

# SAMUEL JOHNSON

JOHNSON'S LIVES OF  
THE POETS. VOLUME 2

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*Johnson's Lives of the Poets – Volume 2:*

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# **Samuel Johnson Johnson's Lives of the Poets – Volume 2**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This volume contains a record of twenty lives, of which only one—that of Edward Young—is treated at length. It completes our edition of Johnson's Lives of the Poets, from which a few only of the briefest and least important have been omitted.

The eldest of the Poets here discussed were Samuel Garth, Charles Montague (Lord Halifax), and William King, who were born within the years 1660-63. Next in age were Addison's friend Ambrose Philips, and Nicholas Rowe the dramatist, who was also the first editor of Shakespeare's plays after the four folios had appeared. Ambrose Philips and Rowe were born in 1671 and 1673, and Isaac Watts in 1674. Thomas Parnell, born in 1679, would follow next, nearly of like age with Young, whose birth-year was 1681. Pope's friend John Gay was of Pope's age, born in 1688, two years later than Addison's friend Thomas Tickell, who was born in 1686. Next in the course of years came, in 1692, William Somerville, the author of "The Chace." John Dyer, who wrote "Grongar Hill," and James Thomson, who wrote the

"Seasons," were both born in the year 1700. They were two of three poets—Allan Ramsay, the third—who, almost at the same time, wrote verse instinct with a fresh sense of outward Nature which was hardly to be found in other writers of that day. David Mallet, Thomson's college-friend and friend of after-years—who shares with Thomson the curiosity of critics who would decide which of them wrote "Rule Britannia"—was of Thomson's age.

The other writers of whose lives Johnson here gives his note were men born in the beginning of the eighteenth century: Gilbert West, the translator of Pindar, in 1706; George Lyttelton, in 1709. William Shenstone, whose sense of Nature, although true, was mixed with the conventions of his time, and who once asked a noble friend to open a waterfall in the garden upon which the poet spent his little patrimony, was born in 1714; Thomas Gray, in 1716; William Collins, in 1720; and Mark Akenside, in 1721. In Collins, while he lived with loss of reason, Johnson, who had fears for himself, took pathetic interest. Akenside could not interest him much. Akenside made his mark when young with "The Pleasures of Imagination," a good poem, according to the fashion of the time, when read with due consideration as a young man's first venture for fame. He spent much of the rest of his life in overloading it with valueless additions. The writer who begins well should let well alone, and, instead of tinkering at bygone work, follow the course of his own ripening thought. He should seek new ways of doing worthy service in the years of labour left to him.

H. M.

# KING

William King was born in London in 1663; the son of Ezekiel King, a gentleman. He was allied to the family of Clarendon.

From Westminster School, where he was a scholar on the foundation under the care of Dr. Busby, he was at eighteen elected to Christ Church in 1681; where he is said to have prosecuted his studies with so much intensesness and activity, that before he was eight years' standing he had read over, and made remarks upon, twenty-two thousand odd hundred books and manuscripts. The books were certainly not very long, the manuscripts not very difficult, nor the remarks very large; for the calculator will find that he despatched seven a day for every day of his eight years; with a remnant that more than satisfies most other students. He took his degree in the most expensive manner, as a **GRAND COMPOUNDER**; whence it is inferred that he inherited a considerable fortune.

In 1688, the same year in which he was made Master of Arts, he published a confutation of Varillas's account of Wickliffe; and, engaging in the study of the civil law, became Doctor in 1692, and was admitted advocate at Doctors' Commons.

He had already made some translations from the French, and written some humorous and satirical pieces; when, in 1694, Molesworth published his "Account of Denmark," in which he treats the Danes and their monarch with great contempt; and

takes the opportunity of insinuating those wild principles by which he supposes liberty to be established, and by which his adversaries suspect that all subordination and government is endangered.

This book offended Prince George; and the Danish Minister presented a memorial against it. The principles of its author did not please Dr. King; and therefore he undertook to confute part, and laugh at the rest. The controversy is now forgotten: and books of this kind seldom live long when interest and resentment have ceased.

In 1697 he mingled in the controversy between Boyle and Bentley; and was one of those who tried what wit could perform in opposition to learning, on a question which learning only could decide.

In 1699 was published by him "A Journey to London," after the method of Dr. Martin Lister, who had published "A Journey to Paris." And in 1700 he satirised the Royal Society—at least, Sir Hans Sloane, their president—in two dialogues, intituled "The Transactioner."

Though he was a regular advocate in the courts of civil and canon law, he did not love his profession, nor, indeed, any kind of business which interrupted his voluptuary dreams or forced him to rouse from that indulgence in which only he could find delight. His reputation as a civilian was yet maintained by his judgments in the Courts of Delegates, and raised very high by the address and knowledge which he discovered in 1700, when he defended

the Earl of Anglesea against his lady, afterwards Duchess of Buckinghamshire, who sued for a divorce and obtained it.

The expense of his pleasures, and neglect of business, had now lessened his revenues; and he was willing to accept of a settlement in Ireland, where, about 1702, he was made Judge of the Admiralty, Commissioner of the Prizes, Keeper of the Records in Birmingham's Tower, and Vicar-General to Dr. Marsh, the primate.

But it is vain to put wealth within the reach of him who will not stretch out his hand to take it. King soon found a friend, as idle and thoughtless as himself, in Upton, one of the judges, who had a pleasant house called Mountown, near Dublin, to which King frequently retired; delighting to neglect his interest, forget his cares, and desert his duty.

