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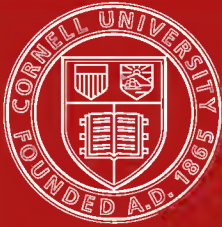
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ROCHESTER

AND

OTHER LITERARY RAKES OF THE COURT OF CHARLES II.

WITH

SOME ACCOUNT OF THEIR SURROUNDINGS

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF SIR KENELM DIGBY,"
"THE LIFE OF A PRIG," ETC.

Longueville, Thomas;

WITH PORTRAITS

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1902

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P R E F A C E.

THE frivolities and the vices of the Court of Charles II. are notorious ; but, in contemptuously dismissing its courtiers from notice with short and scanty mention, students of their period have, perhaps, scarcely given sufficient recognition to the existence among them of a set of more or less literary rakes, of whom Rochester may be selected as one of the most characteristic.

It will not be pretended in these pages that this little clique of writing and rhyming companions of Charles II. had an important influence on English literature ; yet they probably exercised upon it an influence of some sort ; and their appearance in a Court abandoned to pleasure was somewhat phenomenal.

In a study of the rakish side of the Court of Charles II., and even in a study of the literary aspects of that rakishness, it will be necessary to enter some unsavoury places, and to mix among some questionable companions. Those who fear either had better accept this warning, and bid us farewell at the threshold ; but, if any should feel

inclined to go farther, they may rest assured that the greatest care shall be taken to render details of nauseous deeds and events as inoffensive as circumstances will permit.

The materials for a work such as the following consist mainly of a mass of discursive gossip, and it would be very difficult to deal with it without discursiveness. The author is only too conscious that he has succumbed to that difficulty without making any very serious effort to overcome it ; but he hopes that, in a book which is not a biography, but an attempt to give some idea of a group of men, one of which is made the central figure, discursiveness may be forgiven, or at least tolerated.

Politics and history, properly so called, have no place, and will receive no notice in these pages. The subject of those pages, it must be admitted, is not very important ; but side-lights, however insignificant, have their uses, and it may be that this particular side-view of the Court of Charles II. has been hitherto somewhat neglected.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
Conditions at the Opening of the Reign of Charles II.—His Court when in Exile—In Scotland—A French View of the English Court—London—The Country—The Metaphysical Poets—Ovid . . .	1

CHAPTER II.

Creature Comforts — Music — Sports — Games — Bear-Gardens — Executions—Drinks—Food—Clothes	16
--	----

CHAPTER III.

The First Lord Rochester—The Second Lord Rochester—Rochester's Mother — School — Oxford—Foreign Travel—Cowley—Boileau—Alcoholism—Enters the Court of Charles II.—Sweet Seventeen —Hobbledehoys and Cats—Periwigs	29
--	----

CHAPTER IV.

Other Literary Rakes—Whitehall—Charles II.—What is a Literary Man? — Charles's Proclamations and Letters — Scientific — An Everlasting Talker—His Contradictions—Charles's Boyhood and Youth—Charles's Good-nature and Toleration—Royal Meals—Rochester's Lampoons on the King	41
--	----

CHAPTER V.

The Duke of York—The Duchess—The Duke's Infidelities—Tom Otter — Tom Killigrew — The Ambassador from Muscovy — Miss Warmestre—Henry Killigrew—Sir Charles Sedley—His Daughter —His Works—Sir John Denham—His Poems—His Wife—A Gambler	66
---	----

CHAPTER VI.

	PAGE
Earl of Roscommon—Gambler, Duellist, and Pietist—Ombre, Hazard and Basset—George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham—Peter of the Wood—Lady Shrewsbury—A Duel—The Dowager Duchess—Sir William Davenant—John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham—Earl of Dorset—His Works—Sir Carr Scrope—Marquis of Halifax—Waller—Sacharissa	83

CHAPTER VII.

Duke of Lauderdale—A Refreshing Sillibub—Fleetwood Sheppard—Etheredge— <i>The Man of Mode</i> —Etheredge's Story from Ratisbon .	105
--	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

Count Grammont—Count A. Hamilton—Miss Hamilton—Le Maréchal de Grammont—The Grammont <i>Memoirs</i> —Story from Them—G. Hamilton—Lady Chesterfield—Duke of York—Lord Chesterfield and His Jealousy—How Lady Chesterfield Treated Hamilton .	117
--	-----

CHAPTER IX.

St. Evremond—Writing a Mechanic Part of Wit—Duchess of Mazarin—Duke and Duchess of Newcastle	132
--	-----

CHAPTER X.

Rochester—Miss Price—Miss Temple—Duchess of York—Miss Hobart—Miss Jennings—Lady Falmouth—Lady Yarborough—Sir Charles Lyttleton—Sydney—Sarah—A Court Ball—Rochester and Killigrew—Meeting in the Mall—Rochester in Disgrace .	143
--	-----

CHAPTER XI.

Rochester as a Man of Business—City Men—A Dinner at the Guildhall—Ill-feeling between City and Court—Rochester as a Quack Doctor—Expedition of Miss Price and Miss Jennings to Visit Him at Tower Hill—Brouncker	164
--	-----

CHAPTER XII.

Cost of Clothes—Elizabeth Mallet—Lord Hinchinbroke, Lord John Butler, Lord Herbert and Sir Francis Popham—Abductions of Heiresses—Miss Stewart—Stealing an Heiress—Rochester in the Tower—Lady Sandwich—The Revenge—Rochester in a Naval Engagement—A Presentiment Fulfilled—Gentlemen of the Bed-chamber—Rochester's Troop of Horse—Captain Spragge—Rochester's Noble Deed at Sea—The Great Fire of London—Dress at the Court—The Persian Mode—Ladies Carrying Loaded Pistols	181
--	-----

CONTENTS.

ix

CHAPTER XIII.

	PAGE
De Ruyter's Advance up the Thames—Panic in London—Miss Mallet Marries Rochester—His Unfaithfulness—His "Paradoxical Impieties"—A Dream Fulfilled—Mulgrave's Duel with Rochester—Mulgrave's Satire on Rochester and Other Impeachments of Rochester's Courage—Rochester Boxes Killigrew's Ears	200

CHAPTER XIV.

John Dryden—Nell Gwynn—Elkanah Settle—John Crowne—Otway—Lord Plymouth—Dryden upon Rochester—Mistaken Authorship of the <i>Essay on Satire</i> —Rochester Hires Ruffians to Ill-treat Dryden—Influence of the King's Mistresses on the Literary Rakes—Lady Castlemaine—Nell Gwynn—The Duchess of Richmond—Duchess of Portsmouth—Duchess of Mazarin—The Chiffinches—The Back-Stairs	216
---	-----

CHAPTER XV.

A Delicate Subject—High Æstheticism and Low Morality—The French Court—Charles II. the Recipient of an Annuity from Louis XIV.—Courtin, the French Ambassador—French and English Ways—Rochester and Buckingham as Tavern-keepers	236
---	-----

CHAPTER XVI.

Newmarket—Racing of the Times—Charles II. a Gentleman-rider—Other Amusements at Newmarket—Hawking—Hare-hunting—Rochester's Low Practical Joke upon Charles II. at Newmarket—Lord Arlington's Pocket Picked—Euston—Tunbridge Wells	246
---	-----

CHAPTER XVII.

Drunkenness of Rochester and the Literary Rakes—Charles II. makes the Prince of Orange Drunk—Learned Judges Drunk—Charles II. and the Duke of York Drunk—Mad Frank of Buckhurst and Sedley—Rochester in the Country—His Libels—Country Life in His Times—Adderbury—Ranger's Lodge at Woodstock—Ditchley—Miserable Life and Actions of Rochester—Costly Hospitality in the Country	259
---	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Poems of Rochester— <i>Upon Nothing</i> —Works Attributed to Rochester Conjointly with Buckingham— <i>A Trial of the Poets</i> —Scrope's <i>Defence of Satire</i> — <i>Timon</i> — <i>Farewell</i> — <i>Satire against Mankind</i> —Griffith's <i>Answer</i> —Byron's <i>Don Juan</i> —Rochester's Amatory Poems—His Estimate of Women—Of the Clergy—An Atrocious Poem—Verses to the Queen Mother—Rochester's Inconstancy— <i>Colloquies</i> of Erasmus—Oldham	278
--	-----

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER XIX.

	PAGE
Rochester and Politics—His Speech in Parliament—His Dissipation tells its Tale—Very Ill—Bishop Burnet—His <i>Life and Death of Rochester</i> —Reported Untrustworthiness of Burnet's Statements—Polygamy—Burnet and Milton on Marriage—Rochester and Burnet's Arguments about Religion—Serious Condition of Rochester on His Return from Somersetshire—Rochester's Letter to Savile—"Conversion" of Rochester—Rochester's Letter to Burnet—Quotation from <i>Troas</i>	299

CHAPTER XX.

Comparison of the Deathbeds of Rochester and Charles II.—Death of Rochester—Estimate of Rochester—Estimate of the Other Literary Rakes	314
--	-----

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

JOHN WILMOT, SECOND EARL OF ROCHESTER. By W. Wissing	<i>Frontispiece</i>
CHARLES II. By Sir Peter Lely	<i>facing page 44</i>
DUKE OF YORK. By Sir Peter Lely - -	,, 66
THOMAS KILLIGREW - -	,, 74
COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY. By Sir Peter Lely	,, 90
DUCHESS OF BUCKINGHAM	,, 94
COMTE DE GRAMMONT - - -	,, 118
EARL OF CHESTERFIELD	,, 124
ST. EVREMOND	,, 136
MISS TEMPLE - - -	,, 146
MISS PRICE. By Sir Peter Lely - -	,, 172
MISS JENNINGS. By S. Verelet - -	,, 175
LA TRISTE HÉRITIÈRE (COUNTESS OF ROCHESTER)	,, 202
DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM - - -	,, 242
JOHN, EARL OF ROCHESTER. By Sir Peter Lely	,, 316



CHAPTER I.

IN the scantily furnished hall of a fine old Jacobean mansion, which had been the scene of much dissipation under the ownership of a notoriously profligate courtier in the reign of Charles II., the daylight was failing fast in a sunless sunset on a December afternoon; although the darkness was slightly delayed by the glimmer from the white ground and the snow-laden trees outside the lozenge-paned windows. If the outside world looked dreary, the hall within was also somewhat depressing. Except for the blazing logs in the large grate, and their reflections upon the polished oak of the floor and of the panelled walls, everything seemed to hint at want rather than wealth. Evidences of former grandeur in the shape of rich mouldings and emblazoned coats of arms showed but too plainly by their cracked and faded condition that money was far from plentiful: the best of the pictures which formerly graced the walls had been sold to modern millionaires; and the absence of modern luxuries eloquently bespoke the poverty of the inmates.

Yet the house had never gone out of the family

that had built it in the reign of James I. That family had clung resolutely to the old home and to at least a portion of the old estate ; although it had been heavily impoverished, first by its loyalty in the days of Charles I., and secondly by its extravagance in those of Charles II. ; nor had it done much to revive its fortunes by judicious, loveless marriages with rich heiresses, in the reigns intervening between those of the Stuart Kings and that of King Edward VII.

A visitor, who had been out for a long tramp in the snow, was lounging, as best he could, in a high, unstuffed arm-chair by the handsome fireplace, and, in the half day-light, half fire-light, he tried to people the old hall, in his imagination, with the ghosts of the gay ladies and smartly dressed courtiers of the period in which the house had been seen in its most wanton splendour, namely the reign of Charles II. The day-dreamer was sufficiently fatigued and had been long enough exposed to the cold, frosty air to make rest and warmth enjoyable ; he was drowsy, yet hindered from actual sleep by the slight uneasiness of the hard-seated, straight-backed arm-chair ; and to his free fancy smiling gallants, in periwigs, doublets, and slashed jackets, accompanied by ringletted ladies in dresses embroidered with gold and silver, were grouped about in the hall, the brilliant hues of the silks, satins and velvets of both sexes being thrown into relief by the dark oak background, while men-servants in gay

liveries were carrying in trays laden with fruits of rich colours and flagons and cups of silver and of gold.

This pleasant vision was dispelled and the dreamer was roused from his reverie by the entrance of a female servant—butlers and footmen were things of the past in this impoverished house—bringing in that enemy to romance, the paraffin lamp; and the occupant of the chair rose slowly from his seat and strolled round the hall.

Pausing before a book-case, he took down a volume from its shelves. It was *The Poems of Lord Rochester*. Turning over its leaves, the reader was transported from dreamland to the somewhat, if little, more substantial foothold of letters; yet in the same period, in the same company, and with almost as much freedom to the imagination, as in his late semi-sleepy fantasies. Laying Rochester on one side, for a more careful reading later on, he took down another book, then another, then others: each proving to be a collection of poems or plays by one or other of the courtiers of Charles II.

So engrossed was the reader that tea and his hostess entering the hall escaped his notice.

“Upon what are you so intent?” asked the sole heiress of an estate mortgaged to the hilt, and of a fine old house rapidly falling into decay for want of repair.

“Rochester and other literary rakes of the court of Charles II.,” replied her guest.

“Ah!” said the hostess, “I am still burdened by their rakishness; and literature is still burdened by their doggerel.”

During the immediately succeeding days, thaw and storm followed the frost and snow. While the pattering rain was driven by the fierce wind against the windows—and there are no windows that seem so sensitive to wind and to rain as the diminutive leaden-cased panes of Jacobean houses—the visitor’s day-dream and his casual handling of the works of Rochester and other literary rakes of the court of Charles II. led him to begin the studies which resulted in the production of the present volume.

The word Rake is said by Dr. Johnson to be derived from the Dutch word *Rekel*, meaning “a worthless cur dog”; and worthless dogs indeed were some of the literary courtiers of Charles II., a few of whom it is now proposed to notice. Pope asserted that “every woman is at heart a rake”; and, if ever the word rake was applicable to females, it was eminently applicable to many of the beauties at the court of Charles II.; but, although women will figure to a large extent in these pages, the word rake will only be used here in the masculine gender.

A great deal that is bad and very little that is good will have to be said of Rochester and his companions; it will be well, therefore, to begin by recalling to our memories the disadvantages of the period which produced them, and, on account of

those disadvantages, to be prepared to make for them such excuses as we can.

The reign of Charles II. opened at a time of violent reaction. Eleven years earlier the King of England had been beheaded : meanwhile the Commonwealth had ruled the country with a strait-lacedness hitherto unknown to it, and a strictness as unnatural as it was unwholesome had immediately followed the inevitable laxity of civil war.

The previous century had been largely spent in ridding England of its old religion : its new religion was fresh from the melting-pot and, if moulded, was still in the rough. Its people, therefore, as a whole, were uncontrolled by any very definite faith, and altruism, as a creed and a code of morals, had not then been discovered. Chivalry was a thing of the past, and the gentleman had not yet been invented.

The spirit of the people, and especially of the rich, at the Restoration, was much the same as that of children when let out of school. Under the Commonwealth the theatres had been closed and the actors had been whipped. Nasal psalm-singing had supplanted secular music, sombre garments had taken the place of the gay colours of the Cavaliers, and an overstrained propriety had obliterated every trace of the fun and the frolic of the reigns of James and Charles. The prim Puritans had taken their revenge without mercy upon the pleasure-loving Cavaliers, and now that the court was restored, the Cavaliers, if Cavaliers they could still be called, were

in a hurry, not so much to be revenged in their turn upon the Puritans, as to obliterate every trace of Puritanism. In short they were determined that scandal should eradicate all traces of that—to them—hateful word, “edification”. In a study of the reign of Charles II., therefore, it cannot be kept too prominently before the mind that it was essentially, and above all things, a period of reaction.

In fairness it must be admitted that, if James I. and Charles I. had encouraged amusement, the graver illicit pleasures had been almost as severely dealt with in their reigns by Laud as later by the Puritans. That bishop had not hesitated to obtain the condemnation of a naughty viscountess to do penance barefooted, in a white sheet, in the Church of the Savoy.¹ But even if Charles II. had been inclined to be prudish, his young courtiers would probably have warned him that the policy of Laud had helped to bring his father to the scaffold: and indeed their king would have been much occupied if he had made even the peccant ladies of his own court do penance in white sheets. There was as much reaction, accordingly, against Laudism as against Puritanism during his reign, and there was practically no restraining influence brought to bear against the most open evil-living.

As a contemporary poet described the situation :—
 Twice have men turn'd the World (that silly blockhead)
 The wrong side outward, like a juggler's pocket,

¹ *Hist. of the Troub. and Tryal of W. Laud*, p. 146.

Shook out hypocrisy as fast and loose
As e'er the Devil could teach, or sinners use,
And on the other side at once put in
As impotent iniquity and sin.

—SAMUEL BUTLER'S *Satire upon the Licentious Age of Charles II.*

Charles II. had spent part of his boyhood in France ; and after the defeat of his army by Cromwell, he had lived in Paris, Cologne and Bruges, from the time he was twenty-one until he was thirty, surrounded by a little court consisting for the most part of young people selected solely for their capabilities of affording him gratification and entertainment. A reigning king usually has much to occupy his mind and his time, and the court of a reigning monarch has its duties ; but a king in exile, with a party of hangers-on who only formed a court in name, had nothing to do except to amuse themselves, to intrigue, and to plot ; and their enforced leisure constituted the most dangerous form of idleness. Of a set of courtiers merely selected for their powers of amusing their king, with no scruples and no employment, what good could be expected ?

If there had been no Restoration, the debauchery, drunkenness, and wantonness of the mock-court of Charles II. when in exile would have been a notorious historical warning and a laughing-stock for all time. As there was a Restoration, both its absurdities and its iniquities have to a large extent fallen into oblivion. The vice and licentiousness of the little pantomime court were bad enough ; but

in addition to this, its courtiers lived in a most pernicious atmosphere of deceit, pretence and humbug, the influence of which undoubtedly afterwards affected the court at Whitehall.

While Charles II. was aping the splendours and ceremonies of royalty, his courtiers observed that his own clothes were threadbare; they perceived that he was dismissing one servant after another, owing to his inability to pay their wages; they knew that he was pawning his plate. At the very time that he was openly adding to the number of his mistresses and constantly getting drunk, they were aware that he tolerated the fraud that one of his supporters should write of him for the benefit of the Scottish Presbyterians: "He hates not the vicious, but abominates their vices. . . . He hates not the drunkard, but his drunkenness. . . . He is the perfect pattern of piety . . . a perfect enemy to all debauchedness." Charles encouraged, and set an example of, the wildest profligacy; yet, if any one of a serious mind from England, or more especially Scotland, visited him, he would enjoin his courtiers to hurriedly throw on a cloak of spurious piety. "We are all commanded," wrote one of them on such an occasion, "to be plaguy godly."

In courts, as in other places, "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women players"; but to the court of Charles II. all the world was a broad farce, the courtiers were harlequins, the courtesans—the word most applicable to many of the ladies

of that court—were columbines. If Cromwell brought tragedy to London, Charles II. brought burlesque; and the somewhat meretricious “godliness” of the Commonwealth was supplanted by the comic opera of the Restoration.

Rochester and the literary rakes whom we are about to study were members of the most flippant court, they were the companions of the most pleasure-loving king, at one of the most reactionary periods in the whole of English history.

If due allowances are made for its exaggerations, some idea of the manners of the English nobility and gentry of the time of Charles II. may be formed from a contemporary satire¹—if indeed it be a satire—written upon them in the form of a letter from a Frenchman in England to a Frenchman in France. The writer says that “persons of quality esteemed it a piece of wit to make a man drunk”; and that after dinner the conversation was “heavy, dull and insignificant . . . loud, querulous and impertinent”. As to the ladies, he “never beheld a ruder conversation” than theirs, and this he attributed in part to the gentlemen remaining “separate from the conversation of the ladies to drink,” and when they were with the ladies being “ill courtiers, unplyant, morose, and vulgar of address”. Nevertheless, “though the ladies and gentlemen are so shy of one another, yet,

¹“A Character of England, as It Was Lately Presented in a Letter to a Nobleman of France,” *Somers Tracts*, vol. vii., p. 176 (ed. 1812).

when once they grow acquainted, it passes into expressions and compellations, extremely new to our (French) usages and the stile of our country. Do but imagine how it would become our ladies to call Mons. N. 'Jack N.'. What more frequent than this? 'Tom P. was here to-day'!"

In the spring the same writer frequently accompanied "my Lord N. into a field near the town, which they call Hide Park; the place not unpleasant," but, instead of walking gracefully in it, as the French ladies and gentlemen walked in "our Thuilleries," the "company walk in it at such a rate, as you would think all the ladies were so many Atalantas contending with their woers".

It is difficult for us to realise the, at that time, material condition of London, a large part of which was so soon to be burned to the ground. Doubtless it contained some fine houses—a few very fine houses; but the London houses of even great men were then in many cases very small and unimposing.

As a town, London had more disadvantages than attractions. The streets were filthy. Pails were freely emptied into them from windows, instead of as now into drains. Beside some of the streets ran open but polluted brooks. At night, until the last year of the reign of Charles II., the streets were not systematically lighted. Thieves, robbers, and drunken youths bent on mischief made it dangerous to go out after nightfall. If a man had

enemies, he was in yet further danger after dark ; for there were men, even men of high rank, who did not hesitate to hire professional ruffians to waylay and beat those against whom they had a grudge ; as we shall find later on, was the case with Rochester.

If the town had its disadvantages, so also had the country. Luxuries were brought from other countries by sea to London ; but, in the country, they were unobtainable. The condition of the roads often made the journey to the nearest provincial town from a country mansion far longer in point of time than it would take in these days to go to London by rail from the same starting point. If the roads were bad for horses and carriages they were even worse for people on foot. Indoors things were little better. The appliances for warming even the finest country houses were then so inadequate that in the winter their inmates wore hats and cloaks in them. Coal was brought to London by sea ; but in most country districts there was none to be had. Pepys complains of having caught cold on one occasion by not wearing his hat at dinner, and Clarendon says that, when a young man, he always took off his hat in the presence of his elders *except at meals*. Hats were worn in church as a matter of course.

It must not be inferred that by decrying the material surroundings of the literary rakes it is intended to attempt to prove that, in the midst of low living, there was high thinking. Such is not

exactly to be the key-note of the following notice of Rochester and other literary rakes of the court of Charles II.

Literary courtiers were no new thing. Those of the previous reign would bear very favourable comparison with the literary rakes of the court of Charles II. With some exceptions, their morals were better, their ideas loftier, their range of thought wider, their poems less offensive than those of the Rochester school; but, when considering how far their works should be expected to have influenced those of the literary rakes of the next reign, we ought to remember that it was of their verses that Dr. Johnson wrote:—

“About the beginning of the seventeenth century, appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets. They were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour: but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.”

Johnson makes these remarks in his *Life of Cowley*; Cowley was the English poet most admired by Rochester, and the school of Rochester may be said to have been a product of the school of Cowley, although Rochester derides even Cowley, as indeed he derides his best friends.

Nor that slow drudge in swift Pindaric strains, .
Flatman, who Cowley imitates with pains,
And rides a jaded Muse, whipt, with loose reins.

—*Tenth Satyr.*

Truly Rochester cannot be accused of having been metaphysical ; and if sometimes, though not always, his verses like those of Cowley stand “the trial of the finger better than of the ear,” he did not, like the metaphysical poets, make it his endeavour to show his learning.

The most extraordinary point in connection with these two successive schools of rhymsters is that Milton was a contemporary of Rochester, and that Shakespeare was almost a contemporary of Cowley, having died only two years before Cowley’s birth. Yet whereas men like Cowley and Rochester influenced the verse of their contemporaries, and even of their successors, the works of Shakespeare and Milton appear to have had but little effect upon other writers of their own, or of the immediately succeeding times. Indeed, if the works of the metaphysical poets, or those of Rochester and the courtly rhymsters, were to be put into the hands of one who knew nothing about them, and he were to be asked to assign a date to their production, he would be likely to make the negative reply that, at any rate, they could not have been written anywhere near the times of Milton or Shakespeare.

At certain periods, an author, or even a single book, has become the fashion, and exercised an

influence not only on literature, but far beyond it. Some of us are old enough to remember the latter part of what may be called the age of Sir Walter Scott, and to look higher, there was a time, indeed there have been several times, when *the* book has been "the Bible and the Bible only".

The second half of the seventeenth century was essentially a period of one author, so far as polite letters in England were concerned, and that author was Ovid. Rochester, Scrope, and the other literary rakes, with poets of far higher calibre, including even John Dryden, and, a little later, Pope, Congreve and Addison, vied with one another in translating and imitating the works of that classic author.

The revival of an admiration for Ovid was not a new thing in the reign of Charles II. It was rather a legacy from the period of the Renaissance. Nor was its study limited to the sterner sex. Nearly a hundred years earlier than the times dealt with here, Brantome complained that French girls had their imaginations corrupted in the schoolroom by being made to read the works of Ovid at their lessons.

If anybody should be ignorant of Ovid's matter and style, let him read the pathetic lamentations of James Anthony Froude, on finding himself on a ship bound for Australia with the works of Ovid as his literary companions. He had never read them before and had taken them for study and amusement on his long voyage. His opinion of

them will be found graphically described in his *Oceana*.

The professional poets of the seventeenth century Englished Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, his *Art of Love*, and his shorter pieces, in smoothly flowing lines; but let us hope that they neither emulated nor imitated his morals. The amateur poets, Rochester among them, failed in their attempts to translate his works into good verse; but they more than succeeded in imitating his immorality and his coarseness.

It is no aim of the present writer to decry the beauties of Ovid: even Shakespeare and Milton are usually believed to have been influenced by them, and no Roman poet wrote with greater ease of style, or with more vivacity, fertility or rapidity of movement; but the sparkling cup which he offers is unfortunately defiled by most ungrateful dregs, and it was in these very dregs that Rochester and the rhyming rakes of the court of Charles II. revelled and delighted.

CHAPTER II.

AMUSEMENTS and creature comforts were dearer to the literary courtiers than even Ovid. Such having been the case, we propose to consider a few of them ; but any reader who may think them unworthy of notice will do well to skip this chapter.

First as to music ! For music was to the courtiers rather an amusement and a creature comfort, a mere accompaniment or stimulant to dancing, than a fine art. There was the mandoline to accompany a love song and that was about all it was good for. There was the fiddle, which was then a comparatively modern instrument ; nor had it in this country become the violin ; although the Amati were then living at Cremona and Stradivarius was to be born before the death of Rochester. There was the harp : but as a rule the harps of that period were very poor instruments. It was some little time after the Restoration that the guitar was introduced, and then it became so fashionable at court, that, as Grammont tells us, "every person played on it, well or ill, and you were as sure to see it on a lady's toilet, as rouge or patches". One of the best amateur performers on this instrument at the court was the Duke of York,

who will presently take his place among our literary rakes.

The sports of those times were much on a par with the music. So little of the country was enclosed that hunting did not try the courage and test the riding of the seventeenth-century squire as it does those of the hunting men of the twentieth. Reference to county maps of the reign of Charles II. would probably surprise most people by the evidence they would find of large tracts of woodland forest in places where the country is now cultivated or laid down in permanent pasture; and, except on the large commons, there were few places where a long run in the open could have been obtained with hounds. There was coursing to be had and hawking; but neither of those sports demanded the accuracy of sight, steadiness of hand, and development of skill required by shooting, a form of sport then unknown, so far as small game was concerned. There was racing, and of a kind probably less unwholesome than that of our times; but it cannot have afforded anything like the same exercise to the mind and the memory as the modern turf, with its large number of horses, its numerous stakes, and its intricate handicaps. Racing, as will appear by-and-by, was the only sport in which there is any record of Rochester's having taken part.

At a time when there were few books, and intellectual pleasures were scanty, it might be thought that sports would have occupied a far more important

position than they do at present. The exact contrary was the case. Sports were nothing like so good then as they are now ; the opportunities of enjoying them were fewer, and they do not appear to have been so much thought of. Still, some of them were in considerable repute, as will be observed when we deal with Newmarket.

As to indoor amusements, chess, of course, was already a very ancient game, and its students had the venerable *Game and Playe of the Chesse*, printed by Caxton, as an authority ; but the trump and whisk and ronfa, as well as the other games of cards then in vogue, can have been nothing like such "mind-sharpeners" as their highly developed descendants, whist, *ecarté* and piquet, to say nothing of bridge. Games of pure luck were at that time most appreciated, and there was much heavy gambling. Billiards existed, but upon the most primitive of tables, with what we should call impossible cues, and it can scarcely have then been a very scientific game. The tennis of the time was much on a par with the billiards.

If the sports of the reign of Charles II. were inferior to ours, there was in those days one popular sport, if sport it could be called, which we do not enjoy ; and before judging our literary rakes too severely, it may be well to consider the probable influence of such pastimes. The courtiers of Whitehall had neither a Hurlingham nor a Ranelagh, nor a Prince's ; but they had, what was much more to

their taste, a Bear Garden. This particular garden was not restricted to its original purpose, the baiting of bears, for this so-called Bear Garden was also used for fights between other animals, including men.

Pepys writes: "After dinner with my wife to the Bear Garden; where . . . I saw some good sport of the bulls tossing of the dogs". A few months later he was there again, to witness a prize fight between a butcher and waterman. The house was so full that he had to go "into the pit, where the bears are baited; and upon a stool to see them fight; which they did furiously, a butcher and a waterman". The waterman was worsted in the combat—the details are disagreeable—and his friends suspected unfair measures.

"But Lord! to see how in a minute the whole stage was full of watermen to revenge the foul play, and the butchers to defend their fellow, though most blamed him; and there they all fell to it, knocking down and cutting many on each side. It was pleasant to see," says the unselfish Pepys, "but that I stood in the pit, and feared that in the tumult I might get some hurt."

The more refined Evelyn also went, though somewhat reluctantly, to the same place of amusement. "I went with some friends to the Bear Garden, where was cock-fighting, dog-fighting, bear and bull-baiting, it being a famous day for all these butcherly sports, or rather barbarous cruelty. The bulls did exceedingly well. One of the bulls tossed

a dog full into a lady's lap, as she sat in one of the boxes at a considerable height from the arena." Both Evelyn and Pepys make mention of the attendance of ladies at the Bear Garden.

Let not the reader fear that this book is to consist of a mere *réchauffé* of Pepys and Evelyn's diaries. But they are very important and valuable witnesses to the surroundings of the literary rakes of the court of Charles II., and especially to the matters dealt with in the opening chapters of this work.

In 1683 an attempt was made to introduce bull-fighting into England. It failed: not because the cruelty of the entertainment shocked the spectators: quite the contrary; but because the bull did not hurt anybody.¹ "Out then springs a nimble Portuguese, who on foot attacks the bull, vaults upon his back and bestrides him, and the bull could no sooner acquit himself of him than he was up again; and this indeed gave some diversion: but this was not the thing the people looked for; they thought to have seen at least a horse or a man killed outright. But being bereft of their expectation, as having not mischief enough for their money, they pulled down the scaffoldings surrounding the arena, and carried away the bull, and so the show ended."

But above all other sports, pastimes and pleasures in those times, the entertainment most appreciated was an execution. Even fifty years ago, when

¹ *Old News-letter*. See *Cavalier and Puritan*, pp. 233-34.

executions were public, they were thought, and rightly thought, to have a degrading influence; but what were the simple hangings of that time in comparison with the horrible executions of the seventeenth century? And when we reflect that the upper classes of both sexes in that century went to executions as a sport and a pastime, we naturally draw our own conclusions as to their refinement, taste, and spirit.

Pepys, who will frequently be quoted as a witness of the manners and customs of the times, although not of high birth, was much at court. He cannot be ranked among our literary rakes—he was much too respectable for that—but what he would tolerate, the rakes would more than tolerate. Now nobody loved an execution more than old Pepys. He rejoiced in his luck in having seen Charles I. beheaded, and then “the first blood shed in revenge,” when Major-General Harrison, who had sat as one of the king’s judges, was hanged, drawn and quartered. “He looked as cheerful as any man could do in that condition.”

Pepys was terribly disappointed at having been prevented by the crowd on the scaffold from seeing the actual cutting off of the head of Sir Harry Vane; and also on another occasion, because through talking to a friend at Lord Sandwich’s house, he arrived at Tyburn just too late to see two men and a woman hanged.

He was prepared to bear considerable discomfort

in order to enjoy a beheading, a hanging, a drawing, or a quartering. "21st January, 1664," he writes, "Up, and after sending my wife to my Aunt Wright's to get a place to see Turner hanged, I go to the Change." He had feared that his business would have prevented him from seeing the execution; but, to his great delight, he found that when his work was done the hanging had not yet taken place. "I got for a shilling to stand upon the wheel of a cart, in great pain, above an hour before the execution was done; he, the culprit, delaying the time by long discourses, and prayers one after another, in hopes of a reprieve, but none came, and at last was flung off the ladder in his cloak. A comely looking man he was, and kept his countenance to the end." It was evidently the "countenance" exhibited by the patient that introduced the element of sport into these disgusting exhibitions.

There was also the interest of the victim's "last words". An eye-witness mentioned an execrable assassin, whose dying speech was that he "hoped and believed God would deal with him like a gentleman". With all his gentleness and refinement, when Evelyn met the quarters of four traitors, who had just been executed, carried in a basket, "mangled, cut and reeking," instead of turning away with horror, he exclaimed: "Oh! the miraculous providence of God!"

There was an extra pleasure to the spectators when any nobleman, or near relation to a nobleman,

enjoyed the privilege of being hanged with a silken rope. One of the literary rakes to be noticed, Lord Dorset, was so near to obtaining that privilege as to be tried for murder.

It is as difficult for modern readers to enter into these ghastly pleasures of the seventeenth century, as it is for people of refinement to understand the intense enjoyment derived by the lower classes of our own days from a death-bed, a ghastly accident, or a corpse.

Objection may be taken both to the space and to the insistence given in this chapter to material and even disgusting subjects, before Rochester and the other literary rakes have been so much as introduced; but it would be difficult to understand the coarseness and want of refinement of those rhymsters and playwrights without a due appreciation of the roughness, if not the semi-barbarism of their surroundings.

It may be replied that the surroundings of Shakespeare and of Milton were as rough or rougher. No doubt they were. To their surroundings, however, those two poets were superior; their life's object and work was their art; in their persons, mind conquered matter. With the men with whom we are about to deal it was otherwise. Far from rising above their surroundings, Rochester and his companions were essentially of the same level: their lives' object and work was the gratification of their carnal appetites; their art, such as

it was, merely served as a condiment to savour their sensual enjoyments, and their mental pleasures were always secondary and subservient to their material self-indulgences.

The author hopes that this apology may be accepted for lingering still further upon gross matter in the form of meats, drinks and clothes.

The character of a people, or of a class, may possibly be affected by the manner, if not the matter, of its eating; it is certainly affected by the manner of its drinking. In the case of intemperate literary men—and it will be with literary inebriates, such as Rochester, that we shall have chiefly to deal—the style of their works to a certain extent depends upon the nature of the fluids which derange their fancies; spirits, wine and beer each imparting a separate flavour to literature. Coffee had too lately come into fashion to exercise a potent influence upon letters at the period we are considering; and tea was too expensive to be wasted upon authorship. When tea had cheapened, in the following century, Dr. Johnson discovered its qualities for producing a ready flow of ideas. The verses of Rochester might have been improved by either tea or coffee.

Enough of drinks for the present. In the matter of food, the upper classes in the seventeenth century were better off than in certain other respects; although quantity rather than quality or variety was its principal feature. The food most esteemed was

that which would satisfy hunger in the shortest possible time. Lord Ailesbury tells us in his *Memoirs* that the favourite supper of Charles II., even when he was so much out of health as to be supposed to be eating next to nothing, consisted of two goose's eggs.

Here is the menu of a little dinner for a party of twelve, given by Mr. and Mrs. Pepys in the year of the Restoration :—

Marrow-bones.
 Leg of Mutton.
 Loin of Veal.
 Chickens.
 Larks.
 Tart.
 Neat's Tongue.
 Anchovies.
 Prawns.
 Cheese.

Even the dinners of great men were not always good or well managed. Pepys writes: "I found the Duke of Albemarle at dinner with sorry company, some of his officers of the army: dirty dishes and a nasty wife at table, and bad meat, of which I made but an ill dinner".

Respecting the foods of the English, we learn from the *Travels of Cosmo III.* that, although the population of Paris was larger than that of London, the consumption of butcher's meat was much larger in London than in Paris. The brains, whose literary effusions we shall presently notice, derived

their nourishment from great lumps of animal food, many pies and puddings, and quantities of beer. Not that other luxuries were wanting. The author just mentioned tells us that London abounded in provisions of all kinds,¹ "the convenience of navigation conveying thither from the most remote parts every delicacy or expensive luxury that is not produced in the kingdom".

While our ancestors in London were able to enjoy all the luxuries mentioned by Cosmo III., those in the country, as has already been stated, had to a large extent to go without them. Plain and solid food was the chief feature of their feasts. During the greater part of the winter, butcher's meat was salted or pickled, as there were not sufficient, in fact there were scarcely any, root crops upon which to fatten cattle. Vegetables and fruits also were to a great extent eaten in the form of "preserves".

As Sir Walter Besant states:² "They pickled everything: walnuts, lemons, asparagus, peaches, cauliflowers, plums, nectarines, onions, barberries, mushrooms, nasturtium buds, oysters, elder roots. They 'jarred' everything, they potted everything." These and other discomforts of a country life ought to be taken into consideration, when the time comes for considering Rochester's dislike to it.

The aristocracy of the seventeenth century began

¹ *Travels of Cosmo III.*, p. 403.

² *London*, p. 331.

the day by eating quantities of cold meat. Pepys mentions a breakfast on turkey-pie and goose washed down with beer : their dinners, as has been shown, were the heaviest of the heavy, and they ended the day with an equally heavy supper on cold meat, after which they sipped spiced ale or possets.¹ At what period of the day or night could good poetry, or even good prose, be expected upon such a diet? To give Rochester his due, however, there is no record of his having been a gross feeder ; nor do his portraits represent him as such. Probably he drank too much to be able to eat.

Of the already noticed coffee and tea, we may add that the former had been introduced into England less than twenty years ; and that tea had only come into use three years before the Restoration, when it had at first cost £10 per pound. In September, 1660, Pepys wrote : " I did send for a cup of tea (a China drink) of which I never drank before".

Seven years later he mentions finding his " wife making of tea : a drink which Mr. Pelling, the Potticary, tells her is good for her cold and defluxions".

The beer-saturated brains of Rochester and the literary rakes of the court, if stimulated by snuff, were little and seldom soothed by smoking, a practice which the grandfather of Charles II. had stigmatised as " loathsome to the eye, hurtful to the nose, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black stinking fume thereof

¹ A posset, says Annandale's dictionary, was " a drink composed of hot milk curdled by some infusion, as wine or other liquor".

nearest resembling the horrible Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless,"¹ and he had practically signified his disapproval of the custom by putting a tax of six shillings and tenpence a pound upon tobacco.

If the foods of the latter part of the seventeenth century were inferior to those of the beginning of the twentieth, the clothes, at least of the men, at the earlier period immeasurably surpassed those of the latter in material, colour and splendour. At no epoch in the history of England has magnificence, richness, and elaboration in masculine dress been carried to a higher point than during the reign of Charles II. There may have been other times when ladies were as finely attired; but men were never so overbedizened with laces, ribbons, velvets, satins, silks and brightly coloured cloths as in the days of the Merry Monarch; and few, if any, of the gorgeously dressed courtiers were so resplendent as Rochester.

¹ James I. in his *Counterblaste to Tobacco*.

CHAPTER III.

As John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, will be the central figure in the group which it is proposed to describe, a short introductory notice may be given of his father; and this seems the more desirable because the second Lord Rochester, with whom we shall have most to do, inherited some of his worst propensities from the first.

Cavaliers of the reign of Charles I., if more than sufficiently frivolous, were less so than those of the court of Charles II. They knew how to be serious enough when occasion called for seriousness; they could be grave politicians as well as men of pleasure; and their greatest pride was to be the valiant soldiers of their king. The Cavaliers of Charles II.'s time were ready enough to play at politics; but, with some few and notable exceptions, the business of their lives was amusement, if nothing worse, and they generally preferred making love to making war. If the despotism which had prevailed during his father's reign was relaxed in that of Charles II., there was a still greater relaxation of the already rather lax morality.

The portraits of Henry, Lord Wilmot,¹ drawn by Lloyd in his *Memoirs*, and by Clarendon in his *History of the Rebellion*, vary considerably. Lloyd describes him as a great scholar, capable of giving the best advice, and as a soldier more fitted to follow such advice than any other man in England: quick in avenging a private affront—"he gave a box on the ear to one of the most eminent men in this nation"—but very patient in enduring disgrace or insult for the public good, and exceedingly courageous.

Clarendon, on the contrary, considered him haughty and ambitious, "of a pleasant wit and an ill understanding". While Clarendon admits that Wilmot excelled in good-fellowship, he accuses him of being on occasion sullen and perverse, a hard drinker, exceedingly vicious in temperament, faithless to his promises and faithless to his friends. As to his valour, Wilmot "saw danger in the distance with great courage," but he "looked upon it less resolutely when it was nearer"; a not very rare method of regarding it. Yet Clarendon gives him full credit for his brilliant successes as a soldier; and, indeed, it would have been difficult to deny it to one of the most distinguished officers in the army of Charles I. If Clarendon is to be believed, Henry

¹ Henry, second Lord Wilmot, was the son of Sir Charles, first Viscount Wilmot, Lord President of Connaught, and Privy Councillor to James I. He received considerable grants of land in Ireland in return for his services to Queen Elizabeth and King James.

Wilmot's drunkenness, vice, and uncertain courage should be remembered in studying the character of his son John, who, as will be seen, inherited every one of these three unfortunate characteristics.

In the House of Commons Henry Wilmot resolutely and ably espoused the cause of the king and of his troops, but not invariably with tact or judgment; and his attitude in Parliament probably did much to exasperate the Roundheads against the monarchy. Having been of considerable service to the king in his flight, as well as in other matters, he was eventually created Earl of Rochester. He did not long enjoy his earldom, which passed to his little son, the most prominent character among our literary rakes.

John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, of whom Wood writes as "this noble and beautiful count," was born at Ditchley, near Woodstock, in April, 1648. Of this year St. Evremond says:¹ "The year 1648 was distinguished from others by two extraordinary events, the martyrdom of King Charles I. . . . and the birth of my Lord Rochester, as eminent for wit and gallantry as that unfortunate king was for piety and religion. . . . All I have to say is that the king was fitter for that world to which he went from the scaffold, and my lord for that he entered at the same time."

¹ *Miscel. Works of the late Earls of Rochester and Roscommon. With Memoir in a letter to the Duchess of Mazarine, by Monsieur St. Evremond, 1707.*

John Wilmot's mother, whom the same writer describes as "a lady of equal parts and beauty," was a daughter of Sir John St. John, of Lyddiard Tregoz, Co. Wilts. When Lord Rochester married her she was the widow of Sir Henry Lee of Ditchley, Oxford. She was related to the notorious Lady Castlemaine whom Charles II. made Duchess of Cleveland, a lady with whom her cousin, the leading subject of this sketch, was a good deal associated. John Wilmot was the only surviving son of the marriage of Lord Rochester to the widow of Sir Henry Lee, and he succeeded his father when only nine years old.

Rochester terribly belied his future character by being a very good little boy. This probably means that he was delicate. No little boy thoroughly healthy in mind and body is good, as all truthful parents will, or ought to, testify. St. Evremond states that Rochester was exceptionally docile and that he made rapid progress in his lessons. The nearest grammar school was the Eton of those days and "Rochester, Dominus," was sent to the Free School at Burford, a place associated with the name of a literary courtier of a very different stamp, namely, Lucius Cary, Lord Falkland.

Boys then went to a university at an earlier age than now finds them going to a public school, and young Rochester became an undergraduate at Wadham College, Oxford, when he was eleven.¹

¹ Rochester's "Funeral Sermon," by the Rev. Robert Parsons. It may be found in Burnet's *Lives of Hale and Rochester*.

“There,” says one who knew him well, “he first sucked from the breast of his mother, the University, those perfections of wit, eloquence and poetry, which afterwards by his own corrupt stomach were turned into poison by himself and others.”

