



FROM AN OLD PRINT IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

## Seventeenth-Century Epigrams

BY EDMUND GOSSE

WHEN we look over early seventeenth-century books of verse, we often come upon small seed-pearls of poetry, from two to six lines long, which are apt to seem to us not merely unattractive, but positively incomprehensible. To mention a greatly and deservedly admired volume, the *Hesperides* of Herrick, it is certain that when we read,

Sweet are my Julia's lips, and clean,  
As if o'erwashed in hippocrene,

we turn the page to read the rest of it. But there is no rest of it, and we do not feel that this is enough to form a complete piece. Nor does the following highly sensible remark seem to deserve to be treated as a poem in itself:

He who wears blacks and mourns not for  
the dead,  
Does but deride the party buried.

Our modern taste demands more—or less.  
But this kind of literature was extremely

popular in the reigns of James I. and Charles I., and was held to be a very important and serious branch of poetry. It is worth while to try to understand what the significance of these blunt epigrams was.

As is well known, an epigram, in its primary signification, was nothing more nor less than an inscription. It was "something written" to mark a spot or an event; it was the form of words attached to an altar, or a monument, or an image, to show whose image or monument or altar it was. If you consecrated a secular elm to Pan, you pinned an epigram on the bark to announce that fact; if you presented to a friend an amethyst cup engraved with a figure of Bacchus, you embodied in an epigram your sentiments. It is a mistake to suppose that these pieces were in their first inception satirical, but the Romans made them so, and, as time went on, the trick of writing them, in Latin as well as in Greek, involved an attention to concentrated

effect. The epigrammatist tried to fill his little glass as full as possible, and there were bubbles of malice round the brim. Gradually the idea grew that an epigram ought to finish with a snap; that the very end of the last line ought to contain the essence of the lampoon. This type of the form was amusingly defined by Dr. Edward Walsh, a poet of the later half of the eighteenth century:

An Epigram should be—if right—  
Short, simple, pointed, keen and bright,  
A lively little thing,  
A wasp, with taper body, bound  
By lines, not many, neat and round,—  
All ending in a sting.

But the class of epigrams of which we are now speaking had lost the Roman conception of this form of verse as necessarily sharp and finely finished. It was not the idea of the seventeenth century that an epigram should close in a point. Curiously enough, it was not even considered needful that it should be neat and precise in metre or language. It was, often, a mere accidental reflection or observation put into rhyme. The poetical shape was always preserved, since without it an epigram would scarcely have been anything at all. A French wit, La Monnoye, said that an epigram in prose is a cavalryman dismounted. But a large proportion of the Elizabethan and Jacobean epigrams were beggars on horseback, who, if they had been turned off their rhyme, would have been beggars—and nothing else. The idea was that a joke, or a play upon words, or a compliment, or a statement of fact, whether grave or gay, had but to be rhymed to become a piece of literature, worthy to be printed and preserved in the archives of a poet's writings.

The typical Elizabethan epigrammatist, the one who expended the greatest amount of energy on his work and carried it out on the largest scale, was John Owen, a Welshman of Monmouth, whose collections of little poems were enormously successful. It would not be paradoxical to say that there were plenty of educated people in the early years of James I. who thought a great deal more of Owen as a poet than of his contemporary, Shakespeare. Unfortunately, John Owen, or Audoenus, as he called himself, wrote

entirely in Latin, so that "foreigners," as Anthony à Wood tells us, might enjoy "the ingenious liberty of joking by him used," as well as English people. Owen amused all the world, except his uncle, who, being a Papist, thought that his nephew went too far in a merry epigram against the Church of Rome. In consequence, while everybody else was laughing, the old gentleman "dashed" the poet's "name out from his last will and testament."

Owen completed the collections of his epigrams in 1613, when there were nearly a thousand of them. They consisted of little poems, of which the briefest were in distich—that is to say, two lines, one hexameter and the other pentameter,—and the longest consisted of six lines. Owen treats of every possible subject—of the Weeping of the Magdalen, of Sir Philip Sidney's "Arcadia," of the virtues of warm water, of Oxford, his "alma mater." He compliments his friends by name; he celebrates that "most noble and most learned Heroine," the Lady Arabella Stuart; he praises the young poets of his day—Samuel Daniel, John Harington, John Suckling. He has little sententious pieces about heretics, and the Anglo-Scottish Union, and the merits of an ass, and the history of St. Paul's Cross in Cheape; about sacred adverbs, and the marriage of the clergy, and the patience of lovers, and the mirror given by a gentleman to his wife as a birthday present. Nothing comes amiss to the active, garrulous Muse of Owen; and his contemporaries, who could all, of course, read his transparently easy Latin, took the keenest delight in his productions. His great fame was by no means confined to England. All over Europe the facetious Welshman was accepted as the true modern Martial, as the first of living epigrammatists. When he died, in 1622, he received the honor of public burial in St. Paul's Cathedral.

