

The Life of Cowley Main Text

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The life of Cowley, notwithstanding the penury of English biography, has been written by Dr. Sprat, an author whose pregnancy of imagination and elegance of language have deservedly set him high in the ranks of literature; but his zeal of friendship, or ambition of eloquence, has produced a funeral oration rather than a history: he has given the character, not the life, of Cowley; for he writes with so little detail, that scarcely any thing is distinctly known, but all is shown confused and enlarged through the mist of panegyrick.

Abraham Cowley was born in the year one thousand six hundred and eighteen. His father was a grocer, whose condition Dr. Sprat conceals under the general appellation of a citizen; and, what would probably not have been less carefully suppressed, the omission of his name in the register of St. Dunstan's parish gives reason to suspect that his father was a sectary. Whoever he was, he died before the birth of his son, and, consequently, left him to the care of his mother; whom Wood represents as struggling earnestly to procure him a literary education, and who, as she lived to the age of eighty, had her solicitude rewarded, by seeing her son eminent, and, I hope, by seeing him fortunate, and partaking his prosperity. We know, at least, from Sprat's account, that he always acknowledged her care, and justly paid the dues of filial gratitude.

In the window of his mother's apartment lay Spenser's Fairy Queen; in which he very early took delight to read, till, by feeling the charms of verse, he became, as he relates, irrecoverably a poet. Such are the accidents which, sometimes remembered, and, perhaps, sometimes forgotten, produce that particular designation of mind, and propensity for some certain science or employment, which is commonly called genius. The true genius is a mind of large general powers, accidentally determined to some particular direction. Sir Joshua Reynolds, the great painter of the present age, had the first fondness for his art excited by the perusal of Richardson's treatise.

By his mother's solicitation he was admitted into Westminster school, where he was soon distinguished. He was wont, says Sprat, to relate, "that he had this defect in his memory at that time, that his teachers never could bring it to retain the ordinary rules of grammar."

This is an instance of the natural desire of man to propagate a wonder. It is, surely, very difficult to tell any thing as it was heard, when Sprat could not refrain from amplifying a commodious incident, though the book to which he prefixed his narrative, contained its confutation. A memory admitting some things and rejecting others, an intellectual digestion that concocted the pulp of learning, but refused the husks, had the appearance of an instinctive elegance, of a particular provision made by nature for literary politeness. But, in the author's own honest relation, the marvel vanishes: he was, he says, such "an enemy to all constraint, that his master never could prevail on him to learn the rules without book." He does not tell, that he could not learn the rules; but that, being able to perform his exercises without them, and being an "enemy to constraint," he spared himself the labour.

Among the English poets, Cowley, Milton, and Pope, might be said "to lisp in numbers;" and have given such early proofs, not only of powers of language, but of comprehension of things, as, to more tardy minds, seems scarcely credible. But of the learned puerilities of Cowley there is no doubt, since a volume of his poems was not only written, but printed, in his thirteenth year[6]; containing, with other poetical compositions, the Tragical History of Pyramus and Thisbe, written when he was ten years old; and Constantia and Philetus, written two years after.

While he was yet at school, he produced a comedy, called, Love's Riddle, though it was not published, till he had been some time at Cambridge. This comedy is of the pastoral kind, which requires no acquaintance with the living world, and, therefore, the time at which it was composed adds little to the wonders of Cowley's minority.

In 1636, he was removed to Cambridge[7], where he continued his studies with great intenseness; for he is said to have written, while he was yet a young student, the greater part of his Davideis; a work of which the materials could not have been collected without the study of many years, but by a mind of the greatest vigour and activity.

Two years after his settlement at Cambridge he published Love's Riddle, with a poetical dedication to sir Kenelm Digby, of whose acquaintance all his contemporaries seem to have been ambitious; and Naufragium Jocularis, a comedy, written in Latin, but without due attention to the ancient models; for it is not loose verse, but mere prose. It was printed with a dedication in verse, to Dr. Comber, master of the college; but, having neither the facility of a popular, nor the accuracy of a learned work, it seems to be now universally neglected.

At the beginning of the civil war, as the prince passed through Cambridge, in his way to York, he was entertained with a representation of the Guardian, a comedy, which, Cowley says, was neither written nor acted, but rough-drawn by him, and repeated by the scholars. That this

comedy was printed during his absence from his country, he appears to have considered as injurious to his reputation; though, during the suppression of the theatres, it was sometimes privately acted with sufficient approbation.

In 1643, being now master of arts, he was, by the prevalence of the parliament, ejected from Cambridge, and sheltered himself at St. John's college, in Oxford; where, as is said by Wood, he published a satire, called the Puritan and Papist, which was only inserted in the last collection of his works[8]; and so distinguished himself by the warmth of his loyalty and the elegance of his conversation, that he gained the kindness and confidence of those who attended the king, and, amongst others, of lord Falkland, whose notice cast a lustre on all to whom it was extended.

About the time when Oxford was surrendered to the parliament, he followed the queen to Paris, where he became secretary to the lord Jermyn, afterwards earl of St. Alban's, and was employed in such correspondence as the royal cause required, and particularly in ciphering and deciphering the letters that passed between the king and queen; an employment of the highest confidence and honour. So wide was his province of intelligence, that, for several years, it filled all his days and two or three nights in the week.

In the year 1647, his *Mistress* was published; for he imagined, as he declared in his preface to a subsequent edition, that "poets are scarcely thought freemen of their company without paying some duties, or obliging themselves to be true to love."

This obligation to amorous ditties owes, I believe, its original to the fame of Petrarch, who, in an age rude and uncultivated, by his tuneful homage to his Laura, refined the manners of the lettered world, and filled Europe with love and poetry. But the basis of all excellence is truth: he that professes love ought to feel its power. Petrarch was a real lover, and Laura doubtless deserved his tenderness. Of Cowley, we are told by Barnes, who had means enough of information, that, whatever he may talk of his own inflammability, and the variety of characters by which his heart was divided, he, in reality, was in love but once, and then never had resolution to tell his passion.

This consideration cannot but, abate, in some measure, the reader's esteem for the work and the author. To love excellence is natural; it is natural, likewise, for the lover to solicit reciprocal regard by an elaborate display of his own qualifications. The desire of pleasing has, in different men, produced actions of heroism, and effusions of wit; but it seems as reasonable to appear the champion as the poet of an "airy nothing," and to quarrel as to write for what Cowley might have learned from his master Pindar, to call "the dream of a shadow."

It is surely not difficult, in the solitude of a college, or in the bustle of the world, to find useful studies and serious employment. No man needs to be so burdened with life, as to squander it in voluntary dreams of fictitious occurrences. The man that sits down to suppose himself charged with treason or peculation, and heats his mind to an elaborate purgation of his character from crimes which he was never within the possibility of committing, differs only by the infrequency of his folly from him who praises beauty which he never saw; complains of jealousy which he never felt; supposes himself sometimes invited, and sometimes forsaken; fatigues his fancy, and ransacks his memory, for images which may exhibit the gaiety of hope, or the gloominess of despair; and dresses his imaginary Chloris or Phyllis, sometimes in flowers fading as her beauty, and sometimes in gems lasting as her virtues.

At Paris, as secretary to lord Jermyn, he was engaged in transacting things of real importance with real men and real women, and, at that time, did not much employ his thoughts upon phantoms of gallantry. Some of his letters to Mr. Bennet, afterwards earl of Arlington, from April to December, in 1650, are preserved in *Miscellanea Aulica*, a collection of papers, published by Brown. These letters, being written, like those of other men, whose minds are more on things than words, contribute no otherwise to his reputation, than as they show him to have been above the affectation of unseasonable elegance, and to have known, that the business of a statesman can be little forwarded by flowers of rhetoric. One passage, however, seems not unworthy of some notice. Speaking of the Scotch treaty, then in agitation: "The Scotch treaty," says he, "is the only thing now in which we are vitally concerned; I am one of the last hopers, and yet cannot now abstain from believing that an agreement will be made; all people upon the place incline to that of union. The Scotch will moderate something of the rigour of their demands; the mutual necessity of an accord is visible, the king is persuaded of it. And, to tell you the truth, which I take to be an argument above all the rest, Virgil has told the same thing to that purpose."

This expression from a secretary of the present time would be considered as merely ludicrous, or, at most, as an ostentatious display of scholarship; but the manners of that time were so tinged with superstition, that I cannot but suspect Cowley of having consulted, on this great occasion, the Virgilian lots[9], and to have given some credit to the answer of his oracle.

Some years afterwards, "business," says Sprat, "passed of course into other hands;" and Cowley, being no longer useful at Paris, was, in 1656, sent back into England, that, "under pretence of privacy and retirement, he might take occasion of giving notice of the posture of things in this nation."

Soon after his return to London, he was seized by some messengers of the usurping powers, who were sent out in quest of another man; and, being examined, was put into confinement, from which he was not dismissed without the security of a thousand pounds, given by Dr. Scarborough.

This year he published his poems, with a preface, in which he seems to have inserted something suppressed in subsequent editions, which was interpreted to denote some relaxation of his loyalty. In this preface he declares, that "his desire had been for some days past, and did still very vehemently continue, to retire himself to some of the American plantations, and to forsake this world for ever."

From the obloquy which the appearance of submission to the usurpers brought upon him, his biographer has been very diligent to clear him, and, indeed, it does not seem to have lessened his reputation. His wish for retirement we can easily believe to be undissembled; a man harassed in one kingdom, and persecuted in another, who, after a course of business that employed all his days, and half his nights, in ciphering and deciphering, comes to his own country, and steps into a prison, will be willing enough to retire to some place of quiet and of safety. Yet let neither our reverence for a genius, nor our pity for a sufferer, dispose us to forget, that, if his activity was virtue, his retreat was cowardice[10].

He then took upon himself the character of physician, still, according to Sprat, with intention "to dissemble the main design of his coming over;" and, as Mr. Wood relates, "complying with the men then in power, which was much taken notice of by the royal party, he obtained an order to be created doctor of physick; which being done to his mind, whereby he gained the ill will of some of his friends, he went into France again, having made a copy of verses on Oliver's death."

