



SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS





Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy (*Sonn. 33*).

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS.

EDITED, WITH NOTES,

BY

WILLIAM J. ROLFE, LITT. D.,

FORMERLY HEAD MASTER OF THE HIGH SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

WITH ENGRAVINGS.



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Shakespeare's Sonnets.

W. P. 7

PREFACE.

IN this volume, as almost every page of the Introduction and the Notes bears witness, I have been under special obligations to Professor Dowden's excellent editions of the Sonnets. I have not, however, drawn at all from Part II. of the Introduction to his *larger* edition (see the footnote on p. 11), which condenses into some seventy-five pages the entire literature of the Sonnets. For the critical student this careful *résumé* answers a double purpose: as a bibliography of the subject, directing him to the many books and papers that have been written upon the Sonnets, if he is moved to read any or all of them; and as a compact and convenient substitute for these books and papers, if he wants to know their gist and substance without the drudgery of wading through them. I doubt not that the majority of students will be thankful that Professor Dowden has relieved them of the drudgery by compressing many a dull volume or magazine article into a page or a paragraph.

I will only add that the text of the *Sonnets*, like that of the *Poems*, is given without omission or expurgation.

NOTE TO REVISED EDITION OF 1890.

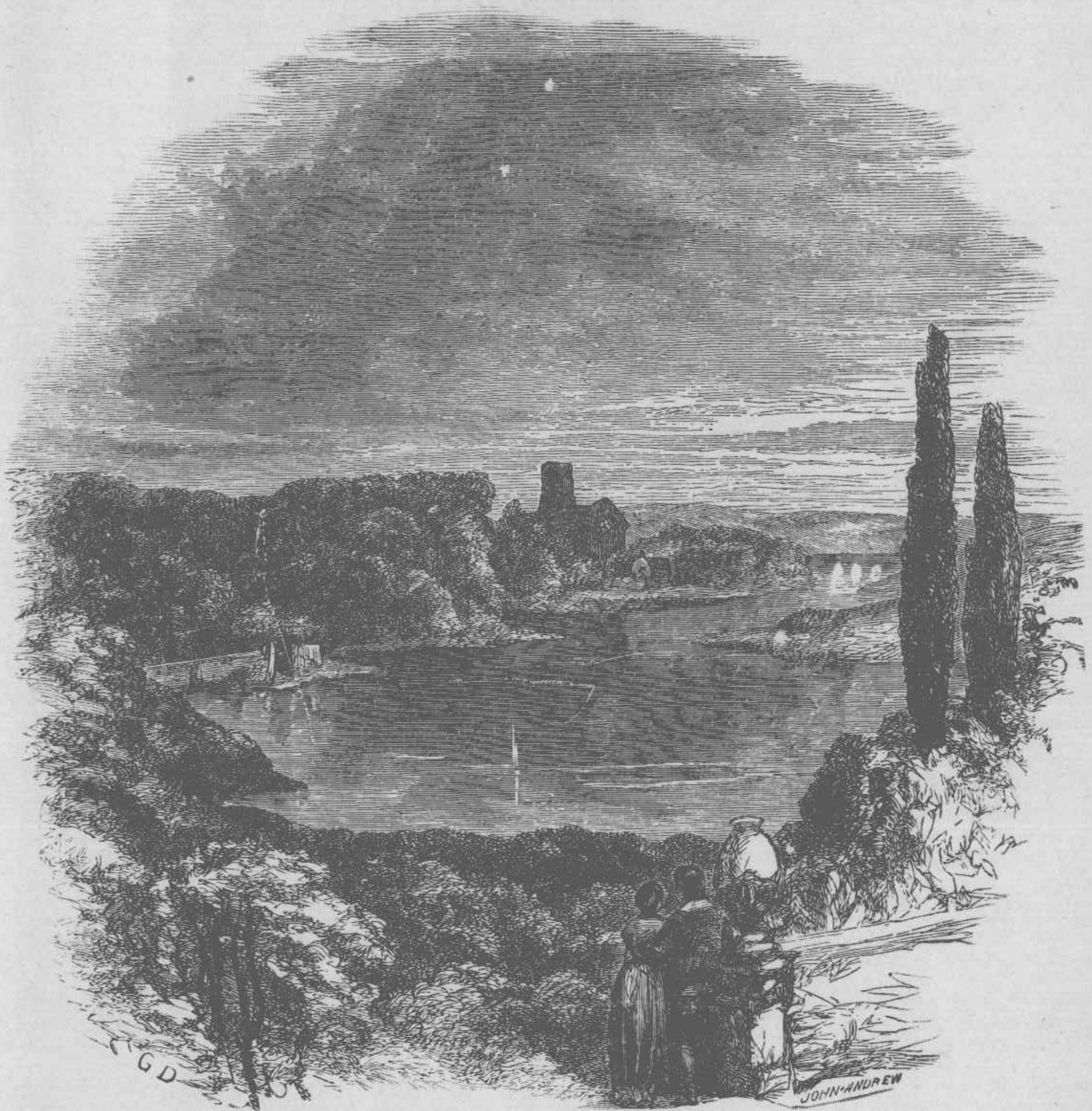
For new matter, giving the substance of the latest researches in the history of the Sonnets, see "Addenda," p. 184 fol. Certain changes have also been made in the Introduction (pp. 10, 11, 12) and here and there in the Notes.