Several of Owen's Latin epigrams are addressed to that amusing character Sir John Harington, who seems to have had a smarter sense than any of his contemporaries of what epigram should be. One of Harington's couplets was famous:

Treason doth never prosper: what's the  
reason?  
For if it prosper, none dare call it Treason.

would it? I think it would be *he*. I think so. In that case one would parse it thus: nominative, *he*; dative, *him*; possessive, *his'n*. Well, I will consider it a man and call it he until it turns out to be something else. This will be handier than having so many uncertainties.

*Next week Sunday.*—All the week I tagged around after him and tried to get acquainted. I had to do the talking, because he was shy, but I didn't mind it. He seemed pleased to have me around, and I used the sociable "we" a good deal, because it seemed to flatter him to be included.

*Wednesday.*—We are getting along very well indeed, now, and getting better and better acquainted. He does not try to avoid me any more, which is a good sign, and shows that he likes to have me with him. That pleases me, and I study to be useful to him in every way I can, so as to increase his regard. During the last day or two I have taken all the work of naming things off his hands, and this has been a great relief to him, for he has no gift in that line, and is evidently very grateful. He can't think of a rational name to save him, but I do not let him see that I am aware of his defect. Whenever a new creature comes along I name it before he has time to expose himself by an awkward silence. In this way I have saved him many embarrassments. I have no defect like his. The minute I set eyes on an animal I know what it is. I don't have to reflect a moment; the right name comes out instantly, just as if it were an inspiration, as no doubt it is, for I am sure it wasn't in me half a minute before. I seem to know just by the shape of the creature and the way it acts what animal it is.

When the dodo came along he thought it was a wildcat—I saw it in his eye. But I saved him. And I was careful not to do it in a way that could hurt his pride. I just spoke up in a quite natural way of pleased surprise, and not as if I was dreaming of conveying information, and said, "Well, I do declare if there isn't the dodo!" I explained—without seeming to be explaining—how I knew it for a dodo, and although I thought maybe he was a little piqued that I knew the creature when he didn't, it was quite evident that he admired me. That was

very agreeable, and I thought of it more than once with gratification before I slept. How little a thing can make us happy when we feel that we have earned it.

*Thursday.*—My first sorrow. Yesterday he avoided me and seemed to wish I would not talk to him. I could not believe it, and thought there was some mistake, for I loved to be with him, and loved to hear him talk, and so how could it be that he could feel unkind toward me when I had not done anything? But at last it seemed true, so I went away and sat lonely in the place where I first saw him the morning that we were made and I did not know what he was and was indifferent about him; but now it was a mournful place, and every little thing spoke of him, and my heart was very sore. I did not know why very clearly, for it was a new feeling; I had not experienced it before, and it was all a mystery, and I could not make it out.

But when night came I could not bear the lonesomeness, and went to the new shelter which he has built, to ask him what I had done that was wrong and how I could mend it and get back his kindness again; but he put me out in the rain, and it was my first sorrow.

*Sunday.*—It is pleasant again, now, and I am happy; but those were heavy days; I do not think of them when I can help it.

I tried to get him some of those apples, but I cannot learn to throw straight. I failed, but I think the good intention pleased him. They are forbidden, and he says I shall come to harm; but so I come to harm through pleasing him why shall I care for that harm?

*Monday.*—This morning I told him my name, hoping it would interest him. But he did not care for it. It is strange. If he should tell me his name, I would care. I think it would be pleasanter in my ears than any other sound.

He talks very little. Perhaps it is because he is not bright, and is sensitive about it and wishes to conceal it. It is such a pity that he should feel so, for brightness is nothing; it is in the heart that the values lie. I wish I could make him understand that a loving good heart is riches, and riches enough, and that without it intellect is poverty.

Although he talks so little he has quite a considerable vocabulary. This morning he used a surprisingly good word. He evidently recognized, himself, that it was a good one, for he worked it in twice afterward, casually. It was not good casual art, still it showed that he possesses a certain quality of perception. Without a doubt that seed can be made to grow, if cultivated.

Where did he get that word? I do not think I have ever used it.

No, he took no interest in my name. I tried to hide my disappointment, but I suppose I did not succeed. I went away and sat on the moss-bank with my feet in the water. It is where I go when I hunger for companionship, some one to look at, some one to talk to. It is not enough—that lovely white body painted there in the pool—but it is something, and something is better than utter loneliness. It talks when I talk; it is sad when I am sad; it comforts me with its sympathy; it says, "Do not be downhearted, you poor friendless girl; I will be your friend." It is a good friend to me, and my only one; it is my sister.

That first time that she forsook me! ah, I shall never forget that—never, never. My heart was lead in my body! I said, "She was all I had, and now she is gone!" In my despair I said, "Break, my heart; I cannot bear my life any more!" and hid my face in my hands, and there was no solace for me. And when I took them away, after a little, there she was again, white and shining and beautiful, and I sprang into her arms!

