

Classic Poetry Series

**Charles Cotton**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2012

**Publisher:**

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# Charles Cotton(28 April 1630 – 16 February 1687)

Charles Cotton was an English poet and writer, best known for translating the work of Michel de Montaigne from the French, for his contributions to *The Compleat Angler*, and for the highly influential *The Compleat Gamester* which has been attributed to him.

## **Early Life**

He was born at Beresford Hall on the border of Derbyshire and Staffordshire. His father, Charles Cotton the Elder, was a friend of [Ben Jonson](http://www.poemhunter.com/ben-jonson/), John Selden, [A href="](#)

## **Fishing**

His friendship with Izaak Walton began about 1655, and contradicts the assumptions about Cotton's character based on his coarse burlesques of Virgil and Lucian. Walton's initials made into a cipher with Cotton's own were placed over the door of Cotton's fishing cottage on the Dove near Hartington. Cotton contributed a second section "Instructions how to angle for a trout or grayling in a clear stream", to Walton's *The Compleat Angler*; the additions consisted of twelve chapters on fishing in clear water, which he understood largely but not exclusively to be fly fishing.

## **Marriages**

In 1656 he married his cousin Isabella Hutchinson, the daughter of Charles Hutchinson, M.P. for Nottingham. She was a half-sister of Col. John Hutchinson; They had one child, Catherine Cotton, who married Sir Kingsmill Lucy, 2nd bt. her mother Isebella (Hutchinson) Cotton, died in 1670. At the request of his wife's sister, Miss Stanhope Hutchinson, he undertook the translation of Pierre Corneille's *Horace* in 1671. In 1675, he married the dowager Countess of Ardglass; she had a jointure of £1500 a year, but he did not have the power to spend it.

## **Writings**

The 1674 first edition of *The Compleat Gamester* is attributed to Cotton (by publishers of later editions, to which additional, post-Cotton material was added in 1709 and 1725, along with some updates to the rules Cotton had described

earlier. The book was considered the "standard" English-language reference work on the playing of games – especially gambling games, and including billiards, card games, dice, horse racing and cock fighting, among others – until the publication of Edmond Hoyle's *Mr. Hoyle's Games Complete* in 1750, which outsold Cotton's then-obsolete work.

At Cotton's death in 1687 he was insolvent and left his estates to his creditors. He was buried in St James's Church, Piccadilly, on February 16, 1687.

Cotton's reputation as a burlesque writer may account for the neglect with which the rest of his poems have been treated. Their excellence was not, however, overlooked by good critics. Coleridge praises the purity and unaffectedness of his style in *Biographia Literaria*, and Wordsworth (Preface, 1815) gave a copious quotation from the "Ode to Winter". The "Retirement" is printed by Walton in the second part of the *Compleat Angler*.

*He was a Derbyshire man: his father moved there from the South England to live on his wife's estates. The Peak district is no longer associated with trout fishing. In Cotton's day, the inaccessibility of good fishing spots was physical as well as legal. The opening chapters of his section of the Compleat Angler draw Cotton and his friend across a savage and mountainous landscape. The friend, who will be taught fly-fishing, expresses doubt as to whether they are still in Christendom.*

*"What do I think? Why, I think it is the steepest place that ever sure men and horses went down; and that, if there be any safety at all, the safest way is to alight..." says the pupil. After he picked his way down, they reach a bridge. "Do you ... travel with wheelbarrows in this country" he asks. "Because this bridge certainly was made for nothing else; why, a mouse can hardly go over it: it is not two fingers broad."*

His masterpiece in translation, the *Essays of M. de Montaigne* (1685–1686, 1693, 1700, etc.), has often been reprinted, and still maintains its reputation; his other works include *The Scarronides, or Virgil Travestie* (1664–1670), a gross burlesque of the first and fourth books of the *Aeneid*, which ran through fifteen editions; *Burlesque upon Burlesque, ... being some of Lucian's Dialogues newly put into English fustian* (1675); *The Moral Philosophy of the Stoicks* (1667), from the French of Guillaume du Vair; *The History of the Life of the Duke d'Espernon* (1670), from the French of G Girard; the *Commentaries* (1674) of Blaise de Montluc; the *Planter's Manual* (1675), a practical book on arboriculture, in which he was an expert; *The Wonders of the Peake* (1681); the *Compleat Gamester* and *The Fair one of Tunis*, both dated 1674, are also assigned to Cotton.

