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Original Poems And Translations, By John Dryden, Esq; Now First Collected and Publish'd together, In Two Volumes

Containing Translations, Epistles, Prologues, Epilogues, Elegies, Epitaphs, And Songs

Dryden, John

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To the Right Honourable the Earl of Abingdon, &c.

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To the Right Honourable the

Earl of *Abingdon*, &c.

My LORD,

THE Commands, with which You honour'd me ſome Months ago, are now perform'd: They had been ſooner; but betwixt ill Health, ſome Buſineſs, and many Troubles, I was forced to defer them 'till this time. *Ovid*, going to his Baniſhment, and writing from on Shipboard to his Friends, excuſed the Faults of his Poetry by his Misfortunes; and told them, that good Verſes never flow, but from a ſerene and compos'd Spirit. Wit, which is a kind of *Mercury*, with Wings faſten'd to his Head and Heels, can fly but ſlowly in a damp Air. I therefore choſe rather to obey You late than ill: if at leaſt I am capable of writing any thing, at any time, which is worthy your Peruſal and Your Patronage. I cannot ſay that I have eſcap'd from a Shipwreck; but have only gain'd a Rock by hard Swimming; where I may pant a

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while and gather breath: For the Doctors give me a ſad Aſſurance, that my Diſeaſe never took its leave of any Man, but with a Purpoſe to return. However, my Lord, I have laid hold on the Interval, and manag'd the ſmall Stock, which Age has left me, to the beſt advantage, in performing this inconſiderable ſervice to my Lady's Memory. We, who are Prieſts of *Apollo*, have not the Inſpiration when we pleaſe; but muſt wait 'till the God comes ruſhing on us, and invades us with a fury, which we are not able to reſiſt: which gives us double Strength while the Fit continues, and leaves us languiſhing and ſpent, at its departure. Let me not ſeem to boaſt, my Lord; for I have really felt it on this Occaſion, and prophesy'd beyond my natural Power. Let me add, and hope to be believ'd, that the Excellency of the Subject contributed much to the Happineſs of the Execution; and that the weight of thirty Years was taken off me, while I was writing. I ſwam with the Tide, and the Water under me was buoyant. The Reader will eaſily obſerve, that I was tranſported by the multitude and variety of my Similitudes; which are generally the product of a luxuriant Fancy, and the wantonneſs of Wit. Had I call'd in my Judgment to my aſſiſtance, I had certainly retrench'd many of them. But I defend them not; let them paſs for beautiful faults amongſt the better ſort of Criticks: For the whole Poem, though written in that which they call Heroick Verſe, is of the Pindarick nature, as well in the Thought as the Expreſſion; and, as ſuch, requires the ſame grains of allowance for it. It was intended, as Your Lordſhip ſees in the Title, not for an Elegy, but a Panegyrick: A kind of Apotheoſis, indeed, if a Heathen Word may be applied to a Chriſtian uſe. And on all Occaſions of Praiſe, if we take the Ancients for our Patterns, we are bound by Preſcription

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to employ the magnificence of Words, and the force of Figures, to adorn the ſublimity of Thoughts. *Iſocrates* amongſt the *Grecian* Orators, and *Cicero*, and the younger *Pliny*, amongſt the *Romans*, have left us their Precedents for our ſecurity: For I think I need not mention the inimitable *Pindar*, who ſtretches on theſe Pinions out of ſight, and is carried upward, as it were, into another World.

This, at leaſt, my Lord, I may juſtly plead, that, if I have not perform'd ſo well as I think I have, yet I have us'd my beſt endeavours to excel my ſelf. One Diſadvantage I have had; which is, never to have known or ſeen my Lady: And to draw the Lineaments of her Mind, from the Deſcription, which I have received from others, is for a Painter to ſet himſelf at work without the living Original before him: Which, the more beautiful it is, will be ſo much the more difficult for him to conceive, when he has only a Relation given him of ſuch and ſuch Features by an Acquaintance or a Friend, without the nice Touches, which give the beſt Reſemblance, and make the Graces of the Picture. Every Artiſt is apt enough to flatter himſelf (and I amongſt the reſt) that their own ocular Obſervations would have diſcover'd more Perfections, at leaſt others, than have been deliver'd to them: Though I have received mine from the beſt Hands, that is, from Perſons who neither want a juſt Underſtanding of my Lady's Worth, nor a due Veneration for her Memory.