In the middle of his college career the monarchy was re-established in England, whereby the prospects of the scion of such a Royalist family as that of the Wilmots were immeasurably improved: at the same time it might have been for Rochester’s moral and even perhaps for his material advantage if the court of Charles II. had not been installed in England till many years later; for it is probable that the extravagance of his vices, an extravagance that led to his early death, was to a large extent attributable to his entrance as a mere boy into that sink of depravity.

At the age of thirteen, Rochester took his degree as Master of Arts. The question then arose what was to be done with the boy; and it was decided to enlarge his mind by foreign travel. A tutor was engaged to act as his companion and protector, and to add what little educational gloss it might still be possible to add to an M.A. Oxon. Young Rochester also took with him the introductions proper to a nobleman travelling abroad, with a view to learning the ways of the world. In other words, having learnt what was good at Oxford, he was sent to learn what was bad at the dissolute continental courts of the seventeenth century.

After passing a novitiate at the court of Louis XIV., young Rochester must afterwards have been surprised at nothing that he saw at the court of Charles II. The French ladies of the court at Versailles and Paris would pet and pamper the good-looking English boy in a manner more calculated to gratify his vanity and excite his passions than to increase his virtue or promote his modesty.

St. Evremond informs us that Rochester showed no disposition to continue his studies. He had already had enough of schools and colleges, establishments to which he subsequently referred with scant respect in the lines :—

This busy puzzling stirrer up of doubt,
 That frames deep mysteries, then finds 'em out.
 Filling with frantic crowds of thinking fools,
 The reverend Bedlams, Colleges and Schools.
 —*Satyr against Mankind.*

His tutor, however, endeavoured to induce him to turn his attention to literature, not as a study but as a pleasure. This worthy pedagogue made him “perfectly in love with knowledge, by engaging him in books suitable to his inclinations”. So far as can be ascertained, the works of the aforesaid Ovid would appear to have been the books to which those inclinations were most suited : and it may be doubted whether the reading of such works increased his love of virtue as much as his admiration for the classics. Poor much-abused classics, which have been made responsible both for the “Greek-particle

bishops" and for "the worst features of the Renaissance"!

The boy's reading was not limited to the works of ancient authors. We do not learn that he cared for Shakespeare—Rochester and Shakespeare were writers of very different metal. As has already been stated, his favourite English poet was Cowley, of whose verses Dr. Johnson wrote that they contained "some striking thoughts, but they were not well wrought," a criticism which Rochester, with all his admiration for Cowley, would scarcely have gainsaid, since Dryden, after remarking that Cowley's books were not selling so well as they had sold formerly, observes: "For, as my last Lord Rochester said, though somewhat profanely, 'Not being of God, he could not stand'".¹ But of all modern authors, Rochester preferred the French poet, Boileau, who, like Cowley, lived in his own times. Nor was Rochester the only British poet who admired or imitated Boileau. Dryden revised an English translation of his *Maxims*, the style of which, again, was cleverly copied in *The Art of Criticism*, by Pope, who also imitated Boileau by taking *Lutrin* as his model for *The Rape of the Lock*.

The second Earl of Rochester would appear to have inherited from the first that most heritable of all vices or infirmities, alcoholism; for he exhibited

¹ Dryden, Preface to *Fables*.

symptoms of it at an early age. With the assistance of his tutor, and by living in countries where light wines were the common beverage, he temporarily overcame it, but he yielded very freely to it after his return to England.

When yet a mere boy, being only seventeen, Rochester went to the court of King Charles II. Good-looking, tall, slender—if anything, too slender—modest, but overflowing with fun, and exceedingly comical when drunk, he became at once the pet of the king and of the court. The men were amused by the precocious lad, the women were in love with the handsome boy. The court beauties, most of them much older than himself, considered no familiarities unbecoming with such a “child”. A most dangerous notion! Heaven help the woman who is fool enough to fancy that demonstrative flirtation, or amatory horse-play, with a “mere boy”—or, worse still, with “only an old man”—is an innocent or an innocuous pastime.

Rochester had not been on the Continent without discovering that, there, lads of his own age were considerably more advanced, not in piety or morality, but in certain other characteristics, than in his native country. Having had the works of Ovid for his lessons, and the companionship, example, and suggestions of hot-blooded young Italians and Frenchmen in his play, Rochester returned to England in every way suited to the court of Charles II.

One of his attractions was his skill in writing what was then termed "a libel," which consisted of a squib in verse upon the latest scandal, or if scandal there were none, on an invented scandal. If he might justly have been described by a certain contemporary Bishop of Salisbury¹ as one of those "whose life is but to laugh and be laughed at," who are "only wits in jest and fools in earnest," he was superficially brilliant and scurrilously entertaining.

At "sweet seventeen," the age at which Rochester went to court, the disposition of a youth towards the opposite sex is very different from what it becomes a little later. If precocious, he falls in love more violently and uncontrollably at seventeen than he ever does again. At the same time there is enough of the rude boy left in him to admit of his hating at least as violently a girl who may happen to offend him; and when his animosity is aroused, it is even more openly displayed than his affection. For the lad has only just developed from the woman-hater into the woman-lover, if indeed he has developed quite so far.

The evolution of the son is but too familiar to other parents besides that lady "of equal parts and beauty"—Ann, Lady Rochester. From a clean and pretty child, the boy becomes, at from eight to ten, a dirty ugly savage, and he so continues until he is

¹ Earle, in his *Microcosmography*.

about fifteen or sixteen. Then he gradually assumes that semi-civilisation which is so odious in every sort of barbarian from the negro to the squireling. The creature's sentiments and attitude towards women, at that particular period of its existence, is peculiar if not interesting.

Has the reader ever carefully observed the courtship of two cats? On the face of the female there is an expression of amused curiosity combined with contempt and malevolence : on that of the male there is a look of animal passion tempered by deadly hatred, and of mortal fear struggling against eager aspiration. That

Love oftentimes is amorous hate,
And hating most affectionate,¹

is about equally true of the cat and of the hobbledhoy ; and though Rochester was very much in advance of the average lad of seventeen, there was still a good deal that was cat-like in his disposition.

If an apology be required for the above lengthy, though inadequate, treatise upon the great subject of amorous seventeen, it must be that a consideration of this question is necessary for the due appreciation of the position of Rochester on entering the court of Charles II.

Rochester was exceptionally forward for his age : few lads could have been more so, and worse still, just as some lads very early lose their sense

¹ *Romance of the Rose* (Ellis's translation).

of taste for sweets, so Rochester, when still at a tender age, had completely lost his sense of morality. But however brilliant the outward veneer may be on the surface of a youth of seventeen, even to the extreme extent of the external polish on young Rochester, there will almost always be a good deal that is very uncouth beneath it. In short, if you scratch the man of seventeen, you will find the boy. And, in respect to Rochester, it should be remembered that the lad, overforced in any direction whatsoever, is a highly unnatural product, and that of all exotics the experienced lady-killer of seventeen is the most unwholesome.

Perhaps the youthful appearance of the boy of seventeen may have been somewhat concealed in Rochester's case by a fashion that had been adopted shortly before he first went to court, namely, that of wearing periwigs; just as in a court of law the wearing of barristers' wigs prevents the older members of the bar from overwhelming the younger with the dignity of their grey hairs. In earlier pictures of the court of Charles II., although the hair was worn very long, the perwig does not appear. Possibly one reason of the King's setting the fashion of wearing one was that he found his own hair turning grey.¹ At the time Rochester first came to court he must have hesitated in pur-

¹ *Pepys' Diary*, 2nd November, 1663. "I heard the Duke say he was going to wear a perwig, and they say the King also will. I never till this day observed that the King is mighty gray."

chasing a periwig, for just then everybody was afraid of buying London-made periwigs lest the hair of which they were made might have been cut from the heads of people who had died from the plague.¹ Periwigs were expensive things. Pepys used to give from £2 to £3 for his; and in one year Sir Richard Newdigate kept ten periwigs :—²

To wear abroad in winter	2
To wear in cold weather visiting	1
For winter at home ith' house	1
For summer abroad	2
For summer at home ith' house	1
For London	3
	—
	10

But, whatever their price or their number, periwigs must have had the effect of considerably lessening apparent differences in age; and Rochester probably looked much older than seventeen in his stately curls.

¹ *Pepys' Diary*, 3rd September, 1665.

² *Newdigate MS.*

CHAPTER IV.

HAVING introduced ourselves to Rochester, and Rochester to the court, we purpose to take leave of him during the immediately succeeding chapters, in order to make the acquaintance of some of the other literary rakes at the court of Charles II. For this purpose let us imagine ourselves at Whitehall. Considering that that palace was the scene of so much history and romance, it is wonderful how little of it remains and how small the interest taken in its site, now put to other uses.

As everybody knows, the banqueting hall designed by Inigo Jones is practically all that is left of the palace. It was in this handsome building, by the way, that Charles II. used to touch for the evil. Possibly the destruction of the remainder may not be much loss from an architectural point of view, especially if the description of it given in the *Travels of Cosmo III.*¹ is to be trusted. It is there stated that the palace was more remarkable for its situation on the Thames and its connection with the beautiful park of St. James "than for the nobleness of its structure; being nothing more than an assemblage

¹ Page 367.

of several houses, badly built, at different times and for different purposes ; it has nothing in its exterior from which you could think it to be the habitation of the King. All its magnificence is confined to the royal saloon," meaning, of course, the banqueting hall, in front of which Charles I. was beheaded. The remainder of the palace, says the same authority, "is mean and out of all order, being divided into lodges," *i.e.*, houses, "galleries, halls, and chambers, of which there are reckoned to be as many as two thousand. . . . All the apartments, however, are small, and badly arranged, and without doors, etc."

Roughly speaking, the palace extended from Scotland Yard (inclusive) to Parliament Street, and from the Horse Guards to the river. The King's garden was immediately to the west of the banqueting hall, and the king's and the queen's rooms lay between the garden and the river, to which they almost reached. There were, however, other buildings at Whitehall, besides these "lodgings". There was a handsome theatre, though Pepys says that it was ill-built for hearing, and that the plays were not so good there as in the public theatres ; its chief attraction being the display of beautiful and finely dressed Maids of Honour—to give them their nominal title—who sat in the pit, a place which they never occupied in public theatres. Some slight idea of the usual occupants of pit and gallery at a theatre may be obtained from the prologue to Rochester's play "Valentinian":—

And now, ye little Sparks who infest the Pit,
Learn all the rev'ence due to sacred wit,
Disturb not with your empty noise each bench,
Nor break your bawdy jests to orange-wench ;
Nor in that scene of Fops, the Gallery,
Vent your no-wit, and spurious raillery,
That noisy place where meet all sorts of tools,
Your huge fat lovers, and consumptive fools.

There was also at Whitehall a concert-room, called the King's Music House, a large tennis-court, where Charles II. used to begin to play tennis in summer as early as five o'clock in the morning, a tilt-yard, and a large and beautiful bowling-green.

We will now enter the king's garden and approach the group of courtiers standing near the celebrated sundial in its midst. It is a fine November day, and if there be a slight suspicion of mist rising from the Thames, there is none of that thick murky fog which under similar conditions will make the same spot opaque, gloomy and nauseous two hundred years hence. Yet, in the autumn air, it is not over-warm, and the courtiers are wearing their short capes, over which hang deep lace collars. On their heads are wide-brimmed hats, adorned with long ostrich feathers dyed in various brilliant tints.

This group of rakes, some few of whom are literary, are talking and laughing over jokes which, from the twinkle in their eyes and the mischievous expression of their faces, we suspect to be neither particularly charitable nor exceptionally chaste.

Presently a grave, dark-complexioned, hard-fea-

tured and morose-looking man, in a coal-black wig, with so small a moustache that it looks like a mere line across his upper lip, and followed by a number of little long-haired, black and tan lap-dogs, lounges up to the group, which receives him with a deference that cannot be due to his age. One of the courtiers, however, whispers to another that the gold and silver lacing on the new-comer's coat is now quite out of fashion. His taciturn expression is in strong contrast to that of most of the merry, rollicking courtiers among whom he takes his place.

There is sudden silence, the solemn-looking man's severe expression gives place to a pleasant smile; he begins to talk; everybody eagerly listens as if expecting to be amused, and he has not spoken for many minutes before the genuine laughter of his audience greatly exceeds their merriment before his arrival. The new-comer is the King.

Yes! In his own garden at Whitehall, the king has every right to be; but has he a claim to a place in our pages? In other words, was Charles II. a literary rake?

His rakishness has never been questioned; but was he literary? Horace Walpole would probably have replied "No". "The only genius of the line of Stuart," says he,¹ "Charles II., was no author, unless we allow him to have composed" two papers, which Walpole attributes to other hands. These papers

¹ *Royal and Noble Authors*, vol. i., p. 50.



CHARLES II.

BY SIR PETER LELY.

consisted of arguments in favour of the Catholic Church. Macaulay, however, says nothing against their authenticity, and states that they appear to be in the handwriting of Charles II. James II., he adds, declared them to be his brother's and had them "printed with the utmost pomp of typography".

David Lloyd again, mentions "several majestick poems," written by Charles II. in his youth.

How should a literary man be defined? And what are the limits beyond which a man is not literary? Is the term to be applied to the critic as well as the creator of literature : is it to be restricted to the producer of literature or may it be extended to the consumer also?

If to be very appreciative of literary smartness, to encourage it in others, to say witty things, with the power of writing them, to be a keen critic of the work of the playwright, to have sufficient command of letters to be an entertaining correspondent, and to carry a copy of a book like *Hudibras* in the pocket and often to refer to it, could give a man any claim to be considered literary, then Charles II. possessed it.

Moreover Charles II. may be given the credit of some little literary merit, if his proclamations were his own. Possibly they may have been as much the work of the ministers of the Crown as are kings and queens' speeches in modern times ; but he is said to have had a considerable hand in, if he did not write entirely, the manifestoes

that appeared in his name. If this be true, it must have been with a good deal of satire that he wrote or dictated his proclamation against "Vicious, debauched, and profane persons! . . . a sort of men of whom we have heard much, and are sufficiently ashamed, who spend their time in taverns, tippling-houses and debauches; giving no other evidence of their affection to us but in drinking our health". Four days after the issue of this proclamation, Charles got horribly drunk himself, at the Mulberry Gardens. Further on in the same proclamation he piously laments "the licence and corruption of the time, and the depraved nature of man," as well as the "many enormities, scandals, and impieties in practice and manners, which laws cannot well describe, and consequently not well enough provide against, which may, by the example and severity of virtuous men, be easily discountenanced and by degrees suppressed".¹

Surely such a proclamation, coming from such a king, must have afforded his subjects intense amusement; and, if Charles II. was in reality its author, it was a magnificent specimen of irony!

In his letters—by the way, his handwriting was excellent, graceful and very clear—Charles II. could say a sharp thing, as when he wrote of Harry Killigrew:² "I am glad the poor wretch has got

¹ D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*, "Royal Proclamations".

² This was not the Killigrew presently to be noticed, but his son.

means of subsistence ; but have one caution of him, that you believe not one word he says of us here ; for he is a most notorious liar, and does not want wit to set forth his stories pleasantly enough ". And also to his sister : "They who do not believe anything to be reasonable designed unless it be successfully executed, have need of a less difficult game to play than mine ". From a graver point of view, Charles II.'s beautiful letter to his sister, after his father's death, might well be given much higher praise than most of the writings of the literary rakes of his court. And if all his extant letters were collected, well selected and ably edited, they might form a volume, not only as interesting, but as entertaining, as many of the books of letters and autobiography that now pass under the name of literature.

To quote at any length from his letters here would be impracticable—but to show that he could put a good deal of meaning as well as expression into a few words, and that he had the rare art of administering a sharp rebuke in graceful and tender language, two specimens may be given. The first is from a short note written to his sister, Henrietta Anne, on the day after his landing in England at the Restoration :—

"I arrived yesterday at Dover, where I found Monk, with a great number of the nobility, who almost overwhelmed me with kindness and joy for my return. My head is so dreadfully stunned with the acclamations of the people, and the vast amount

of business, that I know not whether I am writing sense or nonsense ; therefore pardon me if I say no more than that

“ I am entirely yours.¹”

“ For my dear Sister.”

The second is from a letter to his eldest sister, Mary :—

“ I do not desire that you should prosecute all persons I am displeas'd with, but certainly I may expect, from the kindness we have always had together, that those who are justly in my disfavour, and who I have told you are so, should not be the better for it, and that all the world should see that you favour persons whom I think quite the contrary. I shall, for the present, only name my Lord Balcarres ; who I cannot choose but take notice of, that you have used him much better since I have been unsatisfied with him than you ever did before ; judge whether I have not reason to be troubled, when everybody must take notice of this, to both our prejudices. I will only add that this was not so two years ago, and I cannot accuse myself of being changed from what I was then ; and now, when I have said all this, I do assure you that neither anything you have done, nor anything you can do, shall ever change me from being, with all the kindness imaginable,

“ Yours, etc., etc.”²

¹ Green's *Princesses of England*, vol. vi., p. 427.

² *Clarendon Papers*, vol. iii., p. 363.

All who had personal intercourse with Charles II. were charmed with his gentle manner, good temper, and fair promises, until they discovered, as they usually did discover, that his professions of liberality were made with the sole object of ridding himself of importunity and were as insincere as they were worthless. Although his education had been so neglected that he could scarcely read the easiest Latin, he was naturally intelligent and quick-witted. He interested himself in chemistry, anatomy and engineering; he found pleasure in pictures, poetry and music,¹ and of shipbuilding and navigation he is said to have had an almost technical and professional knowledge.

Burnet says that "he was an everlasting talker". He liked to throw aside all state and ceremony and to put those with whom he was conversing on an equal footing with himself.

Lord Ailesbury, who, as a gentleman of the bedchamber, was with him early and late, says in his interesting *Memoirs* :—

"No Prince was ever so diverting and amusing as the King at his levée and coucher, in the Queen's withdrawing-room, twice a day, at meals the same, and indeed on all occasions".

Even when he thought it necessary to assert his dignity he did so gently and with grace. William

¹ Sir J. Hawkins in his *History* (iv., p. 359, note) says that Charles II. "understood the notes and sang—to use the expression of one who had often sung with him—a *plump base*".

Penn, the Quaker, once had an audience of the king, when, contrary to the rules of the court, but in strict accordance with those of his sect, he kept his hat on in the king's presence. Charles took off his own hat and stood bareheaded before Penn.

"Friend Charles," said Penn, "why dost thou not keep on thy hat?"

"'Tis the custom of this place," replied the king, "for only one person to remain covered."¹

Charles II. liked to have good listeners; and not only good listeners, but also long-enduring listeners. Sir John Resesby wrote on a certain Christmas Eve: "I was at the King's going to bed. There were but four present; and his Majesty being in good humour, spent some time upon the subject of showing the cheat of such as pretended to be more holy and devout than others. . . . He was that night two hours in putting off his clothes."

The king indulged himself with fun and frolic even in church. He was fond of listening to anthems; but his behaviour during the other parts of the services of his church was far from exemplary. He could not preserve his gravity; he would play at "peep" with Lady Castlemaine through the curtains dividing the royal box from the ladies' pew; and Burnet says that "both at prayers and sacrament, he, as it were, took care to satisfy the people that he was in no sort concerned in that about

¹ Granger.

which he was employed". We learn too from the Ailesbury *Memoirs* that, in his private chapel, "it used to amuse him to see the maids of honour and other young persons laugh outright to hear the chaplain in waiting read at evening service some chapters of St. Paul's Epistles relative to marriage and continency".

His character appears to have consisted of a series of contradictions. With a hard, saturnine countenance, he was merry and merciful: yet easy and good-natured as he was in private, he could be both severe and inflexible in affairs of state. Lazy and idle to an extreme degree, he could be indefatigable when in the vein, and he could continue at work till all his coadjutors were wearied out. Of some of his friends and his servants he was so fond that he could deny them nothing; but if he did not see them for a week, he forgot all about them. Formal in appearance, he hated formality; generous in thousands, he could be niggardly in units; utterly careless at the loss of unseen money, he hated to see money lost; loving above all things beautiful women, he was not jealous when they were loved by his rivals; wishing for peace and quiet, he plunged into unnecessary wars; taking infinite trouble to preserve his health by medicines and exercise, he did all in his power to ruin it by excess in his pleasures; when well, he consulted quack doctors, when ill, none but the best physicians; a bad friend, he was a good enemy. Such were the contradictions of his character as sketched by those who knew him.

Charles II. was a lenient monarch ; but it may surprise modern readers to learn that Sir Richard Bulstrode, in proof of that leniency, states,¹ what was apparently to his mind the astounding fact, that during the first twelve years of the king's reign "there was not one nobleman put to death".

Bulstrode, however, admits that Charles's gentleness was not universal. "I confess," says he, "the Roman Catholics who were peaceable and innocent, suffered at this time many grievous persecutions, which were not only permitted by the King, but his Parliament was encouraged therein, though the King was not ignorant of their innocence ; yet to persons that knew those times, and how continually the King was teased by those ill-natured gentlemen of the House of Commons, it will be the less wonder, that such things should happen in the days of such a Prince, who had so yielding a nature as the King." This point is only noticed here to show that, in state affairs, firm as he could be when he chose, Charles II. was apt to be lazy and yielding, when not in the humour to be what moderns call "bothered".

John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, describes Charles II. as "witty in all sorts of conversation, and telling a story so well, that, not out of flattery but the pleasure of hearing it, we seemed ignorant of what he had repeated to us ten times before : as a good comedy will bear the being often seen".

Rochester was of a very different opinion. "He

¹ *Memoirs*, pp. 228-29.

wondered to see a man have so good a memory as to repeat the same story without losing the least circumstance, and yet not remember that he had told it to the same persons the very day before." Burnet, also, says that although he told capital stories, "they came in his way too often".

Whatever may have been the wildness of Charles II. in his younger years, later in his life, in the opinion of one who knew him so well as Sheffield, "there was as much of laziness as of love in all those hours he passed among the ladies of his Court. Their society afforded him an excuse for indulging in that bewitching kind of pleasure called Sauntering, and talking without constraint was the true Sultana Queen he delighted in." Sheffield declares him to have been an adroit dissembler to others, but of all men the most blind to dissimulation; to have exercised great cunning to gain one little point, and at the same time to have carelessly lost ten others; and to have made friends with the very people who had deceived him most, yet to have been excessively quick in perceiving the false friendships contracted by others.

In estimating the character of Charles II., some consideration must be given to the exceptional circumstances of his boyhood, youth and early manhood. At the age of twelve he was under fire at the battle of Edge-hill, and at fifteen he was nominally commander-in-chief of his father's army in the West of England. Then came a change of fortune, for at sixteen and seventeen, instead of being in a position

of high authority in his own country, he was in Paris under the absolute power of his mother, by whom, says Clarendon, "he was governed with such strictness that though his Highness was above the age of seventeen, he never put his hat on before the Queen, or had above ten pistoles in his pocket".

At the age of twenty and twenty-one, he was playing the part of king in Scotland, but, in reality, enduring something nearly akin to servitude under the galling prudishness and rudeness of the Presbyterian ecclesiastics. After the gaiety of Paris and the laxity of the court of Louis XIV., this thralldom must have been unendurable to a man of his disposition, especially as its odious pedantry was constantly held up before his eyes in derision by the witty and sarcastic Buckingham,¹ the only English courtier permitted to attend him, and certainly the courtier most unsuited for the purpose. Charles II., says Hume, had once been "observed to use some familiarity with a young woman: and a committee of ministers was appointed to reprove him". The spokesman, "with a severe aspect, informed the King that great scandal had been given to the godly, and enlarged on the heinous nature of the sin, etc.". Among the vast number of funny scenes in which Charles II. bore a part, this must have been about the most comical.

All this was highly calculated to create a strong reaction in a gay youth like Charles II. Many

¹ George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and not the above-mentioned John Sheffield.

modern readers may be able to recall to memory instances in private life of the evil results of excessive primness, prudishness, strictness and restraint upon youths of a gay and frolicsome disposition, and the mischief thus done in the case of Charles II. was incalculable. No wonder, therefore, that when shortly afterwards he set up his little pseudo-court, first at Cologne and afterwards at Bruges, with nothing for his idle hands to do, he more than made up for all the rigid restraint that he had so unwillingly endured under the successors of John Knox ; or that, to use the words of Oliver Cromwell, he became “damnably debauched”.

It looks as if Charles II. had rather liked than disliked to be thought a “gay dog” ; or Rochester would scarcely have ventured to write a prologue to a play to be acted by ladies before the king in the private theatre at Whitehall, in which the following lines occur :—

Nor can you 'scape our soft captivity,
 From which alone old age must set you free.
 Then tremble at the consequence
 Since 'tis well known, for your own part, great Prince,
 'Gainst us you still have made a weak defence,
 Be generous and wise and take our part :
 Remember we have Eyes and you a heart :
 Else you may find too late, that we are things
 Born to kill vassals, and to conquer Kings.

Yet there were not wanting contemporary authorities who took a very different view of Charles II. and his proceedings. Lord Halifax wrote that :—

In Charles, so good a man and King we see
A double image of the Deity.

And Aurelian Cook, in his *Titus Britannicus* (p. 505), says: "His very diversions were so serious and pleasing that every part of his time was thought to be well spent and to deserve commendation. Never was a Prince more loving and affectionate to his Queen than he." But the general verdict of posterity upon the character of Charles II. is of a very different nature.

There can be little doubt that it comforted him to see his companions as wicked as, or, if he could possibly persuade himself to think so, even more wicked than, himself. Something beyond this, however, was required in a companion acceptable to Charles II. He cared not that a man should be vicious, unless he were cynically vicious. If his own cynicism was of the most shameless nature, its expression was original, smart and satirical: and he expected originality, smartness and satire from his companions. His courtiers may have been fools in the sense that they did not live wisely; but he liked them to be clever fools and witty fools; fools by choice and not by nature.

Rochester was an apt pupil in the school of this impure pedagogue. His tastes were those of his master, and, like him, he was cynical, entertaining, trivial, and ready in repartee. The king was delighted with his pupil, and the youth's courage and brilliance in rallying his royal master met with a

tolerance that was extended to scarcely any other courtier, even by that most tolerant of all monarchs.

So long as Rochester's taunts and lampoons contained flattery under the veil of satire, Charles rather encouraged than repressed them; but, as time went on, Rochester substituted exposure for satire and abuse for flattery. In some verses, afterwards published in his works under the title of *A Satire which the King took out of Lord Rochester's pocket*,¹ he was guilty of an insolence which would have been unpardonable if exhibited to an equal, or even to an inferior, and of an indecency which if published in these days would be punishable by law. The King could not be expected to like to see himself described as "A merry Monarch, scandalous and poor," or to learn that one of his petted courtiers could "hate all monarchs and the thrones they sat on". But Rochester wrote far worse insults than this, in lines quite unquotable in these days.

Yet if Rochester was the most privileged of all the lampooners of the king, considerable liberty was accorded to others, even to some of much lower caste. Andrew Marvel wrote of Charles II. with impunity:—

In loyal libels we have often told him
How one has jilted him, the other sold him;
How that affects to laugh, how this to weep.
But Who can rail so long as he can sleep!

¹ Burnet, however, says (*History*, p. 179): "Once being drunk he intended to give the King a libel that had been written on some ladies: but by mistake he gave him one written on himself".

Was ever Prince by two¹ at once misled,
False, foolish, old, ill-natured and ill-bred?

This author was as impertinent to the king in prose as in verse. Before Parliament met in 1675, Marvel issued anonymously a lampoon purporting to be the king's speech. In one passage it says: "If you desire more instances of my zeal I have them for you. For example, I have converted all my natural sons from popery. . . . It would do your hearts good to hear how prettily little George"—son of the Duchess of Cleveland and afterwards created Duke of Northumberland—"can read already in the Psalter. They are all fine children, God bless them, and so like me in their understandings." In spite of all this, Charles II. had a liking for Andrew Marvel and was immensely amused by this scurrilous lampoon.

This mention of Marvel seems a fitting opportunity for observing that Aubrey (vol. ii., p. 438) "heard him say that the Earle of Rochester was the only man in England that had the true veine of Satyre".

From his courtiers, the king would bear a good deal, in speech as well as in written squibs.

"I believe," said he to Shaftesbury, "thou art the wickedest dog in England."

"May it please your Majesty," replied Shaftesbury, "of a *subject*, I believe I am."

¹Two of his mistresses.

Even from a complete stranger, who had been bitten by one of his celebrated King Charles spaniels—a very ill-tempered and snappy breed—the king good-humouredly endured the remark: “God bless your Majesty, but God damn your dog!”

We may give another specimen of this king’s toleration. Sir Richard Bulstrode states¹ that Charles once found Killigrew looking at a book of his own plays and said:—

“What account will you give, Killigrew, at the day of judgment, for all the idle words in that book?”

To which Killigrew replied:—

“Why truly I shall give a better account for all the idle words in this book than your Majesty shall do for all your idle promises and more idle patents, which have undone many; but my idle words in this book have undone none”.

Of this Bulstrode remarks: “This was a bold and sharp repartee; but the King being an indulgent master, and not of a disposition to do harsh things, gave Killigrew a great liberty of fooling”.

Ailesbury, who had every reason for knowing the king’s character, says in his *Memoirs*: “Although by the King’s connivance many men of assurance and of a buffooning humour made the King wink often at their forwardness because they made him laugh for the present, yet, when he would,

¹ *Memoirs*.

he could keep up Majesty to the height by his great countenance, for he would not say a hard word to any one, and if that was of absolute necessity, it was executed by another ”.

Cosmo III.¹ commented at great length on the freedom of the English court, saying among other things that it “keeps up less reserve than that of other princes, it being there very easy to see the King, who, as he was obliged by the circumstances of the kingdom to lead in his early years a common and almost private life, an exile and a wanderer, so it is still necessary that he should show affection towards his subjects, and affability towards strangers : and this is the style which the English like. . . . The King, in order to conciliate the love and esteem of the noblemen and gentlemen of the kingdom, converses with them with all the familiarity that his high rank will allow, and the nobility endeavour to conform to his example in their dealings with their inferiors.”

In considering the freedom with which Charles II. allowed his courtiers and others to converse with him, it should therefore be remembered that, rightly or wrongly, he believed familiarity, and his consequent popularity with his nobility, his courtiers and the public in general, to be one of the most important sources of strength to his newly restored, and but doubtfully secured throne.

¹ *Travels through England*, p. 405 *et seq.*

It is difficult to ascertain exactly how much of the licence permitted at the court to people of but moderate importance, and even to the general public, was granted voluntarily by the king, and how much was the consequence of traditional custom, or the necessities of a court restored after a Commonwealth and still depending in some measure for its very existence upon its popularity among the people at large.

Pepys, in giving an account of a royal dinner, bears witness to the well-known publicity of the dinners of Charles II. at Whitehall. "By-and-by the King came to dinner, and I waited there his dining, but Lord! how little I should be pleased, I think, to have so many people crowding about me; and among other things it astonished me to see my Lord Barkshire waiting at table, and serving the King drink, in that dirty pickle as I never saw man in my life."

In the *Travels of Cosmo III.* there is an account of a great supper given by that prince to Charles II. and the Duke of York, which demonstrates the liberty then allowed to the general public.

It was a gorgeous entertainment. The supper "was served up in eighty magnificent dishes, many of which were decorated with smaller ones, filled with various delicious meats. To the service of fruit succeeded a most excellent course of confectionery, both those of Portugal and other countries famous for the choiceness of their sweetmeats, which

was in all respects on a par with the supper that preceded it."

Now mark what follows! Remember that it was in a splendid house, the temporary residence of a foreign prince, and that the king and his courtiers were present, guarded by servants, officials and soldiers.

"Scarcely was it"—the confectionery—"set upon the table, when the whole of it was carried off and plundered by the people who came to see the spectacle of the entertainment; nor was the presence of the King sufficient to restrain them from the pillage of these very delicate viands, much less his Majesty's soldiers armed with carbines, who guarded the entrance of the saloon, to prevent all ingress into the inside, lest the confinement and too great heat should prove annoying; so that his Majesty, to avoid the crowd, was obliged to rise from table, and retire to his Highness's apartment."

That the mob should have been able to lay violent hands upon the confectionery under the very nose of the king is the more remarkable, because it had been stated that "his highness's gentlemen, with some who belonged to the King's Court and that of the Duke, stood round the table, behind their royal masters".

As to his own boon companions and his allies in vice, large as was the licence which the king allowed them, he thoroughly despised them; describing them simply as "good enough to drink with". And there

was a limit beyond which he would not tolerate liberties, and that limit Rochester not unfrequently exceeded. For his atrocious verses on the king Rochester was occasionally banished from the court ; and it is likely that it was during one of these periods of exile that he revenged himself by writing his well-known lines :—

Here lives a mighty Monarch,
Whose promise none relies on,
Who never said a foolish thing,
Nor ever did a wise one,

and fastening them to the gate of the palace at Whitehall.¹ When the king heard of it, he is said to have replied : “ That is easily accounted for : my words are my own : my actions are those of my ministers ! ”

It was at this gate of Whitehall that Rochester gave an exhibition of his readiness of retort. A grand carriage—for the ordinary court coaches of those days were more gorgeous than the Lord Mayor’s of our own—was waiting at the gate to take the king’s favourite, the Duchess of Cleveland, for a drive, and when she was on the point of entering

¹ So it is stated in the *Miscellaneous Works of Lords Rochester and Roscommon* (1707). But Sir Walter Scott (*Misc. Prose Works*, xxiv., p. 171) says that the lines were the result of a playful request from the king that Rochester should write his epitaph. This version runs :—

“ Here lies our Sovereign Lord, the King,
Whose word no man relied on,” etc.

it, her cousin, Rochester, in the presence of all the attendants and footmen, had the impudence to try to kiss her. The duchess promptly knocked him down. As he lay on his back on the road, he exclaimed :—

By heavens, it was bravely done,
First to attempt the chariot of the sun,
And then to fall like Phaeton.

As to Rochester's relations to the king, St. Evremond says : " His talent of satire was admirable, and in it he spared none, not even the King himself, whose weakness for some of his mistresses he endeavoured to cure by several means : that is either by winning them from him, in spite of the indulgence and liberality they felt for a royal gallant, or by severely lampooning them and him on various occasions : which generally the King (who was a man of wit and pleasure, as well as my Lord) took for the natural sallies of his genius, and meant as sports of fancy, more than effects of malice. Yet either by too frequent repetition, or by a too close and poignant violence, he banished him the court for a satire made directly on him."

In his " Farewell," Rochester abused Charles and his mistresses one after another, in lines of which, perhaps, the least offensive are those in which he thus apostrophises Lady Portsmouth :—

But what must we expect, who daily see
Unthinking Charles ruled by unthinking thee ?

If Rochester only lampooned the king with the excellent object attributed to him by St. Evremond, he deserved some praise for it. It is certain that with regard to his monarch, he was no respecter of persons: whatever his faults, he was no sycophant; but, if on this point he was worthy of admiration, it is a question whether it is with noble courage that he should be credited or with splendid impudence.

Rochester deliberately defended his lampoons in a conversation with Burnet (*Life*, p. 204) on the ground that "there were some people who could not be kept in order or admonished but in this way". Burnet objected that the malice of a libel could hardly be consistent with the charity of an admonition, and that lampoons too often enriched fact with mendacious fiction. To this Rochester replied that "a man could not write with life unless he were heated by revenge; for to write a satire without resentments, upon the cold notions of philosophy, was as if a man would, in cold blood, cut men's throats who had never offended him; and he said the lies in those libels came often in as ornaments, that could not be spared without spoiling the beauty of the poem". The liveliness of Rochester's libellous verses is sufficiently obvious; but their "beauty" does not yield itself quite so readily to research.

CHAPTER V.

ONE of the most noted and notable rakes at the court of Charles II. was the king's own brother, the Duke of York, afterwards James II., and if he was guiltless of libels and bad verses, he was literary to the extent of being the author of *Memoirs of His Own Life and Campaigns to the Restoration*. Two other books were also written under his name. Like his elder brother's, his early life had been very adventurous. He was taken prisoner at the age of thirteen by Fairfax at Oxford : at fifteen he escaped to Holland, and by the time he was two and twenty he had served, not in the English army only, but also in the French and in the Spanish. At the Restoration, when he was only twenty-six, he was made Lord High Admiral : and if his victory over the Dutch in 1665 was due more to good luck than to good management, and if his drawn battle with De Ruyter brought him no great credit as an admiral, his naval career was at least free from serious disaster.

The duke was by nature candid, sincere, courageous, honourable and straightforward ; he was industrious, attentive to detail, prudent in his expenses, and, in



DUKE OF YORK.

BY SIR PETER LELY.

most matters, he was conscientious in the performance of what he believed to be his duty. But his sensual passions were at the time of the Restoration as uncontrolled as those of his brother Charles. Unlike that brother, he was a good friend but a bitter enemy. He was singularly wanting in judgment; and too easily led by those whom he trusted, yet doggedly obstinate against good advice from any other quarter.

Buckingham said¹ that "he was perpetually in one amour or another, without being very nice in his choice: upon which the King said once," obviously after the duke had become a Catholic, that "he believed his brother had his mistresses given him by his priests as a penance". Buckingham also said, in comparing the two brothers, Charles and James, that "the King could see things if he would, and that the Duke would see things if he could".

Before the Restoration, the Duke of York fell in love with one of his sister the Princess of Orange's maids of honour, namely, Ann Hyde, a daughter of the celebrated Chancellor Clarendon. Ann was no beauty: Monconis² says that she had blood-shot eyes and a large and ugly mouth; but the court of Holland, where the duke met her, was singularly devoid of pretty women, and from among the very

¹ Burnet's *History*, vol. i., p. 169.

² *Journal de Monconis*, p. 22.

plain ladies with whom he happened to be there thrown, the Duke of York selected her for his attentions, as being no uglier than the others, and being far more witty and clever than any of them. Burnet calls her "a very extraordinary woman".

With this young lady the Duke of York fell in love, and he secretly married her shortly after the Restoration. When the marriage was announced, not very long after its accomplishment, there was a terrible outcry. Even the bride's own father joined in it and advised the king to send her to the Tower. So irate were some of the courtiers and authorities, that they are said to have suborned witnesses to prove that there was sufficient evidence against the bride to obtain a divorce.

After a temporary uproar the matter was allowed to quiet down and, before very long, the duchess was acknowledged by the king and received at court. "The Duke of York," says Grammont, having quieted his conscience by the declaration of his marriage, thought that he was entitled, by this generous effort, to give way a little to his inconstancy; he therefore immediately seized whatever he could lay his hands upon, which was Lady Carnegy," etc.

Grammont furnishes us with a long and unedifying, though it must be admitted amusing, list of the Duke of York's love adventures. One of them will be partly described when we study the character and stories of Grammont himself. It is but fair

to the memory of James II. to say that many of his flirtations as Duke of York ended in flirtations only, partly perhaps because he was generally on with a new love before he was off with the old; and partly because he was not a very successful wooer.

Bishop Burnet seems to have taken a special pleasure in noticing the Duke of York's infidelities that took place after he had left the Established Church and become a Catholic. So much for your Catholics! he would appear to hint. But whatever the duke's conduct may have been after he joined the Catholic Church, it cannot have been worse than it was when he was a member of the Anglican.

On 14th October, 1660, Pepys writes: "To Whitehall Chapel, where one Dr. Crofts made an indifferent sermon and after it an anthem, ill sung, which made the King laugh. . . . Here I also observed, how the Duke of York and Mrs. Palmer did talk to one another very wantonly through the hangings that part the King's closet and the closet where the ladies sit." This was very near the date of the duke's marriage to Ann Hyde.

It is some satisfaction to learn that, as time went on, the Duke of York gave up his infidelities and became almost a slave to his wife. In a play entitled "Epicene, or the Silent Woman," a character called Tom Otter was represented as a very henpecked husband. One day Charles II. had been speaking of the Duke of York as a man

in complete subjection to his wife, and he exclaimed :—¹

“I'll not go about any more with this Tom Otter and his wife!”

“Sir,” replied the irrepressible Killigrew, “pray, which is the best for a man, to be a Tom Otter to his wife or to his mistress?”

At that time the king was far more under the dominion of Lady Castlemaine than was the Duke of York under that of the duchess.

But before their reconciliation the Duke of York had been ridiculously jealous of his wife. Whatever she did, he misconstrued her motives; and for this reason she became so nervous that she only ventured to permit herself one enjoyment, namely that of good eating. Grammont says that she “was one of the highest feeders in England: as this was an unforbidden pleasure, she indulged herself in it, as an indemnification for other self-denials. It was really an edifying sight to see her at table. The Duke, on the contrary, being incessantly in the hurry of new fantasies, exhausted himself by his inconstancy, and was gradually wasting away; whilst the poor princess, gratifying her good appetite, grew so fat and plump, that it was a blessing to see her.”

There is at least this to be said for the duke's illicit amours, that he liked women with a certain

¹ *Pepys' Diary*, 30th September, 1667.

amount of intellect, while his brother, with some few exceptions, put a pretty face before every other attraction. The duke's own intellect may not have been of a very high order ; but he admired intellect in the opposite sex. The admiration thus excited may not, in his case, have been of the purest and chastest character ; but, with all his vices, there was something less degrading in his " free love " than in his brother's, and it should be remembered that it was the brain rather than the face or the figure of Ann Hyde that provided the attractions which led to his marrying her.

The present writer is not a very great admirer of James II. ; he is fully alive to his many faults and failings, both as a prince and as a king ; but, in the low company of the literary rakes of the court of his brother, the Duke of York probably deserved a higher place than most of his companions.

We began by honouring royalty with the first place in our notices of the literary rakes of the court of Charles II. : we will honour age by giving it the next place, in the person of Thomas Killigrew, an intimate friend of Rochester, although thirty-eight years his senior ; but still bright, witty, wicked, smartly dressed and by no means a brilliant example of virtue to set before a youth beginning life.

Thomas Killigrew was a younger son of Sir Robert, who had been chamberlain to the queen-mother. Thomas's eldest brother, Sir William, was

vice-chamberlain to Charles II., and his youngest brother, Henry, was chaplain to the Duke of York and master of the Savoy Chapel. All three were authors, and all three were playwrights.

Wood says¹ that Thomas Killigrew was "not educated in any University (and therefore wanted some learning to poise his excellent natural parts)". He had been a page of honour to Charles I., and later on he was Resident at Venice for Charles II. Wood does not mention, what is said to have been the fact, that he was sent thither to borrow money from the merchants.

After the Restoration, he became a groom of the bedchamber and master of the revels. Wood says: "He was a person of great esteem for his lepid Vein of Wit in Conversation and therefore beloved of K. Ch. II. whose jester he was while Groom of his Bedchamber; and much respected by all for the generosity and good Acts he did for several poor Cavaliers, that had in a woeful manner suffer'd for his Majesty's cause". So far as the present writer can remember, Tom Killigrew was the only literary rake at the court of Charles II. of whom "generosity and good acts" are recorded with anything approaching to probability.

The same chronicler goes on to say that he was readier with his tongue than with his pen, whereas Cowley, though a ready writer, was slow and dull in

¹ *Ath. Ox.*, vol. ii., p. 1081.

conversation; and he quotes Sir John Denham's lines :—

Had Cowley ne'er spoke, Killigrew ne'er writ,
Combined in one they'd made a matchless wit.¹

Tom Killigrew was of a very jovial disposition. "He possessed a great deal of wit," says Grammont, "and still more eloquence, which most particularly established itself when he was a little elevated with the juice of the grape."

On one occasion, however, the juice of the grape, in combination with another vegetable substance, had far from an elevating effect upon him. Abraham de la Pryme, the Yorkshire antiquary, in his diary of 25th June, 1697, says that Killigrew once visited "an Ambassador from Muscovy," who had come to represent his country at the English Court. The Muscovite invited Killigrew to drink the king's health with him, to which "Killigrew (who was the king of drinkers in those days) readily consented". The ambassador then sent for two very large glasses of raw brandy, "and a great paperful of pepper," a handful of which he put into each glass and "stir'd it well in". Then he drank off his own at one draught. It was now Killigrew's turn to drink the king's health. He "was mighty loath to take such a drench . . . yet not knowing how to deny it, he took

¹ Aubrey's version of this runs :—

"Had Cowley ne'er spoke, nor Killigrew writt,
They'd both have made a very good witt."

—*Lives*, vol. ii., p. 296.

it off. The Ambassador was for drinking several more such healths, but Killigrew (with a great deal of sorrow and shame) declined them, and taking his leave he went to the King, swearing that the devil and hell itself was in it: he had got a morning's draught that almost burnt him to pieces."

