kind. Simultaneously with the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel* appeared *Religio Laici*, an argument for the faith of the Church of England as a *juste milieu* between Popery and Deism. In one respect this takes the highest place among the works of Dryden, for it is the most perfect example he has given of that reasoning in rhyme of which he was so great a master. There is not and could not be any originality in the reasonings themselves, but Pope's famous couplet was never so finely illustrated, except by Pope himself:

'True wit is nature to advantage drest;  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well exprest.'

At the same time the poetry hardly rises to the height which the theme might have justified. There is little to captivate or astonish, but perpetual admiration attends upon the masterly conduct of the argument, and the ease with which dry and difficult propositions melt and glide in harmonious verse. The execution is singularly equable; but perhaps hardly maintains the elevation of the fine exordium:

'Dim as the borrow'd beams of moon and stars  
To lonely, weary, wandering travellers,  
Is reason to the soul: and as, on high,  
Those rolling fires discover but the sky,

Not light us here; so reason's glimmering ray	}
Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,	
But guide us upwards to a better day.	

And as those nightly tapers disappear,  
When day's bright lord ascends our hemisphere;  
So pale grows reason at religion's sight,  
So dies, and so dissolves in supernatural light.  
Some few, whose lamp shone brighter, have been led  
From cause to cause, to nature's sacred head,  
And found that one First Principle must be:  
But what, or who, that universal He;  
Whether some soul, encompassing this ball,  
Unmade, unmoved; yet making, moving all;  
Or various atoms' interfering dance  
Leap'd into form, the noble work of chance;

Or this great All was from eternity. —	
Not even the Stagyrte himself could see,	}
And Epicurus guess'd as well as he.	

As blindly groped they for a future state,  
 As rashly judged of providence and fate;  
 But least of all could their endeavours find  
 What most concern'd the good of human kind;  
 For happiness was never to be found,  
 But vanish'd from them like enchanted ground.  
 One thought content the good to be enjoy'd;  
 This very little accident destroy'd:  
 The wiser madmen did for virtue toil,  
 A thorny, or, at best, a barren soil:

In pleasure some their glutton souls would steep;	
But found their line too short, the well too deep,	}
And leaky vessels which no bliss could keep.	

Thus anxious thoughts in endless circles roll,  
 Without a centre where to fix the soul:  
 In this wild maze their vain endeavours end: —  
 How can the less the greater comprehend?  
 Or finite reason reach infinity?  
 For what could fathom God were more than he.'

Dryden's next important poem brought obloquy upon him in his own day, and must be perused with mingled feelings in this. Between 1682 and 1687, the date of the publication of *The Hind and the Panther*, the laureate of the Church of England had, as we have seen, become a Roman Catholic, and most reasonably desired to justify this step to the world. The Court also expected his pen to be drawn in their service, and hence the double purpose which runs through the poem, of vindicating his personal change of conviction and of justifying the political measures to which James had had recourse for establishing the supremacy of his church. All this was perfectly natural; the extraordinary thing is that so great a master of ridicule should have been blind to the ludicrous character of the machinery which he devised to carry out his purpose. The comparison of the true church to the milk-white hind, and of the corrupt church to the beautiful but spotted panther, might have been employed with propriety as an ornament or illustration of the poem, but the endeavour to make it the groundwork of the entire piece is pregnant with absurdity. Animals may very well be introduced as actors in a fiction upon condition that they behave like animals; and their faculties may even be expanded to suit the author's purpose so long as their exercise is confined to visible and concrete things; but the notion of a pair of quadrupeds discussing the sacraments, tradition, and the infallibility of the Pope, is only fit for burlesque, and constitutes, indeed, a running burlesque upon the poem. Dryden probably took up the idea without sufficient consideration, and when he had made some progress in his work he may well have been too enamoured with the beautiful but preposterous exordium to surrender it to common sense. Perverse and fantastic as is the plan of his poem, none of his works is richer in beauties of detail. 'In none,' says Macaulay, 'can be found passages more pathetic and magnificent, greater ductility and energy of language, or a more pleasing and various music.' The power of reasoning in rhyme is little inferior to that displayed in *Religio Laici*, and the narrative character of the piece allows of a diversified variety excluded by the simply didactic character of its

predecessor. The invective against Calvinists and Socinians, typified by the wolf and the fox, is an average, and not beyond an average, example of Dryden's matchless force. Near the end, it will be perceived, he suddenly bethinks himself that, as the apologist of James's ostensible policy, it is his business to recommend not persecution but toleration, and he caps his objurgation with a passage conceived in a widely different spirit, a severe though unintentional reflection upon the practice of his own church:

'O happy pair, how well you have increased!  
What ills in church and state have you redress'd!  
With teeth, untried, and rudiments of claws,  
Your first essay was on your native laws;

Those having torn with ease, and trampled down,	
Your fangs you fasten'd on the mitred crown,	}
And freed from God and monarchy your town.	

What though your native kennel still be small,  
Bounded betwixt a puddle and a wall;  
Yet your victorious colonies are sent  
Where the north ocean girds the continent.  
Quicken'd with fire below, your monsters breed  
In fenny Holland, and in fruitful Tweed;  
And, like the first, the last affects to be  
Drawn to the dregs of a democracy.  
As, where in fields the fairy rounds are seen,  
A rank sour herbage rises on the green;  
So, springing where those midnight elves advance,  
Rebellion prints the footsteps of the dance.

Such are their doctrines, such contempt they show	
To heaven above, and to their prince below,	}
As none but traitors and blasphemers know.	

God, like the tyrant of the skies, is placed,  
And kings, like slaves, beneath the crowd debased.  
So fulsome is their food, that flocks refuse  
To bite, and only dogs for physic use.  
As, where the lightning runs along the ground,  
No husbandry can heal the blasting wound;  
Nor bladed grass, nor bearded corn succeeds,  
But scales of scurf and putrefaction breeds;  
Such wars, such waste, such fiery tracks of dearth  
Their zeal has left, and such a teemless earth.  
But, as the poisons of the deadliest kind  
Are to their own unhappy coasts confined;  
As only Indian shades of sight deprive,  
And magic plants will but in Colchos thrive  
So presbytery and pestilential zeal  
Can only flourish in a commonweal.

From Celtic woods is chased the wolfish crew;  
 But ah! some pity e'en to brutes is due;  
 Their native walks, methinks, they might enjoy,  
 Curb'd of their native malice to destroy.  
 Of all the tyrannies on human kind,  
 The worst is that which persecutes the mind.  
 Let us but weigh at what offence we strike;  
 'Tis but because we cannot think alike.  
 In punishing of this, we overthrow  
 The laws of nations and of nature too.  
 Beasts are the subjects of tyrannic sway,  
 Where still the stronger on the weaker prey;  
 Man only of a softer mould is made,  
 Not for his fellows' ruin, but their aid;  
 Created kind, beneficent and free,  
 The noble image of the Deity.'

Dryden produced yet one more poem in the interest of the Court, his *Britannia Rediviva*, an official panegyric on the birth of the Prince of Wales, June, 1688. Literature has perhaps no more signal instance of adulation wasted and prediction falsified. Many lines are spirited, but others betray Dryden's fatal insensibility to the ridiculous in his own person:

'When humbly on the royal babe we gaze,  
 The manly lines of a majestic face  
 Give awful joy.'

