SAMUEL JOHNSON

LIVES OF THE ENGLISH POETS : WALLER, MILTON, COWLEY

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

Samuel Johnson, born at Lichfield in the year 1709, on the 7th of September Old Style, 18th New Style, was sixty-eight years old when he agreed with the booksellers to write his "Lives of the English Poets." "I am engaged," he said, "to write little Lives, and little Prefaces, to a little edition of the English Poets." His conscience was also a little hurt by the fact that the bargain was made on Easter Eve. In 1777 his memorandum, set down among prayers and meditations, was "29 March, Easter Eve, I treated with booksellers on a bargain, but the time was not long."

The history of the book as told to Boswell by Edward Dilly, one of the contracting booksellers, was this. An edition of Poets printed by the Martins in Edinburgh, and sold by Bell in London, was regarded by the London publishers as an interference with the honorary copyright which booksellers then respected among themselves. They said also that it was inaccurately printed and its type was small. A few booksellers agreed, therefore, among themselves to call a meeting of proprietors of honorary or actual

copyright in the various Poets. In Poets who had died before 1660 they had no trade interest at all. About forty of the most respectable booksellers in London accepted the invitation to this meeting. They determined to proceed immediately with an elegant and uniform edition of Poets in whose works they were interested, and they deputed three of their number, William Strahan, Thomas Davies, and Cadell, to wait on Johnson, asking him to write the series of prefatory Lives, and name his own terms. Johnson agreed at once, and suggested as his price two hundred guineas, when, as Malone says, the booksellers would readily have given him a thousand. He then contemplated only "little Lives." His energetic pleasure in the work expanded his Preface beyond the limits of the first design; but when it was observed to Johnson that he was underpaid by the booksellers, his reply was, "No, sir; it was not that they gave me too little, but that I gave them too much." He gave them, in fact, his masterpiece. His keen interest in Literature as the soul of life, his sympathetic insight into human nature, enabled him to put all that was best in himself into these studies of the lives of men for whom he cared, and of the books that he was glad to speak his mind about in his own shrewd independent way. Boswell was somewhat disappointed at finding that the selection of the Poets in this series would not be Johnson's, but that he was to furnish a Preface and Life to any Poet the booksellers pleased. "I asked him," writes Boswell, "if he would do this to any dunce's works, if they should ask him." Johnson. "Yes, sir; and *say* he was a

dunce."

The meeting of booksellers, happy in the support of Johnson's intellectual power, appointed also a committee to engage the best engravers, and another committee to give directions about paper and printing. They made out at once a list of the Poets they meant to give, "many of which," said Dilly, "are within the time of the Act of Queen Anne, which Martin and Bell cannot give, as they have no property in them. The proprietors are almost all the booksellers in London, of consequence."

In 1780 the booksellers published, in separate form, four volumes of Johnson's "Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the most Eminent of the English Poets." The completion followed in 1781. "Sometime in March," Johnson writes in that year, "I finished the Lives of the Poets." The series of books to which they actually served as prefaces extended to sixty volumes.

When his work was done, Johnson then being in his seventy-second year, the booksellers added £100 to the price first asked. Johnson's own life was then near its close. He died on the 13th of December, 1784, aged seventy-five.

Of the Lives in this collection, Johnson himself liked best his Life of Cowley, for the thoroughness with which he had examined in it the style of what he called the metaphysical Poets. In his Life of Milton, the sense of Milton's genius is not less evident than the difference in point of view which made it difficult for Johnson to know Milton thoroughly. They know each other now. For Johnson sought as steadily as Milton to do

all as “in his great Taskmaster’s eye.”

H. M.

WALLER

Edmund Waller was born on the third of March, 1605, at Coleshill, in Hertfordshire. His father was Robert Waller, Esquire, of Agmondesham, in Buckinghamshire, whose family was originally a branch of the Kentish Wallers; and his mother was the daughter of John Hampden, of Hampden, in the same county, and sister to Hampden, the zealot of rebellion.

His father died while he was yet an infant, but left him a yearly income of three thousand five hundred pounds; which, rating together the value of money and the customs of life, we may reckon more than equivalent to ten thousand at the present time.

He was educated, by the care of his mother, at Eton; and removed afterwards to King's College, in Cambridge. He was sent to Parliament in his eighteenth, if not in his sixteenth year, and frequented the court of James the First, where he heard a very remarkable conversation, which the writer of the Life prefixed to his Works, who seems to have been well informed of facts, though he may sometimes err in chronology, has delivered as indubitably certain:

"He found Dr. Andrews, Bishop of Winchester, and Dr. Neale, Bishop of Durham, standing behind his Majesty's chair; and there happened something extraordinary," continues this writer, "in the conversation those prelates had with the king, on which Mr. Waller did often reflect. His Majesty asked the

bishops, 'My Lords, cannot I take my subject's money, when I want it, without all this formality of Parliament?' The Bishop of Durham readily answered, 'God forbid, Sir, but you should: you are the breath of our nostrils.' Whereupon the king turned and said to the Bishop of Winchester, 'Well, my Lord, what say you?' 'Sir,' replied the bishop, 'I have no skill to judge of Parliamentary cases. The king answered, 'No put-offs, my Lord; answer me presently.' 'Then, Sir,' said he, 'I think it is lawful for you to take my brother Neale's money; for he offers it.' Mr. Waller said the company was pleased with this answer, and the wit of it seemed to affect the king; for a certain lord coming in soon after, his Majesty cried out, 'Oh, my lord, they say you lig with my Lady.' 'No, Sir,' says his lordship in confusion; 'but I like her company, because she has so much wit.' 'Why, then,' says the king, 'do you not lig with my Lord of Winchester there?'"

Waller's political and poetical life began nearly together. In his eighteenth year he wrote the poem that appears first in his works, on "The Prince's Escape at St. Andero:" a piece which justifies the observation made by one of his editors, that he attained, by a felicity like instinct, a style which perhaps will never be obsolete; and that "were we to judge only by the wording, we could not know what was wrote at twenty, and what at' fourscore." His versification was, in his first essay, such as it appears in his last performance. By the perusal of Fairfax's translation of Tasso, to which, as Dryden relates, he confessed himself indebted for the smoothness of his numbers, and by his

own nicety of observation, he had already formed such a system of metrical harmony as he never afterwards much needed, or much endeavoured, to improve. Denham corrected his numbers by experience, and gained ground gradually upon the ruggedness of his age; but what was acquired by Denham was inherited by Waller.

The next poem, of which the subject seems to fix the time, is supposed by Mr. Fenton to be the "Address to the Queen," which he considers as congratulating her arrival, in Waller's twentieth year. He is apparently mistaken; for the mention of the nation's obligations to her frequent pregnancy proves that it was written when she had brought many children. We have therefore no date of any other poetical production before that which the murder of the Duke of Buckingham occasioned; the steadiness with which the king received the news in the chapel deserved indeed to be rescued from oblivion.

Neither of these pieces that seem to carry their own dates could have been the sudden effusion of fancy. In the verses on the prince's escape, the prediction of his marriage with the Princess of France must have been written after the event; in the other, the promises of the king's kindness to the descendants of Buckingham, which could not be properly praised till it had appeared by its effects, show that time was taken for revision and improvement. It is not known that they were published till they appeared long afterwards with other poems.

Waller was not one of those idolaters of praise who cultivate

their minds at the expense of their fortunes. Rich as he was by inheritance, he took care early to grow richer, by marrying Mrs. Banks, a great heiress in the city, whom the interest of the court was employed to obtain for Mr. Crofts. Having brought him a son, who died young, and a daughter, who was afterwards married to Mr. Dormer, of Oxfordshire, she died in childbed, and left him a widower of about five-and-twenty, gay and wealthy, to please himself with another marriage.