# Clepsydra

WHY, let it run! who bids it stay?  
Let us the while be merry;  
Time there in water creeps away,  
With us it posts in sherry.  
Time not employ'd's empty sound,  
Nor did kind Heaven lend it,  
But that the glass should quick go round,  
And men in pleasure spend it.  
Then set thy foot, brave boy, to mine,  
Ply quick to cure our thinking;  
An hour-glass in an hour of wine  
Would be but lazy drinking.  
The man that snores the hour-glass out  
Is truly a time-waster,  
But we, who troll this glass about,  
Make him to post it faster.  
Yet though he flies so fast, some think,  
'Tis well known to the sages,  
He'll not refuse to stay and drink,  
And yet perform his stages.  
Time waits us whilst we crown the hearth,  
And dotes on ruby faces,  
And knows that this carrier of mirth  
Will help to mend our paces:  
He stays with him that loves good time,  
And never does refuse it,  
And only runs away from him  
That knows not how to use it.  
He only steals by without noise  
From those in grief that waste it,  
But lives with the mad roaring boys  
That husband it, and taste it.  
The moralist perhaps may prate  
Of virtue from his reading,  
'Tis all but stale and foisted chat  
To men of better breeding.  
Time, to define it, is the space  
That men enjoy their being;  
'Tis not the hour, but drinking glass,

Makes time and life agreeing.  
He wisely does oblige his fate  
Does cheerfully obey it,  
And is of fops the greatest that  
By temp'rance thinks to stay it.  
Come, ply the glass then quick about,  
To titillate the gullet,  
Sobriety's no charm, I doubt,  
Against a cannon-bullet.

Charles Cotton

# The Angler's Ballad

AWAY to the brook,  
All your tackle out look,  
Here's a day that is worth a year's wishing;  
See that all things be right,  
For 'tis a very spite  
To want tools when a man goes a-fishing.

Your rod with tops two,  
For the same will not do  
If your manner of angling you vary  
And full will you may think  
If you troll with a pink,  
One too weak will be apt to miscarry.

Then basket, neat made  
By a master in's trade  
In a belt at your shoulders must dangle;  
For none e'er was so vain  
To wear this to disdain,  
Who a true Brother was of the Angle.

Next, pouch must not fail,  
Stuff'd as full as a mail,  
With wax, crewels, silks, hair, furs and feathers,  
To make several flies,  
For the several skies,  
That shall kill in despite of all weathers.

The boxes and books  
For your lines and your hooks,  
And, though not for strict need notwithstanding,  
Your scissors, and your hone  
To adjust your points on,  
With a net to be sure for your landing.

All these things being on,  
'Tis high time we were gone,  
Down, and upward, that all may have pleasure;  
Till, here meeting at night,

We shall have the delight  
To discourse of our fortunes at leisure.

The day's not too bright,  
And the wind hits us right,  
And all Nature does seem to invite us;  
We have all things at will  
For to second our skill,  
As they all did conspire to delight us.

Or stream now, or still,  
A large pannier will fill,  
Trout and grayling to rise are so willing;  
I dare venture to say  
'Twill be a bloody day,  
And we all shall be weary of killing.

Away then, away,  
We lose sport by delay,  
But first leave all our sorrows behind us;  
If misfortune do come,  
We are all gone from home,  
And a-fishing she never can find us.

The Angler is free  
From the cares that degree  
Finds itself with so often tormented;  
And though we should slay  
Each a hundred to-day,  
'Tis a slaughter needs ne'er be repented.

And though we display  
All our arts to betray  
What were made for man's pleasure and diet;  
Yet both princes and states  
May, for all our quaint baits,  
Rule themselves and their people in quiet.

We scratch not our pates,  
Nor repine at the rates  
Our superiors impose on our living;  
But do frankly submit,

Knowing they have more wit  
in demanding, than we have in giving.

Whilst quiet we sit  
We conclude all things fit,  
Acquiescing with hearty submission;  
For, though simple, we know  
The soft murmurs will grow  
At the last into down-right sedition.

We care not who says,  
And intends it dispraise,  
That an Angler t'a fool is next neighbour;  
Let him prate, what care we,  
We're as honest as he,  
And so let him take that for his labour.

We covet no wealth  
But the blessing of health,  
And that greater good conscience within;  
Such devotion we bring  
To our God and our King,  
That from either no offers can win.

Whilst we sit and fish  
We do pray as we wish,  
For long life to our King James the Second;  
Honest Anglers then may,  
Or they've very foul play,  
With the best of good subjects be reckon'd.