This is no favourable representation, yet even in this not much wrong can be discovered. How far he complied with the men in power, is to be inquired before he can be blamed. It is not said, that he told them any secrets, or assisted them by intelligence or any other act. If he only promised to be quiet, that they in whose hands he was might free him from confinement, he did what no law of society prohibits.

The man whose miscarriage in a just cause has put him in the power of his enemy may, without any violation of his integrity, regain his liberty, or preserve his life, by a promise of neutrality; for, the stipulation gives the enemy nothing which he had not before: the neutrality of a captive may be always secured by his imprisonment or death. He that is at the disposal of another may not promise to aid him in any injurious act, because no power can compel active obedience. He may engage to do nothing, but not to do ill.

There is reason to think that Cowley promised little. It does not appear that his compliance gained him confidence enough to be trusted without security, for the bond of his bail was never cancelled; nor that it made him think himself secure, for, at that dissolution of government which followed the death of Oliver, he returned into France, where he resumed his former station, and staid till the restoration[11].

"He continued," says his biographer, "under these bonds, till the general deliverance;" it is, therefore, to be supposed, that he did not go to France, and act again for the king, without the consent of his bondsman; that he did not show his loyalty at the hazard of his friend, but by his friend's permission.

Of the verses on Oliver's death, in which Wood's narrative seems to imply something encomiastick, there has been no appearance. There is a discourse concerning his government, indeed, with verses intermixed, but such as certainly gained its author no friends among the abettors of usurpation.

A doctor of physick, however, he was made at Oxford, in December, 1657; and, in the commencement of the Royal Society, of which an account has been given by Dr. Birch, he appears busy among the experimental philosophers, with the title of Dr. Cowley.

There is no reason for supposing that he ever attempted practice: but his preparatory studies have contributed something to the honour of his country. Considering botany as necessary to a physician, he retired into Kent to gather plants; and as the predominance of a favourite study affects all subordinate operations of the intellect, botany, in the mind of Cowley, turned into poetry. He composed, in Latin, several books on plants, of which the first and second display the qualities of herbs, in elegiac verse; the third and fourth, the beauties of flowers, in various measures; and the fifth and sixth, the uses of trees, in heroick numbers.

At the same time were produced, from the same university, the two great poets, Cowley and Milton, of dissimilar genius, of opposite principles; but concurring in the cultivation of Latin poetry, in which the English, till their works and May's poem appeared[12], seemed unable to contest the palm with any other of the lettered nations.

If the Latin performances of Cowley and Milton be compared, (for May I hold to be superiour to both,) the advantage seems to lie on the side of Cowley. Milton is generally content to express the thoughts of the ancients in their language; Cowley, without much loss of purity or elegance, accommodates the diction of Rome to his own conceptions.

At the restoration, after all the diligence of his long service, and with consciousness not only of the merit of fidelity, but of the dignity of great abilities, he naturally expected ample

preferments; and, that he might not be forgotten by his own fault, wrote a song of triumph. But this was a time of such general hope, that great numbers were inevitably disappointed; and Cowley found his reward very tediously delayed. He had been promised, by both Charles the first and second, the mastership of the Savoy, "but he lost it," says Wood, "by certain persons, enemies to the muses."

The neglect of the court was not his only mortification; having by such alteration, as he thought proper, fitted his old comedy of the Guardian for the stage, he produced it[13], under the title of the Cutter of Coleman street[14]. It was treated on the stage with great severity, and was afterwards censured as a satire on the king's party.

Mr. Dryden, who went with Mr. Sprat to the first exhibition, related to Mr. Dennis, "that, when they told Cowley how little favour had been shown him, he received the news of his ill success, not with so much firmness as might have been expected from so great a man."

What firmness they expected, or what weakness Cowley discovered, cannot be known. He that misses his end will never be as much pleased as he that attains it, even when he can impute no part of his failure to himself; and when the end is to please the multitude, no man, perhaps, has a right, in things admitting of gradation and comparison, to throw the whole blame upon his judges, and totally to exclude diffidence and shame by a haughty consciousness of his own excellence.

For the rejection of this play, it is difficult now to find the reason: it certainly has, in a very great degree, the power of fixing attention and exciting merriment. From the charge of disaffection he exculpates himself, in his preface, by observing, how unlikely it is, that, having followed the royal family through all their distresses, "he should choose the time of their restoration to begin a quarrel with them." It appears, however, from the Theatrical Register of Downes, the prompter, to have been popularly considered as a satire on the royalists.

That he might shorten this tedious suspense, he published his pretensions and his discontent, in an ode called the Complaint; in which he styles himself the melancholy Cowley. This met with the usual fortune of complaints, and seems to have excited more contempt than pity.

These unlucky incidents are brought, maliciously enough, together in some stanzas, written about that time on the choice of a laureate; a mode of satire, by which, since it was first introduced by Suckling, perhaps, every generation of poets has been teased.

Savoy-missing Cowley came into the court, Making apologies for his bad play; Every one gave him so good a report, That Apollo gave heed to all he could say: Nor would he have had, 'tis thought, a rebuke, Unless he had done some notable folly; Writ verses unjustly in praise of Sam

Tuke, Or printed his pitiful Melancholy.

His vehement desire of retirement now came again upon him. "Not finding," says the morose Wood, "that preferment conferred upon him which he expected, while others for their money carried away most places, he retired discontented into Surrey."

"He was now," says the courtly Sprat, "weary of the vexations and formalities of an active condition. He had been perplexed with a long compliance to foreign manners. He was satiated with the arts of a court; which sort of life, though his virtue made it innocent to him, yet nothing could make it quiet. Those were the reasons that moved him to follow the violent inclination of his own mind, which, in the greatest throng of his former business, had still called upon him, and represented to him the true delights of solitary studies, of temperate pleasures, and a moderate revenue below the malice and flatteries of fortune."

So differently are things seen! and so differently are they shown! But actions are visible, though motives are secret. Cowley certainly retired; first to Barn-elms, and afterwards to Chertsey, in Surrey. He seems, however, to have lost part of his dread of the "hum of men[15]." He thought himself now safe enough from intrusion, without the defence of mountains and oceans; and, instead of seeking shelter in America, wisely went only so far from the bustle of life as that he might easily find his way back, when solitude should grow tedious. His retreat was, at first, but slenderly accommodated; yet he soon obtained, by the interest of the earl of St. Alban's and the duke of Buckingham, such a lease of the queen's lands, as afforded him an ample income[16].

By the lovers of virtue and of wit it will be solicitously asked, if he now was happy. Let them peruse one of his letters, accidentally preserved by Peck, which I recommend to the consideration of all that may, hereafter, pant for solitude.

"TO DR. THOMAS SPRAT.

"Chertsey, May 21, 1665.

"The first night that I came hither I caught so great a cold, with a defluxion of rheum, as made me keep my chamber ten days. And, two after, had such a bruise on my ribs with a fall, that I am yet unable to move or turn myself in my bed. This is my personal fortune here to begin with. And, besides, I can get no money from my tenants, and have my meadows eaten up every night by cattle put in by my neighbours. What this signifies, or may come to in time, God knows; if it be ominous, it can end in nothing less than hanging. Another misfortune has been, and stranger than all the rest, that you have broke your word with me, and failed to come, even though you told Mr. Bois that you would. This is what they call 'Monstri simile.' I do hope

to recover my late hurt so farre within five or six days, (though it be uncertain yet whether I shall ever recover it,) as to walk about again. And then, methinks, you and I and 'the dean' might be very merry upon St. Ann's hill. You might very conveniently come hither the way of Hampton Town, lying there one night. I write this in pain, and can say no more: 'Verbum sapienti.'"

He did not long enjoy the pleasure, or suffer the uneasiness, of solitude; for he died at the Porch-house[17] in Chertsey, in 1667, in the forty-ninth year of his age.

He was buried, with great pomp, near Chaucer and Spenser; and king Charles pronounced, "that Mr. Cowley had not left behind him a better man in England." He is represented, by Dr. Sprat, as the most amiable of mankind; and this posthumous praise may safely be credited, as it has never been contradicted by envy or by faction.

Such are the remarks and memorials which I have been able to add to the narrative of Dr. Sprat; who, writing when the feuds of the civil war were yet recent, and the minds of either party were easily irritated, was obliged to pass over many transactions in general expressions, and to leave curiosity often unsatisfied. What he did not tell, cannot, however, now be known; I must, therefore, recommend the perusal of his work, to which my narration can be considered only as a slender supplement.

Cowley, like other poets who have written with narrow views, and, instead of tracing intellectual pleasures in the minds of men, paid their court to temporary prejudices, has been at one time too much praised, and too much neglected at another.

Wit, like all other things, subject by their nature to the choice of man, has its changes and fashions, and, at different times, takes different forms. About the beginning of the seventeenth century, appeared a race of writers, that may be termed the metaphysical poets; of whom in a criticism on the works of Cowley, it is not improper to give some account.

The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and, to show their learning was their whole endeavour; but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses, and, very often, such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.

If the father of criticism has rightly denominated poetry, 'technae mimaetikhæ', an imitative art, these writers will, without great wrong, lose their right to the name of poets; for they cannot be said to have imitated any thing; they neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter, nor represented the operations of intellect.

Those, however, who deny them to be poets, allow them to be wits. Dryden confesses of himself and his contemporaries, that they fall below Donne in wit; but maintains, that they surpass him in poetry.

If wit be well described by Pope, as being "that which has been often thought, but was never before so well expressed," they certainly never attained, nor ever sought it; for they endeavoured to be singular in their thoughts, and were careless of their diction. But Pope's account of wit is undoubtedly erroneous: he depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language.

If, by a more noble and more adequate conception, that be considered as wit which is, at once, natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just; if it be that, which he that never found it, wonders how he missed; to wit of this kind the metaphysical poets have seldom risen. Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were ever found.

But wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of "discordia concors;" a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtilty surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.