As to Killigrew's plays one quotation from a stage direction may give a faint idea of their tone: "She must be as nastily drest as they can dress her". His plays are as dull as they are disagreeable.

A story in which Killigrew bore a part may be noticed as illustrative of the period. It is told by Grammont, who was at one time in love with its heroine, a certain Miss Warmestre. A relation of Killigrew's was one of the many country squires who in those days rarely, if ever, went to London. When only six months a widower, however, he happened to go there, and, during his visit, he fell in love at first sight with Miss Warmestre. This young lady had another admirer in Lord Taafe, who constantly presented her with pledges of his affection, and according to Grammont these love-tokens took the substantial form of "ham pies, bottles of wine, and other products".

Killigrew warned his relative that his lady-love preferred Lord Taafe to himself, and "that a girl educated at Court was a terrible piece of furniture for the country," adding, "that to carry her thither against her inclination would as effectually rob him of his happiness and repose as if he was transported



THOMAS KILLIGREW.

to hell"—a favourite word of Killigrew's. But the love-sick relative would not listen to reason, and he persuaded Killigrew to go to Miss Warmestre and propose to her on his behalf.

Killigrew dreaded nothing more than Miss Warmestre's consent to his request that she should marry his relative; but he was not prepared for the contempt and vehemence with which, to his intense satisfaction, she refused it.

Not very long afterwards, a most untoward event occurred to Miss Warmestre, which made it unlikely that she would ever obtain a respectable husband. Unfortunately it occurred at the palace; and great was the scandal, even in that most scandalous of courts. Killigrew, in high delight, hastened to inform his cousin, and to congratulate him upon having escaped marriage with such a woman. What was his astonishment when, on hearing the news, his relative fell devoutly upon his knees, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, poured forth this exclamation:—

“Praised be the Lord for a small misfortune, which perhaps may prove the comfort of my life! Who knows but the beautiful Miss Warmestre will now accept of me for a husband?”

And accept him she did; moreover, although contracted under such inauspicious circumstances, the marriage turned out an exceptionally happy one.

Tom Killigrew himself had two wives and a scapegrace son named Henry. In May, 1668, Pepys speaks of him as “a rogue newly come back from

France, but still in disgrace at our Court". Why he was in disgrace is not clear; but ten months earlier Pepys wrote of "the fray between the Duke of Buckingham at the Duke's playhouse . . . and Henry Killigrew, whom the Duke did soundly beat and take away his sword, and made a fool of till the fellow prayed him to spare his life, and I am glad of it . . . and I wish he had paid this fellow's coat well". It may be remembered that, a few pages back, a quotation was given from a letter by the king, in which he called Henry Killigrew "a most notorious liar," and yet acknowledged his wit, a wit undoubtedly inherited from his father.

Tom Killigrew had not a very high reputation for the strict integrity of his private life, but he was very charitable, and he was loved by the poor. The bearer of this mixed character obtained the honour of burial in Westminster Abbey.

Although allotted a tomb in the most celebrated mausoleum of this country, Tom Killigrew appears to have retained his character for rakishness to the end.

The next courtier to attract our attention began as a rake but ended as a precisian.

Sir Charles Sedley was Rochester's senior by ten years, and he has not inaptly been described¹ as "one of the gay wits that enlivened the pleasurable Court of King Charles II. . . . Sir Charles

¹ In the *Biographia Britannica*.

had such a distinguishingly polite easiness in his manner and conversation as set him higher in the royal notice and favour than any of the Courtiers, his rivals." Burnet, however, says that although he "had a more sudden and copious wit" than Rochester, he was not "so sparkling".

Sedley was distinguished for his dissoluteness in a particularly dissolute court. But when James II., from whom Sedley had received many favours, made love to Sedley's daughter and created her Countess of Dorchester, Sedley was as scandalised and as furious as if he had himself lived the purest of lives and had ever upheld the most prudish of principles. From a courtier and cavalier he then became a rebel and a Revolutionist, and he helped to bring about the dethronement of the last of the Stuart kings. When James II. had been dethroned and his daughter Mary, Princess of Orange, became Queen of England, Sedley, in voting for her, observed :—

"James made my daughter a Countess. I now make his daughter a Queen."¹

As a specimen of Sedley's verse the following may be quoted :—

Let's tope and be merry,
Be jolly and cheery ;
Since here is good wine, good wine.

Let's laugh at the fools,
Who live by dull rules,
And at us good fellows repine.

¹ Forneron's *Louise de Keroualle*, p. 77, footnote.

And again :—

Let us indulge the joys we know
Of music, wine and love ;
We're sure of what we find below,
Uncertain what's above.

From his amatory poems we will make no extracts. It may be a fine point whether, at their worst, Sedley or Rochester was the coarsest rhymster of the pair.

Sedley wrote several plays and it is enough to say of them that they were plays suited to the tastes of the court of Charles II. Once when his play "Bellamira ; or The Mistress," an adaptation from Terence's "Eunuch," was being acted, the roof of the theatre fell in, slightly injuring Sedley and several others. Sir Fleetwood Shepherd told Sedley that his play was so full of fire that it blew up the poet, the theatre and the audience. "No," replied Sedley, "the play was so heavy that it brought down the house and buried the poet in his own rubbish."

It is difficult to imagine the times when such a coarse and atrocious production as the play in question could have been tolerated upon the English stage. Yet in the Memoir "By an Eminent Hand," which prefaces Sedley's *Works*, the writer calmly states that "in all he wrote we find nothing indecent or obscene, tho' that was the fashionable vice of the poets in that day". The same writer says that Rochester and other court poets "as they conceived lewdly, so they wrote in plain English, and took no care to cover up the worst of their thoughts in clean

linen. . . . But Sedley's poems shall live for ever : no divine will stick to espouse them . . . what is merry is extremely polite : what is amorous is always clean."

Well! Probably opinions will ever differ. All that need be said here is that, if "no divine will stick to espouse" the published poems of Sedley, no divine will stick to espouse anything.

Perhaps the severest accusation of impropriety against Sedley's poems was made by Rochester, though it was evidently intended as a compliment :—¹

Sedley has that prevailing, gentle art,
That can with a resistless charm impart
The loosest wishes to the chastest heart.

His poetry from a technical point of view is roughly handled among that of many others by Pope :—²

But for the wits of either Charles's days,
The mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease,
Sprat, Carew, Sedley and a hundred more
(Like twinkling stars the miscellanies o'er),
One simile that solitary shines
In the dry desert of a thousand lines,
Or lengthened thought that gleams through many a page
Has sanctified whole poems for an age.

A very superior poet to Sedley was Sir John Denham, a man of about the same age as Killigrew, or even slightly older. This literary rake—for rake

¹ *Allusion to Tenth Satyr, etc.*

² *Second Book of Horace, Ep. 1.*

he was, having been an inveterate gambler, and having, as Grammont tells us, “passed his youth in the midst of those pleasures which people at that age indulge in without restraint”—is called by Dr. Johnson “one of the fathers of English poetry”. Certainly none other of the literary rakes of the court of Charles II. described in these pages ever wrote such lines as those of Denham on the Thames :—

O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
My great example—as it is my theme !
Tho’ deep, yet clear : tho’ gentle, yet not dull ;
Strong without rage ; without o’er flowing full.¹

But his verses were not always so smooth. Indeed he was fond of queer metres, such as :—

But fate
Brought the letter too late,
’Twas of too old a date
To relieve their damned state.

And of Killigrew he wrote :—

Our resident Tom
From Venice is come,
And hath left the statesman behind him.
Talks at the same pitch,
Is as wise, is as rich,
And just where you left him, you find him.

¹ Into the long scientific criticisms which these famous lines have excited, this is not the place to enter. Prior evidently imitated them in his *Carmen Seculare* when describing the Thames :—

“ Wide gentle course, devolving fruitful streams,
Serene yet strong ; majestic yet sedate :
Swift without violence, without terror great ”.

Here is a quaint change again :—

No, surely, quoth James Naylor,
 'Twas but an insurrection
 Of the carnal part,
 For a Quaker in heart
 Can never lose perfection.

When of a considerable age, Denham married a young and second wife—"a very beautiful young lady: Sir John was ancient and limping," says Aubrey. The Duke of York's admiration for Denham's young wife excited the jealousy of her husband, and Grammont hints that this jealousy induced Denham to poison her. Other contemporary scandal-mongers attributed her sudden death to the jealousy of the Duchess of York. According to Wood, Denham became temporarily insane after the death of this second wife.

Denham was one of the leading gamblers of a very gambling court. Like many a more modern gamester, he took to play at Oxford.¹ His father, a grave judge of the exchequer, threatened to cut him off with a shilling unless he abandoned the habit, as well as "the unsanctified crew of gamesters"! Whereupon Denham wrote *A Little Essay against Gaming*, which he presented to his father in proof of his reformation. In consequence of this stratagem, he succeeded to his father's estate, and then gambled it away.

¹ Wood's *Ath. Ox.*, vol. ii., pp. 422-23.

Aubrey tells a story of him which may help to illustrate the pranks of the period. "Denham," says he, "was generally temperate as to drinking; but one time when he was a student of Lincoln's Inne, having been merry at ye taverne with his comerades, late at night, a frolick came into his head, to get a playsterers brush and a pott of inke, and blott out all the signes between Temple-barre and Charing-crosse, w^{ch} made a strange confusion the next day, and 'twas in Terme time. But it happened that they were discovered, and it cost them some moneys. This I had from R. Estcourt, Esq. Y^t carried the inke pot."

Any account of Denham's political and diplomatic life would be irrelevant to these pages.

CHAPTER VI.

HAVING finished the last chapter with a description of one rhyming gambler of the court of Charles II., we will begin this chapter with a notice of another, namely that "young man of pregnant parts," as Wood calls him, the Earl of Roscommon. Johnson states that he "learned so much of the dissoluteness of the Court, that he addicted himself immoderately to gaming. This impaired his fortune, and involved him in quarrels in which he is said to have frequently hazarded his life in duels."

There was a great deal of heavy play at the court of Charles II. Shortly after the time at which Rochester joined it, Evelyn wrote:¹ "I saw deepe and prodigious gaming at the Groome-Porters, vast heapes of gold squander'd away in a vaine and profuse manner. This I looked on as a horrid vice and unsuitable in a Christian Court."

There was a good deal of play at hazard, as well as at ombre and at trente et quarante; but the favourite medium for heavy gambling of those times was basset, a game practically the same as

¹ *Diary*, 8th January, 1668.

faro. At this game the chances are much in favour of the banker, which may have been the reason why each of the king's mistresses kept a basset-table. The greatest gambler of those times would appear to have been Lady Castlemaine, who is stated to have lost £25,000 at basset in one night and to have been in the habit of staking from £1,000 to £1,500 at a cast.¹ Courtin, the French ambassador, stated that at the Duchess of Portsmouth's there were usually three gaming-tables going at once; one for ombre, one for basset, and one for trente et quarante.

Roscommon was a notorious gambler and duellist; but there appear to be no other records against his moral character, and with respect to his poems, Pope wrote that:—

in all Charles's days,
Roscommon only boasts unspotted lays.²

Possibly John Milton, who also lived in Charles's days, might have objected to this assertion as too exclusive: but doubtless Pope had good reason for passing a general censure upon the poetry of the reign of Charles II.

If Roscommon was the purest poet of Charles's days, it was rather hard upon his memory that his poems should be subsequently published in one

¹ Mrs. Jameson's *Court Beauties*.

² Roscommon himself wrote, in his *Essay on Translated Verse*:—
"Immodest words admit of no defence:
For want of decency is want of sense".

volume with those of the poet generally reputed to have been among the impurest of that period. The work in question is entitled *The Miscellaneous Works of the Right Hon. The Earls of Rochester and Roscommon*, and it was published in the year 1707.

Many of Roscommon's verses were of a serious nature, and he made an English translation of the *Dies Irae*, two lines of which—

My God, my Father, and my Friend,
Do not forsake me in my end,

are said to have been the last words he ever uttered. His most famous poem is his *Essay on Translated Verse*. The following lines may be taken as a fair specimen of the work :—

On sure foundations let your fabric rise,
And with attractive majesty surprise,
Not by affected meretricious arts,
But strict harmonious symmetry of parts ;
Which through the whole insensibly must pass,
With vital heat to animate the mass :
A pure, an active, an auspicious flame,
And bright as Heaven, from whence the blessing came ;
But few, oh ! few souls preordained by Fate,
The race of gods have reached that envied height.

Toward vices other than gambling Roscommon was somewhat severe ; but possibly it might be an injustice to his memory to suggest that he may have endeavoured to compound for the sin—

He was inclined to
By damning those he had no mind to.

Johnson described his ideas and expressions as "elegant but not great"; his versification as "smooth, but rarely vigorous"; and he thought that Roscommon might "be numbered among the benefactors to English literature".

Very different from Johnson's is Walpole's description of Roscommon: "One of the most renowned writers in the reign of Charles II., but one of the most careless too". And after praising two of his works, he adds: "in the rest of his poems there are scarce above four lines that are as striking as these:—

The Law appear'd with Maynard at their head,
In legal murder none so deeply read."

Roscommon is interesting as having been the only literary rake of the court of Charles II. who wrote religious poetry; and one would imagine that among such a set it would bring him into considerable ridicule; yet there is no evidence of this having been the case. Possibly his companions may have been of opinion that his duels and his heavy play atoned for what they would consider his idiosyncrasies, if not his iniquities, in this respect. The idea of a poet who wrote hymns by day, gambled by night and fought duels the next morning, is not particularly edifying: but be this as it may, if we put on one side the faith without works exhibited at that time by the Duke of York, Roscommon was the only member of the whole party who showed the faintest traces of religious feeling.

Yet another gambling and rhyming courtier was Sydney Godolphin, who, says Burnet, "loved gaming the most of any man of business I ever knew, and gave one reason for it : because it delivered him from the obligation of talking much. He was the most silent and modest man that was perhaps ever bred in a court." Lord Dartmouth states that when Godolphin was a king's page, Charles II. said of him : " He is never *in* the way, nor *out* of the way ". A high encomium ! Pepys says he found him " a very pretty and able person, a man of very fine parts ". And in a small way he was literary too ; but as to his verses, an unkind historian has recorded that none of them were " worth remembering ".

Rochester was at one time a good deal in the company of a remarkable man, the son of a much more remarkable father. In the reigns of James I. and Charles I. no public character rose more rapidly or exercised more power than George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham ; and in the reign of Charles II. no courtier was more notorious than George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham. The second duke, although a companion of Rochester, was about twenty-two years his senior. Buckingham was essentially a courtier, having been brought up with King Charles I.'s children, after the death of their father. His military, political and diplomatic career, which is of great interest, cannot be noticed here ; but it may be remarked that in his politics he was as shifty as in everything else. Of

all the British noblemen at the Restoration, he was the most hospitable, the most extravagant; and of all the advisers of Charles II. he was probably the worst. His chief attraction to the king was his power of turning everything human and divine into ridicule. He did a little of many things: he was in turn a chemist, an alchemist, a musician, a mimic, a wit, a dramatist, a poet, a profligate, and a spend-thrift. In *Absalom and Achitophel* John Dryden wrote of him:—

A man so various that he seemed to be
 Not one, but all mankind's epitome:
 Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,
 Was everything by starts, and nothing long,
 But in the course of one revolving moon
 Was chemist, fiddler, statesman and buffoon:
 Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
 Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.

.
 Railing and praising were his usual themes,
 And both to show his judgment in extremes:
 So over-violent or over-civil,
 That every man with him was God or Devil.
 In squandering wealth was his peculiar art:
 Nothing went unrewarded but desert.
 Beggared by fools, whom still he found too late;
 He had his jest, and they had his estate.

Besides being chemist, fiddler, statesman and buffoon, Buckingham was a glass-maker. On the 19th of September, 1676, Evelyn went to see Buckingham's glass-works at Lambeth, "where they make huge vases of metal, as clear, ponderous and

thick as crystal : also looking-glasses far larger and better than any that come from Venice”.

Buckingham¹ was as fickle in his friendships as in his opinions and his pursuits, as we shall have an opportunity of observing later, in his relations to Rochester.

Grammont describes one of his escapades. There was at the English court a nobleman from Portugal, Don Pedro Tomasco Correo de Silva, “extremely handsome, but a greater fool than all the Portuguese put together : he was more vain of his names than his person ; but the Duke of Buckingham, a still greater fool than he, though more addicted to raillery, gave him the additional name of Peter of the Wood. He was so enraged at this, that after many fruitless complaints and ineffectual menaces, poor Pedro de Silva was obliged to leave England, while the happy Duke kept possession of a Portuguese nymph more hideous than the Queen’s Maids of Honour, whom he had taken from him, as well as two of his names. Besides these, there were six chaplains, four bakers, a Jew perfumer, and a certain officer, probably without an office, who was called her highness’s barber.”

In Bishop Burnet’s² opinion, much of Charles’s vice was the result of Buckingham’s suggestions and encouragement—possibly something of the sort might be said of Rochester’s vice also—and he states that Buckingham proposed to the king that he should

¹ For portrait of Buckingham, see p. 242.

² *History*, Book ii.

kidnap the queen and send her to a plantation, where she would be taken care of, and that she should never be heard of again. He recommended this diabolical plot in order that the king might obtain a divorce on the plea of his wife's desertion, and then marry again and beget an heir to the throne. It is some satisfaction to be able to add that, according to Burnet, Charles rejected this iniquitous proposal with horror.

The readiness of Buckingham's wit was shown at an early performance of one of Dryden's plays, in which a character had to say :—

My wound is great because it is so small.

Whereupon Buckingham sprang from his seat and exclaimed in a loud voice :—

Then 'twould be greater, were it none at all.

This had the effect of ruining the play. Dryden took his revenge in the lines quoted above.

There are many stories of Buckingham's quarrels and duels. Only one specimen of them need be given here.

Killigrew, when no longer a young man, but made up until he flattered himself that he looked like one, fell in love with the pretty but naughty Lady Shrewsbury, who encouraged his admiration, even in public. The old rascal was immensely flattered by her smiles, but he was terribly disappointed that they did not arouse the jealousy of rivals. As a matter of fact, those smiles had been already liberally bestowed



COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.

BY SIR PETER LE LY.

upon more than half the courtiers in their turn,¹ therefore nobody sighed for them. But it so happened that the Duke of Buckingham had never yet taken a fancy to Lady Shrewsbury, and as Killigrew, who frequently dined with him, was ever haranguing him on the subject of her charms, the duke, incredulously and contemptuously, told Killigrew that he would examine into them for himself. For this purpose, he paid her a visit.

“He went to scoff: he stayed to pray,”

and he worshipped her devoutly for a considerable time. Her ladyship, proud of the attentions of the duke, not only threw over the commoner, but even cut him.

Killigrew was furious at being dethroned, and he determined to be revenged; not upon Buckingham—that he did not dare to attempt—but upon the lady who had rejected him. He now abused Lady Shrewsbury as much as he had formerly belauded her: he attributed the worst of motives to her conduct, and he raised such a scandal in connection with her name that at last it reached the ears of her husband.

So great a stir had Killigrew made about the matter, that Shrewsbury, a gentle, easy-going creature, only too glad to allow his wife to flirt as much as she liked, with as many as she liked, if only he could be left in peace and quietness, felt obliged in honour, though sorely against his will, to send a challenge to Buckingham.

¹ So, at least, says Grammont.

The duel took place near Barn-Elms on 16th January, 1668. Each duellist had two seconds. It was said that Lady Shrewsbury was present, disguised as a page, and that she held Buckingham's horse during the fighting. St. Evremond in a letter to Waller¹ stated "that she had pistols concealed, and that she had pledged her honour to shoot both Shrewsbury and herself, if her husband proved victorious".

The duel was a very sanguinary affair. The principals and the seconds all fought at once, and the victory was on Buckingham's side. The peaceable Lord Shrewsbury received a wound in the breast from which he died in two months: one of his seconds was killed on the spot, and the other was wounded in the arm. According to Pepys, all the combatants were "in a little measure wounded".

Shortly after the death of her husband, Buckingham took Lady Shrewsbury to his own home, although his wife, who on a certain occasion had saved his life with extraordinary courage and skill, was then occupying it.

"It is impossible for me to endure that woman under my roof," exclaimed the duchess, on his arrival.

"So I thought, madam," replied Buckingham, "and I have therefore ordered your coach to convey you to your father."

There is a story to the effect that the duke's chaplain was induced to go through the farce of

¹ No. iv.

marrying him to Lady Shrewsbury. At the court, his real wife, who by the way had been a niece of Oliver Cromwell, used afterwards to be spoken of as the dowager duchess.

It remains to be told how Lady Shrewsbury revenged herself upon Killigrew, if the following extract from a letter from Colbert to Lionne (20th May, 1669) is to be believed. "Infuriated against Killigrew because he boasted that she had denied him no favour, she nursed her anger against him until she could wreak her vengeance. She was able to do this yesterday. Killigrew had arranged to visit her at her house, which is six miles from London. He went alone in his coach, and on the way fell asleep. He was awoke by the thrust of a sword which pierced his neck, and came out at the shoulder. Before he could cry out, he was flung from the vehicle, and stabbed in three other places by varlets of the Countess. The lady herself looked on from her coach and six, in which she was with her three daughters, and cried out to the assassins: 'Kill the villain'. Nor did she drive off until he was thought to be dead. He was but badly wounded, and has sworn informations. You may fancy the noise the attempt to murder him causes, and the worry and anxiety of the Duke of Buckingham, who is still passionately in love with this virago."

Happily there is reason for believing¹ that some

¹ Forneron, p. 50.

time later Lady Shrewsbury sincerely repented of her evil life ; and she gave up the illicit society of Buckingham for a period of religious seclusion in a convent at Dunkirk. Buckingham then patched up his quarrel with his "dowager duchess".

Buckingham wrote both prose and verse. Among his best-known works are his comedy, *The Rehearsal*, and his *Reflections upon Absalom and Achitophel*. Bound with his other works are several poems professing to be the joint work of Rochester and himself. The question of their authorship will be dealt with later.

One of the most unpleasant descriptions of Buckingham is that of a contemporary writer, who says that in order to obtain influence in Parliament, he "soe personally courted all the members in towne, the debauchees by drinking with them, the sober by grave and serious discourses, the pious by receiving the Sacrament with them at Westminster, that he thinketh he hath gained a strong party of friends".

Buckingham's vicious habits told terribly upon his system, and towards the end of his life, if we may judge from Burnet's account, he lost his charms of wit and conversation. At the age of sixty he got a sudden chill after hunting, and he died in a farmhouse to which he was taken.

On once a flock bed, but repaired with straw,
With tape-tied curtains never meant to draw ;
The George and Garter dangling from that bed,
Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,



DUCHESS OF BUCKINGHAM.

Great Villiers lies—alas, how chang'd from him
That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim.¹

A very old literary rake, who lived but a short time after Rochester went to court, was Sir William Davenant, who had been made Poet Laureate in succession to Ben Jonson. Although he frequented the court, he was of low birth, being the son of a publican at Oxford. There was a scandalous piece of gossip,² which he is said to have supported, if he had not originated, to the effect that he was a natural son of William Shakespeare; but it is believed to have been utterly without foundation. It is true, however, that he was Shakespeare's godson.

His life was full of adventures of various kinds, many of which were in no way connected with poetry or literature. His poems have long been neglected, and in a literary sense he is chiefly remembered for having tampered with Shakespeare's works by flavouring them to suit the low tastes of the court of Charles II.

His principal work is *Gondibert*, a tedious poem in three books, containing many long cantos. It is all in the following metre :—

Revenge, impatient Herbert proudly sought !
Revenge, which, e'en when just, the wise deride,
For on past wrongs we spend our time and thought,
Which scarce against the future can provide.

¹ Pope's *Epistle to Bathurst*.

² See *Shakespeare's Family*, p. 15; Chalmer's *Poets*, iv., 341; and Johnson and Steeven's *Shakespeare*, ii., p. 309.

Davenant's appearance was chiefly remembered for the terrible disfigurements wrought upon it by his own vices. He had in fact "lost his nose," as Aubrey tells us, with full and unpleasant details. One of his plays is thus elegantly noticed by Sir John Suckling in his description of the choice of Apollo :—¹

Besides, some critics had ow'd him a spite,
 And a little before had made the god fret,
 By letting him know the Laureate did write
 That damnable farce, *The House to be Lett.*

Dryden says that Davenant was "of so quick a fancy, that nothing was proposed to him on which he could not suddenly produce a thought, extremely pleasant and surprising".

Two men, who at one time or another bore the title of Duke of Buckingham, had a good deal to do with Rochester, and, like Rochester, both were literary and rhyming rakes. As will appear in later pages, each was at one time his friend, and afterwards his enemy. We have already dealt with one of these Dukes of Buckingham; the other, John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave and eventually Duke of Buckingham, or Buckinghamshire, was a typical literary rake of the court of Charles II. His father died when he was nine years old; and when he was twelve, he dismissed his own tutor and determined to educate himself. In this attempt he was much more successful than might have been expected.

¹ *The Session of the Poets.*

As a writer, he shone far more in prose than in verse. As Johnson says: "he had the perspicuity and elegance of an historian, but not the fire and fancy of a poet". The same critic, in his *Lives of the Poets*, says: "His religion he may be supposed to have learned from Hobbes: and his morality was such as naturally proceeds from loose opinions. His sentiments with respect to women he picked up in the court of Charles; and his principles concerning property were such as a gaming-table supplies." Johnson adds that, as a poet, he "sometimes glimmers, but rarely shines"; and he describes his verses as "feebly laborious, and at their best but pretty. . . . To be great he hardly tries; to be gay is hardly in his power."

As a specimen of his verse, we will quote a few lines, written concerning Rochester after Rochester's death.

Here, as in all things else, is most unfit
Bare ribaldry, that poor pretence to wit:
Such nauseous songs, by a late author made,
Call an unwilling censure on his shade.

In later pages we shall find him having a somewhat curious quarrel with Rochester.

We now come to a literary rake, who, if in no way more virtuous than Sheffield, appears to have been considerably more attractive and much more popular. Of Rochester's friend, Sackville, Earl of Dorset, or Lord Buckhurst, as he was entitled during most of the time that Rochester knew him,

Horace Walpole says that. "he was the finest gentleman in the voluptuous court of Charles II.," and that he had quite as much wit and a great deal more thought than Rochester. In his conduct Dorset was little, if at all, more immaculate than Rochester, but on account of his popularity, greater excuses were made for him; so much so, indeed, that Rochester said: "I know not how it is; but Lord Dorset may do anything, and yet he is never blamed". Dorset's fine clothes covered a very coarse nature, and some of the records of his escapades would not bear transcription to modern pages. Dorset's popularity was the more remarkable because he wrote with a caustic pen, and he was called by Rochester "The best good man, with the worst-natured muse".

As specimens of the gentle, refined, and veiled sarcasms of Dorset, a few lines may be quoted from his criticisms of some plays and poems by Edward Howard:—

Thou damn'd Antipodes to Common-sense,
 Thou foil to *Flecknoe*, pr'ythee tell from whence
 Does all this mighty Stock of Dullness spring?
 Is it thy own? etc.

.

thy Plays

Are laught at by the Pit, Box, Galleries, nay, Stage,
 Think on't awhile, and thou wilt quickly find
 Thy body made for Labour, not thy Mind.

.

But curst be he that gives thee Pen and Ink:
 Such dangerous Weapons should be kept from Fools,
 As Nurses from their Children keep Edg'd-tools.

Nor did Dorset attack the male sex only with his caustic pen. He wrote the following lines of Lady Dorchester, the already mentioned daughter of Sedley, so greatly admired by James II. and also by Sir David Colyear.

Though she appear as glittering fine,
As gems and jettes and paint can make her,
She ne'er can win a breast like mine ;
The Devil and Sir David take her.

His best-known poem was written at sea the night before a great engagement with the Dutch fleet, in which he is said to have shown considerable courage. The verses are supposed to be addressed to the ladies at home by sailors just going into action. The eighth verse runs :—

But now our Tears tempestuous grow
And cast our Hopes away.
While you regardless of our Woe,
Sit careless at a Play :
Perhaps permit some happier Man
To kiss your Hand, or flirt your Fan.

To be in woe and tears at the thought of going into action is not quite in accordance with the modern idea of the spirit of the British tar. Dorset, however, continues :—

When any mournful Tune you hear,
That dies in ev'ry Note :
As if it sigh'd with each Man's Care,
For being so remote :
Think then how often Love we've made
To you, when all those Tunes were played.

Burnet says that he was "so oppressed with phlegm, that till he was a little heated with wine he scarcely ever spoke: but he was upon that exaltation a very lively man. Never was so much ill-nature in a pen as in his, joined with so much good-nature, as was in himself, even to excess. . . . He hated the Court, and despised the King, when he saw he was neither generous nor tender-hearted." Pope shows that he is of Burnet's opinion as to the contrast between Dorset's satirical writings and his gentle disposition in the line:—

Yet soft his nature, though severe his lay.

When Dorset was dying Congreve went to visit him, and, as he was coming away, some one inquired how Dorset was getting on. "Faith," replied Congreve, "he blabbers more wit than other people in the best of health."

Hitherto we have been endeavouring to interest ourselves in literary rakes who were, at least at one time or another, friends of Rochester. We will now turn our attention for a moment to one who seems always to have been his enemy.

Sir Carr Scrope was one of the "mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease" at the court of Charles II. He was descended from a younger branch of the family noted in later times for the famous dispute with the Grosvenors about the arms—azure a bend or. Burke, in his *Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies*, says that Sir Carr Scrope "appears to have been

in love as well as in verse a rival of Rochester". Wood solemnly observes that "as divers satirical copies of verses were made on him by other persons, so he hath divers made by himself on them, which to this day go hand in hand". Specimens of these verses will be offered by-and-by.

Must we deny admission into these pages to the brilliant, witty and satirical William Savile, Marquis of Halifax? He was certainly a literary courtier, but was he also a rake? The contrary is far from having been proved, so we will admit him on sufferance.

It may be that such a politician—albeit a most vacillating and untrustworthy politician—as Halifax would look down in contempt upon the ordinary literary rakes; but he wrote somewhat in their style, and he fully equalled their wit in such lines as those upon a certain lady:—

Nature did ne'er so equally divide
 A Female heart, 'twixt Piety and Pride
 Her Waiting-maids prevent the Peep of Day,
 And all in Order on the Toilet lay
 Pray'r-books, Patch-boxes, Sermon-notes and Paint,
 At once t'improve the Sinner and the Saint.

.
 You'll find her somewhere in the Litany
 With Pride, Vain-glory and Hypocrisy.¹

With the assistance of Prior, Halifax wrote a parody of Dryden's *Hind and the Panther*, which is

¹On the Countess Dowager of . . . It was then the fashion for ladies to take notes of sermons (see *Travels of Cosmo III.*).

said to have given its author intense annoyance. But Halifax could write in a gentle as well as in a sarcastic vein, as may be observed in the following lines, which he wrote on a blank leaf of a copy of Waller's poems on seeing Vandyke's portrait of Lady Sunderland—the Sacharissa of Waller—at Althorp. These verses of Halifax were intended as a compliment to his hostess :—

Vandyke had colours, softness, fire and art,
 When the fair Sunderland inflam'd his heart.
 Waller had numbers, fancy, wit and fire,
 And Sacharissa was his fond desire.
 Why then at Althorp seem her charms to faint
 In these sweet numbers and that glowing paint ?
 This happy seat a fairer mistress warms ;
 This shining offspring hath eclips'd her charms :
 The different beauties in one face we find
 Soft Amoret with brightest Sacharissa join'd
 As high as Nature reach'd, their art could soar ;
 But she ne'er made a finished piece before.

One of the older literary rakes, probably, indeed, no longer rakish when Rochester was at court, was the just mentioned Edmund Waller, a man of the age of sixty-two when Rochester first went to Whitehall. If age alone gave a claim to the first place after royalty in our portrait gallery, it should have been given to Waller and Davenant, who were born in the same year (1605) and died within a year of each other (1687-1688); but although both figured at the court of Charles II., the memory of each is more connected with the court of Charles I. One of these old rhymsters professed admiration

for the works of the other; for Waller wrote to Davenant :

“Man is thy theme; his virtue or his rage,
Drawn to the life in each elaborate page.”

Of Waller's well-known political character, and his notorious instability, it is needless to say much here. It is only as a literary courtier that we have to do with him. As a poet he is generally considered to have done much, by his example and influence, for the refinement of English verse, although Dr. Johnson, one of his great admirers, admits that “sometimes his thoughts are deficient and sometimes his expression,” and that “his rhymes are sometimes weak”.

One of the few well-known poets rich by inheritance, he increased his wealth by marrying an heiress. After her early death, he fell violently in love with Lady Dorothea Sidney, eldest daughter of Lord Leicester, whom he immortalised in verse under the name of Sacharissa. Dorothea repelled his advances, and, as has just been stated, became Lady Sunderland. When old and a widow she asked Waller when he was again going to make love to her in verse, as he had made it in days of yore.

“When you are as young, madam, and as handsome as you were then,” replied Waller.

Yet, when many years earlier, he imagined that she spurned him because he was older than herself, the faithless poet had written to her :

“ Hope waits upon the flowery prime :
 And summer, though it be less gay,
 Yet is not looked on as a time
 Of declination or decay ;
 For with a full hand that does bring
 All that was promised by the spring.”

In Waller's panegyric in the *Biographia Britannica* we read that “ there is no need to believe that any of Waller's ladies were like the Laura of Petrarch, imaginary only : or that he always wrote like a gallant man and not a lover : for he was in his younger years of a poetical complexion every way, and did not write of love only by theory . . . he led a pleasurable life. . . . His love for Sacharissa did not make him forget what was due to other ladies.”

Aubrey paints his portrait with a bold and unflattering brush : “ No man's conversation is more esteemed at Court now than his. His face is somewhat of an olivaster, his hayre frized, of a brownish colour ; full eie, popping out and working ; ovall faced, his forehead high and full of wrinkles. His head but small, brains very hott and apt to be cholérique.” Aubrey also says that he was generally very sober : but that somebody once “ made him damnable drunk at Somerset-house, where, at the water-stayers, he fell downe, and had a cruel fall. 'Twas a pitty to use such a sweet swan so inhumanely.”

CHAPTER VII.

SCOTLAND was conspicuously represented among the literary rakes of the court of Charles II. in the person of John Maitland, Lord, and afterwards Duke of Lauderdale. With his military and political career, the latter of which was very eventful, we have no concern here. At the date of the Restoration, he was a man of forty-six. He was familiar with Latin, Hebrew, French and Italian. Bruce describes him as a person "of a most extraordinary learning and great memory; as disagreeable in his conversation as in his person; his head was that of a Saracen fiery face, and his tongue too big for his mouth; and his pronounciation high Scotch—no Highlander like him—uttering bald jests for wit, and repeating good ones from others and ever spoiling them in relating them, which delighted the King much. . . . Besides tiring the King with his bald jests, he was continually putting his fingers into the King's snuff box."

His chief attractions to the king were his acquaintance with *belles lettres*, his rough humour and his coarse but very pungent wit. And besides all this, his political services in Scotch affairs made it

necessary that his Majesty should see a good deal of him. In vice, he appears to have equalled the worst of the literary rakes.

Lauderdale had the coolness to go, uninvited, to any party at which the king was present. Charles observed to some of his intimates that this greatly annoyed him, as he was growing heartily tired of Lauderdale and his rough words and works. Shortly afterwards one of these intimates was honoured by the presence of the king at dinner. Lord Ailesbury tells the story :—¹

“We shall be pestered with Lauderdale,” said Charles to his host.

“If your Majesty will give way to it, I have invented a means to disgust him so at my house,” replied the host, “that your Majesty, no doubt, shall for ever be freed from him.”

“That person,” says Ailesbury, “ordered a double sillibub glass, and it was concerted that the King, after having drunk plentifully, should ask the master of the house for a sillibub² to refresh him ; and by a token the King knew which of the two to take, and commending it greatly, the Duke of Lauderdale, for such was his title, then took the double glass in his hand, he having a great share of confidence (very natural to his country), and

¹ *Memoirs*, vol. i., p. 15.

² A sillibub was a mixture of wine or cider, with cream or milk, forming a soft curd : a very questionable form of refreshment after plentiful drinking.

drinking the other half, which was prepared" in a very different manner, he was obliged to confirm the opinion expressed by the king and declare it excellent. It is unnecessary to give the further details of the incident—they may be readily imagined. In a few minutes, the unfortunate Lauderdale had to be carried away, and the king was never again "troubled with him on such diverting occasions".

Lauderdale was got rid of altogether three years after the date of Rochester's joining the court, by being sent as High Commissioner to Scotland, with very far-reaching designs as well as powers, and there he did the king good service, somewhat at the expense of the king's Scotch subjects.

Among the less remembered literary rakes at the court of Charles II. was Fleetwood Sheppard, an Oxfordshire man, and a B.A. of Christ Church, Oxford. Anthony Wood says that "After his Majesty's Restoration, he retired to London, hanged on the Court, became a Debauchee and an Atheist, a grand companion with Charles, Lord Buckhurst," and others.

Sheppard had some slight turn for literature of an unpretentious kind, as Wood tells us that he was the author of "Several Poems—scattered in several Books," and also of "The True and Genuine Explanation of one of King James's Declarations". He is mentioned as having been one of the regular attendants at the private supper-parties in which Charles II. so much delighted. Indeed he may be

said to have been a prominent member of his Majesty's much-beloved Back-Stairs' set, and in every sense a literary rake of the court of Charles II., although not an important or an interesting one.

After some of the literary rakes that we have been noticing, it would, at first sight, appear to be a change to turn to one (Etheredge) of whose verses another poet could write:—

No unchaste words, with harsh, offensive sound,
 The tender ears of blushing maidens wound ;
 Nor thought, which nauseous images inspire,
 And damp the glowing heat of soft desire :
 But calm and easy the sweet numbers move,
 And every verse is influenced by love.¹

Whatever truth there may have been in this statement, as English was then understood, when translated into the modern vernacular, it means that Etheredge's words were too often as unchaste as they were nauseous, and that the only maidens who would not blush at hearing them would be those who did not understand their hideous meanings.

Sir George Etheredge, like Rochester, was educated at an English university and then travelled on the Continent. He was a thin, fair man, with courtly manners, high spirits, and plenty to say for himself. When he returned from his travels, he for a time studied at one of the inns of court ; but he found writing plays much more to his taste than learning law ; and when he was twenty-eight he

¹ *To a Lady*, by C. Tooke.

produced "The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub," a piece which was acted at the Duke of York's Theatre with considerable success. He then became a favourite companion of Rochester, Buckingham, Buckhurst, Sedley and Savile, and he soon took his place at the court of Charles II. His second play was called "She Would if She Could," and Dryden wrote that it was the best comedy that had appeared since the reformation of the stage. Although this play was at least as successful as its predecessor, it did not encourage the lazy and dissipated Etheredge to produce another for seven years. Rochester thus derided him for this idleness in *The Session of the Poets*.¹

But Apollo had got gentle George in his eye ;
 And frankly confessed, of all men that writ,
 There's none had more fancy, sense, judgment, or wit,
 But i'th' crying sin idleness he was so hardened,
 That his long seven years' silence was not to be pardoned.

Etheredge's third comedy, "The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter," was honoured with an epilogue—of much greater merit than the play—by Dryden, who, in noticing the character of Sir Fopling, wrote :—

Most modern wits such monstrous fools have shown,
 They seem not of Heaven's making, but their own.
 Those nauseous Harlequins in farce may pass,
 But there goes more to a substantial ass ;

¹ Elsewhere the question whether this poem is really the work of Rochester will be noticed.

Something of man must be exposed to view,
 That, Gallants, they may more resemble you.
 True Fops help Nature's work, and go to school,
 To file and finish God's Almighty Fool.

It was generally believed that the character of Dorimant in this play was intended to represent Rochester. If this be the case, Etheredge did not do his friend Rochester much honour; for as Andrew Kippis says:¹ "The part of Dorimant seems not so expressly intended for the perfect gentleman as the refined rake or libertine; the unconfined rover after amorous adventures; therefore, strict honour and honesty are not to be expected in such a character". Rochester, however, was apparently in no way annoyed by Etheredge's representation of his character, for in his "Allusion to the Tenth Satyr," he wrote:—

A jest in scorn points out and hits the thing
 More home than the morosest Satyr's sting.
 Shakespeare and Jonson did in this excel,
 And might herein be imitated well;
 Whom refin'd Etheredge copies not at all,
 But is himself a sheer original.

Male dress comes in for much notice in "The Man of Mode":—

"*Medley*.—Your breech though is a handful too high in my eye, Sir Fopling.

"*Sir Fopling*.—Peace, Medley, I have wished it lower a thousand times.

¹ "Etheredge," *Biog. Brit.*

“*Lady Townley*.—His gloves are well fringed, large and graceful.

“*Sir Fopling*.—I was always eminent for being *bien ganté* . . . Orangerii : you know the smell, ladies.”

The last remark refers to the scent of the gloves ; for the smart courtiers wore scented gloves in those days. Charles II. in a letter to one of his sisters thanks her for the present of a pair of gloves, which he describes as being “as good as possible to smell”.

In the play to which we are referring Sir Fopling complains of Dorimant’s (Rochester’s) and Medley’s dress :—

“I sat near one of them at a play to-day, and was almost poisoned with a pair of Cordivant gloves he wears.

“*Mrs. Loveit*.—Oh filthy Cordivant ! How I hate the smell.”

Dorimant was much out of favour with Mrs. Loveit just at this time.

“*Sir Fopling*.—Did you observe, madam, how their cravats hung loose an inch from their necks, and what a frightful air it gave ’em?

“*Mrs. Loveit*.—Oh I took particular notice of one, that he was always spruced up with a deal of dirty sky-coloured ribbon.” This was Dorimant.

Etheredge was not only very immoral, but also very intemperate, as well as a reckless gambler. Hard drinking had the effect of disfiguring his naturally handsome countenance. A drunken roué

would seem an unlikely character to be selected for diplomatic service, nevertheless, in the reign of James II., Etheredge was sent as English Minister to Ratisbon, a city from which he wrote several long letters to the Duke of Buckingham, letters which are likely to be better suited to modern taste than his plays.

In one letter he makes the following pitiful complaint: "The German ladies are so intolerably reserved and virtuous, with tears in my eyes I speak it to your grace, that it is next to impossible to carry on an intrigue with them".

If any one cares to know the sort of stories with which Etheredge garnished his letters, let him read what follows. He begins by lamenting the death of the German friend whom he had most valued of all his many acquaintances in the city of Ratisbon. After describing this friend's charms and virtues he tells Buckingham that his pretty young widow was absolutely inconsolable. "She refused to admit any visits from her nearest relations; her chamber, her antichamber and pro-antichamber, were hung with black, nay, the very candles, her fans, and tea-table wore the livery of grief; she refused all manner of sustenance, and was so averse to all thoughts of living, that she talked of nothing but death."

About a fortnight after her cruel loss Etheredge thought the time had arrived to pay a visit of condolence in memory of the friend who had been so good to him. He scarcely expected admittance;

but, probably owing to the very exceptional favour that had been shown to Etheredge by her husband, the widow received him.

He says : " When I came into the room, I fancied myself in the territories of death ; everything looked so gloomy, so dismal, and so melancholy ". A grave Lutheran minister was exhorting the bereaved lady to Christian resignation.

" You don't consider," said the divine, " that by abandoning yourself thus to despair, you actually rebel against Providence."

" I cannot help it," she replied ; " Providence may e'en thank itself for laying so insupportable a load upon me."

" Oh fie, Madam," cried the other, " this is downright impiety ; what would you say, now, if heaven should punish it by some exemplary visitation?"

" That is impossible," retorted the lady, deeply sighing : " and since it has robbed me of the only delight I had in this world, the only favour it can do me is to level a thunderbolt at my head, and put an end to all my sufferings."

The minister, perceiving that she would not listen to reason, took his leave. Etheredge was now left alone with the widow and it was his turn to attempt to comfort her.

" Madam," he began, " next to my concern for your husband's untimely death, I am grieved to see what an alteration the bemoaning of his loss has occasioned you." Then at some length and with

great delicacy he hinted that to alleviate her grief would be a public as well as a private benefit.

