

Classic Poetry Series

William Habington
- poems -

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William Habington(1605 - 1654)

William Habington was born at Hindlip, Worcestershire in 1605, and educated at Saint-Omer and Paris. He married Lucy, daughter of William Herbert, Baron Powis, and a year or two after his marriage, in 1634, issued his well-known "Castara" (see Arber's English Reprints, 1870), a series of poems addressed mainly to his wife.

In 1635 and 1640 second and third enlarged editions of the book appeared respectively. The poems are mostly short, many of them sonnets, and interspersed are several of the prose characters fashionable at the time. A few verses are addressed to friends, including Ben Jonson. The poetry of "Castara" has been said to show a peculiarly refined and pure imagination; skilful, melodious and containing many beautiful passages. It displays some of the so-called "metaphysical" qualities which pervaded most 'Caroline' verse.

In 1640, he published a romantic tragedy, the "Queen of Arragon", which attracted interest because of passages illustrating an independence of mind upon certain social and political questions. It was acted at Court, and after the revival of the Restoration. In the same year, Thomas a prose "History of Edward IV", reprinted in Kennet's "Complete History of England" (London, 1706) and stated to have been written and published at the desire of King Charles I.

In 1641 followed "Observations upon History", a series of prose pieces depicting great events in Europe, "such as" (he says) "impressed me in the reading and make the imagination stand amazed at the vicissitude of time and fortune". Professor Saintsbury remarks of Habington that "he is creditably distinguished from his contemporaries by a very strict and remarkable decency of thought and language".

Nox Nocti Indicat Scientiam

WHEN I survey the bright
 Celestial sphere;
So rich with jewels hung, that Night
 Doth like an Ethiop bride appear:

 My soul her wings doth spread
 And heavenward flies,
Th' Almighty's mysteries to read
 In the large volumes of the skies.

 For the bright firmament
 Shoots forth no flame
So silent, but is eloquent
 In speaking the Creator's name.

 No unregarded star
 Contracts its light
Into so small a character,
 Removed far from our human sight,

 But if we steadfast look
 We shall discern
In it, as in some holy book,
 How man may heavenly knowledge learn.

 It tells the conqueror
 That far-stretch'd power,
Which his proud dangers traffic for,
 Is but the triumph of an hour:

 That from the farthest North,
 Some nation may,
Yet undiscover'd, issue forth,
 And o'er his new-got conquest sway:

 Some nation yet shut in
 With hills of ice
May be let out to scourge his sin,
 Till they shall equal him in vice.