The raptures of the Byzantine courtiers over the imperial infant Protus were nothing to this. Dryden did not want eloquence or dignity to celebrate the hero if he could have found him; it was his and our misfortune that when the hero did at last come to the throne the poet had disqualified himself from extolling him. The landing in Torbay and the triumphal march to London; the victory at the Boyne and the defence of Londonderry were transactions as worthy of epical treatment as any history records; but the only man in England who could have treated them epically deemed them rather matter for elegy; and to have indulged in elegy he must have fled to France. Public events and political and religious controversy were no longer for him: stripped of his means and position he betook himself to translation and playwriting as the readiest means of repairing his shattered fortunes, and it was not until the mellow sunset of his life that he turned to the compositions which, of all he ever wrote, have given the most delight and the least offence, his *Fables*. These, published at the beginning of 1700, include five adaptations from Chaucer, and three stories told after Boccaccio, as well as *Alexander's Feast*, and a few other pieces. It would not be too much to say that this book achieved two things, either of which would have immortalized a poet: it fixed the standard of narrative poetry, except of the metrical romance or ballad class, and also that of heroic versification. The latter, indeed, was thought for a time to have been transcended by Pope, but modern ears have tired of the balanced seesaw of the Popian couplet, and crave the ease and variety of Dryden, restored to literature in Leigh Hunt's *Story of Rimini*, and afterwards imitated by Keats in *Lamia*. The freedom which so great a master allows himself in rhyming should be a lesson to modern purists: final sounds so slightly akin as *guard* and *prepared*, *placed* and *last*, are of continual occurrence. In matters still more important than versification Dryden is in general equally admirable. He subjected himself to a severe test in competing with Chaucer – severer than he knew, for Chaucer was not yet, even by Dryden, valued at his full worth. In some respects Dryden certainly suffers greatly by the comparison.

He is pre-eminently an intellectual poet, to whom the tree of knowledge had been the tree of life; there is perhaps scarcely a thought in his writings that charms by absolute simplicity and pure nature. Wherever, therefore, Chaucer is transparently simple and unaffected, we find him altered for the worse in Dryden. The very important part, however, of *The Knight's Tale* which is concerned with courts, camps, and chivalry is even better in Dryden than in his model. He might have defined his sphere in the words of Ariosto, a poet who has many points of contact with him:

‘Le donne, i cavalier, l’arme, gli amori,  
Le cortesie, l’audaci imprese io canto.’

If this is true of portions of *Palamon and Arcite*, it is still truer of *The Flower and the Leaf* (then believed to be a genuine work of Chaucer’s), throughout a most brilliant picture of natural beauty and courtly glitter, painted in language of chastened splendour. The other pieces modelled after Chaucer are of inferior interest, yet all excellent in their way. Two of the three tales from Boccaccio are acknowledged masterpieces, *Cymon and Iphigenia* and *Theodore and Honoria*. The interest of the first chiefly consists in the narrative itself, and that of the second in the way of telling it. The story, indeed, though striking, is fantastic and hardly pleasing, but Dryden’s treatment of it is perhaps the most perfect specimen in our language of *l’art de conter*.

An example of Dryden’s descriptive power may be given in a passage from *The Flower and the Leaf*:

‘Thus while I sat intent to see and hear,  
And drew perfumes of more than vital air,  
All suddenly I heard the approaching sound  
Of vocal music, on the enchanted ground:

An host of saints it seem’d, so full the choir;	
As if the bless’d above did all conspire	}
To join their voices, and neglect the lyre.	

At length there issued from the grove behind  
A fair assembly of the female kind:  
A train less fair, as ancient fathers tell,  
Seduced the sons of heaven to rebel.  
I pass their forms, and every charming grace;  
Less than an angel would their worth debase:  
But their attire, like liveries of a kind,  
All rich and rare, is fresh within my mind.  
In velvet white as snow the troop was gown’d,  
The seams with sparkling emeralds set around:  
Their hoods and sleeves the same; and purpled o’er  
With diamonds, pearls, and all the shining store  
Of eastern pomp; their long-descending train  
With rubies edged, and sapphires, swept the plain.  
High on their heads, with jewels richly set,  
Each lady wore a radiant coronet.  
Beneath the circles, all the choir was graced  
With chaplets green on their fair foreheads placed;  
Of laurel some, of woodbine many more,

And wreath of Agnus castus others bore:  
 These last, who with those virgin crowns were dress'd,  
 Appear'd in higher honour than the rest.

They danced around; but in the midst was seen	}
A lady of a more majestic mien;	
By stature, and by beauty, mark'd their sovereign queen.	

She in the midst began with sober grace;  
 Her servants' eyes were fix'd upon her face,  
 And as she moved or turn'd, her motions view'd,  
 Her measures kept, and step by step pursued.  
 Methought she trod the ground with greater grace,  
 With more of godhead shining in her face;  
 And as in beauty she surpass'd the choir,  
 So, nobler than the rest was her attire.  
 A crown of ruddy gold inclosed her brow,  
 Plain without pomp, and rich without a show:  
 A branch of Agnus castus in her hand  
 She bore aloft (her sceptre of command;)  
 Admired, adored by all the circling crowd,  
 For wheresoe'er she turn'd her face, they bow'd.  
 And as she danced, a roundelay she sung,  
 In honour of the laurel, ever young.

She raised her voice on high, and sung so clear,	}
The fawns came scudding from the groves to hear,	
And all the bending forest lent an ear.	

At every close she made, the attending throng  
 Replied, and bore the burden of the song:  
 So just, so small, yet in so sweet a note,  
 It seem'd the music melted in the throat.'

One remarkable feature of the principal poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is the infrequency of the casual visitations of the Muse. They seem to have hardly ever experienced an unsought lyrical inspiration, or to have sung merely for singing's sake. Hence Dryden is permitted to appear only twice in the *Golden Treasury*. His songs, to be treated of more fully when we consider the lyrical poetry of the period, though often instinct with true lyrical spirit, seem to have been deliberately composed for insertion in his plays, and the same is the case with almost the whole of what he would have called his occasional poetry. His two chief odes, *Alexander's Feast* and the memorial verses to Anne Killigrew, were indubitably commissions; and it is probable that few of the epistles, elegies, dedications, and prologues which form so considerable a portion of his poetical works were composed without some similar inducement. As a whole, this collection is creditable to his powers of intellect, quickness of wit, and command of nervous masculine diction. It is frequently the work of a master, though conceived in the spirit of a journeyman. The adulation of the patron or the defunct is generally fulsome enough; yet some compliments are so graceful that it is difficult not to believe them sincere, as when he apostrophizes the Duchess of Ormond:



‘O daughter of the Rose, whose cheeks unite  
The differing titles of the Red and White!  
Who heaven’s alternate beauty well display,  
The blush of morning and the milky way.’

Or the conclusion of his epistle to Kneller:

‘More cannot be by mortal art exprest,  
But venerable age shall add the rest.  
For Time shall with his ready pencil stand,  
Retouch your figures with his ripening hand,  
Mellow your colours, and imbrown the teint,  
Add every grace which Time alone can grant;  
To future ages shall your fame convey,  
And give more beauties than he takes away.’

Or these from the epistle to his kinsman, John Driden, more likely than any of the others to have been the unbought manifestation of genuine regard:

‘O true descendant of a patriot line!  
Who while thou shar’st their lustre lendest thine!  
Vouchsafe this picture of thy soul to see,  
’Tis so far good as it resembles thee.  
The beauties to the original I owe,  
Which when I miss my own defects I show;  
Nor think the kindred Muses thy disgrace;  
A poet is not born in every race;  
Two of a house few ages can afford,  
One to perform, another to record.  
Praiseworthy actions are by thee embraced,  
And ’tis my praise to make thy praises last.’

The last couplet, excellent in sense, is an example of Dryden’s one metrical defect. He is not sufficiently careful to vary his vowel-sounds.