This excited her curiosity. "Bid farewell to compliments," said she, "and explain yourself more particularly."

"Grief," replied Etheredge, "will ruin the appearance of the most beautiful faces sooner than anything else whatsoever. One of the finest women we ever had in England lost her beauty in a fortnight by lamenting a brother's death. I have heard an eminent physician declare that tears, having abundance of saline particles in them, not only spoil the complexion, but hasten wrinkles. But, Madam, why should I trouble you with the testimonies of the cleverest doctors, when your own face testifies to the sad truth of what I have told you?"

Calling to an attendant to bring her a hand-glass, the widow carefully examined the reflection of her own face in it. "Alas," she exclaimed, "what you say is but too true. But what could I do? I owed tears to the memory of my husband and the world expected them."

"My dear Madam," said Etheredge, "your tears can do your husband no good; much less do you lie under any such obligation to the world as to spoil a lovely face only to comply with its tyrannic customs."

"But what would you have me to do?" pitifully inquired the inconsolable widow.

Etheredge begged her to allow him to persuade

her to restore her vitality and to give a chance to Nature, to which she had been so unmerciful of late, by refreshing herself with the most nourishing of foods and the most generous of wines.

With gentle protests, she consented to make this sacrifice of her desires to her duties, on condition that Etheredge would sup with her. What followed is thus described in the letter :—

“We had a noble regale that evening in her chamber ; and our good widow pushed the glass so strenuously about, that her comforter, meaning myself, could hardly find the way to his coach.” Well! To make a long story short, “this phoenix of her sex, this pattern of conjugal fidelity, two mornings ago, was married to a smooth-chinned ensign that has not a farthing in the world but his pay. I assisted at the ceremony, though I had little imagined that the lady would act upon my advice so readily, or that it would effect such a complete and so rapid a cure.”

Of poems, apart from plays, Etheredge does not appear to have published many. We will only give one specimen :—

Fly the fair sex, if bliss you prize ;
The snake's beneath the flower :
Who ever gazed on beauteous eyes,
That tasted quiet more ?

One more specimen shall be given of the play in which Rochester is represented.

“*Dorimant*.—He is a person indeed of great acquired follies.

“*Medley*.—He is like many others, beholden to his education for making him so eminent a coxcomb ; many a fool had been lost to the world had their indulgent parents wisely bestowed neither learning nor good breeding on ’em.”¹

Rochester wrote something much akin to this in his *Artemisa in the Town to Cloe* [*Chloe*] *in the Country*.

Nature’s as lame in making a true Fop
 As a philosopher ; the very top
 And dignity of folly we attain
 By studious search and labour of the brain,
 By observation, counsel, and deep thought :
 God never made a coxcomb worth a groat.
 We owe that name to industry and arts ;
 An eminent fool must be a fool of parts.

Etheredge died at the age of fifty-three. As to the cause of his death there is some doubt ; but according to the *Biographia Britannica*, there is a story that, after entertaining some friends at Ratisbon, he proceeded to conduct them to his door, when he was so drunk that he tumbled downstairs and broke his neck, and “so fell a martyr to his civility”.

¹“The Man of Mode.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE literary rakes were not all Englishmen or even Scotchmen. At one time a very eminent rake at the court of Charles II. was Count Grammont, who was not only, to some small extent, literary himself, but also the furnisher of copious matter for letters in another. It has been more than hinted in our own times that several successful autobiographies consist of reminiscences, not written but verbally recounted by their subjects, and recorded on paper by others; and such was probably the origin of *Mémoires de Comte de Grammont, par Le Comte Antoine Hamilton*; one of the best known and most entertaining biographies in existence. But Grammont did more than provide stories for another to put on paper. As his *Memoirs* relate, when Rochester, or other literary rakes wrote lampoons upon their fellow-courtiers, Grammont "never failed to produce his supplement upon the occasion". He was also credited with having written some verses to a jealous husband beginning:—

Tell me, jealous pated swain,
What avail thine idle arts
To divide united hearts?

In France, Grammont's career at court was cut short by his having the ill-luck to fall in love with a girl admired by the king, and he was in consequence banished from the king's presence. Though expelled from the French court, Grammont determined none the less to be a courtier; and for this purpose he crossed the channel to present himself at the court of Charles II. There he soon made himself exceedingly popular by his wit, by his large fund of amusing anecdote, by the magnificence of his entertainments, by playing for very high stakes and by readily adapting himself to English manners and customs. He was not quite so fortunate in love as in play; and it is to be hoped that he was not so unscrupulous in play as in love; for he did not hesitate to forge the handwriting of his amatory rivals, to intercept their letters, or to bribe their servants. Yet, as he almost always won at play, his scrupulosity at the tables may be doubted. It is some satisfaction to learn that, when he tried his hand at betting on horse-races, he quickly refunded to the English some of the money he had won from them at the gaming-tables.

After a variety of flirtations, he fell violently in love with Miss Hamilton, a sister of the Count Hamilton who eventually wrote his *Memoirs*. When Grammont finally left England to return to his native country, Miss Hamilton's brothers, furious at his having paid her such open court without marrying her, pursued him with the object of



COMTE DE GRAMMONT.

challenging him to a duel. They overtook him near Dover, and they greeted him with the question: "Is there nothing that you have forgotten in London?"

"Ah," said the count quite calmly, "I quite forgot to marry your sister. Let us go back and get it done as soon as possible."

Grammont was above all successful, as a courtier at Whitehall, in his magnificence on the river Thames. On hot summer evenings, when the roads and the parks were dusty, the king and queen used to embark on the royal barges from the river-stairs at Whitehall, attended by numbers of boats filled with beautiful ladies and smartly dressed men, not only from the court, but also from the city. In some of these boats, the occupants were refreshed by mandolines, guitars and singing; in others by the choicest fruits and the contents of gold and silver goblets. When the daylight failed, the river was illuminated by torches. Then the highly decorated barges and boats, with the richly coloured dresses of their occupants, gleamed and glittered in the artificial light, as also did their flickering reflections in the water; and when darkness fell upon the scene, a display of fireworks brought the proceedings to a close.

It was on such occasions that the sensation of the evening was not uncommonly some device of Grammont's. In the midst of a crowd of royal and courtly barges, a splendid chorus and orchestra from

Paris would suddenly strike up from the private barge of the count; or Charles II. and his court would be invited to embark upon it, to find a banquet prepared by French cooks, and surpassing the collations of the king himself. But Grammont was more popular at court on account of his stories than even his magnificence. The king and queen never seem to have been tired of listening to them.

This courtier must not be confused with his celebrated brother, the Maréchal de Grammont, of whom it may be recorded that, when he had taken an enemy's fortress by siege, its governor, after surrendering, said to him: "I will tell you a secret. The reason of my capitulation was that I had no more powder."

The Maréchal replied: "And secret for secret, the reason of my accepting it on such easy terms was that I had no more ball".

The substance of one of Grammont's stories may be given here as a specimen of the sort of subject in which he revelled.

He tells us that a notable figure at Whitehall was one of the Hamiltons, a brother-in-law of his own, and an actual brother of the recorder of his adventures. Hamilton was handsome, witty, polished, a graceful dancer, proverbially the best dressed man at court, and a great favourite with his royal master. Among the courtiers of the opposite sex, little less distinguished was the wife of Lord Chesterfield. She was a lively, blue-eyed brunette, with an

exquisite complexion and a perfect figure. Her manner was as graceful as it was charming. Both by nature and by culture she was one of the most agreeable women of her day, and she was as witty and amusing as she was well informed. To counter-balance this plethora of perfections, she was also an utterly unscrupulous and insincere flirt.

With this seductive but dangerous siren, Hamilton became on terms of intimacy, chiefly in the first instance through being her first cousin. As had been the case with his future brother-in-law, Grammont, he had the Duke of York for a rival; and so jealous was Lord Chesterfield of the heir to the throne that, far from fearing the admiration of Hamilton for his pretty wife, it was to Hamilton that he confided his jealousy of the Duke of York. It so happened that Hamilton's jealousy of the duke fully equalled his own; and the jealous husband and the jealous paramour laid their heads together to defeat the overtures of the heir to the throne.

Hitherto Lord Chesterfield, who had married this, his second wife, merely for purposes of domestic policy and not for love, had cruelly neglected her, and he had devoted his attentions, with too much success, to the notorious Lady Castlemaine. It was only when he observed that his own wife was admired by a royal duke that he discovered her to be even worth looking at. Then he became wild with jealousy; and, in his anxiety for consolation,

he had many private confabulations with her cousin, Hamilton. Possibly he may have made the common but dangerous mistake of looking upon a first cousin much in the light of a brother.

Greatly mystified was Hamilton when, in one of these secret conferences, Lord Chesterfield said: "My wife is charming, it must be acknowledged; but she is far from being such a miracle of beauty as she supposes herself: you probably know that she has ugly feet; but perhaps you may not be aware that she has still uglier legs. I will confide to you that they are short and thick; and that to remedy these defects as much as possible she usually wears green stockings."

Perceiving Hamilton's expression of bewildered amazement, Chesterfield said: "Have a little patience with me and you will soon see the reason of my saying all this".

He then told him that, on the previous day, he had been present when the king and his brother had been discussing the question of what constituted perfection in the female leg. Charles II. maintained that no legs had ever rivalled those of Miss Stewart, who there and then exposed one of them to above the knee, in proof of his Majesty's assertion. Modern critics may decide upon this point for themselves by examining the thinly veiled leg of Britannia, on the back of a penny, as Miss Stewart served for the artist's model from which that figure was designed. The Duke of York,

fearless of the wrath of the reigning beauty, stated in her presence that her leg was too slender. He said that he would give nothing for a leg that was not thicker and shorter, adding that legs looked best when encased in green stockings. "*Now*, do you see?" said Chesterfield.

Hamilton did see! But he, as we are told, shrugged his shoulders, and faintly said that appearances were often deceitful. In reality, he was now, if possible, madder with jealousy of the Duke of York than even Chesterfield himself.

Other incidents followed that of the green stockings. There was the guitar incident, and there was the hands-under-the-table-at-cards incident, two incidents which the author does not feel it incumbent upon himself to describe in detail. The result of all this was that Hamilton strongly advised Chesterfield to get his wife out of harm's way as soon as possible, and to carry her off to his country home, a place far away from Whitehall and all its iniquities: advice which Chesterfield acted upon without delay.

Great was the sensation at court when it became known that the jealous husband had forcibly removed his wife from the sphere of her temptations; and Lord Chesterfield became the butt of all the court wits. Rochester produced one of his most pungent lampoons upon the jealous husband; Buckhurst, Sedley, Etheredge and Grammont likewise ridiculed him in scurrilous ballads; and scandal-

mongers pleasantly inquired why, if so comparatively innocent a lady was carried off in disgrace, this, that and the other beauty, all of whom they mentioned by name, were left behind. Meanwhile, and almost before Lady Chesterfield was well out of London, the Duke of York had forgotten her attractions for those of Lady Denham, a fact which, in the eyes of the gossip-loving court, added to the delightful absurdity of the whole situation.

When Lord and Lady Chesterfield had settled down in the country they appear to have made up their differences. Thanks to the admiration exhibited by the Duke of York for his wife, my lord had now discovered that she was very beautiful, and he fell in love with and began to flirt with his own wife for the first time. Under these changed and happy conditions they became confidential, and Chesterfield told his wife that he would never have been so unkind as to take her from the court, in the middle of an extremely severe winter, to his distant home, if he had not been urged to do so by her own favourite and trusted cousin, who always, said he, had her best interests at heart, and felt towards her like an elder and protective brother.

When Lady Chesterfield had discovered that it was to Hamilton she owed her banishment from the pleasures of Whitehall, as well as her long and fatiguing jolting over bad roads in the worst of weather, and a dull life in a remote district, she determined to repay him with interest.



EARL OF CHESTERFIELD.

In London, meanwhile, Hamilton sorely missed his beloved cousin, and he began to think that he had acted like a fool. "Wherefore," he soliloquised, "was I so eager to make her miserable, who alone, however culpable she may be, has it in her power to make me happy? Cursed jealousy! Yet more cruel to those who torment than to those who are tormented!"

In the midst of his remorse, he received a letter from Lady Chesterfield. This epistle described in vivid colours the horrors of her place of imprisonment. From one window she said that she could see nothing but rugged rocks, from another only towering precipices; while within the house the eyes of a jealous husband met her at every turn. And she ended by saying "Come, therefore, and let me see you once again, that you may hear my justification. Our Argus sets out to-morrow for Chester, where a law-suit will detain him for a week: whether he will win it I care not and know not, but this I do know, that it will be entirely your fault if he does not lose a certain person, about whom he is at least as anxious, as he is about his law-suit."

Without a moment's hesitation, Hamilton prepared to fly to the arms of his paramour. The bearer of the letter told him of a comfortable inn, not far from the country-house in which his lady-love was imprisoned, where full instructions as to his proceedings would be brought to him by a trusted servant of Lady Chesterfield.

“Secrecy being the soul of such expeditions, especially before an amour is accomplished,” he did not set out till after dark, which was early enough on a mid-winter’s afternoon ; and then he set off in a carriage with four horses. By hastily changing horses at every post, and by grudging no gratuities to post-boys, he made the long, tedious journey in the course of one windy, snowy night, and before the winter sun had risen he reached the “comfortable inn,” which proved to be a most miserable little roadside, hut-like cabaret. However he was so tired that, without so much as undressing, he threw himself upon a bed to take a much needed rest, after having been bumped about by going at a racketing pace over the execrable roads, which owing to alternate snows and thaws were at that time in a deplorable condition.

Rising towards the afternoon, he made a poor meal upon the very rough and unsavoury fare which his peasant host could supply, and then, as he was about to present himself before one of the best-dressed ladies in England, he divested himself of his travelling clothes, and devoted his whole attention to adorning himself with the smartest garments that could be made by the smartest tailor that the smartest period of English male attire could produce.

Darkness had set in for some time, when the landlord of the inn informed the resplendent but impatient Hamilton that a servant of Lady Ches-

terfield's awaited him. The servant said that he had orders to conduct him to a door through which he would be speedily led into the presence of her ladyship; and, throwing a thick cloak over all his finery, Hamilton followed his guide into the darkness.

With the aid of a dim lantern, the footman led him for a full half-hour through a park of vast extent. The ground was white with thawing snow. Hamilton's smart boots sank beneath it into that slushy, rushy sort of pasture of which private parks were often formed before the days of systematic draining. Frequent splashes made him tremble for his appearance before "the neatest lady in England". At last they came to a little door in a garden wall, before which the footman requested him to take up his stand, promising that "in a short time, he was to be introduced to a more agreeable situation," and then the man left him in the darkness.

Having now leisure to examine his own condition, and his eyes having become sufficiently accustomed to the darkness to faintly distinguish objects within a few inches, he was aghast at perceiving that his legs and breeches were splashed with mud even above his knees. Anxiously, he waited seconds; impatiently, he waited minutes; angrily, he waited hours. A cold drizzling rain now added to his discomfort, and the thawing snow began to saturate his boots. Silks, satins, and velvets

are but poor protection against the severities of an inclement winter's night in England, even when surmounted by the largest and thickest of cloaks.

“What,” said he to himself, “if I should rap at that cursed door; for, if my fate requires that I should perish, it is at least more honourable to die in a house than to be starved to death in a garden; but then, perhaps, I may thereby expose my lady, whom some unforeseen accident may at this very instant have reduced to greater perplexity than even I myself am in.”

He then began to walk rapidly up and down in front of the door; but all this was to no purpose, for although he used every effort to keep himself warm, and in spite of being muffled up in a voluminous cloak, he began to be benumbed in all his limbs, and the cold gained the ascendancy over his amorous vivacity and eagerness. The day was beginning to dawn, and judging now, that though the accursed door should even be opened, it would be to no purpose, he returned, as well as he could, by retracing his footsteps by the half light in the melting snow to the little inn from whence he had set out upon this most unpleasant expedition.

Having failed to warm his frozen limbs at the poor smouldering pretence of a fire of the cottage inn, and exclaiming, “Wherefore did she forget me in that cursed garden?” Hamilton got into “one of the worst beds in the world, and slept as soundly as if it had been the best”.

Soon after the shivering Hamilton had started back for the inn, Lord Chesterfield left the warm bed in which lay his lovely wife, looked out of his window, and pondered over the question whether the thaw was sufficient to allow of his hunting with his harriers. He decided to try, for although there was still some snow on the ground, he thought that by picking his way he would be able to keep within sight of his hounds.

Towards twelve o'clock much of the snow had melted, and Chesterfield, surrounded by his pack, trotted through his park, and followed a lane that led past a certain humble little hostelry of which we have heard already. Wishing the landlord, who stood at the door, a pleasant "Good-day," Chesterfield turned into the adjoining field, and had scarcely done so when he saw a hare stealing away on the farther side of it. Blowing his horn vigorously, he started off at a gallop to put his hounds in line.

The ill-fitting window of the room in which Hamilton had now been sleeping for about three hours, looked out into the field in which Chesterfield was blowing his horn not a dozen yards off; and Hamilton, suddenly awakened from his deep sleep by the unexpected blast, and entirely forgetting where he was, and what had happened, called out "Who's there?"

"Lord Chesterfield," replied the landlady, who happened to be near his door.

Hamilton was a valiant and distinguished soldier ;

but between the abrupt awakening from a very heavy slumber, the sudden noise of the hunting horn, within a few yards of the bed in which he lay, and the announcement that the jealous husband of his paramour was "there"—perhaps on the point of entering his room to wreak vengeance upon him—even this great warrior's nerves were momentarily shaken, and the hero of a hundred battles, to use Grammont's words, "hid his head under the bed-clothes".

When, some time later, he had arisen and dressed himself, the confidential servant who had taken him to the garden door on the previous evening re-appeared, and placing in his hand a letter, bowed and retired. The man having gone, Hamilton eagerly broke the seal, and read a polite note from a friend of Lady Chesterfield's, gently intimating that he had been made a fool of.

Astonishment, shame, hatred and rage "seized at once upon his heart," and ordering his carriage, he hastened to shake the dust of the place from his feet. As he did so, he saw in passing, now that it was broad daylight, the very fine house of the Chesterfields, a charming place in a pretty home-like country, on the banks of a gently flowing river, without a rock or a precipice anywhere near it.

Neither Hamilton's troubles nor Lady Chesterfield's vengeance were yet over. That amiable lady took good care that Hamilton's discomfiture should become the gossip of Whitehall. The king

heard of it and insisted upon Hamilton's giving him all the details of his adventures in the presence of a full court. To make matters worse, Grammont, who was among the hearers, said to him: "If Lady Chesterfield is to be blamed for carrying the jest so far, you are no less to be blamed for coming back so suddenly, like an ignorant novice. If you had only remained in the neighbourhood till the next day——"

CHAPTER IX.

WE will now notice another foreign, most popular and very remarkable courtier at the court of Charles II. A man eccentric both externally and internally ; a man standing alone in the gay crowd of courtiers, yet never so much at home as when in its midst ; a man of the world, worldly, yet professing a pompous philosophy and a serious cynicism, encouraging the vices of the court with the unction of a Lenten preacher, and mocking at virtue with the gravity of a priest administering the last sacraments.

Charles de Marguetel de St. Denis, or, as he was usually called, de St. Evremond, from the name of one of the smaller estates of the family, was a literary courtier who lived among rakes, if he was not a rake himself. That his moral tone cannot have been higher than theirs, whatever his actions may have been, may be inferred from his asking Mme. de Keroualle which was the "most injurious to the well being of the fair sex, either to abandon themselves wholly to their inclinations, or to follow all the dictates of Virtue,"¹ and from his adding : "Do not too severely resist temptations".

¹ *Works of St. Evremond*, vol. i., pp. lxxxiii.-iv.

In one letter he assures her that if she ever enters a convent, she will be thought very little of among the nuns, unless she has the character of a Magdalen. "The true penitent is she who afflicts and mortifies herself at the remembrance of her faults. What can a pure Virgin, who has done no wickedness, have to repent of? You will appear ridiculous to the other Nuns, who have just reason to repent, if you exhibit repentance only out of grimace."

Such sentiments as these, and the companions he chose, are enough to qualify St. Evremond for classification among the rakes, even if it were to be admitted—and it might be a large admission—that his extraordinary admiration for, and great intimacy with, the Duchess of Mazarin were purely platonic. Indeed it is pretty clear, in respect to rakishness, that if, at the age at which he figured at the court of Charles II., his flesh was weak, his spirit was willing.

St. Evremond sneers at repentance for immorality. "There are but few conversions," he writes, "wherein is not felt a secret mixture of the pleasure of remembrance and the sorrow of repentance. . . . Our repentance for the vices, which were dear to us, always leaves some small tenderness for them, which is mingled with our tears. There is something of the amorous kind in our repenting of an amorous passion." And he observes that a converted soul often "fixes its remembrance very agreeably upon the object of its past pleasures".

St. Evremond's estimate of the repentance in old

age of free-livers of both sexes may be found in his *Letter to a Lady Who Designed to Turn Devout*. Their repentance, he tells her, is not so much sorrow for their past sins, as regret that their sins are past : " wherein they are themselves deceived, amorously lamenting what they have lost, while they believe that they devoutly bewail what they have done ".

St. Evremond was by no means an infidel ; but whatever the differences in belief, or unbelief, between St. Evremond and Voltaire, it is certain that Voltaire in his writings was much influenced by the literary style of St. Evremond, if he did not actually copy it. As to St. Evremond's influence upon the literary rakes whose society he so much affected, it cannot be said to exhibit itself to any large extent in their writings : but it probably did much to make writing of some sort the fashion among them in spite of the then prevailing tone towards literary work expressed by Etheredge's character, Sir Fopling Flutter : " Writing, Madam, is a mechanic part of wit : gentlemen should never go beyond a song or billet. . . . Damn your authors ! " Even St. Evremond does not seem to have thought it quite the part of a high-bred gentleman to publish his writings. He never could be persuaded to authorise the printing of any of his works during his own lifetime, although he empowered Des Maizeaux to publish them after his death. It is true that before it a collection of them was published by Barbin, but without his permission.

After a very adventurous career as a soldier and politician in France, including imprisonment in the Bastille, St. Evremond had to fly from his own country, and eventually he came to England, where he not only received a warm welcome but also an annuity of £300 from Charles II.

The rakes of the court appear to have tolerated, if not encouraged, his cynical advice. He recommended Grammont to go on with his gambling, and not to get entangled in any more love affairs, not because of the immorality of his manner of love-making, but because he generally failed in the latter and succeeded in the former. When Buckingham had gone to live in the country it was rumoured that he had so far degenerated as to become pious. Respecting this scandalous rumour St. Evremond wrote to him: "Mr. Burnet is so strongly persuaded of the sincerity of your conversion, that he speaks of it to all your friends after this rate: 'I dare venture my own salvation upon the same bottom with that of the Duke of Buckingham'".¹ Farther on in his letter St. Evremond says: "But with Mr. Burnet's leave, I shall account for it after another manner. 'Tis a certain maxim with me, that no man of a nice palate can love vice, when once it ceases to be agreeable ;

¹ In his *History of the Reign of Charles II.* Burnet wrote of Buckingham: "The madness of vice appeared in his person in very eminent instances; since at last he became contemptible and poor, sickly, and sunk in his parts," etc. This is very inconsistent with what St. Evremond states that Burnet said of Buckingham.

therefore I don't wonder that a person of refined taste, takes up with the virtue of continence in the North, where there are no objects to tempt him. But I dare engage, that if your Grace were among Beauties that had charms enough to tempt you, we should find the convert of Mr. Burnet . . . to be nothing in the world, but the true genuine Duke of Buckingham. Heaven forbid that I should ever persuade you to love. But I have another sin to propose to you which of yourself you would never guess : and yet I recommend it sincerely to you, and from the bottom of my heart : I mean Covetousness." Buckingham had been notorious for his reckless extravagance.

St. Evremond's principal pleasure in England was the society of the Duchess of Mazarin. We will quote from his own description of its charms : "I am unjustly accused for having too great a complaisance for Madame Mazarin : for in truth, there is no person that she has greater reason to complain of than myself. For six months together I have been maliciously spying out something in her, which might displease me, but in spite of all my endeavours, I could discover nothing there that was not too lovely, and too charming. . . . When Madame Mazarin pleases me too much in her negligence, I advise her to have recourse to art, hoping that her ornaments and her dress will not fail to ruin her native charms : but scarce has she dressed herself, but I am forced to confess, that I never saw in any



ST. EVREMOND.

person so great and so noble an air as hers. Nor is my ill-nature satisfied with this. I have a mind to see her in her chamber, amongst her dogs, her monkeys, and her birds, hoping that the disorder of her dress will make her lose the majesty of that beauty, that astonished us at Court. But here it is, that she is a hundred times more amiable; here it is that a more natural charm gives us a disgust to all that art and industry can do; here it is that the freedom of her wit and of her humour leaves none to the person that beholds her." What were his true relations to the duchess, it is difficult to ascertain.

In appearance St. Evremond was rather intelligent than handsome. He had sparkling blue eyes and a well-shaped mouth and chin; but his nose was ill-modelled, and his face was too broad and too square. In his later years a wen grew on his forehead, between his eyebrows, and at last attained to a considerable size. When he first came to England, he had long, full, flowing locks; but they became short and very thin with age, and his hair turned quite white. Nothing would induce him to wear a periwig. For many years, however, he wore a large leather skull-cap. Dr. Silvestre says that "he was naturally slovenly, which was occasioned chiefly by his having dogs, cats, and all sorts of animals always with him". This love of having dogs always about him would be a taste in common between St. Evremond and Charles II., whose lap-dogs made a dirty

dog-kennel of the most splendid of the royal apartments.

This slovenly ill-dressed courtier, with his thin grey locks, and a repelling deformity upon his forehead, must have looked strangely out of place in the gay crowd of lords and ladies, bastard children and women of evil life, with all their foppery, finery and jewels, at the court. Yet none was more welcome, none more popular, none more sparkling in wit, jest and repartee. And in such company he would be the more appreciated because, as his biographer, Des Maizeaux, tells us, "he did not pretend to over-rigid morals". He had the gift of writing and speaking immorally without being coarse; and altogether he was probably the ablest of all the literary rakes at the court of Charles II.

St. Evremond's description of Rochester, in a letter to the Duchess of Mazarin, published with the combined works of Rochester and Roscommon, is the most brilliant account ever written of the notorious literary rake whose name has been chosen as a title for this work.

If the present writer were criticising his own work, he would feel inclined to point out that the foregoing long list of literary rakes might produce the false impression that all the courtiers at Whitehall were rakes and all the courtly writings rakish. With the object of preventing so erroneous an inference, a digression, it is hoped a pardonable digression, shall now be made.

An at one time very prominent literary courtier, who was in no sense a rake, shall therefore be introduced here, in company with his highly respectable wife, by way of contrast to the catalogue of more or less disreputable courtiers already noticed, and to prove that the literary courtiers of the reign of Charles II. were not invariably ne'er-do-weels. Throw wide open the doors, therefore, and admit that worthy couple, their Graces the Duke and Duchess of Newcastle.

So far from being a rake, we have Clarendon's authority¹ for the statement that, after Newcastle had married his wife, "he mostly confined himself to her company". Newcastle had been a very distinguished general in the reign of Charles I., and he is far more deserving of being designated an historical character than most of the dubious individuals noticed in this volume. Unfortunately, after he had made himself celebrated as a warrior, both he and his wife brought themselves into ridicule by their abortive attempts to attain eternal fame in literature.

Although Newcastle's two books on horses and horsemanship have a decided value as bearing upon the history of the manners and customs of his times, Horace Walpole declares him to have been "fitter to break Pegasus for a *manège* than to mount him on the steeps of Parnassus"; adding that "of all the riders of that steed perhaps there have not been a

¹ *Life*, p. 126.

more fantastic couple than his grace and his faithful duchess, who was never off her pillion”.

Lord Clarendon¹ gives Newcastle a high character, and states that he was “a very fine gentleman,” “amorous in poetry and music”. As to his wife, Evelyn² calls her “a mighty pretender to learning, poetry and philosophy” who “had in both published divers books”. Pepys went to see a performance of her play “‘The Humorous Lovers,’ the most ridiculous thing that ever was wrote, but yet she and her lord mightily pleased with it”.

The duchess was renowned for her extraordinary dresses; indeed she usually affected theatrical or classical costumes. In the *Grammont Memoirs* it is recorded that, at a court ball, Grammont, on entering the ball-room, informed the king that a lady was about to come in who must have at least sixty ells of gauze and silver tissue about her.

“I bet,” said the king, “that it is the Duchess of Newcastle.”

“And I,” said Lord Muskerry, “will bet it is another fool; for I am very much mistaken if it is not my wife.”

The Duchess of Newcastle had been one of the maids-of-honour to the queen of Charles I. As a specimen of her prose, the following description of her own character written by herself may be quoted: “It pleased God to command his servant Nature

¹ *History*, vol. ii., p. 507.

² *Diary*, 30th May, 1667.

to indue her with a poetical and philosophical genius even from her birth”.

The duke is said to have lost nearly three-quarters of a million sterling by the civil wars, and the courage and soldier-like qualities which he exhibited in them were beyond praise. Yet, after all this, he “degraded himself,” says Walpole, “to the utmost idleness of literature”. Well! he had worked and suffered; so some recreation at the end of his life was surely allowable; and if he pleased to play at literature, why should he not have done so?

In literary output, Newcastle was far excelled by his wife, who produced no less than thirteen folios, ten of which are, or were, in print.¹ She “kept a number of young ladies about her person, who occasionally wrote what she dictated. Some of them slept in a room contiguous to that in which her Grace lay, that they might be ready, at the call of her bell, to rise at any hour of the night to take down her conceptions, lest they should escape her memory. . . . There can be no doubt that they frequently wished that their lady’s poetical and philosophical imagination had been less fruitful; especially as she was not destitute of some degree of peevishness.”²

The duke had much more common sense than his wife. When he was tutor to Charles II., then Prince of Wales, he wrote to him: “Whensoever

¹ See Grainger’s *Biog. Hist.*, vol. iv., p. 60.

² *Biog. Brit.*, Kippis’s ed., vol. iii., p. 338.

you are too studious, your contemplation will spoil your government, for you cannot be a good contemplative man, and a good commonwealth's man. Therefore take heed of too much book." The king obeyed him to the letter. Newcastle also told him that a king should "read men and not books".

This quaint couple must have caused considerable amusement to the rakes and the Jezebels at the court of Charles II. As Sir Egerton Brydges says, in his preface to the duchess's autobiography, their graces seem "to have afforded contempt and jests to the sophisticated mob of dissolute wits who crowded round King Charles II."

It is to be hoped that both readers and writer may have derived refreshment from contemplating for a few moments such an oasis of prudish perfection in the midst of this wilderness of unedifying pages. Thus fortified and edified let us return to our bad company.

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE proceeding further it seems desirable to state that successive and complete records for anything approaching to a biography of Rochester are wanting. For that matter, probably there was little in his life that was worth recording. This must be the author's apology for any apparently undue lingering over comparatively trivial incidents; since such incidents form, for the most part, the only materials at his disposal for an attempt to sketch the man and his doings.

If the youthful Rochester professed to be above all things a man of gallantry, he was not always gallant, and few were the prominent ladies at the court of Charles II. who escaped his satire. Indeed he would appear to have been at mortal feud with every lady with whom he was not in love. In this the remains of the already mentioned woman-hater in the youth asserted themselves.

Among the queen's maids-of-honour, and by no means the prettiest or the prudest, was Miss Price, who, says Mrs. Jameson,¹ had "forfeited all claims to the title, if not to the office, of a maid of honour". She

¹ *Beauties of the Court of Charles II.*, p. 64.

was a frolicsome, foolish, mischievous and laughter-loving minx, and, as ardent and as extreme in her hatreds as in her affections. At one time the special object of her hatred was a pretty young girl with whom Rochester happened to be on a footing of extreme intimacy: and this fact Miss Price was imprudent enough to publish to the world, an imprudence for which she was severely punished.

In Rochester, says Grammont, she “drew upon herself the most dangerous enemy in the universe: and never did any man write with more ease, humour, spirit and delicacy,”—the delicacy the present writer has failed to observe: but no matter! “He was at the same time the most severe satirist. Poor Miss Price, who had thus involuntarily provoked his resentment, was daily exposed in some new shape; there was every day some new song or other, the subject of which was her conduct and the burden her name. How was it possible for her to bear up against these attacks, in a Court where every person was eager to obtain the most insignificant trifle that came from the pen of Lord Rochester?”

One of these “insignificant trifles,” in the shape of a most virulent lampoon upon the unhappy Miss Price, was destined to do further mischief and bring sorrow upon a more beautiful and a much more innocent victim.

Among the maids-of-honour of the Duchess of York was a Warwickshire girl of the name of

Temple, who had only lately left the healthy, and at the time densely woodland, retreat of that beautiful county, for the vitiated moral atmosphere of St. James's and Whitehall. She was a lovely brunette, with a slight and graceful figure, soft eyes, and a pretty smiling mouth. Though vain, as well as too credulous and confiding, she was gentle, pure and amiable in disposition. Unfortunately this charming girl obtained an admirer in the unscrupulous and artful Rochester.

Though fond of admiration, her character stood too high for a man of Rochester's reputation to have any chance of winning her affections by the methods usually most successful with, as well as most pleasing to, the ordinary run of beauties frequenting the court of Charles II. Rochester, young, but not innocent, was already an artist in his own unholy craft, and, quickly perceiving the situation, he dexterously operated in a manner far more likely to achieve his object.

For some time he made no demonstrations of affection to the pretty maid-of-honour. On the contrary, he assured her that he cared for nothing but literature, and that he regarded human passions purely from a psychological point of view. Calmly contemplating them from the heights of Parnassus, he made them the subjects of his art: but personally he was unmoved by them. As to his own literary work, he cared nothing for the opinion upon it of ordinary critics: yet of really fine criticism no poet

could be more desirous than himself. Indeed he was ever seeking it, and at last he had discovered a source from which it might be obtained. He would not flatter Miss Temple by telling her where. Sufficient for him to say that she would lay him under an everlasting obligation if she would sometimes allow him to read his unfinished poems in her presence, and if she would then tell him, with perfect candour, all the faults she perceived in them.

Thus began a literary flirtation, which on account of its insidiousness, is the most dangerous of all flirtations, with the one and only exception of a religious flirtation. Professing that it was merely as an artist might ask a beautiful lady-friend to sit for him as a model, Rochester begged Miss Temple to permit him to make her the subject of some of his poems. The girl reluctantly consented, purely, of course, for the furtherance of literature and art : but the knowledge that her charms were described in the glowing language of the most fashionable of the then many courtier-poets made her head dizzy with pride.

The Duchess of York observed with much concern the frequent and lengthy conversations, in the royal reception rooms and in the ball rooms, in the Mall and in Hyde Park, between her new maid-of-honour and the notoriously unscrupulous young rhymster ; for, well knowing the character of Rochester, she greatly dreaded the consequences ; yet, from what she knew of each of the pair con-



MISS TEMPLE.

FROM A MINIATURE.

cerned, she feared that it would do more harm than good to put a stop to their interviews peremptorily or abruptly, and she considered it safer to set about terminating their intimacy with gentleness and tact. To this end she determined to employ another of her maids-of-honour, a lady, unfortunately, wanting in both those qualities, namely a certain Miss Hobart, a lively, imperious and almost masculine young woman, possessing more vigour than beauty, and more wit than discretion.

With a view to carrying out the duchess's instructions, Miss Hobart set to work to ingratiate herself with Miss Temple. Knowing that the girl loved two things—flattery and sweetmeats—Miss Hobart invited her to partake of the latter and to be plied with the former.

It so happened that Miss Hobart had charge of the duchess's baths: her room adjoined them, and, in a cabinet close by was kept an assortment of bonbons and liqueurs. Into this parlour the spider invited the fly.

The first occasion on which Miss Temple availed herself of this open invitation was after returning from a long ride, when she begged to be allowed to make her toilette in Miss Hobart's room. Miss Hobart had been on the point of going out; but seeing Miss Temple approaching, she returned and hurriedly took off her hat and outdoor things.

"I was just going to propose it," replied Miss Hobart; "you are as charming as an angel in your

riding-habit, but you will be more charming still and much more comfortable in a dressing-gown. You cannot imagine, my dear, how much you please me by this free and unceremonious conduct." As she said this she warmly embraced her. "But, above all, I am enchanted with your exquisite cleanliness. How greatly you differ in this, as in many other matters, from that silly and dirty creature, Jennings!" Miss Jennings, afterwards a celebrated Duchess, was another of the maids-of-honour of the Duchess of York, and one of the most lovely as well as one of the most fascinating of the beauties at the court of Charles II. Whatever may have been the cleanliness of her body, she was certainly cleaner in mind than Miss Hobart; and, unlike the common run of those beauties, her external attractions were enhanced by the charms of intelligence and virtue.

"Have you observed," continued Miss Hobart, "how all our Court fops admire this silly creature for her brilliant complexion, which perhaps, after all, is not her own, and for her gauche blunders, which are her own but too truly; blunders mistaken by those fools of courtiers for wit? I have not conversed with her long enough to perceive in what her wit consists; but of this I am certain, that if it is not better than her feet, it is very coarse. What stories have I heard of her sluttishness! No cat ever dreaded water so much as she does. Fie upon her!"

Instead of summoning a servant, Miss Hobart

helped Miss Temple with her own hands to change her riding-habit for an easy lounging gown, and then led her into the bathroom and sat beside her on a luxurious couch. "You are too young, my dear," she then began, "to know the baseness of men in general, and you have been too short a time acquainted with the Court, to know the character of its inhabitants. Now allow me to give you a short sketch of the principal persons in it, a sketch in which there shall not be a breath of scandal—a thing I detest."

After a liberal abuse of courtiers, every one of whom, according to her, was deficient either in honesty, good sense, judgment, wit or sincerity, and remarkable for either extravagance, deep play, pride, or a supreme contempt for others, Miss Hobart went on to say that courtiers simply looked upon maids-of-honour as created for their criticism and brought to court for their amusement. Miss Temple ought not to be so foolish as to imagine that the court was the best place in which to find a good husband; it was in fact quite the worst. The only motives of court marriages were money or caprice. Virtue and beauty were equally useless to bring about such matches.

For instance, caprice had been the origin of Lady Falmouth's marriage, because "her poor weak husband could not possibly have found anything to marry her for, except her great red face and her broad feet". (Lady Falmouth was in reality a

woman of very exceptional beauty ; and, better still, of a virtue in those days even more exceptional, and, whatever may have been Lord Falmouth's faults—and they were many—weakness was not one of them.)

As for the pale Lady Yarborough, who appeared so proud of her match, said Miss Hobart, "I saw her go away about this time twelve-month, in a coach with four such lean horses, that I cannot believe she is yet half way to her miserable little castle. . . . Believe me, my dear," she continued, "the pleasures of matrimony are so inconsiderable in comparison with its inconveniences, that I cannot imagine how any reasonable creature can resolve upon it."

After giving a recent and particularly unsavoury instance of the perfidy of courtly mankind to her own sex, Miss Hobart informed Miss Temple that at least three courtiers admired her, saying : "The handsome Sydney ogles you ; Lord Rochester is delighted with your conversation, and the most serious Sir Charles Lyttleton forsakes his natural gravity in favour of your charms".

Miss Hobart then enlarged upon the characters of all three ; and, of course, as Rochester was the sole object of her attack, he was the last to be dealt with. If Miss Temple married Lyttleton, said Miss Hobart, she would have to pass her days at a lonely house in a bleak country, a week's journey from London, without a neighbour within a day's drive, occupied "in casting up housekeeping bills, and in

darning old napkins," consoling herself with the reflection that she had "a Cato for a husband, whose speeches were so many lectures, and whose lectures were composed of nothing but ill-nature and censure". As to Sydney, Miss Hobart professed to have good reasons for warning Miss Temple against a man whose only recommendations were his good looks.

By the way she had mentioned Rochester, but had almost forgotten to say anything further about him. "He is," said she, "without contradiction the wittiest man in all England: but then he is likewise the wickedest, and he is devoid even of the least tincture of honour: to our sex only—not to his own—is he dangerous, and that to such a degree that there is not a woman who gives ear to him three times, without irretrievably losing her reputation. Nothing is more dangerous than the artful insinuating manner with which he gains possession of a girl's mind: he applauds her taste, submits to her sentiments, at the very instant that he himself does not believe a single word of what he is saying. I dare lay a wager that, from the conversation you had with him, you thought him one of the most honourable and sincere men living. Here," said she, drawing a paper from her pocket, "you may see a copy of some verses he has made in your praise, while he lulls your credulity to rest by flattering speeches and feigned respect."

The manuscript which she handed to Miss Temple consisted of a copy of the most scandalous

of all the lampoons that Rochester had written upon poor Miss Price.

Miss Temple was almost driven to distraction by rage and astonishment. Unable to find words to express her anger and resentment at the vile calumnies in the verses, she cried like a child. Miss Hobart pretended to comfort her by asserting that Rochester was too well known as a mendacious scandalmonger to have any influence. She advised her that silent contempt was the best weapon to use against such an adversary, and strongly recommended her never to speak to him again.

Good cause had Miss Hobart to urge her friend against further communications with Rochester, as a conversation would probably lead to an accusation, an accusation to an explanation, and an explanation to the ruin of Miss Hobart, under a shower of Rochester's most scathing lampoons.

Unhappily for Miss Hobart, her precautions were in vain, for a reason which shall be forthwith explained. Rochester by no means confined his admiration to the beauties of a single rank in life: and it so happened that, at this particular time, he was on terms of the greatest intimacy with a girl named Sarah, the very pretty niece of a governess in the employment of the duchess.¹

¹ It may be scarcely necessary to say that the title of governess was applied, in those days, to women of much lower position than that of the average governess of our own. Nor were a governess's duties then what they are now.

Now Sarah was a friend of Miss Hobart's chambermaid and the chambermaid had invited Sarah to the duchess's bathroom. These two friends were in the act of surreptitiously enjoying the luxuries of the royal bath, in the supposed absence of Miss Hobart—it will be remembered that Miss Hobart had been on the point of going out at the time at which Miss Temple arrived—when they were suddenly and most unexpectedly alarmed by hearing the voices of Miss Hobart and Miss Temple : and the chambermaid had only just time to draw the silk curtains across the glass partition between the bath and the dressing-room, before the two young ladies entered. The chambermaid and her guest crept noiselessly out of the bath and, shivering with cold and fear, sat upon the marble seat beside it, without daring to move a muscle, lest they should be discovered, while the young ladies reclined in warmth and luxury upon the soft and comfortable couch in the attiring-room. As a necessary result, Sarah and the chambermaid heard every word of the edifying conversation recorded above.

That same afternoon Sarah had an appointment with Rochester, and, it is scarcely necessary to add, retailed to him every word she could remember of the conversation in question. With natural jealousy she asked him whether it was true that he was in love with Miss Temple ; but his unscrupulousness and his skill in the management of women enabled him to soothe her fears in this respect.

Determined to see for himself what effect Miss Hobart's calumnies and description of his character might have had upon Miss Temple, Rochester attended the duchess's ball that evening. Miss Temple was equally anxious to be there, with a view to exhibiting her contemptuous disdain of Rochester. At the same time she was miserable at appearing in public, for she imagined that all the court must have read Rochester's lampoon upon her, and her anxiety on this point had brought a gentle but becoming blush to her cheeks and animation to her eyes. Never before had she looked so beautiful, and she received many compliments upon the brilliancy of her appearance.

"Pshaw," she replied to her admirers, thinking that they had all read Rochester's descriptions of her. "You all know that I am a monster, made unlike other women. All is not gold that glitters. The compliments you pay me in public, you laugh over in private."

Miss Hobart did her best to induce Miss Temple to be silent; but the girl was irate and excited, and would not be pacified.

Presently Lord Rochester came in, with his graceful, easy manner, smiling a compliment to one acquaintance, and with a grave face convulsing another with laughter. But a court ball in those times was a very ceremonious affair, and Miss Temple had to wait for a long time before an opportunity offered itself for a display of her animosity towards Rochester.

Small wonder that she had to wait. Pepys describes what took place at such functions: "The King takes out the Duchess of York; and the Duke [of York] the Duchess of Buckingham; the Duke of Monmouth my Lady Castlemaine, and so other lords other ladies: and they dance the Brantle".

