Classic Poetry Series

Abraham Cowley

- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Abraham Cowley (1618 - 28 July 1667)

His father, a wealthy citizen, who died shortly before his birth, was a stationer. His mother was wholly given to works of devotion, but it happened that there lay in her parlour a copy of The Faerie Queene. This became the favourite reading of her son, and he had twice devoured it all before he was sent to school.

As early as 1628, that is, in his tenth year, he composed his Tragicall History of Piramus and Thisbe, an epic romance written in a six-line stanza, a style of his own invention. It is not too much to say that this work is the most astonishing feat of imaginative precocity on record; it is marked by no great faults of immaturity, and possesses constructive merits of a very high order.

Two years later the child wrote another and still more ambitious poem, Constantia and Philetus, being sent about the same time to Westminster School. Here he displayed extraordinary mental precocity and versatility, and wrote in his thirteenth year the Elegy on the Death of Dudley, Lord Carlton. These three poems of considerable size, and some smaller ones, were collected in 1633, and published in a volume entitled Poetical Blossoms, dedicated to the head master of the school, and prefaced by many laudatory verses by schoolfellows.

The author at once became famous, although he had not, even yet, completed his fifteenth year. His next composition was a pastoral comedy, entitled Love's Riddle, a marvelous production for a boy of sixteen, airy, correct and harmonious in language, and rapid in movement. The style is not without resemblance to that of Randolph, whose earliest works, however, were at that time only just printed.

In 1637 Cowley was elected into Trinity College, Cambridge, where he betook himself with enthusiasm to the study of all kinds of learning, and early distinguished himself as a ripe scholar. It was about this time that he composed his scriptural epic on the history of King David, one book of which still exists in the Latin original, the rest being superseded in favour of an English version in four books, called the Davideis, which were published after his death. The epic, written in a very dreary and turgid manner, but in good rhymed heroic verse, deals with the adventures of King David from his boyhood to the smiting of Amalek by Saul, where it abruptly closes.

In 1638 Love's Riddle and a Latin comedy, the Naufragium Joculare, were printed, and in 1641 the passage of Prince Charles through Cambridge gave occasion to the production of another dramatic work, The Guardian, which was acted before the royal visitor with much success. During the civil war this play was privately performed at Dublin, but it was not printed till 1650.

It is bright and amusing, in the style common to the "sons" of Ben Jonson, the university wits who wrote more for the closet than the public stage.

Royalist in exile

The learned quiet of the young poet's life was broken up by the Civil War; he warmly espoused the royalist side. He became a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, but was ejected by the Parliamentarians in 1643. He made his way to Oxford, where he enjoyed the friendship of Lord Falkland, and was tossed, in the tumult of affairs, into the personal confidence of the royal family itself

After the battle of Marston Moor he followed the queen to Paris, and the exile so commenced lasted twelve years. This period was spent almost entirely in the royal service, "bearing a share in the distresses of the royal family, or labouring in their affairs. To this purpose he performed several dangerous journeys into Jersey, Scotland, Flanders, the Netherlands, or wherever else the king's troubles required his attendance. But the chief testimony of his fidelity was the laborious service he underwent in maintaining the constant correspondence between the late king and the queen his wife. In that weighty trust he behaved himself with indefatigable integrity and unsuspected secrecy; for he ciphered and deciphered with his own hand the greatest part of all the letters that passed between their majesties, and managed a vast intelligence in many other parts, which for some years together took up all his days, and two or three nights every week."

In spite of these labours he did not refrain from literary industry. During his exile he met with the works of Pindar, and determined to reproduce their lofty lyric passion in English. It must be noted, however, that Cowley misunderstood Pindar's metrical practice and therefore his reproduction of the Pindaric Ode form in English does not accurately reflect Pindar's poetics. But despite this problem, Cowley's use of iambic lines of irregular length, pattern, and rhyme scheme was very influential and is still known as English "Pindarick" Ode, or Irregular Ode. One of the most famous odes written after Cowley in the Pindaric tradition is Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality."

During this same time, Cowley occupied himself in writing a history of the Civil War (which did not get published in full until 1973). In the preface to his 1656 Poems, Cowley mentioned that he had completed three books of an epic poem on the Civil War, but had left it unfinished after the First Battle of Newbury when the Royalist cause began to lose significant ground. In the preface Cowley indicated that he had destroyed all copies of the poem, but this was not precisely the truth. In 1697, twelve years after Cowley's death, a shortened version of the first book of the poem, called A Poem on the Late Civil War was published. It was assumed that the rest of the poem had indeed been destroyed or lost until the mid-20th century when scholar Allan Pritchard discovered the first of two extant manuscript copies of the whole poem among the Cowper family papers. Thus, the three completed books of Cowley's great (albeit unfinished) English epic, The Civill Warre (otherwise spelled "The Civil War"), was finally published in full for the first time in 1973.