Being too young to resist beauty, and probably too vain to think himself resistible, he fixed his heart, perhaps half-fondly and half-ambitiously, upon the Lady Dorothea Sidney, eldest daughter of the Earl of Leicester, whom he courted by all the poetry in which Sacharissa is celebrated; the name is derived from the Latin appellation of "sugar," and implies, if it means anything, a spiritless mildness, and dull good-nature, such as excites rather tenderness and esteem, and such as, though always treated with kindness, is never honoured or admired.

Yet he describes Sacharissa as a sublime predominating beauty, of lofty charms, and imperious influence, on whom he looks with amazement rather than fondness, whose chains he wishes, though in vain, to break, and whose presence is "wine" that "inflames to madness."

His acquaintance with this high-born dame gave wit no opportunity of boasting its influence; she was not to be subdued by the powers of verse, but rejected his addresses, it is said, with disdain, and drove him away to solace his disappointment with

Amoret or Phillis. She married in 1639 the Earl of Sunderland, who died at Newbury in the king's cause; and, in her old age, meeting somewhere with Waller, asked him, when he would again write such verses upon her; "When you are as young, Madam," said he, "and as handsome as you were then."

In this part of his life it was that he was known to Clarendon, among the rest of the men who were eminent in that age for genius and literature; but known so little to his advantage, that they who read his character will not much condemn Sacharissa, that she did not descend from her rank to his embraces, nor think every excellence comprised in wit.

The lady was, indeed, inexorable; but his uncommon comprised in wit, qualifications, though they had no power upon her, recommended him to the scholars and statesmen; and undoubtedly many beauties of that time, however they might receive his love, were proud of his praises. Who they were, whom he dignifies with poetical names, cannot now be known. Amoret, according to Mr. Fenton, was the Lady Sophia Murray.

Perhaps by traditions preserved in families more may be discovered.

From the verses written at Penshurst, it has been collected that he diverted his disappointment by a voyage; and his biographers, from his poem on the Whales, think it not improbable that he visited the Bermudas; but it seems much more likely that he should amuse himself with forming an imaginary scene, than that so important an incident, as a visit to America, should have been

left floating in conjectural probability.

From his twenty-eighth to his thirty-fifth year, he wrote his pieces on the Reduction of Sallee; on the Reparation of St. Paul's; to the King on his Navy; the Panegyric on the Queen Mother; the two poems to the Earl of Northumberland; and perhaps others, of which the time cannot be discovered.

When he had lost all hopes of Sacharissa, he looked round him for an easier conquest, and gained a lady of the family of Bresse, or Breaux. The time of his marriage is not exactly known. It has not been discovered that his wife was won by his poetry; nor is anything told of her, but that she brought him many children. He doubtless praised some whom he would have been afraid to marry, and perhaps married one whom he would have been ashamed to praise. Many qualities contribute to domestic happiness, upon which poetry has no colours to bestow; and many airs and sallies may delight imagination, which he who flatters them never can approve. There are charms made only for distant admiration. No spectacle is nobler than a blaze.

Of this wife, his biographers have recorded that she gave him five sons and eight daughters.

During the long interval of Parliament, he is represented as living among those with whom it was most honourable to converse, and enjoying an exuberant fortune with that independence and liberty of speech and conduct which wealth ought always to produce. He was, however, considered as the kinsman of Hampden, and was therefore supposed by the

courtiers not to favour them.

When the Parliament was called in 1640, it appeared that Waller's political character had not been mistaken. The king's demand of a supply produced one of those noisy speeches which disaffection and discontent regularly dictate; a speech filled with hyperbolical complaints of imaginary grievances: "They," says he, "who think themselves already undone, can never apprehend themselves in danger; and they who have nothing left can never give freely." Political truth is equally in danger from the praises of courtiers, and the exclamations of patriots.

He then proceeds to rail at the clergy, being sure at that time of a favourable audience. His topic is such as will always serve its purpose; an accusation of acting and preaching only for preferment: and he exhorts the Commons "carefully" to "provide" for their "protection against Pulpit Law."

It always gratifies curiosity to trace a sentiment. Waller has in his speech quoted Hooker in one passage; and in another has copied him, without quoting. "Religion," says Waller, "ought to be the first thing in our purpose and desires; but that which is first in dignity is not always to precede in order of time; for well-being supposes a being; and the first impediment which men naturally endeavour to remove, is the want of those things without which they cannot subsist. God first assigned unto Adam maintenance of life, and gave him a title to the rest of the creatures before he appointed a law to observe."

"God first assigned Adam," says Hooker, "maintenance of

life, and then appointed him a law to observe. True it is, that the kingdom of God must be the first thing in our purpose and desires; but inasmuch as a righteous life presupposeth life, inasmuch as to live virtuously it is impossible, except we live; therefore the first impediment which naturally we endeavour to remove is penury, and want of things without which we cannot live."

The speech is vehement; but the great position, that grievances ought to be redressed before supplies are granted, is agreeable enough to law and reason: nor was Waller, if his biographer may be credited, such an enemy to the king, as not to wish his distresses lightened; for he relates, "that the king sent particularly to Waller, to second his demand of some subsidies to pay off the army, and Sir Henry Vane objecting against first voting a supply, because the king would not accept unless it came up to his proportion, Mr. Waller spoke earnestly to Sir Thomas Jermyn, comptroller of the household, to save his master from the effects of so bold a falsity; 'for,' he said, 'I am but a country gentleman, and cannot pretend to know the king's mind:' but Sir Thomas durst not contradict the secretary; and his son, the Earl of St. Albans, afterwards told Mr. Waller, that his father's cowardice ruined the king."

In the Long Parliament, which, unhappily for the nation, met Nov. 3, 1640, Waller represented Agmondesham the third time; and was considered by the discontented party as a man sufficiently trusty and acrimonious to be employed in managing

the prosecution of Judge Crawley, for his opinion in favour of ship-money; and his speech shows that he did not disappoint their expectations. He was probably the more ardent, as his uncle Hampden had been particularly engaged in the dispute, and, by a sentence which seems generally to be thought unconstitutional, particularly injured.

He was not, however, a bigot to his party, nor adopted all their opinions. When the great question, whether Episcopacy ought to be abolished, was debated, he spoke against the innovation so coolly, so reasonably, and so firmly, that it is not without great injury to his name that his speech, which was as follows, has been hitherto omitted in his works:

"There is no doubt but the sense of what this nation had suffered from the present bishops hath produced these complaints; and the apprehensions men have of suffering the like, in time to come, make so many desire the taking away of Episcopacy: but I conceive it is possible that we may not, now, take a right measure of the minds of the people by their petitions; for, when they subscribed them, the bishops were armed with a dangerous commission of making new canons, imposing new oaths, and the like; but now we have disarmed them of that power. These petitioners lately did look upon Episcopacy as a beast armed with horns and claws; but now that we have cut and pared them (and may, if we see cause, yet reduce it into narrower bounds), it may, perhaps, be more agreeable. Howsoever, if they be still in passion, it becomes us soberly to consider the right use

and antiquity thereof; and not to comply further with a general desire, than may stand with a general good.

"We have already showed that Episcopacy and the evils thereof are mingled like water and oil; we have also, in part, severed them; but I believe you will find, that our laws and the present government of the Church are mingled like wine and water; so inseparable, that the abrogation of, at least, a hundred of our laws is desired in these petitions. I have often heard a noble answer of the Lords, commended in this House, to a proposition of like nature, but of less consequence; they gave no other reason of their refusal but this, '*Nolumus mutare Leges Angliæ*:' it was the bishops who so answered them; and it would become the dignity and wisdom of this House to answer the people, now, with a '*Nolumus mutare*.'