That was perfect happiness; I had known happiness before, but it was not like this, which was ecstasy. I never doubted her afterwards. Sometimes she stayed away—maybe an hour, maybe almost the whole day, but I waited and did not doubt; I said, "She is busy, or she is gone a journey, but she will come." And it was so: she always did. At night she would not come if it was dark, for she was a timid little thing; but if there was a moon she would come. I am not afraid of the dark, but she is younger than I am; she was born after I was. Many and many are the visits I have paid her; she is my comfort and my refuge when my life is hard—and it is mainly that.

*Tuesday.*—All the morning I was at work improving the estate; and I purposely kept away from him in the hope that he would get lonely and come. But he did not.

At noon I stopped for the day and took my recreation by flitting all about with the bees and the butterflies and revelling in the flowers, those beautiful creatures that catch the smile of God out of the sky and preserve it! I gathered them, and made them into wreaths and garlands and clothed myself in them whilst I ate my luncheon—apples, of course; then I sat in the shade and wished and waited. But he did not come.

But no matter. Nothing would have come of it, for he does not care for flowers. He calls them rubbish, and cannot tell one from another, and thinks it is superior to feel like that. He does not care for me, he does not care for flowers, he does not care for the painted sky at eventide—is there anything he does care for, except building shacks to coop himself up in from the good clean rain, and thumping the melons, and sampling the grapes, and fingering the fruit on the trees, to see how those properties are coming along?

I laid a dry stick on the ground and tried to bore a hole in it with another one, in order to carry out a scheme that I had, and soon I got an awful fright. A thin, transparent bluish film rose out of the hole, and I dropped everything and ran! I thought it was a spirit, and I was so frightened! But I looked back, and it was not coming; so I leaned against a rock and rested and panted, and let my limbs go on trembling until they got steady again; then I crept warily back, alert, watching, and ready to fly if there was occasion; and when I was come near, I parted the branches of a rose-bush and peeped through—wishing the man was about, I was looking so cunning and pretty—but the sprite was gone. I went there, and there was a pinch of delicate pink dust in the hole. I put my finger in, to feel it, and said *ouch!* and took it out again. It was a cruel pain. I put my finger in my mouth; and by standing first on one foot and then the other, and grunting, I presently eased my misery; then I was full of interest, and began to examine.

I was curious to know what the pink dust was. Suddenly the name of it occurred to me, though I had never heard of it before. It was *fire!* I was as certain of it as a person could be of anything in the world. So without hesitation I named it that—*fire*.

I had created something that didn't exist before; I had added a new thing to the world's uncountable properties; I realized this, and was proud of my achievement, and was going to run and find him and tell him about it, thinking to raise myself in his esteem,—but I reflected, and did not do it. No—he would not care for it. He would ask what it was good for, and what could I answer? for if it was not *good* for something, but only beautiful, merely beautiful—

So I sighed, and did not go. For it wasn't good for anything; it could not build a shack, it could not improve melons, it could not hurry a fruit crop; it was useless, it was a foolishness and a vanity; he would despise it and say cutting words. But to me it was not despicable; I said, "Oh, you fire, I love you, you dainty pink creature, for you are *beautiful*—and that is enough!" and was going to gather it to my breast. But refrained. Then I made another maxim out of my own head, though it was so nearly like the first one that I was afraid it was only a plagiarism: "*The burnt Experiment shuns the fire.*"

I wrought again; and when I had made a good deal of fire-dust I emptied it into a handful of dry brown grass, intending to carry it home and keep it always and play with it; but the wind struck it and it sprayed up and spat out at me fiercely, and I dropped it and ran. When I looked back the blue spirit was towering up and stretching and rolling away like a cloud, and instantly I thought of the name of it—*smoke!*—though, upon my word, I had never heard of smoke before.

Soon, brilliant yellow and red flares shot up through the smoke, and I named them in an instant—*flames!*—and I was right, too, though these were the very first flames that had ever been in the world. They climbed the trees, they flashed splendidly in and out of the vast and increasing volume of tumbling smoke, and I had to clap my hands and

laugh and dance in my rapture, it was so new and strange and so wonderful and so beautiful!

He came running, and stopped and gazed, and said not a word for many minutes. Then he asked what it was. Ah, it was too bad that he should ask such a direct question. I had to answer it, of course, and I did. I said it was fire. If it annoyed him that I should know and he must ask, that was not my fault; I had no desire to annoy him. After a pause he asked,

"How did it come?"

Another direct question, and it also had to have a direct answer.

"I made it."

The fire was travelling farther and farther off. He went to the edge of the burnt place and stood looking down, and said,

"What are these?"

"Fire-coals."

He picked up one to examine it, but changed his mind and put it down again. Then he went away. *Nothing* interests him.