Charles Cotton



# The Evening Quatrains

THE Day's grown old, the fainting Sun  
Has but a little way to run,  
And yet his steeds, with all his skill,  
Scarce lug the chariot down the hill.  
With labour spent, and thirst opprest,  
Whilst they strain hard to gain the West,  
From fetlocks hot drops melted light,  
Which turn to meteors in the Night.  
The shadows now so long do grow,  
That brambles like tall cedars show,  
Mole-hills seem mountains, and the ant  
Appears a monstrous elephant.  
A very little little flock  
Shades thrice the ground that it would stock;  
Whilst the small stripling following them  
Appears a mighty Polypheme.  
These being brought into the fold,  
And by the thrifty master told  
, [counted]  
He thinks his wages are well paid,  
Since none are either lost or stray'd.  
Now lowing herds are each-where heard,  
Chains rattle in the villian's  
yard, [farmer]  
The cart's on tail set down to rest,  
Bearing on high the cuckold's crest.  
The hedge is stripp'd, the clothes brought in,  
Nought's left without should be within,  
The bees are hiv'd, and hum their charm,  
Whilst every house does seem a swarm.  
The cock now to the roost is press'd:  
For he must call up all the rest;  
The sow's fast-pegg'd within the sty,  
To still her squeaking progeny.  
Each one has had his supping mess\*, [meal]  
The cheese is put into the press,  
The pans and bowls are scalded all,  
Rear'd up against the milk-house wall.  
And now on benches all are sat

In the cool air to sit and chat,  
Till Phoebus, dipping in the West,  
Shall lead the World the way to rest.

Charles Cotton

# The Morning Quatrains

THE cock has crow'd an hour ago,  
'Tis time we now dull sleep forego;  
Tir'd Nature is by sleep redress'd,  
And Labour's overcome by rest.  
We have out-done the work of Night,  
'Tis time we rise t'attend the Light,  
And e'er he shall his beams display,  
To plot new bus'ness for the Day.  
None but the slothful, or unsound,  
Are by the Sun in feathers found,  
Nor, without rising with the Sun,  
Can the world's bus'ness e'er be done.  
Hark! Hark! the watchful Chanticleer  
Tells us the Day's bright harbinger  
Peeps o'er the eastern hills, to awe  
And warm night's sov'reign to withdraw.  
The morning curtains now are drawn,  
And now appears the blushing dawn;  
Aurora has her roses shed,  
To strew the way Sol's steeds must tread.  
Xanthus and Aethon harness'd are,  
To roll away the burning car,  
And, snorting flame, impatient bear  
The dressing of the charioteer.  
The sable cheeks of sullen Night  
Are streak'd with rosy streams of light,  
Whilst she retires away in fear,  
To shade the other hemisphere.  
The merry lark now takes her wings,  
And long'd-for Day's loud welcome sings,  
Mounting her body out of sight,  
As if she meant to meet the Light.  
Now doors and windows are unbarr'd,  
Each-where are cheerful voices heard,  
And round about 'Good-morrows' fly,  
As if Day taught Humanity.  
The chimnies now to smoke begin,  
And the old wife sits down to spin,  
Whilst Kate, taking her pail, does trip

Mull's swoll'n and straddl'ing paps to strip.  
Vulcan now makes his anvil ring,  
Dick whistles loud, and Maud doth sing,  
And Silvio with his bugle horn  
Winds an Imprime unto the Morn.  
Now through the morning doors behold  
Phoebus array'd in burning gold,  
Lashing his fiery steeds, displays  
His warm and all-enlight'ning rays.  
Now each one to his work prepares,  
All that have hands are labourers,  
And manufactures of each trade  
By op'ning shops are open laid.  
Hob yokes his oxen to the team,  
The angler goes unto the stream,  
The woodman to the purlews hies,  
And lab'ring bees to load their thighs.  
Fair Amarillis drives her flocks,  
All night safe-folded from the fox,  
To flow'ry downs, where Colin stays,  
To court her with his roundelays.  
The traveller now leaves his inn  
A new day's journey to begin,  
As he would post it with the day,  
And early rising makes good way.  
The slick-fac'd school-boy satchel takes,  
And with slow pace small riddance makes;  
For why, the haste we make, you know  
To Knowledge and to Virtue's slow.  
The fore-horse jingles on the road,  
The wagoner lugs on his load,  
The field with busy people snies,  
And city rings with various cries.  
The World is now a busy swarm,  
All doing good, or doing harm;  
But let's take heed our acts be true,  
For Heaven's eye sees all we do.  
None can that piercing sight evade,  
It penetrates the darkest shade,  
And sin, though it could 'scape the eye,  
Would be discover'd by the cry.