"I see some are moved with a number of hands against the bishops; which, I confess, rather inclines me to their defence; for I look upon Episcopacy as a counterscarp, or outwork; which, if it be taken by this assault of the people, and, withal, this mystery once revealed, 'that we must deny them nothing when they ask it thus in troops,' we may, in the next place, have as hard a task to defend our property, as we have lately had to recover it from the Prerogative. If, by multiplying hands and petitions, they prevail for an equality in things ecclesiastical, the next demand perhaps may be *Lex Agraria*, the like equality in things temporal.

"The Roman story tells us, that when the people began to flock about the Senate, and were more curious to direct and know what

was done, than to obey, that Commonwealth soon came to ruin; their *Legem regare* grew quickly to be a *Legem ferre*: and after, when their legions had found that they could make a Dictator, they never suffered the Senate to have a voice any more in such election.

"If these great innovations proceed, I shall expect a flat and level in learning too, as well as in Church preferments: *Hones alit Artes*. And though it be true, that grave and pious men do study for learning-sake, and embrace virtue for itself; yet it is true, that youth, which is the season when learning is gotten, is not without ambition; nor will ever take pains to excel in anything, when there is not some hope of excelling others in reward and dignity.

"There are two reasons chiefly alleged against our Church government.

"First, Scripture, which, as some men think, points out another form.

"Second, the abuses of the present superiors.

"For Scripture, I will not dispute it in this place; but I am confident that, whenever an equal division of lands and goods shall be desired, there will be as many places in Scripture found out, which seem to favour that, as there are now alleged against the prelacy or preferment of the Church. And, as for abuses, when you are now in the remonstrance told what this and that poor man hath suffered by the bishops, you may be presented with a thousand instances of poor men that have received hard measure from their landlords; and of worldly goods abused, to

the injury of others, and disadvantage of the owners.

"And therefore, Mr. Speaker, my humble motion is that we may settle men's minds herein; and by a question, declare our resolution, 'to reform,' that is, 'not to abolish, Episcopacy.'"

It cannot but be wished that he, who could speak in this manner, had been able to act with spirit and uniformity.

When the Commons begun to set the royal authority at open defiance, Waller is said to have withdrawn from the House, and to have returned with the king's permission; and, when the king set up his standard, he sent him a thousand broad-pieces. He continued, however, to sit in the rebellious conventicle; but "spoke," says Clarendon, "with great sharpness and freedom, which, now there was no danger of being out-voted, was not restrained; and therefore used as an argument against those who were gone upon pretence that they were not suffered to deliver their opinion freely in the House, which could not be believed, when all men knew what liberty Mr. Waller took, and spoke every day with impunity against the sense and proceedings of the House."

Waller, as he continued to sit, was one of the commissioners nominated by the Parliament to treat with the king at Oxford; and when they were presented, the king said to him, "Though you are the last, you are not the lowest nor the least in my favour." Whitelock, who, being another of the commissioners, was witness of this kindness, imputes it to the king's knowledge of the plot, in which Waller appeared afterwards to have been

engaged against the Parliament. Fenton, with equal probability, believes that his attempt to promote the royal cause arose from his sensibility of the king's tenderness. Whitelock says nothing of his behaviour at Oxford: he was sent with several others to add pomp to the commission, but was not one of those to whom the trust of treating was imparted.

The engagement, known by the name of Waller's plot, was soon afterwards discovered. Waller had a brother-in-law, Tomkyns, who was clerk of the queen's council, and at the same time had a very numerous acquaintance, and great influence, in the city. Waller and he, conversing with great confidence, told both their own secrets and those of their friends; and, surveying the wide extent of their conversation, imagined that they found in the majority of all ranks great disapprobation of the violence of the Commons, and unwillingness to continue the war. They knew that many favoured the king, whose fear concealed their loyalty; and many desired peace, though they durst not oppose the clamour for war; and they imagined that, if those who had these good intentions should be informed of their own strength, and enabled by intelligence to act together, they might overpower the fury of sedition, by refusing to comply with the ordinance for the twentieth part, and the other taxes levied for the support of the rebel army, and by uniting great numbers in a petition for peace. They proceeded with great caution. Three only met in one place, and no man was allowed to impart the plot to more than two others; so that, if any should be suspected or seized,

more than three could not be endangered.

Lord Conway joined in the design, and, Clarendon imagines, incidentally mingled, as he was a soldier, some martial hopes or projects, which however were only mentioned, the main design being to bring the loyal inhabitants to the knowledge of each other; for which purpose there was to be appointed one in every district, to distinguish the friends of the king, the adherents to the Parliament, and the neutrals. How far they proceeded does not appear; the result of their inquiry, as Pym declared, was, that within the walls, for one that was for the Royalists, there were three against them; but that without the walls, for one that was against them, there were five for them. Whether this was said from knowledge or guess, was perhaps never inquired.

It is the opinion of Clarendon, that in Waller's plan no violence or sanguinary resistance was comprised; that he intended only to abate the confidence of the rebels by public declarations, and to weaken their powers by an opposition to new supplies. This, in calmer times, and more than this, is done without fear; but such was the acrimony of the Commons, that no method of obstructing them was safe.

About this time another design was formed by Sir Nicholas Crispe, a man of loyalty, that deserves perpetual remembrance; when he was a merchant in the city, he gave and procured the king, in his exigencies, a hundred thousand pounds; and, when he was driven from the Exchange, raised a regiment, and commanded it.

Sir Nicholas flattered himself with an opinion, that some provocation would so much exasperate, or some opportunity so much encourage, the king's friends in the city, that they would break out in open resistance, and would then want only a lawful standard, and an authorised commander; and extorted from the king, whose judgment too frequently yielded to importunity, a commission of array, directed to such as he thought proper to nominate, which was sent to London by the Lady Aubigny. She knew not what she carried, but was to deliver it on the communication of a certain token which Sir Nicholas imparted.

This commission could be only intended to lie ready till the time should require it. To have attempted to raise any forces would have been certain destruction; it could be of use only when the forces should appear. This was, however, an act preparatory to martial hostility.

Crispe would undoubtedly have put an end to the session of Parliament, had his strength been equal to his zeal; and out of the design of Crispe, which involved very little danger, and that of Waller, which was an act purely civil, they compounded a horrid and dreadful plot.

The discovery of Waller's design is variously related.

In "Clarendon's History" it is told, that a servant of Tomkyns, lurking behind the hangings when his master was in conference with Waller, heard enough to qualify him for an informer, and carried his intelligence to Pym.

A manuscript, quoted in the "Life of Waller," relates, that "he

was betrayed by his sister Price, and her Presbyterian chaplain Mr. Goode, who stole some of his papers; and if he had not strangely dreamed the night before, that his sister had betrayed him, and thereupon burnt the rest of his papers by the fire that was in his chimney, he had certainly lost his life by it." The question cannot be decided. It is not unreasonable to believe that the men in power, receiving intelligence from the sister, would employ the servant of Tomkyns to listen at the conference, that they might avoid an act so offensive as that of destroying the brother by the sister's testimony.

The plot was published in the most terrific manner.

On the 31st of May (1643), at a solemn fast, when they were listening to the sermon, a messenger entered the church, and communicated his errand to Pym, who whispered it to others that were placed near him, and then went with them out of the church, leaving the rest in solicitude and amazement. They immediately sent guards to proper places, and that night apprehended Tomkyns and Waller; having yet traced nothing but that letters had been intercepted, from which it appears that the Parliament and the city were soon to be delivered into the hands of the cavaliers.

They perhaps yet knew little themselves, beyond some general and indistinct notices. "But Waller," says Clarendon, "was so confounded with fear, that he confessed whatever he had heard, said, thought, or seen; all that he knew of himself, and all that he suspected of others, without concealing any person of what

degree or quality soever, or any discourse which he had ever upon any occasion entertained with them; what such and such ladies of great honour, to whom, upon the credit of his wit and great reputation, he had been admitted, had spoken to him in their chambers upon the proceedings in the Houses, and how they had encouraged him to oppose them; what correspondence and intercourse they had with some Ministers of State at Oxford, and how they had conveyed all intelligence thither." He accused the Earl of Portland and Lord Conway as co-operating in the transaction; and testified that the Earl of Northumberland had declared himself disposed in favour of any attempt that might check the violence of the Parliament, and reconcile them to the king.