From this account of their compositions it will be readily inferred, that they were not successful in representing or moving the affections. As they were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising, they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasure of other minds: they never inquired what, on any occasion, they should have said or done; but wrote rather as beholders, than partakers of human nature; as beings looking upon good and evil, impassive and at leisure; as epicurean deities, making remarks on the actions of men, and the vicissitudes of life, without interest and without emotion. Their courtship was void of fondness, and their lamentation of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had never been said before.

Nor was the sublime more within their reach than the pathetick; for they never attempted that comprehension and expanse of thought which, at once, fills the whole mind, and of which, the first effect is sudden astonishment, and the second, rational admiration. Sublimity is produced by aggregation, and littleness by dispersion. Great thoughts are always general, and consist in

positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness. It is with great propriety that subtilty, which, in its original import, means exility of particles, is taken, in its metaphorical meaning, for nicety of distinction. Those writers who lay on the watch for novelty could have little hope of greatness; for great things cannot have escaped former observation. Their attempts were always analytick; they broke every image into fragments; and could no more represent, by their slender conceits, and laboured particularities, the prospects of nature, or the scenes of life, than he who dissects a sunbeam with a prism can exhibit the wide effulgence of a summer noon.

What they wanted, however, of the sublime, they endeavoured to supply by hyperbole; their amplification had no limits; they left not only reason but fancy behind them; and produced combinations of confused magnificence, that not only could not be credited, but could not be imagined.

Yet great labour, directed by great abilities, is never wholly lost; if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they, likewise, sometimes struck out unexpected truth; if their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write on their plan it was, at least, necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume the dignity of a writer, by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery, and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme, and volubility of syllables[18].

In perusing the works of this race of authors, the mind is exercised either by recollection or inquiry; either something already learned is to be retrieved, or something new is to be examined. If their greatness seldom elevates, their acuteness often surprises; if the imagination is not always gratified, at least the powers of reflection and comparison are employed; and, in the mass of materials which ingenious absurdity has thrown together, genuine wit and useful knowledge may be sometimes found buried, perhaps, in grossness of expression, but useful to those who know their value; and such as, when they are expanded to perspicuity, and polished to elegance, may give lustre to works which have more propriety, though less copiousness of sentiment.

This kind of writing, which was, I believe, borrowed from Marino and his followers, had been recommended by the example of Donne, a man of very extensive and various knowledge; and by Jonson, whose manner resembled that of Donne more in the ruggedness of his lines than in the cast of his sentiments.

When their reputation was high, they had, undoubtedly, more imitators than time has left behind. Their immediate successours, of whom any remembrance can be said to remain, were

Suckling, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Cleiveland, and Milton. Denham and Waller sought another way to fame, by improving the harmony of our numbers. Milton tried the metaphysick style only in his lines upon Hobson, the carrier. Cowley adopted it, and excelled his predecessors, having as much sentiment, and more musick. Suckling neither improved versification, nor abounded in conceits. The fashionable style remained chiefly with Cowley; Suckling could not reach it, and Milton disdained it.

Critical remarks are not easily understood without examples; and I have, therefore, collected instances of the modes of writing by which this species of poets, for poets they were called by themselves and their admirers, was eminently distinguished.

As the authors of this race were, perhaps, more desirous of being admired than understood, they sometimes drew their conceits from recesses of learning, not very much frequented by common readers of poetry. Thus Cowley, on knowledge:

The sacred tree 'midst the fair orchard grew; The phoenix, truth, did on it rest, And built his perfum'd nest: That right Porphyrian tree which did true logic shew; Each leaf did learned notions give, And th' apples were demonstrative; So clear their colour and divine, The very shade they cast did other lights outshine.

On Anacreon continuing a lover in his old age:

Love was with thy life entwin'd, Close as heat with fire is join'd; A powerful brand prescrib'd the date Of thine, like Meleager's fate Th' antiperistasis of age More enflam'd thy amorous rage.

In the following verses we have an allusion to a rabbinical opinion concerning manna:

Variety I ask not: give me one To live perpetually upon. The person love does to us fit, Like manna, has the taste of all in it.

Thus Donne shows his medicinal knowledge in some encomiastick verses:

In every thing there naturally grows A balsamum to keep it fresh and new, If 'twere not injur'd by extrinsique blows; Your youth and beauty are this balm in you. But you, of learning and religion, And virtue and such ingredients, have made A mithridate, whose operation Keeps off, or cures what can be done or said.

Though the following lines of Donne, on the last night of the year, have something in them too scholastick, they are not inelegant:

This twilight of two years, not past nor next, Some emblem is of me, or I of this, Who, meteor-like, of stuff and form perplex't, Whose what and where in disputation is, If I should call me any

thing, should miss. I sum the years and me, and find me not Debtor to th' old, nor creditor to th' new. That cannot say, my thanks I have forgot; Nor trust I this with hopes; and yet scarce true This bravery is, since these times shew'd me you.

Yet more abstruse and profound is Donne's reflection upon man as a microcosm:

If men be worlds, there is in every one Something to answer in some proportion All the world's riches: and in good men, this Virtue, our form's form, and our soul's soul, is.

Of thoughts so far-fetched, as to be not only unexpected, but unnatural, all their books are full.

To a lady, who wrote poesies for rings:

They, who above do various circles find, Say, like a ring, th' equator heaven does bind. When heaven shall be adorn'd by thee, (Which then more heaven than 'tis will be,) 'Tis thou must write the poesy there, For it wanteth one as yet, Then the sun pass through 't twice a year, The sun, which is esteem'd the god of wit. COWLEY.

The difficulties which have been raised about identity in philosophy, are, by Cowley, with still more perplexity applied to love:

Five years ago (says story) I lov'd you, For which you call me most inconstant now; Pardon me, madam, you mistake the man; For I am not the same that I was then: No flesh is now the same 'twas then in me; And that my mind is chang'd yourself may see. The same thoughts to retain still, and intents, Were more inconstant far; for accidents Must of all things most strangely inconstant prove, If from one subject they t' another move; My members, then, the father members were, From whence these take their birth which now are here. If then this body love what th' other did, 'Twere incest, which by nature is forbid.

The love of different women is, in geographical poetry, compared to travels through different countries:

Hast thou not found each woman's breast (The land where thou hast travelled) Either by savages possest, Or wild, and uninhabited? What joy could'st take, or what repose, In countries so unciviliz'd as those?

Lust, the scorching dogstar, here Rages with immoderate heat; Whilst pride, the rugged northern bear, In others makes the cold too great. And where these are temperate known, The soil's all barren sand, or rocky stone. COWLEY.

A lover, burnt up by his affection, is compared to Egypt:

The fate of Egypt I sustain, And never feel the dew of rain From clouds which in the head appear; But all my too much moisture owe To overflowings of the heart below. COWLEY.

The lover supposes his lady acquainted with the ancient laws of augury, and rites of sacrifice:

And yet this death of mine, I fear, Will ominous to her appear: When sound in every other part, Her sacrifice is found without an heart. For the last tempest of my death Shall sigh out that too, with my breath.

That the chaos was harmonized, has been recited of old; but whence the different sounds arose remained for a modern to discover:

Th' ungovern'd parts no correspondence knew; An artless war from thwarting motions grew; Till they to number and fixt rules were brought. Water and air he for the tenor chose; Earth made the base; the treble, flame arose. COWLEY.

The tears of lovers are always of great poetical account; but Donne has extended them into worlds. If the lines are not easily understood, they may be read again:

On a round ball A workman, that hath copies by, can lay An Europe, Afric, and an Asia, And quickly make that, which was nothing, all.

So doth each tear, Which thee doth wear, A globe, yea world, by that impression grow, Till thy tears mixt with mine do overflow This world, by waters sent from thee my heaven dissolved so.

On reading the following lines, the reader may, perhaps, cry out, "Confusion worse confounded:"

Here lies a she-sun, and a he-moon here, She gives the best light to his sphere, Or each is both, and all, and so They unto one another nothing owe. DONNE.

Who but Donne would have thought that a good man is a telescope?

Though God be our true glass, through which we see All, since the being of all things is he, Yet are the trunks, which do to us derive Things in proportion fit, by perspective Deeds of good men; for by their living here, Virtues, indeed remote, seem to be near.

Who would imagine it possible, that in a very few lines so many remote ideas could be brought together?

Since 'tis my doom, love's undershrieve, Why this reprieve? Why doth my she-advowson fly Incumbency? To sell thyself dost thou intend By candle's end, And hold the contrast thus in doubt, Life's taper out? Think but how soon the market fails, Your sex lives faster than the

males; And if, to measure age's span, The sober Julian were th' account of man, Whilst you live by the fleet Gregorian. CLEIVELAND.

Of enormous and disgusting hyperboles, these may be examples:

By every wind that comes this way, Send me, at least, a sigh or two, Such and so many I'll repay As shall themselves make winds to get to you. COWLEY.

In tears I'll waste these eyes, By love so vainly fed; So lust of old the deluge punished. COWLEY.

All arm'd in brass, the richest dress of war, (A dismal glorious sight!) he shone afar. The sun himself started with sudden fright, To see his beams return so dismal bright. COWLEY.

An universal consternation:

His bloody eyes he hurls round, his sharp paws Tear up the ground; then runs he wild about, Lashing his angry tail, and roaring out. Beasts creep into their dens, and tremble there; Trees, though no wind is stirring, shake with fear; Silence and horror fill the place around; Echo itself dares scarce repeat the sound. COWLEY.

Their fictions were often violent and unnatural.

Of his mistress bathing:

The fish around her crowded, as they do To the false light that treacherous fishers shew, And all with as much ease might taken be, As she at first took me; For ne'er did light so clear Among the waves appear, Though every night the sun himself set there. COWLEY.

The poetical effect of a lover's name upon glass:

My name engrav'd herein Doth contribute my firmness to this glass; Which, ever since that charm, hath been As hard as that which grav'd it was. DONNE.