Dryden’s translations alone would give him a conspicuous place in English literature. The most important, his complete version of Virgil, has been improved upon in many ways, and yet after all it remains true, that ‘Pitt is quoted, and Dryden read.’ Had he never translated Virgil, his renderings or imitations of Juvenal, Horace, and others, would suffice to entitle him to no inconsiderable rank among those who have enriched their native literature from foreign stores. His principle of translation was correct, and accords with that of the greatest of English critics. Coleridge assured Wordsworth that there were only two legitimate systems of metrical translation, strict literality, or compensation carried to its fullest extent. Dryden most probably had not sufficient Latin to be literal; but in any case his genius would have disdained such trammels, not to mention the more prosaic, but not less potent consideration, that what is written for bread must usually be written in haste – a fact which weighed with Dryden when he discontinued rhyme in his tragedies. Thus thrown back on the system of compensation, he has richly repaid his authors for the beauties of which he has bereaved them, by the beauties which he has bestowed – or which, as he maintains, were actually latent in them – and has expressed many of their thoughts with even enhanced energy. He has, in fact, made them write very much as they would have written if they had been English poets of the seventeenth century, and

his work is less translation than transfusion. They necessarily appear much metamorphosed from the originals, but the fault is less that of Dryden than of his age. Could he have attempted the same task in our day with equal resources of genius, and on the same principles of workmanship, he would have succeeded much better, for he would have enjoyed more comprehension of the spirit of his originals than was possible in the seventeenth century. The scholarship of that age had not vivified the information which it had amassed; the idealized, but still vital conceptions of the Renaissance had given place to inanimate conventionality; the people of Greece and Rome appeared to the moderns like people in books; and such warm, affectionate contact between the souls of the present and the past as afterwards inspired Shelley's versions from Homer and Euripides was in that age impossible.

So great and versatile were Dryden's powers that, after all that has been said, his performances as a lyric poet, as a dramatist, and as a critic remain to be spoken of, and his rank in each has to be recognized as that of the foremost writer of his country in his own day. These will be treated in their appropriate places. The present is, perhaps, the most appropriate for a few words on his position as a poet. It is most difficult to determine whether he and his successor, Pope, should be placed at the bottom of the first class, or at the head of the second class of great English poets. If the very highest gifts of all – originality, creative imagination, unstudied music, unconscious inspiration, lofty ideal, the power to interpret nature, are essential conditions of rank in the first class, then assuredly Dryden and Pope must be contented with the second. If not positively excluded by the very nature of the case – if deficiency in the very highest qualities can be compensated by consummate excellence in all the rest – if intellect will supply the place of inspiration, and art that of nature – then they stand so high above the average of the second rank that it seems injurious not to place them in the first. The principle of exclusion, logically carried out, might involve the elevation above them of other writers whom we instinctively feel to be their inferiors; too absolute an insistence, on the other hand, upon the claims of intellectual power and perfect execution as qualifications for supreme poetical rank, must result in preferring Pope to Dryden. Inferior to his successor in both these respects, Dryden may still justly be preferred to him on the ground of his more ample endowment with that divine insanity without which, as Plato truly says, no one can be a poet. But this consideration cannot be invoked in his favour against Pope without admitting his inferiority to poets of the very first order; and it may be seriously questioned whether any poet can belong to the first order who is so exclusively a town poet as Dryden and Pope, and has so little knowledge of nature. The resemblances and contrasts between him and Pope have been frequently discussed; there are two other poets with whom comparison is less hackneyed and not unprofitable. In fecundity, in versatility, in energy, in the frequent application of his poetry to public affairs, in his influence on contemporary literature, position as head of a school, and incontestable superiority to all the poets around him, no less, unfortunately, in bombast and incomprehensible breaches of good taste, he strongly reminds us of Victor Hugo. Hugo, undoubtedly, was a much greater lyrical poet than Dryden, and was enkindled by spontaneous inspirations which never visited Dryden; yet the two are essentially of the same genus; the differences between them are rather characteristic of their eras than of themselves; and while Hugo's imagination would have pined in the seventeenth century, Dryden's intellect and Dryden's modesty would have been highly serviceable to Hugo in the nineteenth. Another poet, whose talent and career offer many analogies to Dryden's, is one whom Dryden himself disparages upon metrical grounds. Claudian, like Dryden, is a remarkable instance of a poet owing a large portion of his fame to his dexterous treatment of occasional subjects. As Dryden drew material for his most powerful writings from the political and religious controversies of his day, so Claudian found his themes in the exploits of Stilicho and the misdeeds of Rufinus. Both have made uninteresting subjects attractive by admirable treatment; both are greatly indebted to art and little to nature; both in their latter days<sup>4</sup> sought relief from politics in

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<sup>4</sup> In his dedication to the second book of *De Raptu Proserpinae*, Claudian says: 'Tu mea plectra moves, Antraque Musarum longo torpentia somno Excutis et placito ducis ab ore sonos.'

more ideal compositions, Dryden in his *Fables*, Claudian in his *Rape of Proserpine*, a poem imbued with the characteristic qualities of Dryden.

Among the greatest services which Dryden rendered to our language and literature are to be reckoned his improvements in heroic versification, of which he has left an unsurpassed model.

‘Waller was smooth, but Dryden taught to join  
The varying verse, the full majestic line,  
The long-resounding march, and energy divine.’

His changes, nevertheless, were not always improvements. He is too uniform, though not absolutely uniform, in confining the sense to the couplet; and, in adding dignity to Chaucer’s verse, he has lost something of its sweetness. Leigh Hunt well observes: ‘Though Dryden’s versification is noble, beautiful, and so complete of its kind that to an ear uninstructed in the metre of the old poet all comparison between the two in this respect seems out of the question and even ludicrous, yet the measure in which Dryden wrote not only originated, but attained to a considerable degree of its beauty in Chaucer; and the old poet’s immeasurable superiority in sentiment and imagination, not only to Dryden, but to all, up to a very late period, who have written in the same form of verse, left him in possession of beauties, even in versification, which it remains for some future poet to amalgamate with Dryden’s in a manner worthy of both, and so carry England’s noble heroic rhyme to its pitch of perfection.’ It need not be said that Pope’s magnificent eulogy solely respects Dryden as a rhyming poet. His blank verse, though in general good enough for the stage, and better than that of most of his contemporaries, is utterly destitute of the sweetness and variety of the Elizabethans.

Dryden’s works were edited with exemplary zeal and fidelity by Sir Walter Scott. The standard modern edition is Mr. Saintsbury’s; the one most convenient for general use, Mr. Christie’s.

## CHAPTER II. POETS CONTEMPORARY WITH DRYDEN

Oldham (1653-1683).

The contemporary of Dryden who approached him most nearly in satiric force, and, generally speaking, in the borderland between poetry and prose, was John Oldham (1653-1683). Not much is known of his life. The son of a Nonconformist minister, he nevertheless obtained a university education, but after leaving college was glad to accept the position of usher in Archbishop Whitgift's free school at Croydon. Coming to town he filled the post of tutor in various families, and by his *Satires upon the Jesuits* (1681) gained the acquaintance of Dryden and other men of letters and the patronage of the Earl of Kingston, who seemed likely to provide for him, but at whose seat in Nottinghamshire he died of the smallpox, December, 1683.

Oldham's poems consist partly of odes, formal and elaborate compositions, and partly of the satires which in his age in some measure supplied the place of the modern journal and review. A secret and unconscious harmony pervades all branches of the contemporary art of every epoch; and in the stately and somewhat stilted lyrics of Oldham and his compeers we discern the counterpart of the elaborate frontispieces with temples and triumphal arches, chariots and cornucopias, tritons and nereids, which the engravers of the age prefixed to its literature. The engraving is hardly art, and the verse is hardly poetry; we are nevertheless conscious of a vigour and a substance which command respect. The work is compact and solid at any rate, and displays much of the force of the Giants, if little of the inspiration of the Gods. Oldham would fain be extravagant in praise of wine; but there is not the least trace of genuine Bacchic frenzy in his laboured dithyramb. The epicedion on his friend Mouvent is a serious composition indeed, forty-two mortal stanzas, with, nevertheless, sufficient good things to justify the praise bestowed on it by Pope. The ode to Ben Jonson is remarkable as expressing the feelings of the men of the Restoration towards the poet who they really thought had reformed the stage, and delivered it from the reprehensible licentiousness of Shakespeare. Like Oldham's other lyrical compositions, it abounds with most dissonant lines, but has also some noble ones, as these, for example:

'Let meaner spirits stoop to low precarious fame,  
Content on gross and coarse applause to live  
And what the dull and senseless rabble give;  
Thou didst it still with noble scorn contemn,  
Nor wouldst that wretched alms receive,  
The poor subsistence of some bankrupt, sordid name:  
Thine was no empty vapour, raised beneath,  
And formed of common breath,  
The false and foolish fire, that's whisk'd about  
By popular air, and glares awhile, and then goes out;  
But 'twas a solid, whole, and perfect globe of light,  
That shone all over, was all over bright,  
And dared all sully'ng clouds, and feared no darkening night.'