Here he wrote "Mully of Mountown," a poem; by which, though fanciful readers in the pride of sagacity have given it a poetical interpretation, was meant originally no more than it expressed, as it was dictated only by the author's delight in the quiet of Mountown.

In 1708, when Lord Wharton was sent to govern Ireland, King returned to London, with his poverty, his idleness, and his wit; and published some essays, called "Useful Transactions." His "Voyage to the Island of Cajamai" is particularly commended. He then wrote the "Art of Love," a poem remarkable, notwithstanding its title, for purity of sentiment; and in 1709 imitated Horace in an "Art of Cookery," which he published with

some letters to Dr. Lister.

In 1710 he appeared as a lover of the Church, on the side of Sacheverell; and was supposed to have concurred at least in the projection of the Examiner. His eyes were open to all the operations of Whiggism; and he bestowed some strictures upon Dr. Kennet's adulatory sermon at the funeral of the Duke of Devonshire.

"The History of the Heathen Gods," a book composed for schools, was written by him in 1711. The work is useful, but might have been produced without the powers of King. The same year he published "Rufinus," an historical essay; and a poem intended to dispose the nation to think as he thought of the Duke of Marlborough and his adherents.

In 1711, competence, if not plenty, was again put into his power. He was, without the trouble of attendance or the mortification of a request, made Gazetteer. Swift, Freind, Prior, and other men of the same party, brought him the key of the Gazetteer's office. He was now again placed in a profitable employment, and again threw the benefit away. An Act of Insolvency made his business at that time particularly troublesome; and he would not wait till hurry should be at an end, but impatiently resigned it, and returned to his wonted indigence and amusements.

One of his amusements at Lambeth, where he resided, was to mortify Dr. Tenison, the archbishop, by a public festivity on the surrender of Dunkirk to Hill; an event with which Tenison's

political bigotry did not suffer him to be delighted. King was resolved to counteract his sullenness, and at the expense of a few barrels of ale filled the neighbourhood with honest merriment.

In the autumn of 1712 his health declined; he grew weaker by degrees, and died on Christmas Day. Though his life had not been without irregularity, his principles were pure and orthodox, and his death was pious.

After this relation it will be naturally supposed that his poems were rather the amusements of idleness than efforts of study; that he endeavoured rather to divert than astonish; that his thoughts seldom aspired to sublimity; and that, if his verse was easy and his images familiar, he attained what he desired. His purpose is to be merry; but perhaps, to enjoy his mirth, it may be sometimes necessary to think well of his opinions.

# HALIFAX

The life of the Earl of Halifax was properly that of an artful and active statesman, employed in balancing parties, contriving expedients, and combating opposition, and exposed to the vicissitudes of advancement and degradation; but in this collection poetical merit is the claim to attention; and the account which is here to be expected may properly be proportioned, not to his influence in the State, but to his rank among the writers of verse.

Charles Montague was born April 16, 1661, at Horton, in Northamptonshire, the son of Mr. George Montague, a younger son of the Earl of Manchester. He was educated first in the country, and then removed to Westminster, where, in 1677, he was chosen a King's Scholar, and recommended himself to Busby by his felicity in extemporary epigrams. He contracted a very intimate friendship with Mr. Stepney; and in 1682, when Stepney was elected at Cambridge, the election of Montague being not to proceed till the year following, he was afraid lest by being placed at Oxford he might be separated from his companion, and therefore solicited to be removed to Cambridge, without waiting for the advantages of another year.

It seemed indeed time to wish for a removal, for he was already a schoolboy of one-and-twenty.

His relation, Dr. Montague, was then Master of the college in

which he was placed a Fellow-Commoner, and took him under his particular care. Here he commenced an acquaintance with the great Newton, which continued through his life, and was at last attested by a legacy.

In 1685 his verses on the death of King Charles made such an impression on the Earl of Dorset that he was invited to town, and introduced by that universal patron to the other wits. In 1687 he joined with Prior in "The City Mouse and the Country Mouse," a burlesque of Dryden's "Hind and Panther." He signed the invitation to the Prince of Orange, and sat in the Convention. He about the same time married the Countess Dowager of Manchester, and intended to have taken Orders; but, afterwards altering his purpose, he purchased for 1,500 pounds the place of one of the clerks of the Council.

After he had written his epistle on the victory of the Boyne, his patron Dorset introduced him to King William with this expression, "Sir, I have brought a MOUSE to wait on your Majesty." To which the King is said to have replied, "You do well to put me in the way of making a MAN of him;" and ordered him a pension of 500 pounds. This story, however current, seems to have been made after the event. The King's answer implies a greater acquaintance with our proverbial and familiar diction than King William could possibly have attained.

In 1691, being member of the House of Commons, he argued warmly in favour of a law to grant the assistance of counsel in trials for high treason; and in the midst of his speech falling into

some confusion, was for a while silent; but, recovering himself, observed, "how reasonable it was to allow counsel to men called as criminals before a court of justice, when it appeared how much the presence of that assembly could disconcert one of their own body."