He undoubtedly confessed much which they could never have discovered, and perhaps somewhat which they would wish to have been suppressed; for it is inconvenient in the conflict of factions, to have that disaffection known which cannot safely be punished.

Tomkyns was seized on the same night with Waller, and appears likewise to have partaken of his cowardice; for he gave notice of Crispe's commission of array, of which Clarendon never knew how it was discovered. Tomkyns had been sent with the token appointed, to demand it from Lady Aubigny, and had buried it in his garden, where, by his direction, it was dug up; and thus the rebels obtained, what Clarendon confesses them to have had, the original copy.

It can raise no wonder that they formed one plot out of these two designs, however remote from each other, when they saw the same agent employed in both, and found the commission of array in the hands of him who was employed in collecting the opinions and affections of the people.

Of the plot, thus combined, they took care to make the most. They sent Pym among the citizens, to tell them of their imminent danger and happy escape; and inform them, that the design was, "to seize the Lord Mayor and all the Committee of Militia, and would not spare one of them." They drew up a vow and covenant, to be taken by every member of either House, by which he declared his detestation of all conspiracies against the Parliament, and his resolution to detect and oppose them. They then appointed a day of thanksgiving for this wonderful delivery; which shut out, says Clarendon, all doubts whether there had been such a deliverance, and whether the plot was real or fictitious.

On June 11, the Earl of Portland and Lord Conway were committed, one to the custody of the mayor, and the other of the sheriff; but their lands and goods were not seized.

Waller was still to immerse himself deeper in ignominy. The Earl of Portland and Lord Conway denied the charge; and there was no evidence against them but the confession of Waller, of which undoubtedly many would be inclined to question the veracity. With these doubts he was so much terrified, that he endeavoured to persuade Portland to a declaration like his own,

by a letter extant in Fenton's edition. "But for me," says he, "you had never known anything of this business, which was prepared for another; and therefore I cannot imagine why you should hide it so far as to contract your own ruin by concealing it, and persisting unreasonably to hide that truth, which, without you, already is, and will every day be made more manifest. Can you imagine yourself bound in honour to keep that secret, which is already revealed by another? or possible it should still be a secret, which is known to one of the other sex?—If you persist to be cruel to yourself for their sakes who deserve it not, it will nevertheless be made appear, ere long, I fear, to your ruin. Surely, if I had the happiness to wait on you, I could move you to compassionate both yourself and me, who, desperate as my case is, am desirous to die with the honour of being known to have declared the truth. You have no reason to contend to hide what is already revealed—inconsiderately to throw away yourself, for the interest of others, to whom you are less obliged than you are aware of."

This persuasion seems to have had little effect. Portland sent (June 29) a letter to the Lords, to tell them that he "is in custody, as he conceives, without any charge; and that, by what Mr. Waller hath threatened him with since he was imprisoned, he doth apprehend a very cruel, long, and ruinous restraint:—He therefore prays, that he may not find the effects of Mr. Waller's threats, a long and close imprisonment; but may be speedily brought to a legal trial, and then he is confident the vanity and

falsehood of those informations which have been given against him will appear."

In consequence of this letter, the Lords ordered Portland and Waller to be confronted; when the one repeated his charge, and the other his denial. The examination of the plot being continued (July 1), Thinn, usher of the House of Lords, deposed, that Mr. Waller having had a conference with the Lord Portland in an upper room, Lord Portland said, when he came down, "Do me the favour to tell my Lord Northumberland, that Mr. Waller has extremely pressed me to save my own life and his, by throwing the blame upon the Lord Conway and the Earl of Northumberland."

Waller, in his letter to Portland, tells him of the reasons which he could urge with resistless efficacy in a personal conference; but he overrated his own oratory; his vehemence, whether of persuasion or entreaty, was returned with contempt.

One of his arguments with Portland is, that the plot is already known to a woman. This woman was doubtless Lady Aubigny, who, upon this occasion, was committed to custody; but who, in reality, when she delivered the commission, knew not what it was.

The Parliament then proceeded against the conspirators, and committed their trial to a council of war. Tomkyns and Chaloner were hanged near their own doors. Tomkyns, when he came to die, said it was a "foolish business;" and indeed there seems to have been no hope that it should escape discovery; for, though

never more than three met at a time, yet a design so extensive must by necessity be communicated to many who could not be expected to be all faithful and all prudent. Chaloner was attended at his execution by Hugh Peters. His crime was, that he had commission to raise money for the king; but it appears not that the money was to be expended upon the advancement of either Crispe's or Waller's plot.

The Earl of Northumberland, being too great for prosecution, was only once examined before the Lords. The Earl of Portland and Lord Conway persisting to deny the charge, and no testimony but Waller's yet appearing against them, were, after a long imprisonment, admitted to bail. Hassel, the king's messenger, who carried the letters to Oxford, died the night before his trial.

Hampden [Alexander] escaped death, perhaps by the interest of his family; but was kept in prison to the end of his life. They whose names were inserted in the commission of array were not capitally punished, as it could not be proved that they had consented to their own nomination; but they were considered as malignants, and their estates were seized.

"Waller, though confessedly," says Clarendon, "the most guilty, with incredible dissimulation affected such a remorse of conscience, that his trial was put off, out of Christian compassion, till he might recover his understanding." What use he made of this interval, with what liberality and success he distributed flattery and money, and how, when he was brought (July 4) before the House, he confessed and lamented, and

submitted and implored, may be read in the "History of the Rebellion" (B. vii.). The speech, to which Clarendon ascribes the preservation of his "dear-bought life," is inserted in his works. The great historian, however, seems to have been mistaken in relating that "he prevailed" in the principal part of his supplication, "not to be tried by a council of war;" for, according to Whitelock, he was by expulsion from the House abandoned to the tribunal which he so much dreaded, and, being tried and condemned, was reprieved by Essex; but after a year's imprisonment, in which time resentment grew less acrimonious, paying a fine of ten thousand pounds, he was permitted to "recollect himself in another country."

Of his behaviour in this part of life, it is not necessary to direct the reader's opinion. "Let us not," says his last ingenious biographer, "condemn him with untempered severity, because he was not a prodigy which the world hath seldom seen, because his character included not the poet, the orator, and the hero."

For the place of his exile he chose France, and stayed some time at Roan, where his daughter Margaret was born, who was afterwards his favourite, and his amanuensis. He then removed to Paris, where he lived with great splendour and hospitality; and from time to time amused himself with poetry, in which he sometimes speaks of the rebels, and their usurpation, in the natural language of an honest man.

At last it became necessary, for his support, to sell his wife's jewels; and being reduced, as he said, at last "to the rump-jewel,"

he solicited from Cromwell permission to return, and obtained it by the interest of Colonel Scroop, to whom his sister was married. Upon the remains of a fortune, which the danger of his life had very much diminished, he lived at Hallbarn, a house built by himself very near to Beaconsfield, where his mother resided.

His mother, though related to Cromwell and Hampden, was zealous for the royal cause, and, when Cromwell visited her, used to reproach him; he, in return, would throw a napkin at her, and say he would not dispute with his aunt; but finding in time that she acted for the king, as well as talked, he made her a prisoner to her own daughter, in her own house. If he would do anything, he could not do less.

Cromwell, now Protector, received Waller, as his kinsman, to familiar conversation. Waller, as he used to relate, found him sufficiently versed in ancient history; and, when any of his enthusiastic friends came to advise or consult him, could sometimes overhear him discoursing in the cant of the times: but, when he returned, he would say, "Cousin Waller, I must talk to these men in their own way;" and resumed the common style of conversation.