Oldham's principal celebrity, however, is derived from his satires. He had the knack of stinging invective, and has been not unjustly compared to Churchill. His *Satires on the Jesuits* exactly suited the time of the Popish Plot, at present they repel by their one-sidedness. All satire, except that inspired by fancy, is apt to become repulsive by its natural tendency to dwell upon the meanest and lowest

aspects of human nature; and this is pre-eminently the case with Oldham, who is always ridiculing or denouncing, always drawing his illustrations from the base and offensive, and seldom diversifies his low matter with an ennobling thought. Yet he evinces so much manly sense, and his style is so nervous, that it is impossible not to admire his vigour, and wish him a more inviting subject. His metre and rhyme frequently stand in need of Dryden's generous apology:

'O early ripe! to thy abundant store  
What could advancing age have added more?  
It might, what Nature never gives the young,  
Have taught the smoothness of thy native tongue.  
But satire needs not these, and wit will shine  
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.'

All this notwithstanding, Oldham had the root of the matter in him, and has described, as only a poet could, the ambition, the toil, and the triumph of a poet:

'Tis endless, Sir, to tell the many ways  
Wherein my poor deluded self I please:  
How, when the fancy lab'ring for a birth,  
With unfelt throes, brings its rude issue forth:  
How, after, when imperfect, shapeless thought  
Is, by the judgment, into fashion wrought:  
When at first search, I traverse o'er my mind,  
None, but a dark and empty void I find:  
Some little hints, at length, like sparks break thence,  
And glimm'ring thoughts, just dawning into sense:  
Confus'd, awhile, the mixt ideas lie  
With nought of mark to be discover'd by;  
Like colours undistinguish'd in the night,  
Till the dusk images mov'd to the light,  
Teach the discerning faculty to choose,  
Which it had best adopt, and which refuse.  
Here rougher strokes, touch'd with a careless dash,  
Resemble the first setting of a face:  
There finish'd draughts in form more full appear,  
And in their justness ask no further care,  
Meanwhile, with inward joy, I proud am grown,  
To see the work successfully go on;  
And prize myself in a creating-power,  
That could make something, what was nought before.  
Sometimes a stiff unwieldy thought I meet,  
Which to my laws, will scarce be made submit:  
But when, after expense of pains and time,  
'Tis manag'd well, and taught to yoke in rhyme,  
In triumph, more than joyful warriors would,  
Had they some stout and hardy foe subdu'd:  
And idly think, less goes to their command,  
That makes arm'd troops in well-placed order stand,  
Than to the conduct of my words, when they

March in due ranks, are set in just array.

Sometimes on wings of thought I seem on high,	
As men in sleep, tho' motionless they lie,	}
Hedg'd by a dream, believe they mount and fly:	

So wiches some enchanted wand bestride,	
And think they thro' the airy regions ride,	}
Where fancy is both trav'ler, way and guide:	

Then straight I grow a strange exalted thing,  
 And equal in conceit at least a king:  
 As the poor drunkard, when wine stums his brains,  
 Anointed with that liquor, thinks he reigns;  
 Bewitch'd by these delusions, 'tis I write,  
 (The tricks some pleasant devil plays in spite)  
 And when I'm in the freakish trance, which I,  
 Fond silly wretch, mistake for ecstasy,  
 I find all former resolutions vain,  
 And thus recant them, and make new again.  
 "What was't I rashly vow'd? shall ever I  
 Quit my beloved mistress, Poetry?  
 Thou sweet beguiler of my lonely hours,  
 Which thus glide unperceiv'd, with silent course:  
 Thou gentle spell, which undisturb'd dost keep  
 My breast, and charm intruding care asleep:  
 They say thou'rt poor, and un-endow'd, what tho'?  
 For thee, I this vain, worthless world forego:  
 Let wealth and honour be for fortune's slaves,  
 The alms of fools, and prize of crafty knaves:  
 To me thou art, whate'er th'ambitious crave,  
 And all that greedy misers want or have.  
 In youth or age, in travel or at home;  
 Here, or in town, at London, or at Rome;  
 Rich, or a beggar, free, or in the Fleet,  
 What'er my fate is, 'tis my fate to write."

Oldham's talent, depending upon masculine sense and vigour of expression rather than upon the more ethereal graces of poetry, was of the kind to expand and mellow by age and practice. Had he lived longer he would undoubtedly have left a name conspicuous in English literature. As it is, he can only be regarded as a bright satellite revolving at a respectful distance around the all-illuminating orb of Dryden. Before passing to Marvell and Butler, the only two really original poets after Dryden besides the veterans Cowley and Waller, who belong to the preceding period, it will be convenient to despatch a group of minor bards, whose inclusion in the standard collections of poetry, involving memoirs by a master of biography, has given them more celebrity than they in most instances deserve.

Lord Rochester (1647-1680).

John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1647-1680), is principally known to posterity by his vices and his repentance. The latter has helped to preserve the memory of the former, which have also left abiding traces in a number of poems not included in his works, and some of which, it may be

hoped, are wrongly attributed to him. For a number of years Rochester obtained notoriety as, after Buckingham, the most dissolute character of a dissolute age; but at the same time a critic and a wit, potent to make or mar the fortunes of men of letters. 'Sure,' says Mr. Saintsbury, 'to play some monkey trick or other on those who were unfortunate enough to be his intimates.' Many a literary cabal was instigated by him, many a libel and lampoon flowed from his pen, among others, *The Session of the Poets*, correctly characterized by Johnson as 'merciless insolence.' Worn out by a life of excess, he died at thirty-three, and his penitence, largely due to the arguments and exhortations of Burnet, afforded the latter material for a narrative which Johnson, entirely opposed as he was to the author's political and ecclesiastical principles, declares that 'the critic ought to read for its elegance, the philosopher for its arguments, and the saint for its piety.'

Rochester's acknowledged poems fall into two divisions of unequal merit. The lyrical and amatory are in general very insipid. The more serious pieces, especially when expressing the discomfort of a sated votary of pleasure, frequently want neither force nor weight. Four particularly fine lines, quoted without indication of authorship in Goethe's *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, have frequently occasioned speculation as to their origin. They come from Rochester's *Satyr against Mankind*, and read:

'Then Old Age and Experience, hand in hand,  
Lead him to Death, and make him understand,  
After a search so painful and so long,  
That all his life he has been in the wrong.'

Goldsmith's 'best-natured man, with the worst-natured muse,' is purloined from Rochester, who is also the propounder of the paradox, 'All men would be cowards if they durst.' Some of his songs are not devoid of merit. After all, however, nothing of his is so well known as the anticipatory epitaph on Charles II., ascribed sometimes to him, sometimes to Buckingham, and very likely due to neither:

'Here lies our mutton-eating king,  
Whose word no man relies on;  
Who never said a foolish thing,  
And never did a wise one.'

Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon (1633? -1684), was a very different character, both as a man and as a poet. He is accused of no fault but a love of gaming, and the purity of his Muse merited the well-known eulogium:

'In all Charles's days  
Roscommon only boasts unsullied bays.'

But he has nothing of the salt and savour of Rochester's more serious poetry, and is at best an elegant versifier, who, in his only considerable original poem, the *Essay on Translated Verse*, thinks justly, reasons clearly, and expresses himself with considerable spirit when the subject requires. The most original feature of his literary character is his preference in a rhyming age for blank verse, which he enforces in theory, but is far from recommending by his practice. In his rhymed pieces he is a better versifier than poet, and in his blank verse the contrary. Milton's eyes were just closed; Shakespeare and Fletcher were still acted; but the secret of beautiful versification, apart from rhyme, seems to have been entirely lost.

