

A
COLLECTION
OF
ENGLISH POEMS

1660—1800

Selected and Edited by
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PREFACE

THIS book is designed primarily for the convenience of advanced students of Restoration and eighteenth-century literature in American colleges and universities. Its main purpose is to give such students, many of whom cannot rely upon access to adequately equipped libraries, a selection of representative poems published in England and Scotland between 1660 and 1800 sufficiently generous to enable them to judge the achievement of the age, in all its variety of themes and styles, for themselves.

It is an age about which it is increasingly easy to form sympathetic and properly instructed views. The prejudices of a hundred years, to be sure, die hard; and there are many readers and critics among us to whom the verdict pronounced by Romantics and Victorians upon the "classical" school of the eighteenth century remains even yet the final word. That true poetry is always a direct outpouring of personal feeling; that its values are determined by the nature of the emotion which it expresses, the standard being naturally set by the preferences of the most admired poets in the nineteenth-century tradition; that its distinctive effort is "to bring unthinkable thoughts and unsayable sayings within the range of human minds and ears"; that the essence of its art is not statement but suggestion—these are still for many persons self-evident propositions; and their effect is still to fasten a taint of the unpoetic upon even the greatest productions of an age which by principle eschewed personal confessions, which loved wit and cultivated regularity, precision, and a "satisfying completeness" of form, and which drew the substance of its verse from such—to the nineteenth century—prosaic things as the scorn of Tory for Whig or of wit for pedant and dunce, as the coming of a city shower, or as the optimistic theory of the world.

But it is clear that the tyranny of these presuppositions about the nature of poetry and of the inhibitions of taste which they have tended to encourage is far less complete at the present moment than it was even a few years ago. There have of course always been readers who have found in the poetry of Dryden and Pope and Swift and Prior and Johnson a source of unfailing delight. The difference is that today such admirers of "classical" verse need no longer feel themselves isolated in the midst of a hostile world. No more are they on the defensive; it is not they but the surviving disciples of Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold who are out of harmony with the movement of modern

criticism and taste. Of this movement in the English-speaking world the most influential spokesman is beyond question Mr. T. S. Eliot; no one has done more than he to make us aware of the limitations of Romantic and Victorian ideas about poetry or to win a respectful hearing for poets who worked in idioms foreign to nineteenth-century taste. His essay on Dryden, inspired by the excellent and no less enthusiastic appraisal of Mr. Van Doren, is a manifesto of revolt. "To enjoy Dryden means to pass beyond the limitations of the nineteenth century into a new freedom." "Dryden [in *Mac Flecknoe*] continually enhances: he makes his object great, in a way contrary to expectation; and the total effect is due to the transformation of the ridiculous into poetry." "The reproach of the prosaic, levelled at Dryden, rests upon a confusion between the emotions considered to be poetic—which is a matter allowing considerable latitude of fashion—and the *result* of personal emotion in poetry. . . ." "Dryden lacked what his master Jonson possessed, a large and unique view of life; he lacked insight, he lacked profundity. But where Dryden fails to satisfy, the nineteenth century does not satisfy us either; and where that century has condemned him, it is itself condemned. In the next revolution of taste it is possible that poets may turn to the study of Dryden. He remains one of those who have set standards for English verse which it is desperate to ignore." That these statements represent a view which has become increasingly prevalent, and that not alone in academic circles, since 1920, there is ample evidence in the mass of recent critical comment not merely on Dryden but on many of his successors in the same tradition—on Pope, on Swift, on Johnson, on Churchill, on the numerous minor poets of the Georgian era who have been so diligently collected by Mr. David Nichol Smith and Mr. Iolo Williams. Not every one would endorse the late Mr. Strachey's enthusiasm for Pope's *Pastorals*; but there are many readers nowadays who appreciate what he means when he speaks of "the enchantment of the heroic couplet," and who would subscribe unreservedly to his emancipated view of the subject-matter of poetry: "If we look at the facts, where do we find poetry? In the wild fantasies of Aristophanes, in the sordid lusts of Baudelaire, in the gentle trivialities of La Fontaine. . . . There is poetry to be found lurking in the metaphysical system of Epicurus, and in the body of a flea. And so need we be surprised if it invests a game of cards, or a gentleman sneezing at Hampton Court?"

Many of the barriers which once stood in the way of a full enjoyment of eighteenth-century poetry have thus been broken down—thanks to the critical revolution of the past decade. But this is not all. Appreciation of the verse contained in this volume is dependent upon other things besides an open mind toward forms of poetry not approved by the nineteenth-century tradition; it demands an adequate conception of the culture, the ruling ideas,