But I was interested. There were ashes, gray and soft and delicate and pretty—I knew what they were at once. And the embers; I knew the embers, too. I found my apples, and raked them out, and was glad; for I am very young and my appetite is active. But I was disappointed; they were all burst open and spoiled. Spoiled apparently; but it was not so; they were better than raw ones. Fire is beautiful; some day it will be useful, I think.

*Friday.*—I saw him again, for a moment, last Monday at nightfall, but only for a moment. I was hoping he would praise me for trying to improve the estate, for I had meant well and had worked hard. But he was not pleased, and turned away and left me. He was also displeased on another account: I tried once more to persuade him to stop going over the Falls. That was because the fire had revealed to me a new passion—quite new, and distinctly different from love, grief, and those others which I had already discovered—*fear*. And it is horrible!—I wish I had never discovered it; it gives me dark moments, it spoils my happiness, it makes me shiver

and tremble and shudder. But I could not persuade him, for he has not discovered fear yet, and so he could not understand me.

Tuesday—Wednesday—Thursday—and to-day: all without seeing him. It is a long time to be alone; still, it is better to be alone than unwelcome.

I *had* to have company—I was made for it, I think,—so I made friends with the animals. They are just charming, and they have the kindest disposition and the politest ways; they never look sour, they never let you feel that you are intruding, they smile at you and wag their tail, if they've got one, and they are always ready for a romp or an excursion or anything you want to propose. I think they are perfect gentlemen. All these days we have had such good times, and it hasn't been lonesome for me, ever. Lonesome! No, I should say not. Why, there's always a swarm of them around—sometimes as much as four or five acres—you can't count them; and when you stand on a rock in the midst and look out over the furry expanse it is so mottled and splashed and gay with color and frisking sheen and sun-flash, and so rippled with stripes, that you might think it was a lake, only you know it isn't; and there's storms of sociable birds, and hurricanes of whirring wings; and when the sun strikes all that feathery commotion, you have a blazing up of all the colors you can think of, enough to put your eyes out.

We have made long excursions, and I have seen a great deal of the world; almost all of it, I think; and so I am the first traveller, and the only one. When we are on the march, it is an imposing sight—there's nothing like it anywhere. For comfort I ride a tiger or a leopard, because it is soft and has a round back that fits me, and because they are such pretty animals; but for long distance or for scenery I ride the elephant. He hoists me up with his trunk, but I can get off myself; when we are ready to camp, he sits and I slide down the back way.

The birds and animals are all friendly to each other, and there are no disputes about anything. They all talk, and they all talk to me, but it must be a foreign language, for I cannot make out a word

they say; yet they often understand me when I talk back, particularly the dog and the elephant. It makes me ashamed. It shows that they are brighter than I am, and are therefore my superiors. It annoys me, for I want to be the principal Experiment myself—and I intend to be, too.

I have learned a number of things, and am educated, now, but I wasn't at first. I was ignorant at first. At first it used to vex me because, with all my watching, I was never smart enough to be around when the water was running up-hill; but now I do not mind it. I have experimented and experimented until now I know it never does run up-hill, except in the dark. I know it does in the dark, because the pool never goes dry; which it would, of course, if the water didn't come back in the night. It is best to prove things by actual experiment; then you *know*; whereas if you depend on guessing and supposing and conjecturing, you will never get educated.

Some things you *can't* find out; but you will never know you can't by guessing and supposing: no, you have to be patient and go on experimenting until you find out that you can't find out. And it is delightful to have it that way, it makes the world so interesting. If there wasn't anything to find out, it would be dull. Even trying to find out and not finding out is just as interesting as trying to find out and finding out, and I don't know but more so. The secret of the water was a treasure until I *got* it; then the excitement all went away, and I recognized a sense of loss.

By experiment I know that wood swims, and dry leaves, and feathers, and plenty of other things; therefore by all that cumulative evidence you know that a rock will swim; but you have to put up with simply knowing it, for there isn't any way to prove it—up to now. But I shall find a way—then *that* excitement will go. Such things make me sad; because by and by when I have found out everything there won't be any more excitements, and I do love excitements so! The other night I couldn't sleep for thinking about it.

At first I couldn't make out what I was made for, but now I think it was to search out the secrets of this wonderful world and be happy and thank the Giver

of it all for devising it. I think there are many things to learn yet—I hope so; and by economizing and not hurrying too fast I think they will last weeks and weeks. I hope so. When you cast up a feather it sails away on the air and goes out of sight; then you throw up a clod and it doesn't. It comes down, every time. I have tried it and tried it, and it is always so. I wonder why it is? Of course it *doesn't* come down, but why should it *seem* to? I suppose it is an optical illusion. I mean, one of them is. I don't know which one. It may be the feather, it may be the clod; I can't prove which it is, I can only demonstrate that one or the other is a fake, and let a person take his choice.