After this he rose fast into honours and employments, being made one of the Commissioners of the Treasury, and called to the Privy Council. In 1694 he became Chancellor of the Exchequer; and the next year engaged in the great attempt of the recoinage, which was in two years happily completed. In 1696 he projected the GENERAL FUND and raised the credit of the Exchequer; and after inquiry concerning a grant of Irish Crown lands, it was determined by a vote of the Commons that Charles Montague, Esq., HAD DESERVED HIS MAJESTY'S FAVOUR. In 1698, being advanced to the first Commission of the Treasury, he was appointed one of the regency in the King's absence: the next year he was made Auditor of the Exchequer, and the year after created Baron Halifax. He was, however, impeached by the Commons; but the Articles were dismissed by the Lords.

At the accession of Queen Anne he was dismissed from the Council; and in the first Parliament of her reign was again attacked by the Commons, and again escaped by the protection of the Lords. In 1704 he wrote an answer to Bromley's speech against occasional conformity. He headed the inquiry into the danger of the Church. In 1706 he proposed and negotiated the

Union with Scotland; and when the Elector of Hanover received the Garter, after the Act had passed for securing the Protestant Succession, he was appointed to carry the ensigns of the Order to the Electoral Court. He sat as one of the judges of Sacheverell, but voted for a mild sentence. Being now no longer in favour, he contrived to obtain a writ for summoning the Electoral Prince to Parliament as Duke of Cambridge.

At the Queen's death he was appointed one of the regents; and at the accession of George I. was made Earl of Halifax, Knight of the Garter, and First Commissioner of the Treasury, with a grant to his nephew of the reversion of the Auditorship of the Exchequer. More was not to be had, and this he kept but a little while; for on the 19th of May, 1715, he died of an inflammation of his lungs.

Of him, who from a poet became a patron of poets, it will be readily believed that the works would not miss of celebration. Addison began to praise him early, and was followed or accompanied by other poets; perhaps by almost all, except Swift and Pope, who forbore to flatter him in his life, and after his death spoke of him—Swift with slight censure, and Pope, in the character of Bufo, with acrimonious contempt.

He was, as Pope says, "fed with dedications;" for Tickell affirms that no dedication was unrewarded. To charge all unmerited praise with the guilt of flattery, and to suppose that the encomiast always knows and feels the falsehoods of his assertions, is surely to discover great ignorance of human nature

and human life. In determinations depending not on rules, but on experience and comparison, judgment is always in some degree subject to affection. Very near to admiration is the wish to admire.

Every man willingly gives value to the praise which he receives, and considers the sentence passed in his favour as the sentence of discernment. We admire in a friend that understanding that selected us for confidence; we admire more, in a patron, that judgment which, instead of scattering bounty indiscriminately, directed it to us; and, if the patron be an author, those performances which gratitude forbids us to blame, affection will easily dispose us to exalt.

To these prejudices, hardly culpable, interest adds a power always operating, though not always, because not willingly, perceived. The modesty of praise wears gradually away; and perhaps the pride of patronage may be in time so increased that modest praise will no longer please.

Many a blandishment was practised upon Halifax which he would never have known had he no other attractions than those of his poetry, of which a short time has withered the beauties. It would now be esteemed no honour, by a contributor to the monthly bundles of verses, to be told that, in strains either familiar or solemn, he sings like Montague.

# PARNELL

The life of Dr. Parnell is a task which I should very willingly decline, since it has been lately written by Goldsmith, a man of such variety of powers, and such felicity of performance, that he always seemed to do best that which he was doing; a man who had the art of being minute without tediousness, and general without confusion; whose language was copious without exuberance, exact without constraint, and easy without weakness.

What such an author has told, who would tell again? I have made an abstract from his larger narrative; and have this gratification from my attempt, that it gives me an opportunity of paying due tribute to the memory of Goldsmith.

Thomas Parnell was the son of a Commonwealthsman of the same name, who, at the Restoration, left Congleton, in Cheshire, where the family had been established for several centuries, and, settling in Ireland, purchased an estate, which, with his lands in Cheshire, descended to the poet, who was born at Dublin in 1679; and, after the usual education at a grammar school, was, at the age of thirteen, admitted into the College where, in 1700, he became Master of Arts; and was the same year ordained a deacon, though under the canonical age, by a dispensation from the Bishop of Derry.

About three years afterwards he was made a priest and in 1705 Dr. Ashe, the Bishop of Clogher, conferred upon him the

archdeaconry of Clogher. About the same time he married Mrs. Anne Minchin, an amiable lady, by whom he had two sons, who died young, and a daughter, who long survived him.

At the ejection of the Whigs, in the end of Queen Anne's reign, Parnell was persuaded to change his party, not without much censure from those whom he forsook, and was received by the new Ministry as a valuable reinforcement. When the Earl of Oxford was told that Dr. Parnell waited among the crowd in the outer room, he went, by the persuasion of Swift, with his Treasurer's staff in his hand, to inquire for him, and to bid him welcome; and, as may be inferred from Pope's dedication, admitted him as a favourite companion to his convivial hours, but, as it seems often to have happened in those times to the favourites of the great, without attention to his fortune, which, however, was in no great need of improvement.

Parnell, who did not want ambition or vanity, was desirous to make himself conspicuous, and to show how worthy he was of high preferment. As he thought himself qualified to become a popular preacher, he displayed his elocution with great success in the pulpits of London; but the Queen's death putting an end to his expectations, abated his diligence; and Pope represents him as falling from that time into intemperance of wine. That in his latter life he was too much a lover of the bottle, is not denied; but I have heard it imputed to a cause more likely to obtain forgiveness from mankind, the untimely death of a darling son; or, as others tell, the loss of his wife, who died (1712) in the midst of his

expectations.