John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire (1649-1721).

Poetry afforded a subject for verse to another noble writer, John Sheffield, successively Earl of Mulgrave, Marquis of Normanby, and Duke of Buckinghamshire (1649-1721), who achieved real if moderate distinction as soldier, statesman, and scholar. As a poet his reputation rests entirely upon his *Essay on Poetry*, which contains many just thoughts expressed in pleasing numbers, although the author's deference to the conventional dicta of criticism leads him into idolatry, not only of Homer and Virgil, but of Bossu. To have fostered the genius of Pope by judicious praise is the highest distinction of 'Granville the polite and knowing Walsh.' Congreve, to be treated more fully as a dramatist, stands somewhat higher than these as an inditer of heroic couplets; but a severer criticism must be passed, if any criticism is needed, upon Pomfret, Duke, Stepney, and the other versifiers of the day who have burrowed their way into the stock collections of poetry.

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678).

Andrew Marvell was a virtuous man whose good qualities contrast so forcibly with the characteristic failings of his age, that he appears by contrast even more virtuous than he actually was. His integrity made him the hero of legend, for, although the Court would no doubt have been glad to gain him, it is hardly credible that the prime minister should by the king's order have personally waited upon him 'up two pair of stairs in a little court in the Strand.' But the apocryphal anecdote attests the real veneration inspired by his independence in a venal age. Born in the neighbourhood of Hull on March 31st, 1621, he studied at Cambridge, travelled for some years on the Continent, and settled down about 1650 as tutor to the daughter of Lord Fairfax. At this period he wrote his exquisite poem, *The Garden*, and other pieces of a similar character. He also wrote in 1650 the poem on Cromwell's return from Ireland, which may have gained for him in 1653 the appointment of tutor to Cromwell's ward, William Dutton. Other pieces of a like description followed, and in 1657 Marvell became joint Latin secretary with Milton, an office for which Milton had recommended him four years previously. His poem on the Protector's death in the following year is justly declared by Mr. Firth to be 'the only one distinguished by an accent of sincerity and personal affection.' He was elected for Hull to Richard Cromwell's Parliament, and continued to sit for the remainder of his life. He was the last Member of Parliament who received a salary from his constituents, to whose interests he in return attended so diligently that upwards of three hundred letters from him upon their concerns and general politics are extant in the Hull archives.

Marvell could scarcely be called a republican. He had been devoted to the Protectorate, and would probably have been easily reconciled to the Restoration if the government had been ably and honestly conducted. In wrath at the general maladministration he betook himself to satires, which circulated in manuscript. At first he attacked Clarendon, but eventually concluded that the only remedy would be the final expulsion of the house of Stuart. In 1672 and 1673 he appeared in print as a prose controversialist with *The Rehearsal Transposed*, a witty attack on a work by Parker, Bishop of Oxford, wherein, in the author's own words, 'the mischiefs and inconveniences of toleration were represented, and all pretences pleaded in behalf of liberty of conscience fully answered.' He silenced his opponent, and escaped being himself silenced through the interposition of Charles II., whose native good sense and easiness of temper inclined him to toleration, and who promoted the freedom of Nonconformists as a means of obtaining liberty for the Church of Rome. Marvell, however, was not to be reconciled, and in 1677 put forth an anonymous pamphlet to prove, what was but too true, that a design had long been on foot to establish absolute monarchy and subvert the Protestant religion. His sudden death on August 18th, 1678, was attributed to poison, but, according to a physician who wrote some years afterwards, was occasioned by that prejudice of the faculty against Peruvian bark which is recorded by Temple and Evelyn.

As a writer of prose, Marvell is both powerful and humorous, but is not a Junius or a Pascal to impart permanent interest to transitory themes, and make the topics of the day topics for all time. As a poet he ranks with those who have been said to be stars alike of evening and of morning. His earliest and most truly poetical compositions belong in spirit to the period of Charles I., when the



strains of the Elizabethan lyric were yet lingering. After passing through a transition stage of manly verse still breathing a truly poetical spirit, but mainly concerned with public affairs, he settles down as a satirist endowed with all the vigour, but, at the same time, with all the prosaic hardness of the Restoration. His most inspired poem, *Thoughts in a Garden*, written under the Commonwealth, and originally composed in Latin, nevertheless rings like a voice from beyond the Civil Wars. Here are the three loveliest of nine lovely stanzas:

‘What wondrous life is this I lead!  
 Ripe apples drop about my head;  
 The luscious clusters of the vine  
 Upon my mouth do crush their wine;  
 The nectarine and curious peach  
 Into my hands themselves do reach;  
 Stumbling on melons as I pass,  
 Ensnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

‘Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,  
 Withdraws into its happiness;  
 The mind, that ocean where each kind  
 Does straight its own resemblance find;  
 Yet it creates, transcending these,  
 Far other worlds, and other seas;  
 Annihilating all that’s made  
 To a green thought in a green shade.

‘Here at the fountain’s sliding foot,  
 Or at some fruit-tree’s mossy root,  
 Casting the body’s vest aside  
 My soul into the boughs does glide:  
 There, like a bird, it sits and sings,  
 There whets and claps its silver wings,  
 And, till prepared for longer flight,  
 Waves in its plumes the various light.’

‘These wonderful verses,’ says Mr. Palgrave of the entire poem, ‘may be regarded as a test of any reader’s insight into the most poetical aspects of poetry.’

As a satirist it is Marvell’s error to confound satire with lampoon. He has the *saeva indignatio* which makes the avenger, but spends too much of it upon individuals. Occasionally some fine personification gives promise of better things, but the poet soon relapses into mere personalities. This may be attributed in great measure to the circumstances under which these compositions appeared. They could only be circulated clandestinely, and the writer may be excused if he did not labour to exalt what he himself regarded as mere fugitive poetry. The most celebrated of these pieces are the series of *Advices to a Painter*, in which the persons and events of the day are described to an imaginary artist for delineation in fitting, and therefore by no means flattering, colours. It is to Marvell’s honour that he succeeds best with a fine subject. When, in his poems on the events of the Commonwealth, he escapes from mere sarcasm and negation, and speaks nobly upon really noble themes, he soars far above the Marvell of the Restoration, though even here his verse is marred by lapses into the commonplace, and by his besetting infirmity of an inability to finish with effect, leaving off like a speaker who sits down rather from the failure of his voice than the exhaustion of his theme. The

panegyric on Cromwell's anniversary, and the poem on his death, abound nevertheless with fine, though faulty passages, of which the following may serve as an example:

‘O human glory vain! O Death! O wings!  
O worthless world! O transitory things!  
Yet dwelt that greatness in his shape decayed,  
That still, though dead, greater than death he laid,  
And in his altered face you something feign  
That threatens Death he yet will live again.  
Not much unlike the sacred oak which shoots  
To heaven its branches, and through earth its roots,  
Whose spacious boughs are hung with trophies round,  
And honoured wreaths have oft the victor crowned,  
When angry Jove darts lightning through the air  
At mortal sins, nor his own plant will spare,  
It groans and bruises all below, that stood  
So many years the shelter of the wood.  
The tree, erewhile foreshortened to our view,  
When fallen shows taller yet than as it grew;  
So shall his praise to after times increase,  
When truth shall be allowed, and faction cease;  
And his own shadows with him fall; the eye  
Detracts from objects than itself more high;  
But when Death takes from them that envied state,  
Seeing how little, we confess how great.’