By watching, I know that the stars are not going to last. I have seen some of the best ones melt and run down the sky. Since one can melt, they can all melt; since they can all melt, they can all melt the same night. That sorrow will come—I know it. I mean to sit up every night and look at them as long as I can keep awake; and I will impress those sparkling fields on my memory, so that by and by when they are taken away I can by my fancy restore those lovely myriads to the black sky and make them sparkle again, and double them by the blur of my tears.

#### AFTER THE FALL

When I look back, the Garden is a dream to me. It was beautiful, surpassingly beautiful, enchantingly beautiful; and now it is lost, and I shall not see it any more.

The Garden is lost, but I have found *him*, and am content. He loves me as well as he can; I love him with all the strength of my passionate nature, and this, I think, is proper to my youth and sex. If I ask myself why I love him, I find I do not know, and do not really much care to know; so I suppose that this kind of love is not a product of reasoning and statistics, like one's love for other reptiles and animals. I think that this must be so. I love certain birds because of their song; but I do not love Adam on account of his singing—no, it is not that; the more he sings the more I do not get reconciled to it. Yet I ask him to sing, because I wish to learn to

like everything he is interested in. I am sure I can learn, because at first I could not stand it, but now I can. It sours the milk, but it doesn't matter; I can get used to that kind of milk.

It is not on account of his brightness that I love him—no, it is not that. He is not to blame for his brightness, such as it is, for he did not make it himself; he is as God made him, and that is sufficient. There was a wise purpose in it, *that* I know. In time it will develop, though I think it will not be sudden; and besides, there is no hurry; he is well enough just as he is.

It is not on account of his gracious and considerate ways and his delicacy that I love him. No, he has lacks in these regards, but he is well enough just so, and is improving.

It is not on account of his industry that I love him—no, it is not that. I think he has it in him, and I do not know why he conceals it from me. It is my only pain. Otherwise he is frank and open with me, now. I am sure he keeps nothing from me but this. It grieves me that he should have a secret from me, and sometimes it spoils my sleep, thinking of it, but I will put it out of my mind; it shall not trouble my happiness, which is otherwise full to overflowing.

It is not on account of his education that I love him—no, it is not that. He is self-educated, and does really know a multitude of things, but they are not so.

It is not on account of his chivalry that I love him—no, it is not that. He told on me, but I do not blame him; it is a peculiarity of sex, I think, and he did not make his sex. Of course I would not have told on him, I would have perished first; but that is a peculiarity of sex, too, and I do not take credit for it, for I did not make my sex.

Then why is it that I love him? *Merely because he is masculine*, I think.

At bottom he is good, and I love him for that, but I could love him without it. If he should beat me and abuse me, I should go on loving him. I know it. It is a matter of sex, I think.

He is strong and handsome, and I love him for that, and I admire him and am proud of him, but I could love him without those qualities. If he were plain, I should love him; if he were a wreck,

I should love him; and I would work for him, and slave over him, and pray for him, and watch by his bedside until I died.

Yes, I think I love him merely because he is *mine*, and is *masculine*. There is no other reason, I suppose. And so I think it is as I first said: that this kind of love is not a product of reasonings and statistics. It just *comes*—none knows whence—and cannot explain itself. And doesn't need to.

It is what I think. But I am only a girl, and the first that has examined this matter, and it may turn out that in my ignorance and inexperience I have not got it right.

a longing which shall never perish from the earth, but shall have place in the heart of every wife that loves, until the end of time; and it shall be called by my name.

But if one of us must go first, it is my prayer that it shall be I; for he is strong, I am weak, I am not so necessary to him as he is to me—life without him would not be life; how could I endure it? This prayer is also immortal, and will not cease from being offered up while my race continues. I am the first wife; and in the last wife I shall be repeated.

AT EVE'S GRAVE

FORTY YEARS LATER

It is my prayer, it is my longing, that we may pass from this life together—

ADAM: Wheresoever she was, *there* was Eden.

THE END.

## At Morning

BY EDITH L. LEWIS

NOW in the fields the dew is wet  
 Upon the green stalks of the rye;  
 Far from the land of aching thoughts,  
 By streams I know, the aspens sigh;  
 And light beneath the trembling clasp  
 Of hedges hung with sweets of May,  
 Between the kisses of delight  
 Young lovers give their hearts away.

But here the late and languid dawn  
 Mounts slowly through the bitter air.  
 And in the streets of breathless stone  
 A thousand weary travellers fare;  
 All save some lad whose captive heart,  
 On dream-worn pathways fled afar,  
 Beneath the gold of wind-swept skies,  
 Goes carolling the morning star.



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WHEN we look over early seventeenth-century books of verse, we often come upon small seed-pearls of poetry, from two to six lines long, which are apt to seem to us not merely unattractive, but positively incomprehensible. To mention a greatly and deservedly admired volume, the *Hesperides* of Herrick, it is certain that when we read,

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By lines, not many, neat and round,—  
    All ending in a sting.

