

SAMUEL JOHNSON

THE WORKS OF SAMUEL
JOHNSON, LL.D. IN NINE
VOLUMES, VOLUME 08

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LL.D. in Nine Volumes, Volume 08

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*The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. in Nine Volumes, Volume 08 / The
Lives of the Poets, Volume II:*

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PRIOR

Matthew Prior is one of those that have burst out from an obscure original to great eminence. He was born July 21, 1664, according to some, at Winburn, in Dorsetshire, of I know not what parents; others say, that he was the son of a joiner of London: he was, perhaps, willing enough to leave his birth unsettled¹, in hope, like Don Quixote, that the historian of his actions might find him some illustrious alliance.

¹ The difficulty of settling Prior's birthplace is great. In the register of his college he is called, at his admission by the president, Matthew Prior, of Winburn, in Middlesex; by himself, next day, Matthew Prior, of Dorsetshire, in which county, not in Middlesex, Winborn, or Winborne, as it stands in the Villare, is found. When he stood candidate for his fellowship, five years afterwards, he was registered again by himself as of Middlesex. The last record ought to be preferred, because it was made upon oath. It is observable, that, as a native of Winborne, he is styled filius Georgii Prior, generosi; not consistently with the common account of the meanness of his birth. Dr. J.

He is supposed to have fallen, by his father's death, into the hands of his uncle, a vintner², near Charing-cross, who sent him for some time to Dr. Busby, at Westminster; but, not intending to give him any education beyond that of the school, took him, when he was well advanced in literature, to his own house, where the earl of Dorset, celebrated for patronage of genius, found him by chance, as Burnet relates, reading Horace, and was so well pleased with his proficiency, that he undertook the care and cost of his academical education.

He entered his name in St. John's college, at Cambridge, in 1682, in his eighteenth year; and it may be reasonably supposed that he was distinguished among his contemporaries. He became a bachelor, as is usual, in four years³; and two years afterwards wrote the poem on the Deity, which stands first in his volume.

It is the established practice of that college, to send every year to the earl of Exeter some poems upon sacred subjects, in acknowledgment of a benefaction enjoyed by them from the bounty of his ancestor. On this occasion were those verses written, which, though nothing is said of their success, seem to have recommended him to some notice; for his praise of the countess's musick, and his lines on the famous picture of Seneca, afford reason for imagining that he was more or less conversant

² Samuel Prior kept the Rummer tavern near Charing-cross, in 1685. The annual feast of the nobility and gentry living in the parish of St. Martin in the Fields was held at his house, Oct. 14, that year. N.

³ He was admitted to his bachelor's degree in 1686; and to his master's, by mandate, in 1700. N.

with that family.

The same year, 1688, he published the *City Mouse and Country Mouse*, to ridicule Dryden's *Hind and Panther*, in conjunction with Mr. Montague. There is a story⁴ of great pain suffered, and of tears shed, on this occasion, by Dryden, who thought it hard that "an old man should be so treated by those to whom he had always been civil." By tales like these is the envy, raised by superiour abilities, every day gratified: when they are attacked, every one hopes to see them humbled; what is hoped is readily believed; and what is believed is confidently told. Dryden had been more accustomed to hostilities, than that such enemies should break his quiet; and if we can suppose him vexed, it would be hard to deny him sense enough to conceal his uneasiness.

The *City Mouse and Country Mouse* procured its authors more solid advantages than the pleasure of fretting Dryden; for they were both speedily preferred. Montague, indeed, obtained the first notice, with some degree of discontent, as it seems, in Prior, who, probably, knew that his own part of the performance was the best. He had not, however, much reason to complain; for he came to London, and obtained such notice, that, in 1691, he was sent to the congress at the Hague as secretary to the embassy. In this assembly of princes and nobles, to which Europe has, perhaps, scarcely seen any thing equal, was formed the grand alliance against Lewis, which, at last, did not produce effects proportionate to the magnificence of the transaction.

⁴ Spence.

The conduct of Prior, in this splendid initiation into publick business, was so pleasing to king William, that he made him one of the gentlemen of his bedchamber; and he is supposed to have passed some of the next years in the quiet cultivation of literature and poetry.

The death of queen Mary, in 1695, produced a subject for all the writers; perhaps no funeral was ever so poetically attended. Dryden, indeed, as a man discountenanced and deprived, was silent; but scarcely any other maker of verses omitted to bring his tribute of tuneful sorrow. An emulation of elegy was universal. Maria's praise was not confined to the English language, but fills a great part of the *Musæ Anglicanæ*.

Prior, who was both a poet and a courtier, was too diligent to miss this opportunity of respect. He wrote a long ode, which was presented to the king, by whom it was not likely to be ever read.

In two years he was secretary to another embassy at the treaty of Ryswick, in 1697⁵; and next year had the same office at the court of France, where he is said to have been considered with great distinction.

As he was one day surveying the apartments at Versailles, being shown the victories of Lewis, painted by Le Brun, and asked whether the king of England's palace had any such decorations: "The monuments of my master's actions," said he, "are to be seen every where but in his own house." The pictures

⁵ He received, in September, 1697, a present of two hundred guineas from the lords justices, for his trouble in bringing over the treaty of peace. N.

of Le Brun are not only in themselves sufficiently ostentatious, but were explained by inscriptions so arrogant, that Boileau and Racine thought it necessary to make them more simple.

He was, in the following year, at Loo with the king; from whom, after a long audience, he carried orders to England, and upon his arrival became under-secretary of state in the earl of Jersey's office; a post which he did not retain long, because Jersey was removed; but he was soon made commissioner of trade.

This year, 1700, produced one of his longest and most splendid compositions, the *Carmen Seculare*, in which he exhausts all his powers of celebration. I mean not to accuse him of flattery; he probably thought all that he writ, and retained as much veracity as can be properly exacted from a poet professedly encomiastick. King William supplied copious materials for either verse or prose. His whole life had been action, and none ever denied him the resplendent qualities of steady resolution and personal courage. He was really, in Prior's mind, what he represents him in his verses; he considered him as a hero, and was accustomed to say, that he praised others in compliance with the fashion, but that in celebrating king William he followed his inclination. To Prior gratitude would dictate praise, which reason would not refuse.

Among the advantages to arise from the future years of William's reign, he mentions a society for useful arts, and, among them,

Some that with care true eloquence shall teach,
And to just idioms fix our doubtful speech;
That from our writers distant realms may know
The thanks we to our monarch owe,
And schools profess our tongue through ev'ry land,
That has invoc'd his aid, or bless'd his hand.

Tickell, in his Prospect of Peace, has the same hope of a new academy:

In happy chains our daring language bound,
Shall sport no more in arbitrary sound.

Whether the similitude of those passages which exhibit the same thought, on the same occasion, proceeded from accident or imitation, is not easy to determine. Tickell might have been impressed with his expectation by Swift's Proposal for ascertaining the English Language, then lately published.

In the parliament that met in 1701, he was chosen representative of East Grinstead. Perhaps it was about this time that he changed his party; for he voted for the impeachment of those lords who had persuaded the king to the partition-treaty, a treaty in which he had himself been ministerially employed.

A great part of queen Anne's reign was a time of war, in which there was little employment for negotiators, and Prior had, therefore, leisure to make or to polish verses. When the battle of Blenheim called forth all the versemen, Prior, among the rest,

took care to show his delight in the increasing honour of his country, by an epistle to Boileau.

He published, soon afterwards, a volume of poems, with the encomiastick character of his deceased patron, the duke of Dorset⁶: it began with the College Exercise, and ended with the Nut-brown Maid.

The battle of Ramilles soon afterwards, in 1706, excited him to another effort of poetry. On this occasion he had fewer or less formidable rivals; and it would be not easy to name any other composition produced by that event which is now remembered.

Everything has its day. Through the reigns of William and Anne no prosperous event passed undignified by poetry. In the last war, when France was disgraced and overpowered in every quarter of the globe, when Spain, coming to her assistance, only shared her calamities, and the name of an Englishman was revered through Europe, no poet was heard amidst the general acclamation; the fame of our counsellors and heroes was entrusted to the Gazetteer.

The nation, in time, grew weary of the war, and the queen grew weary of her ministers. The war was burdensome, and the ministers were insolent. Harley and his friends began to hope that they might, by driving the whigs from court and from power, gratify, at once, the queen and the people. There was now a call for writers, who might convey intelligence of past abuses, and show the waste of publick money, the unreasonable conduct of

⁶ It should be the earl of Dorset.

the allies, the avarice of generals, the tyranny of minions, and the general danger of approaching ruin.

For this purpose a paper, called the Examiner, was periodically published, written, as it happened, by any wit of the party, and sometimes, as is said, by Mrs. Manley. Some are owned by Swift; and one, in ridicule of Garth's verses to Godolphin upon the loss of his place, was written by Prior, and answered by Addison, who appears to have known the author either by conjecture or intelligence.

The tories, who were now in power, were in haste to end the war; and Prior, being recalled, 1710, to his former employment of making treaties, was sent, July, 1711, privately to Paris with propositions of peace. He was remembered at the French court; and, returning in about a month, brought with him the abbé Gaultier, and M. Mesnager, a minister from France, invested with full powers.

This transaction not being avowed, Mackay, the master of the Dover packet-boat, either zealously or officiously, seized Prior and his associates at Canterbury. It is easily supposed that they were soon released.

The negotiation was begun at Prior's house, where the queen's ministers met Mesnager, September 20, 1711, and entered privately upon the great business. The importance of Prior appears from the mention made of him by St. John in his letter to the queen.

“My lord treasurer moved, and all my lords were of the

same opinion, that Mr. Prior should be added to those who are empowered to sign; the reason for which is, because he, having personally treated with monsieur de Torcy, is the best witness we can produce of the sense in which the general preliminary engagements are entered into: besides which, as he is the best versed in matters of trade of all your majesty's servants who have been trusted in this secret, if you shall think fit to employ him in the future treaty of commerce, it will be of consequence that he has been a party concerned in concluding that convention, which must be the rule of this treaty."

The assembly of this important night was, in some degree, clandestine, the design of treating not being yet openly declared, and, when the whigs returned to power, was aggravated to a charge of high treason; though, as Prior remarks in his imperfect answer to the report of the committee of secrecy, no treaty ever was made without private interviews and preliminary discussions.

My business is not the history of the peace, but the life of Prior. The conferences began at Utrecht on the 1st of January, 1711-12, and the English plenipotentiaries arrived on the 15th. The ministers of the different potentates conferred and conferred; but the peace advanced so slowly that speedier methods were found necessary; and Bolingbroke was sent to Paris to adjust differences with less formality; Prior either accompanied him or followed him, and, after his departure, had the appointments and authority of an ambassador, though no

publick character.

By some mistake of the queen's orders, the court of France had been disgusted; and Bolingbroke says in his letter, "Dear Mat, hide the nakedness of thy country, and give the best turn thy fertile brain will furnish thee with to the blunders of thy countrymen, who are not much better politicians than the French are poets."

Soon after, the duke of Shrewsbury went on a formal embassy to Paris. It is related by Boyer, that the intention was to have joined Prior in the same commission, but that Shrewsbury refused to be associated with a man so meanly born. Prior, therefore, continued to act without a title, till the duke returned, next year, to England, and then he assumed the style and dignity of ambassador.

But, while he continued in appearance a private man, he was treated with confidence by Lewis, who sent him with a letter to the queen, written in favour of the elector of Bavaria. "I shall expect," says he, "with impatience, the return of Mr. Prior, whose conduct is very agreeable to me." And while the duke of Shrewsbury was still at Paris, Bolingbroke wrote to Prior thus: "Monsieur de Torcy has a confidence in you; make use of it, once for all, upon this occasion, and convince him thoroughly, that we must give a different turn to our parliament and our people, according to their resolution at this crisis."

Prior's publick dignity and splendour commenced in August, 1713, and continued till the August following; but I am afraid

that, according to the usual fate of greatness, it was attended with some perplexities and mortifications. He had not all that is customarily given to ambassadors; he hints to the queen, in an imperfect poem, that he had no service of plate; and it appeared, by the debts which he contracted, that his remittances were not punctually made.

On the 1st of August, 1714, ensued the downfall of the tories, and the degradation of Prior. He was recalled; but was not able to return, being detained by the debts which he had found it necessary to contract, and which were not discharged before March, though his old friend Montague was now at the head of the treasury.

He returned then as soon as he could, and was welcomed, on the 25th of March, 1715, by a warrant, but was, however, suffered to live in his own house, under the custody of the messenger, till he was examined before a committee of the privy council, of which Mr. Walpole was chairman, and lord Coningsby, Mr. Stanhope, and Mr. Lechmere, were the principal interrogators; who, in this examination, of which there is printed an account not unentertaining, behaved with the boisterousness of men elated by recent authority. They are represented as asking questions sometimes vague, sometimes insidious, and writing answers different from those which they received. Prior, however, seems to have been overpowered by their turbulence; for he confesses that he signed what, if he had ever come before a legal judicature, he should have contradicted or explained away.

The oath was administered by Boscawen, a Middlesex justice, who, at last, was going to write his attestation on the wrong side of the paper.

They were very industrious to find some charge against Oxford; and asked Prior, with great earnestness, who was present when the preliminary articles were talked of or signed at his house? He told them, that either the earl of Oxford or the duke of Shrewsbury was absent, but he could not remember which; an answer which perplexed them, because it supplied no accusation against either. "Could any thing be more absurd," says he, "or more inhuman, than to propose to me a question, by the answering of which I might, according to them, prove myself a traitor? And notwithstanding their solemn promise, that nothing which I could say should hurt myself, I had no reason to trust them; for they violated that promise about five hours after. However, I owned I was there present. Whether this was wisely done or no, I leave to my friends to determine."

When he had signed the paper, he was told by Walpole, that the committee were not satisfied with his behaviour, nor could give such an account of it to the commons as might merit favour; and that they now thought a stricter confinement necessary than to his own house. "Here," says he, "Boscawen played the moralist, and Coningsby the Christian, but both very awkwardly." The messenger, in whose custody he was to be placed, was then called, and very decently asked by Coningsby, "if his house was secured by bars and bolts?" The messenger

answered, "No," with astonishment. At which Coningsby very angrily said, "Sir, you must secure this prisoner; it is for the safety of the nation: if he escape, you shall answer for it."

They had already printed their report; and in this examination were endeavouring to find proofs.

He continued thus confined for some time; and Mr. Walpole, June 10, 1715, moved for an impeachment against him. What made him so acrimonious does not appear: he was by nature no thirster for blood. Prior was, a week after, committed to close custody, with orders that "no person should be admitted to see him without leave from the speaker."

When, two years after, an act of grace was passed, he was excepted, and continued still in custody, which he had made less tedious by writing his *Alma*. He was, however, soon after discharged.

He had now his liberty, but he had nothing else. Whatever the profit of his employments might have been, he had always spent it; and, at the age of fifty-three, was, with all his abilities, in danger of penury, having yet no solid revenue but from the fellowship of his college, which, when in his exaltation he was censured for retaining it, he said, he could live upon at last.

Being, however, generally known and esteemed, he was encouraged to add other poems to those which he had printed, and to publish them by subscription. The expedient succeeded by the industry of many friends, who circulated the proposals⁷,

⁷ Swift obtained many subscriptions for him in Ireland. II.

and the care of some, who, it is said, withheld the money from him, lest he should squander it. The price of the volume was two guineas; the whole collection was four thousand; to which lord Harley, the son of the earl of Oxford, to whom he had invariably adhered, added an equal sum for the purchase of Downhall, which Prior was to enjoy during life, and Harley after his decease.

He had now, what wits and philosophers have often wished, the power of passing the day in contemplative tranquillity. But it seems that busy men seldom live long in a state of quiet. It is not unlikely that his health declined. He complains of deafness; “for,” says he, “I took little care of my ears while I was not sure if my head was my own.”

Of any occurrences in his remaining life I have found no account. In a letter to Swift, “I have,” says he, “treated lady Harriot at Cambridge, (a fellow of a college treat!) and spoke verses to her in a gown and cap! What, the plenipotentiary, so far concerned in the damned peace at Utrecht! the man that makes up half the volume of terse prose, that makes up the report of the committee, speaking verses! Sic est, homo sum.”

He died at Wimpole, a seat of the earl of Oxford, on the 18th of September, 1721, and was buried in Westminster; where, on a monument, for which, as the “last piece of human vanity,” he left five hundred pounds, is engraven this epitaph:

Sui temporis historiam meditati,

Paulatim obrepens febris

Operi simul et vitæ filum abruptit,

Sept. 18, An. Dom. 1721. Ætat. 57

H.S.E

Vir eximius

Serenissimis

Regi Gulielmo, reginæque MARIÆ,

very few memorials have been left by his contemporaries; the account, therefore, must now be destitute of his private character and familiar practices. He lived at a time when the rage of party detected all which it was any man's interest to hide; and, as little ill is heard of Prior, it is certain that not much was known. He was not afraid of provoking censure; for, when he forsook the whigs⁸ under whose patronage he first entered the world, he became a tory, so ardent and determinate, that he did not willingly consort with men of different opinions. He was one of the sixteen tories who met weekly, and agreed to address each other by the title of *brother*; and seems to have adhered, not only by concurrence of political designs, but by peculiar affection, to the earl of Oxford and his family. With how much confidence he was trusted has been already told.

He was, however, in Pope's⁹ opinion, fit only to make verses, and less qualified for business than Addison himself. This was, surely, said without consideration. Addison, exalted to a high place, was forced into degradation by the sense of his own incapacity; Prior, who was employed by men very capable of estimating his value, having been secretary to one embassy, had, when great abilities were again wanted, the same office another time; and was, after so much experience of his knowledge and dexterity, at last sent to transact a negotiation in the highest degree arduous and important; for which he was qualified,

⁸ Spence.

⁹ Spence.

among other requisites, in the opinion of Bolingbroke, by his influence upon the French minister, and by skill in questions of commerce above other men.

Of his behaviour in the lighter parts of life, it is too late to get much intelligence. One of his answers to a boastful Frenchman has been related; and to an impertinent he made another equally proper. During his embassy, he sat at the opera by a man, who, in his rapture, accompanied with his own voice the principal singer. Prior fell to railing at the performer with all the terms of reproach that he could collect, till the Frenchman, ceasing from his song, began to expostulate with him for his harsh censure of a man who was confessedly the ornament of the stage. "I know all that," says the ambassador, "mais il chante si haut, que je ne saurais vous entendre."

In a gay French company, where every one sang a little song or stanza, of which the burden was, "Bannissons la mélancolie;" when it came to his turn to sing, after the performance of a young lady that sat next him, he produced these extemporary lines:

Mais cette voix, et ces beaux yeux,
Font Cupidon trop dangereux;
Et je suis triste quand je crie,
Bannissons la mélancolie.

Tradition represents him as willing to descend from the dignity of the poet and the statesman to the low delights of mean company. His Chloe, probably, was sometimes ideal; but the

woman with whom he cohabited was a despicable drab¹⁰ of the lowest species. One of his wenches, perhaps Chloe, while he was absent from his house, stole his plate, and ran away; as was related by a woman who had been his servant. Of this propensity to sordid converse I have seen an account so seriously ridiculous, that it seems to deserve insertion¹¹.

I have been assured that Prior, after having spent the evening with Oxford, Bolingbroke, Pope, and Swift, would go and smoke a pipe, and drink a bottle of ale, with a common soldier and his wife, in Long-acre, before he went to bed; not from any remains of the lowness of his original, as one said, but, I suppose, that his faculties,

“Strain’d to the height,
In that celestial colloquy sublime,
Dazzled and spent, sunk down, and sought repair.”

Poor Prior! why was he so *strained*, and in such *want* of *repair*, after a conversation with men, not, in the opinion of the world, much wiser than himself? But such are the conceits of speculatists, who *strain* their *faculties* to find in a mine what lies upon the surface.

His opinions, so far as the means of judging are left us, seem to have been right; but his life was, it seems, irregular, negligent,

¹⁰ Spence; and see Gent. Mag. vol 1 vii. p. 1039.

¹¹ Richardsoniana.

and sensual.

Prior has written with great variety, and his variety has made him popular. He has tried all styles, from the grotesque to the solemn, and has not so failed in any as to incur derision or disgrace.

His works may be distinctly considered, as comprising Tales, Love-verses, Occasional Poems, Alma, and Solomon.

His Tales have obtained general approbation, being written with great familiarity and great sprightliness; the language is easy, but seldom gross, and the numbers smooth without appearance of care. Of these tales there are only four. The Ladle; which is introduced by a preface, neither necessary nor pleasing, neither grave nor merry. Paulo Purganti; which has likewise a preface, but of more value than the tale. Hans Carvel, not over-decent; and Protogenes and Apelles, an old story, mingled, by an affectation not disagreeable, with modern images. The Young Gentleman in Love has hardly a just claim to the title of a tale. I know not whether he be the original author of any tale which he has given us. The adventure of Hans Carvel has passed through many successions of merry wits; for it is to be found in Ariosto's satires, and is, perhaps, yet older¹². But the merit of such stories is the art of telling them.

In his amorous effusions he is less happy; for they are not dictated by nature or by passion, and have neither gallantry nor tenderness. They have the coldness of Cowley, without his wit,

¹² It is to be found in Poggii Facetiæ. J.B.

the dull exercises of a skilful versifier, resolved, at all adventures, to write something about Chloe, and trying to be amorous by dint of study. His fictions, therefore, are mythological. Venus, after the example of the Greek epigram, asks when she was seen *naked and bathing*. Then Cupid is *mistaken*; then Cupid is *disarmed*, then he loses his darts to Ganymede; then Jupiter sends him a summons by Mercury. Then Chloe goes a-hunting, with *an ivory quiver graceful at her side*; Diana mistakes her for one of her nymphs, and Cupid laughs at the blunder. All this is, surely, despicable; and even when he tries to act the lover, without the help of gods or goddesses, his thoughts are unaffecting or remote. He talks not "like a man of this world."

The greatest of all his amorous essays is Henry and Emma; a dull and tedious dialogue, which excites neither esteem for the man, nor tenderness for the woman. The example of Emma, who resolves to follow an outlawed murderer wherever fear and guilt shall drive him, deserves no imitation; and the experiment by which Henry tries the lady's constancy, is such as must end either in infamy to her, or in disappointment to himself.

His occasional poems necessarily lost part of their value, as their occasions, being less remembered, raised less emotion. Some of them, however, are preserved by their inherent excellence. The burlesque of Boileau's Ode on Namur has, in some parts, such airiness and levity as will always procure it readers, even among those who cannot compare it with the original. The epistle to Boileau is not so happy. The poems to the

king are now perused only by young students, who read merely that they may learn to write; and of the *Carmen Seculare*, I cannot but suspect that I might praise or censure it by caprice, without danger of detection; for who can be supposed to have laboured through it? Yet the time has been when this neglected work was so popular, that it was translated into Latin by no common master.

His poem on the battle of Ramilles is necessarily tedious by the form of the stanza: an uniform mass of ten lines, thirty-five times repeated, inconsequential and slightly connected, must weary both the ear and the understanding. His imitation of Spenser, which consists principally in *I ween and I weet*, without exclusion of later modes of speech, makes his poem neither ancient nor modern. His mention of Mars and Bellona, and his comparison of Marlborough to the eagle that bears the thunder of Jupiter, are all puerile and unaffecting; and yet more despicable is the long tale told by Lewis in his despair, of Brute and Troynovante, and the teeth of Cadmus, with his similes of the raven and eagle, and wolf and lion. By the help of such easy fictions, and vulgar topicks, without acquaintance with life, and without knowledge of art or nature, a poem of any length, cold and lifeless like this, may be easily written on any subject.

In his epilogues to Phædra and to Lucius he is very happily facetious; but in the prologue before the queen, the pedant has found his way, with Minerva, Perseus, and Andromeda.

His epigrams and lighter pieces are, like those of others,

sometimes elegant, sometimes trifling, and sometimes dull; amongst the best are the Chamelion, and the epitaph on John and Joan.

Scarcely any one of our poets has written so much, and translated so little: the version of Callimachus is sufficiently licentious; the paraphrase on St. Paul's Exhortation to Charity is eminently beautiful.

