

WORKS of Dryden

The numerous dramatic works of Dryden are best left in that obscurity into which they have fallen. How and then they contain a bit of excellent lyric poetry, and in *All for Love*, another version of *Antony and Cleopatra*, where he leaves his cherished heroic couplet for the blank verse of Marlowe and Shakespeare, he shows what he might have done had he not sold his talents to a depraved audience. On the whole, reading his plays is like nibbling at a rotting apple, even the good spots are affected by the decay and one ends by throwing the whole thing into the garbage can where most of the dramatic works of this period belong. The controversial and satirical poems are on a higher plane, though it must be confessed, Dryden's satire often strikes us as cutting and revengeful rather than witty. The best

Known of these, and a masterpiece of its kind is "Absalom and Achitophel", which is undoubtedly the most powerful political satire in our language. Taking the Bible story of David and Absalom, he uses it to ridicule the 'Whig Party' and also to revenge himself upon his enemies. Charles II appeared as King David, his natural son, the Duke of Monmouth, who was mixed up in the 'Rye House Plot' paraded as Absalom, Shaftesbury was Achitophel, the evil counselor and the Duke of Buckingham was satirized as Zimri. The poem had enormous political influence and raised Dryden in the opinion of his contemporaries to the front rank of English poets.

Of the many miscellaneous poems of Dryden, the curious reader will get an idea of his sustained narrative power from the 'Annus Mirabilis'. The best

expression of Dryden's literary genius, however is found in "Alexander's Feast", which is his most enduring ode and one of the best in our language. As a prose writer Dryden had a very marked influence on our literature in shortening his sentences and especially in writing naturally without depending on literary ornamentation to give effect to what he is saying. If we compare his prose with that of Milton or Browne, or Jeremy Taylor, we note that Dryden cares less for style than any of the others, but takes more pains to state his thought clearly and concisely as men speak when they wish to be understood. The classical school which followed the Restoration, looked to Dryden as a leader and to him we owe largely, that tendency to exactness of expression which marks our subsequent prose writing. With his prose

Dryden rapidly developed his critical ability and became the foremost critic of his age. His criticisms, instead of being published as independent works, were generally used as prefaces or introductions to his poetry. The best known of these criticisms are the preface to the Fables, "Of Heroic Plays", "Discourse on Satire", and especially the "Essay of Dramatic Poesy" (1668) which attempts to lay a foundation for all literary criticism.

The end.

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