Marvell's position as the satirist of his era from the Puritan and Republican point of view, was filled upon the Cavalier side by Samuel Butler, who, if general reputation and excellence in his own walk of verse are to be allowed as criterions, may claim to be the third poet of the age after Milton and Dryden. It is true that Butler, though endowed with abundance of fancy, was, strictly speaking, no poet; that he is entirely destitute of the dignity and tenderness which Marvell can display with a congenial theme; and that he possesses nothing of Dryden's power of exalting unpromising subjects into poetry. But he infinitely surpasses Marvell when they meet on the common ground of satire; and though he cannot be said to surpass Dryden, their methods are so different that no proper comparison can be drawn. When writing in Dryden's manner Butler is respectable, but he has the field of burlesque epic entirely to himself. Supremacy in a low style of composition is a surer passport to fame than moderate merit in a high one. With all the defects of Restoration literature, it had a faculty for producing masterpieces, and it must be admitted that Butler's *Hudibras* stands as decidedly at the head of its class as *Paradise Lost*, or *Absalom and Achitophel*, or *Pilgrim's Progress*, or Pepys's *Diary* at the head of theirs.

Samuel Butler (1612-1680).

Samuel Butler was born near Worcester in 1612. His father, a small farmer, procured him a good education at the Worcester Grammar School. His first employment was that of clerk to a country justice named Jefferys. He afterwards entered the household of Elizabeth, Countess of Kent, at Wrest, in Bedfordshire, and subsequently acted as clerk to various justices of the peace, one of whom, Sir Samuel Luke, of Cople Hoo, near Bedford, served as the original of Hudibras. It is curious to reflect that John Bunyan was at the same time going through his spiritual conflicts in the same county. He seems to have also travelled in France and Holland. He published nothing until 1659, when an anonymous tract in favour of the restoration of the monarchy, entitled *Mola Asinaria*, appeared

from his pen. The service was recompensed by the appointment of secretary to the Earl of Carbury, Lord President of Wales, who made him steward of Ludlow Castle, where *Comus* had been performed nearly thirty years before. He resigned this charge upon contracting what seemed a wealthy marriage, but the lady's money was lost, and, notwithstanding the great literary success *Hudibras*, the remainder of the author's life was spent in poverty. The first part of *Hudibras*, stated in the title to have been written during the Civil War, and if so at least fifteen years old, was published in 1663. Its success was instantaneous, though neither the Puritans nor Mr. Pepys could quite see the joke. The merit of the performance, however, was fully apparent to a better and more influential judge, the king, who encouraged the author by giving numerous copies away, though history does not say at whose expense. But this was all he gave, and the poet who had rendered such essential service to the royalist cause by his writings was as completely neglected by the Court as if he had been John Milton. It is indeed said that he was in receipt of a pension of £100 at his death; but this seems contradicted by the letter, already quoted, of Dryden to the Lord High Treasurer within two years after Butler's death, where he says: "Tis enough for one age to have neglected Mr. Cowley and starved Mr. Butler."<sup>5</sup> Oldham's lines, written at the same time, are still more emphatic:

‘On Butler who can think without just rage,  
The glory and the scandal of the age?  
Fair stood his hopes when first he came to town,  
Met everywhere with welcomes of renown,  
Courtied and loved by all, with wonder read,  
And promises of princely favour fed;  
But what reward for all had he at last,  
After a life of dull expectance passed?  
The wretch at summing up his misspent days  
Found nothing left but poverty and praise;  
Of all his gains by verse he could not save  
Enough to purchase flannel and a grave;  
Reduced to want, he in due time fell sick,  
Was fain to die, and be interred on tick;  
And well might bless the fever that was sent  
To rid him hence, and his worse fate prevent.’

These spirited verses are certainly exaggerated. Butler, though, as his biographer says, ‘personally known to few,’ partook on the same authority of the munificence of Dorset, and dying on September 25th, 1680, was buried on September 27th in the churchyard of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, at the expense of another friend, William Longueville, benchet of the Inner Temple, who had previously endeavoured to obtain his interment in Westminster Abbey, where, Atterbury being dean, a tardy monument was erected to him in 1721 by Alderman Barber. Very little is known of the latter years of his life, except that he lived in Rose Street, Covent Garden, and that he suffered much from the gout. He had published a second part of *Hudibras* in 1664, and a third in 1678, containing many allusions to events much later than the Civil War. He bequeathed his posthumous papers to Longueville, by whom they were carefully preserved, and a large portion eventually came to be published in 1759. They will be treated of in another place. Not much is known of Butler's personal character and habits. He must evidently have been a man of extensive reading, and versed in several languages and literatures. It seems natural to attribute the neglect of so popular an author to some infirmity in his own temper, but the little testimony we have makes the other way. Wood describes

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<sup>5</sup> Mr. Churton Collins, by a clerical error, prints *Waller*.

him as 'a boon and witty companion;' and Aubrey says, 'A severe and sound judgment, a good fellow.' It must be remembered that he was forty-eight at the Restoration, and had spent almost all his life in the country; we shall also find reason to believe that he was neither enough of a churchman nor enough of a loyalist to be entirely agreeable to his own party.

The defect in *Hudibras* pointed out by Dr. Johnson, the want of logical sequence in the action, undoubtedly exists, but is almost inherent in the conception of such a performance. A more serious drawback, the disproportion between the hero's deeds and his words, probably arises from the poem having been written at different periods of the author's life. When he began to write his invention was lively and vigorous, but it naturally flagged after middle age, although his wit remained unimpaired. In the first and part of the second canto disquisition and adventure are so evenly blended that each supports the other; in the latter part of the poem the burden falls almost entirely upon the former. Hence the picturesque and cleverly varied incident of the bear-baiting, with the varied characters it brings upon the scene, will always be the favourite passage of the poem, unless an exception be made for the portraits of Hudibras and Ralpho. There is, however, considerable inconsistency in the character of Hudibras. He is represented as a fool, yet half the good things of the book are, from sheer necessity, put into his mouth. We are to suppose him a coward, yet he takes and deals cuffs and bangs in the spirit of a pugilist; and his attack upon the seven champions of bear-baiting, one of them an Amazon, is so far from cowardice, that it more resembles temerity. The more odious traits of his character hardly seem properly to belong to it; and in fact Butler probably commenced his poem without too curiously considering how he was to conduct it, or rather where it was to conduct him, and scribbled away in the spirit of his own maxim —

'One for sense, and one for rhyme,  
Is quite sufficient at one time' —

trusting to the humour ever springing up under his pen to redeem his verse from the imputation of doggerel. This it certainly did; for although *Hudibras* as a whole is rambling, ill-compacted, and wordy, the terseness of many individual passages is as remarkable as their humour:

'A tool  
That knaves do work with, called a fool.'

'Cerberus himself pronounce  
A leash of languages at once.'

'Hudibras wore but one spur,  
As wisely knowing, could he stir  
To active trot one side of 's horse  
The other would not hang.'

'For as on land there is no beast,  
But in some fish at sea's exprest;  
So in the wicked there's no vice  
Of which the saints have not a spice.'

'Quoth she, There are no bargains driven,  
Nor marriages clapped up in heaven,  
And that's the reason, as some guess,  
There is no heaven in marriages.'