Alma is written in professed imitation of Hudibras, and has, at least, one accidental resemblance: Hudibras wants a plan, because it is left imperfect; Alma is imperfect, because it seems never to have had a plan. Prior appears not to have proposed to himself any drift or design, but to have written the casual dictates of the present moment.

What Horace said when he imitated Lucilius, might be said of Butler by Prior; his numbers were not smooth or neat. Prior excelled him in versification; but he was, like Horace, "inventore minor;" he had not Butler's exuberance of matter and variety of illustration. The spangles of wit which he could afford, he knew how to polish; but he wanted the bullion of his master. Butler pours out a negligent profusion, certain of the weight, but careless of the stamp. Prior has comparatively little, but with that little he makes a fine show. Alma has many admirers, and was the only piece among Prior's works of which Pope said that he should wish to be the author.

Solomon is the work to which he entrusted the protection of his name, and which he expected succeeding ages to regard

with veneration. His affection was, natural; it had undoubtedly been written with great labour; and who is willing to think that he has been labouring in vain? He had infused into it much knowledge and much thought; had often polished it to elegance, often dignified it with splendour, and sometimes heightened it to sublimity: he perceived in it many excellencies, and did not discover that it wanted that without which all others are of small avail, the power of engaging attention and alluring curiosity.

Tediousness is the most fatal of all faults; negligences or errors are single and local, but tediousness pervades the whole; other faults are censured and forgotten, but the power of tediousness propagates itself. He that is weary the first hour, is more weary the second; as bodies forced into motion contrary to their tendency, pass more and more slowly through every successive interval of space.

Unhappily this pernicious failure is that which an author is least able to discover. We are seldom tiresome to ourselves; and the act of composition fills and delights the mind with change of language and succession of images; every couplet, when produced, is new, and novelty is the great source of pleasure. Perhaps no man ever thought a line superfluous when he first wrote it, or contracted his work till his ebullitions of invention had subsided. And even if he should control his desire of immediate renown, and keep his work nine years unpublished, he will be still the author, and still in danger of deceiving himself: and if he consults his friends, he will, probably, find men who

have more kindness than judgment, or more fear to offend, than desire to instruct.

The tediousness of this poem proceeds not from the uniformity of the subject, for it is sufficiently diversified, but from the continued tenour of the narration; in which Solomon relates the successive vicissitudes of his own mind, without the intervention of any other speaker, or the mention of any other agent, unless it be Abra; the reader is only to learn what he thought, and to be told that he thought wrong. The event of every experiment is foreseen, and, therefore, the process is not much regarded.

Yet the work is far from deserving to be neglected. He that shall peruse it will be able to mark many passages, to which he may recur for instruction or delight; many from which the poet may learn to write, and the philosopher to reason.

If Prior's poetry be generally considered, his praise will be that of correctness and industry, rather than of compass of comprehension, or activity of fancy. He never made any effort of invention: his greater pieces are only tissues of common thoughts; and his smaller, which consist of light images, or single conceits, are not always his own. I have traced him among the French epigrammatists, and have been informed that he poached for prey among obscure authors. The Thief and the Cordelier is, I suppose, generally considered as an original production; with how much justice this epigram may tell, which was written by Georgius Sabinus, a poet now little known or read, though once

the friend of Luther and Melancthon.

De Sacerdote Furem consolante.

Quidam sacrificus furem comitatus euntem
Huc ubi dat sontes carnificina neci,
Ne sis mœstus, ait; summi conviva Tonantis
Jam cum cœlitibus (si modo credis) eris.
Ille gemens, si vera mihi solatia præbes,
Hospes apud superos sis meus oro, refert.
Sacrificus contra; mihi non convivia fas est
Ducere, jejunans hac edo luce nihil.

What he has valuable he owes to his diligence and his judgment. His diligence has justly placed him amongst the most correct of the English poets; and he was one of the first that resolutely endeavoured at correctness. He never sacrifices accuracy to haste, nor indulges himself in contemptuous negligence, or impatient idleness; he has no careless lines, or entangled sentiments; his words are nicely selected, and his thoughts fully expanded. If this part of his character suffers any abatement, it must be from the disproportion of his rhymes, which have not always sufficient consonance, and from the admission of broken lines into his Solomon; but, perhaps, he thought, like Cowley, that hemistichs ought to be admitted into heroick poetry¹³.

¹³ The same thought is found in one of Owen's epigrams, lib. i. epig. 123. and in

He had, apparently, such rectitude of judgment as secured him from every thing that approached to the ridiculous or absurd; but as laws operate in civil agency not to the excitement of virtue, but the repression of wickedness, so judgment in the operations of intellect can hinder faults, but not produce excellence. Prior is never low, nor very often sublime. It is said by Longinus of Euripides, that he forces himself sometimes into grandeur by violence of effort, as the lion kindles his fury by the lashes of his own tail. Whatever Prior obtains above mediocrity seems the effort of struggle and of toil. He has many vigorous but few happy lines; he has every thing by purchase, and nothing by gift; he had no “nightly visitations” of the muse, no infusions of sentiment or felicities of fancy.

His diction, however, is more his own than that of any among the successors of Dryden; he borrows no lucky turns, or commodious modes of language, from his predecessors. His phrases are original, but they are sometimes harsh; as he inherited no elegancies, none has he bequeathed. His expression has every mark of laborious study; the line seldom seems to have been formed at once; the words did not come till they were called, and were then put by constraint into their places, where they do their duty, but do it sullenly. In his greater compositions there may be found more rigid stateliness than graceful dignity.

Of versification he was not negligent: what he received from Dryden he did not lose; neither did he increase the

difficulty of writing by unnecessary severity, but uses triplets and alexandrines without scruple. In his preface to Solomon he proposes some improvements, by extending the sense from one couplet to another, with variety of pauses. This he has attempted, but without success; his interrupted lines are displeasing, and his sense, as less distinct is less striking.

He has altered the stanza of Spenser, as a house is altered by building another in its place of a different form. With how little resemblance he has formed his new stanza to that of his master, these specimens will show:

SPENSER

She flying fast from heaven's hated face,
And from the world that her discover'd wide,
Fled to the wasteful wilderness apace,
From living eyes her open shame to hide,
And lurk'd in rocks and caves long unesp'y'd.
But that fair crew of knights, and Una fair,
Did in that castle afterwards abide,
To rest themselves, and weary powers repair,
Where store they found of all, that dainty was and rare.

PRIOR

To the close rock the frighted raven flies,
Soon as the rising eagle cuts the air:
The shaggy wolf unseen and trembling lies,
When the hoarse roar proclaims the lion near.
Ill-starr'd did we our forts and lines forsake,
To dare our British foes to open fight:
Our conquest we by stratagem should make;
Our triumph had been founded in our flight.
'Tis ours, by craft and by surprise to gain:
'Tis theirs, to meet in arms, and battle in the plain¹⁴.

By this new structure of his lines he has avoided difficulties; nor am I sure that he has lost any of the power of pleasing; but he no longer imitates Spenser.

Some of his poems are written without regularity of measure; for, when he commenced poet, we had not recovered from our Pindarick infatuation; but he probably lived to be convinced, that the essence of verse is order and consonance.

His numbers are such as mere diligence may attain; they seldom offend the ear, and seldom sooth it; they commonly want

¹⁴ Prior was not the first inventor of this stanza; for excepting the alexandrine close, it is to be found in Churchyard's Worthies of Wales. See his introduction for Brecknockshire. J.B.

airiness, lightness, and facility; what is smooth, is not soft. His verses always roll, but they seldom flow.

A survey of the life and writings of Prior may exemplify a sentence which he doubtless understood well, when he read Horace at his uncle's; "the vessel long retains the scent which it first receives." In his private relaxation he revived the tavern, and in his amorous pedantry he exhibited the college. But on higher occasions and nobler subjects, when habit was overpowered by the necessity of reflection, he wanted not wisdom as a statesman, nor elegance as a poet.

CONGREVE

William Congreve descended from a family in Staffordshire, of so great antiquity that it claims a place among the few that extend their line beyond the Norman conquest; and was the son of William Congreve, second son of Richard Congreve, of Congreve and Stratton. He visited, once, at least, the residence of his ancestors; and, I believe, more places than one are still shown, in groves and gardens, where he is related to have written his *Old Bachelor*.

Neither the time nor place of his birth are certainly known: if the inscription upon his monument be true, he was born in 1672¹⁵. For the place; it was said by himself, that he owed his nativity to England, and by every body else that he was born in Ireland. Southern mentioned him with sharp censure, as a man that meanly disowned his native country. The biographers assign his nativity to Bardsa, near Leeds, in Yorkshire, from the account given by himself, as they suppose, to Jacob.

To doubt whether a man of eminence has told the truth about his own birth, is, in appearance, to be very deficient in candour; yet nobody can live long without knowing that falsehoods of convenience or vanity, falsehoods from which no

¹⁵ Mr. Malone has ascertained both the place and time of his birth by the register of Bardsey, which is as follows: "William, the sonne of Mr. William Congreve of Bardsey Grange, was baptised Febr. 10th, 1669." See Malone's *Dryden*, vol. i. p. 225. J.B.

evil immediately visible ensues, except the general degradation of human testimony, are very lightly uttered, and once uttered are sullenly supported. Boileau, who desired to be thought a rigorous and steady moralist, having told a petty lie to Lewis the fourteenth, continued it afterwards by false dates; thinking himself obliged, *in honour*, says his admirer, to maintain what, when he said it, was so well received.

Wherever Congreve was born, he was educated first at Kilkenny, and afterwards at Dublin, his father having some military employment that stationed him in Ireland: but, after having passed through the usual preparatory studies, as may be reasonably supposed, with great celerity and success, his father thought it proper to assign him a profession, by which something might be gotten; and, about the time of the revolution, sent him, at the age of sixteen, to study law in the Middle Temple, where he lived for several years, but with very little attention to statutes or reports.

His disposition to become an author appeared very early, as he very early felt that force of imagination, and possessed that copiousness of sentiment, by which intellectual pleasure can be given. His first performance was a novel, called *Incognita*, or *Love and Duty reconciled*: it is praised by the biographers, who quote some part of the preface, that is indeed, for such a time of life, uncommonly judicious. I would rather praise it than read it.

His first dramattick labour was the *Old Bachelor*; of which he says, in his defence against Collier, "that comedy was written,

as several know, some years before it was acted. When I wrote it, I had little thoughts of the stage; but did it, to amuse myself in a slow recovery from a fit of sickness. Afterwards, through my indiscretion, it was seen, and in some little time more it was acted; and I, through the remainder of my indiscretion, suffered myself to be drawn into the prosecution of a difficult and thankless study, and to be involved in a perpetual war with knaves and fools.”

There seems to be a strange affectation in authors of appearing to have done every thing by chance. The *Old Bachelor* was written for amusement, in the languor of convalescence. Yet it is apparently composed with great elaborateness of dialogue, and incessant ambition of wit. The age of the writer considered, it is, indeed, a very wonderful performance; for, whenever written, it was acted, 1693, when he was not more than twenty-one years old; and was then recommended by Mr. Dryden, Mr. Southern, and Mr. Maynwaring. Dryden said, that he, never had seen such a first play; but they found it deficient in some things requisite to the success of its exhibition, and by their greater experience fitted it for the stage.

Southern used to relate of one comedy, probably of this, that, when Congreve read it to the players, he pronounced it so wretchedly that they had almost rejected it; but they were afterwards so well persuaded of its excellence, that, for half a year before it was acted, the manager allowed its author the privilege of the house.

Few plays have ever been so beneficial to the writer; for it procured him the patronage of Halifax, who immediately made him one of the commissioners for licensing coaches, and soon after gave him a place in the pipe-office, and another in the customs, of six hundred pounds a year. Congreve's conversation must surely have been, at least, equally pleasing with his writings.

Such a comedy, written at such an age, requires some consideration. As the lighter species of dramattick poetry professes the imitation of common life, of real manners, and daily incidents, it apparently presupposes a familiar knowledge of many characters, and exact observation of the passing world; the difficulty, therefore, is to conceive how this knowledge can be obtained by a boy.

But if the *Old Bachelor* be more nearly examined, it will be found to be one of those comedies which may be made by a mind vigorous and acute, and furnished with comick characters by the perusal of other poets, without much actual commerce with mankind. The dialogue is one constant reciprocation of conceits, or clash of wit, in which nothing flows necessarily from the occasion, or is dictated by nature. The characters, both of men and women, are either fictitious and artificial, as those of Heartwell, and the ladies; or easy and common, as Wittol, a tam idiot; Bluff, a swaggering coward; and Fondlewife, a jealous puritan; and the catastrophe arises from a mistake not very probably produced, by marrying a woman in a mask.

Yet this gay comedy, when all these deductions are made,

will still remain the work of very powerful and fertile faculties; the dialogue is quick and sparkling, the incidents such as seize the attention, and the wit so exuberant, that it “o’er-informs its tenement.”

Next year he gave another specimen of his abilities in the *Double Dealer*, which was not received with equal kindness. He writes to his patron, the lord Halifax, a dedication, in which he endeavours to reconcile the reader to that which found few friends among the audience. These apologies are always useless: “de gustibus non est disputandum;” men may be convinced, but they cannot be pleased, against their will. But, though taste is obstinate, it is very variable; and time often prevails when arguments have failed.

Queen Mary conferred upon both those plays the honour of her presence; and when she died, soon after, Congreve testified his gratitude by a despicable effusion of elegiack pastoral; a composition in which all is unnatural, and yet nothing is new.

In another year, 1695, his prolifick pen produced *Love for Love*; a comedy of nearer alliance to life, and exhibiting more real manners than either of the former. The character of Foresight was then common. Dryden calculated nativities; both Cromwell and king William had their lucky days; and Shaftesbury himself, though he had no religion, was said to regard predictions. The *Sailor* is not accounted very natural, but he is very pleasant.

With this play was opened the new theatre, under the direction

of Betterton the tragedian; where he exhibited, two years afterwards, 1697, the Mourning Bride, a tragedy, so written as to show him sufficiently qualified for either kind of dramattick poetry.

In this play, of which, when he afterwards revised it, he reduced the versification to greater regularity, there is more bustle than sentiment; the plot is busy and intricate, and the events take hold on the attention; but, except a very few passages, we are rather amused with noise, and perplexed with stratagem, than entertained with any true delineation of natural characters. This, however, was received with more benevolence than any other of his works, and still continues to be acted and applauded.

But whatever objections may be made, either to his comick or tragick excellence, they are lost, at once, in the blaze of admiration, when it is remembered that he had produced these four plays before he had passed his twenty-fifth year; before other men, even such as are some time to shine in eminence, have passed their probation of literature, or presume to hope for any other notice than such as is bestowed on diligence and inquiry. Among all the efforts of early genius which literary history records, I doubt whether any one can be produced that more surpasses the common limits of nature than the plays of Congreve.

About this time began the long-continued controversy between Collier and the poets. In the reign of Charles the first the puritans had raised a violent clamour against the drama, which

they considered as an entertainment not lawful to christians, an opinion held by them in common with the church of Rome; and Prynne published *Histriomastix*, a huge volume, in which stageplays were censured. The outrages and crimes of the puritans brought afterwards their whole system of doctrine into disrepute, and from the restoration the poets and the players were left at quiet; for to have molested them would have had the appearance of tendency to puritanical malignity.

This danger, however, was worn away by time; and Collier, a fierce and implacable nonjuror, knew that an attack upon the theatre would never make him suspected for a puritan; he, therefore, 1698, published a short *View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, I believe with no other motive than religious zeal and honest indignation. He was formed for a controvertist; with sufficient learning; with diction vehement and pointed, though often vulgar and incorrect; with unconquerable pertinacity; with wit, in the highest degree, keen and sarcastick; and with all those powers exalted and invigorated by just confidence in his cause.

Thus qualified, and thus incited, he walked out to battle, and assailed, at once, most of the living writers, from Dryden to d'Urfey. His onset was violent: those passages, which while they stood single had passed with little notice, when they were accumulated and exposed together, excited horreur; the wise and the pious caught the alarm; and the nation wondered why it had so long suffered irreligion and licentiousness to be openly taught

at the publick charge.

Nothing now remained for the poets but to resist or fly. Dryden's conscience, or his prudence, angry as he was, withheld him from the conflict; Congreve and Vanbrugh attempted answers. Congreve, a very young man, elated with success, and impatient of censure, assumed an air of confidence and security. His chief artifice of controversy is to retort upon his adversary his own words: he is very angry, and, hoping to conquer Collier with his own weapons, allows himself in the use of every term of contumely and contempt; but he has the sword without the arm of Scanderbeg; he has his antagonist's coarseness, but not his strength. Collier replied; for contest was his delight: he was not to be frighted from his purpose or his prey.

The cause of Congreve was not tenable: whatever glosses he might use for the defence or palliation of single passages, the general tenour and tendency of his plays must always be condemned. It is acknowledged, with universal conviction, that the perusal of his works will make no man better; and that their ultimate effect is to represent pleasure in alliance with vice, and to relax those obligations by which life ought to be regulated.

The stage found other advocates, and the dispute was protracted through ten years; but, at last, comedy grew more modest, and Collier lived to see the reward of his labour in the reformation of the theatre.

Of the powers by which this important victory was achieved, a quotation from *Love for Love*, and the remark upon it, may

afford a specimen:

Sir Sampson. "Sampson's a very good name; for your Sampsons were strong dogs from the beginning."

Angel. "Have a care—If you remember, the strongest Sampson of your name pull'd an old house over his head at last."

"Here you have the sacred history burlesqued; and Sampson once more brought into the house of Dagon, to make sport for the Philistines!"

Congreve's last play was the *Way of the World*; which, though as he hints in his dedication it was written with great labour and much thought, was received with so little favour, that, being in a high degree offended and disgusted, he resolved to commit his quiet and his fame no more to the caprices of an audience.

From this time his life ceased to be publick; he lived for himself and for his friends; and, among his friends, was able to name every man of his time whom wit and elegance had raised to reputation. It may be, therefore, reasonably supposed that his manners were polite, and his conversation pleasing.

He seems not to have taken much pleasure in writing, as he contributed nothing to the *Spectator*, and only one paper to the *Tatler*, though published by men with whom he might be supposed willing to associate; and though he lived many years after the publication of his *Miscellaneous Poems*, yet he added nothing to them, but lived on in literary indolence; engaged in no controversy, contending with no rival, neither soliciting flattery by publick commendations, nor provoking enmity by malignant

criticism, but passing his time among the great and splendid, in the placid enjoyment of his fame and fortune.

Having owed his fortune to Halifax, he continued always of his patron's party, but, as it seems, without violence or acrimony; and his firmness was naturally esteemed, as his abilities were revered. His security, therefore, was never violated; and when, upon the extrusion of the whigs, some intercession was used lest Congreve should be displaced, the earl of Oxford made this answer:

“Non obtusa adeo gestamus pectora Pœni,
Nec tam aversus equos Tyria sol jungit ab urbe.”

He that was thus honoured by the adverse party might naturally expect to be advanced when his friends returned to power; and he was, accordingly, made secretary for the island of Jamaica¹⁶, a place, I suppose, without trust or care, but which, with his post in the customs, is said to have afforded him twelve hundred pounds a year.

His honours were yet far greater than his profits. Every writer mentioned him with respect; and, among other testimonies to his merit, Steele made him the patron of his Miscellany, and Pope inscribed to him his translation of the Iliad.

But he treated the muses with ingratitude; for, having long conversed familiarly with the great, he wished to be considered

¹⁶ Dec. 17, 1714, and May 3, 1718, he received a patent for the same place for life.

rather as a man of fashion than of wit; and, when he received a visit from Voltaire, disgusted him by the despicable foppery of desiring to be considered not as an author but a gentleman; to which the Frenchman replied, “that if he had been only a gentleman, he should not have come to visit him.”

In his retirement he may be supposed to have applied himself to books; for he discovers more literature than the poets have commonly attained. But his studies were, in his latter days, obstructed by cataracts in his eyes, which, at last, terminated in blindness. This melancholy state was aggravated by the gout, for which he sought relief by a journey to Bath; but, being overturned in his chariot, complained from that time of a pain in his side, and died, at his house in Surrey-street, in the Strand, Jan. 29¹⁷, 1728-9. Having lain in state in the Jerusalem-chamber, he was buried in Westminster Abbey, where a monument is erected to his memory by Henrietta, duchess of Marlborough, to whom, for reasons either not known or not mentioned, he bequeathed a legacy of about ten thousand pounds; the accumulation of attentive parsimony, which, though to her superfluous and useless, might have given great assistance to the ancient family from which he descended, at that time, by the imprudence of his relation, reduced to difficulties and distress.

Congreve has merit of the highest kind; he is an original writer, who borrowed neither the models of his plot nor the manner of his dialogue. Of his plays I cannot speak distinctly;

¹⁷ The Historical Register says Jan. 19. æt. 57.

for, since I inspected them many years have passed; but what remains upon my memory is, that his characters are commonly fictitious and artificial, with very little of nature, and not much of life. He formed a peculiar idea of comick excellence, which he supposed to consist in gay remarks and unexpected answers, but that which he endeavoured, he seldom failed of performing. His scenes exhibit not much of humour, imagery, or passion; his personages are a kind of intellectual gladiators; every sentence is to ward or strike; the contest of smartness is never intermitted; his wit is a meteor playing to and fro with alternate coruscations. His comedies have, therefore, in some degree, the operation of tragedies; they surprise rather than divert, and raise admiration oftener than merriment. But they are the works of a mind replete with images, and quick in combination.

Of his miscellaneous poetry, I cannot say any thing very favourable. The powers of Congreve seem to desert him when he leaves the stage, as Antæus was no longer strong than when he could touch the ground. It cannot be observed without wonder, that a mind so vigorous and fertile in dramattick compositions should, on any other occasion, discover nothing but impotence and poverty. He has, in these little pieces, neither elevation of fancy, selection of language, nor skill in versification: yet, if I were required to select from the whole mass of English poetry the most poetical paragraph, I know not what I could prefer to an exclamation in the Mourning Bride:

ALMERIA

It was a fancy'd noise; for all is hush'd.

LEONORA

It bore the accent of a human voice.

ALMERIA

It was thy fear, or else some transient wind
Whistling thro' hollows of this vaulted isle:
We'll listen—

LEONORA

Hark!

ALMERIA

No, all is hush'd and still as death.—'Tis dreadful!
How reverend is the face of this tall pile;
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads,
To bear aloft its arch'd and ponderous roof,
By its own weight made stedfast and immoveable,
Looking tranquillity! It strikes an awe
And terror on my aching sight; the tombs
And monumental caves of death look cold,
And shoot a chilness to my trembling heart.
Give me thy hand, and let me hear thy voice;
Nay, quickly speak to me, and let me hear
Thy voice—my own affrights me with its echoes.

He who reads these lines enjoys, for a moment, the powers of a poet; he feels what he remembers to have felt before, but he feels it with great increase of sensibility; he recognises a familiar image, but meets it again amplified and expanded, embellished with beauty, and enlarged with majesty.

Yet could the author, who appears here to have enjoyed the confidence of nature, lament the death of queen Mary in lines like these:

The rocks are cleft, and new-descending rills

Furrow the brows of all th' impending hills.
The water-gods to floods their rivulets turn,
And each, with streaming eyes, supplies his wanting urn.
The fauns forsake the woods, the nymphs the grove,
And round the plain in sad distractions rove:
In prickly brakes their tender limbs they tear,
And leave on thorns their locks of golden hair.
With their sharp nails, themselves the satyrs wound,
And tug their shaggy beards, and bite with grief the ground.
Lo Pan himself, beneath a blasted oak,
Dejected lies, his pipe in pieces broke.
See Pales weeping too, in wild despair,
And to the piercing winds her bosom bare.
And see yon fading myrtle, where appears
The queen of love, all bath'd in flowing tears;
See how she wrings her hands, and beats her breast,
And tears her useless girdle from her waist!
Hear the sad murmurs of her sighing doves!
For grief they sigh, forgetful of their loves.