He repaid the Protector for his favours (1654) by the famous Panegyric, which has been always considered as the first of his poetical productions. His choice of encomiastic topics is very judicious; for he considers Cromwell in his exaltation, without inquiring how he attained it; there is consequently no mention of the rebel or the regicide. All the former part of his hero's

life is veiled with shades; and nothing is brought to view but the chief, the governor, the defender of England's honour, and the enlarger of her dominion. The act of violence by which he obtained the supreme power is lightly treated, and decently justified. It was certainly to be desired that the detestable band should be dissolved, which had destroyed the Church, murdered the king, and filled the nation with tumult and oppression; yet Cromwell had not the right of dissolving them, for all that he had before done could be justified only by supposing them invested with lawful authority. But combinations of wickedness would overwhelm the world by the advantage which licentious principles afford, did not those, who have long practised perfidy, grow faithless to each other.

In the poem on the War with Spain are some passages at least equal to the best parts of the Panegyric; and, in the conclusion, the poet ventures yet a higher flight of flattery, by recommending royalty to Cromwell and the nation. Cromwell was very desirous, as appears from his conversation, related by Whitelock, of adding the title to the power of monarchy, and is supposed to have been withheld from it partly by fear of the army, and partly by fear of the laws, which, when he should govern by the name of king, would have restrained his authority. When, therefore, a deputation was solemnly sent to invite him to the crown, he, after a long conference, refused it, but is said to have fainted in his coach when he parted from them.

The poem on the death of the Protector seems to have been

dictated by real veneration for his memory. Dryden and Sprat wrote on the same occasion; but they were young men, struggling into notice, and hoping for some favour from the ruling party.

Waller had little to expect; he had received nothing but his pardon from Cromwell, and was not likely to ask anything from those who should succeed him.

Soon afterwards, the Restoration supplied him with another subject; and he exerted his imagination, his elegance, and his melody, with equal alacrity, for Charles the Second. It is not possible to read, without some contempt and indignation, poems of the same author, ascribing the highest degree of "power and piety" to Charles the First, then transferring the same "power and piety" to Oliver Cromwell; now inviting Oliver to take the Crown, and then congratulating Charles the Second on his recovered right. Neither Cromwell nor Charles could value his testimony as the effect of conviction, or receive his praises as effusions of reverence; they could consider them but as the labour of invention, and the tribute of dependence.

Poets, indeed, profess fiction; but the legitimate end of fiction is the conveyance of truth, and he that has flattery ready for all whom the vicissitudes of the world happen to exalt must be scorned as a prostituted mind, that may retain the glitter of wit, but has lost the dignity of virtue.

The Congratulation was considered as inferior in poetical merit to the Panegyric; and it is reported that, when the king told Waller of the disparity, he answered, "Poets, Sir, succeed better

in fiction than in truth."

The Congratulation is indeed not inferior to the Panegyric, either by decay of genius, or for want of diligence, but because Cromwell had done much and Charles had done little. Cromwell wanted nothing to raise him to heroic excellence but virtue, and virtue his poet thought himself at liberty to supply. Charles had yet only the merit of struggling without success, and suffering without despair. A life of escapes and indigence could supply poetry with no splendid images.

In the first Parliament summoned by Charles the Second (March 8, 1661), Waller sat for Hastings, in Sussex, and served for different places in all the Parliaments of that reign. In a time when fancy and gaiety were the most powerful recommendations to regard, it is not likely that Waller was forgotten. He passed his time in the company that was highest, both in rank and wit, from which even his obstinate sobriety did not exclude him.

Though he drank water, he was enabled by his fertility of mind to heighten the mirth of Bacchanalian assemblies; and Mr. Saville said, that "no man in England should keep him company without drinking but Ned Waller."

The praise given him by St. Evremond is a proof of his reputation; for it was only by his reputation that he could be known, as a writer, to a man who, though he lived a great part of a long life upon an English pension, never consented to understand the language of the nation that maintained him.

In Parliament, "he was," says Burnet, "the delight of the

House, and though old, said the liveliest things of any among them." This, however, is said in his account of the year seventy-five, when Waller was only seventy. His name as a speaker occurs often in Grey's Collections, but I have found no extracts that can be more quoted as exhibiting sallies of gaiety than cogency of argument.

He was of such consideration, that his remarks were circulated and recorded. When the Duke of York's influence was high, both in Scotland and England, it drew, says Burnet, a lively reflection from Waller, the celebrated wit. He said, "The House of Commons had resolved that the duke should not reign after the king's death: but the king, in opposition to them, had resolved that he should reign even in his life." If there appear no extraordinary "liveliness" in this "remark," yet its reception proves its speaker to have been a "celebrated wit," to have had a name which men of wit were proud of mentioning.

He did not suffer his reputation to die gradually away, which may easily happen in a long life, but renewed his claim to poetical distinction from time to time, as occasions were offered, either by public events or private incidents; and, contenting himself with the influence of his Muse, or loving quiet better than influence, he never accepted any office of magistracy.

He was not, however, without some attention to his fortune, for he asked from the king (in 1665) the provostship of Eton College, and obtained it; but Clarendon refused to put the seal to the grant, alleging that it could be held only by a clergyman.

It is known that Sir Henry Wotton qualified himself for it by deacon's orders.

To this opposition, the Biographia imputes the violence and acrimony with which Waller joined Buckingham's faction in the prosecution of Clarendon. The motive was illiberal and dishonest, and showed that more than sixty years had not been able to teach him morality. His accusation is such as conscience can hardly be supposed to dictate without the help of malice. "We were to be governed by Janizaries instead of Parliaments, and are in danger from a worse plot than that of the fifth of November; then, if the Lords and Commons had been destroyed, there had been a succession; but here both had been destroyed for ever." This is the language of a man who is glad of an opportunity to rail, and ready to sacrifice truth to interest at one time, and to anger at another.

A year after the chancellor's banishment, another vacancy gave him encouragement for another petition, which the king referred to the Council, who, after hearing the question argued by lawyers for three days, determined that the office could be held only by a clergyman, according to the Act of Uniformity, since the provosts had always received institution as for a parsonage from the Bishops of Lincoln. The king then said he could not break the law which he had made; and Dr. Zachary Cradock, famous for a single sermon, at most for two sermons, was chosen by the Fellows.

That he asked anything else is not known; it is certain that he

obtained nothing, though he continued obsequious to the court through the rest of Charles's reign.

At the accession of King James (in 1685) he was chosen for Parliament, being then fourscore, at Saltash, in Cornwall; and wrote a Presage of the Downfall of the Turkish Empire, which he presented to the king on his birthday. It is remarked, by his commentator Fenton, that in reading Tasso he had early imbibed a veneration for the heroes of the Holy War, and a zealous enmity to the Turks, which never left him. James, however, having soon after begun what he thought a holy war at home, made haste to put all molestation of the Turks out of his power.

James treated him with kindness and familiarity, of which instances are given by the writer of his life. One day, taking him into the closet, the king asked him how he liked one of the pictures: "My eyes," said Waller, "are dim, and I do not know it." The king said it was the Princess of Orange. "She is," said Waller, "like the greatest woman in the world." The king asked who was that; and was answered, Queen Elizabeth. "I wonder," said the king, "you should think so; but I must confess she had a wise council." "And, Sir," said Waller, "did you ever know a fool choose a wise one?" Such is the story, which I once heard of some other man. Pointed axioms, and acute replies, fly loose about the world, and are assigned successively to those whom it may be the fashion to celebrate.

When the king knew that he was about to marry his daughter to Dr. Birch, a clergyman, he ordered a French gentleman to

tell him that "the king wondered he could think of marrying his daughter to a falling church." "The king," said Waller, "does me great honour in taking notice of my domestic affairs; but I have lived long enough to observe that this falling church has got a trick of rising again."

