

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Edward Herbert**

**- 4 poems -**

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## **Edward Herbert (3 March 1583 – 20 August 1648)**

Edward Herbert, 1st Baron Herbert of Cherbury was an Anglo-Welsh soldier, diplomat, historian, poet and religious philosopher of the Kingdom of England.

### Early Life

He was the eldest son of Richard Herbert of Montgomery Castle (a member of a collateral branch of the family of the Earls of Pembroke) and of Magdalen, daughter of Sir Richard Newport, and brother of the poet George Herbert. He was born at Eyton-on-Severn near Wroxeter. After private tuition, he matriculated at University College, Oxford, as a gentleman commoner, in May 1596. On 28 February 1599, at the age of 15, he married his cousin Mary, then aged 21, ('notwithstanding the disparity of years betwixt us'), who was daughter and heiress of Sir William Herbert (d. 1593). He returned to Oxford with his wife and mother, continued his studies, and learned French, Italian and Spanish, as well as music, riding and fencing. During this period, before he was 21, he started a family.

He entered Parliament as knight of the shire for Montgomeryshire in 1601. On the accession of King James I he presented himself at court and was created a Knight of the Bath on 24 July 1603. From 1604 to 1611 he was Member of Parliament for Merioneth. From 1605 he was magistrate and appointed sheriff in Montgomeryshire for 1605.

### Soldier

In 1608 he went to Paris, with Aurelian Townshend, enjoying the friendship and hospitality of the old Constable de Montmorency at Merlou and meeting King Henry IV; he toured Europe with Inigo Jones, and lodged for many months with Isaac Casaubon. On his return, as he says himself, he was "in great esteem both in court and city, many of the greatest desiring my company." At this period he was close to both Ben Jonson and John Donne, and in Jonson's *Epicoene*, or the *Silent Woman* Herbert is probably alluded to. Both Donne and Jonson honoured him in poetry.

In 1610 he served as a volunteer in the Low Countries under the Prince of Orange, whose intimate friend he became, and distinguished himself at the capture of Juliers from the emperor. He offered to decide the war by engaging in single combat with a champion chosen from among the enemy, but his challenge was declined. During an interval in the fighting he paid a visit to Spinola, in the Spanish camp near Wezel, and afterwards to the elector palatine at Heidelberg, subsequently travelling in Italy. At the instance of the Duke of Savoy he led an expedition of 4,000 Huguenots from

Languedoc into Piedmont to help the Savoyards against Spain, but after nearly losing his life in the journey to Lyon he was imprisoned on his arrival there, and the enterprise came to nothing. Thence he returned to the Netherlands and the Prince of Orange, arriving in England in 1617.

#### Diplomat

In 1619, Herbert was made ambassador to Paris, taking in his entourage Thomas Carew. A quarrel with de Luynes and a challenge sent by him to the latter occasioned his recall in 1621. After the death of de Luynes, Herbert resumed his post in February 1622.

He was very popular at the French court and showed considerable diplomatic ability. His chief objects were to accomplish the marriage between Charles, Prince of Wales and Henrietta Maria, and to secure the assistance of Louis XIII for Frederick V, Elector Palatine. He failed in the latter, and was dismissed in April 1624.

He returned home greatly in debt and received little reward for his services beyond the Irish peerage of Castle Island on 31 May 1624 and the English barony of Cherbury, or Chirbury, on 7 May 1629.

#### Later Life

In 1632 he was appointed a member of the council of war. He attended the king at York in 1639, and in May 1642 was imprisoned by the parliament for urging the addition of the words "without cause" to the resolution that the king violated his oath by making war on parliament. He determined after this to take no further part in the struggle, retired to Montgomery Castle, and declined the king's summons.

On 5 September 1644 he surrendered the castle, by negotiation, to the Parliamentary forces led by Sir Thomas Myddelton. He returned to London, submitted, and was granted a pension of £20 a week. In 1647, he paid a visit to Pierre Gassendi at Paris, and died in London the following summer, being buried in the church of St Giles's in the Fields.

#### Family

Lord Herbert left two sons, Richard (c. 1600-1655), who succeeded him as 2nd Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and Edward, the title becoming extinct in the person of Henry Herbert, the 4th baron, grandson of the 1st Lord Herbert, in 1691. In 1694, however, it was revived in favour of another Henry Herbert (1654-1709), son of Sir Henry Herbert (1595-1673), brother of the 1st Lord Herbert of Cherbury. Lord Herbert's cousin and namesake, Sir Edward Herbert, was also a prominent figure in the English Civil War.

#### De Veritate

Herbert's major work is the *De veritate, prout distinguitur a revelatione, a verisimili, a possibili, et a falso* (On Truth, as It Is Distinguished from Revelation, the Probable, the Possible, and the False) He published it on the advice of Grotius.

In the *De veritate* Herbert produced the first purely metaphysical treatise, written by an Englishman. Herbert's real claim to fame is as "the father of English Deism". The common notions of religion are the famous five articles, which became the charter of the English deists. Charles Blount, in particular, acted as a publicist for Herbert's idea.