Their conceits were sentiments slight and trifling. On an inconstant woman:

He enjoys the calmy sunshine now, And no breath stirring hears; In the clear heaven of thy brow, No smallest cloud appears. He sees thee gentle, fair and gay, And trusts the faithless April of thy May. COWLEY

Upon a paper, written with the juice of lemon, and read by the fire:

Nothing yet in thee is seen, But when a genial heat warms thee within, A new-born wood of various lines there grows: Here buds an L, and there a B; Here sprouts a V, and there a T; And

all the flourishing letters stand in rows. COWLEY.

As they sought only for novelty, they did not much inquire, whether their allusions were to things high or low, elegant or gross; whether they compared the little to the great, or the great to the little.

Physick and chirurgery for a lover:

Gently, ah gently, madam, touch The wound, which you yourself have made; That pain must needs be very much, Which makes me of your hand afraid, Cordials of pity give me now, For I too weak for purgings grow. COWLEY.

The world and a clock:

Mahol th' inferior world's fantastic face Thro' all the turns of matter's maze did trace; Great nature's well-set clock in pieces took; On all the springs and smallest wheels did look Of life and motion, and with equal art Made up the whole again of every part. COWLEY.

A coal-pit has not often found its poet; but, that it may not want its due honour, Cleiveland has paralleled it with the sun:

The moderate value of our guiltless ore Makes no man atheist, and no woman whore; Yet why should hallow'd vestal's sacred shrine Deserve more honour than a flaming mine? These pregnant wombs of heat would fitter be, Than a few embers, for a deity. Had he our pits, the Persian would admire No sun, but warm 's devotion at our fire: He'd leave the trotting whipster, and prefer Our profound Vulcan 'bove that wagoner. For wants he heat, or light? or would have store Of both? 'tis here: and what can suns give more? Nay, what's the sun, but in a different name, A coal-pit rampant, or a mine on flame! Then let this truth reciprocally run, The sun's heaven's coalery, and coals our sun.

Death, a voyage:

No family E'er rigg'd a soul for heaven's discovery, With whom more venturers might boldly dare Venture their stakes, with him in joy to share. DONNE.

Their thoughts and expressions were sometimes grossly absurd, and such as no figures or license can reconcile to the understanding.

A lover neither dead nor alive:

Then down I laid my head, Down on cold earth; and for awhile 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'er again in me? COWLEY.

A lover's heart, a hand grenado:

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

To poetical propagation of light;

The prince's favour is diffus'd o'er all, From which all fortunes, names, and natures fall: Then from those wombs of stars, the bride's bright eyes, At every glance a constellation flies, And sows the court with stars, and doth prevent, In light and power, the all-ey'd firmament: First her eye kindles other ladies' eyes, Then from their beams their jewels' lustres rise: And from their jewels torches do take fire, And all is warmth, and light, and good desire. DONNE.

They were in very little care to clothe their notions with elegance of dress, and, therefore, miss the notice and the praise which are often gained by those who think less, but are more diligent to adorn their thoughts.

That a mistress beloved is fairer in idea than in reality, is, by Cowley, thus expressed:

Thou in my fancy dost much higher stand, Than woman can be plac'd by nature's hand; And I must needs, I'm sure, a loser be, To change thee, as thou'rt there, for very thee.

That prayer and labour should cooperate, are thus taught by Donne:

In none but us are such mix'd engines found, As hands of double office: for the ground We till with them; and them to heaven we raise: Who prayerless labours, or, without this, prays, Doth but one half, that's none.

By the same author, a common topick, the danger of procrastination, is thus illustrated:

That which I should have begun In my youth's morning, now late must be done; And I, as giddy travellers must do, Which stray or sleep all day, and, having lost Light and strength, dark and tir'd must then ride post.

All that man has to do is to live and die; the sum of humanity is comprehended by Donne in the following lines:

Think in how poor a prison thou didst lie; After enabled but to suck and cry. Think, when 'twas grown to most, 'twas a poor inn, A province pack'd up in two yards of skin, And that usurp'd, or threaten'd with a rage Of sicknesses, or their true mother, age. But think that death hath now enfranchis'd thee; Thou hast thy expansion now, and liberty; Think, that a rusty piece discharg'd is flown In pieces, and the bullet is his own, And freely flies: this to thy soul allow, Think thy shell broke, think thy soul hatch'd but now.

They were sometimes indelicate and disgusting. Cowley thus apostrophises beauty:

Thou tyrant, which leav'st no man free! Thou subtle thief, from whom nought safe can be! Thou murderer, which hast kill'd; and devil, which would'st damn me!

Thus he addresses his mistress:

Thou who, in many a propriety, So truly art the sun to me, Add one more likeness, which I'm sure you can, And let me and my sun beget a man.

Thus he represents the meditations of a lover:

Though in thy thoughts scarce any tracks have been So much as of original sin,

Such charms thy beauty wears, as might Desires in dying confest saints excite. Thou with strange adultery Dost in each breast a brothel keep; Awake, all men do lust for thee, And some enjoy thee when they sleep.

The true taste of tears:

Hither with crystal vials, lovers, come, And take my tears, which are love's wine, And try your mistress' tears at home; For all are false, that taste not just like mine. **DONNE.**

This is yet more indelicate:

As the sweet sweat of roses in a still, As that which from chaf'd musk-cat's pores doth trill, As the almighty balm of th' early east; Such are the sweet drops of my mistress' breast. And on her neck her skin such lustre sets, They seem no sweat-drops, but pearl coronets: Rank, sweaty froth thy mistress' brow defiles. **DONNE.**

Their expressions sometimes raise horror, when they intend, perhaps, to be pathetick:

As men in hell are from diseases free, So from all other ills am I, Free from their known formality: But all pains eminently lie in thee. **COWLEY.**

They were not always strictly curious, whether the opinions from which they drew their illustrations were true; it was enough that they were popular. Bacon remarks, that some falsehoods are continued by tradition, because they supply commodious allusions.

It gave a piteous groan, and so it broke: In vain it something would have spoke; The love within too strong for't was, Like poison put into a Venice-glass. COWLEY.

In forming descriptions, they looked out, not for images, but for conceits. Night has been a common subject, which poets have contended to adorn. Dryden's Night is well known; Donne's is as follows:

Thou seest me here at midnight, now all rest: Time's dead low-water; when all minds divest Tomorrow's business; when the labourers have Such rest in bed, that their last church-yard grave, Subject to change, will scarce be a type of this; Now when the client, whose last hearing is Tomorrow, sleeps; when the condemned man, Who, when he opes his eyes, must shut them then Again by death, although sad watch he keep, Doth practise dying by a little sleep; Thou at this midnight seest me.

It must be, however, confessed of these writers, that if they are upon common subjects often unnecessarily and unpoetically subtle; yet, where scholastick speculation can be properly admitted, their copiousness and acuteness may justly be admired. What Cowley has written upon hope shows an unequalled fertility of invention:

Hope, whose weak being ruin'd is, Alike if it succeed and if it miss; Whom good or ill does equally confound, And both the horns of fate's dilemma wound; Vain shadow! which dost vanish quite, Both at full noon and perfect night! The stars have not a possibility Of blessing thee; If things then from their end we happy call, 'Tis hope is the most hopeless thing of all. Hope, thou bold taster of delight, Who, whilst thou should'st but taste, devour'st it quite! Thou bring'st us an estate, yet leav'st us poor, By clogging it with legacies before! The joys which we entire should wed, Come deflower'd virgins to our bed; Good fortunes without gain imported be, Such mighty custom's paid to thee; For joy, like wine, kept close, does better taste; If it take air before its spirits waste.

To the following comparison of a man that travels and his wife that stays at home, with a pair of compasses, it may be doubted whether absurdity or ingenuity has better claim:

Our two souls, therefore, which are one, Though I must go, endure not yet A breach, but an expansion, Like gold to airy thinness beat. If they be two, they are two so As stiff twin compasses are two; Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show To move, but doth if th' other do. And though it in the centre sit, Yet, when the other far doth roam, It leans, and hearkens after

it, And grows erect, as that comes home. Such wilt thou be to me, who must Like th' other foot obliquely run, Thy firmness makes my circle just, And makes me end where I begun. DONNE[19].

In all these examples it is apparent, that whatever is improper or vitious is produced by a voluntary deviation from nature, in pursuit of something new and strange; and that the writers fail to give delight by their desire of exciting admiration.

Having thus endeavoured to exhibit a general representation of the style and sentiments of the metaphysical poets, it is now proper to examine, particularly, the works of Cowley, who was almost the last of that race, and undoubtedly the best.

His miscellanies contain a collection of short compositions, written some as they were dictated by a mind at leisure, and some as they were called forth by different occasions; with great variety of style and sentiment, from burlesque levity to awful grandeur. Such an assemblage of diversified excellence no other poet has hitherto afforded. To choose the best, among many good, is one of the most hazardous attempts of criticism. I know not whether Scaliger himself has persuaded many readers to join with him in his preference of the two favourite odes, which he estimates, in his raptures, at the value of a kingdom. I will, however, venture to recommend Cowley's first piece, which ought to be inscribed, To my Muse, for want of which the second couplet is without reference. When the title is added, there will still remain a defect; for every piece ought to contain, in itself, whatever is necessary to make it intelligible. Pope has some epitaphs without names; which are, therefore, epitaphs to be let, occupied, indeed, for the present, but hardly appropriated.

The ode on wit is almost without a rival. It was about the time of Cowley, that wit, which had been, till then, used for intellection, in contradistinction to will, took the meaning, whatever it be, which it now bears.

Of all the passages in which poets have exemplified their own precepts, none will easily be found of greater excellence than that in which Cowley condemns exuberance of wit:

Yet 'tis not to adorn and gild each part, That shews more cost than art. Jewels at nose and lips but ill appear; Rather than all things wit, let none be there. Several lights will not be seen, If there be nothing else between. Men doubt, because they stand so thick i'th' sky, If those be stars which paint the galaxy.