In 1647 a collection of his love verses, entitled The Mistress, was published, and in the next year a volume of wretched satires, The Four Ages of England, was brought out under his name, with the composition of which he had nothing to do.

In spite of the troubles of the times, so fatal to poetic fame, his reputation steadily increased, and when, on his return to England in 1656, he published a volume of his collected poetical works, he found himself without a rival in public esteem. This volume included the later works already mentioned, the Pindarique Odes, the Davideis, the Mistress and some Miscellanies. Among the latter are to be found Cowley's most vital pieces. This section of his works opens with the famous aspiration:

"What shall I do to be for ever known,

And make the coming age my own?"

It contains elegies on Wotton, Vandyck, Falkland, William Hervey and Crashaw, the last two being among Cowley's finest poems, brilliant, sonorous and original; the amusing ballad of The Chronicle, giving a fictitious catalogue of his supposed amours; various gnomic pieces; and some charming paraphrases from Anacreon. The Pindarique Odes contain weighty Lines and passages, buried in irregular and inharmonious masses of moral verbiage. Not more than one or two are good throughout, but a full posy of beauties may easily be culled from them. The long cadences of the Alexandrines with which most of the strophes close, continued to echo in English poetry from Dryden down to Gray, but the Odes themselves, which were found to be obscure by the poet's contemporaries, immediately fell into disesteem.

The Mistress was the most popular poetic reading of the age, and is now the least read of all Cowley's works. It was the last and most violent expression of the amatory affectation of the 17th century, an affectation which had been endurable in Donne and other early writers because it had been the vehicle of sincere emotion, but was unendurable in Cowley because in him it represented nothing but a perfunctory exercise, a mere exhibition of literary calisthenics. He appears to have been of a cold, or at least of a timid, disposition; in the face of these elaborately erotic volumes, we are told that to the end of his days he never summoned up courage to speak of love to a single woman in real life. The "Leonora" of The Chronicle is said to have been the only woman he ever loved, and she married the brother of his biographer, Sprat.

Return to England

Soon after his return to England he was seized in mistake for another person, and only obtained his liberty on a bail of £1000. In 1658 he revised and altered his play of The Guardian, and prepared it for the press under the title of The Cutter of Coleman Street, but it did not appear until 1661. Late in 1658 Oliver Cromwell died, and Cowley took advantage of the confusion of affairs to escape to Paris, where he remained until the Restoration brought him back in Charles's train. He published in 1663 Verses upon several occasions, in which The Complaint is included.

Cowley obtained permission to retire into the country; and through his friend, Lord St Albans, he obtained a property near Chertsey, where, devoting himself to botany and books, he lived in comparative solitude until his death. He took a practical interest in experimental science, and he was one of those advocating the foundation of an academy for the protection of scientific enterprise. Cowley's pamphlet on The Advancement of Experimental Philosophy, 1661, immediately preceded the foundation of the Royal Society; to which Cowley, in March 1667, at the suggestion of John Evelyn, addressed an ode. He died in the Porch House, in Chertsey, in consequence of having caught a cold while superintending his farm-labourers in the meadows late on a summer evening. On 3 August, Cowley was buried in Westminster Abbey beside the ashes of Chaucer and Spenser, where in 1675 the duke of Buckingham erected a monument to his memory. His Poemata Latina, including six books "Plantarum," were printed in 1668. The poetry of Cowley rapidly fell into neglect.

The works of Cowley were collected in 1668, when Thomas Sprat brought out an edition in folio, to which he prefixed a life of the poet. There were many reprints of this collection, which formed the standard edition till 1881, when it was superseded by Alexander Balloch Grosart's privately printed edition in two volumes, for the Chertsey Worthies library. The Essays have frequently been revived.

Eserleri:

The Works of Mr. Abraham Cowley (Posthumous Collection 1688) A Satire Against Separatists (Disputed 1675)

A Supplication

Awake, awake, my Lyre!
And tell thy silent master's humble tale
In sounds that may prevail;
Sounds that gentle thoughts inspire:
Though so exalted she
And I so lowly be
Tell her, such different notes make all thy harmony.

Hark, how the strings awake!
And, though the moving hand approach not near,
Themselves with awful fear
A kind of numerous trembling make.
Now all thy forces try;
Now all thy charms apply;
Revenge upon her ear the conquests of her eye.

Weak Lyre! thy virtue sure
Is useless here, since thou art only found
To cure, but not to wound,
And she to wound, but not to cure,
Too weak too wilt thou prove
My passion to remove;
Physic to other ills, thou'rt nourishment to love.

Sleep, sleep again, my Lyre!
For thou canst never tell my humble tale
In sounds that will prevail,
Nor gentle thoughts in her inspire;
All thy vain mirth lay by,
Bid thy strings silent lie,
Sleep, sleep again, my Lyre, and let thy master die.