The Brantle, Branle, or Brawl, as it was called in English, was "une espèce de danse de plusieurs personnes, qui se tiennent par la main et qui se menent tour-à-tour". It was in two time, and its leading feature was the "rû de vache," or cow's kick, a sort of convulsive side jerk with one leg.¹

The formal royal dancing, however, was not over yet; for, "After that, the King led a lady a single Coranto". This was a very grave performance. It was danced on tip-toe, with curved and jumping steps, and many bows and curtsseys. A single pair danced round the room and, when they had returned to the starting point, the dancer made a low obeisance to his partner and then left her.

At last the king finished his dance, and then one pair after another, and only one pair at a time, to use a Scotch expression, "took the floor". Presently the ceremonious steps were over; French dancing made place for English; gravity gave way to frolic, and the king ordered his favourite old country dance, called "Cuckolds all awry".

¹ See *Dancing*, Badminton Library, p. 249.

At this stage of a Court ball, Rochester would be free to make his way through the crowd of courtiers and fine ladies to Miss Temple. When she saw him approaching, she turned first crimson and then deadly pale. With angry eyes she made a step towards him, and then changing her intention drew hurriedly back. Her nervous agitation prevented her from keeping still for a moment : and she pulled her long gloves, first one and then the other, up to her elbow. Then she fanned herself with most unnecessary vigour.

With his usual bright smile and a graceful compliment, Rochester stood before her and bowed. Without taking the slightest notice of his salutation, she abruptly turned round and stood with her back to him. In an instant Rochester had sprung to the other side and stood bowing before her again.

“Madam,” said he, “nothing can be so glorious as to be able to look so charming as you do, after so fatiguing a day. To endure a ride of three hours, and after that a very long conversation with Miss Hobart, must have demanded a constitution of iron.”

On hearing this Miss Temple grew red ; and Miss Hobart grew white. The eyes of the generally mild-looking Miss Temple were now blazing with passion, while all the usual fun and mischief in the eyes of Miss Hobart had deserted them. Standing beside Miss Temple and fearing an outburst of reproaches and invectives upon Rochester, Miss Hobart

sharply pinched her arm. This distracted her attention for the moment, and in the meantime Rochester quietly retired as if nothing unusual had happened. Miss Hobart was terribly alarmed at his pointed allusion to her conversation with Miss Temple. Evidently he knew something about it! Yet who could have given him the information?

Among all the balls attended by Miss Temple and Miss Hobart there were none that either of them looked back upon with less pleasure than that just described.

A few days later Sarah brought Rochester further news, obtained from her friend the ducal chambermaid. Miss Hobart and Miss Temple, she told him, had agreed to walk that evening in the Mall at nine o'clock, wearing black masks, as ladies then occasionally did; and, with the intention of being mistaken one for the other, they had arranged to exchange dresses. Miss Hobart had been averse from the project, said Sarah; but Miss Temple would take no denial.

The Mall, on a summer's evening, was the favourite meeting place of the courtiers. "'Tis now the High-Mall, Madam, the most entertaining time of the evening," says Dorimant (Rochester) in "The Man of Mode".

This escapade, thought Rochester, might be turned to his own advantage, and to that end he took into his confidence our old friend Tom Killigrew. The result of their deliberations will be seen presently.

Towards nine o'clock the two maids-of-honour started on their frolic, masked, and wearing each other's clothes. Their figures were somewhat alike, their faces very unlike; therefore they thought that, when masked, it would be probable that those who recognised the dresses would believe them to be worn by their rightful owners. It should be remembered that, although ladies wore very expensive dresses made of the richest materials at that period, they did not have nearly so many in number as modern ladies. Miss Temple's real object in planning the freak was, if possible, to find Rochester, to walk with him in the character of Miss Hobart, and to give him as unpleasant an interview as possible.

There were fewer people than usual in the Mall; but, to Miss Temple's satisfaction and Miss Hobart's annoyance when these two ladies entered it, Rochester and Killigrew were pacing up and down. Miss Temple walked rapidly towards them. This was not at all what Miss Hobart desired and, touching her friend's arm, she said: "Where are you running to? Have you a mind to engage in conversation with those two devils, and to be exposed to all the insolence and impertinence for which they are so notorious?" But Miss Temple persisted in her intention, and would only yield so far as to consent to Miss Hobart's request to answer no questions that Rochester might put to her.

As the two couples approached each other, Rochester pretended to mistake Miss Hobart for

Miss Temple, and walked off with her, while Killigrew addressed himself to the real Miss Temple, feigned great satisfaction at meeting "Miss Hobart," and begged for a short conversation with her upon a very private matter.

At this point the true Miss Hobart, having secured Rochester for herself and left Miss Temple in the hands of Killigrew, congratulated herself upon her judicious management, while Miss Temple was bitterly annoyed at the failure of her plot.

When Killigrew had contrived to keep Miss Temple standing still until Rochester and Miss Hobart were well out of hearing, he began:—

"In the name of God, Hobart, what did you mean by railing so fiercely against Lord Rochester to Miss Temple? You know him to be one of the most honourable men at Court. What do you think would become of you, if he knew that you made Miss Temple believe herself to be the lady reviled in a certain song, which you know as well as I do was directed against the clumsy Miss Price, more than a year before the fair Temple was heard of at Court! Be not surprised at my knowledge of the matter, but pay attention to what I am about to tell you out of pure friendship."

Killigrew then spoke, as if to Miss Hobart, in such a manner as to convey to Miss Temple the impression that Miss Hobart was in reality not a "Miss" at all, but a youth in the disguise of a woman; that he was known to be deeply in love

with Miss Temple, and that jealousy alone had prompted him to malign and blacken the character of Rochester to the object of his affections. As Miss Hobart was a very demonstrative young lady, and, when she wished to ingratiate herself with an acquaintance, made an ostentatious exhibition of affection by means of energetic embraces and kisses, poor Miss Temple, who had had many experiences of her effusive blandishments, was terribly alarmed.

“Were I in your situation,” Killigrew continued, “I would endeavour to reconcile Lord Rochester and Miss Temple. Once more I recommend you to take care that your attempts to mislead her innocency, in order to blast his honour, may not come to his knowledge; and do not estrange from her a man who tenderly loves her, and whose probity is so great, that he would not even suffer his eyes to wander towards her except virtuously.”

Miss Temple was speechless with horror at what she had just heard; and perceiving that his words had had the desired effect, Killigrew made a bow and left her. Instead of rejoining Miss Hobart, Miss Temple hurried off alone to her rooms at St. James's Palace.

On seeing her going away by herself, Miss Hobart suspected mischief and feared lest Killigrew might have told her dupe more than it would be convenient for her to know. Accordingly she determined to go straight to Miss Temple's quarters, and with eager caresses and soft words to regain her confidence, if indeed that were possible.

Miss Temple on reaching her apartments went to her bedroom, and, without sending for her maid, flung off the now loathsome garments, which she imagined to belong to, and to have been worn by, a man. She was about to begin an entirely fresh toilet, when the door opened at her back, and in an instant she found herself clasped in the warm and demonstrative embraces of Miss Hobart.

Imagining herself to be in the clutches of a man, with a piercing scream she gave Miss Hobart a push which sent her reeling, and eventually on to her back upon the floor, and then the terrified Miss Temple yelled for help, calling, as Grammont tells us, "both heaven and earth to her assistance".

The first person to respond to these cries for succour was the governess, Sarah's aunt, who, having been duly warned by Rochester as to the part she might have to play, began to lecture Miss Hobart with great severity, and threatened to complain of her to the duchess. This confirmed Miss Temple in her mistaken notions respecting the sex of Miss Hobart.

The tables, however, were turned, for instead of the governess complaining to the duchess of Miss Hobart, Miss Hobart complained to the duchess of the governess, who was forthwith dismissed, to find, as will presently be shown, a temporary home elsewhere. Miss Temple feared too much for her own reputation, after having been on such intimate terms with Miss Hobart, to say a word that might lead to

the discovery of what she believed to be that lady's sex : and she contented herself with allowing it to be supposed that her own sudden coldness towards her former friend was the result of some ordinary quarrel.

Miss Temple's one wish now, was to have an interview with Rochester in order to apologise for her apparently rude behaviour to him. This, perhaps fortunately for her, was not to be. The reason shall be explained.

The art of the jesters employed by the great men of old, lay in approaching as nearly as possible to the limit of their master's endurance. When they exceeded that limit, they were whipped, or even dismissed from service, after their parti-coloured shirts had been dragged over their heads.

Now Rochester was an amateur jester who never could resist the temptation of saying, or, if inclined, of writing and circulating, any scurrilous nonsense that happened to come into his head ; however imprudent its wording, however inopportune its occasion, however exalted its subject, and however injurious the probable consequences to himself. The result, as might have been expected, was that he occasionally received orders to absent himself from the court.

When Miss Temple sought to see Rochester and to effect a reconciliation, the king had just sent him into banishment for some such misdemeanour, and the exile had gone to his country home, taking with him for consolation the pretty

Sarah and her aunt, who, as we have seen, had fallen into disgrace through endeavouring to serve him. He amused himself during his banishment by training Sarah for the stage, and eventually he succeeded in getting her an appointment among the king's comedians, whereby, says Grammont, "the public was obliged to him for the prettiest, but, at the same time, the worst actress in the kingdom".

It might be supposed that, during Rochester's enforced absence, Miss Temple would have languished in morbid misery at the long delay in clearing away the unhappy misunderstanding between herself and that spritely earl, and that she would have been mentally starving for the literary nourishment which she had so much enjoyed in his society.

If this were a work of fiction, she should certainly be made so to do, but as it is one of fact, at least so far as the gossiping records of the long past can be regarded as fact, the unromantic truth must be confessed that she consoled herself with the dry conversation and serious flirtations of the solemn Sir Charles Lyttleton, in spite of Miss Hobart's warnings that his speeches were "as many lectures". It must also be confessed that before very long she married Lyttleton, to spend her days, as Miss Hobart had suggested, in "casting up the weekly bills of housekeeping and in darning old napkins". It is stated that she thenceforward lived almost entirely in the country and had thirteen children.

Sic transit gloria—

CHAPTER XI.

ROCHESTER'S temporary exiles do not appear to have damped his spirits. Indeed, of the two, the king suffered more from these exiles than the exile himself, for, boy as Rochester was, no one else had such a power of flattering his Majesty under a veil of satire, or of so often giving the king an opportunity of making a joke, by skilfully laying himself out as a butt for the royal wit. In short, during the absence of Rochester, Charles II. appears to have imagined himself with

No wit to flatter left of all his store !
No fool to laugh at, which he valued more.¹

Therefore when Rochester considered that the king must be about tired of being without him, he came to London in order to be within reach on the earliest summons. On this as on many subsequent occasions of a similar nature, he lived under a disguise, advising a confidential friend where to find him at a moment's notice in case the king should send for him. So cleverly would he make himself up as a porter, a beggar, or a mountebank, that, says Bishop

¹ Pope's *Epistle to Bathurst*.

Burnet, "his nearest friends could not have known him". The bishop also furnishes us with the edifying information that Rochester occasionally adopted such disguises with the object of "following some mean amours, which for the variety of them he affected".

On the occasion with which we are now dealing, when he arrived in London, he took up his abode in the city under a feigned name, disguised as a man of business; and he contrived to obtain introductions, under his disguise and his pseudonym, to several merchants and wealthy tradesmen, thinking that it would be a refreshing experience to live for a time in a society where, as Grammont observes, "politeness indeed is not so much cultivated as at Court; but where pleasure, luxury, and abundance reign with less confusion and more sincerity".

At that period the London merchants lived in the city, and for the most part, at their places of business. John Evelyn (26th Sept., 1672) describes the house of a sheriff of London in the Old Jewry, built "at excessive cost. The cedar dining-roome is painted with the historie of the Gyants' War." Another city magnate spent the then very large sum of £4,000 on the furniture of his house. Fragments of rich carving and noble staircases in city houses, now diverted to other purposes than domestic dwellings, still testify to the luxuriousness of the London merchants of the seventeenth century. On their dress, again, the city merchants and their

wives not only spent much money, but, up to a certain point, imitated in it the gay colours and the rich materials worn at Whitehall. The court vice of gambling, again, was almost as prevalent in the city.

There are ignorant people who appear to labour under the impression that self-made *nouveaux riches* are not only new individually, but also as an institution. There could scarcely be a greater historical error. To point to the Doges of Venice, or to the princely family of the Medici of Florence, would alone be sufficient to refute it. But in this country also there were many city men of wealth and power in the long past. So important did certain noblemen of high position consider it to be popular with such as these in the seventeenth century, that they purposely built their own dwelling-houses in the heart of the city.

It may be that the distinction between the aristocracy and men of trade was then drawn more abruptly than it is at present; but not so abruptly as some may suppose. Even in a story which will have to be told later in connection with Rochester, casual mention will be made of a well-known courtier, afterwards a peer, dining with a city man in the neighbourhood of Tower Street. There were many instances in the seventeenth century, again, of the younger branches of ancient and distinguished families putting their sons into trade, and even into shops. Two cases occur to the memory of the writer, without any reference to books or manu-

scripts. In one the business chosen was that of a bookseller, in the other that of a goldsmith. It is true that the goldsmiths of that period were practically bankers; but they were goldsmiths in the modern acceptation of the word as well.

It was then the fashion for courtiers to go often to the Guildhall and to dine with the Lord Mayor. Pepys gives an account (29th Sept., 1663) of such a banquet, which was said to have cost between £700 and £800. "Under every salt there was a bill of fare," but only the mayors and the lords of the Privy Council had napkins or *knives*. The guests went to the buttery before dinner and there drank wine in preparation for the meal. The dinner itself began at one o'clock. Pepys sat at the merchant strangers' table. There were ten dishes, or courses, and there was "plenty of wine of all sorts". The plates were wooden and were never changed throughout the dinner; nor, apparently, were the drinking cups, which were of earthenware.

The city people were delighted with the disguised Rochester. The aldermen welcomed the entertaining young man of business to their banquets, invited him to their private homes and presented him to their wives, who were yet more charmed by him than the husbands. The well-to-do shopkeepers were no less enchanted with his society, and he became the pampered pet of the back-parlour.

When in conversation with the tradesmen, Rochester declaimed against the Government and

became, or seemed to become, infuriated as he enlarged upon the gross injustice whereby the industrious poor were made to pay for "the curst extravagances of the Court," the nobility, and the country gentry. When in the society of their wives, he railed against the scandal of the king's mistresses: he vowed that the city ladies were far more beautiful than the women of fashion and the favourites at the court, and he expressed his astonishment that "Whitehall was not consumed by fire from heaven, since such rakes as Rochester, Killigrew and Sydney were suffered there, fellows who had the impudence to assert that all married men in the city were cuckolds, and all their wives painted".¹

In order to appreciate how welcome such remarks of Rochester's must have been to the burgesses, it should be remembered that there was then a very strong feeling against both the king and his courtiers in the city. Sir John Reresby writes of dining "with the Lord Mayor of London, one of the faction, where some reflection being cast upon the Court, I answered it the best I could". And he afterwards states that "a great fanatic and oppressor of the Court being tried for high treason at the Guildhall," the sheriffs of London packed the jury so as to insure his acquittal in the face of undeniable evidence, adding "so great was the anti-Court interest then in the City, that the juries would seldom find for the King".

After his intimate acquaintance with the bur-

¹ Grammont.

gesses, Rochester must have had many queer stories of their sayings and opinions to tell for the amusement of the king, when he was restored to favour at court.

So popular did the disguised Rochester become in the city, that, before long, the endless invitations and heavy dinners began to pall upon him. No summons, however, had yet been sent to him from the court: therefore he made up his mind to disappear from mercantile society and to assume an entirely new character.

Presently notices were posted about in London—advertisements were not quite so common in those times as in these—announcing “the recent arrival of a famous foreign doctor, who, by long application and experience, had found out wonderful secrets and infallible remedies”. This practitioner had established himself in Tower Street, and no one who was not in the secret recognised in the foreign physician the versatile Rochester. Professing deep, wide and multifarious knowledge, he offered to reveal the past, to remedy the present, and, by the aid of astrology, to foretell the future. If, among his many accomplishments, he prided himself upon any one speciality, it was his skill in the capacity of a lady’s doctor, a branch of his profession in which he speedily obtained a large and a flourishing practice.

His prospectus is published in at least one edition of his works.¹ It states his hours of receiving

¹J. Tonson’s, 1732.

patients to have been "from three of the clock in the afternoon till eight at night, in his lodgings in Tower Street, next door to the sign of the Black Swan at a Goldsmith's house". He professed to "take away from his fair clients" their "fatness who have overmuch, and to add flesh to those who want it, without the least detriment to their constitutions". "I will also," said he, "preserve and cleanse your teeth, white and round as pearls, fastening them that are loose; your gums shall be kept entire, and red as coral, your lips of the same colour, and soft as you could wish for your lawful kisses." If any other doctor should consider such trifles beneath the notice of learned physicians, "I would boldly answer him," wrote this noble quack, "that I take more glory in preserving God's image in its unblemished beauty upon one good face, than I would do in patching up all the decayed carcasses in the world".

At the same time he was prepared to cure more serious ailments—"gouts, aches, dropsies, consumptions," and lassitude in the limbs and joints, especially the legs. He adds that he seldom fails in his practice of such things as "astrological predictions, physiognomy, divination by dreams and otherwise: but palmistry," says he, "I have not faith in, because there can be no reason alleged for it".

While praising himself, he has a word to say concerning other doctors, that "bastard race of quacks and cheats," and the "empty mistakes of their self-deluded imaginations in physic, chemical

and Galenic, in astrology, physiognomy, palmistry, mathematics, alchemy and even in government itself”.

Although he was successful in his own immediate neighbourhood, for a little time he had few, if any, patients from the west end of the town; but by degrees his reputation reached more aristocratic quarters, if it did not actually reach aristocrats: for the Tower Hill girls informed such of their relatives as happened to be servants in the west end, of the wonderful things done by the foreign doctor.

Rochester recognised among his new patients the lady's-maids of one or two of the maids-of-honour. To these he revealed events of their mistresses' past, which a man in his position, thought they, could not possibly be aware of except through supernatural agencies. The maids repeated what he had told them to their ladies, who in their turn told each other, and before long the doings of the Tower Street doctor and astrologer became the gossip of the court.

One of the lady's-maids who consulted the mysterious physician was Miss Temple's; and he told her most particularly to warn her mistress against being by any chance thrown into the company of a man dressed like a woman. This, of course, put Miss Temple into a fever of terror, and she gave Miss Hobart a wider berth than ever. Then came the maid of his old enemy, Miss Price, when Rochester hinted at most important and far-reaching

astrological omens respecting her mistress's future which he could reveal and would reveal, but only to their subject herself.

When Miss Price heard of this, partly from the desire to learn the prognostication and partly from curiosity to see the Tower Street doctor, of whom all the maids-of-honour had by this time heard much and seen nothing, she persuaded another maid-of-honour, even her friend Miss Jennings, to go thither with her under the disguise of orange girls.

As has already been noticed, Miss Jennings was beautiful, fascinating, and intellectual; better still, she was proof against the dangers of the dissolute court of the period. Both Charles II. and the Duke of York had signally failed to obtain her intimacy. Nor did she hesitate to repel the advances of her royal admirers by bringing them into ridicule. The Duke of York, finding that she avoided his conversation, tried the effect of love-letters. She refused to receive them. He forced them upon her. "Every day," says Grammont, "billets, containing the tenderest expressions and most magnificent promises, were slipped into her pockets or into her muff: this, however, could not be done unperceived; and the malicious little gipsy took care that those who saw them slip in should likewise see them fall out, unperused and unopened; she only shook her muff, or pulled out her handkerchief, as soon as his back was turned, and his billets fell about her like hailstones, and whoever pleased might take them up."



MISS PRICE.

BY SIR PETER LE LY.

As she appears to have been virtuous, it is probable that, in making such a friend as Miss Price, Miss Jennings was ignorant of the woman's real character.

Having dressed themselves as near the characters they wished to feign as they were able, and having provided themselves with baskets of oranges, the two maids-of-honour crossed St. James's Park and took a hackney-coach which was plying for hire in the streets near Whitehall Gate. They then started for Tower Street without any escort.

No one has a more profound respect for ladies than the humble writer of these pages, and it is only with the deepest reverence that he ventures to remark that he has observed one common characteristic of their sex to be a difficulty in leaving well alone. Thus it happened with Miss Price and Miss Jennings. All had prospered so far with their project. In their very risky walk in disguise from St. James's Palace across the park to Whitehall they had been neither recognised nor insulted; they had had the luck to meet with an empty hackney-coach exactly when they wanted one, and now it was unlikely that anything would interrupt their journey to Tower Street.

Suddenly, as they came near to the theatre¹ to

¹ The two principal theatres, at that time, were those of "the King's servants at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, [Patent] granted to K. H. Killigrew, from 1663"; and "the Duke of York's servants" at Lincoln's Inn Fields, the patent being granted to Sir William Davenant from 1662.

which their mistress, the Duchess of York, had gone to spend the evening—by the way one at least of the frolicsome couple had got off the duty of accompanying her thither on the score of illness—Miss Price was struck by the happy idea that it would be a capital joke to go into the theatre and sell oranges to the courtiers, before the very eyes of the duchess, without being recognised. In the twentieth century lords and gentlemen-in-waiting do not usually suck oranges at theatres; but apparently such was their custom in the seventeenth, when the orange was by no means a common or inexpensive fruit. The notorious Nell Gwynn had been at one time an orange girl, and had sold oranges in the king's theatre. Elsewhere, too, orange girls seem to have held their own. The character said to be intended for Rochester in one of Etheredge's plays, when finishing his toilet, and in his dressing-gown and slippers, sends his servant to bring up to his room an orange woman whom he sees through his window, and then he cheapens her wares and gossips with her.

Miss Jennings was delighted at the suggestion to invade the theatre; so they alighted, paid off their hackney-coachman, and, threading their way among the carriages in front of the theatre, they entered it with the orange baskets (with which it will be remembered they had provided themselves) on their arms. Miss Price went up to the handsome Sydney and offered him an orange; but he



MISS JENNINGS.

BY S. VERELET.

had only just arrived and was so busily engaged in arranging the curls of his wig, that, to her intense annoyance and disappointment, he did not take the slightest notice of her.

Quite different was the behaviour of Tom Killigrew. He was only too anxious to talk to Miss Price. His effusive garrulity, however, vexed her even more than Sydney's contemptuous silence; for his conversation was not respecting her own charms, but was entirely about those of her companion orange girl, Miss Jennings, whom he told her he greatly admired. If, said he, addressing her as if she were a venerable duenna, she would bring the pretty young orange girl to his rooms on the following day, he would give her a sum of money worth many baskets full of oranges. Then he went to Miss Jennings, chucked her under the chin, and became altogether unpleasantly familiar. Miss Jennings' horror and Miss Price's pique were so great that they hurried from the theatre and engaged the first hackney-coach they could find.

Miss Jennings felt so outraged that she wished to go straight home; but, when the frisky Miss Price had taunted her with cowardice and having no courage to finish a frolic upon which she had entered with eagerness, she reluctantly consented to continue the expedition to the house of the celebrated foreign doctor.

The progress of the two adventurers was uneventful until they were within half a street of the

house where Rochester masqueraded as a physician, when an unfortunate incident befell them.

It so happened that Henry Brouncker, afterwards Lord Brouncker, a gentleman of the bedchamber to the Duke of York, happened to have been dining with a city man that day ; he had dined well, and he was just starting for home when he beheld a hackney-coach conveying the very unusual freight of a couple of orange girls, one of whom was exceedingly pretty, pulling up near his late host's door. There must be something queer about this, thought he, and he went up to the carriage to get a nearer view.

Now Brouncker, says Grammont, "was not young, nor was his person agreeable ; however, with a great deal of wit, he had a violent passion for the fairer sex". And Clarendon describes Brouncker as "a man throughout his whole life notorious for nothing but the highest degree of impudence".

Shortly after the time at which this personage figures in our story, he is reported to have prevented the English fleet from pursuing the Dutch, by giving an order, which he pretended to have received from the Duke of York (whom he had in reality just left fast asleep in his cabin), that the British ships were to slacken sail ; and he is said to have resorted to this trick purely from cowardice, in order to escape a naval battle. Some time afterwards, when this circumstance was noticed in Parliament, Brouncker was in consequence expelled from the House of

Commons. Pepys calls him "a pestilent rogue, an atheist, that would have sold his King and country for 6d. almost".

Brouncker was valiant towards women, if not towards men, as Miss Price was well aware; therefore when she recognised his well-known and, at that moment, somewhat vinous features leering in at the carriage window, she looked another way, and called out to the coachman to drive on quickly. In about another thirty yards they stopped again and got out of the carriage, as they were close to their destination. "Brouncker, Love's squire,"¹ as Andrew Marvell calls him, had followed them, and at once perceived the cloven foot, for he noticed, as the orange girls stepped out of the carriage, that their shoes and stockings were very different from those usually worn by women of that class.

Miss Price and Miss Jennings were in the act of handing their baskets of oranges to the coachman, and asking him to take care of them during their interview with the doctor, when to their consternation Brouncker thrust himself between them and addressed them in a very free and easy tone. Although he suspected them to be ladies in disguise, he did not at first recognise them; but, disconcerted by his sudden and undesired appearance, they forgot for the moment to make any attempt to conceal their identity by assumed voices or manners,

¹ *Poems*, vol. ii., p. 94.

and Brouncker very soon discovered who they were. He gave them, however, no sign whatever of recognition. As Hamilton puts it, "the old fox possessed a wonderful command of temper on such occasions, and, having teased them a little longer to remove all suspicions, he quitted them".

Much unnerved by their adventures, the two maids-of-honour now thought that nothing further could frustrate their visit to the doctor and astrologer. In this they were mistaken. Brouncker had scarcely disappeared when they with their hackney-coach were surrounded by a crowd of boys who stormed the carriage in order to possess themselves of the oranges. The coachman showed fight, and, hearing the uproar, people came running from all directions to see the fun. This was the last straw. The two ladies could hold out no longer. Having ordered the coachman to throw all the oranges among the rabble, and thus rid them of their persecutors, they scrambled back into their hackney-coach and told the man to drive off as fast as he could to St. James's Palace.

Thus the wished-for consultation with the quack doctor was denied them just as they had seemed to be on the very point of obtaining it; and thereby Rochester lost an opportunity from which he would not only have derived an immense amount of amusement but would have worked out a scandal for the entertainment of many future generations. In short, the world had a loss when Miss Price and Miss

Jennings ordered that hackney-coachman to drive back to St. James's Palace.

For a time Brouncker kept his knowledge of this escapade a secret ; and with an object. Fully expecting, as did many others, that Miss Jennings would be married to his great friend Jermyn, he had the amiable intention of allowing the marriage to take place, and of afterwards telling Jermyn all about an adventure of his wife's which had, to say the least of it, a very ugly look. Indeed the charitable Brouncker had put the very worst possible construction upon Miss Jennings's visit in disguise to a low part of the city.

Before long, however, Miss Jennings gave Jermyn his dismissal, emphasising it by addressing to him a satirical parody of one of Ovid's Epistles, which was circulated about the court and made Jermyn the laughing-stock of Whitehall. After that Brouncker had no longer any need to withhold his good story.

When repeated it naturally lost nothing by the telling, and, after being still further exaggerated by other mouths, it became a wondrous piece of scandal. In due course the Duchess of York heard of it ; but she good-naturedly forgave the delinquents, and Miss Jennings had the sense to join in the laugh at her own discomfiture. The adventure was a very trivial one in her very adventurous life. When it presently leaked out that Rochester had been the quack doctor, to see whom the two maids-of-honour

had gone through so many vicissitudes, the joke was prodigiously improved, and Rochester was practically the only person connected with the affair who came out of it with flying colours.

It would appear from Pepys' diary that this prank was played in February, 1665. About three months later Rochester's name was again in everybody's mouth, though for a very different reason.

CHAPTER XII.

ROCHESTER was far from rich, for an earl, and the court of Charles II. cannot have been a place well suited for the saving of money by a poor peer. To say nothing of the gambling there prevalent, the cost of the wardrobe necessary for a courtier must have been enormous, with the then extravagant and constantly changing fashions.

And to give some idea of the cost of male attire, it may be worthy of mention that, although Mrs. Pepys was a woman of good family, while her husband was the son of a tailor, her dress seems, at least during one month, to have cost less than her husband's; and dangerous as it would be to infer too much from a single instance such as this, it is quite possible that the clothes of men may have cost more than those of ladies at the court of Charles II. On 30th November, 1663, Pepys lamented that his monthly balance was unsatisfactory. "It hath chiefly arisen," he writes, "from layings-out in clothes for myself and wife; *viz.*, for her about £12 and for myself £55, or thereabouts." And no wonder, since he writes about his silver-laced coat, his silk suit, his white suit, his black camlet coat with silver buttons,

his velvet clothes, his black cloth suit trimmed with scarlet ribbons, and several others.

But, whatever the cause, while still a mere youth, Rochester was in great debt, and he conceived the project of marrying an heiress, nor was he long in selecting one for that purpose.

Among the ladies then received at court was Elizabeth, daughter and sole heiress of a certain John Mallet, of Enmere, in Somerset. The Mallets, or Malets, had come to England with William the Conqueror, and they obtained possession of Enmere or Enmore, a property situated a few miles north of Taunton, soon after the Conquest.¹

A contemporary writer describes Elizabeth Mallet as a "great beauty"—an assertion unsupported by her portrait—and well off. He tells us that she would have £2,500 a year, and that her mother already allowed her the use of the greater part of it. Grammont calls her "la triste héritière"; but whether he thereby referred to her appearance, to her disposition, or to her subsequent career, is uncertain. She had several suitors. At one time she was engaged to Lord Hinchinbroke,² an engagement broken off in a quarrel just before the date of which we are going to treat; and among her other admirers were Lord John Butler, Lord Herbert and Sir Francis Popham.

¹ Collinson's *History of Somersetshire*, p. 90 *et seq.*

² Eldest son of the celebrated admiral, the Earl of Sandwich.

It would seem that she did not respond to the advances of Rochester as readily as he desired. For this reason he begged the king to urge his suit with the young lady, and his Majesty had often done so, although without success. Rochester, thinking perhaps that "faint heart never won fair lady," determined to try stronger measures, and, fair means having failed, he tried foul, by plotting to kidnap her.

Nor were forcible abductions of heiresses very rare in those times. In a newsletter of February, 1680 (Newdigate MSS.), there is an account of five men and a woman going to Lady Tirrell's house in Buckinghamshire, pretending to have a warrant to search the house for a priest; but in reality with the intention of carrying off its heiress. They were overpowered, taken to jail and indicted for burglary; but the grand jury only found a bill for riot. On another occasion, a certain Captain Clifford employed men to seize an especially wealthy heiress as she was crossing Hounslow Heath. They succeeded in their attempt and took her to Calais. The captain was fined £1,000 to the king and £1,500 to the mother of the heiress. Again, Elizabeth, widow of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and co-heiress of Lord Chandos, was forcibly carried off by another captain, a Captain Sarsfield, who was assisted in the kidnapping by a friend. After the abduction, Sarsfield and his friend quarrelled and fought, when each ran the other through the body with his sword.

There were then scoundrels, and those not only of low birth, who had sunk so low through crime or misfortune as to make it their profession to act as hired bullies for any one who would employ and pay them. They would kidnap either an heiress or the poor girl of a rich man's fancy; they would waylay and maltreat the enemy of their employer; they would even commit murder provided their fees were high enough. In short, they were prepared to do any dirty work, amorous, revengeful or political, for money. The notorious Colonel Blood¹ was a specimen of what may be termed the highest class of the lowest ruffian of this description.

On Friday, 26th May, 1665, Elizabeth Mallet had been to supper at Whitehall, with the celebrated beauty, Miss Stewart, afterwards Duchess of Richmond, but at that time the reigning favourite of Charles II. Miss Elizabeth drove home in her coach, under the protection of her grandfather, Lord Hawley of Donamore. As they were passing Charing Cross, then a comparatively quiet and little-frequented spot at night, the coach was suddenly surrounded both by men on horseback and by men on foot. In spite of old Lord Hawley's rage and remonstrance, his screaming granddaughter was forcibly dragged out of her coach, and carried to another drawn by six horses. In that carriage two

¹ A long and interesting account of this particular ruffian may be found in the Notes to Sir Walter Scott's *Peveril of the Peak*.

women were waiting to act as jailers to the captured heiress.

Away galloped the six horses with Rochester's hired coach and stolen heiress, and away went the irate grandfather—not in pursuit, but in exactly the opposite direction—to Whitehall hard by, to inform the king of the outrage.

Charles was furious. He had shown great kindness to Rochester by his endeavours to induce the fair Elizabeth to marry his young favourite: but it was quite another matter for a man of Rochester's ill-repute to lay violent hands upon a lady a few minutes after she had been the guest of a maid-of-honour, and that the most favoured, in his own royal palace. The king, without a moment's hesitation, ordered armed men to start in pursuit of the delinquent.

The horsemen who went on the chase were fortunate in ascertaining the direction taken by Rochester in prosecution of his villainous plot: and he would seem to have waited until he heard that his prey had been secured, before starting to seize it; for his pursuers cannot have been very far behind him, since they caught him up and captured him fifteen miles from London, on the Oxford Road, at Uxbridge.

It must have been a great and an unpleasant surprise to Rochester, to be arrested by the royal officials, and to find that, through attempting to take a prisoner, he himself had been made one. He was

dealt with very summarily, being taken straight back to London, where King Charles, in a violent passion, sent him to the Tower.

Whether Elizabeth Mallet was as angry as was the king concerning the kidnapping is not revealed, but, for the time being, she sufficiently broke off all relations with Rochester to raise sanguine expectations in the minds of her other admirers. Lady Sandwich, Lord Hinchingbroke's mother, was so hopeful that Elizabeth might now be induced to renew her engagement to her son, that, although terribly afraid of the plague then raging in London, and most anxious to go into the country to be out of its reach, she risked its infection and remained in London in order to see the king, and to induce him to espouse her son's cause with the heiress as warmly as he had formerly espoused that of Rochester. This managing mamma does not seem to have been afraid of Rochester's rhyming libels, which many women would have dreaded almost more than the plague.

As to the "triste héritière" herself, she was soon disporting herself as usual among her former admirers. Rochester had been liberated from the Tower; but so far as the heiress was concerned, he had tried force and had failed; so he was put out of court. Hinchingbroke was in little better case. His tiff with his lady-love was not yet made up, and both he and she were still pretending to be angry with each other. On either side their relatives

were urging them to make a match, which both asserted they did not desire.

Lord John Butler was in the full swing of violent courtship to the fair Elizabeth. Lord Herbert meanwhile was spoiling his chance by arrogance, simply stating his intention that she should be his : while Sir Francis Popham, on the contrary, ruined his prospects by being too obsequious, vowing that he was prepared to do or to suffer anything in this world to obtain the smiles of his divinity.

Thus were matters standing when the year which had begun with fun, frolic and flirtation was evidently going to end much more seriously. War was declared against Holland. The very courtiers had something else to do than to play mad freaks, and much to talk about besides royal and other scandals. The king himself was anxious and care-worn and in no humour for joking. In June, his brother, the Duke of York, fought a successful battle against Van Tromp, in which the Dutch were said to have lost four admirals and 7,000 men in killed, wounded and prisoners. All this became the talk of the court and a war-fever raged among the courtiers.

In the autumn, Lord Sandwich, the father of the above-mentioned Lord Hinchinbroke, took command of the fleet as soon as the damaged ships had been repaired, and he sailed against some Dutch merchantmen who were known to be on their way back to Holland from India and Smyrna. These

ships were avoiding the English men-of-war in the Channel, by going round the north of Ireland and Scotland and skirting the coast of Norway.

The news of this expedition aroused the ardour of Rochester, and he obtained a commission on board the *Revenge* under Captain Seddiman, with the hope of seeing active service. It is but too notorious that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries no knowledge of seamanship was considered necessary for a naval officer. Macaulay says (chap. iii.) that, in the reign of Charles II., "any lad of noble birth, any dissolute courtier for whom one of the King's mistresses would speak a word, might hope that a ship of the line and with it the lives of hundreds of brave men would be committed to his care". He might have added that, less than a hundred years earlier, the grandee, whom the King of Spain placed in command of the Spanish Armada, had begged, and begged in vain, to be relieved from his appointment, on the ground that he knew nothing whatever about ships, and that when on board them he was always sea-sick.

Rochester had not very long to wait for an action after embarking. As the Dutch fleet was sailing down the North Sea, its admiral observed an English fleet bearing down upon it, and he put into the neutral harbour of Bergen, in Norway. The King of Denmark had consented to connive at the capture of the Dutch ships by the English, on condition that he should receive a moiety of the

spoils. The governor of the fort of Bergen, however, had not yet received full instructions from Copenhagen when the English fleet made its attack ; and, in revenge for certain damages done to the town by the English guns, he allowed his fort to open a very destructive fire upon Sandwich's ships. One of them was sunk, others, cutting their cables, ran out to sea, and the attempt was abandoned.

In this battle young Rochester gained the distinction now known as being "mentioned in despatches," although it may be that then, as possibly in later times, mention often meant an unknown and very indefinite quantity ; and that it was an honour not invariably escaped by titled warriors. Here, however, was an encouraging change in Rochester ! As with many another youth, when he had had no special calling or occupation, he had got into bad ways : now that he had an object and an interest, he showed energy in their pursuit and distinguished himself in their accomplishment. His friends had surely every right to say : "He has sown his wild oats ; he will now become a celebrated warrior and a valuable servant to his country". We shall see !

Shortly after the quasi-defeat of the British ships at Bergen, the Dutch fleet, when escorting its own merchantmen to Holland, was scattered by a storm. Sandwich, who was lying within observation, seized this opportunity for attack, captured eight Dutch men-of-war, two of the richest of the Indiamen, and some twenty other ships. The first naval expedition,

therefore, in which Rochester took part returned with honour after experiencing varied fortunes.

Dr. Burnet records a curious incident that took place during this expedition. According to this story, Rochester told him that two friends of his, who were in his ship, had a presentiment that they would never return alive to England. Rochester made an agreement with one of them, "not without ceremonies of religion, that if either of them died he should appear, and give the other notice of the future state, if there was any". In the battle of Bergen both of his friends showed remarkable courage until near the end of the action, when one of them began to tremble so violently as scarcely to be able to stand upright, and the other ran up to him and supported him in his arms. Just at that moment a cannon-ball went through both their bodies, as they stood in each other's embrace: one was killed on the spot, the other died within an hour. Thus the presentiment came true, but no ghost appeared to Rochester, who inferred from this that although there were such things as supernatural presentiments, there were no such things as heaven and hell.

Shortly after his return from this expedition, Rochester received £750 as a free gift from the king.¹ For what reason this handsome present of a sum equal to perhaps two or three thousands of our money was made to Rochester by his impecunious

¹ *S. P., Dom., Charles II.*, vol. cxxxv., 3.

monarch does not appear. In the March of the following year, he received a further royal favour by being sworn in as a gentleman of the bedchamber.¹

This office afforded its bearer exceptional opportunities of becoming intimate with the king, opportunities of which Rochester availed himself to the full. The gentleman of the bedchamber in waiting, after undressing in a room set apart for the purpose, was conducted by the page of the king's closet into the king's bedroom, where a bed was prepared for him. When the king had gone to bed, the gentleman of the bedchamber did the same; but not always to sleep. Lord Ailesbury, who held that office, says in his *Memoirs* (vol. i., p. 87): "Several circumstances made the lodging very uneasy—the great grate being filled with Scotch coal that burnt all night, a dozen dogs that came to our bed, and several pendulums, that struck at the half quarter, and not all going alike, it was a continual chiming. The King being used to it, it was habitual." He adds presently: "We had liberty to go to his bedside in the morning before anybody came in, and might discourse with him at pleasure and ask of him anything".

At about the same time that he became a gentleman of the bedchamber, Rochester temporarily exchanged naval for military service, and at that period in England, as elsewhere, warriors frequently

¹ *S. P., Dom., Charles II.*, vol. cli., 89.

served in both the army and the navy ; for there is a state paper¹ granting a commission to a quartermaster "in the Earl of Rochester's troop of horse".

War, however, again took place at sea. On the 25th of July, 1666, fashionable loungers in St. James's Park heard distant and unfamiliar sounds, which were at first mistaken for thunder. They turned out to be caused by the booming of the guns of the English and Dutch fleets in an engagement at the mouth of the Thames. The sounds were faint but distinct, and they produced considerable alarm. The gay courtiers and the beauties at Whitehall began to make preparations for flight, in case of need.

Once more Rochester went to sea, and on board the ship of Sir Edward Spragge.² In this naval war, again, the English fleet met alternately with defeat and victory.

During one action, Spragge being dissatisfied with the behaviour of one of his captains, wished to send some one to carry orders to this officer. No one volunteered for the forlorn hope of crossing in a small boat from Spragge's ship to that of the captain in question, under a hail of shot, until Rochester offered himself for that dangerous service. His offer was accepted, he delivered the message and returned in safety to receive very high praise for

¹ *S. P., Dom., Charles II.*, vol. clxv., 14.

² *Ibid.*, vol. clxiii., 142.

his bravery from his admiral. This is the noblest action recorded of Rochester. It is to be regretted that he afterwards lost his reputation for courage. But of that more in due course.

Both the Dutch and the English fleets were eventually scattered by a terrific storm, which, to England, was even more disastrous inland than at sea, for a fire which began at a baker's oven in London, fanned by the wind, spread with amazing rapidity until it developed into that appalling conflagration celebrated in English history as The Great Fire of London, an event thus described by John Evelyn: "Oh the miserable and calamitous spectacle! Such as haply the world had not seen the like since the foundation of it, nor be outdon till the universal conflagration of it. All the skie was of a fiery aspect, like the top of a burning oven, and the light seene above 40 miles round about for many nights. God grant mine eyes may never behold the like, who now saw above 10,000 houses all in one flame."¹

It is but fair to the memory of Charles II. to state that he worked hard and showed considerable courage in personally directing and assisting in the efforts to subdue the fire. So bravely and with such presence of mind did he conduct himself under these very trying conditions that, if his youth and early manhood had been spent under different circumstances, it is fair to assume he might have been a very different man.

¹ *Diary*, 3rd September, 1666.

Our business in these pages, however, is not with serious matters or great events, but with the trivialities in manners, customs, dress, amusements and literature which made up the useless lives of the literary rakes.

Possibly the sobering effects of a year in which the sound of an enemy's guns could be heard at his palace, and a great part of his city had been burned to the ground, may for the moment have induced Charles II. to meditate upon the emptiness of earthly vanities; for it was immediately after those significant warnings that he made up his mind to bring about a sweeping reform in the matter of male attire.

Even from an artistic point of view, tailoring was open to improvement at this period of his reign, and for that matter, so also were dressmaking and millinery. In short there had been a steady and decided deterioration, owing chiefly to exaggeration and wanton extravagance, in the clothes of both sexes since the Restoration.

The present writer is sitting opposite a picture of the court of Charles II. by Palamedes. It represents the king and a number of his courtiers and ladies either shortly before the Restoration or immediately after it. The colours and materials of the men's clothes are rich and handsome; yet, for the times, and considering the male attire which many of them must have seen at the court of Versailles, their dress cannot be called extravagant;

and their hair, if too long and too curly, is at least their own.

As to the ladies in the same picture, their dresses are graceful and free from flounces, they are mostly plain and whole-coloured, and their chief decoration consists in lawn and lace on the breasts and sleeves, with rich, but not excessive, gold or silver embroidery down the fronts of the skirts. Their hair, also, is dressed in good taste. A somewhat similar description might be given of Janssen's famous picture of the Ball at the Hague.

Now let us look at a picture of the same court, painted a few years later. What a change we find! The men are in preposterous wigs, rising high above the tops of their heads and falling in ridiculous ringlets below their shoulders. Their jackets and their doublets are so slashed and cut about that their shirts are protruding in all sorts of unexpected places: laces, fringes, tassels, bows and embroidery are here, there, and everywhere upon their persons; and wherever it is possible to tie some ribbon, there ribbon is tied.

The dresses of the ladies are more changed still. They are all festoons and flounces; and they are gathered and looped up with jewels. The bodices, to put it mildly, are cut very low; and more may be learned on this point from a contemporary tract, entitled *A Just and Seasonable Reprehension of Naked Breasts and Shoulders*.