He was now to derive every future addition to his preferments from his personal interest with his private friends, and he was not long unregarded. He was warmly recommended by Swift to Archbishop King, who gave him a prebend in 1713; and in May, 1716, presented him to the vicarage of Finglass, in the diocese of Dublin, worth 400 pounds a year. Such notice from such a man inclines me to believe that the vice of which he has been accused was not gross or not notorious.

But his prosperity did not last long. His end, whatever was its cause, was now approaching. He enjoyed his preferment little more than a year; for in July, 1717, in his thirty-eighth year, he died at Chester on his way to Ireland.

He seems to have been one of those poets who take delight in writing. He contributed to the papers of that time, and probably published more than he owned. He left many compositions behind him, of which Pope selected those which he thought best, and dedicated them to the Earl of Oxford. Of these Goldsmith has given an opinion, and his criticism it is seldom safe to contradict. He bestows just praise upon "The Rise of Woman," "The Fairy Tale," and "The Pervigilium Veneris;" but has very properly remarked that in "The Battle of Mice and Frogs" the Greek names have not in English their original effect. He tells us that "The Bookworm" is borrowed from Beza; but he should have added with modern applications: and when he discovers that "Gay Bacchus" is translated from Augurellus, he ought to have

remarked that the latter part is purely Parnell's. Another poem, "When Spring Comes On," is, he says, taken from the French. I would add that the description of "Barrenness," in his verses to Pope, was borrowed from Secundus; but lately searching for the passage which I had formerly read, I could not find it. "The Night Piece on Death" is indirectly preferred by Goldsmith to Gray's "Churchyard;" but, in my opinion, Gray has the advantage in dignity, variety, and originality of sentiment. He observes that the story of "The Hermit" is in More's "Dialogues" and Howell's "Letters," and supposes it to have been originally Arabian.

Goldsmith has not taken any notice of "The Elegy to the Old Beauty," which is perhaps the meanest; nor of "The Allegory on Man," the happiest of Parnell's performances. The hint of "The Hymn to Contentment" I suspect to have been borrowed from Cleveland.

The general character of Parnell is not great extent of comprehension or fertility of mind. Of the little that appears, still less is his own. His praise must be derived from the easy sweetness of his diction: in his verses there is more happiness than pains; he is sprightly without effort, and always delights, though he never ravishes; everything is proper, yet everything seems casual. If there is some appearance of elaboration in "The Hermit," the narrative, as it is less airy, is less pleasing. Of his other compositions it is impossible to say whether they are the productions of nature, so excellent as not to want the help of art, or of art so refined as to resemble nature.

This criticism relates only to the pieces published by Pope. Of the large appendages which I find in the last edition, I can only say that I know not whence they came, nor have ever inquired whither they are going. They stand upon the faith of the compilers.

# GARTH

Samuel Garth was of a good family in Yorkshire, and from some school in his own county became a student at Peter House, in Cambridge, where he resided till he became Doctor of Physic on July the 7th, 1691. He was examined before the College at London on March the 12th, 1691-2, and admitted Fellow June 26th, 1693. He was soon so much distinguished by his conversation and accomplishments as to obtain very extensive practice; and, if a pamphlet of those times may be credited, had the favour and confidence of one party, as Radcliffe had of the other. He is always mentioned as a man of benevolence; and it is just to suppose that his desire of helping the helpless disposed him to so much zeal for "The Dispensary;" an undertaking of which some account, however short, is proper to be given.

Whether what Temple says be true, that physicians have had more learning than the other faculties, I will not stay to inquire; but I believe every man has found in physicians great liberality and dignity of sentiment, very prompt effusion of beneficence, and willingness to exert a lucrative art where there is no hope of lucre. Agreeably to this character, the College of Physicians, in July, 1687, published an edict, requiring all the Fellows, Candidates, and Licentiates to give gratuitous advice to the neighbouring poor. This edict was sent to the Court of Aldermen; and, a question being made to whom the appellation

of the POOR should be extended, the College answered that it should be sufficient to bring a testimonial from the clergyman officiating in the parish where the patient resided.

After a year's experience the physicians found their charity frustrated by some malignant opposition, and made to a great degree vain by the high price of physic; they therefore voted, in August, 1688, that the laboratory of the College should be accommodated to the preparation of medicines, and another room prepared for their reception; and that the contributors to the expense should manage the charity.

It was now expected that the apothecaries would have undertaken the care of providing medicines; but they took another course. Thinking the whole design pernicious to their interest, they endeavoured to raise a faction against it in the College, and found some physicians mean enough to solicit their patronage by betraying to them the counsels of the College. The greater part, however, enforced by a new edict, in 1694, the former order of 1687, and sent it to the Mayor and Aldermen, who appointed a committee to treat with the College and settle the mode of administering the charity.

It was desired by the aldermen that the testimonials of churchwardens and overseers should be admitted; and that all hired servants, and all apprentices to handicraftsmen, should be considered as POOR. This likewise was granted by the College.

It was then considered who should distribute the medicines, and who should settle their prices. The physicians procured

some apothecaries to undertake the dispensation, and offered that the warden and company of the apothecaries should adjust the price. This offer was rejected; and the apothecaries who had engaged to assist the charity were considered as traitors to the company, threatened with the imposition of troublesome offices, and deterred from the performance of their engagements. The apothecaries ventured upon public opposition, and presented a kind of remonstrance against the design to the committee of the City, which the physicians condescended to confute: and at last the traders seem to have prevailed among the sons of trade; for the proposal of the College having been considered, a paper of approbation was drawn up, but postponed and forgotten.