A Vote (excerpt)

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This only grant me: that my means may lie
Too low for envy, for contempt too high.
Some honour I would have,
Not from great deeds, but good alone;
Th' ignote are better than ill-known,
Rumour can ope the grave.
Acquaintance I would hug, but when 't depends
Not from the number, but the choice of friends.

Books should, not bus'ness, entertain the light,
And sleep, as undisturb'd as death, the night.
My house a cottage, more
Than palace, and should fitting be
For all my use, no luxury.
My garden painted o'er
With Nature's hand, not Art's, and pleasures yield
Horace might envy in his Sabine field.

Thus would I double my life's fading space, For he that runs it well, twice runs his race. And in this true delight, These unbought sports and happy state I would not fear, nor wish my fate, But boldly say each night, To-morrow let my sun his beams display, Or in clouds hide them; I have liv'd to-day.

Anacreontics, Drinking

THE thirsty earth soaks up the rain, And drinks and gapes for drink again; The plants suck in the earth, and are With constant drinking fresh and fair; The sea itself (which one would think Should have but little need of drink) Drinks twice ten thousand rivers up, So fill'd that they o'erflow the cup. The busy Sun (and one would guess By 's drunken fiery face no less) Drinks up the sea, and when he 's done, The Moon and Stars drink up the Sun: They drink and dance by their own light, They drink and revel all the night: Nothing in Nature 's sober found, But an eternal health goes round. Fill up the bowl, then, fill it high, Fill all the glasses there--for why Should every creature drink but'I? Why, man of morals, tell me why?

Anacreontics, The Epicure

UNDERNEATH this myrtle shade, On flowerly beds supinely laid, With odorous oils my head o'erflowing, And around it roses growing, What should I do but drink away The heat and troubles of the day? In this more than kingly state Love himself on me shall wait. Fill to me, Love! nay, fill it up! And mingled cast into the cup Wit and mirth and noble fires, Vigorous health and gay desires. The wheel of life no less will stay In a smooth than rugged way: Since it equally doth flee, Let the motion pleasant be. Why do we precious ointments shower?--Nobler wines why do we pour?--Beauteous flowers why do we spread Upon the monuments of the dead? Nothing they but dust can show, Or bones that hasten to be so. Crown me with roses while I live, Now your wines and ointments give: After death I nothing crave, Let me alive my pleasures have: All are Stoics in the grave.

Anacreontics, The Swallow

FOOLISH prater, what dost thou So early at my window do? Cruel bird, thou'st ta'en away A dream out of my arms to-day; A dream that ne'er must equall'd be By all that waking eyes may see. Thou this damage to repair Nothing half so sweet and fair, Nothing half so good, canst bring, Tho' men say thou bring'st the Spring.

Beauty

LIBERAL Nature did dispence To all things Arms for their defence; And some she arms with sin'ewy force, And some with swiftness in the course; Some with hard Hoofs, or forked claws, And some with Horns, or tusked jaws. And some with Scales, and some with Wings, And some with Teeth, and some with Stings. Wisdom to Man she did afford, Wisdom for Shield, and Wit for Sword. What to beauteous Woman-kind, What Arms, what Armour has she assigne'd? Beauty is both; for with the Faire What Arms, what Armour can compare? What Steel, what Gold, or Diamond, More Impassible is found? And yet what Flame, what Lightning ere So great an Active force did bear? They are all weapon, and they dart Like Porcupines from every part. Who can, alas, their strength express, Arm'd when they themselves undress, Cap a pe* with Nakedness?

Davideis: A Sacred Poem Of The Troubles Of David (excerpt)

BOOK I (excerpt)

I sing the man who Judah's sceptre bore
In that right hand which held the crook before;
Who from best poet, best of kings did grow;
The two chief gifts Heav'n could on man bestow.
Much danger first, much toil did he sustain,
Whilst Saul and Hell cross'd his strong fate in vain.
Nor did his crown less painful work afford;
Less exercise his patience, or his sword;
So long her conqueror fortunes spite pursued;
Till with unwearied virtue he subdued
All homebred malice, and all foreign boasts;
Their strength was armies, his the Lord of Hosts.

Thou, who didst David's royal stem adorn, And gav'st him birth from whom thy self wast born; Who didst in triumph at death's court appear, And slew'st him with thy nails, thy cross and spear, Whilst Hell's black tyrant trembled to behold, The glorious light he forfeited of old; Who Heav'ns glad burden now, and justest pride, Sit'st high enthron'd next thy great Father's side, (Where hallowed flames help to adorn that head Which once the blushing thorns environed, Till crimson drops of precious blood hung down Like rubies to enrich thine humble crown.) Even thou my breast with such blest rage inspire, As mov'd the tuneful strings of David's lyre, Guide my bold steps with thine old travelling flame, In these untrodden paths to sacred fame; Lo, with pure hands thy heav'enly fires to take, My well-chang'd Muse I a chaste vestal make! From earth's vain joys, and love's soft witchcraft free, I consecrate my Magdalene to thee! Lo, this great work, a temple to thy praise, On polish'd pillars of strong verse I raise! A temple, where if thou vouchsafe to dwell, It Solomon's, and Herod's shall excel. Too long the Muses-land have heathen bin; Their gods too long were devils, and virtues sin; But thou, Eternal Word, has call'd forth me Th' apostle, to convert that world to thee; T' unbind the charms that in slight fables lie, And teach that truth is purest poesy.