#### Other Work

The *De religione gentilium* was a posthumous work, influenced by the *De theologia gentili* of Gerardus Vossius, and seen into print by Isaac Vossius. It is an early work on comparative religion, and gives, in David Hume's words, "a natural history of religion." It is also to some extent dependent on the *De dis Syris* of John Selden, and the *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim* of

Marin Mersenne. By examining pagan religions Herbert finds the universality of his five great articles, and that these are clearly recognizable. The same vein is maintained in the tracts *De causis errorum*, an unfinished work on logical fallacies, *Religio laici*, and *Ad sacerdotes de religione laici* (1645).

Herbert's first historical work was the *Expeditio Buckinghami ducis*, a defence of the Duke of Buckingham's conduct on the La Rochelle expedition of 1627. *The Life and Raigne of King Henry VIII* (1649) is considered good for its period, but hampered by limited sources.

His poems, published in 1665 (reprinted and edited by John Churton Collins in 1881), show him in general a faithful disciple of Donne. His satires are poor, but a few of his lyrical verses show power of reflection and true inspiration, while his use of the metre afterwards employed by Tennyson in his "In Memoriam" is particularly happy and effective. His Neo-Latin poems are evidence of his scholarship. Three of these had appeared together with the *De causis errorum* in 1645.

To these works must be added *A Dialogue between a Tutor and a Pupil*, which is of disputed authenticity; and a treatise on the king's supremacy in the Church (manuscript in the Record Office and at the Queen's College, Oxford). His well-known autobiography, first published by Horace Walpole in 1764, a naïve and amusing narrative, is much occupied with his duels and amorous adventures, and breaks off in 1624. Missing from it are his friendships and the diplomatic side of his embassy in France, in relation to which he described only the splendour of his retinue and his social triumphs.

He was a lutenist, and Lord Herbert of Cherbury's *Lute-Book* survives in manuscript.

## Elegy over a Tomb

Must I then see, alas, eternal night  
Sitting upon those fairest eyes,  
And closing all those beams, which once did rise  
So radiant and bright  
That light and heat in them to us did prove  
Knowledge and love?

Oh, if you did delight no more to stay  
Upon this low and earthly stage,  
But rather chose an endless heritage,  
Tell us at least, we pray,  
Where all the beauties that those ashes ow'd  
Are now bestow'd.

Doth the sun now his light with yours renew?  
Have waves the curling of your hair?  
Did you restore unto the sky and air  
The red, and white, and blue?  
Have you vouchsaf'd to flowers since your death  
That sweetest breath?

Had not heav'n's lights else in their houses slept,  
Or to some private life retir'd?  
Must not the sky and air have else conspir'd,  
And in their regions wept?  
Must not each flower else the earth could breed,  
Have been a weed?

But thus enrich'd may we not yield some cause  
Why they themselves lament no more?  
That must have chang'd the course they held before,  
And broke their proper laws,  
Had not your beauties giv'n this second birth  
To heaven and earth.

Tell us (for oracles must still ascend  
For those that crave them at your tom ,  
Tell us where are those beauties now become,  
And what they now intend;  
Tell us, alas, that cannot tell our grief,  
Or hope relief.

Edward Herbert

## **Tears, flow no more**

TEARS, flow no more, or if you needs must flow,  
    Fall yet more slow,  
    Do not the world invade,  
From smaller springs than yours rivers have grown,  
    And they again a Sea have made,  
Brackish like you, and which like you hath flown.

Ebb to my heart, and on the burning fires  
    Of my desires,  
    O let your torrents fall,  
From smaller heate than theirs such sparks arise  
    As into flame converting all,  
This world might be but my love's sacrifice.

Yet if the tempests of my sighs so blow  
    You both must flow,  
    And my desires still burn,  
Since that in vain all help my love requires,  
    Why may not yet their rages turn  
To dry those tears, and to blow out those fires ?

Edward Herbert

## To Her face

Fatal Aspect ! that hast an Influence  
More powerful far than those Immortal Fires  
That but incline the Will and move the Sense,  
Which thou alone contrain'st, kindling Desires  
Of such an holy force, as more inspires  
The Soul with Knowledge, than Experience  
Or Revelation can do with all  
Their borrow'd helps : Sacred Astonishment  
Sits on thy Brow, threatning a sudden fall  
To all those Thoughts that are not lowly sent,  
In wonder and amaze, dazling that Eye  
Which on those Mysteries doth rudely gaze,  
Vow'd only unto Love's Divinity:  
Sure Adam sinn'd not in that spotless Face.

Edward Herbert

## **To his Watch, When He Could Not Sleep**

Uncessant Minutes, whil'st you move  
    you tell  
    The time that tells our life, which  
    though it run  
    Never so fast or farr, you'r new  
    begun  
Short steps shall overtake; for though life well

May scape his own Account, it shall not yours,  
    You are Death's Auditors, that both divide  
And summ what ere that life inspir'd endures  
    Past a beginning, and through you we bide

The doom of Fate, whose unrecall'd Decree  
    You date, bring, execute; making what's new,  
    Ill and good, old, for as we die in you,  
You die in Time, Time in Eternity.

Edward Herbert