But the class of epigrams of which we are now speaking had lost the Roman conception of this form of verse as necessarily sharp and finely finished. It was not the idea of the seventeenth century that an epigram should close in a point. Curiously enough, it was not even considered needful that it should be neat and precise in metre or language. It was, often, a mere accidental reflection or observation put into rhyme. The poetical shape was always preserved, since without it an epigram would scarcely have been anything at all. A French wit, La Monnoye, said that an epigram in prose is a cavalryman dismounted. But a large proportion of the Elizabethan and Jacobean epigrams were beggars on horseback, who, if they had been turned off their rhyme, would have been beggars—and nothing else. The idea was that a joke, or a play upon words, or a compliment, or a statement of fact, whether grave or gay, had but to be rhymed to become a piece of literature, worthy to be printed and preserved in the archives of a poet's writings.

The typical Elizabethan epigrammatist, the one who expended the greatest amount of energy on his work and carried it out on the largest scale, was John Owen, a Welshman of Monmouth, whose collections of little poems were enormously successful. It would not be paradoxical to say that there were plenty of educated people in the early years of James I. who thought a great deal more of Owen as a poet than of his contemporary, Shakespeare. Unfortunately, John Owen, or Audoenus, as he called himself, wrote

entirely in Latin, so that "foreigners," as Anthony à Wood tells us, might enjoy "the ingenious liberty of joking by him used," as well as English people. Owen amused all the world, except his uncle, who, being a Papist, thought that his nephew went too far in a merry epigram against the Church of Rome. In consequence, while everybody else was laughing, the old gentleman "dashed" the poet's "name out from his last will and testament."

Owen completed the collections of his epigrams in 1613, when there were nearly a thousand of them. They consisted of little poems, of which the briefest were in distich—that is to say, two lines, one hexameter and the other pentameter,—and the longest consisted of six lines. Owen treats of every possible subject—of the Weeping of the Magdalen, of Sir Philip Sidney's "Arcadia," of the virtues of warm water, of Oxford, his "alma mater." He compliments his friends by name; he celebrates that "most noble and most learned Heroine," the Lady Arabella Stuart; he praises the young poets of his day—Samuel Daniel, John Harington, John Suckling. He has little sententious pieces about heretics, and the Anglo-Scottish Union, and the merits of an ass, and the history of St. Paul's Cross in Cheape; about sacred adverbs, and the marriage of the clergy, and the patience of lovers, and the mirror given by a gentleman to his wife as a birthday present. Nothing comes amiss to the active, garrulous Muse of Owen; and his contemporaries, who could all, of course, read his transparently easy Latin, took the keenest delight in his productions. His great fame was by no means confined to England. All over Europe the facetious Welshman was accepted as the true modern Martial, as the first of living epigrammatists. When he died, in 1622, he received the honor of public burial in St. Paul's Cathedral.

Several of Owen's Latin epigrams are addressed to that amusing character Sir John Harington, who seems to have had a smarter sense than any of his contemporaries of what epigram should be. One of Harington's couplets was famous:

Treason doth never prosper: what's the reason?  
For if it prosper, none dare call it Treason.

This puts a political observation not only very shrewdly, but extremely neatly. Harington was Queen Elizabeth's godson, but his acts of eccentricity and his waywardness were forever depriving him of her favor. He knew all about treason and its legitimate varieties, for he was in the confidence of Essex, and was deputed by that mad ruffler to make his peace with the Queen, who drove Harington from her presence in a storm of anger. But, in calmer moments, Harington greatly diverted her Majesty with his conversation and his poetry. It would even seem that Elizabeth, who prided herself on her delivery, had the singular complaisance of reading some of Harington's epigrams aloud in the court, for the poet writes:

Forever - dear. forever-  
dreaded Prince,  
You read a verse of mine  
a little since,  
And so pronounced each  
word and every letter,  
Your gracious reading  
graced my verse the  
better.

Since, then, your Highness doth, by gift exceeding,  
Make what you read the better for your  
reading,  
Let my poor muse your pains thus far  
importune.  
To leave to read my verse,—and read my  
fortune!

This may be styled the hint direct; but although Harington offered to undertake any service—he positively proposed, if the Queen would make him archbishop in Ireland, to take holy orders on the spot,—Elizabeth preferred reading his epigrams to giving him responsible office in the state. The poet engraved his bitter disappointment in a couplet, which might have been smoother, but was doubtless quite sincere:

Who lives in courts, must mark what they  
say;

Who lives for ease had better live away.