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Hymn To Light

First-born of Chaos, who so fair didst come From the old Negro's darksome womb! Which, when it saw the lovely child, The melancholy mass put on kind looks and smiled,

Thou tide of glory which no rest dost know, But ever ebb and ever flow! Thou golden shower of a true Jove, Who does in thee descend, and heaven to earth make love!

Hail, active nature's watchful life and health, Her joy, her ornament and wealth! Hail to thy husband Heat, and thee! Thou the world's beauteous bride, the lusty bridegroom he!

Say, from what golden quivers of the sky Do all thy winged arrows fly? Swiftness and power by birth are thine: From thy great Sire they came, thy Sire the Word divine.

'Tis, I believe, this archery to show, That so much cost in colors thou, And skill in painting, dost bestow Upon thy ancient arms, the gaudy heavenly bow.

Swift as light thoughts their empty career run, Thy race is finished when begun; Let a post-angel start with thee, And thou the goal of earth shalt teach as soon as he.

Thou in the moon's bright chariot, proud and gay, Dost thy bright wood of stars survey, And all the year dost with thee bring, Of thousand flowery lights, thine own nocturnal spring.

Thou Scythian-like dost round thy lands, above The sun's gilt tent, forever move, And still, as thou in pomp dost go, The shining pageants of the world attend thy show.

Nor amidst all these triumphs dost thou scorn The humble glowworms to adorn, And with those living spangles gild - O greatness without pride! - the bushes of the field.

Night and her ugly subjects thou dost fright, And sleep, the lazy owl of night; Ashamed and fearful to appear, They screen their horrid shapes with the black hemisphere.

With 'em there hastes, and wildly takes the alarm, Of painted dreams, a busy swarm;

At the first openings of thine eye, The various clusters break, the antic atoms fly.

The guilty serpents and obscener beasts Creep conscious to their secret rests; Nature to thee does reverence pay; Ill omens and ill sights removes out of thy way.

At thy appearance, Grief itself is said To shake his wings and rouse his head. And cloudy Care has often took A gentle beamy smile reflected from thy look.

At thy appearance, Fear itself grows bold; Thy sunshine melts away his cold. Encouraged at the sight of thee, To the cheek color comes, and firmness to the knee.

Even Lust, the master of a hardened face, Blushes if thou beest in the place, To darkness' curtains he retires; In sympathizing night he rolls his smoky fires.

When, goddess, thou list'st up thy wakened head Out of the morning's purple bed, Thy quire of birds about thee play, And all the joyful world salutes the rising day.

The ghosts and monster spirits that did presume A body's privilege to assume Vanish again invisibly, And bodies gain again their visibility.

All the world's bravery that delights our eyes Is but thy several liveries; Thou the rich dye on them bestow'st; Thy nimble pencil paints this landscape as thou go'st.

A crimson garment in the rose thou wear'st; A crown of studded gold thou bear'st; The virgin blies in their white Are clad but with the lawn of almost naked light.

The violet, spring's little infant, stands Girt in thy purple swaddling-bands; On the fair tulip thou dost dote; Thou cloth'st it in a gay and parti-colored coat.

With flame condensed thou dost the jewels fix, And solid colors in it mix; Flora herself envies to see Flowers fairer than her own, and durable as she. Ah, goddess! would thou couldst thy hand withhold And be less liberal to gold; Didst thou less value to it give, Of how much care, alas! mightst thou poor man relieve!

To me the sun is more delightful far, And all fair days much fairer are, But few, ah wondrous few, there be Who do not gold prefer, O goddess, even to thee.

Through the soft ways of heaven, and air, and sea, Which open all their pores to thee, Like a clear river thou dost glide, And with thy living stream through the close channels slide.

But where firm bodies thy free course oppose, Gently thy source the land o'erflows, Takes there possession, and does make Of colors mingled, light, a thick and standing lake.

But the vast ocean of unbounded day In the empyrean heaven does stay. Thy rivers, lakes, and springs below From thence took first their rise, thither at last must flow.

Life

Life's a name
That nothing here can truly claim;
This wretched inn, where we scarce stay to bait,
We call our dwelling-place!
And mighty voyages we take,
And mighty journeys seem to make,
O'er sea and land, the little point that has no space.
Because we fight and battles gain,
Some captives call, and say, 'the rest are slain';
Because we heap up yellow earth, and so
Rich, valiant, wise, and virtuous seem to grow;
Because we draw a long nobility
From hieroglyphic proofs of heraldryWe grow at last by Custom to believe,
That really we Live;
Whilst all these Shadows, that for Things we take,
Are but the empty Dreams which in Death's sleep we make.