In his verses to lord Falkland, whom every man of his time was proud to praise, there are, as there must be in all Cowley's compositions, some striking thoughts, but they are not well wrought. His elegy on sir Henry Wotton is vigorous and happy; the series of thoughts is easy

and natural; and the conclusion, though a little weakened by the intrusion of Alexander, is elegant and forcible.

It may be remarked, that in this elegy, and in most of his encomiastick poems, he has forgotten or neglected to name his heroes.

In his poem on the death of Hervey, there is much praise, but little passion; a very just and ample delineation of such virtues as a studious privacy admits, and such intellectual excellence as a mind not yet called forth to action can display. He knew how to distinguish, and how to commend, the qualities of his companion; but, when he wishes to make us weep, he forgets to weep himself, and diverts his sorrow by imagining how his crown of bays, if he had it, would crackle in the fire. It is the odd fate of this thought to be the worse for being true. The bay-leaf crackles remarkably as it burns; as, therefore, this property was not assigned it by chance, the mind must be thought sufficiently at ease that could attend to such minuteness of physiology. But the power of Cowley is not so much to move the affections, as to exercise the understanding.

The Chronicle is a composition unrivalled and alone: such gaiety of fancy, such facility of expression, such varied similitude, such a succession of images, and such a dance of words, it is in vain to expect, except from Cowley. His strength always appears in his agility; his volatility is not the flutter of a light, but the bound of an elastick mind. His levity never leaves his learning behind it; the moralist, the politician, and the critick, mingle their influence even in this airy frolick of genius. To such a performance Suckling could have brought the gaiety, but not the knowledge; Dryden could have supplied the knowledge, but not the gaiety.

The verses to Davenant, which are vigorously begun and happily concluded, contain some hints of criticism very justly conceived and happily expressed. Cowley's critical abilities have not been sufficiently observed: the few decisions and remarks, which his prefaces and his notes on the Davideis supply, were, at that time, accessions to English literature, and show such skill as raises our wish for more examples.

The lines from Jersey are a very curious and pleasing specimen of the familiar descending to the burlesque.

His two metrical disquisitions for and against reason are no mean specimens of metaphysical poetry. The stanzas against knowledge produce little conviction. In those which are intended to exalt the human faculties, reason has its proper task assigned it; that of judging, not of things revealed, but of the reality of revelation. In the verses for reason, is a passage which Bentley, in the only English verses which he is known to have written, seems to have copied, though

with the inferiority of an imitator.

The holy book like the eighth sphere doth shine With thousand lights of truth divine, So numberless the stars, that to our eye It makes all but one galaxy. Yet reason must assist too; for, in seas So vast and dangerous as these, Our course by stars above we cannot know Without the compass too below.

After this, says Bentley[20]:

Who travels in religious jars, Truth mix'd with error, shade with rays, Like Whiston wanting pyx or stars, In ocean wide or sinks or strays.

Cowley seems to have had what Milton is believed to have wanted, the skill to rate his own performances by their just value, and has, therefore, closed his miscellanies with the verses upon Crashaw, which apparently excel all that have gone before them, and in which there are beauties which common authors may justly think not only above their attainment, but above their ambition.

To the miscellanies succeed the Anacreontiques, or paraphrastical translations of some little poems, which pass, however justly, under the name of Anacreon. Of these songs dedicated to festivity and gaiety, in which even the morality is voluptuous, and which teach nothing but the enjoyment of the present day, he has given rather a pleasing, than a faithful representation, having retained their sprightliness, but lost their simplicity. The Anacreon of Cowley, like the Homer of Pope, has admitted the decoration of some modern graces, by which he is undoubtedly more amiable to common readers, and, perhaps, if they would honestly declare their own perceptions, to far the greater part of those whom courtesy and ignorance are content to style the learned.

These little pieces will be found more finished in their kind than any other of Cowley's works. The diction shows nothing of the mould of time, and the sentiments are at no great distance from our present habitudes of thought. Real mirth must be always natural, and nature is uniform. Men have been wise in very different modes; but they have always laughed the same way.

Levity of thought naturally produced familiarity of language, and the familiar part of language continues long the same; the dialogue of comedy, when it is transcribed from popular manners, and real life, is read, from age to age, with equal pleasure. The artifices of inversion, by which the established order of words is changed, or of innovation, by which new words, or meanings of words, are introduced, is practised, not by those who talk to be understood, but by those who write to be admired.

The Anacreontiques, therefore, of Cowley, give now all the pleasure which they ever gave. If he was formed by nature for one kind of writing more than for another, his power seems to have been greatest in the familiar and the festive.

The next class of his poems is called the Mistress, of which it is not necessary to select any particular pieces for praise or censure. They have all the same beauties and faults, and nearly in the same proportion. They are written with exuberance of wit, and with copiousness of learning; and it is truly asserted by Sprat, that the plenitude of the writer's knowledge flows in upon his page, so that the reader is commonly surprised into some improvement. But, considered as the verses of a lover, no man that has ever loved will much commend them. They are neither courtly nor pathetick, have neither gallantry nor fondness. His praises are too far-sought, and too hyperbolical, either to express love, or to excite it; every stanza is crowded with darts and flames, with wounds and death, with mingled souls, and with broken hearts.

The principal artifice by which the Mistress is filled with conceits, is very copiously displayed by Addison. Love is by Cowley, as by other poets, expressed metaphorically by flame and fire; and that which is true of real fire is said of love, or figurative fire, the same word in the same sentence retaining both significations. Thus, "observing the cold regard of his mistress's eyes, and, at the same time, their power of producing love in him, he considers them as burning-glasses made of ice. Finding himself able to live in the greatest extremities of love, he concludes the torrid zone to be habitable. Upon the dying of a tree on which he had cut his loves, he observes that his flames had burnt up and withered the tree."

These conceits Addison calls mixed wit; that is, wit which consists of thoughts true in one sense of the expression, and false in the other. Addison's representation is sufficiently indulgent: that confusion of images may entertain for a moment; but, being unnatural, it soon grows wearisome. Cowley delighted in it, as much as if he had invented it; but, not to mention the ancients, he might have found it full-blown in modern Italy. Thus Sannazaro:

Aspice quam variis dstringar, Lesbia, curis! Uror, et heu! nostro manat ab igne liquor: Sum Nilus, sumque Aetna simul; restringite flammas O lacrimae, aut lacrimas ebibe, flamma, meas.

One of the severe theologians of that time censured him, as having published "a book of profane and lascivious verses." From the charge of profaneness, the constant tenour of his life, which seems to have been eminently virtuous, and the general tendency of his opinions, which discover no irreverence of religion, must defend him; but that the accusation of lasciviousness is unjust, the perusal of his work will sufficiently evince.

Cowley's Mistress has no power of seduction: she "plays round the head, but reaches not the heart." Her beauty and absence, her kindness and cruelty, her disdain and inconstancy, produce no correspondence of emotion. His poetical account of the virtues of plants, and colours of flowers, is not perused with more sluggish frigidity. The compositions are such as might have been written for penance by a hermit, or for hire by a philosophical rhymmer, who had only heard of another sex; for they turn the mind only on the writer, whom, without thinking on a woman but as the subject for his task, we sometimes esteem as learned, and sometimes despise as trifling, always admire as ingenious, and always condemn as unnatural.

The Pindarique odes are now to be considered; a species of composition, which Cowley thinks Pancirolus might have counted in "his list of the lost inventions of antiquity," and which he has made a bold and vigorous attempt to recover.

The purpose with which he has paraphrased an Olympick and Nemaean ode, is, by himself, sufficiently explained. His endeavour was, not to show "precisely what Pindar spoke, but his manner of speaking." He was, therefore, not at all restrained to his expressions, nor much to his sentiments; nothing was required of him, but not to write as Pindar would not have written.

Of the Olympick ode, the beginning is, I think, above the original in elegance, and the conclusion below it in strength. The connexion is supplied with great perspicuity; and the thoughts, which, to a reader of less skill, seem thrown together by chance, are concatenated without any abruptness. Though the English ode cannot be called a translation, it may be very properly consulted as a commentary.

The spirit of Pindar is, indeed, not every where equally preserved. The following pretty lines are not such as his deep mouth was used to pour:

Great Rhea's son, If in Olympus' top, where thou Sitt'st to behold thy sacred show, If in Alpheus' silver flight, If in my verse thou take delight, My verse, great Rhea's son, which is Lofty as that, and smooth as this.

In the Nemaean ode the reader must, in mere justice to Pindar, observe, that whatever is said of "the original new moon, her tender forehead, and her horns," is super-added by his paraphrast, who has many other plays of words and fancy unsuitable to the original, as

The table, free for ev'ry guest, No doubt will thee admit, And feast more upon thee, than thou on it.

He sometimes extends his author's thoughts without improving them. In the Olympionick an oath is mentioned in a single word, and Cowley spends three lines in swearing by the Castalian

stream. We are told of Theron's bounty, with a hint that he had enemies, which Cowley thus enlarges in rhyming prose:

But in this thankless world the giver Is envied even by the receiver; 'Tis now the cheap and frugal fashion Rather to hide than own the obligation: Nay, 'tis much worse than so; It now an artifice does grow Wrongs and injuries to do, Lest men should think we owe.

It is hard to conceive that a man of the first rank in learning and wit, when he was dealing out such minute morality in such feeble diction, could imagine, either waking or dreaming, that he imitated Pindar.

In the following odes, where Cowley chooses his own subjects, he sometimes rises to dignity truly Pindarick; and, if some deficiencies of language be forgiven, his strains are such as those of the Theban bard were to his contemporaries:

Begin the song, and strike the living lyre: Lo, how the years to come, a numerous and well-fitted quire, All hand in hand do decently advance. And to my song with smooth and equal measure dance; While the dance lasts, how long soe'er it be, My musick's voice shall bear it company; Till all gentle notes be drown'd In the last trumpet's dreadful sound.

After such enthusiasm, who will not lament to find the poet conclude with lines like these:

But stop, my muse-- Hold thy Pindarick Pegasus closely in, Which does to rage begin --'Tis an unruly and a hard-mouth'd horse-- 'Twill no unskilful touch endure, But flings writer and reader too that sits not sure.