Paint and patches now became the fashion.

Evelyn observes, "The women began to paint themselves, formerly a most ignominious thing, and only used by prostitutes"; and Pepys frequently notices the fashion of wearing patches on the face, a custom which he gradually came to admire, and at last even to tolerate in his wife.

Altogether it will be observed that, with extravagance came decadence in the style of the dress of both sexes in the court of Charles II. The picturesque gave place to the monstrous, good taste was supplanted by vulgarity; and fashions which began as adornments, ended in disfigurements. Nor was ultra-dressing limited to the young, the beautiful, or the handsome. In a prologue to one of Rochester's plays, the speaker

Desired the ladies of maturer years,
 If some remaining spark their heart enrages,
 At home to quench their embers with their pages.
 Pert, patched and painted, there to spend their days,
 Nor crowd the front of boxes at new plays :
 Advised young sighing fools to be more pressing,
 And fops of forty to give over-dressing.

Masculine attire had attained to such a pitch of extravagance in 1666 that Charles II., possibly instigated as has been suggested by the grave events of the preceding months, determined to introduce a new fashion altogether, and one of severe simplicity. Moreover it was never to be changed, but to continue the fashion for ever and ever. Evelyn thus describes it :¹ "His Majesty put himself solemnly into the

¹ *Evelyn's Diary*, 18th October, 1666.

Eastern fashion of vest, changing doublet, stiff collar, bands and cloak, into a comely vest" (Pepys describes it as "a long cassock close to the body"), "after the Persian mode, with girdle or straps, and stockings and garters into buckles of which some were set with precious stones, resolving never to alter it, and to leave the French mode, which had hitherto obtained to our great expense and reproach".

Many of the courtiers then made bets with the king that he would not persist in this good resolution. They had not long to wait before winning their wagers.

News of Charles II.'s reformed attire reached the French court, where it became the source of immense amusement and ridicule. Louis XIV. said he would soon put an end to the King of England's new fashion; and this he very effectually proceeded to do by adopting the reformed English court dress as the livery of his servants, which Pepys calls "the greatest indignity ever done by one prince to another".

Be that as it may, the result was that Charles II.'s fashion, which was to last for ever, lasted only two months, and dress at Whitehall became more French and more extravagant than ever.

But let us be fair! Clothing at the court of Charles II. was not entirely a matter of external show and glitter. Even at that frivolous court, a doctrine now esteemed in this country as next to godliness, if not indeed considerably before it,

namely that flannel should be worn next the skin, was already established. The French ambassador declared¹ that he owed his life to the advice of Charles II. to wear underclothes made of "a plain sort of woollen stuff, woven in the cottages of Wales . . . nothing could be more warm, comfortable, or hygienic". And we read in Sir John Reresby's *Memoirs*, that Charles II. warned him against wearing thin soles to his boots in the country.

Sometimes, again, the dresses of the ladies tended in a direction exactly opposite to that of excessive effeminacy and any undue development of female finery; and what we are about to quote in proof of this assertion will show that there is nothing new under the sun—even in the present aping of male dress by females. "Walking in the galleries at Whitehall," says a diarist, in 1666, "I find the ladies of honour dressed in their riding garbs, with coats and doublets with deep skirts, just for all the world like mine, and buttoned their doublets up to the breast, with periwigs and with hats; so that, only for a long petticoat dragging under their men's coats, nobody could take them for women in any point whatever, which was an odd sight, and a sight did not please me." What would he have said if he could have known that even the "long petticoat dragging" would be discarded? Men's clothes were not the only male appurtenances

¹ *French State Papers, Courtin to Pomponne*, tome cxx., fol. 271, Autograph P.S.

adopted by the ladies at the court of Charles II. During the panic caused by the so-called Popish plot, it became the fashion for ladies to carry loaded pistols in their muffs.¹ Those must indeed have been desperately dangerous times in London!

¹“The Countess of Shaftesbury had always in her muff little pocket pistols, loaden, to defend her from the papists, being instructed by her lord; and most timorous ladies followed her fashion” (Bruce’s *Memoirs*, vol. i., p. 29).

CHAPTER XIII.

WE noticed that when an opportunity for energetic action presented itself, Rochester abandoned his idle, profligate life to avail himself of it, and appeared to have turned over a new leaf. Reformation of life is a splendid achievement ; but it is of little permanent value without perseverance : and perseverance—at any rate perseverance in well-doing—is a virtue in which Rochester was singularly deficient.

Although only eighteen years old, he appears to have ended his naval and military career in 1666. This is the more remarkable because his late captain, Sir Edward Spragge, commanded the squadron of eighteen ships which opposed De Ruyter's advance up the Thames in the following year ; and that year was a notable one in the history of the British navy.

Evelyn describes the alarm caused by that "most audacious enterprise" of the Dutch in "entering the very river with part of their fleet, doing us not only disgrace, but incredible mischief in burning several of our best men-of-war lying at anchor and moored there, and all this through our unaccountable negligence in not setting out our fleet in due time. This alarm caused me . . . to send away my best goods,

plate, etc., from my house to another place. The alarm was so great that it put both Country and City into a panic, fear, and consternation, such as I hope I shall never see more; everybody was flying, none knew why or whither."

Pepys, as secretary to the Admiralty, went down to Gravesend, where he was able to hear the firing of the guns "most distinctly". He was told that "people do complain of Sir Edward Spragge that he hath not done extraordinary". Pepys seems to have shared Evelyn's uneasiness during this anxious crisis respecting his personal property. On 19th June, 1667, he wrote: "My wife did give me so bad an account of her and my father's method in burying of our gold, that made me mad, and she herself is not pleased with it, she believing that my sister knows of it. My father and she did it on Sunday, when they were gone to Church, in open daylight, in the midst of the garden, where, for ought they knew, many eyes might see them." A hole in the ground, it may be observed, was the bank of the period.

Happily the enemy never looted London. Nevertheless, Londoners were considerably impoverished indirectly by the presence of the Dutch fleet at the mouth of the Thames, through its influence upon the price of coal. Nearly all the coal that came to London at that period was brought by sea, indeed mineral coal used to be called sea-coal for that reason. The navy was not strong enough to send escorts for the coal ships coming from Newcastle to London, and

it was even feared that the Dutch would go to Newcastle and burn the colliers' ships there. So scarce had coal become in London that on the 26th of June, 1667, it rose to about £4 per ton. This would be equivalent to from £12 to £16 of our money.

There is no record of Rochester's having accompanied Spragge upon the occasion just mentioned, and it may be pretty safely supposed that the dissolute youth was only too glad to break off his connection with wars, warriors and weapons, in order to devote his whole attention to wit, wine, and women, in spite of his own lines:—

Women and men of wit are dangerous tools,
And ever fatal to admiring fools.¹

A very important event in his life was about to take place. *La donna e mobile* and, although that match-making mother, Lady Sandwich, thought she had reasons for believing Miss Mallet to be relenting and intending to bestow herself and her thousands upon Lord Hinchinbroke, the rich heiress had her own ideas on the subject. To the astonishment of everybody, within two years of her ill-treatment by Rochester, she married him. Of how all this was brought about there are unhappily no records. Possibly he may have appeared to her eyes in a new light when he returned home in the character of a hero from the wars.

Pepys thus describes her appearance at a London

¹ *Satire against Mankind.*



LA TRISTE HÉRITIÈRE (COUNTESS OF ROCHESTER).

theatre after her marriage :¹ “Soon as dined, my wife and I out to the Duke’s playhouse, and there saw ‘Heraclius,’ an excellent play, to my extraordinary content ; and the more from the house being very full, and great company : among others, Mrs. Stewart, very fine, with her locks done up with puffes, as my wife calls them : and several other great ladies had their hair so, though I do not like it ; but my wife do mightily—but it is only because she sees it is the fashion. Here I saw my Lord Rochester and his lady, Mrs. Mallett, who hath after all this ado married him, and as I hear some say in the pit, it is a great act of charity, for he hath no estate. But it was pleasant to see how everybody rose up when my Lord John Butler, the Duke of Ormond’s son, came into the pit towards the end of the play, who was a servant [*i.e.*, suitor] to Mrs. Mallett, and now smiled upon her, and she on him.”

Whether her smiling upon men with whom she had formerly flirted awakened the jealousy of her husband does not appear ; but it is pretty clear that her husband did much to awaken the jealousy of his wife, and it is unquestionable that their unhappiness was to a great extent owing to the misdemeanours of Rochester. Few things are more certain than that he was a faithless husband.

“La triste héritière,” however, must have been changeable, uncertain and unstable. As we have seen, she was on and off with one admirer after

¹ *Diary*, 4th February, 1667.

another: then she refused to have anything to do with Rochester, and was furious at his attempt to run away with her, yet eventually she married him; and, after becoming a Catholic, she left the Catholic Church and again became an Anglican.

In his *Life of Rochester* Burnet states that "during his whole [last] sickness, he expressed so much tenderness and true kindness to his lady, that, as it easily effaced the remembrance of everything wherein he had been in fault formerly, so it drew from her the most passionate care and concern for him that was possible".

We may as well dispose of Rochester's family life here by saying that he had four children, a son who died young and unmarried, and three daughters, one of whom married a son of her mother's old flame, Lord Hinchinbroke, and is said to have inherited a large share of her father's wit.

One disagreeable habit of Rochester's may have added to the prevailing discord between himself and his wife, namely that of swearing. It is improbable that the ladies of those times liked being sworn at any better than the ladies of these.¹ During his fatal illness, Bishop Burnet congratulated him on having so far overcome this habit as to use no

¹ "Frank and I have been playing at husband and wife," said a little girl

"How did you do that?" inquired a friend.

"I told him that his conduct was disgraceful. Then he said 'Damn,' and I left the room."

—*Punch* (but quotation unverified).

worse word than "damn". Evelyn corroborates Burnet's account of his blasphemy, by describing him in his *Diary* as "A very profane wit".

Besides Bishop Burnet, another clergyman made gentle mention of Rochester's imperfections. His chaplain, in his funeral sermon, after admitting that he had occasionally deviated from the strait and narrow path, and that he had been, in short, a great sinner, proceeded to say :—

"And truly none but one so great in parts could be so. His sins were like his parts, from which they sprang, all of them high and extraordinary. He seemed to affect something singular and paradoxical in his impieties, as well as in his writings, above the reach and thought of other men."

It is something to be distinguished for anything—even for high and extraordinary sins; and any celebrity may be better than none—even a celebrity for paradoxical impieties above the reach and thought of other men!

Rochester appears to have occasionally regretted his evil life; but, says Burnet, he "was very much ashamed of his former practices, rather because he had made himself a beast, and had brought pain and sickness on his body, and had suffered much in his reputation, than from any deep sense of a Supreme Being or another state". Now and then he endeavoured to overcome his bad habits "by the study of philosophy, and he had not a few no less solid than pleasant notions concerning the folly and mad-

ness of vice. But he confessed he had no remorse for his past actions against God, but only as injuries to himself and to mankind." And, whenever he came in the way of a pretty woman, his pleasant notions were forgotten.

Little, if anything, more will be said of Lady Rochester in these pages, indeed little is known about her; but this may be a fitting opportunity for noticing an incident said by Rochester to have taken place in the house of her mother, Lady Warre.¹

Rochester told Burnet that Lady Warre's chaplain dreamed that he should die on a certain date. For the moment, the chaplain was somewhat worried by the idea; but thinking it a mere ordinary dream, he put it out of his mind and almost forgot all about it.

He was unpleasantly reminded of the date the evening before the day foretold, by observing that the supper party at Lady Warre's consisted of thirteen people. Others also noticed the unlucky number, and one of the young ladies present playfully told the chaplain that he was the thirteenth person. Then his dream flashed upon his memory, and he was rather upset; but, when he described it to the rest of the party, everybody laughed the matter off; because of all who were present he seemed to be in the best health.

The next morning he was found dead in his bed.

¹ Unton, daughter of Lord Hawley, married first, John Mallet (by whom she had Elizabeth, wife of Lord Rochester), and secondly Francis Warre, who was created a baronet in 1673. Both her husbands were Somersetshire men.

When Rochester was not more than twenty-three or twenty-four, he had a quarrel with another young earl of about his own age, the already noticed John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, afterwards Duke of Buckingham. Mulgrave gives a lengthy account of the incident, in his own short autobiography,¹ observing that it "had somewhat in it singular enough to be related," which is true enough.

Like Rochester, Mulgrave had travelled on the Continent, and had been with the fleet in the war against the Dutch; Mulgrave resembled Rochester, again, in his love of rhyming and rioting.

Before the unhappy quarrel about to be described, Rochester and Mulgrave would appear to have been on terms of intimate friendship, if one may judge from the "Epistolary Essay from Lord Rochester to Lord Mulgrave upon their Mutual Poems," beginning:—

Dear friend, I hear this town doth so abound
In saucy censurers, that faults are found
With what of late we, in poetic rage
Bestowing, threw away on the dull age.

The conversion of these two "dear friends"

¹ *The Works of John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham*, 1753, vol. ii., p. 6 *et seq.*, from which the following description of the duel is taken. The conversations have been put somewhat freely into the first instead of the third person. In the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and the *Biographia Britannica* he is called Duke of Buckinghamshire; but both Burke, in his *Extinct Peerages*, and Horace Walpole, in his *Royal and Noble Authors*, call him Duke of Buckingham.

into bitter enemies came about after this fashion. It happened to reach the ears of Mulgrave that Rochester had said something about him "which, according to his custom, was very malicious". Intensely annoyed, Mulgrave sent "a very mettled friend," a certain Colonel Aston, to Rochester, to demand an apology. Rochester denied having ever used the words attributed to him, and Mulgrave fully believed him. Nevertheless, as it had become common gossip that Rochester had made one of his witty and pungent remarks to the detriment of Mulgrave, Mulgrave, although believing Rochester to be perfectly innocent, "foolishly thought," to use his own words, that his honour required him to send Rochester a challenge.

It may seem to us absurd to send a challenge under such circumstances: but duels were expected on the smallest pretexts in those days. For instance, one Sunday in York Minster when Sir John Brook stood up at the psalms, Sir John Reresby took his cushion and put it on his own seat. Brook was "disturbed" at this treatment; and Reresby stayed at home on the following day, momentarily expecting a challenge. None coming, he sent a friend to inquire from Brook whether he desired satisfaction about the cushion, when Brook pretended that he had only been "disturbed" at losing the opportunity of the pleasure of gratuitously offering the cushion to Reresby by Reresby's appropriating it uninvited. That was all!

When Mulgrave's "very mettled friend" called upon Rochester, Rochester accepted the challenge and elected "to fight on horseback, a way in England a little unusual, but it was his part to choose".

Fearing that the news of the approaching duel might leak out, and that the principals might be arrested, Mulgrave and Colonel Aston, his second, would not sleep in London the night before it was to take place, but rode out of the town to the, then, very quiet little suburban village of Knightsbridge, where they slept at an inn. Even at this retired spot, they feared for their safety, as they thought they might be taken for highwaymen "skulking in an old inn for one night: but," says Mulgrave, "this I suppose the people of that house were used to, and so took no notice of us, but liked us the better". Knightsbridge would be a convenient place from which to proceed for the purpose of attacking travellers as they left London for the country, and it was probably frequented by outlaws who had taken to the road. The following morning, when Mulgrave reached the place appointed for the duel, Rochester was waiting for him; but, instead of being accompanied by Colonel Porter, the second who he had assured Colonel Aston would be there to act for him, he had brought an "errant life-guard-man," whatever that might have been—possibly a "gentleman of the life-guards," as troopers in the Life Guard regiments

were called on parade.¹ The Life Guards then consisted chiefly of cavaliers, apparently of some social standing; for, according to Macaulay (vol. i., chap. iii.), a trooper in that regiment received four shillings a day. Allowing for the difference in the value of money, this would be about equal to the pay of a captain in our times.

Colonel Aston began to make objections. First, he strongly objected to the unknown second appointed by Rochester to act with him—perhaps, as was very common at that period, the seconds were to fight as well as the principals, and Aston may have thought that the “errant life-guard-man” looked an ugly foe; and secondly, he protested against Rochester being mounted upon a remarkably fine horse, while

¹ There were also Foot Guards in the reign of Charles II. The Coldstream regiment was formed by General Monk in 1659-60; and in July, 1678, Evelyn wrote: “Now were brought into service a new sort of soldiers called *Grenadiers*, who were dexterous in flinging hand grenades, every one having a pouch full; they had furred caps with coped crowns like Janizaries, which made them look very fierce, and some had long hoods hanging down behind as we picture fools. Their clothing being likewise piebald yellow and red.” A picture of a Grenadier in one of these hoods or fool’s caps is to be found in Colonel Ross of Bladensburg’s *History of the Coldstream Guards*, p. 18.

De Laune, in his *Present State of London* (1681), says: “The Guards of Horse are in number 600 men, well armed and equipped; who are generally young gentlemen of considerable families, who are there made fit for military commands”. This looks as if the troopers afterwards became officers in other regiments. In those days in the Life Guards cornets ranked as majors in the army, lieutenants as lieutenant-colonels, and captains as full colonels.

Mulgrave was riding a small hack. To make such an objection Aston had little right, for it had been clearly his duty, as Mulgrave's second, to see to the proper mounting of his principal beforehand, in a duel arranged to be fought on horseback; perhaps for the objection to the change of the second, there might be rather more to be said; but Rochester, so far as can be ascertained, yielded from sheer good nature to the objection to his horse and consented to fight on foot.

Then the whole party made for the nearest field to fight the duel, and the two principals rode together and chatted familiarly over the affair in a manner altogether contrary to the modern etiquette of duelling. Rochester then said:—

“My reason for wishing to fight on horseback was that I am so weak from a certain distemper that I am really not fit to fight at all, and much less on foot”.

Mulgrave was greatly surprised, for after his return from the wars Rochester had had as great a reputation for courage as any man in England. Although Mulgrave had no ill-feeling towards his adversary, since he was satisfied that Rochester had never uttered the words that gave rise to the quarrel, he replied:—

“Let me take the liberty of pointing out that if we return to town without fighting we shall both become the laughing-stock of London: so may I advise you, for your sake, as well as my own, to

proceed with the duel: for, you see, if it does not take place, I shall be obliged in self-defence to lay the blame upon you?"

"I am content to submit to that," said Rochester. "And I believe you to be too honourable a man to desire to fight any one in so weak a condition as I am in at present."

"If you put it in that way, my hands are tied," said Mulgrave; "and, if you will allow me to call our seconds, and let them be witnesses to the whole transaction, the affair shall be at an end."

To this Rochester agreed, and the two parties separated, to all appearance perfectly satisfied and pleased with each other.

"When we returned to London," says Mulgrave, "we found it full of this quarrel, upon our being absent so long; and therefore Mr. Aston thought himself obliged to write down every word and circumstance of the whole matter, in order to spread everywhere the true reason of our returning without having fought, which being never in the least either contradicted or resented by the Lord Rochester, entirely ruined his reputation as to courage (of which I was really sorry to be the occasion), though nobody has still a greater as to wit; which supported him pretty well in the world, notwithstanding some more accidents of the same kind, that never fail to succeed one another, when once people know a man's weakness."

Was all this sufficient "to ruin the reputation"

of Rochester “as to courage”? The falling through of the duel would appear to have been as much Mulgrave’s fault as Rochester’s: for, so far as Mulgrave’s story tells us, it would seem that the duel would have taken place without any demur on the part of Rochester, if Mulgrave had kept to the original terms of the arrangements for it.

Again, after formally agreeing that the duel should be abandoned, was Mulgrave justified in energetically spreading about the defence of his own courage in the affair, and in allowing the public to believe that Rochester had been glad to escape fighting, not on account of his invalided condition, but through abject fear?

Not content with permitting the world to regard Rochester as a coward, Mulgrave afterwards lampooned him, in his *Essay on Satire*, with a very malicious spirit:—

Last enter R——r of sprightly wit,
 Yet not for converse safe, or business fit.
 Mean in each action, lewd in every limb,
 Manners themselves are mischievous in him.
 A gloss he gives to every foul design,
 And we must own his very vices shine.
 But of this odd ill-nature to mankind
 Himself alone the ill effects will find.
 So envious hags in vain their witchcraft try,
 Yet for intended mischief justly die.
 For what a Bessus has he always lived,
 And his own kickings notably contrived?
 For (there’s the folly that’s still mixed with fear)
 Cowards more blows than any heroes bear.
 Of fighting sparks fame may her pleasure say;

But 'tis a bolder thing to run away.
 The world may well forgive him all his ill,
 For every fault does prove his penance still.
 Easily he falls into some dang'rous noose ;
 And then as meanly labours to get loose :
 A life so infamous is better quitting,
 Spent in base injuring and low submitting.

These lines were attributed to another hand, as will presently be shown, but before entering upon that matter and its unhappy consequences, let us notice that Mulgrave was not the only versifier who taunted Rochester concerning this very ill-conditioned duel. In the second bout of a rhyming battle with Rochester, our acquaintance, Sir Carr Scrope, wrote :—

Thou can'st hurt no man's fame with thy ill word ;
 Thy pen is full as harmless as thy sword.

His contemporary, St. Evremond,¹ again makes an imputation upon his courage, when he says : “ Under the Earl of Sandwich and Sir Edward Spragge, he gave uncommon proof of his intrepid soul ; however, he afterwards lost that character in private broils ”. As to whether Sir Walter Scott had any grounds for making Buckingham say, in *Peveiril of the Peak*, “ It is mere fright, like Rochester's when he crept into the bass viol to hide himself from Sir Dermot O'Cleaver,” the present writer is not in a position to express an opinion.

¹ *Memoirs of Rochester.*

Pepys, nevertheless,¹ tells a story of Rochester which shows that he was not invariably a coward, and that he was not always afraid of resenting an affront. It shall be given here in Pepys' own words :—

“The King dining yesterday at the Dutch Ambassador's, after dinner they drank and were pretty merry ; and, amongst the rest of the King's company there was that worthy fellow, my lord of Rochester, and Tom Killigrew, whose mirth and raillery offended the former so much, that he did give Tom Killigrew a box on the ear in the King's presence,² which do give much offence to the people here at Court, to see how cheap the King makes himself, and the more, for that the King hath not only passed by the thing, and pardoned it to Rochester already, but this very morning the King did publicly walk up and down, and Rochester I saw with him as free as ever, to the King's everlasting shame, to have so idle a rogue his companion. How Tom Killigrew takes it I do not hear.”

This took place before Rochester's affair with Mulgrave : and possibly after going out to meet the latter antagonist and being subsequently lampooned by him, his courage, like Bob Acres's, may have “oozed out of his fingers' ends”.

¹ *Diary*, 17th February, 1669.

² As stated in an early part of this volume, Rochester's father, also, once gave “an eminent person” a box on the ear.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Mulgrave's *Essay on Satire*, with the aforementioned bitter attack on Rochester, first appeared, it was generally believed to be the work of Dryden : and it was Dryden, not Mulgrave, who had to bear the brunt of Rochester's ire on this account. Mulgrave himself refers to this in his *Essay on Poetry*, when he says of Dryden :—

Though praised and punished for another's rhymes,
His own deserved as great applause sometimes.

A good deal remains to be said about Rochester's relations to Dryden, before the details of his revenge for this imagined insult by the great poet can fitly be described.

Rochester liked to pose, not only as a poet, but also as a patron of poets. He wished to be esteemed as a great critic, as well as a great artist. No fault can be found with him for his appreciation of the merits of John Dryden.¹ Not that Dryden was in need of powerful patrons. Dryden was some sixteen years older than Rochester ; and before Rochester took him up he had already been intimate with the

¹ Burnet (*History of Kg. Ch. II.*) somewhat unfairly calls Dryden "a monster of immodesty and of impurity of all sorts".

Duke of Ormonde, Lord Clifford, the Duke of Newcastle, Lord Buckhurst and Sir Charles Sedley, all of whom enjoyed the society of Dryden in that little literary coterie which the poet himself describes as spending its evenings in conversation, neither too grave nor too gay, always agreeable, and often instructive, the satire being neither unduly pungent to its subjects who were present, nor unfairly injurious to its subjects who were absent.

For Dryden's advancement with the king, however, a considerable amount of mediation was necessary; for, like Waller, Dryden had written poems in honour of Oliver Cromwell before the change of Government had made it his interest to belaud King Charles II. It may be that Rochester's good words on Dryden's behalf did much towards inducing the king to appoint Dryden as his poet laureate; and it is certain from the fulsome flattery bestowed by Dryden upon Rochester in his dedication to Rochester of his *Mariage à la Mode*, that the poet was to some extent indebted to the peer for fortune as well as for reputation. In this dedication, curiously enough, Dryden unconsciously uttered a singularly successful prophecy; for, after observing that Rochester had been praising some of his poems, he wrote: "Your Lordship has but another step to make, and from the patron of wit you may become its tyrant, and oppress our little reputations with more ease than you now protect them"; which was exactly what Rochester very soon did.

So pleased was Rochester with this public acknowledgment of his patronage, that he substantially rewarded it, whereupon Dryden wrote a letter to Rochester expressing his shame at being so much overpaid for a dedication full of shortcomings, of which he was painfully conscious. As he soon discovered, he had no cause to be over-scrupulous on this point.

Unfortunately for Dryden, Rochester shared the fickleness which he often satirised in the sex to which he was so devoted. Possibly, esteeming himself the best poet of his age, Rochester may have felt jealous of the celebrity of Dryden. It is still more likely that he may have been nettled at observing the increasing friendship between Dryden and his foe, Mulgrave; and if he fancied that Dryden preferred his enemy to himself, this need be no matter for surprise.

Nell Gwynn,¹ when living with Rochester,² was a profound admirer of Dryden. As an actress she had taken parts in several of his plays; and, having

¹ Of Charles II.'s relations to Nell Gwynn, reference is thus made in *Royal Resolutions*, a poem attributed to Andrew Marvell:—

“I'll wholly abandon all my publick affairs,
And pass all my time with buffoons and players,
And saunter to Nell when I should be at prayers”.

² It is stated that she lived for some time with Rochester, in an editorial addition to Mrs. Jameson's notice of Nell Gwynn, in her *Beauties of the Court of Charles II.* The author, however, has found no other evidence in support of the statement.

heard that Dryden was greatly annoyed because the Lord Chamberlain had objected to one of his pieces, she mentioned the matter to Rochester, and begged him to use his influence in getting the objection removed. Instead of consenting to her request, Rochester did exactly the opposite, and left no stone unturned in his endeavours to get Dryden discredited at court. He actually went so far as to induce the king to patronise Dryden's greatest enemy, Elkanah Settle, contriving that that very inferior writer's play, "The Empress of Morocco," should be performed before the court, in the place of Dryden's rejected piece.

On hearing of this, Dryden was exceedingly angry. He took the ill-advised step of writing a pamphlet in abuse of "The Empress of Morocco" and its author, whom, in a parody of Settle's affected alliteration, he thus apostrophised :—

Thy lines a mess of rhyming nonsense yield,
 A senseless tale with flattering fustian filled.
 No grain of sense does in one line appear,
 Thy words big bulks of boisterous bombast bear.

So high was Rochester's reputation as a wit and a critic, that he had no difficulty in making Settle the fashion, and in putting Dryden out of it; at least for the moment. Of course, such work as Dryden's could not long remain in disrepute, but its temporary dishonour was deeply galling to its talented author.

Settle was just beginning, like Dryden before

him, to feel shame at the excessive kindness of Rochester, when his turn came to be dethroned. Somehow or other he also incurred the jealousy of Rochester, who forthwith proceeded to put him as much out of favour at court as Dryden.

The lords and ladies at Whitehall wanted to act in a masque. As Dryden had then been made poet laureate, it was his duty to compose the pieces for such occasions; but Rochester herein perceived an opportunity of mortifying not only Dryden but also Settle. He persuaded the king to allow "Starch Johnny Crowne," a dramatist thus nicknamed on account of the invariable stiffness of his cravat, to write a masque for the purpose. The result was his "Callisto," the deficiencies of which were to a great extent concealed by the splendour of the scenery, the magnificence of the dresses, and the beauty of the actresses.

"Callisto," whatever its demerits, was superior to many of the plays acted before the court of Charles II. Crowne states that his aim and object was "to write a clean, decent and inoffensive play," and to introduce nothing that "would be unfit for Princesses and ladies to speak, and a Court to hear". That particular court was accustomed to hear, and indeed its princesses and its ladies were in the habit of speaking, many things neither clean, decent nor inoffensive; but this fact does not lessen the merits of Crowne's good intentions.

In "Callisto," Jupiter is made to tempt the virtue

of Chastity, in the person of one of the characters, without success; and finally he exclaims to that character:—

My wretched self, as to my crimes is due,
I doom to part eternally from you.
And to the pain of heav'nly joy I go;
But yet I must not leave you here below.
In pity to the world, I must remove
Those fatal eyes, out of the reach of love.
Love must not here those killing darts retain
To wound and torture gods, and murder men.

When Crowne had risen to popularity through the success of "Callisto," he, in his turn, became the object of Rochester's dislike and envy; and Rochester, as usual, had a rival in readiness to supplant the subject of his jealousy. He persuaded the king and the Duke of York that Crowne was very inferior to a rising writer named Otway, and in saying this he spoke the truth. Johnson calls Otway's name one of the first in the English drama. Before long Rochester had a slap at Crowne, coupled with Dryden, in verse. He admitted that Dryden's

plays, embroidered up and down
With wit and learning, justly please the town,

but—

Yet having this allowed, the heavy mass,
That stuffs up his loose volumes, must not pass:
For by that rule, I might as well admit
Crowne's tedious scenes, for poetry and wit.

—*Tenth Satyr.*

Otway, in his preface to his "Don Carlos," owns his obligations to Rochester. "I can never enough

acknowledge," says he, "the unspeakable obligations I received from the Earl of Rochester, who, far above what I am ever able to deserve of him, seemed almost to make it his business to establish it in the good opinion of the King and His Royal Highness; from both of which I have since received confirmation of their good-liking of it, and encouragement to proceed. And it is to him I must in all gratitude confess, I owe the greatest part of my good success in this, and on whose indulgency I extremely build my hopes of a next." Acting upon this confidence, he dedicated one of his works in the following year to his "good and generous patron," the Earl of Rochester. Before very long, the good and generous patron began to suspect that Otway's celebrity was eclipsing his own, and he thus elegantly lampooned him in his *Trial of the Poets*:—¹

Tom Otway came next. Tom Shadwell's dear zany,
 And swears for heroics he writes best of any.
 "Don Carlos" his pockets so amply had filled,
 That his mange was quite cured, and his lice were all killed.
 But Apollo had seen his face on the stage,
 And prudently did not think fit to engage
 The scum of a playhouse for the prop of an age.

The mention of the skin trouble and the parasites was in ridicule of the miserable condition of want and penury in which Otway had returned from a military expedition to Flanders. Lord Plymouth, a natural son of Charles II., had obtained for the poet a com-

¹ This is assuming that *The Trial of the Poets* was written by Rochester.

mission as cornet in a troop of cavalry for that expedition. Otway had not distinguished himself as a soldier and he had returned to England in rags, if not in disgrace. Although not of sufficient rank to be a courtier, Otway was a boon companion to the literary rakes of the court; and for this he was well fitted, having been very immoral, as indeed were some of his plays. In spite of the indecency of his works they exhibit considerable power. Petted by great men at one time of his life, he died in neglect and poverty.

The two discarded favourites, Settle and Otway, tired of abusing Dryden, and, both abused by Rochester, began to abuse each other. After a fierce altercation, Otway challenged Settle to a duel; but Settle's courage seems to have failed him.

Rochester ridiculed three of his former protégés in his *Allusion to the Tenth Satire of the First Book of Horace* :—

And may not I have leave impartially
 To search and censure Dryden's works and try
 If those gross faults his choice pen doth commit
 Proceed from want of judgment or of wit?
 Or if his lumpish fancy doth refuse
 Spirit and grace to his loose slattern muse?
 Five hundred verses every morning writ,
 Prove him no more a poet than a wit.

— even that talent merits, in some sort
 That can divert the rabble and the Court :
 Which blundering Settle never could obtain,
 And puzzling Otway labours at in vain.

Dryden never retaliated upon Rochester in verse, but there can be little doubt that he had Rochester in his mind when, in his preface to *All for Love*, he exclaimed, ostensibly concerning literary amateurs of wealth and high position in general :—

“ And is not this a wretched affectation not to be contented with what fortune hath done for them, and sit down quietly with their estates, but they must call their wits in question, and needlessly expose their nakedness to public view. Not considering that they are not to expect the same approbation from sober men which they have found from their flatterers after the third bottle. . . . A poet is not pleased, because he is not rich ; and the rich are discontented, because the poets will not admit them of their number. Thus the case is hard with writers ; if they succeed not, they must starve ; and if they do, some malicious satire is prepared to level them, for daring to please without leave. But while they are so eager to destroy the fame of others, their ambition is manifest in their concernment ; some poem of their own is to be produced and the slaves are to be laid flat with their faces on the ground, that the monarch may appear in the greater majesty.”

It became more clear at whom Dryden was aiming in the above quotation, when he described such writers as poor imitators of Horace, who parody his good Latin in bad English.

Dryden, even more unmistakably still, had a hit at Rochester after his death, when, in his *Essay*

on *Satire*, addressed to Buckhurst, he referred to Rochester's lines, in the *Allusion to Horace's Tenth Satire*—

For pointed satire I would Buckhurst choose :
The best good man, with the worst-natured muse,

by saying : " An author of your own quality (whose ashes I will not disturb), has given you all the commendation which his self-sufficiency could afford to any man ! 'The best good man, with the worst-natured muse' . . . an insolent, sparing and invidious panegyric : where good nature, the most god-like commendation of a man, is only attributed to your person, and denied to your writings."

It was long after Rochester's sudden aversion to Dryden and his patronage of rival poets that the incident occurred of Mulgrave's attack upon Rochester in the *Essay on Satire* and Dryden's reputation of being its author. As was but natural, Rochester was very angry, and, believing Dryden to be the aggressor, he determined to punish him.

Of Mulgrave's *Essay on Satire*, he wrote to his friend Henry Savile : " The author is apparently Mr. Dr[yden], his patron, Lord M[ulgrave], having a panegyric in the midst ". Referring to it again in another letter, he wrote : " You wrote me word that I'm out of favour with a certain poet, whom I have admired for the disproportion of him and his attributes. He is a rarity which I cannot but be fond of, as one would be of a hog that could fiddle or a singing owl. If he falls on me at the blunt,

which is his very good weapon in wit, I will forgive him if you please : *and leave the repartee to Black Will with a cudgel.*"

It is but fair to Rochester to say that, in what followed, he is supposed to have been instigated or at least encouraged by the Duchess of Portsmouth and the Duchess of Cleveland, both of whom, like Rochester himself, had been satirised in the offensive verses. The measures adopted by Rochester were the hiring of three ruffians with orders to waylay and soundly thrash the person of his Majesty's poet laureate on a dark winter's night. These mercenary bullies faithfully fulfilled their mission. On 19th December, 1679, Londoners read in a newspaper :—

" Last night, Mr. Dryden, the famous poet, going from a coffee-house in Covent Garden, was set upon by three persons unknown to him, and so rudely by them handled, that, as it is said, his life is in no small danger. It is thought to have been the effect of private grudge rather than upon the too common design of unlawful gain ; an unkind trespass by which not only he himself, but the commonwealth of learning may receive an injury."

If anything could prove Rochester's cowardice, it was the hiring of these roughs to injure a man whom he believed to have written verses accusing him of that very characteristic. Rochester did not live a particularly exemplary life ; but this was about the most dastardly of all his recorded actions.

Although the actual perpetrators of this cowardly outrage were unknown, the "wits" and the "gossips" at the coffee-houses did not hesitate for a moment to assign its authorship to that lampooned lampooner, the versatile Rochester; and, to their shame be it spoken, their sympathy appears to have been, as, in such cases, sympathy is too often wont to be, with the kicker, and not with the kicked.

Dryden very wisely attempted no retaliation except by means of the law, and that he endeavoured to set in motion by obtaining the royal consent to the insertion in the *London Gazette*, No. 1472, 29th December, 1679, of the following proclamation:—

"Whereas John Dreyden, Esq. was on Thursday the 18th inst., at night, barbarously assaulted and wounded in Rose Street, in Covent Garden, by diverse men unknown: if any person shall make discovery of the said offenders to the said Mr. Dreyden, or to any Justice of the Peace, he shall not only receive the fifty pounds, which is deposited in the hands of Mr. Blanchard, goldsmith, next door to Temple Bar, for the said purpose, but if he be a principal or an accessory in the said fact, His Majesty is graciously pleased to promise him his pardon for the same".

This reward was never claimed, nor were the criminals ever brought to justice; but Dryden became the ridicule, and Rochester the hero, of what was called the "Rose-alley ambushade". It

is greatly to the discredit of the wits and the period that Rochester should have been honoured for the cowardly action of hiring three scoundrels to waylay and ill-treat a helpless man in the dark.

Another discarded favourite of Rochester's, who was once a rival of Dryden's, seems to have been the only writer to defend Dryden. Otway wrote :—

Poets in honour of the truth should write
 With the same spirit brave men for it fight,
 And though against him causeless hatreds rise,
 And daily where he goes, of late, he spies
 The scowl of sullen and revengeful eyes ;
 'Tis what he knows with much contempt to bear,
 And serves a cause too good to let him fear :
 He fears no poison from incensed drab,
 No ruffian's five-foot sword, nor rascal's stab ;
 Nor any other snares of mischief laid,
Not a Rose-alley cudgel ambuscade :
 From any private cause where malice reigns,
 Or general pique all blockheads have to brains.

Although the instigator of the "Rose-alley cudgel ambuscade" suffered no retaliation from the hands of Dryden, fate was at his heels ; for within a few months of the perpetration of this outrage Rochester was dead.

Enough, however, of Rochester's protégés and his ill-treatment of them. The remainder of this chapter shall be devoted to a consideration of one influence, and that a very potent one, which must be reckoned with in studying the literary rakes of the court of Charles II., namely, that of the female favourites of the king.

Lady Castlemaine, afterwards Duchess of Cleveland, was exceedingly coarse, and it is most improbable that she had any taste for literature; but she encouraged Dryden in the early days of his literary career; she was a woman with a very strong character, and was herself so far witty as to have a remarkable gift of repartee. Although the king was for long her abject slave, he sometimes turned round upon her. On one occasion (July, 1667), Pepys reports that the king and Lady Castlemaine “parted with very foul words, the King calling her a jade that meddled with things she had nothing to do with at all: and she calling him fool”. Her influence over him was so great that she is said to have been able to obtain any appointment she chose for her friends; and she is reputed to have made the bishops of her time.

The very antipodes to this high-born dame was Nell Gwynn, a woman of very low birth. Nell Gwynn exerted her influence on behalf of both Dryden and Butler, the author of *Hudibras*. Nor was she only a patroness of wit. Her own was natural, original, and sparkling! In her many *bon mots* the felicity of her expression was equalled by its charm. A patroness of poets and playwrights, she had been herself a successful actress.

“La belle Stewart,” afterwards Duchess of Richmond, if not clever, was cunning. Probably Nat Lee, the poet, exaggerated when he wrote to her, “your extraordinary love of heroic poetry is

not the least argument to show the greatness of your mind"; for Grammont declares that "it was hardly possible for a woman to have less wit, or more beauty". He says that her taste for frivolous amusements, although perfectly natural and unaffected, was only fitted for a girl of twelve or thirteen; that with the exception of not playing with a doll, she was in every respect a child; that blind man's buff was her favourite amusement, and that while the deepest play was going on in her rooms, she would amuse herself by building houses with playing-cards, surrounded by eager gallants, who handed her the materials. Some authorities have stated that this famous beauty never lost her virtue,¹ a question into which we need not put ourselves to the trouble of inquiring.

The notorious Duchess of Portsmouth was more charming than intellectual; her letters are like those of an ill-educated servant; her spelling is atrocious; but she was a clever diplomatist, and certainly she seems to have been endowed with an insatiable appreciation of the refinements of luxury, and of the luxuries of art. With all her immorality, there was a refinement, a delicacy, and a charm in her conversation, unsurpassed by that of any other lady, virtuous or vicious, at the court.

As to the Duchess of Mazarin, a letter attributed

¹ For instance see Miss Strickland's *Lives of the Queens of England*, vol. viii., p. 344.

to St. Evremond,¹ in describing a dispute in her presence between two eminent men, testifies to her talents and brilliancy. It says that the duchess "entered upon the particularities, which were told her of the causes of their division, and weighed every little circumstance with such nicety and insight," etc. And it states that when the subject was changed to one of state affairs, she argued with great reason and coolness. Further on the writer of the letter says: "She laughs at those foolish amusements to which others abandon themselves". Her library was a favourite subject of conversation at Whitehall and St. James's; and she was as literary as the most literary of the rakes, so far as a love of books was concerned. When she arrived in London—disguised in male attire,² after her escape from the place in which her husband had immured her—Charles II. fell desperately in love with her. Her victory over the king was so obvious and so complete that the Duchess of Cleveland gave up the battle and retired to France; and the influence of the Duchess of Portsmouth was so evidently killed by that of the new favourite, that Nell Gwynn mockingly put on mourning for it.

Take them all in all, however, it cannot be said that the mistresses of Charles II. were remarkable for their literary tastes. Yet most of them seem to

¹ *Works of St. Evremond*, vol. iii., pp. 172-73.

² Forneron, however, denies this story of her escape to England in a man's clothes.

have had a certain amount of character, some of them exhibited considerable wit, and such as were not witty themselves were at least patronesses of wit in others.

Charles II. had intimate friendships with very many other women than those named. Most of these were not received at court : the great mistresses ignored their existence ; but the king enjoyed their free and easy society in a region known at Whitehall as the Back-Stairs. The society of the Belle Stewart's, Nell Gwynn's, Lady Castlemaine's and the wicked duchesses was respectable in comparison with that of the Back-Stairs clique.¹ For showing these women up the back-stairs to the king's assignation rooms at Whitehall a regularly appointed official, Mistress Chiffinch, received a salary of £1,200 a year.²

The subject is an unpleasant one ; but some notice of the back-stairs—the Back-Stairs with capital letters—the management of the assignations, and the Chaffinch, or Chiffinch, family, is almost necessary to a work dealing with the rakish side of the court of Charles II., even when that rakishness is only considered in relation to its influence upon literature.

The doorless rooms, and the passages connecting a number of small houses and rambling nests of buildings, such as constituted the so-called palace of

¹ Certain portions of the Back-Stairs, however, were within the region socially recognised by the court.

² *Louise de Keroualle*, p. 206.

Whitehall, were highly conducive to the free and easy life which suited the taste of Charles II. There was no saying where the king might not appear at any moment of the day or night.

That monarch loved the informal supper parties of his boon companions. Wood tells us something of these;¹ stating that they generally included Rochester, Dorset, Buckhurst, Rochester's great friend Henry Savile, Tom Killigrew, Henry Grey the King's Cupbearer, and Fleetwood Sheppard. Five out of these seven courtiers were literary. By means of the many aforesaid passages and doorless chambers, mentioned in the *Travels of Cosmo III.*, the king could go to these suppers without attracting notice and without ceremony. Sometimes they took place in the "Lodgings" of the Duchess of Portsmouth, or in those of Nell Gwynn, or of Henry Grey; but very frequently in those of Cheffing, more commonly known as Chiffinch, "near the Back-Stairs".

The male Chiffinch was one of the pages of the bedchamber and keeper of the private closet. He could therefore approach the king when no other official was admitted. But it was understood between the master and the man that this page of the bedchamber was to perform other duties of a much more delicate nature; and in carrying out these duties, as has been already hinted, he was ably

¹ *Ath. Ox.*, vol. ii., p. 1039.

assisted by his wife. Both appear to have received liberal salaries for their work.

In a contemporary lampoon, entitled *Sir Edmund-bury Godfrey's Ghost*, reference is thus made to his duties :—

It happened, in the twilight of the day,
As England's Monarch in his closet lay,
And Chiffinch stepped to fetch the female prey, etc.

Chiffinch was not the only official who performed secret services for the royal family. There was a certain "Matted Gallery at Whitehall," along which there were unholy goings and comings, both on the part of, and on behalf of, the Duke of York. The gentleman who chiefly contrived these confidential affairs for the duke was Mr. Brouncker, whose acquaintance we made on a former occasion.