And, many years after, he gave no proof that time had improved his wisdom or his wit; for, on the death of the marquis of Blandford, this was his song:

And now the winds, which had so long been still.
Began the swelling air with sighs to fill:
The water-nymphs, who motionless remain'd,
Like images of ice, while she complain'd,
Now loos'd their streams; as when descending rains

Roll the steep torrents headlong o'er the plains.
The prone creation, who so long had gaz'd,
Charm'd with her cries, and at her griefs amaz'd,
Began to roar and howl with horrid yell,
Dismal to hear and terrible to tell!
Nothing but groans and sighs were heard around,
And echo multiplied each mournful sound.

In both these funeral poems, when he has *yelled* out many *syllables* of senseless *dolour*, he dismisses his reader with senseless consolation: from the grave of Pastora rises a light that forms a star; and where Amaryllis wept for Amyntas, from every tear sprung up a violet.

But William is his hero, and of William he will sing:

The hov'ring winds on downy wings shall wait around,
And catch, and waft to foreign lands, the flying sound.

It cannot but be proper to show what they shall have to catch and carry:

'Twas now, when flow'ry lawns the prospect made,
And flowing brooks beneath a forest shade,
A lowing heifer, loveliest of the herd,
Stood feeding by; while two fierce bulls prepar'd
Their armed heads for fight, by fate of war to prove
The victor worthy of the fair one's love.
Unthought presage of what met next my view;

For soon the shady scene withdrew.
And now, for woods, and fields, and springing flowers,
Behold a town arise, bulwark'd with walls and lofty towers;
Two rival armies all the plain o'erspread,
Each in battalia rang'd, and shining arms array'd;
With eager eyes beholding both from far
Namur, the prize and mistress of the war.

The Birth of the Muse is a miserable fiction. One good line it has, which was borrowed from Dryden. The concluding verses are these:

This said, no more remain'd. Th' ethereal host
Again impatient crowd the crystal coast.
The father now, within his spacious hands,
Encompass'd all the mingled mass of seas and lands;
And, having heav'd aloft the pond'rous sphere,
He launch'd the world to float in ambient air.

Of his irregular poems, that to Mrs. Arabella Hunt seems to be the best; his ode for St. Cecilia's Day, however, has some lines which Pope had in his mind when he wrote his own.

His imitations of Horace are feebly paraphractical, and the additions which he makes are of little value. He sometimes retains what were more properly omitted, as when he talks of *vervain* and *gums* to propitiate Venus.

Of his translations, the satire of Juvenal was written very early, and may, therefore, be forgiven, though it have not the

massiness and vigour of the original. In all his versions strength and sprightliness are wanting: his hymn to Venus, from Homer, is, perhaps, the best. His lines are weakened with expletives, and his rhymes are frequently imperfect.

His petty poems are seldom worth the cost of criticism. sometimes the thoughts are false, and sometimes common. In his verses on lady Gethin, the latter part is in imitation of Dryden's ode on Mrs. Killigrew; and Doris, that has been so lavishly flattered by Steele, has, indeed, some lively stanzas, but the expression might be mended; and the most striking part of the character had been already shown in *Love for Love*. His *Art of Pleasing* is founded on a vulgar, but, perhaps, impracticable principle, and the staleness of the sense is not concealed by any novelty of illustration or elegance of diction.

This tissue of poetry, from which he seems to have hoped a lasting name, is totally neglected, and known only as it is appended to his plays.

While comedy, or while tragedy, is regarded, his plays are likely to be read; but, except what relates to the stage¹⁸, I know not that he has ever written a stanza that is sung, or a couplet that is quoted. The general character of his *Miscellanies* is, that they show little wit, and little virtue.

Yet to him it must be confessed, that we are indebted for the

¹⁸ "Except!" Dr. Warton exclaims, "Is not this a high sort of poetry?" He mentions, likewise, that Congreve's opera, or oratorio, of *Semele*, was set to musick by Handel; I believe, in 1743.

correction of a national error, and for the cure of our Pindarick madness. He first taught the English writers that Pindar's odes were regular; and though certainly he had not the fire requisite for the higher species of lyric poetry, he has shown us, that enthusiasm has its rules, and that, in mere confusion, there is neither grace nor greatness.

BLACKMORE

Sir Richard Blackmore is one of those men whose writings have attracted much notice, but of whose life and manners very little has been communicated, and whose lot it has been to be much oftener mentioned by enemies than by friends.

He was the son of Robert Blackmore, of Corsham, in Wiltshire, styled, by Wood, gentleman, and supposed to have been an attorney. Having been, for some time, educated in a country school, he was sent, at thirteen, to Westminster; and, in 1668, was entered at Edmund hall, in Oxford, where he took the degree of M.A. June 3, 1676, and resided thirteen years; a much longer time than it is usual to spend at the university; and which he seems to have passed with very little attention to the business of the place; for, in his poems, the ancient names of nations or places, which he often introduces, are pronounced by chance. He afterwards travelled: at Padua he was made doctor of physick; and, after having wandered about a year and a half on the continent, returned home.

In some part of his life, it is not known when, his indigence compelled him to teach a school; an humiliation, with which, though it certainly lasted but a little while, his enemies did not forget to reproach him, when he became conspicuous enough to excite malevolence; and let it be remembered, for his honour, that to have been once a schoolmaster is the only reproach which

all the perspicacity of malice, animated by wit, has ever fixed upon his private life.

When he first engaged in the study of physick, he inquired, as he says, of Dr. Sydenham, what authors he should read, and was directed by Sydenham to Don Quixote; “which,” said he, “is a very good book; I read it still.” The perverseness of mankind makes it often mischievous in men of eminence to give way to merriment; the idle and the illiterate will long shelter themselves under this foolish apophthegm.

Whether he rested satisfied with this direction, or sought for better, he commenced physician, and obtained high eminence and extensive practice. He became fellow of the College of Physicians, April 12, 1687, being one of the thirty, which, by the new charter of king James, were added to the former fellows. His residence was in Cheapside¹⁹, and his friends were chiefly in the city. In the early part of Blackmore’s time, a citizen was a term of reproach; and his place of abode was another topick to which his adversaries had recourse, in the penury of scandal.

Blackmore, therefore, was made a poet not by necessity but inclination, and wrote not for a livelihood but for fame; or, if he may tell his own motives, for a nobler purpose, to engage poetry in the cause of virtue.

I believe it is peculiar to him, that his first publick work was an heroick poem. He was not known as a maker of verses till he published, in 1695, Prince Arthur, in ten books, written, as

¹⁹ At Saddlers’ hall.

he relates, “by such catches and starts, and in such occasional uncertain hours, as his profession afforded, and for the greatest part in coffee-houses, or in passing up and down the streets.” For the latter part of this apology he was accused of writing “to the rumbling of his chariot-wheels.” He had read, he says, “but little poetry throughout his whole life; and for fifteen years before had not written an hundred verses, except one copy of Latin verses in praise of a friend’s book²⁰.”

He thinks, and with some reason, that from such a performance perfection cannot be expected; but he finds another reason for the severity of his censurers, which he expresses in language such as Cheapside easily furnished. “I am not free of the poets’ company, having never kissed the governor’s hands: mine is, therefore, not so much as a permission poem, but a downright interloper. Those gentlemen who carry on their poetical trade in a joint stock, would, certainly, do what they could to sink and ruin an unlicensed adventurer, notwithstanding I disturbed none of their factories, nor imported any goods they had ever dealt in.” He had lived in the city till he had learned its note.

That Prince Arthur found many readers is certain; for in two years it had three editions; a very uncommon instance of favourable reception, at a time when literary curiosity was yet confined to particular classes of the nation. Such success naturally raised animosity; and Dennis attacked it by a formal

²⁰ The book he alludes to was *Nova Hypothesis ad explicanda februm intermittentium symptomata*, &c. Authore Gulielmo Cole, M.D. 1693.

criticism, more tedious and disgusting than the work which he condemns. To this censure may be opposed the approbation of Locke and the admiration of Molineux, which are found in their printed letters. Molineux is particularly delighted with the song of Mopas, which is, therefore, subjoined to this narrative.

It is remarked by Pope, that what “raises the hero, often sinks the man.” Of Blackmore it may be said, that, as the poet sinks, the man rises; the animadversions of Dennis, insolent and contemptuous as they were, raised in him no implacable resentment: he and his critick were afterwards friends; and in one of his latter works he praises Dennis as “equal to Boileau in poetry, and superior to him in critical abilities.”

He seems to have been more delighted with praise than pained by censure, and, instead of slackening, quickened his career. Having in two years produced ten books of Prince Arthur, in two years more, 1697, he sent into the world King Arthur, in twelve. The provocation was now doubled, and the resentment of wits and criticks may be supposed to have increased in proportion. He found, however, advantages more than equivalent to all their outrages; he was this year made one of the physicians in ordinary to king William, and advanced by him to the honour of knighthood, with the present of a gold chain and a medal.

The malignity of the wits attributed his knighthood to his new poem; but king William was not very studious of poetry; and Blackmore, perhaps, had other merit; for he says, in his dedication to Alfred, that “he had a greater part in the succession

of the house of Hanover than ever he had boasted.”

What Blackmore could contribute to the succession, or what he imagined himself to have contributed, cannot now be known. That he had been of considerable use, I doubt not but he believed, for I hold him to have been very honest; but he might easily make a false estimate of his own importance: those whom their virtue restrains from deceiving others, are often disposed, by their vanity, to deceive themselves. Whether he promoted the succession or not, he at least approved it, and adhered invariably to his principles and party through his whole life.

His ardour of poetry still continued; and not long after, 1700, he published a Paraphrase on the book of Job, and other parts of the scripture. This performance Dryden, who pursued him with great malignity, lived long enough to ridicule in a prologue.

The wits easily confederated against him, as Dryden, whose favour they almost all courted, was his professed adversary. He had besides given them reason for resentment, as, in his preface to Prince Arthur, he had said of the dramattick writers almost all that was alleged afterwards by Collier; but Blackmore's censure was cold and general, Collier's was personal and ardent; Blackmore taught his reader to dislike, what Collier incited him to abhor.

In his preface to King Arthur he endeavoured to gain, at least, one friend, and propitiated Congreve by higher praise of his Mourning Bride than it has obtained from any other critick.

The same year he published a Satire on Wit, a proclamation

of defiance which united the poets almost all against him, and which brought upon him lampoons and ridicule from every side. This he doubtless foresaw, and evidently despised; nor should his dignity of mind be without its praise, had he not paid the homage to greatness which he denied to genius, and degraded himself by conferring that authority over the national taste, which he takes from the poets, upon men of high rank and wide influence, but of less wit, and not greater virtue.

Here is again discovered the inhabitant of Cheapside, whose head cannot keep his poetry unmingled with trade. To hinder that intellectual bankruptcy which he affects to fear, he will erect a *bank for wit*.

In this poem he justly censured Dryden's impurities, but praised his powers; though, in a subsequent edition, he retained the satire, and omitted the praise. What was his reason I know not; Dryden was then no longer in his way.

His head still teemed with heroick poetry; and, 1705, he published *Eliza*, in ten books. I am afraid that the world was now weary of contending about Blackmore's heroes; for I do not remember that by any author, serious or comical, I have found *Eliza* either praised or blamed. She "dropped," as it seems, "dead-born from the press." It is never mentioned, and was never seen by me till I borrowed it for the present occasion. Jacob says, "it is corrected and revised for another impression;" but the labour of revision was thrown away.

From this time he turned some of his thoughts to the

celebration of living characters; and wrote a poem on the Kit-cat Club²¹, and Advice to the Poets how to celebrate the Duke of Marlborough; but, on occasion of another year of success, thinking himself qualified to give more instruction, he again wrote a poem of Advice to a Weaver of Tapestry. Steele was then publishing the Tatler; and, looking round him for something at which he might laugh, unluckily lighted on sir Richard's work, and treated it with such contempt, that, as Fenton observes, he put an end to the species of writers that gave *advice to painters*.

Not long after, 1712, he published Creation, a philosophical poem, which has been, by my recommendation, inserted in the late collection. Whoever judges of this by any other of Blackmore's performances, will do it injury. The praise given it by Addison, Spectator, 339, is too well known to be transcribed; but some notice is due to the testimony of Dennis, who calls it a "philosophical poem, which has equalled that of Lucretius in the beauty of its versification, and infinitely surpassed it in the solidity and strength of its reasoning."

Why an author surpasses himself, it is natural to inquire. I have heard from Mr. Draper, an eminent bookseller, an account received by him from Ambrose Philips, "That Blackmore, as he proceeded in this poem, laid his manuscript, from time to time, before a club of wits with whom he associated; and

²¹ "The Kit-cat Club," says Horace Walpole, "though generally mentioned as a set of wits, were, in fact, the patriots who saved Britain." See, for the history of its origin and name, Addisoniana, i. 120; Ward's complete and humorous account of the remarkable Clubs and Societies. Ed.

that every man contributed, as he could, either improvement or correction; so that," said Philips, "there are, perhaps, nowhere in the book thirty lines together that now stand as they were originally written."

The relation of Philips, I suppose, was true; but when all reasonable, all credible allowance is made for this friendly revision, the author will still retain an ample dividend of praise; for to him must always be assigned the plan of the work, the distribution of its parts, the choice of topics, the train of argument, and, what is yet more, the general predominance of philosophical judgment and poetical spirit. Correction seldom effects more than the suppression of faults: a happy line, or a single elegance, may, perhaps, be added; but, of a large work, the general character must always remain; the original constitution can be very little helped by local remedies; inherent and radical dulness will never be much invigorated by extrinsic animation.

This poem, if he had written nothing else, would have transmitted him to posterity among the first favourites of the English muse; but to make verses was his transcendent pleasure, and, as he was not deterred by censure, he was not satiated with praise.

He deviated, however, sometimes into other tracks of literature, and condescended to entertain his readers with plain prose. When the Spectator stopped, he considered the polite world as destitute of entertainment; and, in concert with Mr. Hughes, who wrote every third paper, published, three times a

week, the Lay Monastery, founded on the supposition that some literary men, whose characters are described, had retired to a house in the country to enjoy philosophical leisure, and resolved to instruct the publick, by communicating their disquisitions and amusements. Whether any real persons were concealed under fictitious names, is not known. The hero of the club is one Mr. Johnson; such a constellation of excellence, that his character shall not be suppressed, though there is no great genius in the design, nor skill in the delineation.

“The first I shall name is Mr. Johnson, a gentleman that owes to nature excellent faculties and an elevated genius, and to industry and application many acquired accomplishments. His taste is distinguishing, just, and delicate: his judgment clear, and his reason strong, accompanied with an imagination full of spirit, of great compass, and stored with refined ideas. He is a critick of the first rank; and, what is his peculiar ornament, he is delivered from the ostentation, malevolence, and supercilious temper, that so often blemish men of that character. His remarks result from the nature and reason of things, and are formed by a judgment free, and unbiassed by the authority of those who have lazily followed each other in the same beaten track of thinking, and are arrived only at the reputation of acute grammarians and commentators; men, who have been copying one another many hundred years, without any improvement; or, if they have ventured farther, have only applied in a mechanical manner the rules of ancient criticks to modern writings, and,

with great labour, discovered nothing but their own want of judgment and capacity. As Mr. Johnson penetrates to the bottom of his subject, by which means his observations are solid and natural, as well as delicate, so his design is always to bring to light something useful and ornamental; whence his character is the reverse to theirs, who have eminent abilities in insignificant knowledge, and a great felicity in finding out trifles. He is no less industrious to search out the merit of an author, than sagacious in discerning his errors and defects; and takes more pleasure in commending the beauties, than exposing the blemishes of a laudable writing; like Horace, in a long work, he can bear some deformities, and justly lay them on the imperfection of human nature, which is incapable of faultless productions. When an excellent drama appears in publick, and by its intrinsick worth attracts a general applause, he is not stung with envy and spleen; nor does he express a savage nature, in fastening upon the celebrated author, dwelling upon his imaginary defects, and passing over his conspicuous excellencies. He treats all writers upon the same impartial footing; and is not, like the little criticks, taken up entirely in finding out only the beauties of the ancient, and nothing but the errors of the modern writers. Never did any one express more kindness and good-nature to young and unfinished authors; he promotes their interests, protects their reputation, extenuates their faults, and sets off their virtues, and, by his candour, guards them from the severity of his judgment. He is not like those dry criticks, who are morose because

they cannot write themselves, but is himself master of a good vein in poetry; and though he does not often employ it, yet he has sometimes entertained his friends with his unpublished performances.”

The rest of the lay monks seem to be but feeble mortals, in comparison with the gigantick Johnson; who yet, with all his abilities, and the help of the fraternity, could drive the publication but to forty papers, which were afterwards collected into a volume, and called, in the title, a Sequel to the Spectators.

Some years afterwards, 1716 and 1717, he published two volumes of essays in prose, which can be commended only as they are written for the highest and noblest purpose, the promotion of religion. Blackmore’s prose is not the prose of a poet; for it is languid, sluggish, and lifeless; his diction is neither daring nor exact, his flow neither rapid nor easy, and his periods neither smooth nor strong. His account of wit, will show with how little clearness he is content to think, and how little his thoughts are recommended by his language.

“As to its efficient cause, wit owes its production to an extraordinary and peculiar temperament in the constitution of the possessor of it, in which is found a concurrence of regular and exalted ferments, and an affluence of animal spirits, refined and rectified to a great degree of purity; whence, being endowed with vivacity, brightness, and celerity, as well in their reflections as direct motions, they become proper instruments for the sprightly operations of the mind; by which means the imagination can,

with great facility, range the wide field of nature, contemplate an infinite variety of objects, and, by observing the similitude and disagreement of their several qualities, single out and abstract, and then suit and unite, those ideas which will best serve its purpose. Hence beautiful allusions, surprising metaphors, and admirable sentiments, are always ready at hand: and while the fancy is full of images, collected from innumerable objects and their different qualities, relations, and habitudes, it can at pleasure dress a common notion in a strange but becoming garb; by which, as before observed, the same thought will appear a new one, to the great delight and wonder of the hearer. What we call *genius* results from this particular happy complexion in the first formation of the person that enjoys it, and is nature's gift, but diversified by various specifick characters and limitations, as its active fire is blended and allayed by different proportions of phlegm, or reduced and regulated by the contrast of opposite ferments. Therefore, as there happens in the composition of a facetious genius a greater or less, though still an inferior degree of judgment and prudence, one man of wit will be varied and distinguished from another."

In these essays he took little care to propitiate the wits; for he scorns to avert their malice at the expense of virtue or of truth.

"Several, in their books, have many sarcastical and spiteful strokes at religion in general; while others make themselves pleasant with the principles of the christian. Of the last kind, this age has seen a most audacious example in the book entitled, a

Tale of a Tub. Had this writing been published in a pagan or popish nation, who are justly impatient of all indignity offered to the established religion of their country, no doubt but the author would have received the punishment he deserved. But the fate of this impious buffoon is very different; for in a protestant kingdom, zealous of their civil and religious immunities, he has not only escaped affronts, and the effects of publick resentment, but has been caressed and patronised by persons of great figure, and of all denominations. Violent party-men, who differed in all things besides, agreed in their turn to show particular respect and friendship to this insolent derider of the worship of his country, till at last the reputed writer is not only gone off with impunity, but triumphs in his dignity and preferment. I do not know that any inquiry or search was ever made after this writing, or that any reward was ever offered for the discovery of the author, or that the infamous book was ever condemned to be burnt in publick; whether this proceeds from the excessive esteem and love that men in power, during the late reign, had for wit, or their defect of zeal and concern for the christian religion, will be determined best by those who are best acquainted with their character.”

In another place he speaks with becoming abhorrence of a “godless author,” who has burlesqued a psalm. This author was supposed to be Pope, who published a reward for any one that would produce the coiner of the accusation, but never denied it; and was afterwards the perpetual and incessant enemy of Blackmore.

One of his essays is upon the Spleen, which is treated by him so much to his own satisfaction, that he has published the same thoughts in the same words; first in the Lay Monastery; then in the Essay; and then in the preface to a Medical Treatise on the Spleen. One passage, which I have found already twice, I will here exhibit, because I think it better imagined, and better expressed, than could be expected from the common tenour of his prose:

“As the several combinations of splenetick madness and folly produce an infinite variety of irregular understanding, so the amicable accommodation and alliance between several virtues and vices produce an equal diversity in the dispositions and manners of mankind; whence it comes to pass, that as many monstrous and absurd productions are found in the moral, as in the intellectual world. How surprising is it to observe, among the least culpable men, some whose minds are attracted by heaven and earth, with a seeming equal force; some who are proud of humility; others who are censorious and uncharitable, yet self-denying and devout; some who join contempt of the world with sordid avarice; and others who preserve a great degree of piety, with ill-nature and ungoverned passions! Nor are instances of this inconsistent mixture less frequent among bad men, where we often, with admiration, see persons at once generous and unjust, impious lovers of their country, and flagitious heroes, good-natured sharpers, immoral men of honour, and libertines who will sooner die than change their religion; and though it is

true that repugnant coalitions of so high a degree are found but in a part of mankind, yet none of the whole mass, either good or bad, are entirely exempted from some absurd mixture.”

He, about this time, Aug. 22, 1716, became one of the elects of the College of Physicians; and was soon after, Oct. 1, chosen censor. He seems to have arrived late, whatever was the reason, at his medical honours.

Having succeeded so well in his book on Creation, by which he established the great principle of all religion, he thought his undertaking imperfect, unless he, likewise, enforced the truth of revelation; and, for that purpose, added another poem on Redemption. He had, likewise, written, before his Creation, three books on the Nature of Man.

The lovers of musical devotion have always wished for a more happy metrical version than they have yet obtained of the Book of Psalms: this wish the piety of Blackmore led him to gratify; and he produced, 1721, a new version of the psalms of David, fitted to the tunes used in churches; which, being recommended by the archbishops and many bishops, obtained a license for its admission into publick worship: but no admission has it yet obtained, nor has it any right to come where Brady and Tate have got possession. Blackmore's name must be added to those of many others, who, by the same attempt, have obtained only the praise of meaning well.

He was not yet deterred from heroick poetry. There was another monarch of this island, for he did not fetch his heroes

from foreign countries, whom he considered as worthy of the epick muse; and he dignified Alfred, 1723, with twelve books. But the opinion of the nation was now settled; a hero introduced by Blackmore was not likely to find either respect or kindness; Alfred took his place by Eliza, in silence and darkness: benevolence was ashamed to favour, and malice was weary of insulting. Of his four epick poems, the first had such reputation and popularity as enraged the criticks; the second was, at least, known enough to be ridiculed; the two last had neither friends nor enemies.

Contempt is a kind of gangrene, which, if it seizes one part of a character, corrupts all the rest by degrees. Blackmore, being despised as a poet, was, in time, neglected as a physician; his practice, which was once invidiously great, forsook him in the latter part of his life; but being by nature, or by principle, averse from idleness, he employed his unwelcome leisure in writing books on physick, and teaching others to cure those whom he could himself cure no longer. I know not whether I can enumerate all the treatises by which he has endeavoured to diffuse the art of healing; for there is scarcely any distemper, of dreadful name, which he has not taught his reader how to oppose. He has written on the smallpox, with a vehement invective against inoculation; on consumptions, the spleen, the gout, the rheumatism, the king's evil, the dropsy, the jaundice, the stone, the diabetes, and the plague.

Of those books, if I had read them, it could not be expected

that I should be able to give a critical account. I have been told that there is something in them of vexation and discontent, discovered by a perpetual attempt to degrade physick from its sublimity, and to represent it as attainable without much previous or concomitant learning. By the transient glances which I have thrown upon them, I have observed an affected contempt of the ancients, and a supercilious derision of transmitted knowledge. Of this indecent arrogance, the following quotation, from his preface to the treatise on the smallpox, will afford a specimen; in which, when the reader finds, what I fear is true, that, when he was censuring Hippocrates, he did not know the difference between aphorism and apophthegm, he will not pay much regard to his determinations concerning ancient learning.

“As for this book of aphorisms, it is like my lord Bacon’s of the same title, a book of jests, or a grave collection of trite and trifling observations; of which though many are true and certain, yet they signify nothing, and may afford diversion, but no instruction; most of them being much inferior to the sayings of the wise men of Greece, which yet are so low and mean, that we are entertained every day with more valuable sentiments at the table-conversation of ingenious and learned men.”

I am unwilling, however, to leave him in total disgrace, and will, therefore, quote, from another preface, a passage less reprehensible.