On the Death of Mr. Crashaw

Poet and Saint! to thee alone are given
The two most sacred names of earth and heaven,
The hard and rarest union which can be
Next that of godhead with humanity.
Long did the Muses banish'd slaves abide,
And built vain pyramids to mortal pride;
Like Moses thou (though spells and charms withstand)
Hast brought them nobly home back to their Holy Land.

Ah wretched we, poets of earth! but thou Wert living the same poet which thou'rt now. Whilst angels sing to thee their airs divine, And joy in an applause so great as thine, Equal society with them to hold, Thou need'st not make new songs, but say the old. And they (kind spirits!) shall all rejoice to see How little less than they exalted man may be. Still the old heathen gods in numbers dwell, The heavenliest thing on earth still keeps up Hell. Nor have we yet quite purg'd the Christian land; Still idols here like calves at Bethel stand. And though Pan's death long since all oracles broke, Yet still in rhyme the fiend Apollo spoke: Nay with the worst of heathen dotage we (Vain men!) the monster Woman deify; Find stars, and tie our fates there in a face, And Paradise in them by whom we lost it, place. What different faults corrupt our Muses thus Wanton as girls, as old wives fabulous!

Thy spotless Muse, like Mary, did contain
The boundless Godhead; she did well disdain
That her eternal verse employ'd should be
On a less subject than eternity;
And for a sacred mistress scorn'd to take
But her whom God himself scorn'd not his spouse to make.
It (in a kind) her miracle did do;
A fruitful mother was, and virgin too.

How well, blest swan, did fate contrive thy death; And make thee render up thy tuneful breath In thy great mistress' arms! thou most divine And richest offering of Loretto's shrine! Where like some holy sacrifice t' expire A fever burns thee, and Love lights the fire. Angels (they say) brought the fam'd chapel there, And bore the sacred load in triumph through the air. 'Tis surer much they brought thee there, and they, And thou, their charge, went singing all the way.

Pardon, my Mother Church, if I consent That angels led him when from thee he went, For even in error sure no danger is When join'd with so much piety as his. Ah, mighty God, with shame I speak't, and grief, Ah that our greatest faults were in belief! And our weak reason were even weaker yet, Rather than thus our wills too strong for it. His faith perhaps in some nice tenents might Be wrong; his life, I'm sure, was in the right. And I myself a Catholic will be, So far at least, great saint, to pray to thee.

Hail, bard triumphant! and some care bestow On us, the poets militant below! Oppos'd by our old enemy, adverse chance, Attack'd by envy, and by ignorance, Enchain'd by beauty, tortured by desires, Expos'd by tyrant Love to savage beasts and fires. Thou from low earth in nobler flames didst rise, And like Elijah, mount alive the skies. Elisha-like (but with a wish much less, More fit thy greatness, and my littleness) Lo here I beg (I whom thou once didst prove So humble to esteem, so good to love) Not that thy spirit might on me doubled be, I ask but half thy mighty spirit for me; And when my Muse soars with so strong a wing, 'Twill learn of things divine, and first of thee to sing.

On the Death of Mr. William Hervey

IT was a dismal and a fearful night:
Scarce could the Morn drive on th' unwilling Light,
When Sleep, Death's image, left my troubled breast
By something liker Death possest.
My eyes with tears did uncommanded flow,
And on my soul hung the dull weight
Of some intolerable fate.
What bell was that? Ah me! too much I know!

My sweet companion and my gentle peer,
Why hast thou left me thus unkindly here,
Thy end for ever and my life to moan?
O, thou hast left me all alone!
Thy soul and body, when death's agony
Besieged around thy noble heart,
Did not with more reluctance part
Than I, my dearest Friend, do part from thee.

My dearest Friend, would I had died for thee! Life and this world henceforth will tedious be: Nor shall I know hereafter what to do
 If once my griefs prove tedious too.
Silent and sad I walk about all day,
 As sullen ghosts stalk speechless by
 Where their hid treasures lie;
Alas! my treasure 's gone; why do I stay?

Say, for you saw us, ye immortal lights,
How oft unwearied have we spent the nights,
Till the Ledaean stars, so famed for love,
Wonder'd at us from above!
We spent them not in toys, in lusts, or wine;
But search of deep Philosophy,
Wit, Eloquence, and Poetry-Arts which I loved, for they, my Friend, were thine.

Ye fields of Cambridge, our dear Cambridge, say
Have ye not seen us walking every day?
Was there a tree about which did not know
The love betwixt us two?
Henceforth, ye gentle trees, for ever fade;
Or your sad branches thicker join
And into darksome shades combine,
Dark as the grave wherein my Friend is laid!