The physicians still persisted; and in 1696 a subscription was raised by themselves according to an agreement prefixed to "The Dispensary." The poor were, for a time, supplied with medicines; for how long a time I know not. The medicinal charity, like others, began with ardour, but soon remitted, and at last died gradually away.

About the time of the subscription begins the action of "The Dispensary." The poem, as its subject was present and popular, co-operated with passions and prejudices then prevalent, and, with such auxiliaries to its intrinsic merit, was universally and liberally applauded. It was on the side of charity against the intrigues of interest; and of regular learning against licentious usurpation of medical authority, and was therefore naturally favoured by those who read and can judge of poetry.

In 1697 Garth spoke that which is now called "The Harveian Oration;" which the authors of "The Biographia" mention with more praise than the passage quoted in their notes will fully justify. Garth, speaking of the mischiefs done by quacks, has these expressions: "Non tamen telis vulnerat ista agyrtarum colluvies, sed theriaca quadam magis perniciosa, non pyrrio, sed pulvere nescio quo exotico certat, non globulis plumbeis, sed pilulis aequè lethalibus interficit." This was certainly thought fine by the author, and is still admired by his biographer. In October, 1702, he became one of the censors of the College.

Garth, being an active and zealous Whig, was a member of the Kit-Cat Club, and, by consequence, familiarly known to all the great men of that denomination. In 1710, when the government fell into other hands, he writ to Lord Godolphin, on his dismissal, a short poem, which was criticised in the Examiner, and so successfully either defended or excused by Mr. Addison that, for the sake of the vindication, it ought to be preserved.

At the accession of the present family his merits were acknowledged and rewarded. He was knighted with the sword of his hero, Marlborough; and was made Physician-in-Ordinary to the King, and Physician-General to the army. He then undertook an edition of Ovid's "Metamorphoses," translated by several hands; which he recommended by a preface, written with more ostentation than ability; his notions are half-formed, and his materials immethodically confused. This was his last work. He

died January 18th, 1717-18, and was buried at Harrow-on-the-Hill.

His personal character seems to have been social and liberal. He communicated himself through a very wide extent of acquaintance; and though firm in a party, at a time when firmness included virulence, yet he imparted his kindness to those who were not supposed to favour his principles. He was an early encourager of Pope, and was at once the friend of Addison and of Granville. He is accused of voluptuousness and irreligion; and Pope, who says that "if ever there was a good Christian, without knowing himself to be so, it was Dr. Garth," seems not able to deny what he is angry to hear and loth to confess.

Pope afterwards declared himself convinced that Garth died in the communion of the Church of Rome, having been privately reconciled. It is observed by Lowth that there is less distance than is thought between scepticism and Popery; and that a mind wearied with perpetual doubt, willingly seeks repose in the bosom of an infallible Church.

His poetry has been praised at least equally to its merit. In "The Dispensary" there is a strain of smooth and free versification; but few lines are eminently elegant. No passages fall below mediocrity, and few rise much above it. The plan seems formed without just proportion to the subject; the means and end have no necessary connection. Resnel, in his preface to Pope's Essay, remarks that Garth exhibits no discrimination of characters; and that what any one says might, with equal

propriety, have been said by another. The general design is, perhaps, open to criticism; but the composition can seldom be charged with inaccuracy or negligence. The author never slumbers in self-indulgence; his full vigour is always exerted; scarcely a line is left unfinished; nor is it easy to find an expression used by constraint, or a thought imperfectly expressed. It was remarked by Pope, that "The Dispensary" had been corrected in every edition, and that every change was an improvement. It appears, however, to want something of poetical ardour, and something of general delectation; and therefore, since it has been no longer supported by accidental and intrinsic popularity, it has been scarcely able to support itself.

# ROWE

Nicholas Rowe was born at Little Beckford, in Bedfordshire, in 1673. His family had long possessed a considerable estate, with a good house, at Lambertoun in Devonshire. The ancestor from whom he descended in a direct line received the arms borne by his descendants for his bravery in the Holy War. His father, John Rowe, who was the first that quitted his paternal acres to practise any part of profit, professed the law, and published Benlow's and Dallison's Reports in the reign of James the Second, when, in opposition to the notions then diligently propagated of dispensing power, he ventured to remark how low his authors rated the prerogative. He was made a serjeant, and died April 30, 1692. He was buried in the Temple church.

Nicholas was first sent to a private school at Highgate; and, being afterwards removed to Westminster, was at twelve years chosen one of the King's Scholars. His master was Busby, who suffered none of his scholars to let their powers lie useless; and his exercises in several languages are said to have been written with uncommon degrees of excellence, and yet to have cost him very little labour. At sixteen he had, in his father's opinion, made advances in learning sufficient to qualify him for the study of law, and was entered a student of the Middle Temple, where for some time he read statutes and reports with proficiency proportionate to the force of his mind, which was

already such that he endeavoured to comprehend law, not as a series of precedents, or collection of positive precepts, but as a system of rational government and impartial justice. When he was nineteen, he was, by the death of his father, left more to his own direction, and probably from that time suffered law gradually to give way to poetry. At twenty-five he produced the *Ambitious Step-Mother*, which was received with so much favour that he devoted himself from that time wholly to elegant literature.

