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First Impressions of Seventeenth Century Poets as Seen in Their Poems, From Donne to Dryden.

(Continued from last week.)

"The Emblems" impress me as a miniature Paradise Lost, with the scene in hell omitted. Quarles was a poet of far inferior imagination to Milton, and less gifted in the use of proper names in poetic composition. But, like Milton, yet in far less extent, he draws on mythology, and often to good purpose, too. For the most part his verse is heroic in alternating rhyme.

I feel that the tone or pitch struck in "The Invocation" is not quite sustained throughout the poem.

As to Quarles' art, I think it ranks with his genius, that is, as a second rate poet.

He is often happy in phraseology as in I. "the blue-spangled flame" in II. "The white-mouthed water now ushers the shore." His figures are mainly those of similitude and contrast, and he is prone to the use of the proverb. The marks of learning and culture are evident, and his mind is inclined to morality and religion.

Poems of Richard Crashaw

Of all the seventeenth century poets Crashaw has given me most delight. I was at once taken with his smooth, musical style. He was fond of epigram, as was the fashion of the day.

The collections of poems entitled "The Delights of the Muses" are themselves delightful. But his greatest poem is "Sospetto d' Herode." Approaching it through the "Steps of the Temple" was like walking through a flowing, fragrant, musical landscape on a June morning. But upon coming into the poem itself, the organ of sublime poetic melody thrilled my soul. "It is so Miltonic that Paradise Lost, in large measure, must have been built up from it. Even the invocations in the two poems are almost the same.

Robert Herrick.

Herrick belongs in a minor group of seventeenth century poets, if classed according to genius. He has but little originality. Ben Jonson, Chaucer, and Greek and Latin poets, all enter into his compositions, and many of his poems are either translations or parallels of works written by Martial, Horace, or Virgil.

In "Hesperides," Herrick is an easy-going gentleman of high society, and is rather delightful, gay and joyous than in-

structive or inspiring. Number 178, "Corina's Going a Maying," is his most beautiful poem. "Noble Notes," his religious poems, are exceedingly weak compared with Donne, and are far inferior in soul fervency to Herbert.

If Herrick surpassed in anything, it was in the art of song-writing. I regard him an artist here, without a rival, so far, in the list of seventeenth century poets, and even in the English language so far as I am informed. Moore's "Irish Melodies" were almost, if not quite as popular at one time as Herrick's songs, but when the two are put side by side one sees why, or rather feels why, Herrick is superior to Moore.

Lovelace and Suckling.

Lovelace and Suckling belong to the same class of lyricists as Carew and Herrick. All believed a sanctum aliquid resided in the female breast. This worshipful something in the feminine heart was their inspiration; the haunts of their muse was the happy fields of sensuous passion. No nobler strain was ever struck from their harps.

Had Lovelace and Suckling not been burnt out by the fires of youthful dissipation, and had they not come so early to want and dissipation, but had lived longer as did Donne, there might have been a higher poetic note in their warblings. They were the children of a sensuous, dissipated court, and in their gayety and splendor and polished singing, they were blasted and swept away by the Puritan storm that broke over England ere they had reached their prime.

Suckling's "Session of the Poets" shows ability in satire. I do not care for his dramas, "Aglaura" and "Brennaralt." His squibs are of most interest to me. In them he is an artful singer.

Lovelace, like Suckling, is at his best in the song or other short lyric. His longer poems, "The Falcon," "Amarantha," and "The Toad and the Spider," are not well sustained and I had no inclination to stay for a second reading.

Abraham Cowley.

Upon meeting Cowley in his poetry, I felt like one reaching the borders of a new country; the landscape, sky, and all was changed. For so long I had been keeping company with harrowing pictures of blood in the subjects of the atonement, and then with passionate, sensuous love scenes, that it was rather a pleasant sensation to arrive on this eminence, Cowley, that gives one both a retrospective and prospective view.