“Some gentlemen have been disingenuous and unjust to me, by wresting and forcing my meaning in the preface to another

book, as if I condemned and exposed all learning, though they knew I declared that I greatly honoured and esteemed all men of superiour literature and erudition; and that I only undervalued false or superficial learning, that signifies nothing for the service of mankind; and that, as to physick, I expressly affirmed that learning must be joined with native genius, to make a physician of the first rank; but if those talents are separated, I asserted, and do still insist, that a man of native sagacity and diligence will prove a more able and useful practiser, than a heavy notional scholar, encumbered with a heap of confused ideas.”

He was not only a poet and a physician, but produced, likewise, a work of a different kind; a true and impartial History of the Conspiracy against King William, of glorious memory, in the year 1695. This I have never seen, but suppose it, at least, compiled with integrity. He engaged, likewise, in theological controversy, and wrote two books against the Arians; *Just Prejudices against the Arian Hypothesis*; and *Modern Arians unmasked*. Another of his works is *Natural Theology, or Moral Duties considered apart from Positive*; with some observations on the Desirableness and Necessity of a supernatural Revelation. This was the last book that he published. He left behind him the *Accomplished Preacher, or an Essay upon Divine Eloquence*; which was printed, after his death, by Mr. White, of Nayland, in Essex, the minister who attended his deathbed, and testified the fervent piety of his last hours. He died on the eighth of October, 1729.

Blackmore, by the unremitted enmity of the wits, whom he provoked more by his virtue than his dulness, has been exposed to worse treatment than he deserved. His name was so long used to point every epigram upon dull writers, that it became, at last, a by-word of contempt; but it deserves observation, that malignity takes hold only of his writings, and that his life passed without reproach, even when his boldness of reprehension naturally turned upon him many eyes desirous to espy faults, which many tongues would have made haste to publish. But those who could not blame, could, at least, forbear to praise, and, therefore, of his private life and domestick character there are no memorials.

As an author he may justly claim the honours of magnanimity. The incessant attacks of his enemies, whether serious or merry, are never discovered to have disturbed his quiet, or to have lessened his confidence in himself; they neither awed him to silence nor to caution; they neither provoked him to petulance, nor depressed him to complaint. While the distributors of literary fame were endeavouring to depreciate and degrade him, he either despised or defied them, wrote on as he had written before, and never turned aside to quiet them by civility, or repress them by confutation.

He depended with great security on his own powers, and perhaps was, for that reason, less diligent in perusing books. His literature was, I think, but small. What he knew of antiquity, I suspect him to have gathered from modern compilers; but,

though he could not boast of much critical knowledge, his mind was stored with general principles, and he left minute researches to those whom he considered as little minds.

With this disposition he wrote most of his poems. Having formed a magnificent design, he was careless of particular and subordinate elegancies; he studied no niceties of versification; he waited for no felicities of fancy; but caught his first thoughts in the first words in which they were presented: nor does it appear that he saw beyond his own performances, or had ever elevated his views to that ideal perfection, which every genius, born to excel, is condemned always to pursue, and never overtake. In the first suggestions of his imagination he acquiesced; he thought them good, and did not seek for better. His works may be read a long time without the occurrence of a single line that stands prominent from the rest.

The poem on Creation has, however, the appearance of more circumspection; it wants neither harmony of numbers, accuracy of thought, nor elegance of diction: it has either been written with great care, or, what cannot be imagined of so long a work, with such felicity as made care less necessary.

Its two constituent parts are ratiocination and description. To reason in verse, is allowed to be difficult; but Blackmore not only reasons in verse, but very often reasons poetically; and finds the art of uniting ornament with strength, and ease with closeness. This is a skill which Pope might have condescended to learn from him, when he needed it so much in his Moral Essays.

In his descriptions, both of life and nature, the poet and the philosopher happily coöperate; truth is recommended by elegance, and elegance sustained by truth.

In the structure and order of the poem, not only the greater parts are properly consecutive, but the didactick and illustrative paragraphs are so happily mingled, that labour is relieved by pleasure, and the attention is led on, through a long succession of varied excellence, to the original position, the fundamental principle of wisdom and of virtue.

As the heroick poems of Blackmore are now little read, it is thought proper to insert, as a specimen from Prince Arthur, the song of Mopas, mentioned by Molineux.

But that which Arthur with most pleasure heard,
Were noble strains, by Mopas sung, the bard
Who to his harp in lofty verse began,
And through the secret maze of nature ran.
He the great spirit sung, that all things fill'd,
That the tumultuous waves of chaos still'd:
Whose nod dispos'd the jarring seeds to peace,
And made the wars of hostile atoms cease.
All beings we in fruitful nature find,
Proceeded from the great eternal mind;
Streams of his unexhausted spring of power,
And cherish'd with his influence, endure.
He spread the pure cerulean fields on high,
And arch'd the chambers of the vaulted sky,
Which he, to suit their glory with their height,

Adorn'd with globes, that reel, as drunk with light.
His hand directed all the tuneful spheres,
He turn'd their orbs, and polish'd all the stars.
He fill'd the sun's vast lamp with golden light,
And bid the silver moon adorn the night.
He spread the airy ocean without shores,
Where birds are wafted with their feather'd oars.
Then sung the bard how the light vapours rise
From the warm earth, and cloud the smiling skies:
He sung how some, chill'd in their airy flight,
Fall scatter'd down in pearly dew by night;
How some, rais'd higher, sit in secret steams
On the reflected points of bounding beams,
Till, chill'd with cold, they shade th' ethereal plain,
Then on the thirsty earth descend in rain;
How some, whose parts a slight contexture show,
Sink hov'ring through the air, in fleecy snow;
How part is spun in silken threads, and clings
Entangled in the grass in gluey strings;
How others stamp to stones, with rushing sound
Fall from their crystal quarries to the ground;
How some are laid in trains, that kindled fly
In harmless fires by night, about the sky;
How some in winds blow with impetuous force,
And carry ruin where they bend their course,
While some conspire to form a gentle breeze,
To fan the air, and play among the trees;
How some, enrag'd, grow turbulent and loud,
Pent in the bowels of a frowning cloud,

That cracks, as if the axis of the world
Was broke, and heav'n's bright tow'rs were downwards hurl'd.
He sung how earth's wide ball, at Jove's command,
Did in the midst on airy columns stand;
And how the soul of plants, in prison held,
And bound with sluggish fetters, lies conceal'd,
Till with the spring's warm beams, almost releas'd
From the dull weight, with which it lay opprest,
Its vigour spreads, and makes the teeming earth
Heave up, and labour with the sprouting birth:
The active spirit freedom seeks in vain,
It only works and twists a stronger chain;
Urging its prison's sides to break away,
It makes that wider, where 'tis forc'd to stay:
Till, having form'd its living house, it rears
Its head, and in a tender plant appears.
Hence springs the oak, the beauty of the grove,
Whose stately trunk fierce storms can scarcely move.
Hence grows the cedar, hence the swelling vine
Does round the elm its purple clusters twine.
Hence painted flowers the smiling gardens bless,
Both with their fragrant scent and gaudy dress.
Hence the white lily in full beauty grows.
Hence the blue violet, and blushing rose.
He sung how sunbeams brood upon the earth,
And in the glebe hatch such a num'rous birth;
Which way the genial warmth in summer storms
Turns putrid vapours to a bed of worms;
How rain, transform'd by this prolifick power,

Falls from the clouds an animated shower.
He sung the embryo's growth within the womb,
And how the parts their various shapes assume;
With what rare art the wondrous structure's wrought,
From one crude mass to such perfection brought;
That no part useless, none misplac'd we see,
None are forgot, and more would monstrous be.

FENTON

The brevity with which I am to write the account of Elijah Fenton, is not the effect of indifference or negligence. I have sought intelligence among his relations in his native county, but have not obtained it.

He was born near Newcastle, in Staffordshire, of an ancient family²² whose state was very considerable; but he was the youngest of eleven children, and being, therefore, necessarily destined to some lucrative employment, was sent first to school, and afterwards to Cambridge²³, but with many other wise and virtuous men, who, at that time of discord and debate, consulted conscience, whether well or ill informed, more than interest,

²² He was born at Shelton, near Newcastle, May 20, 1683; and was the youngest of eleven children of John Fenton, an attorney-at-law, and one of the coroners of the county of Stafford. His father died in 1694; and his grave, in the church-yard of Stoke upon Trent, is distinguished by the following elegant Latin inscription from the pen of his son: H. S. E. JOHANNES FENTON, de Shelton antiqua stirpe generosus: juxta reliquias conjugis CATHERINÆ forma, moribus, pietate, optimo viro dignissimæ: Qui intemerata in ecclesiam fide, et virtutibus intaminatis enituit; nec non ingenii lepore bonis artibus expoliti, ac animo erga omnes benevolens, sibi suisque jucundus vixit Decem annos uxori dilectæ superstes magnum sui desiderium bonis omnibus reliquit, anno salutis humanæ 1694, {ætatis suffi 56 See Gent. Mag. 1791, vol. lxi. p. 703. N

²³ He was entered of Jesus college, and took a bachelor's degree in 1704: but it appears, by the list of Cambridge graduates, that he removed, in 1726, to Trinity hall. N.

he doubted the legality of the government, and, refusing to qualify himself for publick employment by the oaths required, left the university without a degree; but I never heard that, the enthusiasm of opposition impelled him to separation from the church.

By this perverseness of integrity he was driven out a commoner of nature, excluded from the regular modes of profit and prosperity, and reduced to pick up a livelihood uncertain and fortuitous; but it must be remembered that he kept his name unsullied, and never suffered himself to be reduced, like too many of the same sect, to mean arts and dishonourable shifts. Whoever mentioned Fenton, mentioned him with honour.

The life that passes in penury must necessarily pass in obscurity. It is impossible to trace Fenton from year to year, or to discover what means he used for his support. He was awhile secretary to Charles, earl of Orrery in Flanders, and tutor to his young son, who afterwards mentioned him with great esteem and tenderness. He was, at one time, assistant in the school of Mr. Bonwicke, in Surrey; and at another kept a school for himself at Sevenoaks, in Kent, which he brought into reputation; but was persuaded to leave it, 1710, by Mr. St. John, with promises of a more honourable employment.

His opinions, as he was a nonjuror, seem not to have been remarkably rigid. He wrote with great zeal and affection the praises of queen Anne, and very willingly and liberally extolled the duke of Marlborough when he was, 1707, at the height of

his glory.

He expressed still more attention to Marlborough and his family by an elegiack pastoral on the marquis of Blandford, which could be prompted only by respect or kindness; for neither the duke nor dutchess desired the praise, or liked the cost of patronage.

The elegance of his poetry entitled him to the company of the wits of his time, and the amiableness of his manners made him loved wherever he was known. Of his friendship to Southern and Pope there are lasting monuments.

He published, in 1707²⁴ a collection of poems.

By Pope he was once placed in a station that might have been of great advantage. Craggs, when he was advanced to be secretary of state, about 1720, feeling his own want of literature, desired Pope to procure him an instructor, by whose help he might supply the deficiencies of his education. Pope recommended Fenton, in whom Craggs found all that he was seeking. There was now a prospect of ease and plenty, for Fenton had merit, and Craggs had generosity; but the smallpox suddenly put an end to the pleasing expectation.

When Pope, after the great success of his Iliad, undertook the Odyssey, being, as it seems, weary of translating, he determined to engage auxiliaries. Twelve books he took to himself, and twelve he distributed between Broome and Fenton: the books allotted to Fenton were the first, the fourth, the nineteenth, and

²⁴ 1717. M.

the twentieth. It is observable, that he did not take the eleventh, which he had before translated into blank verse; neither did Pope claim it, but committed it to Broome. How the two associates performed their parts is well known to the readers of poetry, who have never been able to distinguish their books from those of Pope.

In 1723 was performed his tragedy of Mariamne; to which Southern, at whose house it was written, is said to have contributed such hints as his theatrical experience supplied. When it was shown to Cibber, it was rejected by him, with the additional insolence of advising Fenton to engage himself in some employment of honest labour, by which he might obtain that support which he could never hope from his poetry. The play was acted at the other theatre; and the brutal petulance of Cibber was confuted, though, perhaps, not shamed, by general applause. Fenton's profits are said to have amounted to near a thousand pounds, with which he discharged a debt contracted by his attendance at court.

Fenton seems to have had some peculiar system of versification. Mariamne is written in lines of ten syllables, with few of those redundant terminations which the drama not only admits, but requires, as more nearly approaching to real dialogue. The tenour of his verse is so uniform that it cannot be thought casual; and yet upon what principle he so constructed it, is difficult to discover.

The mention of his play brings to my mind a very trifling

occurrence. Fenton was one day in the company of Broome, his associate, and Ford, a clergyman²⁵, at that time too well known, whose abilities, instead of furnishing convivial merriment to the voluptuous and dissolute, might have enabled him to excel among the virtuous and the wise. They determined all to see the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which was acted that night; and Fenton, as a dramattick poet, took them to the stage-door; where the door-keeper, inquiring who they were, was told that they were three very necessary men, Ford, Broome, and Fenton. The name in the play, which Pope restored to Brook, was then Broome.

It was, perhaps, after his play that he undertook to revise the punctuation of Milton's poems, which, as the author neither wrote the original copy, nor corrected the press, was supposed capable of amendment. To this edition he prefixed a short and elegant account of Milton's life, written, at once, with tenderness and integrity.

He published, likewise, 1729, a very splendid edition of Waller, with notes often useful, often entertaining, but too much extended by long quotations from Clarendon. Illustrations drawn from a book so easily consulted, should be made by reference rather than transcription.

The latter part of his life was calm and pleasant. The relict of sir William Trumbull invited him, by Pope's recommendation,

²⁵ Ford was Johnson's relation, his mother's nephew, and is said to have been the original of the parson in Hogarth's *Modern Midnight Conversation*. See Boswell, i. and iii. Ed.

to educate her son; whom he first instructed at home, and then attended to Cambridge. The lady afterwards detained him with her as the auditor of her accounts. He often wandered to London, and amused himself with the conversation of his friends.

He died in 1730²⁶, at East Hampstead, in Berkshire, the seat of lady Trumbal; and Pope, who had been always his friend, honoured him with an epitaph, of which he borrowed the two first lines from Crashaw.

Fenton was tall and bulky, inclined to corpulence, which he did not lessen by much exercise; for he was very sluggish and sedentary, rose late, and when he had risen, sat down to his books or papers. A woman that once waited on him in a lodging, told him, as she said, that he would “lie a-bed, and be fed with a spoon.” This, however, was not the worst that might have been prognosticated; for Pope says, in his letters, that “he died of indolence;” but his immediate distemper was the gout.

Of his morals and his conversation the account is uniform: he was never named but with praise and fondness, as a man in the highest degree amiable and excellent. Such was the character given him by the earl of Orrery, his pupil; such is the testimony of Pope²⁷; and such were the suffrages of all who could boast of his acquaintance.

By a former writer of his life²⁸, a story is told, which ought not

²⁶ July 16.

²⁷ Spence.

²⁸ Shiels, Dr. Johnson’s amanuensis, who says, in Cibber’s Lives of the Poets, that

to be forgotten. He used, in the latter part of his time, to pay his relations in the country a yearly visit. At an entertainment made for the family by his elder brother, he observed, that one of his sisters, who had married unfortunately, was absent, and found, upon inquiry, that distress had made her thought unworthy of invitation. As she was at no great distance, he refused to sit at the table till she was called, and, when she had taken her place, was careful to show her particular attention.

His collection of poems is now to be considered. The ode to the Sun is written upon a common plan, without uncommon sentiments; but its greatest fault is its length.

No poem should be long of which the purpose is only to strike the fancy, without enlightening the understanding by precept, ratiocination, or narrative. A blaze first pleases, and then tires the sight.

Of Florello it is sufficient to say, that it is an occasional pastoral, which implies something neither natural nor artificial, neither comick nor serious.

The next ode is irregular, and, therefore, defective. As the sentiments are pious, they cannot easily be new; for what can be added to topicks on which successive ages have been employed!

Of the Paraphrase on Isaiah nothing very favourable can be said. Sublime and solemn prose gains little by a change to blank verse; and the paraphrast has deserted his original, by admitting images not Asiatick, at least not Judaical:

Returning peace,
Dove-ey'd, and rob'd in white.

Of his petty poems, some are very trifling, without any thing to be praised, either in the thought or expression. He is unlucky in his competitions; he tells the same idle tale with Congreve, and does not tell it so well. He translates from Ovid the same epistle as Pope; but, I am afraid, not with equal happiness.

To examine his performances, one by one, would be tedious. His translation from Homer into blank verse will find few readers, while another can be had in rhyme. The piece addressed to Lambarde is no disagreeable specimen of epistolary poetry; and his ode to the lord Gower was pronounced, by Pope, the next ode in the English language to Dryden's Cecilia. Fenton may be justly styled an excellent versifier and a good poet.

Whatever I have said of Fenton is confirmed by Pope in a letter, by which he communicated to Broome an account of his death:

to

The Rev^d. Mr. BROOME,

At Pulham, near Harlestone

Nor Suffolk

[By Beccles Bag.]

D^r Sir,

I intended to write to you on this melancholy subject, the death of Mr. Fenton, before y^rs came; but stay'd to have inform'd myself & you of y^e circumstances of it. All I hear is, that he felt a Gradual Decay, tho' so early in Life, & was declining for 5 or 6 months. It was not, as I apprehended, the Gout in his Stomach, but I believe rather a Complication first of Gross Humours, as he was naturally corpulent, not discharging themselves, as he used no sort of Exercise. No man better bore y^e approaches of

his Dissolution (as I am told) or with less ostentation yielded up his Being. The great modesty w^{ch} you know was natural to him, and y^e great Contempt he had for all Sorts of Vanity and Parade, never appeared more than in his last moments: He had a conscious Satisfaction (no doubt) in acting right, in feeling himself honest, true, & unpretending to more than was his own. So he dyed, as he lived, with that secret, yet sufficient, Contentment.

As to any Papers left behind him, I dare say they can be but few; for this reason: He never wrote out of Vanity, or thought much of the Applause of Men. I know an Instance where he did his utmost to conceal his own merit that way; and if we join to this his natural Love of Ease, I fancy we must expect little of this sort: at least I hear of none except some few further remarks on Waller (w^{ch} his cautious integrity made him leave an order to be given to Mr. Tonson) and perhaps, tho' 'tis many years since I saw it, a Translation of ye first Book of Oppian. He had begun a Tragedy of Dion, but made small progress in it.

As to his other affairs, he died poor, but honest, leaving no Debts, or Legacies; except of a few p^{ds} to Mr. Trumbull and my Lady, in token of respect, Gratefulness, and mutual Esteem.

I shall with pleasure take upon me to draw this amiable, quiet, deserving, unpretending, Christian and Philosophical character, in his Epitaph. There Truth may be spoken in a few words: as for Flourish, & Oratory, & Poetry, I leave them to younger and more lively Writers, such as love writing for writing sake, & w^d

rather show their own Fine Parts, yⁿ Report the valuable ones of any other man. So the Elegy I renounce.

I condole with you from my heart, on the loss of so worthy a man, and a Friend to us both. Now he is gone, I must tell you he has done you many a good office, and set your character in y^e fairest light, to some who either mistook you, or knew you not. I doubt not he has done the same for me.

Adieu: Let us love his Memory, and profit by his example. I am very sincerely

D^r Sir,

Your affectionate

& real Servant,

A. Pope.

Aug. 29th 1730.

GAY

John Gay, descended from an old family that had been long in possession of the manor of²⁹ Goldworthy in Devonshire, was born in 1688, at or near Barnstaple, where he was educated by Mr. Luck, who taught the school of that town with good reputation, and, a little before he retired from it, published a volume of Latin and English verses. Under such a master he was likely to form a taste for poetry. Being born without prospect of hereditary riches, he was sent to London in his youth, and placed apprentice to a silkmercer.

How long he continued behind the counter, or with what degree of softness and dexterity he received and accommodated the ladies, as he probably took no delight in telling it, is not known. The report is, that he was soon weary of either the restraint or servility of his occupation, and easily persuaded his master to discharge him.

The dutchess of Monmouth, remarkable for inflexible perseverance in her demand to be treated as a princess, in 1712 took Gay into her service as secretary: by quitting a shop for such service, he might gain leisure, but he certainly advanced little in the boast of independence. Of his leisure he made so good use, that he published, next year, a poem on Rural

²⁹ Goldworthy does not appear in the Villare. Dr. J.—Holdsworthy is probably meant.

Sports, and inscribed it to Mr. Pope, who was then rising fast into reputation. Pope was pleased with the honour; and when he became acquainted with Gay, found such attractions in his manners and conversation, that he seems to have received him into his inmost confidence; and a friendship was formed between them which lasted to their separation by death, without any known abatement on either part. Gay was the general favourite of the whole association of wits; but they regarded him as a playfellow rather than a partner, and treated him with more fondness than respect.

Next year he published the Shepherd's Week, six English pastorals, in which the images are drawn from real life, such as it appears among the rusticks in parts of England remote from London. Steele, in some papers of the Guardian had praised Ambrose Philips, as the pastoral writer that yielded only to Theocritus, Virgil, and Spenser. Pope, who had also published pastorals, not pleased to be overlooked, drew up a comparison of his own compositions with those of Philips, in which he covertly gave himself the preference, while he seemed to disown it. Not content with this, he is supposed to have incited Gay to write the Shepherd's Week, to show, that if it be necessary to copy nature with minuteness, rural life must be exhibited such as grossness and ignorance have made it. So far the plan was reasonable; but the pastorals are introduced by a Proem, written with such imitation as they could attain of obsolete language, and, by consequence, in a style that was never spoken nor written

in any age, or in any place.

But the effect of reality and truth became conspicuous, even when the intention was to show them grovelling and degraded. These pastorals became popular, and were read with delight, as just representations of rural manners and occupations, by those who had no interest in the rivalry of the poets, nor knowledge of the critical dispute.

In 1713 he brought a comedy, called the Wife of Bath, upon the stage, but it received no applause: he printed it, however, and seventeen years after, having altered it, and, as he thought, adapted it more to the publick taste, he offered it again to the town; but, though he was flushed with the success of the Beggars' Opera, had the mortification to see it again rejected.

In the last year of queen Anne's life, Gay was made secretary to the earl of Clarendon, ambassador to the court of Hanover. This was a station that naturally gave him hopes of kindness from every party; but the queen's death put an end to her favours, and he had dedicated his Shepherd's Week to Bolingbroke, which Swift considered as the crime that obstructed all kindness from the house of Hanover.

He did not, however, omit to improve the right which his office had given him to the notice of the royal family. On the arrival of the princess of Wales, he wrote a poem, and obtained so much favour, that both the prince and princess went to see his What d'ye call it, a kind of mock tragedy, in which the images were comick, and the action grave; so that, as Pope relates, Mr.

Cromwell, who could not hear what was said, was at a loss how to reconcile the laughter of the audience with the solemnity of the scene.

Of this performance the value certainly is but little; but it was one of the lucky trifles that give pleasure by novelty, and was so much favoured by the audience, that envy appeared against it in the form of criticism; and Griffin, a player, in conjunction with Mr. Theobald, a man afterwards more remarkable, produced a pamphlet, called the Key to the What d'ye call it; which, says Gay, "calls me a blockhead, and Mr. Pope a knave."

But fortune has always been inconstant. Not long afterwards, 1717, he endeavoured to entertain the town with Three Hours after Marriage; a comedy written, as there is sufficient reason for believing, by the joint assistance of Pope and Arbuthnot. One purpose of it was to bring into contempt Dr. Woodward, the fossilist, a man not really or justly contemptible. It had the fate which such outrages deserve: the scene in which Woodward was directly and apparently ridiculed, by the introduction of a mummy and a crocodile, disgusted the audience, and the performance was driven off the stage with general condemnation.

Gay is represented as a man easily incited to hope, and deeply depressed when his hopes were disappointed. This is not the character of a hero; but it may naturally imply something more generally welcome, a soft and civil companion. Whoever is apt to hope good from others is diligent to please them: but he that believes his powers strong enough to force their own way,

commonly tries only to please himself.