His next tragedy (1702) was *Tamerlane*, in which, under the name of *Tamerlane*, he intended to characterise King William, and Louis the Fourteenth under *Bajazet*. The virtues of *Tamerlane* seem to have been arbitrarily assigned him by his poet, for I know not that history gives any other qualities than those which make a conqueror. The fashion, however, of the time was to accumulate upon Louis all that can raise horror and detestation; and whatever good was withheld from him, that it might not be thrown away was bestowed upon King William. This was the tragedy which Rowe valued most, and that which probably, by the help of political auxiliaries, excited most applause; but occasional poetry must often content itself with occasional praise. *Tamerlane* has for a long time been acted only once a year, on the night when King William landed. Our quarrel with Louis has been long over; and it now gratifies neither zeal nor malice to see him painted with aggravated features, like a Saracen upon a sign.

The Fair Penitent, his next production (1703), is one of the most pleasing tragedies on the stage, where it still keeps its turns of appearing, and probably will long keep them, for there is scarcely any work of any poet at once so interesting by the fable, and so delightful by the language. The story is domestic, and therefore easily received by the imagination, and assimilated to common life; the diction is exquisitely harmonious, and soft or sprightly as occasion requires.

The character of Lothario seems to have been expanded by Richardson into Lovelace; but he has excelled his original in the moral effect of the fiction. Lothario, with gaiety which cannot be hated, and bravery which cannot be despised, retains too much of the spectator's kindness. It was in the power of Richardson alone to teach us at once esteem and detestation, to make virtuous resentment overpower all the benevolence which wit, elegance, and courage, naturally excite; and to lose at last the hero in the villain. The fifth act is not equal to the former; the events of the drama are exhausted, and little remains but to talk of what is past. It has been observed that the title of the play does not sufficiently correspond with the behaviour of Calista, who at last shows no evident signs of repentance, but may be reasonably suspected of feeling pain from detection rather than from guilt, and expresses more shame than sorrow, and more rage than shame.

His next (1706) was Ulysses; which, with the common fate of mythological stories, is now generally neglected. We have been too early acquainted with the poetical heroes to expect

any pleasure from their revival; to show them as they have already been shown, is to disgust by repetition; to give them new qualities, or new adventures, is to offend by violating received notions.

"The Royal Convert" (1708) seems to have a better claim to longevity. The fable is drawn from an obscure and barbarous age, to which fictions are more easily and properly adapted; for when objects are imperfectly seen, they easily take forms from imagination. The scene lies among our ancestors in our own country, and therefore very easily catches attention. Rodogune is a personage truly tragical, of high spirit, and violent passions, great with tempestuous dignity, and wicked with a soul that would have been heroic if it had been virtuous. The motto seems to tell that this play was not successful.

Rowe does not always remember what his characters require. In Tamerlane there is some ridiculous mention of the God of Love; and Rodogune, a savage Saxon, talks of Venus and the eagle that bears the thunder of Jupiter.

This play discovers its own date, by a prediction of the Union, in imitation of Cranmer's prophetic promises to Henry VIII. The anticipated blessings of union are not very naturally introduced, nor very happily expressed. He once (1706) tried to change his hand. He ventured on a comedy, and produced the Biter, with which, though it was unfavourably treated by the audience, he was himself delighted; for he is said to have sat in the house laughing with great vehemence, whenever he had, in his own

opinion, produced a jest. But finding that he and the public had no sympathy of mirth, he tried at lighter scenes no more.

After the Royal Convert (1714) appeared Jane Shore, written, as its author professes, IN IMITATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S STYLE. In what he thought himself an imitator of Shakespeare it is not easy to conceive. The numbers, the diction, the sentiments, and the conduct, everything in which imitation can consist, are remote in the utmost degree from the manner of Shakespeare, whose dramas it resembles only as it is an English story, and as some of the persons have their names in history. This play, consisting chiefly of domestic scenes and private distress, lays hold upon the heart. The wife is forgiven because she repents, and the husband is honoured because he forgives. This, therefore, is one of those pieces which we still welcome on the stage.

His last tragedy (1715) was Lady Jane Grey. This subject had been chosen by Mr. Smith, whose papers were put into Rowe's hands such as he describes them in his preface. This play has likewise sunk into oblivion. From this time he gave nothing more to the stage.

Being by a competent fortune exempted from any necessity of combating his inclination, he never wrote in distress, and therefore does not appear to have ever written in haste. His works were finished to his own approbation, and bear few marks of negligence or hurry. It is remarkable that his prologues and epilogues are all his own, though he sometimes supplied others; he afforded help, but did not solicit it.

As his studies necessarily made him acquainted with Shakespeare, and acquaintance produced veneration, he undertook (1709) an edition of his works, from which he neither received much praise, nor seems to have expected it; yet I believe those who compare it with former copies will find that he has done more than he promised; and that, without the pomp of notes or boasts of criticism, many passages are happily restored. He prefixed a life of the author, such as tradition, then almost expiring, could supply, and a preface, which cannot be said to discover much profundity or penetration. He at least contributed to the popularity of his author. He was willing enough to improve his fortune by other arts than poetry. He was under-secretary for three years when the Duke of Queensberry was Secretary of State, and afterwards applied to the Earl of Oxford for some public employment. Oxford enjoined him to study Spanish; and when, some time afterwards, he came again, and said that he had mastered it, dismissed him with this congratulation, "Then, sir, I envy you the pleasure of reading 'Don Quixote' in the original."