Butler's *Hudibras* may perhaps be best defined as a metrical parody upon *Don Quixote*, with a spice of allusion to the *Faerie Queene*, in which the nobility and pathos of the originals are designedly obliterated, and the humour exaggerated into farce to suit the author's polemic purpose. His design is to kill Presbyterianism and Independency by ridicule, and he is consequently compelled to shut his eyes to everything in them except their occasional tendency to baseness, and their perpetual liability to cant. This is the constant Nemesis of the satirist; but Butler is even more of a caricaturist than the situation called for. The endurance of his poem to our own times, however, is sufficient proof that, although a caricature, it was not a libel, and amid the enthusiastic reaction of the Restoration it may well have passed for a fair portrait. The machinery is closely modelled upon *Don Quixote*. Presbyterianism is incarnated in the doughty justice of the peace, Sir Hudibras; Independency and new light sectarianism in general in his squire, Ralpho; and the two sally forth in quest of adventure quite in the style of Don Quixote and Sancho, except that the Don's great aim is to deliver damsels, and Hudibras's to imprison them. Though the scene appears to be laid in the west of England, there is no reason to doubt the tradition that the prototype of Hudibras's satire was Butler's master, the Bedfordshire magistrate, Sir Samuel Luke, who is evidently alluded to where a rhyme to *Mameluke* is left blank to be supplied by the reader's ingenuity. If, as is more than probable, this worthy justice was given to suppressing bear-baitings, Butler would need no more material for his burlesque; and the first part of the poem, at all events, may well have been written while he was in Sir Samuel's employment. It seems, from internal evidence, to have been composed before Cromwell had ejected the Long Parliament, and its general atmosphere almost precludes the idea of its having been written after the execution of Charles I. The second part has many allusions to later events. The description of Hudibras, mind and body, is so vivid and precise as to present internal evidence of having been drawn from a living model, while Ralpho is in comparison vague. Soon after sallying forth the pair find themselves at odds with a crowd about to revel in the amusement of bear-baiting, which they proceed to interrupt; not, as has been remarked, out of compassion to the bear, but out of grudge to the public. This brings on a fight, most amusingly described, but at somewhat too great length; the 'fatal facility' of the octosyllabic couplet being nowhere more conspicuous than in Butler's humorous doggerel. After various turns of fortune, the knight and squire find themselves in the stocks, where they sit until Hudibras's lady-love, a frolicsome widow with a jointure, appears to the rescue:

'No sooner did the Knight perceive her,  
But straight he fell into a fever,  
Inflam'd all over with disgrace,  
To be seen by her in such a place;  
Which made him hang his head, and scowl,  
And wink, and goggle like an owl.  
He felt his brains begin to swim,  
When thus the Dame accosted him,  
This place (quoth she) they say's enchanted,  
And with delinquent spirits haunted,  
That here are tied in chains, and scourged,  
Until their guilty crimes be purged:  
Look, there are two of them appear  
Like persons I have seen somewhere.  
Some have mistaken blocks and posts  
For spectres, apparitions, ghosts,  
With saucer-eyes, and horns, and some  
Have heard the Devil beat a drum:

But if our eyes are not false glasses,  
 That give a wrong account of faces,  
 That beard and I should be acquainted,  
 Before 'twas conjur'd and enchanted;  
 For tho' it be disfigured somewhat,  
 As if 't had lately been in combat,  
 It did belong t' a worthy Knight,  
 Howe'er this goblin is come by it.  
 When Hudibras the lady heard,  
 Discoursing thus upon his beard,  
 And speak with such respect and honour,  
 Both of the beard, and the beard's owner;  
 He thought it best to set as good  
 A face upon it as he cou'd,  
 And thus he spoke: Lady, your bright  
 And radiant eyes are in the right;  
 The beard's th' identic beard you knew,  
 The same numerically true:  
 Nor is it worn by fiend or elf,  
 But its proprietor himself.  
 Oh Heav'ns! quoth she, can that be true?  
 I do begin to fear 'tis you;  
 Not by your individual whiskers,  
 But by your dialect and discourse,  
 That never spoke to man or beast  
 In notions vulgarly exprest.  
 But what malignant star, alas!  
 Has brought you both to this sad pass?  
 Quoth he, The fortune of the war,  
 Which I am less afflicted for,  
 Than to be seen with beard and face  
 By you in such a homely case.  
 Quoth she, Those need not be asham'd  
 For being honourably maim'd;  
 If he that is in battle conquer'd,  
 Have any title to his own beard,  
 Tho' yours be sorely lugg'd and torn,  
 It does your visage more adorn,  
 Than if 'twere prun'd, and starch'd and lander'd,  
 And cut square by the Russian standard.  
 A torn beard's like a tatter'd ensign,  
 That's bravest which there are most rents in,  
 That petticoat about your shoulders  
 Does not so well become a soldier's,  
 And I'm afraid they are worse handled,  
 Although i' th' rear, your beard the van led;  
 And those uneasy bruises make  
 My heart for company to ache,  
 To see so worshipful a friend

I' th' pill'ry set at the wrong end.'

The mischievous lady, nevertheless, only consents to liberate Hudibras upon condition that he shall administer a sound flogging to himself. Hudibras willingly promises this, and is released, but next day he thinks better of it, and consults Ralpho whether he is actually bound by his oath. Ralpho's reply abounds with the pithy couplets so frequent in *Hudibras*, which have become a part of the language:

'Oaths were not purposed, more than law,  
To keep the good and just in awe,  
But to confine the bad and sinful,  
Like moral cattle in a pincfold.'

'The Rabbins write, when any Jew  
Did make to God or man a vow  
Which afterward he found untoward  
And stubborn to be kept, or too hard;  
Any three other Jews of the nation  
Might free him from his obligation.  
And have not two saints power to use  
A greater privilege than three Jews?'

'Does not in Chancery every man swear  
What makes best for him in his answer?'

'He that imposes an oath makes it,  
Not he that for convenience takes it;  
Then how can any man be said  
To break an oath he never made?'

'That sinners may supply the place  
Of suff'ring saints is a plain case.  
Justice gives sentence many times  
On one man for another's crimes.  
Our brethren of New England use  
Choice malefactors to excuse,  
And hang the guiltless in their stead,  
Of whom the churches have less need:  
As lately 't happened in a town,  
There liv'd a cobbler, and but one,  
That out of doctrine could cut use,  
And mend men's lives as well as shoes.  
This precious brother having slain,  
In times of peace, an Indian,  
(Not out of malice, but mere zeal,  
Because he was an infidel)  
The mighty Tottipottymoy  
Sent to our elders an envoy;  
Complaining sorely of the breach

Of league, held forth by brother Patch,  
 Against the articles in force  
 Between both churches, his and ours,  
 For which he crav'd the saints to render  
 Into his hands, or hang th' offender:  
 But they maturely having weigh'd  
 They had no more but him o' th' trade,  
 (A man that serv'd them in a double  
 Capacity, to teach and cobble,)  
 Resolv'd to spare him; yet to do  
 The Indian Hoghgan Moghgan too  
 Impartial justice, in his stead did  
 Hang an old weaver that was bed-rid.'

Hudibras, however, is but half convinced, or rather, doubts whether conviction can be brought to the minds of others. He bethinks himself of a middle course, and suggests that the whipping shall be inflicted by proxy, and that Ralpho shall be the proxy. To this Ralpho demurs, and an impending rupture is only averted by a new adventure, which seems invented for the purpose. When it is over Hudibras has profited by the interval of reflection to resolve to consult the wizard Sidrophel, who is apparently intended for Lilly. The scene affords Butler an opportunity of venting the dislike to physical science which he shared with so many other literary men, and to which he gave more definite expression in *The Elephant in the Moon*. The interview terminates in a scuffle, in which Hudibras overthrows Sidrophel, and, thinking he has killed him, makes off, leaving Ralpho, as he deems, to bear the brunt. The trusty squire, however, has already gone to the lady with the tale of Hudibras's perjury, which insures the knight a warm reception. Here the action of the story ends, the remainder of the poem being chiefly occupied by 'heroical epistles' between the parties, which do not help it on, and by a digression on the downfall of the Rump, chiefly remarkable for allusions to politics of later date.

One of the most noticeable phenomena in Butler is, that after all this Cavalier poet is little of a Cavalier, and this assailant of Puritanism little of a Churchman. His loyalty is but hatred of anarchy, and his religion but hatred of cant. The genuineness of both these feelings is attested by the detached thoughts found among his papers; otherwise it might fairly have been doubted whether his motive for espousing the royalist cause had been any other than the infinitely greater scope which Puritanism and Republicanism offered to the shafts of a satirist. The follies of the Cavalier party proved that things may be absurd without being ridiculous; those of their opponents demonstrated that ridicule may justly attach to things not intrinsically absurd. It is clear, notwithstanding, from Butler's prose remains, that he was constitutionally hostile to liberty in politics and to the inward light in religion, and that he obeyed his own sincere conviction in attacking them. But it is equally clear that his preference for monarchy was solely utilitarian, and that his preferences in religion were determined simply by taste. The ground of his acquiescence in the Church of England is thus frankly stated by himself in one of his detached thoughts:

'Men ought to do in religion as they do in war. When a man of honour is overpowered, and must of necessity surrender himself up a prisoner, such are always wont to endeavour to do it to some person of command and quality, and not to a mere scoundrel. So, since all men are obliged to be of some church, it is more honourable, if there were nothing else in it, to be of that which has some reputation, than such a one as is contemptible, and justly despised by all the best of men.'