Cowley is delightful skillful, musical. In such poems as "The Resurrection" and "The Extasie" he coins verses like a nimble, tripping fairy dancing through the air, or like the unseen hand moulds crystal figures that come dancing down in white.

I feel that Cowley belongs more to the Restoration period than to the class of Caroline poets with whom he is put. His odes are certainly a new departure in verse.

Edmund Waller.

Waller is a poet for light entertainment. He makes small draft upon the understanding.

If Waller polished his verse like marble, it was because he believed in the classics. In the little poem on "English Verse" he thus expresses that belief:

"Poets that lasting marble seek,  
Must carve in Latin or in Greek."

He was under the influence of the metaphysical poets in the use of conceits. Example from "The Last Verses in the Book":

"The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Lets in new light through chinks that time has made."

Waller's skill in the heroic rimed couplet is something new; and, next to a sweet lyric mood, his rarest gift, if, indeed, real poetic gifts he had, is the source of a delightful charm.

Andrew Marvel.

I am meeting so many poets whom I had not known before that these papers are properly styled "first impressions," yet, in some instances, I have hardly got an impression before one passes and another is looking me squarely in the face as if to say, "and what do you think of me?" Now, here is one Andrew Marvel by name asking that same question, and he ought to be "marvel" by interpretation, for I got one impression when looking at him through his lyrics, but quite a different impression when seeing him through his satires. In the former he is a sweet singer, often lofty in tone. In the poems on Cromwell the heroic rimed couplets are managed with such skill and the praise of the protector is so nearly in keeping with my opinion of him, that the impression is gratifying and happy.

But in the satires I get an impression of a very different "marvel," one keenly sarcastic, resembling the spirit in Donne, not powerful, yet more polished.

Butler's Hudibras.

If Hudibras was a son of Don Quixote there is no proof here that genius is hereditary. Hudibras strikes me as being unique. The skilled rider, Butler, has his steed, the octosyllabic rimed couplet, cutting all sorts of antics. Now with high head and stately tread, and anon cantering and bucking like a Texas pony, he keeps up infinite delight in the observer.

My first with Hudibras to do,  
I thought should be a bird's-eye view,  
Then with deliberate aim to find  
The meaning couched in every line.

But here I dropped the tread of my dogglerel in astonishment at the skill of Butler in weaving so much learning and such a wide knowledge of contemporary life into such an inimicable fabric. Throughout it is highly colored with caricature, wit, and humor, and we instinctively laugh so long as we see the fog fly from the stream of satire turned

on the other fellow, but would feel like fleeing as from the nozzle of a modern fire-engine hose at high pressure, if turned on us. It is the most masterful piece of satire I have ever seen.

John Dryden.

First of all, Dryden is easy to read and not by any means uninteresting. His verse is greatly influenced by Cowley. There are, also, unmistakable influences from Donne and the other metaphysical poets. The fifth of the "Stanzas on Oliver Cromwell" might have been written by a typical metaphysical poet.

Much of Dryden's poetry was written for special occasions and is, therefore, termed occasional poetry. For this reason it loses in its appeal to one in our day. If Dryden was sincere in his praise of Cromwell, it is not easy to understand how his extreme laudation of Charles II. was also sincere, yet one feels the pulsation of genuine sincerity in both poems.

The long historical poem, "Annus Mirabilis," failed to interest me. His prose narratives are far better.

Dryden's Satires.

Donne and Dryden guard the entrance to seventeenth century literature as the two lights on the Virginia capes; Donne, the Cape Charles light, ever revolving and flashing out various colors, and Dryden, with the steady glow of the Cape Henry light, stand as signals pointing the way to a harbor filled with countless lesser lights. Donne was a flashing genius. Dryden was not a genius, but he was a masterful artist. His superiority to Donne, in this respect, is more easily felt than expressed. But when I place the satires of the two poets side by side Donne, to me, is superior to Dryden. Dryden is more of a rhetorician than a poet. He has more intellect than soul. He is, therefore, entertaining rather than inspiring.

Walter P. Lawrence.

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