This story is sufficiently attested; but why Oxford, who desired to be thought a favourer of literature, should thus insult a man of acknowledged merit, or how Rowe, who was so keen a Whig that he did not willingly converse with men of the opposite party, could ask preferment from Oxford, it is not now possible to discover. Pope, who told the story, did not say on what occasion the advice was given; and, though he owned Rowe's disappointment, doubted whether any injury was intended him,

but thought it rather Lord Oxford's ODD WAY.

It is likely that he lived on discontented through the rest of Queen Anne's reign; but the time came at last when he found kinder friends. At the accession of King George he was made Poet-Laureate—I am afraid, by the ejection of poor Nahum Tate, who (1716) died in the Mint, where he was forced to seek shelter by extreme poverty. He was made likewise one of the land-surveyors of the customs of the Port of London. The Prince of Wales chose him Clerk of his Council; and the Lord Chancellor Parker, as soon as he received the seals, appointed him, unasked, Secretary of the Presentations. Such an accumulation of employments undoubtedly produced a very considerable revenue.

Having already translated some parts of Lucan's "Pharsalia," which had been published in the Miscellanies, and doubtless received many praises, he undertook a version of the whole work, which he lived to finish, but not to publish. It seems to have been printed under the care of Dr. Welwood, who prefixed the author's life, in which is contained the following character:—

"As to his person, it was graceful and well made; his face regular, and of a manly beauty. As his soul was well lodged, so its rational and animal faculties excelled in a high degree. He had a quick and fruitful invention, a deep penetration, and a large compass of thought, with singular dexterity and easiness in making his thoughts to be understood. He was master of most parts of polite learning, especially the classical authors,

both Greek and Latin; understood the French, Italian, and Spanish languages, and spoke the first fluently, and the other two tolerably well. He had likewise read most of the Greek and Roman histories in their original languages, and most that are wrote in English, French, Italian, and Spanish. He had a good taste in philosophy; and, having a firm impression of religion upon his mind, he took great delight in divinity and ecclesiastical history, in both of which he made great advances in the times he retired into the country, which was frequent. He expressed on all occasions his full persuasion of the truth of revealed religion; and, being a sincere member of the Established Church himself, he pitied, but condemned not, those that dissented from it. He abhorred the principles of persecuting men upon the account of their opinions in religion; and, being strict in his own, he took it not upon him to censure those of another persuasion. His conversation was pleasant, witty, and learned, without the least tincture of affectation or pedantry; and his inimitable manner of diverting and enlivening the company made it impossible for any one to be out of humour when he was in it. Envy and detraction seemed to be entirely foreign to his constitution; and whatever provocations he met with at any time, he passed them over without the least thought of resentment or revenge. As Homer had a Zoilus, so Mr. Rowe had sometimes his; for there were not wanting malevolent people, and pretenders to poetry too, that would now and then bark at his best performances; but he was so conscious of his own genius, and had so much good-nature,

as to forgive them, nor could he ever be tempted to return them an answer.

"The love of learning and poetry made him not the less fit for business, and nobody applied himself closer to it when it required his attendance. The late Duke of Queensberry, when he was Secretary of State, made him his secretary for public affairs; and when that truly great man came to know him well, he was never so pleased as when Mr. Rowe was in his company. After the duke's death, all avenues were stopped to his preferment; and during the rest of that reign he passed his time with the Muses and his books, and sometimes the conversation of his friends. When he had just got to be easy in his fortune, and was in a fair way to make it better, death swept him away, and in him deprived the world of one of the best men, as well as one of the best geniuses, of the age. He died like a Christian and a philosopher, in charity with all mankind, and with an absolute resignation to the will of God. He kept up his good-humour to the last; and took leave of his wife and friends, immediately before his last agony, with the same tranquillity of mind, and the same indifference for life, as though he had been upon taking but a short journey. He was twice married—first to a daughter of Mr. Parsons, one of the auditors of the revenue; and afterwards to a daughter of Mr. Devenish, of a good family in Dorsetshire. By the first he had a son; and by the second a daughter, married afterwards to Mr. Fane. He died 6th December, 1718, in the forty-fifth year of his age, and was buried on the 19th of the same month in

Westminster Abbey, in the aisle where many of our English poets are interred, over against Chaucer, his body being attended by a select number of his friends, and the dean and choir officiating at the funeral."

To this character, which is apparently given with the fondness of a friend, may be added the testimony of Pope, who says, in a letter to Blount, "Mr. Rowe accompanied me, and passed a week in the Forest. I need not tell you how much a man of his turn entertained me; but I must acquaint you, there is a vivacity and gaiety of disposition, almost peculiar to him, which make it impossible to part from him without that uneasiness which generally succeeds all our pleasure."

Pope has left behind him another mention of his companion less advantageous, which is thus reported by Dr. Warburton:—

"Rowe, in Mr. Pope's opinion, maintained a decent character, but had no heart. Mr. Addison was justly offended with some behaviour which arose from that want, and estranged himself from him, which Rowe felt very severely. Mr. Pope, their common friend, knowing this, took an opportunity, at some juncture of Mr. Addison's advancement, to tell him how poor Rowe was grieved at his displeasure, and what satisfaction he expressed at Mr. Addison's good fortune, which he expressed so naturally that he (Mr. Pope) could not but think him sincere. Mr. Addison replied, 'I do not suspect that he feigned; but the levity of his heart is such, that he is struck with any new adventure, and it would affect him just in the same manner if he heard I was

going to be hanged.' Mr. Pope said he could not deny but Mr. Addison understood Rowe well."