He took notice to his friends of the king's conduct; and said that "he would be left like a whale upon the strand." Whether he was privy to any of the transactions that ended in the revolution is not known. His heir joined the Prince of Orange.

Having now attained an age beyond which the laws of nature seldom suffer life to be extended, otherwise than by a future state, he seems to have turned his mind upon preparation for the decisive hour, and therefore consecrated his poetry to devotion.

It is pleasing to discover that his piety was without weakness; that his intellectual powers continued vigorous; and that the lines which he composed when "he, for age, could neither read nor write," are not inferior to the effusions of his youth.

Towards the decline of life he bought a small house, with a little land, at Coleshill; and said "he should be glad to die, like the stag, where he was roused." This, however, did not happen.

When he was at Beaconsfield, he found his legs grow tumid: he went to Windsor, where Sir Charles Scarborough then attended the king, and requested him, as both a friend and physician, to tell him "what that swelling meant." "Sir," answered Scarborough, "your blood will run no longer." Waller repeated some lines of Virgil, and went home to die.

As the disease increased upon him, he composed himself for his departure; and calling upon Dr. Birch to give him the holy sacrament, he desired his children to take it with him, and made an earnest declaration of his faith in Christianity. It now appeared what part of his conversation with the great could be remembered with delight. He related, that being present when the Duke of Buckingham talked profanely before King Charles, he said to him, "My lord, I am a great deal older than your grace and have, I believe, heard more arguments for atheism than ever your grace did; but I have lived long enough to see there is nothing in them; and so, I hope, your grace will."

He died October 21, 1687, and was buried at Beaconsfield, with a monument erected by his son's executors, for which Rymer wrote the inscription, and which I hope is now rescued from dilapidation.

He left several children by his second wife, of whom his daughter was married to Dr. Birch. Benjamin, the eldest son, was disinherited, and sent to New Jersey as wanting common understanding. Edmund, the second son, inherited the estate, and represented Agmondesham in parliament, but at last turned quaker. William, the third son, was a merchant in London. Stephen, the fourth, was an eminent doctor of laws, and one of the commissioners for the union. There is said to have been a fifth, of whom no account has descended.

The character of Waller, both moral and intellectual, has been drawn by Clarendon, to whom he was familiarly known, with

nicety, which certainly none to whom he was not known can presume to emulate. It is therefore inserted here, with such remarks as others have supplied; after which, nothing remains but a critical examination of his poetry.

"Edmund Waller," says Clarendon, "was born to a very fair estate, by the parsimony, or frugality, of a wise father and mother; and he thought it so commendable an advantage, that he resolved to improve it with his utmost care, upon which in his nature he was too much intent; and in order to that, he was so much reserved and retired, that he was scarcely ever heard of, till by his address and dexterity he had gotten a very rich wife in the city, against all the recommendation and countenance and authority of the court, which was thoroughly engaged on the behalf of Mr. Crofts, and which used to be successful, in that age, against any opposition. He had the good fortune to have an alliance and friendship with Dr. Morley, who had assisted and instructed him in the reading many good books, to which his natural parts and promptitude inclined him, especially the poets; and at the age when other men used to give over writing verses (for he was near thirty years when he first engaged himself in that exercise, at least that he was known to do so), he surprised the town with two or three pieces of that kind; as if a tenth Muse had been newly born to cherish drooping poetry. The doctor at that time brought him into that company which was most celebrated for good conversation, where he was received and esteemed with great applause and respect. He was a very pleasant discourser

in earnest and in jest, and therefore very grateful to all kind of company, where he was not the less esteemed for being very rich.

"He had been even nursed in parliaments, where he sat when he was very young; and so, when they were resumed again (after a long intermission) he appeared in those assemblies with great advantage; having a graceful way of speaking, and by thinking much on several arguments (which his temper and complexion, that had much of melancholic, inclined him to), he seemed often to speak upon the sudden, when the occasion had only administered the opportunity of saying what he had thoroughly considered, which gave a great lustre to all he said; which yet was rather of delight than weight. There needs no more be said to extol the excellence and power of his wit, and pleasantness of his conversation, than that it was of magnitude enough to cover a world of very great faults; that is, so to cover them, that they were not taken notice of to his reproach, viz., a narrowness in his nature to the lowest degree; an abjectness and want of courage to support him in any virtuous undertaking; an insinuation and servile flattery to the height, the vainest and most imperious nature could be contented with; that it preserved and won his life from those who most resolved to take it, and in an occasion in which he ought to have been ambitious to have lost it; and then preserved him again from the reproach and the contempt that was due to him for so preserving it, and for vindicating it at such a price that it had power to reconcile him to those whom he had most offended and provoked; and continued to his age with that

rare felicity, that his company was acceptable where his spirit was odious; and he was at least pitied where he was most detested."

Such is the account of Clarendon; on which it may not be improper to make some remarks.

"He was very little known till he had obtained a rich wife in the city."

He obtained a rich wife about the age of three-and-twenty; an age, before which few men are conspicuous much to their advantage. He was now, however, in parliament and at court; and, if he spent part of his time in privacy, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he endeavoured the improvement of his mind as well as his fortune.

That Clarendon might misjudge the motive of his retirement is the more probable, because he has evidently mistaken the commencement of his poetry, which he supposes him not to have attempted before thirty. As his first pieces were perhaps not printed, the succession of his compositions was not known; and Clarendon, who cannot be imagined to have been very studious of poetry, did not rectify his first opinion by consulting Waller's book.

Clarendon observes, that he was introduced to the wits of the age by Dr. Morley; but the writer of his life relates that he was already among them, when, hearing a noise in the street, and inquiring the cause, they found a son of Ben Jonson under an arrest. This was Morley, whom Waller set free at the expense of one hundred pounds, took him into the country as director of

his studies, and then procured him admission into the company of the friends of literature. Of this fact Clarendon had a nearer knowledge than the biographer, and is therefore more to be credited.

The account of Waller's parliamentary eloquence is seconded by Burnet, who, though he calls him "the delight of the House," adds, that "he was only concerned to say that which should make him be applauded, he never laid the business of the House to heart, being a vain and empty, though a witty man."

Of his insinuation and flattery it is not unreasonable to believe that the truth is told. Ascham, in his elegant description of those whom in modern language we term wits, says, that they are "open flatterers, and private mockers." Waller showed a little of both, when, upon sight of the Duchess of Newcastle's verses on the Death of a Stag, he declared that he would give all his own compositions to have written them, and being charged with the exorbitance of his adulation, answered, that "nothing was too much to be given, that a lady might be saved from the disgrace of such a vile performance." This, however, was no very mischievous or very unusual deviation from truth; had his hypocrisy been confined to such transactions, he might have been forgiven, though not praised: for who forbears to flatter an author or a lady?

Of the laxity of his political principles, and the weakness of his resolution, he experienced the natural effect, by losing the esteem of every party. From Cromwell he had only his recall;

and from Charles the Second, who delighted in his company, he obtained only the pardon of his relation Hampden, and the safety of Hampden's son.

As far as conjecture can be made from the whole of his writing, and his conduct, he was habitually and deliberately a friend to monarchy. His deviation towards democracy proceeded from his connexion with Hampden, for whose sake he prosecuted Crawley with great bitterness; and the invective which he pronounced on that occasion was so popular, that twenty thousand copies are said by his biographer to have been sold in one day.

It is confessed that his faults still left him many friends, at least many companions. His convivial power of pleasing is universally acknowledged; but those who conversed with him intimately, found him not only passionate, especially in his old age, but resentful; so that the interposition of friends was sometimes necessary.

His wit and his poetry naturally connected him with the polite writers of his time: he was joined with Lord Buckhurst in the translation of Corneille's Pompey; and is said to have added his help to that of Cowley in the original draft of the Rehearsal.