He had been simple enough to imagine that those who laughed at the *What d'ye call it*, would raise the fortune of its author; and, finding nothing done, sunk into dejection. His friends endeavoured to divert him. The earl of Burlington sent him, 1716, into Devonshire; the year after, Mr. Pulteney took him to Aix; and, in the following year, lord Harcourt invited him to his seat, where, during his visit, the two rural lovers were killed with lightning, as is particularly told in Pope's letters.

Being now generally known, he published, 1720, his poems, by subscription, with such success, that he raised a thousand pounds; and called his friends to a consultation, what use might be best made of it. Lewis, the steward of lord Oxford, advised him to intrust it to the funds, and live upon the interest; Arbuthnot bade him intrust it to providence, and live upon the principal; Pope directed him, and was seconded by Swift, to purchase an annuity.

Gay, in that disastrous year³⁰, had a present from young Craggs of some south-sea stock, and once supposed himself to be master of twenty thousand pounds. His friends persuaded him to sell his share; but he dreamed of dignity and splendour, and could not bear to obstruct his own fortune. He was then importuned to sell as much as would purchase a hundred a year for life, "which," says Fenton, "will make you sure of a clean shirt and a shoulder of mutton every day." This counsel was rejected: the profit and

³⁰ Spence.

principal were lost, and Gay sunk under the calamity so low that his life became in danger.

By the care of his friends, among whom Pope appears to have shown particular tenderness, his health was restored; and, returning to his studies, he wrote a tragedy, called the Captives, which he was invited to read before the princess of Wales. When the hour came, he saw the princess and her ladies all in expectation, and advancing with reverence, too great for any other attention, stumbled at a stool, and falling forward threw down a weighty japan screen. The princess started, the ladies screamed, and poor Gay, after all the disturbance, was still to read his play³¹.

The fate of the Captives, which was acted at Drury-lane in 1723-4, I know not³²; but he now thought himself in favour, and undertook, 1726, to write a volume of fables for the improvement of the young duke of Cumberland. For this he is said to have been promised a reward, which he had, doubtless, magnified with all the wild expectations of indigence and vanity.

Next year the prince and princess became king and queen, and Gay was to be great and happy; but, upon the settlement of the household, he found himself appointed gentleman usher to the princess Louisa. By this offer he thought himself insulted,

³¹ This mishap of Gay's is said to have suggested the story of the scholar's bashfulness in the 157th Rambler; and to similar stories in the Adventurer and Repton's Variety. Ed.

³² It was acted seven nights. The author's third night was by command of their royal highnesses. R.

and sent a message to the queen, that he was too old for the place. There seem to have been many machinations employed afterwards in his favour; and diligent court was paid to Mrs. Howard, afterwards countess of Suffolk, who was much beloved by the king and queen, to engage her interest for his promotion, but solicitations, verses, and flatteries, were thrown away; the lady heard them, and did nothing.

All the pain which he suffered from the neglect, or, as he, perhaps, termed it, the ingratitude of the court, may be supposed to have been driven away by the unexampled success of the Beggars' Opera. This play, written in ridicule of the musical Italian drama, was first offered to Cibber and his brethren at Drury-lane, and rejected; it being then carried to Rich, had the effect, as was ludicrously said, of making Gay *rich*, and Rich *gay*.

Of this lucky piece, as the reader cannot but wish to know the original and progress, I have inserted the relation which Spence has given in Pope's words.

“Dr. Swift had been observing once to Mr. Gay, what an odd pretty sort of a thing a Newgate pastoral might make. Gay was inclined to try at such a thing, for some time; but afterwards thought it would be better to write a comedy on the same plan. This was what gave rise to the Beggars' Opera. He began on it; and when first he mentioned it to Swift, the doctor did not much like the project. As he carried it on, he showed what he wrote to both of us, and we now and then gave a correction, or a word or two of advice; but it was wholly of his own writing. When it

was done, neither of us thought it would succeed. We showed it to Congreve; who, after reading it over, said, it would either take greatly, or be damned confoundedly. We were all, at the first night of it, in great uncertainty of the event; till we were very much encouraged by overhearing the duke of Argyle, who sat in the next box to us, say, 'It will do—it must do! I see it in the eyes of them.' This was a good while before the first act was over, and so gave us ease soon; for that duke, besides his own good taste, has a particular knack, as any one now living, in discovering the taste of the publick. He was quite right in this, as usual; the good-nature of the audience appeared stronger and stronger every act, and ended in a clamour of applause.”

Its reception is thus recorded in the notes to the *Dunciad*.

“This piece was received with greater applause than was ever known. Besides being acted in London sixty-three days, without interruption, and renewed the next season with equal applause, it spread into all the great towns of England; was played in many places to the thirtieth and fortieth time; at Bath and Bristol fifty, &c. It made its progress into Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, where it was performed twenty-four days successively. The ladies carried about with them the favourite songs of it in fans, and houses were furnished with it in screens. The fame of it was not confined to the author only. The person who acted Polly, till then obscure, became, all at once, the favourite of the town; her pictures were engraved, and sold in great numbers; her life written, books of letters and verses to her published, and

pamphlets made even of her sayings and jests. Furthermore, it drove out of England, for that season, the Italian opera, which had carried all before it for ten years.”

Of this performance, when it was printed, the reception was different, according to the different opinion of its readers. Swift commended it for the excellence of its morality, as a piece that “placed all kinds of vice in the strongest and most odious light;” but others, and among them Dr. Herring, afterwards archbishop of Canterbury, censured it, as giving encouragement not only to vice, but to crimes, by making a highwayman the hero, and dismissing him, at last, unpunished. It has been even said, that, after the exhibition of the Beggars’ Opera, the gangs of robbers were evidently multiplied.

Both these decisions are surely exaggerated. The play, like many others, was plainly written only to divert, without any moral purpose, and is, therefore, not likely to do good; nor can it be conceived, without more speculation than life requires or admits, to be productive of much evil. Highwaymen and housebreakers seldom frequent the playhouse, or mingle in any elegant diversion; nor is it possible for any one to imagine that he may rob with safety, because he sees Macheath reprieved upon the stage.

This objection, however, or some other, rather political than moral, obtained such prevalence, that when Gay produced a second part, under the name of Polly, it was prohibited by the lord chamberlain; and he was forced to recompense his

repulse by a subscription, which is said to have been so liberally bestowed, that what he called oppression ended in profit. The publication was so much favoured, that though the first part gained him four hundred pounds, near thrice as much was the profit of the second³³.

He received yet another recompense for this supposed hardship in the affectionate attention of the duke and dutchess of Queensberry, into whose house he was taken, and with whom he passed the remaining part of his life. The duke, considering his want of economy, undertook the management of his money, and gave it to him as he wanted it³⁴. But it is supposed that the discountenance of the court sunk deep into his heart, and gave him more discontent than the applauses or tenderness of his friends could overpower. He soon fell into his old distemper, an habitual colick, and languished, though with many intervals of ease and cheerfulness, till a violent fit, at last, seized him, and hurried him to the grave, as Arbuthnot reported, with more precipitance than he had ever known. He died on the fourth of December, 1732, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. The letter, which brought an account of his death to Swift, was laid by, for some days, unopened, because, when he received it, he was impressed with the preconception of some misfortune.

After his death, was published a second volume of fables, more political than the former. His opera of Achilles was acted,

³³ Spence.

³⁴ Ibid.

and the profits were given to two widow sisters, who inherited what he left, as his lawful heirs; for he died without a will, though he had gathered three thousand pounds³⁵. There have appeared, likewise, under his name, a comedy, called the Distrest Wife, and the Rehearsal at Gotham, a piece of humour.

The character given him by Pope is this, that “he was a natural man, without design, who spoke what he thought, and just as he thought it;” and that “he was of a timid temper, and fearful of giving offence to the great;” “which caution, however,” says Pope, “was of no avail³⁶.”

As a poet, he cannot be rated very high. He was, as I once heard a female critick remark, “of a lower order.” He had not in any great degree the “mens divini^{or},” the dignity of genius. Much, however, must be allowed to the author of a new species of composition, though it be not of the highest kind. We owe to Gay the ballad opera; a mode of comedy which, at first, was supposed to delight only by its novelty, but has now, by the experience of half a century, been found so well accommodated to the disposition of a popular audience, that it is likely to keep long possession of the stage. Whether this new drama was the product of judgment or of luck, the praise of it must be given to the inventor; and there are many writers read with more reverence, to whom such merit of originality cannot be attributed.

His first performance, the Rural Sports, is such as was

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

easily planned and executed; it is never contemptible, nor ever excellent. The Fan is one of those mythological fictions which antiquity delivers ready to the hand, but which, like other things that lie open to every one's use, are of little value. The attention naturally retires from a new tale of Venus, Diana, and Minerva.

His fables seem to have been a favourite work; for, having published one volume, he left another behind him. Of this kind of fables, the authors do not appear to have formed any distinct or settled notion. Phædrus evidently confounds them with tales; and Gay, both with tales and allegorical prosopopoeias. A fable, or apologue, such as is now under consideration, seems to be, in its genuine state, a narrative in which beings irrational, and, sometimes, inanimate, "*arbores loquuntur, non tantum feræ,*" are, for the purpose of moral instruction, feigned to act and speak with human interests and passions. To this description the compositions of Gay do not always conform. For a fable, he gives, now and then, a tale, or an abstracted allegory; and, from some, by whatever name they may be called, it will be difficult to extract any moral principle. They are, however, told with liveliness; the versification is smooth; and the diction, though, now and then, a little constrained by the measure or the rhyme, is generally happy.

To Trivia may be allowed all that it claims; it is sprightly, various, and pleasant. The subject is of that kind which Gay was, by nature, qualified to adorn; yet some of his decorations may be justly wished away. An honest blacksmith might have

done for Patty what is performed by Vulcan. The appearance of Cloacina is nauseous and superfluous; a shoe boy could have been produced by the casual cohabitation of mere mortals. Horace's rule is broken in both cases; there is no "dignus vindice nodus," no difficulty that required any supernatural interposition. A patten may be made by the hammer of a mortal; and a bastard may be dropped by a human strumpet. On great occasions, and on small, the mind is repelled by useless and apparent falsehood.

Of his little poems the publick judgment seems to be right; they are neither much esteemed, nor totally despised. The story of the Apparition is borrowed from one of the tales of Poggio. Those that please least are the pieces to which Gulliver gave occasion; for who can much delight in the echo of an unnatural fiction?

Dione is a counterpart to Aminta, and Pastor Fido, and other trifles of the same kind, easily imitated, and unworthy of imitation. What the Italians call comedies, from a happy conclusion, Gay calls a tragedy, from a mournful event; but the style of the Italians and of Gay is equally tragical. There is something in the poetical Arcadia so remote from known reality and speculative possibility, that we can never support its representation through a long work. A pastoral of a hundred lines may be endured; but who will hear of sheep and goats, and myrtle bowers, and purling rivulets, through five acts? Such scenes please barbarians in the dawn of literature, and children in the dawn of life; but will be, for the most part, thrown away,

as men grow wise, and nations grow learned.

GRANVILLE

Of George Granville, or, as others write, Greenville, or Grenville, afterwards lord Lansdowne, of Bideford, in the county of Devon, less is known than his name and high rank might give reason to expect. He was born about 1667, the son of Bernard Greenville, who was entrusted, by Monk, with the most private transactions of the restoration, and the grandson of sir Bevil Greenville, who died, in the king's cause, at the battle of Lansdowne.

His early education was superintended by sir William Ellis; and his progress was such, that, before the age of twelve, he was sent to Cambridge³⁷, where he pronounced a copy of his own verses to the princess Mary d'Este, of Modena, then dutchess of York, when she visited the university.

At the accession of king James, being now at eighteen, he again exerted his poetical powers, and addressed the new monarch in three short pieces, of which the first is profane, and the two others such as a boy might be expected to produce; but he was commended by old Waller, who, perhaps, was pleased to find himself imitated, in six lines, which though they begin with nonsense and end with dulness, excited in the young author

³⁷ To Trinity college. By the university register it appears, that he was admitted to his master's degree in 1679; we must, therefore, set the year of his birth some years back. H.

a rapture of acknowledgment.

In numbers such as Waller's self might use.

It was probably about this time that he wrote the poem to the earl of Peterborough, upon his accomplishment of the duke of York's marriage with the princess of Modena, whose charms appear to have gained a strong prevalence over his imagination, and upon whom nothing ever has been charged but imprudent piety, an intemperate and misguided zeal for the propagation of popery.

However faithful Granville might have been to the king, or however enamoured of the queen, he has left no reason for supposing that he approved either the artifices or the violence with which the king's religion was insinuated or obtruded. He endeavoured to be true, at once, to the king and to the church.

Of this regulated loyalty he has transmitted to posterity a sufficient proof, in the letter which he wrote to his father, about a month before the prince of Orange landed.

"Mar, near Doncaster, Oct. 6, 1688.

**“To the honourable Mr. Barnard Granville,
at the earl of Bathe’s, St. James’s**

“Sir,

“Your having no prospect of obtaining a commission for me, can no way alter or cool my desire at this important juncture to venture my life, in some manner or other, for my king and my country.

“I cannot bear living under the reproach of lying obscure and idle in a country retirement, when every man who has the least sense of honour should be preparing for the field.

“You may remember, sir, with what reluctance I submitted to your commands upon Monmouth’s rebellion, when no importunity could prevail with you to permit me to leave the academy: I was too young to be hazarded; but, give me leave to say, it is glorious at any age to die for one’s country; and the sooner, the nobler the sacrifice.

“I am now older by three years. My uncle Bathe was not so old when he was left among the slain at the battle of Newbury; nor you yourself, sir, when you made your escape from your tutors, to join your brother at the defence of Scilly.

“The same cause is now come round about again. The king

has been misled; let those who have misled him be answerable for it. Nobody can deny but he is sacred in his own person; and it is every honest man's duty to defend it.

“You are pleased to say, it is yet doubtful if the Hollanders are rash enough to make such an attempt; but, be that as it will, I beg leave to insist upon it, that I may be presented to his majesty, as one whose utmost ambition it is to devote his life to his service, and my country's, after the example of all my ancestors.

“The gentry assembled at York, to agree upon the choice of representatives for the county, have prepared an address, to assure his majesty they are ready to sacrifice their lives and fortunes for him upon this and all other occasions; but, at the same time, they humbly beseech him to give them such magistrates as may be agreeable to the laws of the land; for, at present, there is no authority to which they can legally submit.

“They have been beating up for volunteers at York, and the towns adjacent, to supply the regiments at Hull; but nobody will list.

“By what I can hear, every body wishes well to the king; but they would be glad his ministers were hanged.

“The winds continue so contrary, that no landing can be so soon as was apprehended; therefore I may hope, with your leave and assistance, to be in readiness before any action can begin. I beseech you, sir, most humbly and most earnestly, to add this one act of indulgence more to so many other testimonies which I have constantly received of your goodness; and be pleased to

believe me always, with the utmost duty and submission, sir,

“Your most dutiful son,

“and most obedient servant,

“Geo. Granville.”

Through the whole reign of king William he is supposed to have lived in literary retirement, and indeed had, for some time, few other pleasures but those, of study in his power. He was, as the biographers observe, the younger son of a younger brother; a denomination by which our ancestors proverbially expressed the lowest state of penury and dependence. He is said, however, to have preserved himself at this time from disgrace and difficulties by economy, which he forgot or neglected in life more advanced, and in better fortune.

About this time he became enamoured of the countess of Newburgh, whom he has celebrated with so much ardour by the name of Mira. He wrote verses to her, before he was three-and-twenty, and may be forgiven if he regarded the face more than the mind. Poets are sometimes in too much haste to praise.

In the time of his retirement it is probable that he composed his dramattick pieces, the *She-Gallants*, acted 1696, which he revised, and called *Once a Lover and always a Lover*; the *Jew of Venice*, altered from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, 1698; *Heroick Love*, a tragedy, 1701; the *British Enchanters*, 1706, a dramattick poem; and *Peleus and Thetis*, a mask, written to accompany the *Jew of Venice*.

The comedies, which he has not printed in his own edition of his works, I never saw; *Once a Lover and always a Lover*, is said to be, in a great degree, indecent and gross. Granville could not admire without bigotry; he copied the wrong, as well as the right, from his masters, and may be supposed to have learned obscenity from Wycherley, as he learned mythology from Waller.

In his *Jew of Venice*, as Rowe remarks, the character of Shylock is made comick, and we are prompted to laughter, instead of detestation.

It is evident that *Heroick Love* was written, and presented on the stage, before the death of Dryden. It is a mythological tragedy, upon the love of Agamemnon and Chryseis, and, therefore, easily sunk into neglect, though praised in verse by Dryden, and in prose by Pope.

It is concluded by the wise Ulysses with this speech:

Fate holds the strings, and men like children move
But as they're led; success is from above.

At the accession of queen Anne, having his fortune improved by bequests from his father, and his uncle the earl of Bath, he was chosen into parliament for Fowey. He soon after engaged in a joint translation of the *Invectives* against Philip, with a design, surely weak and puerile, of turning the thunder of Demosthenes upon the head of Lewis.

He afterwards, in 1706, had his estate again augmented by an

inheritance from his elder brother, sir Bevil Granville, who, as he returned from the government of Barbadoes, died at sea. He continued to serve in parliament; and, in the ninth year of queen Anne, was chosen knight of the shire for Cornwall.

At the memorable change of the ministry, 1710, he was made secretary at war, in the place of Mr. Robert Walpole.

Next year, when the violence of party made twelve peers in a day, Mr. Granville became lord Lansdowne baron Bideford, by a promotion justly remarked to be not invidious, because he was the heir of a family in which two peerages, that of the earl of Bath, and lord Granville of Potheridge, had lately become extinct. Being now high in the queen's favour, he, 1712, was appointed comptroller of the household, and a privy counsellor; and to his other honours was added the dedication of Pope's Windsor Forest. He was advanced, next year, to be treasurer of the household.

Of these favours he soon lost all but his title; for, at the accession of king George, his place was given to the earl Cholmondeley, and he was persecuted with the rest of his party. Having protested against the bill for attainting Ormond and Bolingbroke, he was, after the insurrection in Scotland, seized, Sept. 26, 1715, as a suspected man, and confined in the Tower, till Feb. 8, 1717, when he was at last released, and restored to his seat in parliament; where, 1719, he made a very ardent and animated speech against the repeal of the bill to prevent occasional conformity, which, however, though it was

then printed, he has not inserted into his works.

Some time afterwards, about 1722, being, perhaps, embarrassed by his profusion, he went into foreign countries, with the usual pretence of recovering his health. In this state of leisure and retirement, he received the first volume of Burnet's History, of which he cannot be supposed to have approved the general tendency, and where he thought himself able to detect some particular falsehoods. He, therefore, undertook the vindication of general Monk from some calumnies of Dr. Burnet, and some misrepresentations of Mr. Echard. This was answered civilly by Mr. Thomas Burnet, and Oldmixon; and more roughly by Dr. Colbatch.

His other historical performance is a defence of his relation, sir Richard Greenville, whom lord Clarendon has shown in a form very unamiable. So much is urged in this apology to justify many actions that have been represented as culpable, and to palliate the rest, that the reader is reconciled for the greater part; and it is made very probable that Clarendon was by personal enmity disposed to think the worst of Greenville, as Greenville was also very willing to think the worst of Clarendon. These pieces were published at his return to England.

Being now desirous to conclude his labours, and enjoy his reputation, he published, 1732, a very beautiful and splendid edition of his works, in which he omitted what he disapproved, and enlarged what seemed deficient.

He now went to court, and was kindly received by queen

Caroline; to whom and to the princess Anne, he presented his works, with verses on the blank leaves, with which he concluded his poetical labours.

He died in Hanover-square, Jan. 30, 1735, having a few days before buried his wife, the lady Anne Villiers, widow to Mr. Thynne, by whom he had four daughters, but no son.

Writers commonly derive their reputation from their works; but there are works which owe their reputation to the character of the writer. The publick sometimes has its favourites, whom it rewards for one species of excellence with the honours due to another. From him whom we reverence for his beneficence we do not willingly withhold the praise of genius; a man of exalted merit becomes, at once, an accomplished writer, as a beauty finds no great difficulty in passing for a wit.

Granville was a man illustrious by his birth, and, therefore, attracted notice: since he is by Pope styled “the polite,” he must be supposed elegant in his manners, and generally loved: he was, in times of contest and turbulence, steady to his party, and obtained that esteem which is always conferred upon firmness and consistency. With those advantages having learned the art of versifying, he declared himself a poet; and his claim to the laurel was allowed.

But by a critick of a later generation, who takes up his book without any favourable prejudices, the praise already received will be thought sufficient; for his works do not show him to have had much comprehension from nature, or illumination from

learning. He seems to have had no ambition above the imitation of Waller, of whom he has copied the faults, and very little more. He is for ever amusing himself with the puerilities of mythology; his king is Jupiter, who, if the queen brings no children, has a barren Juno. The queen is compounded of Juno, Venus, and Minerva. His poem on the dutchess of Grafton's lawsuit, after having rattled awhile with Juno and Pallas, Mars and Alcides, Cassiope, Niobe, and the Propetides, Hercules, Minos, and Rhadamanthus, at last concludes its folly with profaneness.

His verses to Mira, which are most frequently mentioned, have little in them of either art or nature, of the sentiments of a lover, or the language of a poet: there may be found, now and then, a happier effort; but they are commonly feeble and unaffecting, or forced and extravagant.

His little pieces are seldom either sprightly or elegant, either keen or weighty. They are trifles written by idleness, and published by vanity. But his prologues and epilogues have a just claim to praise.

The Progress of Beauty seems one of his most elaborate pieces, and is not deficient in splendour and gaiety; but the merit of original thought is wanting. Its highest praise is the spirit with which he celebrates king James's consort, when she was a queen no longer.

The Essay on unnatural Flights in Poetry, is not inelegant nor injudicious, and has something of vigour beyond most of his other performances: his precepts are just, and his cautions

proper; they are, indeed, not new, but in a didactick poem novelty is to be expected only in the ornaments and illustrations. His poetical precepts are accompanied with agreeable and instructive notes.

The Mask of Peleus and Thetis has here and there a pretty line, but it is not always melodious, and the conclusion is wretched.

In his British Enchanters he has bidden defiance to all chronology, by confounding the inconsistent manners of different ages; but the dialogue has often the air of Dryden's rhyming plays; and the songs are lively, though not very correct. This is, I think, far the best of his works; for, if it has many faults, it has, likewise, passages which are, at least, pretty, though they do not rise to any high degree of excellence.

YALDEN

Thomas Yalden, the sixth son of Mr. John Yalden, of Sussex, was born in the city of Exeter, in 1671. Having been educated in the grammar-school belonging to Magdalen college in Oxford, he was in 1690, at the age of nineteen, admitted commoner of Magdalen hall, under the tuition of Josiah Pullen³⁸, a man whose name is still remembered in the university. He became, next year, one of the scholars of Magdalen college, where he was distinguished by a lucky accident.

It was his turn, one day, to pronounce a declamation; and Dr. Hough, the president, happening to attend, thought the composition too good to be the speaker's. Some time after, the doctor finding him a little irregularly busy in the library, set him an exercise for punishment; and, that he might not be deceived by any artifice, locked the door. Yalden, as it happened, had been lately reading on the subject given, and produced, with little difficulty, a composition which so pleased the president, that he told him his former suspicions, and promised to favour him.

Among his contemporaries in the college were Addison and

³⁸ We need not remark to any of our readers, but to those who are not Oxford men, that Pullen's name is now remembered in the university, not as a tutor, but by the venerable elm tree which was the term of his morning walks. "I have the honour to be well known to Mr. Josiah Pullen, of our hall above-mentioned, (Magdalen hall,) and attribute the florid old age I now enjoy to my constant morning walks up Headington lull, in his cheerful company." *Guardian*, No. 2. Ed.

Sacheverell, men who were in those times friends, and who both adopted Yalden to their intimacy. Yalden continued, throughout his life, to think, as probably he thought at first, yet did not forfeit the friendship of Addison.

When Namur was taken by king William, Yalden made an ode. There was never any reign more celebrated by the poets than that of William, who had very little regard for song himself, but happened to employ ministers who pleased themselves with the praise of patronage.