This censure time has not left us the power of confirming or refuting; but observation daily shows that much stress is not to be laid on hyperbolical accusations and pointed sentences, which even he that utters them desires to be applauded rather than credited. Addison can hardly be supposed to have meant all that he said. Few characters can bear the microscopic scrutiny of wit quickened by anger; and, perhaps, the best advice to authors would be, that they should keep out of the way of one another.

Rowe is chiefly to be considered as a tragic writer and a translator. In his attempt at comedy he failed so ignominiously that his *Biter* is not inserted in his works: and his occasional poems and short compositions are rarely worthy either praise or censure, for they seem the casual sports of a mind seeking rather to amuse its leisure than to exercise its powers. In the construction of his dramas there is not much art; he is not a nice observer of the unities. He extends time and varies places as his convenience requires. To vary the place is not, in my opinion, any violation of nature, if the change be made between the acts, for it is no less easy for the spectator to suppose himself at Athens in the second act, than at Thebes in the first; but to change the scene, as is done by Rowe, in the middle of an act, is to add more acts to the play, since an act is so much of the business as is transacted without interruption. Rowe, by this licence, easily extricates himself from difficulties; as in *Jane Grey*, when

we have been terrified with all the dreadful pomp of public execution; and are wondering how the heroine or the poet will proceed, no sooner has Jane pronounced some prophetic rhymes than—pass and be gone—the scene closes, and Pembroke and Gardiner are turned out upon the stage.

I know not that there can be found in his plays any deep search into nature, any accurate discriminations of kindred qualities, or nice display of passion in its progress; all is general and undefined. Nor does he much interest or affect the auditor, except in Jane Shore, who is always seen and heard with pity. Alicia is a character of empty noise, with no resemblance to real sorrow or to natural madness.

Whence, then, has Rowe his reputation? From the reasonableness and propriety of some of his scenes, from the elegance of his diction, and the suavity of his verse. He seldom moves either pity or terror, but he often elevates the sentiments; he seldom pierces the breast, but he always delights the ear, and often improves the understanding. His translation of the "Golden Verses," and of the first book of Quillet's poem, have nothing in them remarkable. The "Golden Verses" are tedious.

The version of Lucan is one of the greatest productions of English poetry, for there is perhaps none that so completely exhibits the genius and spirit of the original. Lucan is distinguished by a kind of dictatorial or philosophic dignity, rather, as Quintilian observes, declamatory than poetical; full of ambitious morality and pointed sentences, comprised in vigorous

and animated lines. This character Rowe has very diligently and successfully preserved. His versification, which is such as his contemporaries practised, without any attempt at innovation or improvement, seldom wants either melody or force. His author's sense is sometimes a little diluted by additional infusions, and sometimes weakened by too much expansion. But such faults are to be expected in all translations, from the constraint of measures and dissimilitude of languages. The "Pharsalia" of Rowe deserves more notice than it obtains, and as it is more read will be more esteemed.

# GAY

John Gay, descended from an old family that had been long in possession of the manor of 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 with a silk mercer. 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 Duchess 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 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 rustics 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 Proeme, 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 language 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 public taste, he offered it again to the town; but, though he was flushed with the success of the *Beggar's 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 the Princess went to see his *What D'ye Call It*, a kind of mock tragedy, in which the images were comic 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, 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 to 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 year 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 Penton, "will make you sure of a clean shirt and a shoulder of mutton every day." This counsel was rejected; the profit and 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 forwards, threw down a weighty Japan screen. The Princess started, the ladies screamed, and poor Gay, after all the disturbance, was still to read his play.

The fate of *The Captives*, which was acted at Drury Lane in 1723-4, I know not; 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 on the settlement of the household, he found himself appointed gentleman usher to the Princess Louisa. By this offer he thought himself insulted, 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 solicitation, verses, and flatteries were thrown away; the lady heard them, and did nothing. All the pain which he suffered from 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 *Beggar's 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 Beggar's 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 Argyll, 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 public. 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, etc. 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 opinions 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 Beggar's 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 second. He received yet another recompense for this supposed hardship, in the affectionate attention of the Duke and Duchess 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 it. 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 colic, and languished, though with many intervals

of ease and cheerfulness, till a violent fit at last seized him and carried him to the grave, as Arbuthnot reported, with more precipitance than he had ever known. He died on the 4th 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, 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 pounds. There have appeared likewise under his name a comedy called the Distressed 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 avail.

As a poet he cannot be rated very high. He was, I once heard a female critic remark, "of a lower order." He had not in any great degree the MENS DIVINIOR, 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 or originality cannot be attributed.

His first performance, the *Rural Sports*, is such as was 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 author does not appear to have formed any distinct or settled notion. *Phaedrus* 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 ferae*, 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 public 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 "Amynta" 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 an 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.

# TICKELL

Thomas Tickell, the son of the Rev. Richard Tickell, was born in 1686, at Bridekirk, in Cumberland, and in 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 public 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 encomiastic 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 gained 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 public spirit, and gave in the Spectator such praises of Tickell's poem that when, after having long wished to peruse it, I laid hold of 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 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, anywhere 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

stayed till those people were gone (Budgell and Philips). He 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. This 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."

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