The fault of Cowley, and, perhaps, of all the writers of the metaphysical race, is that of pursuing his thoughts to the last ramifications, by which he loses the grandeur of generality; for of the greatest things the parts are little; what is little can be but pretty, and, by claiming dignity, becomes ridiculous. Thus all the power of description is destroyed by a scrupulous enumeration, and the force of metaphors is lost, when the mind, by the mention of particulars, is turned more upon the original than the secondary sense, more upon that from which the illustration is drawn, than that to which it is applied.

Of this we have a very eminent example in the ode entitled the Muse, who goes to "take the air" in an intellectual chariot, to which he harnesses fancy and judgment, wit and eloquence, memory and invention: how he distinguished wit from fancy, or how memory could properly contribute to motion, he has not explained; we are, however, content to suppose that he could have justified his own fiction, and wish to see the muse begin her career; but there is yet more to be done:

Let the postillion, nature, mount, and let The coachman art be set; And let the airy footmen, running all beside, Make a long row of goodly pride; Figures, conceits, raptures, and sentences, In a well-worded dress, And innocent loves, and pleasant truths, and useful lies, In all their gaudy liveries.

Every mind is now disgusted with this cumber of magnificence; yet I cannot refuse myself the four next lines:

Mount, glorious queen, thy travelling throne, And bid it to put on; For long, though cheerful, is the way, And life, alas! allows but one ill winter's day.

In the same ode, celebrating the power of the muse, he gives her prescience, or, in poetical language, the foresight of events hatching in futurity; but, having once an egg in his mind, he cannot forbear to show us that he knows what an egg contains:

Thou into the close nests of time dost peep, And there with piercing eye Through the firm shell and the thick white dost spy Years to come a-forming lie, Close in their sacred fecundine asleep.

The same thought is more generally, and, therefore, more poetically expressed by Casimir, a writer who has many of the beauties and faults of Cowley:

Omnibus mundi dominator horis Aptat urgendas per inane pennas, Pars adhuc nido latet, et futuros Crescit in annos.

Cowley, whatever was his subject, seems to have been carried, by a kind of destiny, to the light and the familiar, or to conceits which require still more ignoble epithets. A slaughter in the Red sea "new dies the water's name;" and England, during the civil war, was "Albion no more, nor to be named from white." It is, surely, by some fascination not easily surmounted, that a writer professing to revive "the noblest and highest writing in verse," makes this address to the new year:

Nay, if thou lov'st me, gentle year, Let not so much as love be there, Vain, fruitless love I mean; for, gentle year, Although I fear There's of this caution little need, Yet, gentle year, take heed How thou dost make Such a mistake; Such love I mean alone As by thy cruel predecessors has been shewn: For, though I have too much cause to doubt it, I fain would try, for once, if life can live without it.

The reader of this will be inclined to cry out, with Prior,

Ye criticks, say, How poor to this was Pindar's style!

Even those who cannot, perhaps, find in the Isthmian or Nemaean songs what antiquity has disposed them to expect, will, at least, see that they are ill represented by such puny poetry; and all will determine, that if this be the old Theban strain, it is not worthy of revival.

To the disproportion and incongruity of Cowley's sentiments, must be added the uncertainty and looseness of his measures. He takes the liberty of using, in any place, a verse of any length, from two syllables to twelve. The verses of Pindar have, as he observes, very little harmony to a modern ear; yet, by examining the syllables, we perceive them to be regular, and have reason enough for supposing that the ancient audiences were delighted with the sound. The imitator ought, therefore, to have adopted what he found, and to have added what was wanting; to have preserved a constant return of the same numbers, and to have supplied smoothness of transition and continuity of thought.

It is urged by Dr. Sprat, that the "irregularity of numbers is the very thing" which makes "that kind of poesy fit for all manner of subjects." But he should have remembered, that what is fit for every thing can fit nothing well. The great pleasure of verse arises from the known measure of the lines, and uniform structure of the stanzas, by which the voice is regulated, and the memory relieved.

If the Pindarick style be, what Cowley thinks it, "the highest and noblest kind of writing in verse," it can be adapted only to high and noble subjects; and it will not be easy to reconcile the poet with the critick, or to conceive how that can be the highest kind of writing in verse, which, according to Sprat, is "chiefly to be preferred for its near affinity to prose."

This lax and lawless versification so much concealed the deficiencies of the barren, and flattered the laziness of the idle, that it immediately overspread our books of poetry; all the boys and girls caught the pleasing fashion, and they that could do nothing else could write like Pindar. The rights of antiquity were invaded, and disorder tried to break into the Latin: a poem[21] on the Sheldonian theatre, in which all kinds of verse are shaken together, is unhappily inserted in the *Musae Anglicanae*. Pindarism prevailed about half a century; but, at last, died gradually away, and other imitations supply its place.

The Pindarick odes have so long enjoyed the highest degree of poetical reputation, that I am not willing to dismiss them with unabated censure; and, surely, though the mode of their composition be erroneous, yet many parts deserve, at least, that admiration which is due to great comprehension of knowledge, and great fertility of fancy. The thoughts are often new, and often striking; but the greatness of one part is disgraced by the littleness of another; and total negligence of language gives the noblest conceptions the appearance of a fabrick, august in the plan, but mean in the materials. Yet, surely, those verses are not without a just claim to

praise; of which it may be said with truth, that no man but Cowley could have written them.

The *Davideis* now remains to be considered; a poem which the author designed to have extended to twelve books, merely, as he makes no scruple of declaring, because the *Aeneid* had that number; but he had leisure or perseverance only to write the third part. Epick poems have been left unfinished by Virgil, Statius, Spenser, and Cowley. That we have not the whole *Davideis*, is, however, not much to be regretted; for in this undertaking Cowley is, tacitly, at least, confessed to have miscarried. There are not many examples of so great a work, produced by an author generally read, and generally praised, that has crept through a century with so little regard. Whatever is said of Cowley, is meant of his other works. Of the *Davideis* no mention is made; it never appears in books, nor emerges in conversation. By the *Spectator* it has been once quoted; by Rymer it has once been praised; and by Dryden, in *Mac Flecknoe*, it has once been imitated; nor do I recollect much other notice from its publication till now, in the whole succession of English literature.

Of this silence and neglect, if the reason be inquired, it will be found partly in the choice of the subject, and partly in the performance of the work.

Sacred history has been always read with submissive reverence, and an imagination overawed and controlled. We have been accustomed to acquiesce in the nakedness and simplicity of the authentick narrative, and to repose on its veracity with such humble confidence as suppresses curiosity. We go with the historian as he goes, and stop with him when he stops. All amplification is frivolous and vain; all addition to that which is already sufficient for the purposes of religion seems not only useless, but, in some degree, profane.

Such events as were produced by the visible interposition of divine power are above the power of human genius to dignify. The miracle of creation, however it may teem with images, is best described with little diffusion of language: "He spake the word, and they were made."

We are told, that Saul "was troubled with an evil spirit;" from this Cowley takes an opportunity of describing hell, and telling the history of Lucifer, who was, he says,

Once gen'ral of a gilded host of sprites, Like Hesper leading forth the spangled nights; But down, like lightning which him struck, he came, And roar'd at his first plunge into the flame.

Lucifer makes a speech to the inferiour agents of mischief, in which there is something of heathenism, and, therefore, of impropriety; and, to give efficacy to his words, concludes by lashing "his breast with his long tail." Envy, after a pause, steps out, and, among other declarations of her zeal, utters these lines:

Do thou but threat, loud storms shall make reply, And thunder echo to the trembling sky:
Whilst raging seas swell to so bold an height, As shall the fire's proud element affright. Th' old
drudging sun, from his long-beaten way, Shall, at thy voice, start, and misguide the day. The
jocund orbs shall break their measur'd pace, And stubborn poles change their allotted place,
Heaven's gilded troops shall flutter here and there, Leaving their boasting songs tun'd to a
sphere.

Every reader feels himself weary with this useless talk of an allegorical being.

It is not only when the events are confessedly miraculous, that fancy and fiction lose their
effect: the whole system of life, while the theocracy was yet visible, has an appearance so
different from all other scenes of human action, that the reader of the sacred volume habitually
considers it as the peculiar mode of existence of a distinct species of mankind, that lived and
acted with manners uncommunicable; so that it is difficult, even for imagination, to place us in
the state of them whose story is related, and, by consequence, their joys and griefs are not
easily adopted, nor can the attention be often interested in any thing that befalls them.

To the subject thus originally indisposed to the reception of poetical embellishments, the writer
brought little that could reconcile impatience, or attract curiosity. Nothing can be more
disgusting than a narrative spangled with conceits; and conceits are all that the Davideis
supplies.

One of the great sources of poetical delight, is description, or the power of presenting pictures
to the mind. Cowley gives inferences instead of images, and shows not what may be supposed
to have been seen, but what thoughts the sight might have suggested. When Virgil describes
the stone which Turnus lifted against Aeneas, he fixes the attention on its bulk and weight:

Saxum circumspicit ingens, Saxum antiquum, ingens, campo quod forte jacebat, Limes agro
positus, litem ut discerneret arvis.

Cowley says of the stone with which Cain slew his brother,

I saw him fling the stone, as if he meant At once his murther and his monument.

Of the sword taken from Goliah, he says,

A sword so great, that it was only fit, To cut off his great head that came with it.

Other poets describe death by some of its common appearances. Cowley says, with a learned
allusion to sepulchral lamps, real or fabulous,

'Twixt his right ribs deep pierc'd the furious blade, And open'd wide those secret vessels where
Life's light goes out, when first they let in air.

But he has allusions vulgar, as well as learned. In a visionary succession of kings:

Joas at first does bright and glorious shew, In life's fresh morn his fame does early crow.

Describing an undisciplined army, after having said with elegance,

His forces seem'd no army, but a crowd Heartless, unarm'd, disorderly, and loud,

he gives them a fit of the ague.