Of this ode mention is made in a humorous poem of that time, called the Oxford Laureate; in which, after many claims had been made and rejected, Yalden is represented as demanding the laurel, and as being called to his trial, instead of receiving a reward:

His crime was for being a felon in verse,
And presenting his theft to the king;
The first was a trick not uncommon or scarce,
But the last was an impudent thing:
Yet what he had stol'n was so little worth stealing,
They forgave him the damage and cost;
Had he ta'en the whole ode, as he took it piece-mealing,
They had fined him but tenpence at most.

The poet whom he was charged with robbing was Congreve. He wrote another poem on the death of the duke of Gloucester.

In 1700, he became fellow of the college; and next year, entering into orders, was presented by the society with a living in Warwickshire³⁹, consistent with the fellowship, and chosen lecturer of moral philosophy, a very honourable office.

On the accession of queen Anne he wrote another poem, and is said, by the author of the Biographia, to have declared himself of the party who had the honourable distinction of high-churchmen.

In 1706, he was received into the family of the duke of Beaufort. Next year he became doctor in divinity, and soon after resigned his fellowship and lecture; and, as a token of his gratitude, gave the college a picture of their founder.

He was made rector of Charlton and Cleanville⁴⁰, two adjoining towns and benefices in Hertfordshire; and had the prebends, or sinecures, of Deans, Hains, and Pendles, in Devonshire. He had before⁴¹ been chosen, in 1698, preacher of Bridewell Hospital, upon the resignation of Dr. Atterbury⁴².

From this time he seems to have led a quiet and inoffensive life, till the clamour was raised about Atterbury's plot. Every loyal eye was on the watch for abettors or partakers of the horrid conspiracy; and Dr. Yalden, having some acquaintance with the

³⁹ The vicarage of Willoughby, which he resigned in 1708. N.

⁴⁰ This preferment was given him by the duke of Beaufort. N.

⁴¹ Not long after.

⁴² Dr. Atterbury retained the office of preacher at Bridewell till his promotion to the bishoprick of Rochester. Dr. Yalden succeeded him as preacher, in June, 1713. N.

bishop, and being familiarly conversant with Kelly, his secretary, fell under suspicion, and was taken into custody.

Upon his examination he was charged with a dangerous correspondence with Kelly. The correspondence he acknowledged; but maintained that it had no treasonable tendency. His papers were seized; but nothing was found that could fix a crime upon him, except two words in his pocketbook, "thorough-paced doctrine." This expression the imagination of his examiners had impregnated with treason, and the doctor was enjoined to explain them. Thus pressed, he told them that the words had lain unheeded in his pocketbook from the time of queen Anne, and that he was ashamed to give an account of them; but the truth was, that he had gratified his curiosity one day, by hearing Daniel Burgess in the pulpit, and those words were a memorial hint of a remarkable sentence by which he warned his congregation to "beware of thorough-paced doctrine, that doctrine, which, coming in at one ear, passes through the head, and goes out at the other."

Nothing worse than this appearing in his papers, and no evidence arising against him, he was set at liberty.

It will not be supposed that a man of this character attained high dignities in the church; but he still retained the friendship, and frequented the conversation, of a very numerous and splendid set of acquaintance. He died July 16, 1736, in the 66th year of his age.

Of his poems, many are of that irregular kind, which, when

he formed his poetical character, was supposed to be Pindarick. Having fixed his attention on Cowley as a model, he has attempted, in some sort, to rival him, and has written a Hymn to Darkness, evidently as a counterpart to Cowley's Hymn to Light.

This hymn seems to be his best performance, and is, for the most part, imagined with great vigour, and expressed with great propriety. I will not transcribe it. The seven first stanzas are good; but the third, fourth, and seventh, are the best: the eighth seems to involve a contradiction; the tenth is exquisitely beautiful; the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth, are partly mythological, and partly religious, and, therefore, not suitable to each other: he might better have made the whole merely philosophical.

There are two stanzas in this poem where Yalden may be suspected, though hardly convicted, of having consulted the *Hymnus ad Umbram* of Wowerus, in the sixth stanza, which answers, in some sort, to these lines:

*Illa suo præest nocturnis numine sacris—
Perque vias errare novis dat spectra figuris,
Manesque excitos medios ululare per agros
Sub noctem, et questu notos complere penatcs.*

And again, at the conclusion:

*Illa suo senium secludit corpore toto
Haud numerans jugi fugientia secula lapsu.
Ergo ubi postremum mundi compage soluta*

Hanc rerum molem suprema absumpserit hora
Ipsa leves cineres nube amplectetur opaca,
Et prisco imperio rursus dominabitur UMBRA.

His Hymn to Light is not equal to the other. He seems to think that there is an East absolute and positive, where the morning rises.

In the last stanza, having mentioned the sudden eruption of new-created light, he says,

Awhile th' Almighty wond'ring stood.

He ought to have remembered that infinite knowledge can never wonder. All wonder is the effect of novelty upon ignorance.

Of his other poems it is sufficient to say, that they deserve perusal, though they are not always exactly polished, though the rhymes are sometimes very ill sorted, and though his faults seem rather the omissions of idleness than the negligences of enthusiasm.

TICKELL

Thomas Tickell, the son of the reverend Richard Tickell, was born, in 1686, at Bridekirk, in Cumberland; and in April, 1701, became a member of Queen's college, in Oxford; in 1708 he was made master of arts; and, two years afterwards, was chosen fellow; for which, as he did not comply with the statutes by taking orders, he obtained a dispensation from the crown. He held his fellowship till 1726, and then vacated it, by marrying, in that year, at Dublin.

Tickell was not one of those scholars who wear away their lives in closets; he entered early into the world, and was long busy in publick affairs; in which he was initiated under the patronage of Addison, whose notice he is said to have gained by his verses in praise of Rosamond.

To those verses it would not have been just to deny regard; for they contain some of the most elegant encomiastick strains; and, among the innumerable poems of the same kind, it will be hard to find one with which they need to fear a comparison. It may deserve observation, that when Pope wrote, long afterwards, in praise of Addison, he has copied, at least has resembled, Tickell.

Let joy salute fair Rosamonda's shade,
And wreaths of myrtle crown the lovely maid.
While now perhaps with Dido's ghost she roves,

And hears and tells the story of their loves,
Alike they mourn, alike they bless their fate,
Since love, which made them wretched, made them great.
Nor longer that relentless doom bemoan,
Which gain'd a Virgil and an Addison. Tickell.
Then future ages with delight shall see
How Plato's, Bacon's, Newton's, looks agree;
Or in fair series laurell'd bards be shown,
A Virgil there, and here an Addison. Pope.

He produced another piece of the same kind at the appearance of Cato, with equal skill, but not equal happiness.

When the ministers of queen Anne were negotiating with France, Tickell published the Prospect of Peace, a poem, of which the tendency was to reclaim the nation from the pride of conquest to the pleasures of tranquillity. How far Tickell, whom Swift afterwards mentioned as *whiggissimus*, had then connected himself with any party, I know not; this poem certainly did not flatter the practices, or promote the opinions, of the men by whom he was afterwards befriended.

Mr. Addison, however he hated the men then in power, suffered his friendship to prevail over his publick spirit, and gave, in the Spectator, such praises of Tickell's poem, that when, after having long wished to peruse it, I laid hold on it at last, I thought it unequal to the honours which it had received, and found it a piece to be approved rather than admired. But the hope excited by a work of genius, being general and indefinite, is rarely gratified.

It was read at that time with so much favour, that six editions were sold.

At the arrival of king George he sang the Royal Progress; which, being inserted in the Spectator, is well known; and of which it is just to say, that it is neither high nor low.

The poetical incident of most importance in Tickell's life was his publication of the first book of the Iliad, as translated by himself, an apparent opposition to Pope's Homer, of which the first part made its entrance into the world at the same time.

Addison declared that the rival versions were both good; but that Tickell's was the best that ever was made; and with Addison, the wits, his adherents and followers, were certain to concur. Pope does not appear to have been much dismayed; "for," says he, "I have the town, that is, the mob, on my side." But he remarks, "that it is common for the smaller party to make up in diligence what they want in numbers; he appeals to the people as his proper judges; and, if they are not inclined to condemn him, he is in little care about the highflyers at Button's."

Pope did not long think Addison an impartial judge; for he considered him as the writer of Tickell's version. The reasons for his suspicion I will literally transcribe from Mr. Spence's collection.

"There had been a coldness (said Mr. Pope) between Mr. Addison and me for some time; and we had not been in company together, for a good while, any where but at Button's coffee-house, where I used to see him almost every day. On his meeting

me there, one day in particular, he took me aside, and said he should be glad to dine with me, at such a tavern, if I staid till those people were gone, (Budgell and Philips.) We went accordingly; and, after dinner, Mr. Addison said, 'That he had wanted for some time to talk with me; that his friend Tickell had formerly, whilst at Oxford, translated the first book of the Iliad; that he designed to print it, and had desired him to look it over; that he must, therefore, beg that I would not desire him to look over my first book, because, if he did, it would have the air of double-dealing.' I assured him that I did not at all take it ill of Mr. Tickell that he was going to publish his translation; that he certainly had as much right to translate any author as myself; and that publishing both was entering on a fair stage. I then added, that I would not desire him to look over my first book of the Iliad, because he had looked over Mr. Tickell's; but could wish to have the benefit of his observations on my second, which I had then finished, and which Mr. Tickell had not touched upon. Accordingly I sent him the second book the next morning; and Mr. Addison, a few days after, returned it, with very high commendations. Soon after it was generally known that Mr. Tickell was publishing the first book of the Iliad, I met Dr. Young in the street; and, upon our falling into that subject, the doctor expressed a great deal of surprise at Tickell's having had such a translation so long by him. He said, that it was inconceivable to him, and that there must be some mistake in the matter; that each used to communicate to the other whatever verses they wrote,

even to the least things; that Tickell could not have been busied in so long a work there, without his knowing something of the matter; and that he had never heard a single word of it till on this occasion. The surprise of Dr. Young, together with what Steele has said against Tickell in relation to this affair, make it highly probable that there was some underhand dealing in that business; and indeed Tickell himself, who is a very fair worthy man, has since, in a manner, as good as owned it to me. [When it was introduced into a conversation between Mr. Tickell and Mr. Pope, by a third person, Tickell did not deny it; which, considering his honour, and zeal for his departed friend, was the same as owning it.”]

Upon these suspicions, with which Dr. Warburton hints that other circumstances concurred, Pope always, in his *Art of Sinking*, quotes this book as the work of Addison.

To compare the two translations would be tedious; the palm is now given universally to Pope; but I think the first lines of Tickell’s were rather to be preferred; and Pope seems to have since borrowed something from them, in the correction of his own.

When the Hanover succession was disputed, Tickell gave what assistance his pen would supply. His *Letter to Avignon* stands high among party-poems; it expresses contempt without coarseness, and superiority without insolence. It had the success which it deserved, being five times printed.

He was now intimately united to Mr. Addison, who, when he

went into Ireland as secretary to the lord Sunderland, took him thither, and employed him in publick business; and when, 1717, afterwards he rose to be secretary of state, made him under-secretary. Their friendship seems to have continued without abatement; for, when Addison died, he left him the charge of publishing his works, with a solemn recommendation to the patronage of Craggs.

To these works he prefixed an elegy on the author, which could owe none of its beauties to the assistance, which might be suspected to have strengthened or embellished his earlier compositions; but neither he nor Addison ever produced nobler lines than are contained in the third and fourth paragraphs; nor is a more sublime or more elegant funeral-poem to be found in the whole compass of English literature.

He was afterwards, about 1725, made secretary to the lords justices of Ireland, a place of great honour; in which he continued till 1740, when he died on the twenty-third of April, at Bath.

Of the poems yet unmentioned, the longest is Kensington Gardens, of which the versification is smooth and elegant, but the fiction unskilfully compounded of Grecian deities and Gothick fairies. Neither species of those exploded beings could have done much; and when they are brought together, they only make each other contemptible. To Tickell, however, cannot be refused a high place among the minor poets; nor should it be forgotten that he was one of the contributors to the Spectator. With respect to his personal character, he is said to have been a man of gay

conversation, at least a temperate lover of wine and company,
and in his domestick relations without censure.

HAMMOND

Of Mr. Hammond, though he be well remembered as a man esteemed and caressed by the elegant and great, I was at first able to obtain no other memorials than such as are supplied by a book called Cibber's Lives of the Poets; of which I take this opportunity to testify that it was not written, nor, I believe, ever seen by either of the Cibbers; but was the work of Robert Shiels, a native of Scotland, a man of very acute understanding, though with little scholastick education, who, not long after the publication of his work, died in London of a consumption. His life was virtuous, and his end was pious. Theophilus Cibber, then a prisoner for debt, imparted, as I was told, his name for ten guineas. The manuscript of Shiels is now in my possession.

I have since found that Mr. Shiels, though he was no negligent inquirer, has been misled by false accounts; for he relates that James Hammond, the author of the elegies, was the son of a Turkey merchant, and had some office at the prince of Wales's court, till love of a lady, whose name was Dashwood, for a time disordered his understanding. He was unextinguishably amorous, and his mistress inexorably cruel.

Of this narrative, part is true, and part false. He was the second son of Anthony Hammond, a man of note among the wits, poets, and parliamentary orators, in the beginning of this century, who

was allied to sir Robert Walpole by marrying his sister⁴³. He was born about 1710, and educated at Westminster-school; but it does not appear that he was of any university⁴⁴. He was equerry to the prince of Wales, and seems to have come very early into publick notice, and to have been distinguished by those whose friendship prejudiced mankind at that time in favour of the man on whom they were bestowed; for he was the companion of Cobham, Lyttelton, and Chesterfield. He is said to have divided his life between pleasure and books; in his retirement forgetting the town, and in his gaiety losing the student. Of his literary hours all the effects are here exhibited, of which the elegies were written very early, and the prologue not long before his death.

In 1741, he was chosen into parliament for Truro, in Cornwall, probably one of those who were elected by the prince's influence; and died next year in June, at Stowe, the famous seat of lord Cobham. His mistress long outlived him, and, in 1779, died unmarried. The character which her lover bequeathed her was, indeed, not likely to attract courtship.

The elegies were published after his death; and while the writer's name was remembered with fondness, they were read with a resolution to admire them.

The recommendatory preface of the editor, who was then

⁴³ This account is still erroneous. James Hammond, our author, was of a different family, the second son of Anthony Hammond, of Somersham-place, in the county of Huntingdon, esq. See *Gent. Mag.* vol. lvii. p. 780. R.

⁴⁴ Mr. Cole gives him to Cambridge. MSS. *Athenæ Cantab.* in *Mus. Brit.*

believed, and is now affirmed by Dr. Maty, to be the earl of Chesterfield, raised strong prejudices in their favour.

But of the prefacer, whoever he was, it may be reasonably suspected that he never read the poems; for he professes to value them for a very high species of excellence, and recommends them as the genuine effusions of the mind, which expresses a real passion in the language of nature. But the truth is, these elegies have neither passion, nature, nor manners. Where there is fiction, there is no passion: he that describes himself as a shepherd, and his Neæra or Delia as a shepherdess, and talks of goats and lambs, feels no passion. He that courts his mistress with Roman imagery deserves to lose her; for she may, with good reason, suspect his sincerity. Hammond has few sentiments drawn from nature, and few images from modern life. He produces nothing but frigid pedantry. It would be hard to find in all his productions three stanzas that deserve to be remembered.

Like other lovers, he threatens the lady with dying; and what then shall follow?

Wilt thou in tears thy lover's corse attend;
With eyes averted light the solemn pyre,
Till all around the doleful flames ascend,
Then, slowly sinking, by degrees expire?

To sooth the hov'ring soul be thine the care,
With plaintive cries to lead the mournful band;
In sable weeds the golden vase to bear,

And cull my ashes with thy trembling hand:

Panchaia's odours be their costly feast,
And all the pride of Asia's fragrant year,
Give them the treasures of the farthest East,
And, what is still more precious, give thy tear.

Surely no blame can fall upon the nymph who rejected a swain
of so little meaning.

His verses are not rugged, but they have no sweetness; they never glide in a stream of melody. Why Hammond or other writers have thought the quatrain of ten syllables elegiack, it is difficult to tell. The character of the elegy is gentleness and tenuity; but this stanza has been pronounced by Dryden, whose knowledge of English metre was not inconsiderable, to be the most magnificent of all the measures which our language affords.

SOMERVILE

Of Mr.⁴⁵ Somervile's life I am not able to say any thing that can satisfy curiosity.

He was a gentleman whose estate was in Warwickshire: his house, where he was born, in 1692, is called Edston, a seat inherited from a long line of ancestors; for he was said to be of the first family in his county. He tells of himself that he was born near the Avon's banks. He was bred at Winchester-school, and was elected fellow of New college. It does not appear that in the places of his education he exhibited any uncommon proofs of genius or literature. His powers were first displayed in the country, where he was distinguished as a poet, a gentleman, and a skilful and useful justice of the peace.

Of the close of his life, those whom his poems have delighted will read with pain the following account, copied from the letters of his friend Shenstone, by whom he was too much resembled.

“—Our old friend Somervile is dead! I did not imagine I could have been so sorry as I find myself on this occasion: ‘Sublatum quærimus.’ I can now excuse all his foibles; impute them to age, and to distress of circumstances: the last of these considerations wrings my very soul to think on. For a man of high spirit, conscious of having, at least in one production, generally pleased

⁴⁵ William.

the world, to be plagued and threatened by wretches that are low in every sense; to be forced to drink himself into pains of the body, in order to get rid of the pains of the mind, is a misery.”

He died July 19, 1742, and was buried at Wotton, near Henley on Arden.

His distresses need not be much pitied: his estate is said to have been fifteen hundred a-year, which, by his death, devolved to lord Somerville, of Scotland. His mother, indeed, who lived till ninety, had a jointure of six hundred.

It is with regret that I find myself not better enabled to exhibit memorials of a writer, who, at least, must be allowed to have set a good example to men of his own class, by devoting part of his time to elegant knowledge; and who has shown, by the subjects which his poetry has adorned, that it is practicable to be at once a skilful sportsman, and a man of letters.

Somerville has tried many modes of poetry; and though, perhaps, he has not in any reached such excellence as to raise much envy, it may commonly be said, at least, that “he writes very well for a gentleman.” His serious pieces are sometimes elevated, and his trifles are sometimes elegant. In his verses to Addison, the couplet which mentions Clio is written with the most exquisite delicacy of praise; it exhibits one of those happy strokes that are seldom attained. In his odes to Marlborough there are beautiful lines; but, in the second ode, he shows that he knew little of his hero, when he talks of his private virtues. His subjects are commonly such as require no great depth of

thought, or energy of expression. His fables are generally stale, and, therefore, excite no curiosity. Of his favourite, the Two Springs, the fiction is unnatural, and the moral inconsequential. In his tales there is too much coarseness, with too little care of language, and not sufficient rapidity of narration.

His great work is his Chase, which he undertook in his maturer age, when his ear was improved to the approbation of blank verse, of which, however, his two first lines give a bad specimen. To this poem praise cannot be totally denied. He is allowed, by sportsmen, to write with great intelligence of his subject, which is the first requisite to excellence; and, though it is impossible to interest the common readers of verse in the dangers or pleasures of the chase, he has done all that transition and variety could easily effect; and has, with great propriety, enlarged his plan by the modes of hunting used in other countries.

With still less judgment did he choose blank verse as the vehicle of Rural Sports. If blank verse be not tumid and gorgeous, it is crippled prose; and familiar images, in laboured language, have nothing to recommend them but absurd novelty, which, wanting the attractions of nature, cannot please long. One excellence of the Splendid Shilling is, that it is short. Disguise can gratify no longer than it deceives⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ An allusion of approbation is made to the above in Nichol's Literary Anecdotes of the eighteenth century, ii. 58. Ed.

SAVAGE. ⁴⁷

It has been observed, in all ages, that the advantages of nature, or of fortune, have contributed very little to the promotion of happiness; and that those whom the splendour of their rank, or the extent of their capacity, have placed upon the summits of human life, have not often given any just occasion to envy, in those who look up to them from a lower station: whether it be

⁴⁷ The first edition of this interesting narrative, according to Mr. Boswell, was published in 1744, by Roberts. The second, now before me, bears date 1748, and was published by Cave. Very few alterations were made by the author, when he added it to the present collection. The year before publication, 1743, Dr. Johnson inserted the following notice of his intention in the Gentleman's Magazine. "MR. URBAN" "As your collections show how often you have owed the ornaments of your poetical pages to the correspondence of the unfortunate and ingenious Mr. Savage, I doubt not but you have so much regard to his memory, as to encourage any design that may have a tendency to the preservation of it from insults or calumnies; and, therefore, with some degree of assurance, intreat you to inform the publick, that his life will speedily be published by a person who was favoured with his confidence, and received from himself an account of most of the transactions which he proposes to mention, to the time of his retirement to Swansea, in Wales. "From that period to his death in the prison of Bristol, the account will be continued from materials still less liable to objection; his own letters and those of his friends; some of which will be inserted in the work, and abstracts of others subjoined in the margin. "It may be reasonably, imagined that others may have the same design, but as it is not credible that they can obtain the same materials, it must be expected that they will supply from invention the want of intelligence, and that under the title of the Life of Savage, they will publish only a novel, filled with romantick adventures and imaginary amours. You may, therefore, perhaps, gratify the lovers of truth and wit, by giving me leave to inform them, in your magazine, that my account will be published, in octavo, by Mr. Roberts, in Warwick-lane."

that apparent superiority incites great designs, and great designs are naturally liable to fatal miscarriages; or, that the general lot of mankind is misery, and the misfortunes of those, whose eminence drew upon them an universal attention, have been more carefully recorded, because they were more generally observed, and have, in reality, been only more conspicuous than those of others, not more frequent, or more severe.

That affluence and power, advantages extrinsick and adventitious, and, therefore, easily separable from those by whom they are possessed, should very often flatter the mind with expectations of felicity which they cannot give, raises no astonishment; but it seems rational to hope, that intellectual greatness should produce better effects; that minds qualified for great attainments should first endeavour their own benefit; and that they, who are most able to teach others the way to happiness, should with most certainty follow it themselves.

But this expectation, however plausible, has been very frequently disappointed. The heroes of literary as well as civil history, have been very often no less remarkable for what they have suffered, than for what they have achieved; and volumes have been written only to enumerate the miseries of the learned, and relate their unhappy lives and untimely deaths.

To these mournful narratives, I am about to add the life of Richard Savage, a man whose writings entitle him to an eminent rank in the classes of learning, and whose misfortunes claim a degree of compassion, not always due to the unhappy, as they

were often the consequences of the crimes of others, rather than his own.

In the year 1697, Anne, countess of Macclesfield, having lived, for same time, upon very uneasy terms with her husband, thought a publick confession of adultery the most obvious and expeditious method of obtaining her liberty; and, therefore, declared, that the child, with which she was then great, was begotten by the earl Rivers. This, as may be imagined, made her husband no less desirous of a separation than herself, and he prosecuted his design in the most effectual manner; for he applied not to the ecclesiastical courts for a divorce, but to the parliament for an act, by which his marriage might be dissolved, the nuptial contract totally annulled, and the children of his wife illegitimated. This act, after the usual deliberation, he obtained, though without the approbation of some, who considered marriage as an affair only cognizable by ecclesiastical judges⁴⁸; and, on March 3rd, was separated from his wife, whose fortune, which was very great, was repaid her, and who having, as well as her husband, the liberty of making another choice, was, in a short time, married to colonel Brett.