STATUE OF MARY FITTON.

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Nor that full star that ushers in the even
Doth half that glory to the sober west
As those two mourning eyes become thy face (*Sonn. 132*).



INTRODUCTION
TO
SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS.

I. THEIR HISTORY.

The *Sonnets* were first published in 1609, with the following title-page (as given in the fac-simile of 1870):

SHAKE-SPEARES | SONNETS. | Neuer before Im-
printed. | AT LONDON | By *G. Eld* for *T. T.* and are | to be
solde by *William Aspley*. | 1609.

In some copies the latter part of the imprint reads: "to be solde by *John Wright*, dwelling | at Christ Church gate. | 1609."

At the end of the volume *A Lover's Complaint* was printed.

In 1640 the Sonnets (except Nos. 18, 19, 43, 56, 75, 76, 96, and 126), re-arranged under various titles, with the pieces in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, *A Lover's Complaint*, *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, the lines "Why should this a desert be," etc. (*A. Y. L.* iii. 2. 133 fol.), "Take, O take those lips away," etc. (*M. for M.* iv. 1. 1 fol.), and sundry translations from Ovid, evidently not Shakespeare's (see our ed. of *V. and A.* p. 215), were published with the following title:

POEMS: | WRITTEN | BY | WIL. SHAKE-SPEARE. | Gent. |
Printed at *London* by *Tho. Cotes*, and are | to be sold by
John Benson, dwelling in | *S^t. Dunstons Church-yard*. 1640.

There is an introductory address "To the Reader" by Benson, in which he asserts that the poems are "of the same purity the Authour himselve then living avouched," and that they will be found "seren, cleere and eligantly plaine." He adds that by bringing them "to the perfect view of all men" he is "glad to be serviceable for the continuance of glory to the deserved Author."

The order of the poems in this volume is followed in the editions of Gildon (1710) and of Sewell (1725 and 1728); also in those published by Ewing (1771) and Evans (1775). In all these editions the sonnets mentioned above (18, 19, etc.) are omitted, and 138 and 144 are given in the form in which they appear in *The Passionate Pilgrim*.

The first complete reprint of the Sonnets, after the edition of 1609, appears to have been in the collected edition of Shakespeare's Poems, published by Lintott in 1709 (see our ed. of *Venus and Adonis*, etc., p. 13).

The earliest known reference to the Sonnets is in the *Palladis Tamia* of Meres (cf. *M. N. D.* p. 9, and *C. of E.* p. 101), who speaks of them as "his sugred Sonnets among

his private friends." This was in 1598, and in the next year two of them (138 and 144) were printed in *The Passionate Pilgrim*. We do not know that any of the others were published before 1609. They were probably written at intervals during many years. "Some, if we were to judge by their style, belong to the time when *Romeo and Juliet* was written. Others—as, for example, 66–74—echo the sadder tone which is heard in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*" (Dowden). It is evident that there is a gap of at least three years (see 104) between 99 and the following group (100–112).

The theories concerning these interesting poems cannot even be enumerated in the space at our command. "Some have looked on them as one poem; some as several poems—of groups of sonnets; some as containing a separate poem in each sonnet. They have been supposed to be written in Shakespeare's own person, or in the character of another, or of several others; to be autobiographical or heterobiographical, or allegorical; to have been addressed to Lord Southampton, to Sir William Herbert, to his own wife, to Lady Rich, to his child, to his nephew, to himself, to his muse. The 'W. H.' in the dedication has been interpreted as William Herbert, William Hughes, William Hathaway, William Hart (his nephew), William Himself, and Henry Wriothesly" (Fleay).*