Large was his soul: as large a soul as e'er
Submitted to inform a body here;
High as the place 'twas shortly in Heaven to have,
But low and humble as his grave.
So high that all the virtues there did come,
As to their chiefest seat
Conspicuous and great;

So low, that for me too it made a room.

Knowledge he only sought, and so soon caught As if for him Knowledge had rather sought; Nor did more learning ever crowded lie
 In such a short mortality.

Whene'er the skilful youth discoursed or writ,
 Still did the notions throng
 About his eloquent tongue;

Nor could his ink flow faster than his wit.

His mirth was the pure spirits of various wit, Yet never did his God or friends forget; And when deep talk and wisdom came in view, Retired, and gave to them their due. For the rich help of books he always took, Though his own searching mind before Was so with notions written o'er, As if wise Nature had made that her book.

With as much zeal, devotion, piety,
He always lived, as other saints do die.
Still with his soul severe account he kept,
Weeping all debts out ere he slept.
Then down in peace and innocence he lay,
Like the Sun's laborious light,
Which still in water sets at night,
Unsullied with his journey of the day.

But happy Thou, ta'en from this frantic age,
Where ignorance and hypocrisy does rage!
A fitter time for Heaven no soul e'er chose-The place now only free from those.
There 'mong the blest thou dost for ever shine;
And wheresoe'er thou casts thy view
Upon that white and radiant crew,
See'st not a soul clothed with more light than thine.

Sport

The merry waves dance up and down, and play, Sport is granted to the sea; Birds are the choristers of the empty air, Sport is never wanting there. The ground doth smile at the spring's flowery birth, Sport is granted to the earth; The fire its cheering flame on high doth rear, Sport is never wanting there, If all the elements, the earth, the sea, Air, and fire, so merry be, Why is man's mirth so seldom and so small, Who is compounded of them all?

The Change

LOVE in her sunny eyes does basking play; Love walks the pleasant mazes of her hair; Love does on both her lips for ever stray And sows and reaps a thousand kisses there. In all her outward parts Love's always seen; But, oh, He never went within.

Within Love's foes, his greatest foes abide, Malice, Inconstance, and Pride. So the Earth's face, trees, herbs, and flowers do dress, With other beauties numberless; But at the center, darkness is, and Hell; There wicked spirits, and there the Damned dwell.

With me alas, quite contrary it fares; Darkness and death lies in my weeping eyes, Despair and paleness in my face appears, And grief, and fear, Love's greatest enemies; But, like the Persian tyrant, Love within Keeps his proud court, and ne're is seen.

Oh take my heart, and by that means you'll prove Within, too stor'd enough of Love; Give me but yours, I'll by that change so thrive, That Love in all my parts shall live. So powerful is this change, it render can, My outside woman, and your inside man.

The Despair

Beneath this gloomy shade, By Nature only for my sorrows made, I'll spend this voyce in crys, In tears I'll waste these eyes

By Love so vainly fed; So Lust of old the Deluge punished. Ah wretched youth! said I, 'Ah, wretched youth!' twice did I sadly cry: 'Ah, wretched youth!' the fields and floods reply.

When thoughts of Love I entertain, I meet no words but 'Never,' and 'In vain.' 'Never' alas that dreadful name Which fuels the infernal flame:

'Never,' My time to come must waste; 'In vain,' torments the present and the past. 'In vain, in vain!' said I; 'In vain, in vain!' twice did I sadly cry; 'In vain, in vain!' the fields and floods reply.

No more shall fields or floods do so; For I to shades more dark and silent go: All this world's noise appears to me A dull ill-acted comedy:

No comfort to my wounded sight, In the suns busy and imperti'nent Light. Then down I laid my head; Down on cold earth; and for a while was dead, And my freed soul to a strange somewhere fled.

'Ah, sottish Soul' said I, When back to its cage again I saw it fly; 'Fool to resume her broken chain! And row her galley here again!'

'Fool, to that body to return
Where it condemn'd and destin'd is to burn!
Once dead, how can it be,
Death should a thing so pleasant seem to thee,
That thou should'st come to live it o're again in me?'

The Epicure

FILL the bowl with rosy wine,
Around our temples roses twine.
And let us cheerfully awhile,
Like the wine and roses smile.
Crown'd with roses we contemn
Gyge's wealthy diadem.
Today is ours; what do we fear?
Today is ours; we have it here.
Let's treat it kindly, that it may
Wish, at least, with us to stay.
Let's banish business, banish sorrow;
To the Gods belongs tomorrow.

The Given Heart

I wonder what those lovers mean, who say They have giv'n their hearts away. Some good kind lover tell me how; For mine is but a torment to me now.

If so it be one place both hearts contain, For what do they complain?
What courtesy can Love do more,
Than to join hearts that parted were before?