The disadvantages of epigram-writing



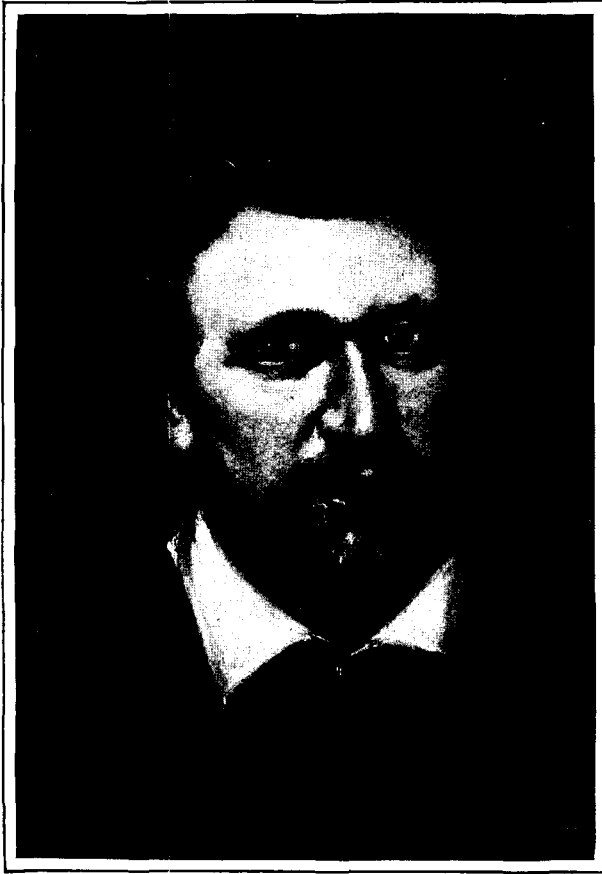
THE FIRST EARL OF SALISBURY

Engraved by Etienne Picart (1631-1721), after a painting by Zuccaro

were so obvious that one wonders what induced the poets to persevere. There must have been something irresistibly fascinating in the possession of this power to amuse yourself and other people by writing and circulating rude little pieces of poetry. Thomas Bastard was among the most irrepressible of these wags. He was a scholar and then a fellow of New College, and his earliest exploit was a collection of lampoons in which he "reflected upon all persons of note in Oxford that were guilty of amorous exploits." In fact, he assumed the poetical office of volunteer proctor, including "town" with "gown." The fun must have been fast and furious, while it lasted, but Bastard was expelled from the uni-

versity. He entered holy orders, retired to his livings in Wessex, and went on writing epigrams for the rest of his life. Bastard's epigrams, which were collected

My Book is not for learned men nor wise,  
Nor merry, nor conceited, nor the plain,  
Nor angry, foolish, critical or nice,  
Nor old, nor young, nor sober, nor the vain,  
Nor for the thrifty, nor the prodigal,  
But if thou needs will know  
for whom? For all.



Courtesy of Walker & Cockerell, London, E. C.

BEN JONSON

From a portrait, by the Dutch painter Gerard Horntorst (1592-1660)

in seven books, called *Chrestoleros*, are highly characteristic of the obscure class of literature of which we are speaking. They are destitute of what is called "point," and they have no more detonation in their going off than a damp squib has. But Bastard merely aimed at putting the bright conversation of his day into metrical form. He follows Martial, who liked to explain what his readers would find in the subsequent section, but his aim is very different from Martial's. Here is the opening to the third book of *Chrestoleros*:

"I am a poor man, Sirs, let me begone!"  
"Nay, but you shall be poor before you pass."  
And so I was, yet lost nothing thereby.  
Would they had robbed me of my poverty.

One sees the penniless parson, riding between Beer Regis and the place he calls "Nullam" (which I can't identify), held up by the two rascally footpads and displaying the emptiness of his pockets. Bastard's little soul went out in his profusion of little poems. He was always bursting with epigram,—

That is the Reverend Mr. Bastard's little joke, that is his mild fizz of humor, and it is highly characteristic of the Elizabethan epigram. Here is Bastard once more upon his own work:

One said my Book was like  
unto a coat  
Of divers colors, black and  
red and white;  
I, but to cross him, said he  
spake by rote,  
For they in making rather  
are unlike:—  
A coat, one garment made  
of many fleeces;  
My Book, one meaning cut  
in many pieces.

It is not easy to decide what Bastard's "one meaning" is, for his hundreds of epigrams treat of every subject under heaven. Probably he means that they illustrate one consistent scheme of providence. He gives us little scraps of autobiography:

Upon the plain, as I rode all  
alone,  
Assaulted by two sturdy  
lads I was;

My pen is like a bow which still is bent,  
My head is like a barrel wanting vent;

but although he justified his garrulous work by an appeal to its usefulness and entertainment, he had none of the colossal arrogance of the ambitious poets of his time. "Reader," he says,

my Book flies low, and comes not near  
The higher world and the celestial sphere.

Bastard, who is almost unknown even to students to-day, deserves considerable attention, particularly as being almost the originator of this kind of English poetry. Owen had revived the custom of writing epigrams, but his were in Latin, and this was supposed to be the necessary language for these little lampoons and sarcastic observations in verse. But Bastard began a new thing:

Methinks some curious reader I hear say  
"What? epigrams in English? 'Tis not  
fit!"

My Book is plain and would have, if it  
may,

An English reader, but a Latin wit.