and in general the artistic and intellectual history of the age in which it was produced. We stand at present only upon the threshold of a proper understanding of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; but progress toward such an understanding has been notably rapid during the last few years, and the student who approaches the period today can do so with the help of much more trustworthy and stimulating guides than would have been available a decade ago.¹ It is not merely that we have for the first time satisfactory texts of a number of important poets (Blake, for example), or that the lives and personalities of others (for instance, Pope) have been put in a fairer light, or that diligent inquiry has told us more than we ever knew before about such topics as the origins of the heroic couplet, the vogue of burlesque and mock-heroic poetry, or the influence of Spenser and Milton on eighteenth-century style. Along with much accumulation of new detail and much fruitful sifting of the old there have come also altered perspectives, and a fresh insight into the complex forces that shaped the period as a whole. In this progress the chief factor has undoubtedly been the renewed concentration by scholars on the relations between eighteenth-century literature and the history of ideas. How vivifying the effect of this form of study can be appears most conspicuously perhaps in the scattered writings of Professor Lovejoy.² If we are now beginning to have something like an adequate understanding of the intellectual atmosphere surrounding neo-classical criticism and poetry, if we are on our way toward a more discriminating and genuinely historical conception of the complex of movements which has been commonly called "romanticism," the credit must in very large measure go to him. Others at the same time, but independently, have applied a similar method to more limited problems, with results that are no less illuminating in their way. Thus—to mention only a few examples—a good deal that was formerly obscure in Dryden's religious poems has now been cleared up; many aspects of Thomson have acquired new meaning by being brought into relation with the scientific and religious ideas of his time; Blake no longer stands an isolated and hence unintelligible figure in the later eighteenth century.

In selecting and reprinting the poems which make up this volume I have tried to keep in mind both of these new directions of interest in the verse of the period. I have naturally devoted most space to major figures, such as Dryden, Prior, Swift, Gay, Pope, Thomson, Johnson, Collins, Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper, Blake, and Burns; but I have not neglected their lesser contemporaries, many of whom have left us verse of indubitable excellence in forms or on subjects that would have been inadequately illustrated in a selection

¹ The titles of the most important or useful of these are brought together in the bibliography at the end of the volume.

² For a list of his principal papers on eighteenth-century topics see the third and fourth sections of the bibliography.

only from the better-known men. With rare exceptions I have included only complete poems or complete parts of poems, and I have taken the texts of these, whenever possible, from the most authoritative contemporary sources, and have printed them unaltered except for the correction of an occasional misprint or the insertion of an occasional needed mark of punctuation.³ In arranging them in the volume I have followed an order determined, for the whole work of an author, by the date of his first important publication,⁴ and, for the individual poems of an author, by the dates, so far as these could be ascertained, of their first appearance in print.⁵

I suppose that no one who undertakes such a work as this can ever feel entirely happy about the printed result. I have omitted some poems which, could I now plan the collection anew, I should certainly wish to include, and I have given valuable space to others of whose superior claims I am no longer quite convinced. In preparing the texts I have not always, as Johnson confessed on a more momentous occasion, "executed my own scheme, or satisfied my own expectations." The difficulties have been greater than I could anticipate. It has not always been easy, and occasionally it has proved impossible, to determine with certainty what particular form of a poem best represented its author's final intentions. I have been reasonably diligent in my inquiries, but so imperfect still is our knowledge of the textual history of this period that I have been forced, more frequently than I could wish, to content myself with what I feel sure are only approximations. Nor, even when I knew what text I ought to print, has it invariably been possible to act upon the information. Certain poems I have been compelled to reproduce from obviously inferior sources; of a number of others I have been obliged to give texts which, though they have been collated in proof with the proper originals, still retain some of the variations in capitalization and punctuation, though not in wording, characteristic of the modern editions from which they were set.⁶ And finally I shall not be surprised to learn, though here again I have taken some pains, that the dates of first publication given in the notes are in some instances incorrect. I can only hope that errors of this sort are not unduly numerous and that users of the collection will have the kindness to inform me of any that they may discover.

³ The source of the text of each poem is indicated in a footnote, though not always. I am afraid, with all the precision that might be demanded in a work of greater scholarly pretensions. It has seemed unnecessary, for example, to take account of the fact that there were duplicate printings, with some textual variations of minor importance, of Cowley's *Works* of 1668, of Prior's *Poems* of 1718, of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July, 1731, and possibly of others among the editions which I have used.

⁴ This appears as the second of the three dates given in parentheses after the name of the author.

⁵ To this latter rule I have admitted a few exceptions. Thus poems printed posthumously have normally been placed according to dates of composition.

⁶ These poems are designated in the bibliographical footnotes by the phrase "See Preface."

The debt which this book owes to earlier attempts in the same kind, and especially to the admirable anthologies of Iolo Williams and David Nichol Smith, will be evident to all readers. I have received much kind assistance, at various stages in its preparation, from friends both in this country and England. Messrs. Birrell and Garnett, of London, and Mr. Walter Hill, of Chicago, have generously allowed me to collate certain rare books in their possession. Mr. L. F. Powell, the learned and benevolent librarian of the Taylor Institution, Oxford, Professor F. B. Snyder, of Northwestern University, and Professors Sir William Craigie, George L. Marsh, and George Sherburn, of the University of Chicago, have aided me in the choice and verification of the texts and in the preparation of the appendixes. I am under obligation also to Mr. Geoffrey Keynes and the Nonesuch Press for permission to use the text of Blake contained in the excellent one-volume edition of his poetry and prose published in 1927; to the Cambridge University Press for authorization to include the text of Prior's *Jinny the Just* first printed from manuscript by A. R. Waller in 1907; and to the University of Chicago Press for permission to imitate the cover design of my *New Essays* by *Oliver Goldsmith*. My chief debt, however, is to my assistant, Mr. W. K. Chandler, from whose advice and criticism, freely given during the whole course of the undertaking, I have profited more than I can adequately say.

A
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