Woe to her stubborn heart, if once mine come Into the self-same room;
'Twill tear and blow up all within,
Like a granado shot into a magazine.

Then shall Love keep the ashes, and torn parts, Of both our broken hearts:
Shall out of both one new one make,
From hers, th' allay; from mine, the metal take.

For of her heart he from the flames will find But little left behind:
Mine only will remain entire;
No dross was there, to perish in the fire.

The Grasshopper

Happy insect, what can be In happiness compared to thee? Fed with nourishment divine, The dewy morning's gentle wine! Nature waits upon thee still, And thy verdant cup does fill; 'Tis filled wherever thou dost tread, Nature's self's thy Ganymede. Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing, Happier than the happiest king! All the fields which thou dost see, All the plants belong to thee; All the summer hours produce, Fertile made with early juice. Man for thee does sow and plow, Farmer he, and landlord thou! Thou dost innocently enjoy; Nor does thy luxury destroy. The shepherd gladly heareth thee, More harmonious than he. Thee country hinds with gladness hear, Prophet of the ripened year! Thee Phoebus loves, and does inspire Phoebus is himself thy sire. To thee, of all things upon earth, Life is no longer than thy mirth. Happy insect! happy thou, Dost neither age nor winter know; But when thou'st drunk, and danced, and sung Thy fill, the flowery leaves among, (Voluptuous and wise withal, Epicurean animal!) Sated with thy summer feast, Thou retir'st to endless rest.

The Praise of Pindar in Imitation of Horace His Second Ode, Book 4

Pindarum quisquis studet oemulari, &c.

I.
Pindar is imitable by none;
The phoenix Pindar is a vast species alone.
Whoe'er but Daedalus with waxen wings could fly
And neither sink too low nor soar too high?
What could he who followed claim
But of vain boldness the unhappy fame,
And by his fall a sea to name?
Pindar's unnavigable song,
Like a swollen flood from some steep mountain, pours along;
The ocean meets with such a voice
From his enlarged mouth as drowns the ocean's noise.

II.
So Pindar does new words and figures roll
Down his impetuous dithyrambic tide,
Which in no channel deigns to abide,
Which neither banks nor dikes control.
Whether the immortal gods he sings
In a no less immortal strain,
Or the great acts of god-descended kings,
Who in his numbers still survive and reign,
Each rich embroidered line,
Which their triumphant brows around
By his sacred hand is bound,
Does all their starry diadems outshine.

Whether at Pisa's race he please
To carve in polished verse the conquerors' images,
Whether the swift, the skillful, or the strong
Be crowned in his nimble, artful, vigorous song,
Whether some brave young man's untimely fate
In words worth dying for he celebrate,
Such mournful and such pleasing words
As joy to his mother's and his mistress' grief affords,
He bids him live and grow in fame;
Among the stars he sticks his name;
The grave can but the dross of him devour,
So small is death's, so great the poet's power.

Lo, how the obsequious wind and swelling air The Theban swan does upwards bear Into the walks of clouds, where he does play, And with extended wings opens his liquid way, Whilst, alas, my timorous Muse Unambitious tracks pursues; Does, with weak, unballast wings, About the mossy brooks and springs,

About the trees' new-blossomed heads, About the gardens' painted beds, About the fields and flowery meads, And all inferior beauteous things, Like the laborious bee, For little drops of honey flee, And there with humble sweets contents her industry.

The Wish

WELL then! I now do plainly see
This busy world and I shall ne'er agree.
The very honey of all earthly joy
Does of all meats the soonest cloy;
And they, methinks, deserve my pity
Who for it can endure the stings,
The crowd and buzz and murmurings,
Of this great hive, the city.

Ah, yet, ere I descend to the grave
May I a small house and large garden have;
And a few friends, and many books, both true,
Both wise, and both delightful too!
And since love ne'er will from me flee,
A Mistress moderately fair,
And good as guardian angels are,
Only beloved and loving me.

O fountains! when in you shall I
Myself eased of unpeaceful thoughts espy?
O fields! O woods! when, when shall I be made
Thy happy tenant of your shade?
Here 's the spring-head of Pleasure's flood:
Here 's wealthy Nature's treasury,
Where all the riches lie that she
Has coin'd and stamp'd for good.

Pride and ambition here
Only in far-fetch'd metaphors appear;
Here nought but winds can hurtful murmurs scatter,
And nought but Echo flatter.
The gods, when they descended, hither
From heaven did always choose their way:
And therefore we may boldly say
That 'tis the way too thither.

Hoe happy here should I
And one dear She live, and embracing die!
She who is all the world, and can exclude
In deserts solitude.
I should have then this only fear:
Lest men, when they my pleasures see,
Should hither throng to live like me,
And so make a city here.