For our own part, we find it as difficult to believe that some of the Sonnets are autobiographical as that others are not; and all that has been written to prove that 1–126 are all addressed to the same person fails to convince us. It is clear enough that certain sets (like 1–17, for instance)

* Some of these theories are discussed in the extracts given below from Dowden's Introduction to his valuable edition of the *Sonnets*. For an admirable *résumé* of the entire literature of the subject, see the larger edition of Dowden (London, 1881), Part II. of the Introduction, pp. 36–110.

form a regular series, but that all the poems are arranged in the order in which Shakespeare meant to have them is not so clear. There is no evidence that the edition of 1609 was supervised or even authorized by him. The enigmatical dedication is not his, but the publisher's; and the arrangement of the poems is probably that of the person who procured them for publication, whoever he may have been. The order seems to us more like that of a *collector*—one who knew something of their history, and was interested in getting them together for publication—than that of the *author*. Possibly this collector had his own little theory as to the interconnection of some of them, like certain of the modern editors, no one of whom seems on the whole to have been any more successful in classifying them. We fear that both their order and the means by which the publisher got possession of them must continue to be among the insoluble problems of literature.*

II. CRITICAL COMMENTS ON THE SONNETS.

[From Dowden's Edition.†]

The student of Shakspeare is drawn to the Sonnets not alone by their ardour and depth of feeling, their fertility and condensation of thought, their exquisite felicities of phrase, and their frequent beauty of rhythmical movement, but in a peculiar degree by the possibility that here, if nowhere else, the greatest of English poets may—as Wordsworth puts it—have “unlocked his heart.”‡ It were strange if his silence,

* See also *Addenda*, p. 184 fol. below.

† *The Sonnets of William Shakspeare*, edited by Edward Dowden (London, 1881), p. xv. fol. (also in the larger ed. p. 4 fol.).

‡ Poets differ in the interpretation of the Sonnets as widely as critics :

“ ‘With this same key
Shakspeare unlocked his heart’ once more !
Did Shakspeare? If so, the less Shakspeare he !”

So, Mr. Browning; to whom replies Mr. Swinburne, “No whit the less like Shakspeare, but undoubtedly the less like Browning.” Some of

deep as that of the secrets of Nature, never once knew interruption. The moment, however, we regard the Sonnets as autobiographical, we find ourselves in the presence of doubts and difficulties, exaggerated, it is true, by many writers, yet certainly real.

If we must escape from them, the simplest mode is to assume that the Sonnets are "the free outcome of a poetic imagination" (Delius). It is an ingenious suggestion of Delius that certain groups may be offsets from other poetical works of Shakspeare; those urging a beautiful youth to perpetuate his beauty in offspring may be a derivative from *Venus and Adonis*; those declaring love for a dark complexioned woman may rehandle the theme set forth in Berowne's passion for the dark Rosaline of *Love's Labour's Lost*; those which tell of a mistress resigned to a friend may be a non-dramatic treatment of the theme of love and friendship presented in the later scenes of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Perhaps a few sonnets, as 110 and 111, refer to circumstances of Shakspeare's life (Dyce); the main body of these poems may still be regarded as mere exercises of the fancy.

Such an explanation of the Sonnets has the merit of simplicity; it unties no knots, but cuts all at a blow; if the collection consists of disconnected exercises of the fancy, we

Shelley's feeling with reference to the Sonnets may be guessed from certain lines to be found among the *Studies for Epipsygidion and Cancelled Passages* (Poetical Works: ed. Forman, vol. ii. pp. 392, 393), to which my attention has been called by Mr. E. W. Gosse:

"If any should be curious to discover
Whether to you I am a friend or lover,
Let them read Shakspeare's sonnets, taking thence
A whetstone for their dull intelligence
That tears and will not cut, or let them guess
How Diotima, the wise prophetess,
Instructed the instructor, and why he
Rebuked the infant spirit of melody
On Agathon's sweet lips, which as he spoke
Was as the lovely star when morn has broke
The roof of darkness, in the golden dawn,
Half-hidden and yet beautiful."

need not try to reconcile discrepancies, nor shape a story, nor ascertain a chronology, nor identify persons. And what indeed was a sonneteer's passion but a painted fire? What was the form of verse but an exotic curiously trained and tended, in which an artificial sentiment imported from Italy gave perfume and colour to the flower?