This is not the language of a very fervent churchman; and Butler's royalism is like his religion, a *pis aller*. Nowhere does his aversion for Puritanism kindle into enthusiasm for its contrary, any more than his humour ever rises into poetry. In his verse he is a satirist; in his prose a sceptic; and his satire and his scepticism are alike rooted in a low opinion of human nature, and a disbelief that things can ever be much better than they are. He is a strong spirit, but of the earth, earthy. At the same time he is not one of the satirists who make their readers cynics; on the contrary, his hearty geniality puts the reader into good humour with mankind, and suggests that if there is not much to admire there is also but little to condemn. It is unnecessary to dilate on his peculiar merits, which are of universal notoriety. Few have enriched the language with so many familiar quotations; few have so much fancy along with a total absence of sentiment; few have been so fertile in odd rhymes and quaint illustrations and comparisons; few have so thoroughly combined the characters of wit and humorist.

In 1759 a quantity of MS. compositions of Butler's, which had remained unpublished during his life, and had come into the possession of his friend Longueville, were edited by R. Thyer, librarian of the Chetham Library at Manchester. The most important, his characters in the manner of Theophrastus, and detached thoughts in prose, will be noticed along with the prose essayists. Of the metrical compositions, the most elaborate is *The Elephant in the Moon*, a satire on the appetite for marvels displayed by some of the members of the then infant Royal Society, which exists in two recensions, one in Hudibrastic, the other in heroic verse. The other pieces are also for the most part satirical, with a strong affinity to *Hudibras*, except where they parody the style of some poet of the day. They are always clever, sometimes very humorous and pointed, and, with Marvell's satires, form a transition from the unpolished quaintness of Donne to the weight and splendour of Dryden. Butler in one instance appears a downright plagiarist; in another he would seem, were the thing possible, to have been copied by a later and more illustrious writer. In his satire against rhyme, he writes:

'When I would praise an author, the untoward  
Damned sense says Virgil, but the rhyme says Howard.'

This is undoubtedly Boileau's 'La raison dit Virgile, et la rime Quinault.' In *Cat and Puss*, on the other hand, an amusing parody of the rhyming tragedy of his day, he observes of the feline Lothario:

'At once his passion was both false and true,  
And the more false, the more in earnest grew.'

Can Tennyson, who borrowed and improved so much, have been to Butler for

'His honour rooted in dishonour stood,  
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true'?

## CHAPTER III. LYRIC POETRY

It is entirely in keeping with the solid and terrestrial character of Restoration literature in general, that no description of poetry should manifest so grievous a lapse from the standard of the preceding age as the lyrical. The decline of the drama has attracted more attention, partly from the violent contrast of two schools which had hardly one principle or one method in common, partly because our own age had but imperfectly realized the exceeding wealth in song of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, until Mr. Arthur Bullen showed what unsuspected treasures of poetry were hidden in old music books. Whatever else an Elizabethan or Jacobean lyric may be, it is almost certain to be melodious. The average Restoration lyric is correct enough in scansion, but the melody is conventional, poor and thin. Here and there, and especially in Dryden, we are surprised by a fine exception; but as a rule the Restoration song is deficient alike in the simple spontaneity which inspired such pieces as *Come live with me and be my love*, and in the more intricate harmonies of its predecessors. It was as though a blight had suddenly fallen upon the nation, and men's ears had become incapable of distinguishing between sweetness and smoothness. So, indeed, they had as respected the music of verse; but how little technical music, whether vocal or instrumental, was neglected, even in private circles, we may learn from Pepys's *Diary*, and it is a remarkable proof how little this music and the music of poetry have to do with each other, that this age of degeneracy in the one produced the greatest of all English masters, Purcell, in the other; while the still more hopelessly unmelodious age of the first Georges was the age of Handel. Poetry makes melody, not melody poetry; and the only explanation is, that the age preceding that of the Restoration was poetical, and the Restoration age was prosaic. It could not well have been otherwise if, as all critics agree, the special literary mission of the Restoration period was to prune the luxuriance of English prose, and by introducing conciseness, perspicuity, and logical order, to render it a fit instrument for narrative, reasoning, and the despatch of business.

Such lyric as the age possessed is almost entirely comprehended in Dryden; for Marvell, of whom we must nevertheless speak, belongs in spirit to a former age. The songs in Dryden's plays, to be mentioned shortly, prove that he was by no means destitute of spontaneous lyrical feeling; but he no doubt succeeded best when, having first penetrated himself with a theme sufficiently stirring to generate the enthusiastic mood which finds its natural expression in song, he sat down to frame a fitting accompaniment by the aid of all the resources of metrical art. The principal examples of this lyrical magnificence which he has given us are the elegy on Anne Killigrew and the two odes on St. Cecilia's Day. Of the first of these two latter, Johnson says that 'it is lost in the splendour of the second,' and such is the fact; but had Dryden produced no other lyric, he would still have ranked as a fine lyrical poet. Of the second ode, better known as *Alexander's Feast*, it is needless to say anything, for all readers of poetry have it by heart, and all recognize its claim to rank among the greatest odes in the language – the greatest, perhaps, until Wordsworth and Shelley wrote, and little, if at all, behind even them. Johnson, indeed, prefers the memorial ode on Anne Killigrew, and if all the stanzas equalled the first he would be right; but this is impossible; as he himself remarks, 'An imperial crown cannot be one continued diamond.' The inevitable falling off, nevertheless, would have been less apparent if Dryden had shown more judgment in the selection of his topics, or at least more tact in handling them. The morals of the age were, indeed, bad enough, as he well knew who had helped to make them so; but such frank treatment of a disagreeable theme jars exceedingly with an ode devoted to the celebration of chastity and virtue. Notwithstanding this flaw, the entire ode deserves Mr. Saintsbury's eulogy, 'As a piece of concerted music in verse it has not a superior.' The hyperbolic praise of Anne Killigrew's now forgotten poems is explained, and in some measure

excused, by the fact that it was written to be prefixed to them. The first stanza, appropriate to thousands beside its ostensible subject, appeals to the general human heart, and indicates the high-water mark of Restoration poetry:

‘Thou youngest virgin-daughter of the skies,  
Made in the last promotion of the blest,  
Whose palms, new-plucked from Paradise,  
In spreading branches more sublimely rise,  
Rich with immortal green above the rest:  
Whether, adopted to some neighbouring star,  
Thou roll’st above us in thy wandering race,  
Or in procession fixed and regular  
Mov’st with the heavens’ majestic pace;  
Or, called to more superior bliss,  
Thou tread’st with seraphims the vast abyss:  
Whatever happy region is thy place,  
Cease thy celestial song a little space;  
Thou wilt have time enough for hymns divine,  
Since Heaven’s eternal year is thine.  
Hear then a mortal Muse thy praise rehearse  
In no ignoble verse;  
But such as thy own voice did practise here,  
When thy first fruits of Poesy were given,  
To make thyself a welcome inmate there  
While yet a young probationer  
And candidate of heaven.’

The poet who so excelled in majestic artificial harmonies was also the one poet of his day who could occasionally sing as the bird sings. Dryden has never received sufficient praise for his songs, inasmuch as these are mostly hidden away in his dramas, and not always adapted for quotation. The following, with a manifest political meaning, is a good example of his simple ease and melody:

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

‘While Pan and fair Syrinx are fled from our shore,  
The Graces are vanished, and Love is no more:  
The soft God of Pleasure that warmed our desires,  
Has broken his bow and extinguished his fires;

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