To The Royal Society (excerpts)

Philosophy the great and only heir Of all that human knowledge which has bin Unforfeited by man's rebellious sin, Though full of years he do appear, (Philosophy, I say, and call it, he, For whatso'ere the painter's fancy be, It a male-virtue seems to me) Has still been kept in nonage till of late, Nor manag'd or enjoy'd his vast estate: Three or four thousand years one would have thought, To ripeness and perfection might have brought A science so well bred and nurst, And of such hopeful parts too at the first. But, oh, the guardians and the tutors then, (Some negligent, and some ambitious men) Would ne'er consent to set him free, Or his own natural powers to let him see, Lest that should put an end to their authority.

That his own business he might quite forget, They' amus'd him with the sports of wanton wit, With the desserts of poetry they fed him, Instead of solid meats t' encrease his force; Instead of vigorous exercise they led him Into the pleasant labyrinths of ever-fresh discourse: Instead of carrying him to see The riches which do hoarded for him lie In Nature's endless treasury, They chose his eye to entertain (His curious but not covetous eye) With painted scenes, and pageants of the brain. Some few exalted spirits this latter age has shown, That labour'd to assert the liberty (From guardians, who were now usurpers grown) Of this old minor still, captiv'd Philosophy; But 'twas rebellion call'd to fight For such a long oppressed right. Bacon at last, a mighty man, arose Whom a wise King and Nature chose Lord Chancellor of both their laws, And boldly undertook the injur'd pupil's cause.

Authority, which did a body boast,
Though 'twas but air condens'd, and stalk'd about,
Like some old giant's more gigantic ghost,
To terrify the learned rout
With the plain magic of true reason's light,
He chas'd out of our sight,
Nor suffer'd living men to be misled
By the vain shadows of the dead:
To graves, from whence it rose, the conquer'd phantom fled;
He broke that monstrous god which stood

In midst of th' orchard, and the whole did claim, Which with a useless scythe of wood, And something else not worth a name, (Both vast for show, yet neither fit Or to defend, or to beget; Ridiculous and senseless terrors!) made Children and superstitious men afraid. The orchard's open now, and free; Bacon has broke that scarecrow deity; Come, enter, all that will, Behold the ripen'd fruit, come gather now your fill. Yet still, methinks, we fain would be Catching at the forbidden tree, We would be like the Deity, When truth and falshood, good and evil, we Without the senses aid within our selves would see; For 'tis God only who can find All Nature in his mind.

From words, which are but pictures of the thought, Though we our thoughts from them perversely drew To things, the mind's right object, he it brought, Like foolish birds to painted grapes we flew; He sought and gather'd for our use the true; And when on heaps the chosen bunches lay, He press'd them wisely the mechanic way, Till all their juice did in one vessel join, Ferment into a nourishment divine, The thirsty soul's refreshing wine. Who to the life an exact piece would make, Must not from other's work a copy take; No, not from Rubens or Vandyke; Much less content himself to make it like Th' ideas and the images which lie In his own fancy, or his memory. No, he before his sight must place The natural and living face; The real object must command Each judgment of his eye, and motion of his hand. From these and all long errors of the way, In which our wand'ring predecessors went, And like th' old Hebrews many years did stray In deserts but of small extent; Bacon, like Moses, led us forth at last, The barren wilderness he past, Did on the very border stand Of the blest promis'd land, And from the mountain's top of his exalted wit, Saw it himself, and shew'd us it. But life did never to one man allow Time to discover worlds, and conquer too; Nor can so short a line sufficient be

To fathom the vast depths of Nature's sea: The work he did we ought t' admire, And were unjust if we should more require From his few years, divided 'twixt th' excess Of low affliction, and high happiness. For who on things remote can fix his sight, That's always in a triumph, or a fight?

From you, great champions, we expect to get These spacious countries but discover'd yet; Countries where yet in stead of Nature, we Her images and idols worshipp'd see: These large and wealthy regions to subdue, Though learning has whole armies at command, Quarter'd about in every land, A better troop she ne're together drew. Methinks, like Gideon's little band, God with design has pick'd out you, To do these noble wonders by a few: When the whole host he saw, they are (said he) Too many to o'ercome for me; And now he chooses out his men, Much in the way that he did then: Not those many whom he found Idly extended on the ground, To drink with their dejected head The stream just so as by their mouths it fled: No, but those few who took the waters up, And made of their laborious hands the cup.

. . .

With courage and success you the bold work begin; Your cradle has not idle bin: None e're but Hercules and you could be At five years age worthy a history. And ne're did fortune better yet Th' historian to the story fit: As you from all old errors free And purge the body of philosophy; So from all modern follies he Has vindicated eloquence and wit. His candid style like a clean stream does slide, And his bright fancy all the way Does like the sun-shine in it play; It does like Thames, the best of rivers, glide, Where the god does not rudely overturn, But gently pour the crystal urn, And with judicious hand does the whole current guide. 'T has all the beauties Nature can impart, And all the comely dress without the paint of art.