It has been stated by more than one writer that King Charles hated wit in a woman. Well! He may not have cared for a blue-stocking; but he certainly detested dulness in his companions, whatever their sex; and, as has just been said, the women described above were either witty themselves or patrons of wits, or lovers of the refinements of luxury and art, or, if nothing else, women of strong and masterful will. Their influence, therefore, upon the young courtiers, however evil, would be in the direction of sprightliness, humour and repartee. A lampoon in verse, a coarse and a very personal lampoon too, was much to their taste.

Again, the ladies of the court admired rather by

the king's brother than by the king himself may not have been without their influence upon the courtiers. It may be repeated that the Duke of York was more exacting in respect to the intellects of his lady-loves than was his kingly brother. Lady Denham, Arabella Churchill, Miss Sedley, Lady Bellasys, Miss Hamilton and Miss Jennings were all women of education and refinement. In justice to the two last named, it should be observed that they were proof against his advances.

CHAPTER XV.

THE question presents itself whether the society of women of easy virtue—and there were plenty of such at the court of Charles II.—would, on the whole, be conducive, or otherwise, to the encouragement of literature of any sort. Those who flinch from a brief study of this delicate question, and all young maidens under fifty, should skip the next page or two.

It is far from the wish of the present writer to defend the position of women of bad repute; but he would avoid the error of supposing that they need necessarily be either lascivious, or vulgar, or dull, or coarse, or illiterate. As a contemporary writer has put it: “High æstheticism is compatible with low morality and conversely”.¹ If vice were invariably accompanied by vulgarity, there would be much less wickedness in the world. To the highly educated, vice is infinitely more dangerous when clothed with refinement, grace, gentleness and culture; and mental attractions, as well as physical, have been the medium of the ruin of many “unfortunates”. Vice

¹ The Rev. G. Tyrrell, S.J., in *The Faith of the Millions*, second series, p. 109.

has approached its victims before now under the appearance of charity and even of piety. Indeed there have been "fallen angels" who held strong religious opinions. There is no reason, therefore, for assuming that the immoralities of the favourite ladies of Charles II. would of necessity lead to the discouragement of mental pleasures, or bar the way to the development of literary tastes and efforts.

It should be remembered that they were the paramours of a king who was witty himself and loved wit in others, a king who could endure anything better than to be bored, a king who revelled in repartee and expected his own jokes and sarcasms to be keenly appreciated by his listeners. Surely the mistresses of such a monarch would have little chance of keeping long in his favour unless they were sparkling with humour and thoroughly conversant with the literary trifles that were his pastime. Nell Gwynn would soon have wearied Charles II. had it not been for her readiness in repartee; nor would his highly born favourites have kept up their ascendancy over him for any length of time if their faces had been their only fortunes.

Many of the notorious women of the past have been more remarkable for their mental than for their physical charms; among others, Madame de Maintenon, Madame de Montespan, and, in later times, Lola Montes; and it would be easy to quote much older, indeed very ancient, examples of the possibility of very high refinement in literature and art

co-existing with the lowest depravities of sensuality and vice.

Altogether it looks likely that the free-loving ladies at the court of Charles II. may have had a good deal to do with the moulding of the literary rakes. Judging from his poems, they would seem to have occupied the gallery to which Rochester appealed in much that he wrote; and, if one or other of these ladies was lampooned by that courtier, the ninety and nine, for the moment so far accounted just persons as to be unlampooned, were ever ready to rejoice at the discomfiture of the victim, and to praise the poet who had exposed her to derision.

To go further afield, the condition of a neighbouring court must not be forgotten in a study of Whitehall. Inclination led Charles II. to copy at his own court the manners of Versailles, and, in addition to this, the requirements of his pocket made it his interest to keep on good terms with the French king; for he was not ashamed to be the pensioner of Louis XIV. In the French Foreign Office there is an autograph MS. of Charles II. that runs:—

“I have received from his most Christian Majesty, by the hands of M. Courtin (the French Ambassador in London), the sum of 100,000 crowns, French money, for the second quarter, ending on the last of June and to be deducted from the 400,000 crowns payable at the end of this year.

“Given at Whitehall, Sep. 25, 1676.

“CHARLES R.”

It was therefore to his financial interests to flatter his most Christian Majesty by "Frenchifying" his court, by adopting the fashions and the manners of Paris, and by encouraging the wits of Whitehall in taking for their models the wits of Versailles. While the British soldiers, sailors, and ordinary civilians looked upon France and its inhabitants as their natural enemies, the king and his courtiers prided themselves upon being indistinguishable from Frenchmen.

So far as moral rectitude and its opposite were concerned, there was probably little to choose between the court of Louis XIV. and that of Charles II. From having spent some of his later 'teens at the court of France, Charles was very French in his ideas, tastes and morals. The very contrast between the austerity of his court at Edinburgh, during his brief reign as King of Scotland only, and the laxity of the court at Paris, made the latter doubly attractive to a man of his temperament and disposition: and the libertinism of the French court was the ideal upon which he framed his own at Whitehall.

Among all the Frenchmen in favour at Whitehall none was more popular than Courtin, the French ambassador. When the ladies of Charles II. had all been quarrelling, through the tact of Courtin a more or less lasting peace was made between them. One night he managed to get them all together to supper at the French Embassy, after the theatre,

and he contrived to make it a very lively meal, at which the fun became uproarious. After supper he offered to show the party over the house, and, as they went through the different rooms, he so arranged that the ladies who hated each other most should be locked up together in couples. In their imprisonment they made friends. When he liberated the Duchess of Portsmouth and the Duchess of Mazarin, who had declared that they would never eat bread in the same house, they came out hand-in-hand, laughing merrily, dancing and jumping.¹

The English courtiers took their cue from their king. His contemporaries tell us that he liked nothing better than repeating, over and over again, anecdotes, presumably none of the most delicate, of the goings-on among the courtiers in Paris. Thus was the standard for King Charles's courtiers set before them! Visitors from the court of France, among others the witty Count Grammont and the entertaining and literary M. de St. Evremond, would doubtless do much to perfect their education on the same lines.

Whatever may have been the vices of Louis XIV. and his courtiers, there was much in his reign that was magnificent and splendid. Alison says² that although during that reign the nobles were "degraded in character by the frivolities of a court drowned in debt by its expenses," the period was

¹ Forneron, p. 183.

² *History of Europe*, vol. i., chap. i.

one remarkable in France for “the triumphs of art encouraged and science enlarged—of genius transcendent and eloquence unbounded”; that “the annals of literary fame have no parallel constellation of intellectual greatness of which to boast,” and that “the greatest of modern French authors, Chateaubriand, has admitted that if we would find the classical era of French literature we must look for it in the age of Louis XIV.”.

The mistresses of Louis XIV., in spite of their vices, exercised a far higher influence upon thought, conversation and literature than did those of Charles II. One of them was exceedingly celebrated for her brilliant sarcasms. Another could hold her own in literary conversation with Racine and Fénelon. When surfeited with pleasure, these women could even be serious, and they delighted in hearing the great Parisian preachers delivering their Advent and Lenten courses of sermons. Madame Ninon de Lenclos, who ruined the virtue, first of the husband, and afterwards of the son of Madame de Sévigné, formed a very fine library, which she bequeathed to Voltaire. Two of the illegitimate daughters of Louis XIV. were the cleverest rhyming lampoonists that ever used the French language for that malignant purpose.

Put into plain words, rakishness and literature were the fashion at the French court. In the contemptible endeavour to follow its fashions, the English courtiers imitated its rakishness with more than

success: but although one of our literary rakes, Roscommon, lamely wrote:—

I'll recant when France can show me wit
As strong as ours and as succinctly writ,

in attempting to emulate the literary brilliancy of the court of Versailles, the English literary courtiers produced the limping lines of which, perhaps, too many specimens are given in the course of this book. It is not pretended here that French rakishness was less evil than English rakishness; possibly it may have been even more evil; but the English rakes had their own way of doing things, and so had the French; and in their successful efforts to emulate the laxity of the French court, the English courtiers adopted English and not French methods of attaining it. For instance the about to be described efforts of two prominent courtiers to effect that laudable intention were certainly more English than French, and it would be difficult to imagine them being put into execution by courtiers of Louis XIV.

On one of the many occasions of Rochester's banishment from the court, he allied himself with another disgraced favourite in the Duke of Buckingham.¹ This exemplary pair happened to learn that a certain inn² was to be let, on the road between

¹ See St. Evremond's "Memoir of Rochester," in the *Miscellaneous Works of Rochester and Roscommon*.

² Said to have been the Green Mare Inn at Six Mile Bottom, near Newmarket. See Hore's *Newmarket*, vol. iii., p. 381.



DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

London and Newmarket, and they took it under feigned names, disguising themselves as inn-keepers. In doing this they had two objects in view: the first to enjoy what both delighted in, a madcap freak; the second to give the king on his journey to Newmarket the opportunity of seeing that, instead of spending their days of disgrace in plotting against himself or his government, they had devoted themselves to amusement, and that of the rollicking type most delighted in and most admired by his gracious Majesty.

St. Evremond's descriptions of the pranks played by Rochester and Buckingham as amateur publicans, although highly entertaining, are scarcely suitable for modern pages. Theirs would seem to have been a very ill-conducted public-house,

Where cups and glasses are small shot,
And cannon-ball a pewter pot,

as their contemporary poet, Butler, once wrote. To serve their own wicked ends, those noble tavern-keepers made men wholly, and women partially, intoxicated; nor did they stop short of drugging the liquors of their victims with opium when it suited their purpose to do so.

In one of his wildest and wickedest escapades while playing at inn-keeping, Rochester dressed himself up as a woman with an ulterior and a very iniquitous object. This was when the jealous husband of one of the greatest beauties in the neighbourhood had come to drink in the bar of the inn. Having

given his brother publican, Buckingham, a hint to make the man drunk and to keep him in the bar parlour as long as possible, Rochester went off in his female attire to the house of the drinker. Pretending to faint opposite its door, Rochester was charitably taken into the house, nursed and put to bed by the kind and hospitable beauty, who supposed him to be of the sex indicated by his apparel.

This is as much of the anecdote as it is necessary to tell here—much more is told by St. Evremond—and of its sequel it may be sufficient to say that when the husband had gradually become sober on the following day, had returned home, and had discovered what had happened during his absence, he hanged himself, a catastrophe which Rochester and Buckingham appear to have regarded in the light of a pleasant joke. Nor did this miserable affair end with the death of the husband. After a scandal of many days, if not of weeks, in which both Rochester and Buckingham took part, behaving as wickedly as the wickedest of the “wicked noblemen” of a tenth rate romance, they sent the widow to London, with the cool suggestion that it was time she should get another husband.

It was lucky for the neighbourhood when the king, stopping at the inn either to change horses or to obtain refreshments, discovered its hosts to be his two banished courtiers, delighted in the joke, restored them to favour, and insisted that both of them should accompany him to Newmarket.

That little town, with its mean houses, was little more than what would now be called a large scattered village ; and the entry of the royal cavalcade, in all its smartness of clothes and of colour, with the Life Guards in their glittering armour, the mistresses in their gilded coaches, the courtiers and their retinues, to say nothing of the king and other royalties, to take up their quarters in such humble dwellings, must have been a curious and somewhat incongruous spectacle.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEWMARKET and its amusements entered very largely into the life of the literary rakes of Charles II. Evelyn says that he found at Newmarket "the jolly blades racing, feasting and revelling, more resembling a luxurious and abandoned rout, than a Christian Court". Indeed it was at Newmarket and at one other country place to be noticed presently—namely Tunbridge Wells—that the court played some of its wildest pranks. As to Newmarket, whether they raced or did not race, the king's courtiers had to spend a good deal of their time at that Rome of racing; and our two publicans, Rochester and Buckingham, were both owners of race-horses, or, as they were then termed, "running-horses"; so the place must have been exactly suited to their tastes.

If the prices now given for race-horses would have amazed the horse-owners of the reign of Charles II., it must not be supposed that racing was then an inexpensive luxury. The best race-horses, if not most of the race-horses of those times, were imported, or, if not imported, had been the foals of imported horses. Many race-horses came from Spain, others

from Italy, and they were for the most part Barbs, or what were then called "Barberie horses," and "Turks," the name then given to Arabs. The Duke of Newcastle, who had a great breeding-stud at Welbeck Abbey, mentions, in his work on horsemanship, that Arabs had been purchased at as much as from £1,000 to £3,000 each, which he calls "an Intollerable and an Incredible price," as well he may, considering the value of a pound sterling in his days. In his opinion, the best race-horses were by Barb horses from English mares.

A well-known stud horse in the reign of Charles II., the Helmsley Turk, belonged to one of the heroes of the just mentioned public-house adventure, namely the Duke of Buckingham, who seems to have had a great many horses in training. We hear of his running two horses in one race, the Town Plate, at Newcastle, when it is hinted that he was guilty of an infamous malpractice. Only these two horses started, and they were entered in the names of different owners, otherwise, by the conditions of the race, the Plate would not have been given: but it was said that both horses in reality belonged to Buckingham.¹ If such an offence could be proved against an owner now, he would, of course, be warned off the turf, and cut by all his acquaintances.

Rochester won the Woodstock Plate, at Woodstock races, with a grey horse, on 16th September,

¹ *S. P., Dom., Charles II.*, vol. cciii., Nos. 56, 120.

1679.¹ Woodstock was a favourite race-meeting of the king's, and, as Rochester had the use of the Ranger's Lodge there, his victory is likely to have been popular at that meeting.

Races were then of an astonishing length. Sir Nicholas Armourer writes to Secretary Williamson that he is going to bring him "two gunnyes w^{ch} was improved on Thump's victory ; won but a yard and soe straight the entire six miles".

The race for the Round Course Plate, at Newmarket, was run in heats, each heat being three miles, the weight twelve stone, "besides bridle and saddle". Half an hour was allowed between each heat, to rub the horses down. When the half-hour was ended, the riders were summoned by a drum or a trumpet. The jockeys were to be what are now termed gentlemen riders, who, more especially if pampered courtiers, must have found the three-mile heats somewhat fatiguing. No wonder that we read of the king, who frequently rode races, "being very much heated".²

The idea of a short flying scurry, at that time, was a race of the length of a mile and a half (or about that of our Derby course), as the following extract from a contemporary letter may demonstrate. Lord Conway wrote from Newmarket about a match³ between a horse of "Sir Rob. Car's and a

¹ *Lord Anglesey's Diary*, MSS., Add. 18, 730.

² *Travels of Cosmo III.*

³ *S. P., Dom., Charles II.*, 5th April, 1682.

gelding of S^r Rob. Geeres, for a mile and a halfe only, *much depending in so short a course* to have them start fairly”.

As we have already noticed, Charles II. was himself what we should now term a gentleman-rider. Isham wrote on 30th October, 1672 :¹ “Mr. Bullivart, Parson of Maidwell, came and said the King had ridden two heats at Newmarket”. Another amateur jockey, the Duke of Albemarle, killed his horse in the same race, and it is stated in Mr. Hore’s *History of Newmarket*, a work to which the present writer is much indebted, that “the King attended the Spring meeting at Newmarket in 1675, where he rode and won several races”. The course called the Rowley Mile is said to have been named after a favourite hack which Charles II. used to ride on Newmarket Heath.²

The author can find no evidence of Rochester’s amateur jockeyship. Probably such a dissipated wreck would have been ill-fitted for race-riding.

The Duke of Newcastle advised Charles II. to have hound-races, “with coloured ribbons,” at Newmarket. Whether this advice was acted upon does not appear, but it is not improbable, and a match having been made at Newmarket between hounds and horses may be remembered by men still living.

¹ *Journal of Thomas Isham.*

² There is another tradition that Rowley was the name of the king’s pet goat.

The amusements of the court at Newmarket were by no means limited to racing. There were fox-hunting and hare-hunting, hawking, foot-racing, bowling, tennis, cock-fighting, and plenty of basset at night. The following description of an afternoon at Newmarket is given in a contemporary newspaper.¹ "After dinner was divertized a Match of Cock-fighting, upon which many of the Court lay'd great Wagers, and 'tis said his Majesty was pleased to Bet several Guinnies. After a Foot Race was Run, between a Country Fellow and a Foot Man. . . . The Evening was spent in Heats and Breathings of several Horses, in order to prepare them for the Races that are very speedily to be Run there."

Other numbers of the same journal mention "great Matches daily plaid at Bowls, the Nobility and Gentry much diverting themselves with that exercise," and horse-races "for Spoons and other Plate". Cups, however, became the usual prizes for races in the latter part of the reign of Charles II. Before that reign, bells were the common trophies² run for on English race-courses.

Respecting the just-mentioned game of bowls, Grammont tells us that, in France, it was the pastime "of servants and mechanics only," whereas in England it was one of the most aristocratic amusements. He adds that "the places where it is practised [in England] are charming. . . . As soon

¹ *Domestick Intelligence*, 8th September, 1681, No. 32.

² *Racing*, Badminton Library, p. 20.

as the heat of the day is over, all the company assemble there : they play deep."

Of other amusements, we may notice that Lord Digby¹ "did upon a wager of £50 undertake to walk (not run or step) 5 miles on Newmarket Common in an hour, but he lost it by half a minute, but he had the honour of Good company, the King and all his nobles to attend to see him do it" entirely unclothed "and barefoot".

Perhaps of all sports in pursuit of game, hawking in those days was held to be the most important. Grammont says of Charles II. that he "of all the diversions of the chase, likes none but hawking, because it is the most convenient for the ladies," and that he used to indulge in it "attended by all the beauties of the Court". The annual cost of the king's hawks is said to have been £3,151. When Charles II. went out hawking, some four or five miles from the town of Newmarket, he was accompanied by three troops of the Life Guards,² a proceeding very incongruous with our modern notions of field-sports.

Hare-hunting was a very favourite sport with the courtiers of Charles II. when at Newmarket. Fuller, in his *Worthies of England*, says: "Hares, though these are found in all counties, yet because lately there was in this Shire an Hare-Park nigh New-Market, preserved for the King's game, let them here be particularly mentioned. Some prefer

¹ Historical MSS. See Hore's *Newmarket*.

² Smith's *Current Intelligence*, 11th March, 1680.

their sport in hunting before their flesh for eating, as accounting it melancholick meat and hard to be digested though others think all the hardness is how to come by it. All the might of this silly creature is in the flight thereof. . . . Whether or no they change their sex every year (as some have reported) let Huntsmen decide."

Reresby gives us a description of the habits of Charles II. when at Newmarket. "The diversions the King followed at Newmarket were these—Walking in the morning till ten o'clock; then to the cockpit till dinner-time; about three he went to the horse-races; at six to the cockpit for an hour; then to the play, though the comedians were very indifferent; so to supper; next to the Duchess of Portsmouth's till bed-time."

Newmarket was the scene of many practical jokes on the part of the courtiers. One of the best known is said to have been played by Rochester. It is of a nature rather difficult to describe in language suitable for very fastidious readers; but it may be found in full detail in the pages of Mr. Hore's *History of Newmarket*.¹ A mere outline sketch of it will be offered here.

The court of Charles II. might be supposed to have been gay enough, free enough, and wild enough to satisfy the liveliest, the wildest and the wickedest; but according to this story, the king longed for fresh

¹ Vol. ii., pp. 384-85.

fields and pastures new. To gratify this desire, Charles consulted his friend Rochester, who is said to have owed him a grudge at that particular time, for his exile from the court during the period which he had spent in amateur inn-keeping.

Rochester persuaded the king carefully to disguise himself and then to accompany him alone, at night, to a place of entertainment of a very low class in the town of Newmarket. While his Majesty's attention was otherwise occupied, Rochester stealthily abstracted the king's money and watch from his pockets and then slipped away and out of the house, unobserved by their owner.

When Charles had had amusement enough, he determined to go home, and for this purpose he looked for Rochester. He was told that his friend had left the house, sometime earlier; and the king was asked to pay for his entertainment. Feeling in his pockets, he found himself without a farthing; and when it occurred to him to offer his watch in pledge, he found that it was gone also. The king was very irate, and declared that he had been robbed: the owner of the establishment took a different view of the matter, and declared that the guest was trying to cheat the house of its dues, and that leave it he should not until full payment had been made. Nobody in the place had the least idea of the rank of the defaulting guest.

At last Charles took off his ring and offered it in pledge. The offer was refused, for the jewellery of a

penniless man was suspected of being false, especially as the stones in the ring were large and showy. In short, they looked far too fine to be real! After a great deal of altercation, a man in the house was persuaded to take the ring to a jeweller, for the purpose of ascertaining whether it was worth the guest's reckoning. At that time of night a jeweller was difficult to find: but, after considerable delay, one was roused from his bed. When the expert had examined the ring, he said: "But one man in the nation can afford to wear it, and that man is the King".

Curious to see the upshot of such an extraordinary affair, the jeweller returned with the messenger, and, on entering the room in which the defaulter was being kept a prisoner, he knelt down and presented the ring to the king. The people in the house were covered with confusion when they discovered the rank of the man whom they had been abusing, and they humbly prayed for his forgiveness upon their knees. Charles granted it with much good humour, and inquired with a laugh whether the security was not sufficient for another bottle.

The king was amused by the joke, but he was furiously angry with its perpetrator, and the consequence was one more of Rochester's exiles from the royal presence and the court.

There is another story of pocket-picking at Newmarket, in which Charles II. took a very different part, and it is offered here on the same authority.¹

¹ Vol. iii., p. 49.

A thief dressed like a courtier managed to get into the palace at Newmarket, and picked Lord Arlington's pocket of a snuff-box. As he did so he saw that the king was watching him, when he had the supreme impudence to put his finger to his nose, to wink at his Majesty, and then to decamp. Charles said nothing, but watched Lord Arlington, and was presently much amused by seeing him feeling in one pocket after another for his snuff-box.

"You need not give yourself any more trouble about it," said his Majesty, "your box is gone, and I own myself an accomplice. I could not help it, I was made a confidant."

Lord Arlington's house, Euston, was a favourite resting place for the king on his way to or from Newmarket. It was a large and magnificent mansion. Evelyn writes of 200 people and 100 horses being entertained there, "besides servants and guards, at infinite expense," for a fortnight at a time in October, 1671. In the morning there was hunting and hawking, and from the afternoon till almost the following morning cards and dice, yet "without noise, swearing, quarrel or confusion of any sort". The house was "filled from one end to the other with lords, ladies, and gallants". All the same, there seem to have been some wild orgies. It was reported that the king's immorality was there openly acknowledged on one occasion by a mock wedding, "and the stocking flung after the manner of a married bride".

Rochester was not the only practical joker at Newmarket. His former fellow publican, Buckingham, begged to be allowed to preach one Sunday before the king and the court. Charles, ever ready for any amusing prank of Buckingham's, however extravagant, consented. "Being there on a Sunday," says Pepys, "the Duke of Bucks preached" an exceedingly indecent "sermon for the edification of the King and Court, on the Canticles."¹

Pepys writes² of two other literary rakes who figure in these pages, namely Sedley and Buckhurst, as having terribly misbehaved themselves at a country town on one of the royal progresses from Newmarket.

"And so away with Mr. Pierce to Tyburne," says he, "to see the people executed; but came too late, it being done: two women and a man hanged. Pierce do tell me, among other news, the late frolick debauchery of Sir Charles Sedley and Buckhurst, running up and down all the night," far from warmly clothed, "through the streets; and at last fighting, and being beat by the watch and clapped up all night; and how the King takes their parts; and my Lord Chief Justice Keeling hath laid the constable by the heels to answer it next Sessions: which is a horrid shame. . . . The King was drunk at Saxam³ with Sedley, Buckhurst, etc."

¹ Braybrook's ed., vol. iv., p. 488.

² *Diary*, 23rd October, 1668.

³ Mr. Baron Croft's place near Newmarket, long since pulled down.

From all this it is evident that the literary rakes in whom we are endeavouring to interest ourselves did not live in an undisturbed atmosphere of culture, virtue, and refinement on their visits to Newmarket.

A short notice has been promised of the other place out of London which seems to have been as much, or almost as much, to the taste of the court as Newmarket. This was Tunbridge Wells, which Grammont calls the place "of all Europe the most rural and simple, and yet, at the same time, the most entertaining and agreeable".

Here, too, there was hawking and hare-hunting, and of gambling any amount. The flirtations were the freest of the free; and if we may judge from that curious book, *A Tour through Great Britain* by the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, introductions among the visitors at this watering-place were at that period considered wholly unnecessary. Defoe writes: "Here you have all the liberty that can be desired, and any person that looks like a gentleman, has an agreeable address and behaves with decency and good manners, may single out whom he pleases, that does not appear engaged, and may talk, rally, and say anything decent to them". But he goes on to explain that this does not involve any further acquaintance; as, for that, a formal introduction is necessary. As may be seen in the pages of Grammont, there were some very queer goings-on at Tunbridge Wells in the reign of Charles II.; and even Defoe

says: "Tunbridge is a place in which a lady, for want of judgment, may as soon shipwreck her character as in any part of England; and where, when she has once injured her reputation, 'tis as hard to restore".

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Rochester was acting the part of a tapster at the way-side inn he is likely to have found his occupation by no means uncongenial. To speak plainly, he was an inveterate drunkard. Dr. Burnet states that "the natural heat of his fancy being inflamed by wine, made him so extravagantly pleasant, that many to be more diverted by that humour studied to engage him deeper and deeper in intemperance".

Another witness to his drunkenness, St. Evremond, says that "the uncommon charms of my Lord's conversation drew every man of taste to engage him with the bottle, his pleasing extravagance increasing with his liquor". And again he says: "As to his Lordship's temper, it was various, as he was more or less inspired with wine".

In justice to Rochester, however, it should be said that drunkenness was one of the prevailing vices of the court of Charles II. While everybody knows that its courtiers were remarkable for their immorality, it may not be so generally understood that they were almost more notorious for their intemperance. Clarendon says¹ that immediately after the

¹ *Life*, p. 19.

Restoration, "The Woeful Vice of Drinking, from the Uneasiness of their Fortune, or the Necessity of frequent Meetings together, for which Taverns were the most secure Places, had spread itself very far in that *Classis* of Men, as well as upon other Parts of the Nation, in all Counties: and had exceedingly weakened the Parts, and broken the Understanding of many, who had formerly competent judgments".

It was difficult, even for the best intentioned, to keep sober at the court of Charles II. A royal example of failure in this respect may be quoted. There was scarcely a more austere youth then living than the young Prince of Orange, who was remarkable for his self-control, his moderation, and his generally prim behaviour. In fact he was what Reresby describes as "a very personable and hopeful prince". Well! this immaculate youth came to England and to Whitehall. The king was not content until he had made this model of perfection very drunk indeed "at a supper given by the Duke of Buckingham. The Prince did not naturally love" strong drink; but having become overpowered by it, he became "more frolic and merry than the rest of the company; . . . he broke the windows of the chambers of the maids of honour and had got into some of their apartments, had they not been timely rescued."

Respecting the habits of the English with regard to drinks, a good word, however, is said in the

Travels of Cosmo III.:¹ as it is there stated that Englishmen have "an agreeable complexion, which is attributable to the temperature of the climate, to the nature of their food, and to the use of beer rather than wine".

The "agreeable complexion" caused by beer was not only to be found on the faces of idle courtiers. Can we be severe upon a man like Rochester for his intemperance, when we consider the following story of his contemporary, the sage Lord Keeper, Guilford.² The Lord Keeper was "what was called a sober person: but, withal, he loved a merry glass with a friend". Concerning this sober person, a tragedy shall now be related. Once, when on circuit at Colchester, "his Lordship, with the rest of his brethren," dined with the Recorder and got very, *very* drunk. After dinner it was necessary to ride on to the place where the next sessions were to be held on the morrow. The grave legal dignitaries had not proceeded far when the Lord Keeper was so tipsy that he fell from his horse; but he insisted on remounting it. His "sprightly nag" then trotted off with him at such a pace that the bar, which was as drunk as the bench, was left far in the rear. At last, his lordship's horse, observing a tempting looking pond, walked in to cool its legs and have a drink on its own account. By this time the Lord Keeper was fast asleep, and

¹ Page 398.

² *Lives of the Norths*, vol. i., p. 91 *et seq.*

a Mr. Card, afterwards "an eminent practiser of conveyancing in Gray's Inn," came up just, and only just, in time to lead the judge's horse out of the pond before his lordship rolled off and got "a scurvy downfall," fortunately on dry land instead of in the pond. For this service, performed in the nick of time, his lordship "ever had a value for Mr. Card".

When a learned and celebrated judge, and a judge considered particularly sober, even for a judge, in those times, could behave like this, some excuse may fairly be made for the intemperance of a gay courtier like Rochester.

Nor was Guildford the only legal luminary ever known to have taken more wine than was good for him. Sir John Resesby wrote that the Lord Chancellor himself very nearly died from the effects of an illness brought on "by a great debauch of wine at Alderman Duncomb's where he and my Lord Treasurer, with others, drank to that height as 'twas whispered that they stripped to their shirts, and, had not an accident prevented, would have got upon a sign-post to drink the king's health, which gave occasion for derision, not to say more of the matter".

As to the example set, in the matter of strong drinks, by royalty itself, only one piece of evidence shall be given. Charles II., the Duke of York, and several of the rakish courtiers went to Cranbourne, the home of Sir George Carteret, after hunting, for some refreshment. "There they were entertained

and all made drunk; and being drunk, Armourer did come to the King and said to him:—

“‘By Gad, Sir, you are not so kind to the Duke of York as you used to be’.

“‘Not I?’ says the King. ‘Why so?’

“‘Why,’ says he, ‘if you are let us drink his health.’

“‘Why, let us,’ says the King.

“Then he (Armourer) fell on his knees and drank it; and having done, the King began to drink it.

“‘Nay, Sir,’ says Armourer, ‘by Gad, you must do it on your knees!’

“So he did, and all the company; and having done it, all fell a-crying for joy, being all maudlin and kissing one another, the King and the Duke of York, and the Duke of York and the King; and in such a maudlin pickle as never people were; and so passed the day.”¹

In the *Travels of Cosmo III.* we read that, in England, “whoever does not like the different kinds of beer, which are far better than those of any other country, as ale, cider, and the delicious and exquisite bottled beer (bouteille-bière), and another sort of beer made with the body of a capon, which is left to go putrid along with the malt, may satisfy himself with the wines of France and Spain, the Rhine, Candia, Naples and Florence”. This is remarkable; for,

¹ Story quoted by Dr. Airy in his *Charles II.*, p. 130.

even now, the wines of Candia, Naples and Florence are (happily) not very common in this country. Port was not introduced into England till late in the seventeenth century,¹ and among the Spanish wines in use during the reign of Charles II. it is improbable that the sherry was of the kind to which we are accustomed. Most likely, therefore, our Carolean ancestors got drunk principally upon beer, brandy, and excessive quantities of what we should call light wines. In *Pevevil of the Peak*, Sir Walter Scott makes Buckingham drink champagne; and champagne of some sort he very likely may have drunk, but the sparkling champagne to which we are accustomed did not come into use in England until more than half a century after the days of Buckingham.²

Even in the tipsy times of Charles II., however, there were teetotalers! Pepys, who had once absurdly disgraced himself before his servants by being very drunk when reading family prayers, made a vow of total abstinence. Notwithstanding this vow, we read of his drinking a fermented liquor, in Metheglin. At another time we find him drinking Hippocras, a medicinal concoction, or cordial, made of wine mixed with spices; when he says: "I only drinking hypocras, which do not break my vow, it being, to the best of my present judgment, only a mixed compound drink, and not any wine. If I am mistaken, God forgive me!" Mixed compound drinks, there-

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Wine".

² See Haydn's *Dictionary of Dates*.

fore, do not appear to have been among the liquids tabooed by Pepys's vow of total abstinence. Possibly he might have considered whisky and water a mixed compound drink suitable to teetotalers, and have drunk it with enjoyment, absolving his conscience by the observation: "If I am mistaken, God forgive me!"

Respecting Rochester's wild pranks, it is but fair to remember that such escapades as he played were then very commonly practised by men of high degree. As an example, it may be mentioned that two of Rochester's friends were guilty of a disgusting frolic, which far surpassed any recorded of himself. These were Sir Charles Sedley and Lord Buckhurst, both of whom have been already noticed at some length. These rhymsters, after getting very drunk at the Cock Tavern in Bow Street—the Bond Street of those times—went out upon the balcony overlooking the street, and played off a most abominable atrocity which they actually considered a joke.¹ Sir Charles was summoned before a court in Westminster for this scandal, and was sentenced to pay a fine of £500—a very heavy one; but by no means *too* heavy.

Sedley had the impudence to beg the king to let him off this fine, which the king very properly refused to do: and then Sedley actually had the still greater effrontery to ask the king to pay the fine for him.

¹ *Athenæ Oxoniensis*, vol. ii., p. 1100, where the horrible details of the story may be found in full.

Amazing and repellent as it seems, Charles II. was weak enough to consent to this most impertinent request.

In our notices of Rochester we have thus far dealt chiefly with his life either in London and at Newmarket, or at an inn on the Newmarket Road. Something should also be said of his life at his country houses, where he professed to spend his most innocent days. Those days of innocence appear to have been largely occupied in writing scandalous lampoons upon calumnies carefully collected in London. Bishop Burnet tells us, in his *History*, that Rochester "found out a footman that knew all the Court, and he furnished him with a red coat and a musket as a sentinel, and kept him all the winter long, every night, at the door of such ladies as he believed might be in intrigues. In the Court a sentinel is little minded and is believed to be posted by a captain of the guards to hinder a combat: so this man walked about, and visited at forbidden hours. By this means, Lord Rochester made many discoveries. And when he was well furnished with materials, he used to retire into the country for a month or two to write libels."

This statement does not represent Rochester in a very amiable light. In other respects, however, he is said to have lived a comparatively blameless life when in the country. On the other hand, when he went to London or its neighbourhood, Rochester said that the devil entered into him

and never left him till he returned to the country again.¹

If Rochester could write :—

Dear solitary groves, where peace doth dwell !
 Sweet harbours of pure love and innocence !
 How willingly could I for ever stay
 Beneath the shade of your embracing greens,
 Listening to the harmony of warbling birds,
 Tuned with the gentle murmur of the streams,²

his actual estimate of country life may be better ascertained from the story that, when bitten by a dog, the worst he said to the dog was: "I wish you were married and living in the country."

And let not Rochester be condemned too hastily for disliking life in the country. We live in days when country-life is charming ; but what was it in the days of Rochester ? The opportunities of seeing neighbours at all were few and rare. Carriages were bad ; roads were worse ; indeed many of them were inferior to some of the cart-tracks across fields of the present time. And when occasionally neighbours did arrive, were they worth receiving ? There were then country gentlemen who could scarcely write their names ; few of them had received more than a very indifferent grammar-school education ; some had lived out of reach of any school

¹ Malone in his notice of Dryden says that Aubrey relates this of Rochester. It does not appear in his *Lives of Eminent Persons* : but Malone had the opportunity of looking through all Aubrey's MSS.

² *Valentinian*.

whatever. They read little, they had scarcely any books, and their knowledge of current politics was chiefly obtained by hearsay at country fairs. Their talk was local, their interests were parochial, their food was of the weightiest and the most indigestible, their drink was beer.

Their wives, sisters and daughters were, if anything, worse educated than themselves. Needlework, the manufacture of home-made messes, household management, and playing upon the spinet, when indeed there was any spinet to be played upon, were almost their only interests, except hawking, and a very occasional meeting of neighbours for a banquet or a ball.

One objection likely to be made by Rochester to some of his country neighbours would be that those who had spent blood and money for Charles I. in the late Civil Wars, and had received no rewards from Charles II., hated the court and were angrily sulking in the retirement of their rural homes. A dissolute courtier, like Rochester, to such would be odious. Country ladies again, were for the most part terribly scandalised by the reports which reached them of the improper proceedings at Whitehall, and of Whitehall Rochester was eminently representative.

Our ideas of the country houses of the seventeenth century are as we ourselves have seen them, with their walls covered by portraits of more or less interest ; but until late in the reign of Charles

II., the pictures in most country houses, even houses of large size, must have been very few and very bad. Much, again, of the furniture and decorations which now look old in such houses, are not of an earlier date than the beginning of the eighteenth century. Take away everything not earlier than the date of the death of Rochester out of the delightful old seventeenth century country houses which we so much admire, and they would in most cases look very bare.

Yet in some instances they had beauties of their own. The walls of many old chambers were hung in the seventeenth century with tapestry, or with stamped and gilded leather from Spain, either in decorative patterns or representing tilts or battles between the Spaniards and the Saracens. Little of that fine old leather-work is now left in this country. Then, if the large entrance halls could boast of few works of art, their walls were hung with swords, pikes, halberts, muskets, arquebuses, heavy horsemen's pistols, helmets, breast-plates, back-pieces, and shields. Rochester's halls were probably decorated with arms and armour borne and worn by his father, and his father's retainers, only half a dozen years before his own birth, at the neighbouring battles of Edgehill and Newbury.

The distinction between people who were much in London and those who were not was far more widely drawn then than it is now. In fact the great proportion of county squires and their families lived

and died without ever going to London at all. A country magnate who had never been to London was so different in appearance and bearing from those who frequented it, that on his first visit he was quite a marked man in the streets.

Few landlords who lived much beyond what are now the suburbs "went up for the season" to London. Courtiers, court officials, soldiers, judges, counsel, members of Parliament, professional men and tradesmen, were the only people who lived much in the metropolis; and, as a rule, landed proprietors who went to court for pleasure, or had official duties requiring their presence in London, seldom put themselves to the discomfort of a journey, possibly lasting several days, to their country homes.

Can we wonder, therefore, at Rochester's finding little, either materially or socially, to his taste in a country life?

Rochester's two country houses, both of them in Oxfordshire, were Adderbury, from which he took the title of his barony, and the ranger's lodge at Woodstock, which he held by virtue of his office as Comptroller of Woodstock Park.

This appointment had been held by a member of the family of Rochester's mother's first husband, Sir Henry Lee, in the time of Queen Elizabeth. Whether Rochester attended very assiduously to his duties as ranger, may be doubted: but we read¹ of

¹ *Reliqq.*, Hearne, Appendix xii., vol. iii., p. 259, Lond., 1769.

Sir Henry Lee, when holding that office, that he "would many times in his younger yeares walke at nights in the parke with his keepers". As several purchases of land were made to enlarge the park, and some new laws were enacted in connection with it, during the reign of Charles II., it would seem probable that the ranger ought to have had a good deal of business in his hands when Rochester held that appointment.

Woodstock was not very far from Rochester's birthplace, Ditchley, where he had spent much of his boyhood, and its associations may not have been without their effects upon his turn of mind. When Rochester was ranger of Woodstock Park, Ditchley was inhabited by his nephew, Sir Edward Lee, who married Lady Charlotte Fitzroy (the daughter of Charles II. and the Duchess of Cleveland), and was created Earl of Litchfield. Evelyn describes Ditchley as "a low ancient timber house, with a pretty bowling-green". Lady Litchfield's kingly father sometimes visited her at Ditchley, for Hearne says that there was¹ "a large elbow chair, now kept at Dichly, near Woodstock, in which King Charles II., her father, used constantly to sleep after dinner". "The said Lady Litchfield, herself, at the time very young, got this chair to be made for the King, which pleased him mightily."

All this, of course, was when Rochester was only

¹ *Diary*, U.S., vol. ii., pp. 55-56.

an occasional visitor, and not a resident, at Ditchley ; but the house had had comparatively recent associations with royalty, even when Rochester was living there as a boy ; for King James I. had been a guest in it. Hearne, describing its great hall in 1718, says :¹ " I was mightily pleased with the sight of this old hall : and was pleased the more because it is adorned with old stags' horns under some of which are the inscriptions, on brass plates ". One of them ran :—

1608, August 24, Saturday.

From Foxhole coppice rowzed, Great Britain's King I fled,
But what? In Kiddington pond he overtooke me dead.

To many lads it makes little difference where they are brought up ; but to a boy of Rochester's imaginative mind and poetical disposition the spending of his childhood in a fine, romantic mansion, with traditions of royal visits, would not be without its influence.

The site of the High Lodge, which Rochester occupied as ranger of Woodstock Park, is about a mile and a quarter from Woodstock on the farther side of the present Palace of Blenheim, a house built some years after Rochester's death for Marlborough, a man almost exactly his own age.

Rochester's ancestral country home was Adderbury, a place about three miles south of Banbury, and noted for the beautiful fourteenth-century spire of its church. His father had been created Baron

¹ *Reliqq.*, Hearne, vol. ii., p. 69.

Wilmot of Adderbury. Adderbury is said to have been¹ a “magnificent mansion” in the days of Rochester, the Duke of Argyle, and the Duke of Buccleugh, its successive occupiers; but it was afterwards reduced to the size of a moderate country house.

Pope slept there in 1739, as the guest of Argyle, and he flattered his host at the cost of the memory of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, by writing:—

With no poetic ardour fir'd
I press the bed where Wilmot lay,
That here he loved or here expir'd
Begets no numbers grave or gay.

Beneath thy roof, Argyle, are bred
Such thoughts as prompt the brave to lie
Stretch'd out in honour's nobler bed
Beneath a nobler roof—the sky.

Near Adderbury is a chapelry called Bodicot, to whose psalm-singing clerk Rochester is said to have extemporised the following lines:—

Sternhold and Hopkins had great qualms,
When they translated David's Psalms,
To make the heart full glad:
But had it been poor David's fate,
To hear thee sing, and then translate,
By Jove, 'twould have drove him mad.

Burnet says that Rochester's visits to the country often lasted for some months, which were wholly devoted to study and the writing of poetry. His studies were “divided between the comical and the

¹ Beesley's *History of Banbury*, p. 488.

witty writings of the ancients and moderns, the Roman authors and books of physic, which the ill state he was fallen into made more necessary to himself”.

Books of physic! Necessary to himself! Could anything have been more harmful except perhaps the alcohol which he kept pouring down his throat. What more miserable or debased object could be imagined than a tipsy, vicious, hypochondriacal, third-rate poet, who, when he was not taking wine, was taking medicine, and that of his own selection from “ Books of Physic ” ; one, moreover, who divided his time between giving scandal in London and scandal-mongering in the country ?

There are no records of Rochester’s having cared for any sport except racing. Without sports, with no taste for agriculture, and with what would now be considered no books, life in the country must have been dull indeed : especially when a man was not on the best of terms with his wife. Rochester’s only pleasures in his rural retreat would appear to have been his lampoons and his Ovid, his drinks and his physics.

It may have been an economy for a courtier to spend some months in the country ; but even there the occasional feasting of guests and retainers must have been expensive. Some idea of the substantial feeding at a country-house may be obtained from a study of “ A Note of what hath been spent in the twelve days, 1668, Xmas,” in the account

book¹ of Richard Newdigate at Arbury in Warwickshire, who was by no means an exceptionally wealthy country squire :—

2 Beefes
 6 Muttons
 6 Veales
 18 Turkeys
 50 Geese
 16 Ducks
 42 Capons
 2 Pullets
 3 Chickens
 3 Pigs
 1 Swan
 1 Pay Bird (? Peacock)
 100 Rabbits
 100 Strike of Wheat
 140 Pounds of Butter
 17 Hogsheads of Beer
 3 Hogsheads of Ale
 1 Barrel of March Beer.

This sort of living was not conducive to the saving of money. When Newdigate made his annual balance, he carefully and accurately entered his debit and credit items on either side of his accounts according to the most approved system of book-keeping, with the result of showing a satisfactory balance in hand. Beneath this balance, however, the amateur book-keeper wrote the following short but significant comment upon his own handicraft in

¹ *Cavalier and Puritan*, by Lady Newdigate (a most interesting book).

that capacity : " 'Tis false. I have not so much by a great deal."

Sir John Reresby also gives us an idea of what was expected of a landlord at Christmas in the reign of Charles II. ; although he laments that Christmas hospitality was not what it used to be. He had more than a dozen guests staying in his house, including "an ingenious clergyman, but too much a good fellow".

On Christmas Eve he had nineteen tenants to dinner ; on Christmas Day, twenty-six ; on St. Stephen's, fifty-four ; on St. John's, forty-five. Having dined his tenants, he began with his friends. On the 30th of December he had "eighteen gentlemen and their wives" at dinner. On 1st January, "sixteen more gentlemen : on the 3rd twenty others ; on the 4th twelve of the neighbouring clergy, on the 6th, seven gentlemen and tradesmen of Rotherham and other places". Having the local tradesmen to dine with him shows the difference between the custom of those days and of these.