While the earl of Macclesfield was prosecuting this affair, his

⁴⁸ This year was made remarkable by the dissolution of a marriage solemnized in the face of the church. Salmon's Review. The following protest is registered in the books of the house of lords: Dissentient: Because we conceive that this is the first bill of that nature that hath passed, where there was not a divorce first obtained in the spiritual court; which we look upon as an ill precedent, and may be of dangerous consequence in the future. HALIFAX. ROCHESTER.

wife was, on the 10th of January, 1697-8, delivered of a son; and the earl Rivers, by appearing to consider him as his own, left none any reason to doubt of the sincerity of her declaration; for he was his godfather, and gave him his own name, which was, by his direction, inserted in the register of St. Andrew's parish⁴⁹ in Holborn, but, unfortunately, left him to the care of his mother, whom, as she was now set free from her husband, he, probably, imagined likely to treat with great tenderness the child that had contributed to so pleasing an event. It is not, indeed, easy to discover what motives could be found to overbalance that natural affection of a parent, or what interest could be promoted by neglect or cruelty. The dread of shame or of poverty, by which some wretches have been incited to abandon or to murder their children, cannot be supposed to have affected a woman who had proclaimed her crimes and solicited reproach, and on whom the clemency of the legislature had undeservedly bestowed a fortune, which would have been very little diminished by the expenses which the care of her child could have brought upon her. It was, therefore, not likely that she would be wicked without temptation; that she would look upon her son, from his birth, with a kind of resentment and abhorrence; and, instead of supporting, assisting, and defending him, delight to see him struggling with misery, or that she would take every opportunity of aggravating his misfortunes, and obstructing his resources, and, with an

⁴⁹ See Mr. Boswell's doubts on this head; and the point, fully discussed by Malone, and Bindley in the notes to Boswell. Edit. 1816. i. 150, 151. Ed.

implacable and restless cruelty, continue her persecution from the first hour of his life to the last.

But, whatever were her motives, no sooner was her son born, than she discovered a resolution of disowning him; and, in a very short time, removed him from her sight, by committing him to the care of a poor woman, whom she directed to educate him as her own, and enjoined never to inform him of his true parents.

Such was the beginning of the life of Richard Savage. Born with a legal claim to honour and to affluence, he was, in two months, illegitimated by the parliament, and disowned by his mother, doomed to poverty and obscurity, and launched upon the ocean of life, only that he might be swallowed by its quicksands, or dashed upon its rocks.

His mother could not, indeed, infect others with the same cruelty. As it was impossible to avoid the inquiries which the curiosity or tenderness of her relations made after her child, she was obliged to give some account of the measures she had taken; and her mother, the lady Mason, whether in approbation of her design, or to prevent more criminal contrivances, engaged to transact with the nurse, to pay her for her care, and to superintend the education of the child.

In this charitable office she was assisted by his godmother, Mrs. Lloyd, who, while she lived, always looked upon him with that tenderness which the barbarity of his mother made peculiarly necessary; but her death, which happened in his tenth year, was another of the misfortunes of his childhood; for though

she kindly endeavoured to alleviate his loss by a legacy of three hundred pounds, yet, as he had none to prosecute his claim, to shelter him from oppression, or call in law to the assistance of justice, her will was eluded by the executors, and no part of the money was ever paid⁵⁰.

He was, however, not yet wholly abandoned. The lady Mason still continued her care, and directed him to be placed at a small grammar-school near St. Alban's, where he was called by the name of his nurse, without the least intimation that he had a claim to any other.

Here he was initiated in literature, and passed through several of the classes, with what rapidity or with what applause cannot now be known. As he always spoke with respect of his master, it is probable that the mean rank, in which he then appeared, did not hinder his genius from being distinguished, or his industry from being rewarded; and if in so low a state he obtained distinction and rewards, it is not likely they were gained but by

⁵⁰ On this circumstance, Boswell founds one of his strongest arguments against Savage's being the son of lady Macclesfield. "If there was such a legacy left," says Boswell, "his not being able to obtain payment of it, must be imputed to his consciousness that he was not the real person. The just inference should be, that, by the death of lady Macclesfield's child before its godmother, the legacy became lapsed; and, therefore, that Johnson's Savage was an impostor. If he had a title to the legacy, he could not have found any difficulty in recovering it; for had the executors resisted his claim, the whole costs, as well as the legacy, must have been paid by them, if he had been the child to whom it was given." With respect for the legal memory of Boswell, we would venture to urge, that the *forma pauperis* is not the most available mode of addressing an English court; and, therefore, Johnson is not clearly proved wrong by the above argument brought against him. Ed.

genius and industry.

It is very reasonable to conjecture, that his application was equal to his abilities, because his improvement was more than proportioned to the opportunities which he enjoyed; nor can it be doubted, that if his earliest productions had been preserved, like those of happier students, we might in some have found vigorous sallies of that sprightly humour which distinguishes the Author to be let, and in others strong touches of that ardent imagination which painted the solemn scenes of the Wanderer.

While he was thus cultivating his genius, his father, the earl Rivers, was seized with a distemper, which, in a short time, put an end to his life⁵¹. He had frequently inquired after his son, and had always been amused with fallacious and evasive answers; but, being now, in his own opinion, on his deathbed, he thought it his duty to provide for him among his other natural children, and, therefore, demanded a positive account of him, with an importunity not to be diverted or denied. His mother, who could no longer refuse an answer, determined, at least, to give such as should cut him off for ever from that happiness which competence affords, and, therefore, declared that he was dead; which is, perhaps, the first instance of a lie invented by a mother to deprive her son of a provision which was designed him by another, and which she could not expect herself, though he should lose it.

This was, therefore, an act of wickedness which could not

⁵¹ He died August 18th, 1712 R.

be defeated, because it could not be suspected; the earl did not imagine there could exist in a human form a mother that would ruin her son without enriching herself, and, therefore, bestowed upon some other person six thousand pounds, which he had in his will bequeathed to Savage.

The same cruelty which incited his mother to intercept this provision which had been intended him, prompted her, in a short time, to another project, a project worthy of such a disposition. She endeavoured to rid herself from the danger of being at any time made known to him, by sending him secretly to the American plantations⁵².

By whose kindness this scheme was counteracted, or by what interposition she was induced to lay aside her design, I know not; it is not improbable that the lady Mason might persuade or compel her to desist, or, perhaps, she could not easily find accomplices wicked enough to concur in so cruel an action; for it may be conceived, that those who had, by a long gradation of guilt, hardened their hearts against the sense of common wickedness, would yet be shocked at the design of a mother to expose her son to slavery and want, to expose him without interest, and without provocation; and Savage might, on this occasion, find protectors and advocates among those who had long traded in crimes, and whom compassion had never touched before.

Being hindered, by whatever means, from banishing him into

⁵² Savage's preface to his Miscellany.

another country, she formed, soon after, a scheme for burying him in poverty and obscurity in his own; and, that his station of life, if not the place of his residence, might keep him for ever at a distance from her, she ordered him to be placed with a shoemaker in Holborn, that, after the usual time of trial, he might become his apprentice⁵³.

It is generally reported, that this project was, for some time, successful, and that Savage was employed at the awl longer than he was willing to confess; nor was it, perhaps, any great advantage to him, that an unexpected discovery determined him to quit his occupation.

About this time his nurse, who had always treated him as her own son, died; and it was natural for him to take care of those effects which, by her death, were, as he imagined, become his own: he, therefore, went to her house, opened her boxes, and examined her papers, among which he found some letters written to her by the lady Mason, which informed him of his birth, and the reasons for which it was concealed.

He was no longer satisfied with the employment which had been allotted him, but thought he had a right to share the affluence of his mother; and, therefore, without scruple, applied to her as her son, and made use of every art to awaken her tenderness, and attract her regard. But neither his letters, nor the interposition of those friends which his merit or his distress procured him, made any impression upon her mind. She, still

⁵³ Savage's preface to his Miscellany.

resolved to neglect, though she could no longer disown him.

It was to no purpose that he frequently solicited her to admit him to see her: she avoided him with the most vigilant precaution, and ordered him to be excluded from her house, by whomsoever he might be introduced, and what reason soever he might give for entering it.

Savage was at the same time so touched with the discovery of his real mother, that it was his frequent practice to walk in the dark evenings⁵⁴ for several hours before her door, in hopes of seeing her as she might come by accident to the window, or cross her apartment with a candle in her hand.

But all his assiduity and tenderness were without effect, for he could neither soften her heart nor open her hand, and was reduced to the utmost miseries of want, while he was endeavouring to awaken the affection of a mother. He was, therefore, obliged to seek some other means of support; and, having no profession, became, by necessity, an author.

At this time the attention of the literary world was engrossed by the Bangorian controversy, which filled the press with pamphlets, and the coffee-houses with disputants. Of this subject, as most popular, he made choice for his first attempt, and, without any other knowledge of the question than he had casually collected from conversation, published a poem against the bishop⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ See the Plain Dealer.

⁵⁵ The title of this poem was the Convocation, or a Battle of Pamphlets, 1717. J. B.

What was the success or merit of this performance, I know not; it was probably lost among the innumerable pamphlets to which that dispute gave occasion. Mr. Savage was himself in a little time ashamed of it, and endeavoured to suppress it, by destroying all the copies that he could collect.

He then attempted a more gainful kind of writing⁵⁶, and, in his eighteenth year, offered to the stage a comedy, borrowed from a Spanish plot, which was refused by the players, and was, therefore, given by him to Mr. Bullock, who, having more interest, made some slight alterations, and brought it upon the stage, under the title of *Woman's a Riddle*⁵⁷, but allowed the unhappy author no part of the profit.

Not discouraged, however, at his repulse, he wrote, two years afterwards, *Love in a Veil*, another comedy, borrowed likewise from the Spanish, but with little better success than before; for, though it was received and acted, yet it appeared so late in the year, that the author obtained no other advantage from it, than the acquaintance of sir Richard Steele, and Mr. Wilks, by whom he was pitied, caressed, and relieved.

Sir Richard Steele, having declared in his favour with all the ardour of benevolence which constituted his character, promoted his interest with the utmost zeal, related his misfortunes, applauded his merit, took all the opportunities of recommending

⁵⁶ Jacob's *Lives of the Dramatick Poets*. Dr. J.

⁵⁷ This play was printed first in 8vo.; and afterwards in 12mo. the fifth edition. Dr. J.

him, and asserted, that “the inhumanity of his mother had given him a right to find every good man his father⁵⁸.”

Nor was Mr. Savage admitted to his acquaintance only, but to his confidence, of which he sometimes related an instance too extraordinary to be omitted, as it affords a very just idea of his patron’s character.

He was once desired by sir Richard, with an air of the utmost importance, to come very early to his house the next morning. Mr. Savage came as he had promised, found the chariot at the door, and sir Richard waiting for him, and ready to go out. What was intended, and whither they were to go, Savage could not conjecture, and was not willing to inquire; but immediately seated himself with sir Richard. The coachman was ordered to drive, and they hurried, with the utmost expedition, to Hyde-park corner, where they stopped at a petty tavern, and retired to a private room. Sir Richard then informed him, that he intended to publish a pamphlet, and that he had desired him to come thither that he might write for him. They soon sat down to the work. Sir Richard dictated, and Savage wrote, till the dinner that had been ordered was put upon the table. Savage was surprised at the meanness of the entertainment, and, after some hesitation, ventured to ask for wine, which sir Richard, not without reluctance, ordered to be brought. They then finished their dinner, and proceeded in their pamphlet, which they concluded in the afternoon.

⁵⁸ Plain Dealer, Dr. J.

Mr. Savage then imagined his task over, and expected that sir Richard would call for the reckoning, and return home; but his expectations deceived him, for sir Richard told him that he was without money, and that the pamphlet must be sold, before the dinner could be paid for; and Savage was, therefore, obliged to go and offer their new production to sale for two guineas, which, with some difficulty, he obtained. Sir Richard then returned home, having retired that day only to avoid his creditors, and composed the pamphlet only to discharge his reckoning.

Mr. Savage related another fact equally uncommon, which, though it has no relation to his life, ought to be preserved. Sir Richard Steele having one day invited to his house a great number of persons of the first quality, they were surprised at the number of liveries which surrounded the table; and after dinner, when wine and mirth had set them free from the observation of rigid ceremony, one of them inquired of sir Richard, how such an expensive train of domesticks could be consistent with his fortune. Sir Richard very frankly confessed, that they were fellows of whom he would very willingly be rid: and being then asked why he did not discharge them, declared that they were bailiffs, who had introduced themselves with an execution, and whom, since he could not send them away, he had thought it convenient to embellish with liveries, that they might do him credit while they staid.

His friends were diverted with the expedient, and, by paying the debt, discharged their attendance, having obliged sir Richard

to promise that they should never again find him graced with a retinue of the same kind.

Under such a tutor Mr. Savage was not likely to learn prudence or frugality; and, perhaps, many of the misfortunes which the want of those virtues brought upon him in the following parts of his life, might be justly imputed to so unimproving an example.

Nor did the kindness of sir Richard end in common favours. He proposed to have established him in some settled scheme of life, and to have contracted a kind of alliance with him, by marrying him to a natural daughter, on whom he intended to bestow a thousand pounds. But, though he was always lavish of future bounties, he conducted his affairs in such a manner, that he was very seldom able to keep his promises, or execute his own intentions; and, as he was never able to raise the sum which he had offered, the marriage was delayed. In the mean time he was officiously informed, that Mr. Savage had ridiculed him; by which he was so much exasperated, that he withdrew the allowance which he had paid him, and never afterwards admitted him to his house.

It is not, indeed, unlikely that Savage might, by his imprudence, expose himself to the malice of a talebearer; for his patron had many follies, which, as his discernment easily discovered, his imagination might sometimes incite him to mention too ludicrously. A little knowledge of the world is sufficient to discover that such weakness is very common, and that there are few who do not sometimes, in the wantonness of

thoughtless mirth, or the heat of transient resentment, speak of their friends and benefactors with levity and contempt, though, in their cooler moments, they want neither sense of their kindness, nor reverence for their virtue: the fault, therefore, of Mr. Savage was rather negligence than ingratitude. But sir Richard must, likewise, be acquitted of severity, for who is there that can patiently bear contempt from one whom he has relieved and supported, whose establishment he has laboured, and whose interest he has promoted?

He was now again abandoned to fortune, without any other friend than Mr. Wilks; a man who, whatever were his abilities or skill as an actor, deserves, at least, to be remembered for his virtues⁵⁹, which are not often to be found in the world,

⁵⁹ As it is a loss to mankind when any good action is forgotten, I shall insert another instance of Mr. Wilks's generosity, very little known. Mr. Smith, a gentleman educated at Dublin, being hindered by an impediment in his pronunciation from engaging in orders, for which his friends designed him, left his own country, and came to London in quest of employment, but found his solicitations fruitless, and his necessities every day more pressing. In this distress he wrote a tragedy, and offered it to the players, by whom it was rejected. Thus were his last hopes defeated, and he had no other prospect than of the most deplorable poverty. But Mr. Wilks thought his performance, though not perfect, at least worthy of some reward, and, therefore, offered him a benefit. This favour he improved with so much diligence, that the house afforded him a considerable sum, with which he went to Leyden, applied himself to the study of physick, and prosecuted his design with so much diligence and success, that, when Dr. Boerhaave was desired by the czarina to recommend proper persons to introduce into Russia the practice and study of physick, Dr. Smith was one of those whom he selected. He had a considerable pension settled on him at his arrival, and was one of the chief physicians at the Russian court. Dr. J.A letter from Dr. Smith, in Russia, to Mr. Wilks, is printed in Chetwood's History of the Stage. R.

and, perhaps, Jess often in his profession than in others. To be humane, generous, and candid, is a very high degree of merit in any case; but those qualities deserve still greater praise, when they are found in that condition which makes almost every other man, for whatever reason, contemptuous, insolent, petulant, selfish, and brutal.

As Mr. Wilks was one of those to whom calamity seldom complained without relief, he naturally took an unfortunate wit into his protection, and not only assisted him in any casual distresses, but continued an equal and steady kindness to the time of his death.

By his interposition Mr. Savage once obtained from his mother⁶⁰ fifty pounds, and a promise of one hundred and fifty more; but it was the fate of this unhappy man, that few promises of any advantage to him were performed. His mother was infected, among others, with the general madness of the South-sea traffick; and, having been disappointed in her expectations, refused to pay what, perhaps, nothing but the prospect of sudden affluence prompted her to promise.

Being thus obliged to depend upon the friendship of Mr. Wilks, he was, consequently, an assiduous frequenter of the

⁶⁰ "This," says Dr. Johnson, "I write upon the credit of the author of his life, which was published in 1727;" and was a small pamphlet, intended to plead his cause with the publick while under sentence of death "for the murder of Mr. James Sinclair, at Robinson's coffee-house, at Charing-cross, price 6d. Roberts." Savage sent a copy of it to Mrs. Carter, with some corrections and remarks. See his letter to that lady in Mrs. Carter's life by Mr. Pennington, vol. i. p. 58.

theatres; and, in a short time, the amusements of the stage took such possession of his mind, that he never was absent from a play in several years.

This constant attendance naturally procured him the acquaintance of the players; and, among others, of Mrs. Oldfield, who was so much pleased with his conversation, and touched with his misfortunes, that she allowed him a settled pension of fifty pounds a year, which was during her life regularly paid.

That this act of generosity may receive its due praise, and that the good actions of Mrs. Oldfield may not be sullied by her general character, it is proper to mention what Mr. Savage often declared, in the strongest terms, that he never saw her alone, or in any other place than behind the scenes.

At her death he endeavoured to show his gratitude in the most decent manner, by wearing mourning, as for a mother; but did not celebrate her in elegies⁶¹, because he knew that too great profusion of praise would only have revived those faults which his natural equity did not allow him to think less, because they were committed by one who favoured him; but of which, though his virtue would not endeavour to palliate them, his gratitude would not suffer him to prolong the memory, or diffuse the censure.

In his *Wanderer*, he has, indeed, taken an opportunity of mentioning her; but celebrates her not for her virtue, but her beauty, an excellence which none ever denied her: this is the

⁶¹ Chetwood, however, has printed a poem on her death, which he ascribes to Mr. Savage. See *History of the Stage*, p. 206

only encomium with which he has rewarded her liberality; and, perhaps, he has, even in this, been too lavish of his praise. He seems to have thought, that never to mention his benefactress would have an appearance of ingratitude, though to have dedicated any particular performance to her memory would have only betrayed an officious partiality, that, without exalting her character, would have depressed his own.

He had sometimes, by the kindness of Mr. Wilks, the advantage of a benefit, on which occasions he often received uncommon marks of regard and compassion; and was once told, by the duke of Dorset, that it was just to consider him as an injured nobleman; and that, in his opinion, the nobility ought to think themselves obliged, without solicitation, to take every opportunity of supporting him by their countenance and patronage. But he had generally the mortification to hear, that the whole interest of his mother was employed to frustrate his applications, and that she never left any expedient untried, by which he might be cut off from the possibility of supporting life. The same disposition she endeavoured to diffuse among all those over whom nature or fortune gave her any influence; and, indeed, succeeded too well in her design; but could not always propagate her effrontery with her cruelty; for some of those, whom she incited against him, were ashamed of their own conduct, and boasted of that relief which they never gave him.

In this censure I do not indiscriminately involve all his relations; for he has mentioned, with gratitude, the humanity of

one lady, whose name I am now unable to recollect, and to whom, therefore, I cannot pay the praises which she deserves, for having acted well, in opposition to influence, precept, and example.

The punishment which our laws inflict upon those parents who murder their infants, is well known; nor has its justice ever been contested; but, if they deserve death who destroy a child in its birth, what pains can be severe enough for her who forbears to destroy him, only to inflict sharper miseries upon him; who prolongs his life, only to make him miserable; and who exposes him, without care and without pity, to the malice of oppression, the caprices of chance, and the temptations of poverty; who rejoices to see him overwhelmed with calamities; and, when his own industry, or the charity of others, has enabled him to rise, for a short time, above his miseries, plunges him again into his former distress?

The kindness of his friends not affording him any constant supply, and the prospect of improving his fortune by enlarging his acquaintance necessarily leading him to places of expense, he found it necessary⁶² to endeavour, once more, at dramatick poetry, for which he was now better qualified, by a more extensive knowledge and longer observation. But having been unsuccessful in comedy, though rather for want of opportunities than genius, he resolved now to try whether he should not be more fortunate in exhibiting a tragedy.

The story which he chose for the subject, was that of sir

⁶² In 1724.

Thomas Overbury, a story well adapted to the stage, though, perhaps, not far enough removed from the present age to admit properly the fictions necessary to complete the plan; for the mind, which naturally loves truth, is always most offended with the violation of those truths of which we are most certain; and we, of course, conceive those facts most certain, which approach nearest to our own time.

Out of this story he formed a tragedy, which, if the circumstances in which he wrote it be considered, will afford, at once, an uncommon proof of strength of genius, and evenness of mind, of a serenity not to be ruffled, and an imagination not to be suppressed.

During a considerable part of the time in which he was employed upon this performance, he was without lodging, and often without meat; nor had he any other conveniences for study than the fields or the streets allowed him: there he used to walk and form his speeches, and, afterwards, step into a shop, beg for a few moments the use of the pen and ink, and write down what he had composed, upon paper which he had picked up by accident.

If the performance of a writer thus distressed is not perfect, its faults ought, surely, to be imputed to a cause very different from want of genius, and must rather excite pity than provoke censure.

But when, under these discouragements, the tragedy was finished, there yet remained the labour of introducing it on the stage; an undertaking, which, to an ingenuous mind, was, in a very high degree, vexatious and disgusting; for, having

little interest or reputation, he was obliged to submit himself wholly to the players, and admit, with whatever reluctance, the emendations of Mr. Cibber, which he always considered as the disgrace of his performance.

He had, indeed, in Mr. Hill, another critick of a very different class, from whose friendship he received great assistance on many occasions, and whom he never mentioned but with the utmost tenderness and regard. He had been for some time distinguished by him with very particular kindness, and on this occasion it was natural to apply to him, as an author of an established character. He, therefore, sent this tragedy to him, with a short copy of verses⁶³, in which he desired his correction. Mr. Hill, whose humanity and politeness are generally known, readily complied with his request; but, as he is remarkable for singularity of sentiment, and bold experiments in language, Mr. Savage did not think his play much improved by his innovation, and had, even at that time, the courage to reject several passages which he could not approve; and, what is still more laudable, Mr. Hill had the generosity not to resent the neglect of his alterations, but wrote the prologue and epilogue, in which he touches on the circumstances of the author with great tenderness.

After all these obstructions and compliances, he was only able to bring his play upon the stage in the summer, when the chief actors had retired, and the rest were in possession of the house for their own advantage. Among these, Mr. Savage was admitted

⁶³ Printed in the late collection of his poems.

to play the part of sir Thomas Overbury⁶⁴, by which he gained no great reputation, the theatre being a province for which nature seemed not to have designed him; for neither his voice, look, nor gesture, were such as were expected on the stage; and he was so much ashamed of having been reduced to appear as a player, that he always blotted out his name from the list, when a copy of his tragedy was to be shown to his friends.

In the publication of his performance he was more successful, for the rays of genius that glimmered in it, that glimmered through all the mists which poverty and Cibber had been able to spread over it, procured him the notice and esteem of many persons eminent for their rank, their virtue, and their wit.

Of this play, acted, printed, and dedicated, the accumulated profits arose to a hundred pounds, which he thought at that time a very large sum, having been never master of so much before.

In the dedication⁶⁵, for which he received ten guineas, there is nothing remarkable. The preface contains a very liberal encomium on the blooming excellencies of Mr. Theophilus Cibber, which Mr. Savage could not in the latter part of his life see his friends about to read without snatching the play out of their hands. The generosity of Mr. Hill did not end on this occasion; for afterwards, when Mr. Savage's necessities returned, he encouraged a subscription to a Miscellany of Poems in a

⁶⁴ It was acted only three nights, the first on June 12, 1723. When the house opened for the winter season it was once more performed for the author's benefit, Oct. 2. R.

⁶⁵ To Herbert Tryst, esq. of Herefoulshire. Dr. J.

very extraordinary manner, by publishing his story in the Plain Dealer ⁶⁶, with some affecting lines, which he asserts to have been written by Mr. Savage upon the treatment received by him from his mother, but of which he was himself the author, as Mr. Savage afterwards declared. These lines, and the paper in which they were inserted, had a very powerful effect upon all but his mother, whom, by making her cruelty more publick, they only hardened in her aversion.

Mr. Hill not only promoted the subscription to the Miscellany, but furnished likewise the greatest part of the poems of which it is composed, and particularly the Happy Man, which he published as a specimen.