The allusions, however, are not always to vulgar things; he offends by exaggeration, as much
as by diminution:

The king was plac'd alone, and o'er his head A well-wrought heaven of silk and gold was
spread.

Whatever he writes is always polluted with some conceit:

Where the sun's fruitful beams give metals birth, Where he the growth of fatal gold doth see,
Gold, which alone more influence has than he.

In one passage he starts a sudden question, to the confusion of philosophy:

Ye learned heads, whom ivy garlands grace, Why does that twining plant the oak embrace; The
oak, for courtship most of all unfit, And rough as are the winds that fight with it?

His expressions have, sometimes, a degree of meanness that surpasses expectation:

Nay, gentle guests, he cries, since now you're in, The story of your gallant friend begin.

In a simile descriptive of the morning:

As glimm'ring stars just at th' approach of day, Cashier'd by troops, at last drop all away.

The dress of Gabriel deserves attention:

He took for skin a cloud most soft and bright, That e'er the mid-day sun pierc'd through with
light; Upon his cheeks a lively blush he spread, Wash'd from the morning beauties' deepest
red; An harmless flatt'ring meteor shone for hair, And fell adown his shoulders with loose care;
He cuts out a silk mantle from the skies, Where the most sprightly azure pleas'd the eyes; This
he with starry vapours sprinkles all, Took in their prime ere they grow ripe and fall; Of a new
rainbow, ere it fret or fade, The choicest piece cut out, a scarf is made.

This is a just specimen of Cowley's imagery: what might, in general expressions, be great and forcible, he weakens and makes ridiculous by branching it into small parts. That Gabriel was invested with the softest or brightest colours of the sky, we might have been told, and been dismissed to improve the idea in our different proportions of conception; but Cowley could not let us go, till he had related where Gabriel got first his skin, and then his mantle, then his lace, and then his scarf, and related it in the terms of the mercer and tailor.

Sometimes he indulges himself in a digression, always conceived with his natural exuberance, and commonly, even where it is not long, continued till it is tedious.

I' th' library a few choice authors stood, Yet 'twas well stor'd, for that small store was good; Writing, man's spiritual physick, was not then itself, as now, grown a disease of men. Learning (young virgin) but few suitors knew; The common prostitute she lately grew, And with the spurious brood loads now the press; Laborious effects of idleness.

As the *Davideis* affords only four books, though intended to consist of twelve, there is no opportunity for such criticism as epick poems commonly supply. The plan of the whole work is very imperfectly shown by the third part. The duration of an unfinished action cannot be known. Of characters, either not yet introduced, or shown but upon few occasions, the full extent and the nice discriminations cannot be ascertained. The fable is plainly implex, formed rather from the *Odyssey* than the *Iliad*; and many artifices of diversification are employed, with the skill of a man acquainted with the best models. The past is recalled by narration, and the future anticipated by vision: but he has been so lavish of his poetical art, that it is difficult to imagine how he could fill eight books more without practising again the same modes of disposing his matter; and, perhaps, the perception of this growing incumbrance inclined him to stop. By this abruptness posterity lost more instruction than delight. If the continuation of the *Davideis* can be missed, it is for the learning that had been diffused over it, and the notes in which it had been explained.

Had not his characters been depraved, like every other part, by improper decorations, they would have deserved uncommon praise. He gives Saul both the body and mind of a hero:

His way once chose, he forward thrust outright, Nor turn'd aside for danger or delight.

And the different beauties of the lofty Merah and the gentle Michol, are very justly conceived and strongly painted.

Rymer has declared the *Davideis* superiour to the *Jerusalem* of Tasso; "which," says he, "the poet, with all his care, has not totally purged from pedantry." If by pedantry is meant that minute knowledge which is derived from particular sciences and studies, in opposition to the

general notions supplied by a wide survey of life and nature, Cowley certainly errs, by introducing pedantry far more frequently than Tasso. I know not, indeed, why they should be compared; for the resemblance of Cowley's work to Tasso's is only that they both exhibit the agency of celestial and infernal spirits, in which, however, they differ widely; for Cowley supposes them commonly to operate upon the mind by suggestion; Tasso represents them as promoting or obstructing events by external agency.

Of particular passages that can be properly compared, I remember only the description of heaven, in which the different manner of the two writers is sufficiently discernible. Cowley's is scarcely description, unless it be possible to describe by negatives: for he tells us only what there is not in heaven. Tasso endeavours to represent the splendours and pleasures of the regions of happiness. Tasso affords images, and Cowley sentiments. It happens, however, that Tasso's description affords some reason for Rymer's censure. He says of the supreme being,

Ha sotto i piedi e fatto e la natura, Ministri umili, e'l moto, e chi'l misura.

The second line has in it more of pedantry than, perhaps, can be found in any other stanza of the poem.

In the perusal of the Davideis, as of all Cowley's works, we find wit and learning unprofitably squandered. Attention has no relief; the affections are never moved: we are sometimes surprised, but never delighted; and find much to admire, but little to approve. Still, however, it is the work of Cowley; of a mind capacious by nature, and replenished by study.

In the general review of Cowley's poetry it will be found, that he wrote with abundant fertility, but negligent or unskilful selection; with much thought, but with little imagery; that he is never pathetick, and rarely sublime; but always either ingenious or learned, either acute or profound.

It is said by Denham, in his elegy,

To him no author was unknown, Yet what he writ was all his own.

This wide position requires less limitation, when it is affirmed of Cowley, than, perhaps, of any other poet.--He read much, and yet borrowed little.

His character of writing was, indeed, not his own: he unhappily adopted that which was predominant. He saw a certain way to present praise; and, not sufficiently inquiring by what means the ancients have continued to delight through all the changes of human manners, he contented himself with a deciduous laurel, of which the verdure, in its spring, was bright and gay, but which time has been continually stealing from his brows.

He was, in his own time, considered as of unrivalled excellence. Clarendon represents him as having taken a flight beyond all that went before him; and Milton is said to have declared, that the three greatest English poets were Spenser, Shakespeare, and Cowley.

His manner he had in common with others; but his sentiments were his own. Upon every subject he thought for himself; and such was his copiousness of knowledge, that something at once remote and applicable rushed into his mind; yet it is not likely that he always rejected a commodious idea merely because another had used it: his known wealth was so great, that he might have borrowed without loss of credit.

In his elegy on sir Henry Wotton, the last lines have such resemblance to the noble epigram of Grotius on the death of Scaliger, that I cannot but think them copied from it, though they are copied by no servile hand.

One passage in his Mistress is so apparently borrowed from Donne, that he probably would not have written it, had it not mingled with his own thoughts, so as that he did not perceive himself taking it from another:

Although I think thou never found wilt be, Yet I'm resolv'd to search for thee: The search itself rewards the pains. So, though the chymic his great secret miss (For neither it in art or nature is,) Yet things well worth his toil he gains;

And does his charge and labour pay With good unsought experiments by the way. COWLEY.

Some that have deeper digg'd love's mine than I, Say, where his centric happiness doth lie: I have lov'd, and got, and told; But should I love, get, tell, till I were old; I should not find that hidden mystery; Oh, 'tis imposture all! And as no chymic yet th' elixir got, But glorifies his pregnant pot, If by the way to him befall Some odoriferous thing, or medicinal, So lovers dream a rich and long delight, But get a winter-seeming summer's night. DONNE.

Jonson and Donne, as Dr. Hurd remarks, were then in the highest esteem.

It is related by Clarendon, that Cowley always acknowledges his obligation to the learning and industry of Jonson; but I have found no traces of Jonson in his works: to emulate Donne appears to have been his purpose; and from Donne he may have learned that familiarity with religious images, and that light allusion to sacred things, by which readers far short of sanctity are frequently offended; and which would not be borne, in the present age, when devotion, perhaps, not more fervent, is more delicate.

Having produced one passage taken by Cowley from Donne, I will recompense him by another which Milton seems to have borrowed from him. He says of Goliath:

His spear, the trunk was of a lofty tree, Which nature meant some tall ship's mast should be.

Milton of Satan:

His spear, to equal which the tallest pine Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast Of some great admiral, were but a wand, He walked with.

His diction was, in his own time, censured as negligent. He seems not to have known, or not to have considered, that words, being arbitrary, must owe their power to association, and have the influence, and that only, which custom has given them. Language is the dress of thought: and, as the noblest mien, or most graceful action, would be degraded and obscured by a garb appropriated to the gross employments of rusticks or mechanicks; so the most heroick sentiments will lose their efficacy, and the most splendid ideas drop their magnificence, if they are conveyed by words used commonly upon low and trivial occasions, debased by vulgar mouths, and contaminated by inelegant applications.

Truth, indeed, is always truth, and reason is always reason; they have an intrinsick and unalterable value, and constitute that intellectual gold which defies destruction; but gold may be so concealed in baser matter, that only a chymist can recover it; sense may be so hidden in unrefined and plebeian words, that none but philosophers can distinguish it; and both may be so buried in impurities, as not to pay the cost of their extraction.

The diction, being the vehicle of the thoughts, first presents itself to the intellectual eye; and, if the first appearance offends, a further knowledge is not often sought. Whatever professes to benefit by pleasing, must please at once. The pleasures of the mind imply something sudden and unexpected; that which elevates must always surprise. What is perceived by slow degrees may gratify us with the consciousness of improvement, but will never strike with the sense of pleasure.

Of all this, Cowley appears to have been without knowledge, or without care. He makes no selection of words, nor seeks any neatness of phrase: he has no elegancies, either lucky or elaborate: as his endeavours were rather to impress sentences upon the understanding than images on the fancy, he has few epithets, and those scattered without peculiar propriety or nice adaptation. It seems to follow from the necessity of the subject, rather than the care of the writer, that the diction of his heroick poem is less familiar than that of his slightest writings. He has given not the same numbers, but the same diction, to the gentle Anacreon and the tempestuous Pindar.