Ben Jonson composed a whole book of English epigrams, and described them as "the ripest of my studies." No doubt, this patronage of the form by the most learned of living poets greatly aided its vogue. In the course of his collection Jonson admits that the classical idea of the epigram is that it shall

be bold, licentious, full of gall,  
Wormwood and sulphur, sharp and tooth'd  
withal,

Become a petulant thing, hurl ink and wit,  
As madmen stones,

but he repudiates that sense, and many of his pieces here are laudatory or else mildly descriptive. A fair example is the epigram on "Spies":

Spies, you are lights in state, but of base  
stuff,

Who, when you've burnt yourselves down to  
the snuff,

Stink, and are thrown away. End fair  
enough!

Jonson does not hold himself bound even to brevity, and many of his epigrams run to thirty or forty lines. He closes his "Epigrams" with the long burlesque poem called "The Famous Voy-

age," which occupies several pages. Some of his satirical portraits, however, are genuine epigrams. If we knew, and doubtless those who read his book were well aware, who "Court-Worm" was intended for, we should relish this satire:

#### ON COURT-WORM

All men are worms; but this no man. In  
silk

'Twas brought to court first, wrapt, and  
white as milk;

Where, afterwards, it grew a butterfly,  
Which was a caterpillar; so 'twill die.

More than a hundred years later, Pope, always peeping about for unconsidered treasures that he could steal, found this forgotten quatrain and polished it up to suit Lord Hervey:

Let Sporus tremble. What, that thing of  
silk?

Sporus, that mere white curd of asses' milk?

A good instance of the epigram which, being passed from hand to hand, or from mouth to mouth, caused a delighted satisfaction which we can only dimly recon-stitute for ourselves, is that which was composed in 1600 on the death of the political miser Sir Horatio Palavazene. To understand it, one has only to know that the subject was a financial agent, who collected money in the Catholic countries of the Continent, that he might lend it, at usurious interest, to Queen Elizabeth, and that Babram was a manor-house, near Cambridge, which he bought with his savings:

Here lies Horatio Palavazene,  
Who robbed the Pope to lend the Queen;  
He was a thief, A thief? Thou liest,  
For why? He robbed but Antichrist.  
Him death with besom swept from Babram  
Into the bosom of old Abram:  
But then came Hercules with his club  
And struck him down to Belzebub.

This is an admirable epigram in the Elizabethan sense, for although it has no closing point, or play upon words, it is satirical, concise, and of the nature of an inscription. One can imagine, after the pompous funerals of Sir Horatio Palavazene, some one coming by night and scribbling these words on the wall of Babram Church, above his newly carved tomb.

The ear of the seventeenth century was curiously little affected by neatness of finish and sharpness of sound. When the eighteenth century, by the pen of Dr. Samuel Johnson, wrote:

Augustus still survives in Maro's strain,  
And Spenser's verse prolongs Eliza's reign;  
Great George's acts let tuneful Cibber sing,  
For Nature form'd the Poet for the King,

there could be no doubt that the stroke went home. Not merely was the rule of three complete—as Augustus was to Virgil, so is George III. to Colley Cibber, a double stroke of satire,—but the form was so sharp and fine that the memory could not help retaining the quatrain. But now let us turn to what is perhaps the most famous political epigram of a hundred years earlier. It is that written, in the form of an epitaph on the first Earl of Salisbury, by Sir Walter Raleigh:

Here lies Hobinall, our pastor whilere,  
That once in a quarter our fleeces did  
shear;  
To please us, his cur he kept under clog,  
And was ever after both shepherd and dog;

For oblation to Pan, his custom was thus,—  
He first gave a trifle, then offered up us;  
And through his false worship such power  
he did gain  
As kept him on the mountain, and us on  
the plain.

Allowing for the allusions to the economical procedures of Salisbury, which would be as luminous to everybody then as they are dark to all but historical students now, it is impossible to see any neatness or point about this lumbering piece of verse. Yet it produced a great sensation when it was first circulated, and King James I. said that he hoped the man who wrote it would die before he did. It performed the work of a bludgeon, smashing in, with a heavy, bold stroke, the reputation of Salisbury, which no one had the courage to impugn; but there was no trace of the rapier, nor any flutter of lace ruffles about a wrist adroitly turned in riposte. The eighteenth-century epigram was to be a sharp, quick lunge, a flash in the air; that of the early seventeenth century was a solid blow, intended to crush the antagonist and flatten him out.

## The Coming of Queen Gwenevere

BY ERNEST RHYS

RISE up, sleepy damsels,  
And let in the Day!  
Her dress of the sunlight,  
She sends night away.

She steps on the darkness  
With shoes white as milk,  
With a shining of samite,  
A rustling of silk.

Step by step, walking with her,  
While the harp-song is sung,  
We are part of her pleasure,  
We are glad she is young.

When she knocks on the lintel,  
The day shall begin:  
Rise up, sleepy damsels,  
And let her come in!