The subscriptions of those whom these papers should influence to patronise merit in distress, without any other solicitation, were directed to be left at Button's coffee-house; and Mr. Savage going thither a few days afterwards, without expectation of any effect from his proposal, found to his surprise seventy guineas⁶⁷, which had been sent him in consequence of

⁶⁶ The Plain Dealer was a periodical paper, written by Mr. Hill and Mr. Bond, whom Savage called the two contending powers of light and darkness. They wrote, by turns, each six essays; and the character of the work was observed regularly to rise in Mr. Hill's weeks, and fall in Mr. Bond's. Dr. J.

⁶⁷ The names of those who so generously contributed to his relief having been mentioned in a former account, ought not to be omitted here. They were the dutchess of Cleveland, lady Cheyney, lady Castlemain, lady Gower, lady Lechmere, the dutchess dowager and dutchess of Rutland, lady Strafford, the countess dowager of Warwick, Mrs. Mary Floyer, Mrs. Sofuel Noel, duke of Rutland, lord Gainsborough, lord Milsington, Mr. John Savage. Dr. J.

the compassion excited by Mr. Hill's pathetick representation.

To this Miscellany he wrote a preface, in which he gives an account of his mother's cruelty in a very uncommon strain of humour, and with a gaiety of imagination; which the success of his subscription probably produced.

The dedication is addressed to the lady Mary Wortley Montague, whom he flatters without reserve, and, to confess the truth, with very little art⁶⁸. The same observation may be extended to all his dedications: his compliments are constrained and violent, heaped together without the grace of order, or the decency of introduction: he seems to have written his panegyrics for the perusal only of his patrons, and to have imagined that he had no other task than to pamper them with praises, however gross, and that flattery would make its way to the heart, without the assistance of elegance or invention.

Soon afterwards the death of the king furnished a general subject for a poetical contest, in which Mr. Savage engaged,

⁶⁸ This the following extract from it will prove:—"Since our country has been honoured with the glory of your wit, as elevated and immortal as your soul, it no longer remains a doubt whether your sex have strength of mind in proportion to their sweetness. There is something in your verses as distinguished as your air. They are as strong as truth, as deep as reason, as clear as innocence, and as smooth as beauty. They contain a nameless and peculiar mixture of force and grace, which is at once so movingly serene, and so majestically lovely, that it is too amiable to appear any where but in your eyes and in your writings." "As fortune is not more my enemy than I am the enemy of flattery, I know not how I can forbear this application to your ladyship, because there is scarce a possibility that I should say more than I believe, when I am speaking of your excellence." Dr. J.

and is allowed to have carried the prize of honour from his competitors: but I know not whether he gained by his performance any other advantage than the increase of his reputation; though it must certainly have been with further views that he prevailed upon himself to attempt a species of writing, of which all the topicks had been long before exhausted, and which was made at once difficult by the multitudes that had failed in it, and those that had succeeded.

He was now advancing in reputation, and though frequently involved in very distressful perplexities, appeared, however, to be gaining upon mankind, when both his fame and his life were endangered by an event, of which it is not yet determined, whether it ought to be mentioned as a crime or a calamity.

On the 20th of November, 1727, Mr. Savage came from Richmond, where he then lodged, that he might pursue his studies with less interruption, with an intent to discharge another lodging which he had in Westminster; and accidentally meeting two gentlemen, his acquaintances, whose names were Merchant and Gregory, he went in with them to a neighbouring coffee-house, and sat drinking till it was late, it being in no time of Mr. Savage's life any part of his character to be the first of the company that desired to separate. He would willingly have gone to bed in the same house; but there was not room for the whole company, and, therefore, they agreed to ramble about the streets, and divert themselves with such amusements as should offer themselves till morning.

In this walk they happened unluckily to discover a light in Robinson's coffee-house, near Charing-cross, and, therefore, went in. Merchant, with some rudeness, demanded a room, and was told that there was a good fire in the next parlour, which the company were about to leave, being then paying their reckoning. Merchant, not satisfied with this answer, rushed into the room, and was followed by his companions. He then petulantly placed himself between the company and the fire, and soon after kicked down the table. This produced a quarrel, swords were drawn on both sides, and one Mr. James Sinclair was killed. Savage, having likewise wounded a maid that held him, forced his way with Merchant out of the house; but being intimidated and confused, without resolution either to fly or stay, they were taken in a back court by one of the company, and some soldiers, whom he had called to his assistance.

Being secured and guarded that night, they were in the morning carried before three justices, who committed them to the Gate-house, from whence, upon the death of Mr. Sinclair, which happened the same day, they were removed in the night to Newgate, where they were, however, treated with some distinction, exempted from the ignominy of chains, and confined, not among the common criminals, but in the press-yard.

When the day of trial came, the court was crowded in a very unusual manner; and the publick appeared to interest itself, as in a cause of general concern. The witnesses against Mr. Savage

and his friends were, the woman who kept the house, which was a house of ill fame, and her maid, the men who were in the room with Mr. Sinclair, and a woman of the town, who had been drinking with them, and with whom one of them had been seen in bed. They swore in general, that Merchant gave the provocation, which Savage and Gregory drew their swords to justify; that Savage drew first, and that he stabbed Sinclair when he was not in a posture of defence, or while Gregory commanded his sword; that after he had given the thrust he turned pale, and would have retired, but that the maid clung round him, and one of the company endeavoured to detain him, from whom he broke, by cutting the maid on the head, but was afterwards taken in a court.

There was some difference in their depositions; one did not see Savage give the wound, another saw it given when Sinclair held his point towards the ground; and the woman of the town asserted, that she did not see Sinclair's sword at all: this difference, however, was very far from amounting to inconsistency; but it was sufficient to show that the hurry of the dispute was such, that it was not easy to discover the truth with relation to particular circumstances, and that, therefore, some deductions were to be made from the credibility of the testimonies.

Sinclair had declared several times before his death, that he received his wound from Savage; nor did Savage at his trial deny the fact, but endeavoured partly to extenuate it, by urging the

suddenness of the whole action, and the impossibility of any ill design, or premeditated malice; and partly to justify it by the necessity of self-defence, and the hazard of his own life, if he had lost that opportunity of giving the thrust: he observed, that neither reason nor law obliged a man to wait for the blow which was threatened, and which, if he should suffer it, he might never be able to return; that it was always allowable to prevent an assault, and to preserve life by taking away that of the adversary by whom it was endangered.

With regard to the violence with which he endeavoured to escape, he declared, that it was not his design to fly from justice, or decline a trial, but to avoid the expenses and severities of a prison; and that he intended to have appeared at the bar without compulsion.

This defence, which took up more than an hour, was heard by the multitude that thronged the court with the most attentive and respectful silence; those who thought he ought not to be acquitted, owned that applause could not be refused him; and those who before pitied his misfortunes, now revered his abilities.

The witnesses which appeared against him were proved to be persons of characters which did not entitle them to much credit; a common strumpet, a woman by whom strumpets were entertained, and a man by whom they were supported: and the character of Savage was, by several persons of distinction, asserted to be that of a modest inoffensive man, not inclined to

broils or to insolence, and who had, to that time, been only known for his misfortunes and his wit.

Had his audience been his judges, he had undoubtedly been acquitted; but Mr. Page, who was then upon the bench, treated him with his usual insolence and severity, and when he had summed up the evidence, endeavoured to exasperate the jury, as Mr. Savage used to relate it, with this eloquent harangue:

“Gentlemen of the jury, you are to consider that Mr. Savage is a very great man, a much greater man than you or I, gentlemen of the jury; that he wears very fine clothes, much finer clothes than you or I, gentlemen of the jury; that he has abundance of money in his pocket, much more money than you or I, gentlemen of the jury; but, gentlemen of the jury, is it not a very hard case, gentlemen of the jury, that Mr. Savage should, therefore, kill you or me, gentlemen of the jury?”

Mr. Savage, hearing his defence thus misrepresented, and the men who were to decide his fate incited against him by invidious comparisons, resolutely asserted, that his cause was not candidly explained, and began to recapitulate what he had before said with regard to his condition, and the necessity of endeavouring to escape the expenses of imprisonment; but the judge having ordered him to be silent, and repeated his orders without effect, commanded that he should be taken from the bar by force.

The jury then heard the opinion of the judge, that good characters were of no weight against positive evidence, though they might turn the scale where it was doubtful; and that though,

when two men attack each other, the death of either is only manslaughter; but where one is the aggressor, as in the case before them, and, in pursuance of his first attack, kills the other, the law supposes the action, however sudden, to be malicious. They then deliberated upon their verdict, and determined that Mr. Savage and Mr. Gregory were guilty of murder; and Mr. Merchant, who had no sword, only of manslaughter.

Thus ended this memorable trial, which lasted eight hours. Mr. Savage and Mr. Gregory were conducted back to prison, where they were more closely confined, and loaded with irons of fifty pounds' weight: four days afterwards they were sent back to the court to receive sentence; on which occasion Mr. Savage made, as far as it could be retained in memory, the following speech:

“It is now, my lord, too late to offer any thing by way of defence or vindication; nor can we expect from your lordships, in this court, but the sentence which the law requires you, as judges, to pronounce against men of our calamitous condition. But we are also persuaded, that as mere men, and out of this seat of rigorous justice, you are susceptible of the tender passions, and too humane not to commiserate the unhappy situation of those, whom the law sometimes, perhaps—exacts—from you to pronounce upon. No doubt, you distinguish between offences which arise out of premeditation, and a disposition habituated to vice or immorality, and transgressions, which are the unhappy and unforeseen effects of casual absence of reason, and sudden

impulse of passion; we, therefore, hope you will contribute all you can to an extension of that mercy, which the gentlemen of the jury have been pleased to show Mr. Merchant, who (allowing facts as sworn against us by the evidence) has led us into this our calamity. I hope this will not be construed as if we meant to reflect upon that gentleman, or remove any thing from us upon him, or that we repine the more at our fate, because he has no participation of it: no, my lord; for my part, I declare nothing could more soften my grief, than to be without any companion in so great a misfortune⁶⁹.”

Mr. Savage had now no hopes of life, but from the mercy of the crown, which was very earnestly solicited by his friends, and which, with whatever difficulty the story may obtain belief, was obstructed only by his mother.

To prejudice the queen against him, she made use of an incident, which was omitted in the order of time, that it might be mentioned together with the purpose which it was made to serve. Mr. Savage, when he had discovered his birth, had an incessant desire to speak to his mother, who always avoided him in publick, and refused him admission into her house. One evening walking, as it was his custom, in the street that she inhabited, he saw the door of her house by accident open; he entered it, and, finding no person in the passage to hinder him, went up stairs to salute her. She discovered him before he could enter her chamber, alarmed the family with the most distressful outcries, and, when she had

⁶⁹ Mr. Savage's life.

by her screams gathered them about her, ordered them to drive out of the house that villain, who had forced himself in upon her, and endeavoured to murder her. Savage, who had attempted, with the most submissive tenderness, to soften her rage, hearing her utter so detestable an accusation, thought it prudent to retire, and, I believe, never attempted afterwards to speak to her.

But, shocked as he was with her falsehood and her cruelty, he imagined that she intended no other use of her lie, than to set herself free from his embraces and solicitations, and was very far from suspecting that she would treasure it in her memory as an instrument of future wickedness, or that she would endeavour for this fictitious assault to deprive him of his life.

But when the queen was solicited for his pardon, and informed of the severe treatment which he had suffered from his judge, she answered, that, however unjustifiable might be the manner of his trial, or whatever extenuation the action for which he was condemned might admit, she could not think that man a proper object of the king's mercy, who had been capable of entering his mother's house in the night, with an intent to murder her.

By whom this atrocious calumny had been transmitted to the queen; whether she that invented had the front to relate it; whether she found any one weak enough to credit it, or corrupt enough to concur with her in her hateful design, I know not; but methods had been taken to persuade the queen so strongly of the truth of it, that she, for a long time, refused to hear any of those who petitioned for his life.

Thus had Savage perished by the evidence of a bawd, a strumpet, and his mother, had not justice and compassion procured him an advocate of rank too great to be rejected unheard, and of virtue too eminent to be heard without being believed. His merit and his calamities happened to reach the ear of the countess of Hertford, who engaged in his support with all the tenderness that is excited by pity, and all the zeal which is kindled by generosity; and, demanding an audience of the queen, laid before her the whole series of his mother's cruelty, exposed the improbability of an accusation by which he was charged with an intent to commit a murder that could produce no advantage, and soon convinced her how little his former conduct could deserve to be mentioned as a reason for extraordinary severity.

The interposition of this lady was so successful, that he was soon after admitted to bail, and, on the 9th of March, 1728, pleaded the king's pardon.

It is natural to inquire upon what motives his mother could prosecute him in a manner so outrageous and implacable; for what reason she could employ all the arts of malice, and all the snares of calumny, to take away the life of her own son, of a son who never injured her, who was never supported by her expense, nor obstructed any prospect of pleasure or advantage: why she should endeavour to destroy him by a lie—a lie which could not gain credit, but must vanish of itself at the first moment of examination, and of which only this can be said to make it probable, that it may be observed from her conduct, that the most

execrable crimes are sometimes committed without apparent temptation.

This mother is still alive⁷⁰ and may, perhaps, even yet, though her malice was so often defeated, enjoy the pleasure of reflecting, that the life, which she often endeavoured to destroy, was, at least, shortened by her maternal offices; that, though she could not transport her son to the plantations, bury him in the shop of a mechanick, or hasten the hand of the publick executioner, she has yet had the satisfaction of imbittering all his hours, and forcing him into exigencies that hurried on his death.

It is by no means necessary to aggravate the enormity of this woman's conduct, by placing it in opposition to that of the countess of Hertford; no one can fail to observe how much more amiable it is to relieve, than to oppress, and to rescue innocence from destruction, than to destroy without an injury.

Mr. Savage, during his imprisonment, his trial, and the time in which he lay under sentence of death, behaved with great firmness and equality of mind, and confirmed by his fortitude the esteem of those who before admired him for his abilities⁷¹.

⁷⁰ She died October 11, 1753, at her house in Old Bond street, aged above fourscore. R.

⁷¹ It appears that during his confinement he wrote a letter to his mother, which he sent to Theophilus Cibber, that it might be transmitted to her through the means of Mr. Wilks. In his letter to Cibber he says: "As to death, I am easy, and dare meet it like a man—all that touches me is the concern of my friends, and a reconcilment with my mother. I cannot express the agony I felt when I wrote the letter to her: if you can find any decent excuse for showing it to Mrs. Oldfield, do; for I would have all my friends (and that admirable lady in particular) be satisfied I have done my duty towards it. Dr.

The peculiar circumstances of his life ere made more generally known by a short account⁷², which was then published, and of which several thousands were, in a few weeks, dispersed over the nation; and the compassion of mankind operated so powerfully in his favour, that he was enabled, by frequent presents, not only to support himself, but to assist Mr. Gregory in prison; and, when he was pardoned and released, he found the number of his friends not lessened.

The nature of the act for which he had been tried was in itself doubtful; of the evidences which appeared against him, the character of the man was not unexceptionable, that of the woman notoriously infamous; she, whose testimony chiefly influenced the jury to condemn him, afterwards retracted her assertions. He always himself denied that he was drunk, as had been generally reported. Mr. Gregory, who is now, 1744, collector of Antigua, is said to declare him far less criminal than he was imagined, even by some who favoured him; and Page himself afterwards confessed, that he had treated him with uncommon rigour. When all these particulars are rated together, perhaps the memory of Savage may not be much sullied by his trial.

Some time after he had obtained his liberty, he met in the street the woman that had sworn with so much malignity against him. She informed him, that she was in distress, and, with a degree of confidence not easily attainable, desired him to relieve

Young to-day sent me a letter most passionately kind." R.

⁷² Written by Mr. Beckingham and another gentleman. Dr. J.

her. He, instead of insulting her misery, and taking pleasure in the calamities of one who had brought his life into danger, reproved her gently for her perjury; and changing the only guinea that he had, divided it equally between her and himself.

This is an action which, in some ages, would have made a saint, and, perhaps, in others a hero, and which, without any hyperbolical encomiums, must be allowed to be an instance of uncommon generosity, an act of complicated virtue; by which he at once relieved the poor, corrected the vitious, and forgave an enemy; by which he at once remitted the strongest provocations, and exercised the most ardent charity.

Compassion was, indeed, the distinguishing quality of Savage; he never appeared inclined to take advantage of weakness, to attack the defenceless, or to press upon the falling: whoever was distressed, was certain at least of his good wishes; and when he could give no assistance to extricate them from misfortunes, he endeavoured to sooth them by sympathy and tenderness.

But when his heart was not softened by the sight of misery, he was sometimes obstinate in his resentment, and did not quickly lose the remembrance of an injury. He always continued to speak with anger of the insolence and partiality of Page, and a short time before his death revenged it by a satire⁷³.

It is natural to inquire in what terms Mr. Savage spoke of this fatal action, when the danger was over, and he was under no necessity of using any art to set his conduct in the fairest

⁷³ Printed in the late collection.

light. He was not willing to dwell upon it; and, if he transiently mentioned it, appeared neither to consider himself as a murderer, nor as a man wholly free from the guilt of blood⁷⁴. How much and how long he regretted it, appeared in a poem which he published many years afterwards. On occasion of a copy of verses, in which the failings of good men were recounted, and in which the author had endeavoured to illustrate his position, that “the best may sometimes deviate from virtue,” by an instance of murder committed by Savage in the heat of wine, Savage remarked, that it was no very just representation of a good man, to suppose him liable to drunkenness, and disposed in his riots to cut throats.

He was now indeed at liberty, but was, as before, without any other support than accidental favours and uncertain patronage afforded him; sources by which he was sometimes very liberally supplied, and which at other times were suddenly stopped; so that he spent his life between want and plenty; or, what was yet worse, between beggary and extravagance; for as whatever he received was the gift of chance, which might as well favour him at one time as another, he was tempted to squander what he had, because he always hoped to be immediately supplied.

Another cause of his profusion was the absurd kindness of his friends, who at once rewarded and enjoyed his abilities, by treating him at taverns, and habituating him to pleasures which he could not afford to enjoy, and which he was not able to deny himself, though he purchased the luxury of a single night by the

⁷⁴ In one of his letters he styles it “a fatal quarrel, but too well known.” Dr. J.

anguish of cold and hunger for a week.

The experience of these inconveniencies determined him to endeavour after some settled income, which, having long found submission and entreaties fruitless, he attempted to extort from his mother by rougher methods. He had now, as he acknowledged, lost that tenderness for her, which the whole series of her cruelty had not been able wholly to repress, till he found, by the efforts which she made for his destruction, that she was not content with refusing to assist him, and being neutral in his struggles with poverty, but was as ready to snatch every opportunity of adding to his misfortunes; and that she was to be considered as an enemy implacably malicious, whom nothing but his blood could satisfy. He, therefore, threatened to harass her with lampoons, and to publish a copious narrative of her conduct, unless she consented to purchase an exemption from infamy, by allowing him a pension.

This expedient proved successful. Whether shame still survived, though virtue was extinct, or whether her relations had more delicacy than herself, and imagined that some of the darts which satire might point at her would glance upon them; lord Tyrconnel, whatever were his motives, upon his promise to lay aside his design of exposing the cruelty of his mother, received him into his family, treated him as his equal, and engaged to allow him a pension of two hundred pounds a year.

This was the golden part of Mr. Savage's life; and, for some time, he had no reason to complain of fortune; his appearance

was splendid, his expenses large, and his acquaintance extensive. He was courted by all who endeavoured to be thought men of genius, and caressed by all who valued themselves upon a refined taste. To admire Mr. Savage, was a proof of discernment; and to be acquainted with him, was a title to poetical reputation. His presence was sufficient to make any place of publick entertainment popular; and his approbation and example constituted the fashion. So powerful is genius, when it is invested with the glitter of affluence! Men willingly pay to fortune that regard which they owe to merit, and are pleased when they have an opportunity at once of gratifying their vanity, and practising their duty.

This interval of prosperity furnished him with opportunities of enlarging his knowledge of human nature, by contemplating life from its highest gradations to its lowest; and, had he afterwards applied to dramatick poetry, he would, perhaps, not have had many superiours; for, as he never suffered any scene to pass before his eyes without notice, he had treasured in his mind all the different combinations of passions, and the innumerable mixtures of vice and virtue, which distinguish one character from another; and, as his conception was strong, his expressions were clear; he easily received impressions from objects, and very forcibly transmitted them to others.

Of his exact observations on human life he has left a proof, which would do honour to the greatest names, in a small

pamphlet, called the Author to be let⁷⁵, where he introduces Iscariot Hackney, a prostitute scribbler, giving an account of his birth, his education, his disposition and morals, habits of life, and maxims of conduct. In the introduction are related many secret histories of the petty writers of that time, but sometimes mixed with ungenerous reflections on their birth, their circumstances, or those of their relations; nor can it be denied, that some passages are such as Iscariot Hackney might himself have produced.

He was accused, likewise, of living in an appearance of friendship with some whom he satirized, and of making use of the confidence which he gained by a seeming kindness, to discover failings and expose them: it must be confessed, that Mr. Savage's esteem was no very certain possession, and that he would lampoon at one time those whom he had praised at another.

It may be alleged, that the same man may change his principles; and that he, who was once deservedly commended, may be afterwards satirized with equal justice; or that the poet was dazzled with the appearance of virtue, and found the man whom he had celebrated, when he had an opportunity of examining him more narrowly, unworthy of the panegyrick which he had too hastily bestowed; and that as a false satire ought to be recanted, for the sake of him whose reputation may be injured, false praise ought likewise to be obviated, lest the

⁷⁵ Printed in his works, vol. ii. p. 231.

distinction between vice and virtue should be lost, lest a bad man should be trusted upon the credit of his encomiast, or lest others should endeavour to obtain the like praises by the same means.

But though these excuses may be often plausible, and sometimes just, they are very seldom satisfactory to mankind, and the writer, who is not constant to his subject, quickly sinks into contempt, his satire loses its force, and his panegyrick its value; and he is only considered at one time as a flatterer, and as a calumniator at another.

To avoid these imputations, it is only necessary to follow the rules of virtue, and to preserve an unvaried regard to truth. For though it is undoubtedly possible that a man, however cautious, may be sometimes deceived by an artful appearance of virtue, or by false evidences of guilt, such errors will not be frequent; and it will be allowed, that the name of an author would never have been made contemptible, had no man ever said what he did not think, or misled others but when he was himself deceived. The Author to be let was first published in a single pamphlet, and afterwards inserted in a collection of pieces relating to the Dunciad, which were addressed by Mr. Savage to the earl of Middlesex, in a dedication⁷⁶ which he was prevailed upon to sign, though he did not write it, and in which there are some positions, that the true author would, perhaps, not have published under his own name, and on which Mr. Savage afterwards reflected with no great satisfaction; the enumeration of the bad effects of

⁷⁶ See his works, vol. ii. p. 233.

the uncontroled freedom of the press, and the assertion that the “liberties taken by the writers of journals with their superiours were exorbitant and unjustifiable,” very ill became men, who have themselves not always shown the exactest regard to the laws of subordination in their writings, and who have often satirized those that at least thought themselves their superiours, as they were eminent for their hereditary rank, and employed in the highest offices of the kingdom. But this is only an instance of that partiality which almost every man indulges with regard to himself: the liberty of the press is a blessing when we are inclined to write against others, and a calamity when we find ourselves overborne by the multitude of our assailants; as the power of the crown is always thought too great by those who suffer by its influence, and too little by those in whose favour it is exerted; and a standing army is generally accounted necessary by those who command, and dangerous and oppressive by those who support it.

Mr. Savage was, likewise, very far from believing, that the letters annexed to each species of bad poets in the Bathos were, as he was directed to assert, “set down at random;” for when he was charged by one of his friends with putting his name to such an improbability, he had no other answer to make than that “he did not think of it;” and his friend had too much tenderness to reply, that next to the crime of writing contrary to what he thought, was that of writing without thinking.

After having remarked what is false in this dedication, it

is proper that I observe the impartiality which I recommend, by declaring what Savage asserted; that the account of the circumstances which attended the publication of the Dunciad, however strange and improbable, was exactly true.

The publication of this piece, at this time, raised Mr. Savage a great number of enemies among those that were attacked by Mr. Pope, with whom he was considered as a kind of confederate, and whom he was suspected of supplying with private intelligence and secret incidents: so that the ignominy of an informer was added to the terrour of a satirist.

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