His versification seems to have had very little of his care; and, if what he thinks be true, that his numbers are unmusical only when they are ill read, the art of reading them is at present

lost; for they are commonly harsh to modern ears. He has, indeed, many noble lines, such as the feeble care of Waller never could produce. The bulk of his thoughts sometimes swelled his verse to unexpected and inevitable grandeur; but his excellence of this kind is merely fortuitous: he sinks willingly down to his general carelessness, and avoids, with very little care, either meanness or asperity.

His contractions are often rugged and harsh:

One flings a mountain, and its rivers too Torn up with 't.

His rhymes are very often made by pronouns, or particles, or the like unimportant words, which disappoint the ear, and destroy the energy of the line.

His combination of different measures is, sometimes, dissonant and displeasing; he joins verses together, of which the former does not slide easily into the latter.

The words do and did, which so much degrade, in present estimation, the line that admits them, were, in the time of Cowley, little censured or avoided; how often he used them, and with how bad an effect, at least to our ears, will appear by a passage, in which every reader will lament to see just and noble thoughts defrauded of their praise by inelegance of language:

Where honour or where conscience does not bind, No other law shall shackle me; Slave to myself I ne'er will be; Nor shall my future actions be confin'd By my own present mind.

Who by resolves and vows engag'd does stand For days, that yet belong to fate, Does, like an unthrift, mortgage his estate, Before it falls into his hand; The bondman of the cloister so, All that he does receive does always owe: And still, as time comes in, it goes away, Not to enjoy, but debts to pay! Unhappy slave, and pupil to a bell, Which his hour's work, as well as hours, does tell! Unhappy till the last, the kind releasing knell.

His heroick lines are often formed of monosyllables; but yet they are sometimes sweet and sonorous.

He says of the Messiah:

Round the whole earth his dreaded name shall sound, And reach to worlds that must not yet be found.

In another place, of David:

Yet bid him go securely, when he sends; 'Tis Saul that is his foe, and we his friends. The man who has his God, no aid can lack; And we who bid him go, will bring him back.

Yet, amidst his negligence, he sometimes attempted an improved and scientifick versification; of which it will be best to give his own account subjoined to this line:

Nor can the glory contain itself in th' endless space.

"I am sorry that it is necessary to admonish the most part of readers, that it is not by negligence that this verse is so loose, long, and, as it were, vast; it is to paint in the number the nature of the thing which it describes, which I would have observed in divers other places of this poem, that else will pass for very careless verses: as before,

And overruns the neighb'ring fields with violent course.

"In the second book,

Down a precipice deep, down he casts them all.

"And,

And fell a-down his shoulders with loose care

"In the third,

Brass was his helmet, his boots brass, and o'er His breast a thick plate of strong brass he wore.

"In the fourth,

Like some fair pine o'erlooking all th' ignobler wood.

"And,

Some from the rocks cast themselves down headlong.

"And many more: but it is enough to instance in a few. The thing is, that the disposition of words and numbers should be such, as that, out of the order and sound of them, the things themselves may be represented. This the Greeks were not so accurate as to bind themselves to; neither have our English poets observed it, for aught I can find. The Latins (*qui musas colunt severiores*) sometimes did it; and their prince, Virgil, always, in whom the examples are innumerable, and taken notice of by all judicious men, so that it is superfluous to collect them."

I know not whether he has, in many of these instances, attained the representation or resemblance that he purposes. Verse can imitate only sound and motion. A boundless verse, a headlong verse, and a verse of brass, or of strong brass, seem to comprise very incongruous and unsociable ideas. What there is peculiar in the sound of the line expressing loose care, I cannot discover; nor why the pine is taller in an alexandrine than in ten syllables.

But, not to defraud him of his due praise, he has given one example of representative versification, which, perhaps, no other English line can equal:

Begin, be bold, and venture to be wise: He, who defers this work from day to day, Does on a river's bank expecting stay Till the whole stream that stopp'd him shall be gone, Which runs, and, as it runs, for ever shall run on.

Cowley was, I believe, the first poet that mingled alexandrines, at pleasure, with the common heroick of ten syllables; and from him Dryden borrowed the practice, whether ornamental or licentious. He considered the verse of twelve syllables as elevated and majestick, and has, therefore, deviated into that measure, when he supposes the voice heard of the supreme being.

The author of the *Davideis* is commended by Dryden for having written it in couplets, because he discovered that any staff was too lyrical for an heroick poem; but this seems to have been known before by May and Sandys, the translators of the *Pharsalia* and the *Metamorphoses*.

In the *Davideis* are some hemistichs, or verses left imperfect by the author, in imitation of Virgil, whom he supposes not to have intended to complete them: that this opinion is erroneous, may be probably concluded, because this truncation is imitated by no subsequent Roman poet; because Virgil himself filled up one broken line in the heat of recitation; because in one the sense is now unfinished; and because all that can be done by a broken verse, a line intersected by a caesura and a full stop, will equally effect.

Of triplets, in his *Davideis*, he makes no use, and, perhaps, did not, at first, think them allowable; but he appears afterwards to have changed his mind, for, in the verses on the government of Cromwell, he inserts them liberally with great happiness.

After so much criticism on his poems, the essays which accompany them must not be forgotten. What is said by Sprat of his conversation, that no man could draw from it any suspicion of his excellence in poetry, may be applied to these compositions. No author ever kept his verse and his prose at a greater distance from each other. His thoughts are natural, and his style has a smooth and placid equability, which has never yet obtained its due commendation. Nothing is far-sought, or hard-laboured; but all is easy without feebleness, and familiar without grossness.

It has been observed by Felton, in his essay on the *Classicks*, that Cowley was beloved by every muse that he courted; and that he has rivalled the ancients in every kind of poetry but tragedy.

It may be affirmed, without any encomiastick fervour, that he brought to his poetick labours a mind replete with learning, and that his pages are embellished with all the ornaments which books could supply; that he was the first who imparted to English numbers the enthusiasm of the greater ode, and the gaiety of the less; that he was equally qualified for sprightly sallies, and for lofty flights; that he was among those who freed translation from servility, and, instead of following his author at a distance, walked by his side; and that if he left versification yet improvable, he left likewise, from time to time, such specimens of excellence as enabled succeeding poets to improve it.

The insertion of Cowley's epitaph may be interesting to our readers.

Epitaphium Autoris In Ecclesia D. Petri apud Westmonasterienses Sepulti. Abrahamus Cowleius, Anglorum Pindarus, Flaccus, Maro, Deliciae, Decus, Desiderium, Aevi sui, Hic juxta situs est.

Aurea dum volitant late tua scripta per orbem, Et fama aeternum vivis, divine poeta, Hic placida jaceas requie: custodiat urnam Cana fides, vigilantque perenni lampade musae Sit sacer iste locus; nee quis temerarius ausit Sacrilega turbare manu venerabile bustum. Intacti maneant; maneant per saecula dulces Cowleii cineres, serventque immobile saxum.

Sic vovatur Votumque suum apud posteros sacratum esse voluit Qui viro incomparabili posuit sepulchrale marmor, Georgius Dux Buckinghamiae. Excessit e vita Anno Aetatis suae 49^o et honorifica pompa elatus ex Aedibus Buckinghamianis, viris illustribus omnium ordinum exequias celebrantibus, sepultus est die 3^o M. Augusti, Anno Domini 1667.

Footnotes:

[Footnote 6: This volume was not published before 1633, when Cowley was fifteen years old. Dr. Johnson, as well as former biographers, seems to have been misled by the portrait of Cowley being, by mistake, marked with the age of thirteen years. R.]

[Footnote 7: He was a candidate this year at Westminster school for election to Trinity college, but proved unsuccessful.]

[Footnote 8: In the first edition of this life, Dr. Johnson wrote, "which was never inserted in any collection of his works;" but he altered the expression when the Lives were collected into volumes. The satire was added to Cowley's works by the particular direction of Dr. Johnson. N.]

[Footnote 9: Consulting the Virgilian lots, Sortes Virgilianae, is a method of divination by the opening of Virgil, and applying to the circumstances of the peruser the first passage in either of the two pages that he accidentally fixes his eye on. It is said, that king Charles the first, and lord Falkland, being in the Bodleian library, made this experiment of their future fortunes, and

met with passages equally ominous to each.

That of the king was the following:

At bello audacis populi vexatus et armis, Finibus extorris, complexu avulsus Iuli, Auxilium imploret, videatque indigna suorum Funera, nec, cum se sub leges pacis iniquae Tradiderit, regno aut optata luce fruatur: Sed cadat ante diem, mediaque inhumatus arena. Aeneid. iv. 615.

Yet let a race untam'd, and haughty foes, His peaceful entrance with dire arms oppose, Oppress'd with numbers in th' unequal field, His men discourag'd and himself expell'd: Let him for succour sue from place to place, Torn from his subjects and his son's embrace. First let him see his friends in battle slain, And their untimely fate lament in vain: And when, at length, the cruel war shall cease, On hard conditions may he buy his peace; Nor let him then enjoy supreme command. But fall untimely by some hostile hand, And lie unburied on the barren sand. DRYDEN.

Lord Falkland's:

Non haec, O Palla, dederas promissa parenti, Cautius ut saevo velles te credere Marti. Haud ignarus eram, quantum nova gloria in armis, Et praedulce decus primo certamine posset. Primitiae juvenis miserae, bellique propinqui Dura rudimenta, et nulli exaudita deorum, Vota precesque meae! Aeneid. xi. 152.

O Pallas, thou hast fail'd thy plighted word, To fight with caution, not to tempt the sword; I warn'd thee, but in vain, for well I knew What perils youthful ardour would pursue, That boiling blood would carry thee too far, Young as thou wert to dangers, raw to war. O curst essay of arms, disastrous doom, Prelude of bloody fields and fights to come! Hard elements of un auspicious war, Vain vows to heaven, and unavailing care! DRYDEN.

Hoffman, in his Lexicon, gives a very satisfactory account of this practice of seeking fates in books: and says, that it was used by the pagans, the jewish rabbins, and even the early Christians; the latter taking the New Testament for their oracle.]