And yet, in this as in other forms, the poetry of the time, which possesses an enduring vitality, was not commonly caught out of the air, but—however large the conventional element in it may have been—was born of the union of heart and imagination; in it real feelings and real experience, submitting to the poetical fashions of the day, were raised to an ideal expression. Spenser wooed and wedded the Elizabeth of his *Amoretti*. The *Astrophel and Stella* tells of a veritable tragedy, fatal perhaps to two bright lives and passionate hearts. And what poems of Drummond do we remember as we remember those which record how he loved and lamented Mary Cunningham?

Some students of the Sonnets, who refuse to trace their origin to real incidents of Shakspeare's life, allow that they form a connected poem, or at most two connected poems, and these, they assure us, are of deeper significance than any mere poetical exercises can be. They form a stupendous allegory; they express a profound philosophy. The young friend whom Shakspeare addresses is in truth the poet's Ideal Self, or Ideal Manhood, or the Spirit of Beauty, or the Reason, or the Divine Logos; his dark mistress, whom a prosaic German translator (Jordan) takes for a mulatto or quadroon, is indeed Dramatic Art, or the Catholic Church, or the Bride of the Canticles, black but comely. Let us not smile too soon at the pranks of Puck among the critics; it is more prudent to move apart and feel gently whether that sleek nole, with fair large ears, may not have been slipped upon our own shoulders.

When we question saner critics why Shakspeare's Sonnets

may not be at once *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, poetry and truth, their answer amounts to this: Is it likely that Shakspeare would so have rendered extravagant homage to a boy patron? Is it likely that one who so deeply felt the moral order of the world would have yielded, as the poems to his dark lady acknowledge, to a vulgar temptation of the senses? or, yielding, would have told his shame in verse? Objections are brought forward against identifying the youth of the Sonnets with Southampton or with Pembroke; it is pointed out that the writer speaks of himself as old, and *that* in a sonnet published in Shakspeare's thirty-fifth year; here evidently he cannot have spoken in his own person, and if not here, why elsewhere? Finally, it is asserted that the poems lack internal harmony; no real person can be—what Shakspeare's friend is described as being—true and false, constant and fickle, virtuous and vicious, of hopeful expectation, and publicly blamed for careless living.

Shakspeare speaks of himself as old; true, but in the sonnet published in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (138), he speaks as a lover, contrasting himself, skilled in the lore of life, with an inexperienced youth; doubtless at thirty-five he was not a Florizel nor a Ferdinand. In the poems to his friend, Shakspeare is addressing a young man perhaps of twenty years, in the fresh bloom of beauty; he celebrates with delight the floral grace of youth, to which the first touch of time will be a taint; those lines of thought and care, which his own mirror shows, bear witness to time's ravage. It is as a poet that Shakspeare writes, and his statistics are those not of arithmetic but of poetry.

That he should have given admiration and love without measure to a youth highborn, brilliant, accomplished, who singled out the player for peculiar favour, will seem wonderful only to those who keep a constant guard upon their affections, and to those who have no need to keep a guard at all. In the Renascence epoch, among natural products of

a time when life ran swift and free, touching with its current high and difficult places, the ardent friendship of man with man was one. To elevate it above mere personal regard a kind of Neo-Platonism was at hand, which represented Beauty and Love incarnated in a human creature as earthly vicegerents of the Divinity. "It was then not uncommon," observes the sober Dyce, "for one man to write verses to another in a strain of such tender affection as fully warrants us in terming them amatory." Montaigne, not prone to take up extreme positions, writes of his dead Estienne de la Boëtie with passionate tenderness which will not hear of moderation. The haughtiest spirit of Italy, Michael Angelo, does homage to the worth and beauty of young Tommaso Cavalieri in such words as these :

"Heavenward your spirit stirreth me to strain;
E'en as you will I blush and blanch again
Freeze in the sun, burn 'neath a frosty sky,
Your will includes and is the lord of mine."

The learned Languet writes to young Philip Sidney: "Your portrait I kept with me some hours to feast my eyes on it, but my appetite was rather increased than diminished by the sight." And Sidney to his guardian friend: "The chief object of my life, next to the everlasting blessedness of heaven, will always be the enjoyment of true friendship, and there you shall have the chiefest place." "Some," said Jeremy Taylor, "live under the line, and the beams of friendship in that position are imminent and perpendicular." "Some have only a dark day and a long night from him [the Sun], snows and white cattle, a miserable life and a perpetual harvest of Catarrhes and Consumptions, apoplexies and dead palsies; but some have splendid fires and aromack spices, rich wines and well-digested fruits, great wit and great courage, because they dwell in his eye and look in his face and are the Courtiers of the Sun, and wait upon him in his Chambers of the East; just so it is in friend-