The care of his fortune, which Clarendon imputes to him in a degree little less than criminal, was either not constant or not successful; for having inherited a patrimony of three thousand five hundred pounds a year in the time of James the First, and augmented at least by one wealthy marriage, he left, about the

time of the Revolution, an income of not more than twelve or thirteen hundred; which, when the different value of money is reckoned, will be found perhaps not more than a fourth part of what he once possessed.

Of this diminution, part was the consequence of the gifts which he was forced to scatter, and the fine which he was condemned to pay at the detection of his plot; and if his estate, as is related in his life, was sequestered, he had probably contracted debts when he lived in exile; for we are told, that at Paris he lived in splendour, and was the only Englishman, except the Lord St. Albans, that kept a table.

His unlucky plot compelled him to sell a thousand a year; of the waste of the rest there is no account, except that he is confessed by his biographer to have been a bad economist. He seems to have deviated from the common practice; to have been a hoarder in his first years, and a squanderer in his last.

Of his course of studies, or choice of books, nothing is known more than that he professed himself unable to read Chapman's translation of Homer without rapture. His opinion concerning the duty of a poet is contained in his declaration, that "he would blot from his works any line that did not contain some motive to virtue."

The characters by which Waller intended to distinguish his writing are sprightliness and dignity; in his smallest pieces, he endeavours to be gay; in the larger to be great. Of his airy and light productions, the chief source is gallantry, that attentive

reverence of female excellence which has descended to us from the Gothic ages. As his poems are commonly occasional, and his addresses personal, he was not so liberally supplied with grand as with soft images; for beauty is more easily found than magnanimity.

The delicacy, which he cultivated, restrains him to a certain nicety and caution, even when he writes upon the slightest matter. He has, therefore, in his whole volume, nothing burlesque, and seldom anything ludicrous or familiar. He seems always to do his best; though his subjects are often unworthy of his care.

It is not easy to think without some contempt on an author, who is growing illustrious in his own opinion by verses, at one time, "To a Lady, who can do anything but sleep, when she pleases;" at another, "To a Lady who can sleep when she pleases;" now, "To a Lady, on her passing through a crowd of people;" then, "On a braid of divers colours woven by four Ladies;" "On a tree cut in paper;" or, "To a Lady, from whom he received the copy of verses on the paper-tree, which, for many years, had been missing."

Genius now and then produces a lucky trifle. We still read the Dove of Anacreon, and Sparrow of Catullus: and a writer naturally pleases himself with a performance, which owes nothing to the subject. But compositions merely pretty have the fate of other pretty things, and are quitted in time for something useful; they are flowers fragrant and fair, but of short duration; or they are blossoms to be valued only as they foretell fruits.

Among Waller's little poems are some, which their excellency ought to secure from oblivion; as, To Amoret, comparing the different modes of regard with which he looks on her and Sacharissa; and the verses on Love, that begin, "Anger in hasty words or blows."

In others he is not equally successful; sometimes his thoughts are deficient, and sometimes his expression.

The numbers are not always musical; as,

> Fair Venus, in thy soft arms
> The god of rage confine:
> For thy whispers are the charms
> Which only can divert his fierce design.
> What though he frown, and to tumult do incline;
> Thou the flame
> Kindled in his breast canst tame
> With that snow which unmelted lies on thine.

He seldom indeed fetches an amorous sentiment from the depths of science; his thoughts are for the most part easily understood, and his images such as the superfices of nature readily supplies; he has a just claim to popularity, because he writes to common degrees of knowledge; and is free at least from philosophical pedantry, unless perhaps the end of a song to the Sun may be excepted, in which he is too much a Copernican. To which may be added the simile of the "palm" in the verses "on her passing through a crowd;" and a line in a more serious poem

on the Restoration, about vipers and treacle, which can only be understood by those who happen to know the composition of the Theriaca.

His thoughts are sometimes hyperbolical and his images unnatural

> The plants admire,
> No less than those of old did Orpheus' lyre;
> If she sit down, with tops all tow'rds her bow'd,
> They round about her into arbours crowd;
> Or if she walks, in even ranks they stand,
> Like some well-marshall'd and obsequious band.

In another place:

> While in the park I sing, the listening deer
> Attend my passion, and forget to fear:
> When to the beeches I report my flame,
> They bow their heads, as if they felt the same.
> To gods appealing, when I reach their bowers
> With loud complaints they answer me in showers.
> To thee a wild and cruel soul is given,
> More deaf than trees, and prouder than the Heaven!

On the head of a stag:

> O fertile head! which every year
> Could such a crop of wonder bear!

The teeming earth did never bring,
So soon, so hard, so large a thing:
Which might it never have been cast,
Each year's growth added to the last,
These lofty branches had supplied
The earth's bold sons' prodigious pride:
Heaven with these engines had been scaled,
When mountains heap'd on mountains fail'd.

Sometimes having succeeded in the first part, he makes a feeble conclusion. In the song of "Sacharissa's and Amoret's Friendship," the two last stanzas ought to have been omitted.

His images of gallantry are not always in the highest degree delicate.

Then shall my love this doubt displace
  And gain such trust that I may come
And banquet sometimes on thy face,
  But make my constant meals at home.

Some applications may be thought too remote and unconsequential; as in the verses on the Lady Dancing:

  The sun in figures such as these
Joys with the moon to play:
  To the sweet strains they advance,
Which do result from their own spheres;
  As this nymph's dance

Moves with the numbers which she hears.

Sometimes a thought, which might perhaps fill a distich, is expanded and attenuated till it grows weak and almost evanescent.

Chloris! since first our calm of peace
  Was frighted hence, this good we find,
Your favours with your fears increase,
  And growing mischiefs make you kind.
So the fair tree, which still preserves
  Her fruit, and state, while no wind blows,
In storms from that uprightness swerves;
  And the glad earth about her strows
  With treasure from her yielding boughs.

His images are not always distinct; as in the following passage, he confounds *Love* as a person with *Love* as a passion:

Some other nymphs, with colours faint,
And pencil slow, may Cupid paint,
And a weak heart in time destroy;
She has a stamp, and prints the boy;
Can, with a single look, inflame
The coldest breast, the rudest tame.

His sallies of casual flattery are sometimes elegant and happy, as that in return for the Silver Pen; and sometimes empty and

trifling, as that upon the Card torn by the Queen. There are a few lines written in the Duchess's Tasso, which he is said by Fenton to have kept a summer under correction. It happened to Waller, as to others, that his success was not always in proportion to his labour.

Of these pretty compositions, neither the beauties nor the faults deserve much attention. The amorous verses have this to recommend them, that they are less hyperbolical than those of some other poets. Waller is not always at the last gasp; he does not die of a frown, nor live upon a smile. There is, however, too much love, and too many trifles. Little things are made too important: and the Empire of Beauty is represented as exerting its influence further than can be allowed by the multiplicity of human passions, and the variety of human wants. Such books, therefore, may be considered as showing the world under a false appearance, and, so far as they obtain credit from the young and unexperienced, as misleading expectation, and misguiding practice.

Of his nobler and more weighty performances, the greater part is panegyrical: for of praise he was very lavish, as is observed by his imitator, Lord Lansdowne:

> No satyr stalks within the hallow'd ground,
> But queens and heroines, kings and gods abound;
> Glory and arms and love are all the sound.

In the first poem, on the danger of the prince on the coast

of Spain, there is a puerile and ridiculous mention of Arion at the beginning; and the last paragraph, on the cable, is in part ridiculously mean, and in part ridiculously tumid. The poem, however, is such as may be justly praised, without much allowance for the state of our poetry and language at that time.

The two next poems are upon the king's behaviour at the death of Buckingham, and upon his Navy.

He has, in the first, used the pagan deities with great propriety:

> 'Twas want of such a precedent as this
> Made the old heathens frame their gods amiss.