# The Night Quatrains

THE Sun is set, and gone to sleep  
With the fair princess of the deep,  
Whose bosom is his cool retreat,  
When fainting with his proper heat;  
His steeds their flaming nostrils cool  
In spume of the cerulean pool;  
Whilst the wheels dip their hissing naves  
[hubs]

Deep in Columbus's western waves.  
From whence great rolls of smoke arise  
To overshadow the beauteous skies,  
Who bid the World's bright eye adieu  
In gelid tears of falling dew.

And now from the Iberian vales  
Night's sable steeds her chariot hales,  
Where double cypress curtains screen  
The gloomy melancholic queen.  
These, as they higher mount the sky,  
Ravish all colour from the ey,  
And leave it but an useless glass  
, [mirror]

Which few or no reflections grace.  
The crystal arch o'er Pinduss crown  
Is on a sudden dusky grown,  
And all's with fun'ral black o'erspread,  
As if the Day, which sleeps, were dead.  
No ray of Light the heart to cheer,  
But little twinkling stars appear,  
Which like faint dying embers lie,  
Fit not to work nor travel by.  
Perhaps to him they torches are,  
Who guide Night's sov'reign's drowsy car,  
And him they may befriend so near,  
But us they neither light nor cheer.  
Or else those little sparks of Light  
Are nails that tire the wheels of Night,  
Which to new stations still are brought  
As they roll o'er the gloomy vault,  
Or nails that arm the horse's hoof

Which trampling o'er the marble roof  
And striking fire in the air,  
We mortals call a shooting star.  
That's all the Light we now receive,  
Unless what belching Vulcans give,  
And those yield such a kind of Light  
As adds more horror to the Night.  
Nyctimine now freed from Day,  
From sullen bush flies out to prey,  
And does with ferret note proclaim  
Th'arrival of th'usurping Dame.  
The rail now cracks in fields and meads,  
Toads now forsake the nettle-beds,  
The tim'rous hare goes to relief,  
And wary men bolt out the thief.  
The fire's new rak'd, and hearth swept clean  
By Madge, the dirty kitchen quean\*, [servant]  
The safe is lock'd, the mouse-trap set,  
The leaven laid, and bucking wet.  
Now in false floors and roofs above,  
The lustful cats make ill-tun'd love,  
The ban-dog on the dunghill lies,  
And watchful nurse sings lullabies.  
Philomel chants it whilst she bleeds,  
The bittern booms it in the reeds,  
And Reynard ent'ring the back yard,  
The Capitolian cry is heard.  
The Goblin now the fool alarms,  
Hags meet to mumble o'er their charms;  
The Night Mare rides the dreaming ass,  
And Fairies trip it on the grass.  
The drunkard now supinely snores,  
His load of ale sweats through his pores,  
Yet when he wakes the swine shall find  
A cropala remains behind.  
The sober now and chaste are blest  
With sweet, and with refreshing rest,  
And to sound sleeps they've best pretence,  
Have greatest share of Innocence.  
We should so live then that we may  
Fearless put off our clots and clay,  
And travel through Death's shades to Light,

For every Day must have its Night.

Charles Cotton



# The Noon Quatrains

THE Day grows hot, and darts his rays  
From such a sure and killing place,  
That half this World are fain to fly  
The danger of his burning eye.  
His early glories were benign,  
Warm to be felt, bright to be seen,  
And all was comfort, but who can  
Endure him when Meridian?  
Of him we as of kings complain,  
Who mildly do begin to reign,  
But to the Zenith got of pow'r,  
Those whom they should protect devour.  
Has not another Phaeton  
Mounted the chariot of the Sun,  
And, wanting art to guide his horse,  
Is hurri'd from the Sun's due course.  
If this hold on, our fertile lands  
Will soon be turn'd to parched sands,  
And not an onion that will grow  
Without a Nile to overflow.  
The grazing herds now droop and pant,  
E'en without labour fit to faint,  
And willingly forsook their meat  
[food]  
To seek out cover from the heat.  
The lagging ox is no unbound,  
From larding  
the new turn'd up ground, [pressing down]  
Whilst Hobbinal alike o'er-laid  
, [burdened]  
Takes his coarse dinner to the shade.  
Cellars and grottos now are best  
To eat and drink in, or to rest,  
And not a soul above is found  
Can find a refuge under ground.  
When pagan tyranny grew hot,  
Thus persecuted Christians got  
Into the dark but friendly womb  
Of unknown subterranean Rome

. [the Roman catacombs]  
And as that heat did cool at last,  
So a few scorching hours o'er-pass'd,  
In a more mild and temp'rate ray  
We may again enjoy the Day.

Charles Cotton