Doctor *Donne*, the greateſt Wit, though not the greateſt Poet of our Nation, acknowledges, that he had never ſeen Mrs. *Drury*, whom he has made immortal in his admirable Anniverſaries. I have had the ſame Fortune, though I have not ſucceeded to the ſame Genius. However I have follow'd his Footſteps in the Deſign of his Panegyrick; which was to raiſe

an Emulation in the Living, to copy out the Example of the Dead. And therefore it was, that I once intended to have call'd this Poem, *The Pattern:* And though, on a ſecond Conſideration, I chang'd the Title into the Name of the Illuſtrious Perſon, yet the Deſign continues, and *Eleonora* is ſtill the Pattern of Charity, Devotion, and Humility; of the beſt Wife, the beſt Mother, and the beſt of Friends.

And now, my Lord, though I have endeavour'd to anſwer your Commands, yet I cou'd not anſwer it to the World, nor to my Conſcience, if I gave not your Lordſhip my Teſtimony of being the beſt Husband now living: I ſay my Teſtimony only; for the Praiſe of it is given you by your ſelf. They, who deſpiſe the Rules of Virtue both in their Practice and their Morals, will think this a very trivial Commendation. But I think it the peculiar Happineſs of the Counteſs of *Abingdon*, to have been ſo truly lov'd by you, while ſhe was living, and ſo gratefully honour'd, after ſhe was dead. Few there are who have either had, or cou'd have, ſuch a Loſs; and yet fewer who carried their Love and Conſtancy beyond the Grave. The exteriors of Mourning, a decent Funeral, and black Habits, are the uſual ſtints of common Husbands: And perhaps their Wives deſerve no better than to be mourn'd with Hypocriſy, and forgot with Eaſe. But you have diſtinguiſh'd yourſelf from ordinary Lovers, by a real and laſting Grief for the Deceas'd; and by endeavouring to raiſe for her the moſt durable Monument, which is that of Verſe. And ſo it would have prov'd, if the Workman had been equal to the Work, and your Choice of the Artificer as happy as your Deſign. Yet, as *Phidias*, when he had made the Statue of *Minerva*, cou'd not forbear to ingrave his own Name, as Author of the Piece: So give me leave to hope, that, by ſubſcribing mine to this

this Poem, I may live by the Goddeſs, and tranſmit my Name to Poſterity by the Memory of Hers. 'Tis no Flattery to aſſure Your Lordſhip, that ſhe is remember'd, in the preſent Age, by all who have had the Honour of her Converſation and Acquaintance; and that I have never been in any Company ſince the News of her Death was firſt brought me, where they have not extoll'd her Virtues, and even ſpoken the ſame things of her in Proſe, which I have done in Verſe.

I therefore think my ſelf oblig'd to thank your Lordſhip for the Commiſſion which you have given me: How I have acquitted my ſelf of it, muſt be left to the Opinion of the World, in ſpite of any Proteſtation, which I can enter againſt the preſent Age, as incompetent or corrupt Judges. For my Comfort, they are but *Engliſhmen*, and, as ſuch, if they think ill of me to-day, they are inconſtant enough to think well of me to-morrow. And after all, I have not much to thank my Fortune that I was born amongſt them. The good of both Sexes are ſo few, in *England*, that they ſtand like Exceptions againſt General Rules: And though one of them has deſerv'd a greater Commendation than I cou'd give her, they have taken care that I ſhould not tire my Pen with frequent exerciſe on the like Subjects; that Praiſes, like Taxes, ſhould be appropriated, and left almoſt as individual as the Perſon. They ſay, my Talent is Satire: If it be ſo, 'tis a fruitful Age, and there is an extraordinary Crop to gather. But a ſingle Hand is inſufficient for ſuch a Harveſt: They have ſown the Dragons Teeth themſelves, and 'tis but juſt they ſhould reap each other in Lampoons. You, my Lord, who have the Character of Honour, though 'tis not my Happineſs to know You, may ſtand aſide, with the ſmall Remainders of the *Engliſh*

Nobility, truly ſuch, and, unhurt your ſelves, behold the mad Combat. If I have pleas'd you, and ſome few others, I have obtain'd my end. You ſee I have diſabled my ſelf, like an elected Speaker of the Houſe: yet like him I have undertaken the Charge, and find the Burden ſufficiently recompens'd by the Honour. Be pleas'd to accept of theſe my unworthy Labours, this Paper Monument; and let her pious Memory, which I am ſure is ſacred to You, not only plead the Pardon of my many Faults, but gain me your Protection, which is ambitiouſly ſought by,

My LORD,

Your Lordſhip's

Moſt Obedient Servant,

JOHN DRYDEN.

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