In the poem on the Navy, those lines are very noble which suppose the king's power secure against a second deluge; so noble, that it were almost criminal to remark the mistake of "centre" for "surface," or to say that the empire of the sea would be worth little if it were not that the waters terminate in land.

The poem upon Sallee has forcible sentiments; but the conclusion is feeble. That on the Repairs of St. Paul's has something vulgar and obvious; such as the mention of Amphion; and something violent and harsh: as,

> So all our minds with his conspire to grace
> The Gentiles' great apostle and deface
> Those state obscuring sheds, that like a chain
> Seem'd to confine, and fetter him again:
> Which the glad saint shakes off at his command,

As once the viper from his sacred hand.
So joys the aged oak, when we divide
The creeping ivy from his injured side.

Of the two last couplets, the first is extravagant, and the second mean.

His praise of the Queen is too much exaggerated; and the thought, that he "saves lovers, by cutting off hope, as gangrenes are cured by lopping the limb," presents nothing to the mind but disgust and horror.

Of the Battle of the Summer Islands, it seems not easy to say whether it is intended to raise terror or merriment. The beginning is too splendid for jest, and the conclusion too light for seriousness. The versification is studied, the scenes are diligently displayed, and the images artfully amplified; but as it ends neither in joy nor sorrow, it will scarcely be read a second time.

The panegyric upon Cromwell has obtained from the public a very liberal dividend of praise, which, however, cannot be said to have been unjustly lavished; for such a series of verses had rarely appeared before in the English language. Of the lines some are grand, some are graceful, and all are musical. There is now and then a feeble verse; or a trifling thought; but its great fault is the choice of its hero.

The poem of the War with Spain begins with lines more vigorous and striking than Waller is accustomed to produce. The succeeding parts are variegated with better passages and

worse. There is something too farfetched in the comparison of the Spaniards drawing the English on by saluting St. Lucar with cannon, "to lambs awakening the lion by bleating." The fate of the Marquis and his Lady, who were burnt in their ship, would have moved more, had the poet not made him die like the Phoenix, because he had spices about him, nor expressed their affection and their end by a conceit at once false and vulgar:

> Alive, in equal flames of love they burn'd,
> And now together are to ashes turn'd.

The verses to Charles, on his return, were doubtless intended to counterbalance the panegyric on Cromwell. If it has been thought inferior to that with which it is naturally compared, the cause of its deficience has been already remarked.

The remaining pieces it is not necessary to examine singly. They must be supposed to have faults and beauties of the same kind with the rest. The Sacred Poems, however, deserve particular regard; they were the work of Waller's declining life, of those hours in which he looked upon the fame and the folly of the time past with the sentiments which his great predecessor Petrarch bequeathed to posterity, upon his review of that love and poetry which have given him immortality.

That natural jealousy which makes every man unwilling to allow much excellence in another, always produces a disposition to believe that the mind grows old with the body; and that he,

whom we are now forced to confess superior, is hastening daily to a level with ourselves. By delighting to think this of the living, we learn to think it of the dead; and Fenton, with all his kindness for Waller, has the luck to mark the exact time when his genius passed the zenith, which he places at his fifty-fifth year.

This is to allot the mind but a small portion. Intellectual decay is doubtless not uncommon; but it seems not to be universal. Newton was in his eighty-fifth year improving his chronology, a few days before his death; and Waller appears not, in my opinion, to have lost at eighty-two any part of his poetical power.

His Sacred Poems do not please like some of his other works; but before the fatal fifty-five, had he written on the same subjects, his success would hardly have been better.

It has been the frequent lamentation of good men that verse has been too little applied to the purposes of worship, and many attempts have been made to animate devotion by pious poetry. That they have very seldom attained their end is sufficiently known, and it may not be improper to inquire why they have miscarried.

Let no pious ear be offended if I advance, in opposition to many authorities, that poetical devotion cannot often please. The doctrines of religion may indeed be defended in a didactic poem; and he, who has the happy power of arguing in verse, will not lose it because his subject is sacred. A poet may describe the beauty and the grandeur of nature, the flowers of the spring, and the harvests of autumn, the vicissitudes of the tide, and the

revolutions of the sky, and praise the Maker for his works, in lines which no reader shall lay aside. The subject of the disputation is not piety, but the motives to piety; that of the description is not God, but the works of God.

Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical. Man, admitted to implore the mercy of his Creator, and plead the merits of his Redeemer, is already in a higher state than poetry can confer.

The essence of poetry is invention; such invention as by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights. The topics of devotion are few, and being few are universally known; but, few as they are, they can be made no more; they can receive no grace from novelty of sentiment, and very little from novelty of expression.

Poetry pleases by exhibiting an idea more grateful to the mind than things themselves afford. This effect proceeds from the display of those parts of nature which attract, and the concealment of those which repel, the imagination: but religion must be shown as it is; suppression and addition equally corrupt it; and such as it is, it is known already.

From poetry the reader justly expects, and from good poetry always obtains, the enlargement of his comprehension and elevation of his fancy: but this is rarely to be hoped by Christians from metrical devotion. Whatever is great, desirable, or tremendous, is comprised in the name of the Supreme Being. Omnipotence cannot be exalted; Infinity cannot be amplified;

Perfection cannot be improved.

The employments of pious meditation are Faith, Thanksgiving, Repentance, and Supplication. Faith, invariably uniform, cannot be invested by fancy with decorations.

Thanksgiving, the most joyful of all holy effusions, yet addressed to a Being without passions, is confined to a few modes, and is to be felt rather then expressed. Repentance, trembling in the presence of the judge, is not at leisure for cadences and epithets. Supplication of man to man may diffuse itself through many topics of persuasion; but supplication to God can only cry for mercy.

Of sentiments purely religious, it will be found that the most simple expression is the most sublime. Poetry loses its lustre and its power, because it is applied to the decoration of something more excellent than itself. All that pious verse can do is to help the memory and delight the ear, and for these purposes it may be very useful; but it supplies nothing to the mind. The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestic for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures, is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere.

As much of Waller's reputation was owing to the softness and smoothness of his numbers, it is proper to consider those minute particulars to which a versifier must attend.

He certainly very much excelled in smoothness most of the writers who were living when his poetry commenced. The

poets of Elizabeth had attained an art of modulation, which was afterwards neglected or forgotten. Fairfax was acknowledged by him as his model; and he might have studied with advantage the poem of Davies, which, though merely philosophical, yet seldom leaves the ear ungratified.

But he was rather smooth than strong; of "the full resounding line," which Pope attributes to Dryden, he has given very few examples. The critical decision has given the praise of strength to Denham, and of sweetness to Waller.

His excellence of versification has some abatements. He uses the expletive "do" very frequently; and, though he lived to see it almost universally ejected, was not more careful to avoid it in his last compositions than in his first. Praise had given him confidence; and finding the world satisfied, he satisfied himself.

His rhymes are sometimes weak words: "so" is found to make the rhyme twice in ten lines, and occurs often as a rhyme through his book.

His double rhymes, in heroic verse, have been censured by Mrs. Phillips, who was his rival in the translation of Corneille's "Pompey;" and more faults might be found were not the inquiry below attention.

He sometimes uses the obsolete termination of verbs, as "waxeth," "affecteth;" and sometimes retains the final syllable of the preterite, as "amazed," "supposed," of which I know not whether it is not to the detriment of our language that we have totally rejected them.

Of triplets he is sparing; but he did not wholly forbear them: of an Alexandrine he has given no example.

The general character of his poetry is elegance and gaiety. He is never pathetic, and very rarely sublime. He seems neither to have had a mind much elevated by nature nor amplified by learning. His thoughts are such as a liberal conversation and large acquaintance with life would easily supply. They had however then, perhaps, that grace of novelty which they are now often supposed to want by those who, having already found them in later books, do not know or inquire who produced them first. This treatment is unjust. Let not the original author lose by his imitators.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.