He tells us that "For music, I had two violins and a bass from Doncaster, that wore my livery, that played well for the country ; two bagpipes for the common people, a trumpeter and a drummer. The expense of liquor, both of wine and others, was considerable, as well as of other provisions ; and my friends seemed well satisfied."

If Rochester was expected to entertain dull

neighbours, rural clergymen by the dozen at a time, and tradesmen at dinner, accustomed as he was to the society of courtiers and wits, he must indeed have been bored in the country, and have thought that, as he said, "living in the country" was the worst evil he could possibly wish to the dog that bit him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN studying the character of a poet, or even of a so-called poet, it is obvious that due attention should be paid to his poems, or what pass as such. Respecting Rochester's it is unsatisfactory that many of those imputed to him should be of very doubtful authenticity. His *Imitation of Horace's Satire*, his *Verses to Lord Mulgrave*, his *Satire against Man*, and his *Verses upon Nothing*, are, according to Dr. Johnson, unquestionably genuine. A few others usually published with his works are also probably his own ; but the rest are looked upon with suspicion by the best judges.

Johnson says of Rochester's poems : " They have no particular character : they tell, like other songs, in smooth and easy language, of scorn and kindness, dismissal and desertion, absence and inconstancy, with the commonplaces of artificial courtship. They are commonly smooth and easy : but have little nature, and little sentiment."¹ Johnson praises Rochester for his skill in following the fashion, just begun in his time, of imitating the style of ancient

¹ *Lives of the Poets*, vol. i., p. 193.

poetry; and he adds, of Rochester's work of this kind that "the versification is indeed sometimes careless, but it is sometimes vigorous and weighty".

Johnson considers Rochester's poem *Upon Nothing* his best work: and Addison gives it very high praise. Rochester was not the first poet to choose "Nothing" as a subject; but there is no evidence to show whether he was aware that the idea on his part was not original.

Although Dr. Johnson, while emphasising the uncertainty of many poems attributed to Rochester, guarantees the authenticity of these *Verses upon Nothing*, in *The Works of His Grace, George Villiers, late Duke of Buckingham* (London, 1715) that poem is stated to be "By the Duke of Buckingham and the Earl of Rochester". Whether the stanzas of this atheistical effusion were written turn and turn about by Buckingham and Rochester, after the manner in which St. Augustine and St. Ambrose are said to have written alternately the stanzas of the *Te Deum*, there is no evidence to explain. Into the theological bearings of *Upon Nothing* it would be out of place to inquire here; and of the political it may be sufficient to quote:—

But Nothing, why doth Something still permit
That Sacred Monarchs should at Council sit
With persons thought, at best, for nothing fit?

Whilst weighty Something, modestly abstains
From Princes' Courts, and from our Statesmen's brains:
And Nothing there like stately Nothing reigns.

Nothing that dwells with fools, in grave disguise,
 For whom they Rev'rend forms and shapes devise,
 Lawn sleeves, furs, gowns, when they like thee look wise.

Another poem stated in *Buckingham's Works* to be the joint work of Buckingham and Rochester, is *A Trial of the Poets for the Bays, in Imitation of a Satyr in Boileau*. It is much more likely, however, to have been imitated from Suckling's *Session of the Poets*, unless indeed Boileau himself imitated Suckling; for Suckling cannot have imitated Boileau, having died in 1641 when Boileau was but seven years old.¹ The poem attributed to Rochester and Buckingham begins:—

Since the sons of the Muses grew num'rous and loud
 For th'appearing so factious and clam'rous a crowd,
 Apollo thought fit, in so weighty a cause,
 T'establish a government, leader and laws.
 The hopes of the bays, at the summoning call,
 Had drawn them together, the Devil and all.

In the head of the gang, John Dryden appeared, etc.

That this was an adaptation of Suckling's *Session* to the times of Rochester is pretty clear when we refer to that *Session* itself:—

¹ Another Duke of Buckingham, the Mulgrave of the already described duel, also wrote a poem in the same style, entitled *The Election of a Poet Laureate in 1719*. Apollo was supposed to have come in state to crown his chosen candidate. After going through a long list of rejected poets, the verses end with:—

“At last in rushed Eusden, and cried who shall have it,
 But I the true Laureate, to whom the King gave it,
 Apollo begged pardon, and granted his claim;
 But vowed though, till then he ne'er heard of his name”.

A Session was held the other day,
 And Apollo himself was at it they say,
 The laurel that had been so long reserved,
 Was now to be given to him best deserved.
 Therefore the wits of the town came together,
 'Twas strange to see how they flocked together.

The first that broke silence was good old Ben, etc.

“Good old Ben” was, of course, Ben Jonson. The similarity of the styles constantly appears as both poems continue. In Suckling’s we have

Wat Montague now stood forth to his trial
 And did not so much as expect a denial ;
 But witty Apollo asked him first of all
 If he understood his own pastoral.

Respecting Apollo’s treatment of a contemporary poet, the more recent authors sarcastically observe that :—

The greatest felicity mankind can claim,
 Is to want sense of smart, and be past sense of shame ;
 And to perfect his bliss in poetical rapture :
 He bid him be dull to the end of the chapter.

Without expressing any opinion as to whether Rochester had any hand in these verses, it may be worth remembering that the editor of a collection of the works of Buckingham would be very unlikely to lessen the importance of his subject by giving another man the credit of a share in his author’s writings, if he could avoid doing so. Indeed, of the two, it seems far less improbable that Rochester may have had a hand in *A Trial of the Poets*, than that Buckingham may have been a collaborator in *Nothing*.

But the reader will be inclined to place little confidence in the assignments of the poems in *Buckingham's Works*, after finding in it *A Satyr upon the Follies of the Men of the Age*, "by the Duke of Buckingham and the Earl of Rochester," because so far from Rochester having assisted in writing this poem, he himself was chastised in it; and it is in fact none other than the *Defence of Satire*, written by Sir Carr Scrope, in reply to Rochester's *Allusion to the Tenth Satyr of the First Book of Horace*.¹ In this squib, Rochester, though not by name, was thus derided:—

Here one whom God to make a fool thought fit,
In spite of Providence will be a wit;
But wanting strength t'uphold his ill made choice,
Set up with lewdness, blasphemy and noise.

It was of Rochester's own scandalous verses again, that Scrope wrote in the same poem:—

Come but in's way and straight a new lampoon
Shall spread your mangled fame about the town.

A few lines farther on Rochester is still more severely handled:—

He that can rail at one he calls a friend,
Or hear him (absent) wrong'd, and not defend;
Who for the sake of some ill-natured jest
Tells what he should conceal, invents the rest;
To fatal midnight quarrels can betray
His brave companion and then run away,

¹ See *The Works of John, Earl of Rochester*, Tonson (1732), p. 96. See also Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, vol. i., p. 194. In neither case is the false assignment in *Buckingham's Works* noticed.

Leave him to be murdered in the street,
 Then put it off with some buffoon conceit ;
 This, this is he you should beware of all,
 Yet him a pleasant, witty man, you call :
 To whet your dull debauches up and down
 You seek him as top-fiddler of the Town.

Could a much greater blunder be imagined than that of publishing this scathing squib on Rochester as partially written by himself? On the contrary, Rochester wrote a reply to it, in which he endeavoured to repay Scrope in his own coin. It began :—

To rack and torture thy unmeaning brain
 In satire's praise, to a low untun'd strain,
 In thee was most impertinent and vain,
 When in thy person we more clearly see,
 That satire of Divine authority,
 For God made one on Man, when he made thee,

and it politely ends by calling Scrope

Half witty and half mad, and scarce half brave,
 Half honest (which is very much a knave),
 Made up of all these halves, thou can'st not pass
 For anything entirely but an ass.

Rochester was ever severe in criticising the works of others. Some one apologised for a second-rate play, on the ground that the author had written it in three weeks.

“How the Devil could he be so long about it?” asked Rochester.

The editor of *Buckingham's Works* also gives a poem called *Timon, a Satire in Imitation of Boileau*, as by “the Duke of Buckingham and the Earl of

Rochester". A few of its lines shall be quoted here in order that the reader may decide upon their authorship for himself :—

a dull dining sot

Seized me i'th Mall, who just my name had got,
 He runs upon me, cries Dear Rogue I'm thine,
 With me some wits of my acquaintance dine.
 I tell him I'm engaged : but . . .

The longer I denied, the more he pressed,
 At last I e'en consent to be his guest.
 He takes me in his coach, and as we go,
 Pulls out a libel of a sheet or two ;
 Insipid as the praise of pious Queens,
 Or Shadwell's unassisted former scenes :
 Which he admired and praised at every line ;
 At last it was so sharp, it must be mine.

He knew my style, he swore, and 'twas in vain
 Thus to deny the offspring of my brain.
 Choked with his flattery, I no answer make,
 But silent leave him to his dear mistake.
 Of a well-meaning fool I'm most afraid
 Who sillily repeats what well was said.

Rochester and Buckingham did not always remain on sufficiently friendly terms to collaborate in verse ; for, if Rochester's *Farewell* be really his own, he used verse as a weapon with which to attack his former friend.¹ Although when he wrote his *Tenth*

¹ It must have been of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and not of John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, that Rochester wrote this, if write it he did ; for, although he had a quarrel with John Sheffield and was challenged to a duel with him, Sheffield was not made Duke of Buckingham till long after Rochester's death.

Satyr of the First Book of Horace he had so high an opinion of Buckingham as to say :—

'tis enough for me
 If Sedley, Shadwel, Sheppard, Wickerley,
 Godolphin, Butler, Buckhurst, Buckingham,
 And some few more whom I omit to name,
 Approve my sense,

he had become such a bitter enemy of that duke when he wrote his *Farewell* as to exclaim :—

But when degrees of villany we name,
 How can we choose but think of Buckingham?
 He who through all of them has boldly ran,
 Left ne'er a law unbroke of God or Man.
 His treasured sins of supererogation,
 Swell to a sum enough to damn a nation.

Of Rochester's indubitable poems, one of the most original—in the sense of originality of thought, and not in that of being “a small thing but his own”—is the *Satire against Mankind*. Though less coarse than many of his other poems, its moral tone is by no means of an exalted order. He boldly recommends mankind to obey its instinct rather than its reason. It begins :—

Were I who to my cost already am
 One of those strange, prodigious creatures man,
 A spirit free to choose for my own share,
 What sort of flesh and blood I pleased to wear,
 I'd be a dog, a monkey, or a bear,
 Or anything but that vain animal,
 Who is so proud of being rational.
 The senses are too gross, and he'll contrive
 A sixth to contradict the other five :

And before certain instinct will prefer
 Reason, which fifty times for one doth err.
 Reason, an *Ignis fatuus* of the mind,
 Which leaves the light of nature, sense, behind !

The whole poem is a mixture of rank pessimism and bad advice. Here is a specimen :—

Wronged shall he live, insulted e'er, oppress,
 Who dares be less a villain than the rest.
 Thus here you see what human nature craves.
 Most men are cowards, all men should be knaves.
 The difference lies, as far as I can see,
 Not in the thing itself, but the degree ;
 And all the subject matter of debate,
 Is only who's a knave of the first rate.

As usual he has a slap at religion :—

Our sphere of action is life's happiness,
 And he that thinks beyond, thinks like an ass.

After his custom, again, he derides philosophers. When he has made mention of Diogenes and his tub, he says :—

And we have modern coxcombs, who
 Retire to think, 'cause they have nought to do.

Perhaps the best known line in this poem may be :—

For all men would be cowards if they durst.

A certain "Reverend Mr. Griffith" wrote a severe *Answer to the Satire against Mankind*. In reply to Rochester's "I'd be a dog, a monkey, or a bear," he addresses that writer somewhat rudely :—

The wisest way these evils to redress,
 Is to be what you are, nor more, nor less ;
 That is, not Man, Dog, Bear, nor Monkey neither,
 But a rare something of them all together.

As to these best known works of Rochester *Upon Nothing* and *A Satyr upon Mankind*, one cannot but ask one's self, when reading *Don Juan*, whether Byron may not have had both of them in his mind when he wrote:—

Must I restrain me, through the fear of strife,
From holding up the nothingness of life?
Dogs, or Men! (for I flatter you in saying
That ye are dogs—your betters far) ye may
Read, or read not, what I am now essaying
To show ye what ye are in every way.

Great importance was attached to epilogues in those days. One attributed to Rochester, if not good poetry, contains good sense. It begins:—

Some few, from wit have this true maxim got,
That 'tis still better to be pleased, than not:
And therefore never their own torment plot.
While the malicious critics still agree,
To loathe each play they come and pay to see.
The first know 'tis a meaner part of sense
To find a fault, than taste an excellence:
Therefore they praise, and strive to like while these
Are dully vain of being hard to please.

With a man of Rochester's temperament, it might be expected that his best work would be found in his amatory poems: but of anything like genuine love there is little in them. Of vice there is plenty, of selfishness there is more, of contempt for women there is most of all. The value of his own affections may be estimated from his lines:—

Love, like us, must fate obey,
Since 'tis nature's law to change,
Constancy alone is strange.

Rochester spent much of his time in assuring women of his profound admiration, but he confides to his readers his real opinion of the sex to which he professed himself so devoted in this graceful couplet :—¹

Ye powers above ! Why did you woman make ?
Without an angel and within a snake.

In another poem he expresses his ideas regarding those who, like himself, yielded passionately to women's attractions :—

Love a woman ! You're an Ass.
'Tis a most insipid passion ;
To choose out for your happiness,
The silliest part of God's creation.

Men without the least religion usually suppose all those who have any to be humbugs. Rochester was no exception to this rule, as may be inferred from the following verses :—

Of what important use religion's made
By those who wisely drive the cheating trade !
As wines prohibited securely pass,
Changing the name of their own native place,
So vice grows safe, dressed in devotion's name,
Unquestioned by the custom-house of fame.
Wherever too much sanctity you see,
Be more suspicious of hid villany.

His estimate of the average contemporary clergyman was not a very high one ; but the question presents itself whether, admitting that he greatly exaggerated, he was altogether unjustified in his low

¹ " On a False Mistress."

opinion of the clerics of his day. Theirs is not generally supposed to have been the most brilliant period of the Anglican Church in this country. He gives us a portrait of one of them :—¹

Whose envious heart makes preaching a pretence
With his obstreperous saucy eloquence
To chide at Kings and rail at men of sense :
Who from the pulpit vents more peevish lies,
More bitter railings, scandals, calumnies,
Than at a gossiping are thrown about
When the good wives are drunk and then fall out.

He also sketches with a bold and vigorous pencil parsons of another type :—

Who hunt good livings, but abhor good lives.

Nor does he let off the higher ecclesiastical dignitaries in the same poem. He irreverently rhymes about a Right Rev. Lord Bishop who was

A greater fop in business at fourscore
Fonder of serious toys, affected more
Than the gay glittering fool at twenty proves
With all his noise, his tawdry clothes and loves.

Little taste had Rochester for anything serious, whether religious or otherwise. He spoke on at least one occasion in Parliament : yet he could write, and it is strongly to be suspected with genuine emotion :—

Too long the wise Commons have been in debate,
'Bout money and conscience, those trifles of State,
Whilst dangerous grievances daily increase,
The subject can't riot in safety and peace.

¹ *Satire on Man.*

An exceptionally atrocious poem, which passed from hand to hand in manuscript, was fathered upon Rochester, and apparently without reason, as a scathing satire upon both the poem and its author, purporting to be by Rochester, is bound up with some editions of Rochester's works. This manuscript is happily extinct; but its very title alone is enough to condemn it; and all that can certainly be now said of it is that it would be difficult to believe the offensive MS. to have been much coarser than the satire professing to chastise it. Perhaps some of Rochester's most creditable expressions occur in "Valentinian, A Trajedy as it is altered by the late Earl of Rochester and acted at the Theatre Royal," if indeed that work was from Rochester's own hand. There is a better tone, than in most of his other poems, in

Kindness hath resistless charms,
 All beside can weakly move;
 Fiercest anger it disarms,
 And clips the wings of flying Love,

and again in the couplet:—

A true friend, and a tender faithful wife,
 The two blest miracles of human life.

Regrets have been expressed at most of Rochester's poems being too broad to be read by modern ladies. Have ladies much loss? His verses unquestionably have their merits. Here and there, in not a few of them, is a brilliant spark of

wit: many of them are full of keen satire; they are mostly and not ineptly devoted to the exposition of the vices, and still more of the follies and the feeblenesses of mankind. But they deride things evil without condemning them; and occasionally they tolerate vice, while in more than one instance they extol it, even at the expense of virtue. Good and noble actions are scarcely mentioned: perhaps Rochester may not have believed in their existence.

The writings of Rochester are further open to the charge of bad taste and false sentiment. As a specimen of both let us look at his verses addressed to the queen mother, after the death of her eldest daughter:—¹

In vain on fevers curses we dispense
And vent our angry passion's eloquence.
In vain we blast the ministers of fate
And the forlorn physicians imprecate;
Say they to death new poisons add and fire,
Murder securely for reward and hire;
Art's basilisks that kill whome'er you see,
And truly write bills of mortality;
Who lest the bleeding corpse should them betray,
First drain those vital, speaking streams away.

If the poems of Rochester excite the passions, they never stir the emotions. No line written by his hand could produce a tear. There are many jarring notes in his verses; there are few of music. He laughs at the fallen, without ever offering a hand to raise them. His effusions are as devoid of

¹ Green's *Princesses of England*, vol. vi., p. 325.

hope as they are devoid of faith and of charity. He had a keen sense of the ludicrous, but none of pathos ; and his frequent and dazzling displays of virulent antipathies are untempered and untuned by any relieving evidences of kindly sympathy for man, woman, child or beast.

Rochester's poetry is realistic to an extreme, and it is quite as extreme in its want of imagination ; while even in his realism there is little true power of description. He rarely brings a scene vividly before the eyes of his readers, and both his lyric and his dramatic abilities were very limited. The only natural objects in which he took any interest were men and women ; and they only interested him with their vices and failings. For their virtues he cared nothing. Scenery did not appeal to his feelings ; nor is there any evidence of his having appreciated music.

It might be expected that there would be too great, rather than too slight, an exhibition of poetic energy in Rochester's amatory verses. Any such expectation would be grievously disappointed. It would be scarcely too much to say that there is no love in his love-songs. As has already been shown, they breathe the spirit of inconstancy, in himself as well as in the objects of his amours :—

Then talk not of inconstancy,
False hearts and broken vows ;
If I by miracle can be
This live-long moment true to thee,
'Tis all that heaven allows.

Nor did he expect constancy from the objects of his affections. What can be said of the romantic emotions of the singer who could exclaim to his lady-love :—

'Tis not that I am weary grown
Of being yours, and yours alone ;
But with what face can I incline
To damn you to be only mine?

The chances are that had it not been for Rochester's position as a peer and a courtier, his verses would neither have attracted much attention during his life nor have survived his death. Their popularity when first written is chiefly to be attributed to their scandalous attacks upon living people, and especially upon living women. Such unsavoury squibs, or libels as they were then not inaptly called, he constantly produced and handed about in manuscript. Happily, only a limited number—and yet too many—of these found their way into print.

To the student of human nature, and of characters which, if not in themselves historical, have attracted notice from having been the friends or companions of historical characters, Rochester's rhymes have a considerable interest, as illustrating their author, and through their author, the period in which he lived ; but intrinsically, as verses, they are of little value ; and a large proportion of them are worse than valueless.

On their worst and most flagrant features, the features for which they are unfortunately best known,

it is not intended to dwell here, but in judging of them, due allowance must be made for the tastes and the tone of the period in which they were written. One of the severest contemporary criticisms of those features was written by a far from unfriendly critic. St. Evremond says: "His looser love songs, too obscene for the ladies' eyes, have their peculiar beauties, and are indeed too dangerous to peruse; for what would have rendered them nauseous, if they had been writ by a genius less powerful, in them charms the fancy, and rouses the blood and appetite more than all the medicaments of Cleopatra".

In censuring the indecency of Rochester's writings, it should not be forgotten that there are a few passages little, if at all, less indecent in the celebrated *Colloquies* of the pious Erasmus; and, if we may be allowed to use such a term, for verbal uncleanness Erasmus, when at his worst, equals Rochester.

It is characteristic of the taste of Rochester's period that another Rochester, even a Bishop of Rochester, should have thought it worth while to translate into Latin the exceedingly coarse and filthy, though brilliantly clever, opening lines of Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*. Then again, as we have said, the plays of Shakespeare were so insipid to the courtiers of Charles II. that Sir William Davenant had to flavour them with, what we should consider, unreadable interpolations before they were tolerated in theatres of the reign of Charles II. Walpole bears witness that "the state poems of that time are a heap

of senseless ribaldry, scarcely in rhyme and more seldom in metre".¹ In criticising the poems of Rochester, he says: "Moralists proclaim loudly that there is no wit in indecency. It is very true. Indecency is far from conferring wit; but it does not destroy it neither." As to Rochester's own poems, he says that they "have much more obscenity than wit, more wit than poetry, more poetry than politeness".

It would be a mistake to suppose that, with all his coarseness, Rochester was absolutely the coarsest writer of his day. Pope directly states the contrary. "Oldham," says he, "is a very indelicate writer: he has strong rage, but it is too like Billingsgate. Lord Rochester had much more delicacy." As the delicacy of Rochester is microscopic, this was not saying much for the delicacy of Oldham.

Oldham was an usher at Croydon Grammar School, where, to his great surprise, he one day received a visit from Rochester,² Buckhurst, and Sir Charles Sedley, three literary rakes who had read some of his poems and had the curiosity to wish to see their author. To these three fashionable critics the most odious feature in Oldham's writings was probably their principal attraction.

Edward Thompson thus quaintly describes this scene in his *Memoirs of Oldham*. "Lord Rochester sending by his servant a verbal compliment to Mr.

¹ *Royal Authors*, vol. ii., p. 44.

² *Biog. Brit.*, "Oldham".

Oldham, the message was received by the Head Master, who was much surprised at the invitation, but concluded it a mistake, yet took the honour of it to himself, not having a capacity sufficient to know the abilities of his Usher. The old gentleman immediately dressed himself in his summer sabbath apparel, and repaired to the appointment, where all these wits burned with impatience for an interview with a man who they had some knowledge of from description. When the tottering pedagogue made his entry, they were all on the laugh; he began a stupid dull preface, of his sense of the honour they had done him; betraying at the same time his ignorance of such a visit: when Lord Dorset, observing the confusion of the man, and the laughing gravity of Lord Rochester, released him with a candid assurance their invitation was to Mr. Oldham, which the old gentleman readily submitted to, confessing he had not wit or learning enough for such good company."

In another place, Thompson says: "Notwithstanding all this, and the great character Mr. Oldham died with, yet many will conclude him to be vicious, and corrupted by the company of Lord Rochester, who it was thought had wit and wickedness enough to debauch the most pious hermit". Wood,¹ again, states that Oldham "became acquainted with that noted poet for obscenity and blasphemy, John, Earl of Rochester, who seemed much delighted in the

¹ *Ath. Oxon.*, "Oldham".

mad, ranting and debauched specimens of poetry of this author, Oldham". He might have added that Oldham fully equalled, if he did not exceed, Rochester in the two qualities for which he had just declared that earl to be noted.

Rochester cannot have admired the verses of Oldham more than Oldham admired those of Rochester, if we may judge from *A Pastoral bewailing the death of the Earl of Rochester by Mr. Oldham*. He declares Rochester to have been :—

lamented more
Than all our tuneful bards that died before.
Old Chaucer who first taught the use of verse,
No longer has the tribute of our tears :
Milton, whose muse with such a daring flight,
Let out the warring Seraphims to fight :

and other poets whom he mentions,

All now unwept, and unrelented pass,
And in our grief no longer share a place.

But in belauding and apostrophising Rochester he does not forget himself :—

If I am reckoned not unblest'd in song,
'Tis what I owe to thy all-teaching tongue :
Some of thy art, some of thy tuneful breath,
Thou didst by will to worthless me bequeath :
Others thy flocks, thy lands, thy riches have,
To me thou didst thy pipe and skill vouchsafe.

Of Rochester's prose there are few remains. As a correspondent he can scarcely be said to have distinguished himself, although some of his letters are more or less entertaining. Most of those published with his works were addressed to his friend,

Henry Savile, one of the grooms of the bedchamber to the Duke of York, and said to have been greatly admired by the duchess.

As a rule, Rochester's letters to Savile were rather complaining than entertaining. "If it were the sign of an honest man to be happy in his friends," he writes in one of them, "sure I were marked out for the worst of men; since no one ne'er lost so many as I have done, or knew how to make so few. The severity you say the Duchess of P[ortsmouth] shows to me, is a proof that 'tis not in my power to deserve well of anybody; since (I call truth to witness) I have never been of an error, that I know, to her . . . I can as well support the hatred of the whole world as anybody, not being generally fond of it. Those whom I have obliged may use me with ingratitude, and not afflict me much: but to be injured by those who have obliged me, and to whose service I am ever bound, is such a curse, as I can only wish on them who wrong me to the Duchess."

CHAPTER XIX.

OF several of the years of Rochester's short life practically nothing is recorded. Perhaps Rochester's own admission that he was drunk during five of them may go some way in accounting for this deficiency.

Rochester never took a very active part in politics. He spoke, however, in Parliament against the bill for the exclusion of the Duke of York. This bill provided that "Whereas the emissaries, priests, and agents of the pope had seduced James, Duke of York, to the communion of the Church of Rome, and prevailed on him to enter into negotiations with the pope and his nuncios, and to advance the power and greatness of the French king, to the end that by the descent of the crown upon a papist, and by foreign alliances, they might be able to succeed in their wicked designs, the said James should be incapable of inheriting the crowns of England and Ireland," etc., etc.

In the debates upon this bill, Rochester took part, and George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, gives the following report of his speech:—¹

¹ His *Dramatick Works*, vol. ii., p. 271.

“Sir, although it hath been said that no good Protestant can speak against this Bill, yet Sir, I cannot forbear to offer some objections against it. I do not know that any of the (late) King’s murderers were condemned without being heard; and must we deal thus with the brother of the King? It is such a severe way of proceeding, that I think we cannot answer for it to the world; and therefore it would consist much better with the justice of the House, to impeach him, and try him in a formal way, and then cut off his head if he deserves it. I will not offer to dispute the power of Parliaments; but I question whether this law, if made, would be good within itself. Some laws have a natural weakness in them. I think that by which the old Long Parliament carried on their Rebellion was judged afterwards void in law, because there was a power given, which could not be taken from the Crown. For ought I know, when you have made this law, it may have the same flaw in it: if not, I am confident there are a royal party which will never obey, but will think themselves bound by their Oath of Allegiance and duty, and will pay obedience to the Duke, if ever he should come to be King, which must occasion a civil war. And, Sir, I do not find that the proviso that was ordered to be added for the security of the Duke’s children is made strong enough to secure them, according to the debate of the House, it being liable to many objections, and the more, because the words ‘presumptive heir to the Crown,’ are industriously

left out, though much insisted on when debated here in the House. Upon the whole matter my humble motion is that the Bill may be thrown out."

Whether if he had directed his energies to politics, Rochester would have become an eminent statesman, may be more than doubtful ; but, so far as can be judged from this brief report, his speech in question was much to the point ; nor was he on this occasion a false prophet : for the bill was passed and yet proved as futile and inoperative as Rochester had predicted.

While yet a young man, Rochester's manner of living began to tell a terrible tale upon his constitution. In one of the consequent illnesses, his life became in serious danger ; and, when he thought he was dying, in spite of all his cynical profanity, he felt much remorse and yet more fear. Some time afterwards, he described his feelings to Burnet, who says : " He was sorry he had lived so as to waste his strength so soon, or that he had brought such an ill name upon himself ; and had an agony in his mind about it, which he knew not well how to express ; but at such times, though he complied with his friends in suffering divines to be sent for, he said he had no great mind to it, and that it was but a piece of his breeding to desire them to pray by him, in which he joined not himself". When the illness passed off and his breeding desired no more prayers, he appears to have resumed his former methods of wasting his strength and confirming his ill name.

In 1679 or early in 1680, however, his condition became permanently grave. Sensible of the rapid decline in his powers, he seems to have begun to consider the possibilities which might follow death, a consideration likely to have been not a little stimulated by his vivid imagination. He would appear at this time to have quite forgotten his own lines :—

Our sphere of action is life's happiness,
And he that thinks beyond, thinks like an ass.

Among his acquaintances in London was the court chaplain, Gilbert Burnet, a man at that time about the age of six or seven and thirty. This clergyman was afterwards made Bishop of Salisbury, but not till many years after the death of Rochester ; although he had refused a Scotch bishopric even so early as the time with which we are dealing. Burnet was on familiar terms with Charles II., who appears to have taken pleasure in speaking freely to him of his own manner of life. "Some things," says Burnet,¹ the king "freely condemned, such as living with another man's wife ; other things he excused, and thought God would not damn a man for a little irregular pleasure."

Rochester became acquainted with Burnet in a curious way. Burnet had been sent for by a seriously invalided lady, with whom Rochester had been on very intimate terms. This came to the ears of Rochester and led him to make the

¹ *History of His Own Times*, pp. 356-57.

acquaintance of a man who had kindly treated a victim of his own vice.¹

When Rochester's health broke down, Burnet had become a very popular preacher in London, and he was in high favour at the court; although now and then, for reasons too many to be noticed here, he was, like Rochester, in his royal master's black books.

All we know of Rochester's end is to be found in Burnet's *Life and Death of Rochester*, a book of which Dr. Johnson said: "We have a good Death; there is not much Life". Yet the same critic wrote of it² in a manner which may well make the writer of a notice of Rochester shrink from attempting to make much use of it.

"The account of these salutary consequences," says Johnson, "is given by Burnet in a book entitled *Some Passages of the Life and Death of John, Earl of Rochester*, which the critic ought to read for its elegance, the philosopher for its arguments, and the saint for its piety. It were an injury to the reader to offer him an abridgment."

Certainly the writer of these pages has no wish to injure his readers; nor will he submit to them an abridgment of Burnet's elegance, arguments, or piety. Perhaps it may be permitted to express a hope that Burnet was more accurate in his account of Rochester than a contemporary writer described him as being

¹ "Life of Bishop Burnet," by his son, at the end of *History of His-Own Times*, 1724.

² *Lives of the Poets*, vol. i.

in other works. In a letter to T. Hearne, Dr. Smith wrote: "there being little or no credit to be given to Dr. Burnet's Collections, he and his Scotch Amanuensis having been guilty of shameful omissions and perversions in numerous instances," etc.¹

In another letter,² Hearne says to Brown Willis concerning Burnet's writings about the monks: "What Burnet hath offered against them, appears to me to be spite and malice. His proofs are weak and groundless."

One of the most trusted friends of Charles II., Thomas Bruce, second Earl of Ailesbury, wrote of Dr. Burnet: "As to the history of his own times, I could give him the lie as many times as there are pages in his book". Again, he wrote of "that false and vain relater, Burnet. . . . And as to what relates to the transactions at Court, and many of the vile characters he hath pointed out, God forgive him."

Another witness, Ballard, writing to Dr. Lyttleton, says:³ "Had I had the least inclination to have lessened his (Bishop Burnet's) character, I did not want proper materials to have done it".

As we are dependent upon Burnet for the account of Rochester's end, these reflections upon his trustworthiness appear to be worth a passing notice; but every public man has his enemies, and they need not necessarily be credited. Moreover it does not

¹ *Letters by Eminent Persons*, Aubrey, Letter liv.

² *Ibid.*, ci.

³ *Ibid.*, clxi.

follow that, because a writer is not always truthful, he is always untruthful.

There is some evidence concerning Burnet, however, which may make Johnson's saints look a little shocked. In his *History of His Own Times*,¹ when lamenting that Charles II. had no child, and discussing the question of a divorce, or other method of giving the king another opportunity of obtaining an heir to his throne, he says: "Lord Lauderdale and Sir Robert Murray asked my opinion of these things. I said, I knew speculative people could say a great deal, in the way of argument, for polygamy and divorce: yet these things were so decried that they were rejected by all Christian societies; so that all such propositions would throw us into great convulsions; and entail war upon us; if any issue came from a marriage so grounded." And in a footnote² we are informed that Burnet wrote two treatises, one maintaining that divorce is justifiable if a wife proves to be unfruitful, and the other concluding with these words: "I see nothing so strong against polygamy as to balance the great and visible imminent hazards that hang over so many thousands, if it be not allowed".

Even on this evidence let not Burnet be condemned too hastily. The ancient religion of the country, with its laws and discipline, had not been overthrown for more than about a century, and with

¹ Year 1668.

² Ed. Wm. Smith, 1838, p. 17.

the new religion had come the doctrine of freedom of private judgment ; it can be no great matter of wonder, therefore, if a bishop like Burnet used that freedom to conceive alterations in the theology and discipline of marriage, just as his predecessors had conceived alterations in other theological doctrines and discipline. As has already been shown, even the pious Milton had some very free notions upon the question of the dissolubility of marriage. He maintained that "contrariety of mind" was a just ground for the dissolution of marriage, and that, instead of going to the expense and enduring the annoyance of a court of law, "far better is it that the doom should be pronounced in private ; to the husband God has given power over his wife ; let him declare that the contract is dissolved".¹ If husbands were to pronounce the doom, whenever they found themselves in "contrariety of mind" with their wives, few married couples would remain undivorced ; but, be this as it may, Burnet with his toleration of the question of polygamy, would not appear much worse than Milton in respect to marriage matters.

Burnet states that he found Rochester in a serious condition of ill-health, and that he "seemed to be slowly recovering from a great disease. He was in the milk diet, and apt to fall into hectic fits ; any accident weakened him, so that he thought he could

¹ *Puritan and Anglican*, E. Dowden, p. 140.

not live long ; and, when he went from London, he said he believed he should never come to town more. Yet, during his being in town, he was so well, that he often went abroad, and had great vivacity of spirit ; so that he was under no such decay as either darkened or weakened his understanding ; nor was he any way troubled with the spleen or vapours, or under the power of melancholy."

It is easy to believe that, at that time, Rochester's understanding was not "darkened or weakened," for it must have been shortly after he had made the speech in Parliament noticed above, and not very long after he had contrived and carried out his atrocious trick upon poor John Dryden.

In Burnet's book, as in most others describing controversies about religion, there is a great deal of what the author said and very little of what was said by his theological opponent. Nevertheless, if Burnet gives his own replies at undue length, he states Rochester's objections to religion very fairly ; indeed the terse, concise style in which the objections are stated is much more vigorous and impressive than the diffuse and wordy manner of the divine's replies to them.

The opinions of the unconverted Rochester were very much the same as those of the average up-to-date agnostic of the present day ; and that he appears to have had a taint of Neo-Buddhism (or shall we say Theosophy?) would appear from Burnet's saying : "for the next state, he thought it more likely that

the soul began anew, and that . . . as soon as she was dislodged . . . the soul went into some other state, to begin a new course ”.

Burnet says that, although he has “not concealed the strongest things” advanced by Rochester in the controversy, neither has he given us “all the excursions of his wit in setting them off”. This is much to be regretted: as “the excursions of his wit” are exactly what a student of Rochester’s character would like to read. “I told him,” says Burnet, “I saw the ill use he made of his wit, by which he slurred the gravest things with a slight dash of his fancy.” The theological fencing between the learned Anglican divine and the flippant though death-fearing rake might have furnished very interesting, though possibly not very edifying, reading; and, in Burnet’s account of their conversations, we feel that but half justice is done to Rochester’s side in the arguments, owing to the entire omission of the “wit by which he slurred over the gravest things”—*i.e.*, Burnet’s arguments—“with a slight dash of his fancy”.

Like many a modern agnostic, Rochester, though unbelieving himself, thought belief a happy, even perhaps an enviable condition; and, within a few months of his death, he often told a friend who believed in Christianity that he was fortunate in having such a faith, and that no word of his own should be aimed at diverting him from it.

Before leaving London, Rochester had much

conversation with Burnet and became feverishly disturbed in his mind on the subject of religion. We hear no more of his writing libels and lampoons. Graver subjects occupied his attention.

When he had returned to his country home at Woodstock, early in April, 1680, his health improved; and he felt so well, that he rode on horseback to his wife's estate in Somersetshire. He could not have done a more unfortunate thing; for the motion brought on internal inflammation: and it was with very great difficulty that he endured a return to the ranger's lodge in Woodstock Park by coach, which, considering the condition of the roads at that period, to say nothing of the carriages, one would imagine to have been almost more likely to shake and to jolt him than even riding.

It was probably at this time that Rochester wrote an undated letter to his friend, Henry Savile, complaining of his ill health, saying: "It is a miraculous thing (as the wise have it) when a man half in the grave, cannot leave off playing the fool and the buffoon; but so it falls out in my comfort. For this moment I am in a damned relapse, brought by a fever, the stone, and some other ten diseases more, which have deprived me of the power of crawling, which I happily enjoyed some days ago; and now I fear I must fall, that it may be fulfilled which was long since written in the good old ballad:—

But he who lives not wise and sober,
Falls with the leaf still in October.

About which time, in all probability, there may be a period added to the ridiculous being of

“Your humble servant,
“Rochester.”

Soon after returning for the last time to Woodstock, Rochester gave up his trivial tone and concentrated his mind on serious things. And with reason, for he had reached that stage of ill health which he himself thus describes :—

Where solid pains succeed our senseless joys,
And short-lived pleasures pass like fleeting dreams.
—*Valentinian.*

As a result of Burnet's prayer and arguments, he became what is termed “converted,” and he died, at any rate from Burnet's point of view, in the odour of sanctity. Respecting the merits or demerits of Rochester's religion and his own particular view of it, no remarks shall be offered here. But whatever may be the religion, right or wrong, in which the phenomenon commonly called conversion occurs, it is usually a sign that the convert has concentrated his attention upon the most serious mysteries of existence, and, it may charitably be hoped, with sorrow for his misdeeds and good intentions for the future. Conversion from one religion to another is altogether a different matter and must be judged by a different standard.

One question, unnoticed by Dr. Burnet, presents itself with regard to Rochester's piety during the last

few weeks of his life. If he had recovered, would his have been a case of

When the devil was ill, the devil a monk would be :
When the devil got well, the devil a monk was he ?

Very likely it might have been! If so, it was a good thing for him that he did not get well. Surely it is a mistake to sneer at the repentance of a dying reprobate, on the ground that, were he to regain his health and be thrown among his old temptations, he would relapse into his evil ways!

Whatever may have been the sincerity or value of Rochester's good resolutions, there can be no doubt that he was greatly changed. What could be in greater contrast to his former writings than such a letter as the following?

“WOODSTOCK PARK,
“OXFORDSHIRE.

“MY MOST HONOURED DR. BURNET,

“My spirits and body decay so equally together, that I shall write you a letter, as weak as I am in person. I begin to value churchmen above all men in the world, etc. If God be yet pleased to spare me longer in this world, I hope in your conversation to be exalted to that degree of piety, that the world may see how much I abhor what I so long loved, and how much I glory in repentance and in God's service. Bestow your prayers upon me, that God would spare me, if it be his good will, to show a true repentance and amendment of life for the time to come: or else,

if the Lord pleaseth to put an end to my worldly being now, that he would mercifully accept of my death-bed repentance, and perform that promise that he hath been pleased to make, that, at what time soever a sinner doth repent, he would receive him. Put up these prayers, most dear Doctor, to Almighty God, for your

“Most obedient and languishing servant,

“ROCHESTER.

“*June 25, 1680.*”

Death looks very different, when it is certainly near, from what it appears when it is probably distant. When strong and gay, Rochester took pleasure in writing of it, in a free translation, after this fashion :—

After death Nothing is, and Nothing Death ;
 The utmost limits of a gasp of breath,
 Let the ambitious Zealot lay aside
 His hope of heaven (whose Faith is but his pride) ;
 Let slavish souls lay by their fear,
 Nor be concerned which way, or where,
 After this life they shall be hurl'd :
 Dead, we become the lumber of the world ;
 And to that mass of matter shall be swept,
 Where things destroyed, with things unborn are kept ;
 Devouring time swallows us whole,
 Impartial death confounds body and soul.
 For hell, and the foul fiend that rules
 The everlasting fiery gaols,
 Devised by rogues, dreaded by fools,
 With his grim grizzly dog that keeps the door,
 Are senseless stories, idle tales,
 Dreams, whimsies and no more.¹

¹ Translation of a chorus in Seneca's *Troas*.

This notice of Rochester and other literary rakes was not undertaken with the object of discussing theological questions; and the religious disputes between Burnet and Rochester shall be left, as Johnson suggests, unabridged, for the philosophers to sneer at and for the saints to argue and quarrel over. It may be sufficient to say that, although the foregoing pages do not present a very edifying record, if Rochester died with the contrition represented by Burnet, he may not have lived in vain.

CHAPTER XX.

It may be worth while to compare, for a moment, the death-bed of Rochester with that of his royal friend and master. If Rochester's was less picturesque than that of his king, it was less distracted by frivolities of scene and company. Charles II. spent his last few weeks in royal splendour, surrounded by his mistresses and his spaniels, within hearing of fiddling, dancing, ribald jesting and the rattling of the dice-box. Rochester's death-bed was undisturbed by sights or sounds other than the presence of his family and his clergy, and the loving voices and heart-felt tears of his mother, his wife, and his children.

There is no reason, however, for doubting that the repentance of Charles II. was at least as sincere as that of Rochester. Charles's favourite gentleman of the bedchamber, Thomas Bruce, who was with him at the last, although not of the religion in which Charles II. died, says that the king "made a general confession with a most true, hearty, and sincere repentance, weeping and bewailing his sins, and he received what is styled all the rites of the (Catholic) Church, like a true and hearty penitent".

Rochester and Charles II. died professing dif-

ferent faiths ; but it is remarkable that two such dissolute libertines, who in life had done so much to encourage each other in evil, should both in death, according to their respective creeds, have apparently done their best to repent of their misdoings.

It is true that Rochester, to use an old phrase, "made his soul" some weeks before his end, whereas Charles II. put off that duty to the last ; but it should be remembered that death had been staring Rochester in the face for months, and that, although the king had been very much out of health for some time, the serious attack that resulted in his death only lasted for a few hours. Rochester had long doubtings, disputes, waverings and questionings, between faith and unfaith, Christianity and Deism, Deism and Agnosticism, before his mind was settled respecting religion. Charles II., on the contrary, had no doubts whatever in his own mind as to the faith or the Church to which he would have recourse, supposing the whim should ever seize him that his soul might possibly be worth saving.

We will not dwell upon Rochester's last few weeks of severe suffering. On the 26th of July, 1680, at the age of thirty-two, the once handsome John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, wasted to little except skin and bone, the miserable wreck of his own debauchery, died in peace, without a groan or a struggle. Or, as Anthony Wood puts it : "At length, after a short, but pleasant life, this noble and beautiful Count paid his debt to nature".

Rochester was buried beside his father under the north aisle of Spelsbury church, in Oxfordshire. It is much to be regretted that many of his writings were not buried with him. Indeed, as to that matter, he was hardly used; for one of his dying requests had been that they should be destroyed. Unfortunately, his poems, especially his "libels," had been very freely handed about in manuscript and copied. Not only were some few of these collected and published, but other verses which he had never written, some of them of the most objectionable character, were attributed to him and even bound up with his own.

Burnet says of Rochester: "Here were parts so exalted by nature, and improved by study, and yet so corrupted and debased by irreligion and vice, that he, who was made to be one of the glories of his age, was become a proverb, and, if his repentance had not interposed, would have been one of the greatest reproaches of it".

Burnet's statements concerning Rochester's death-bed repentance shall not be called in question here; but his remarks in the preceding paragraph seem to require a brief notice.

Was Rochester "exalted by nature"? *Was* he "improved by study"? *Was* he "made to be one of the glories of his age"? Let us for a moment compare him with a noble literary rake who lived more than a century later. Byron did not live the life of a saint; perhaps he may have been quite as



JOHN, EARL OF ROCHESTER.

BY SIR PETER LELY.

immoral as Rochester; it has been supposed by some that he was much more so; nor are all his poems of the chastest; but if the worst of them is marred by indecent allusions, it contains some fine passages, some refined ideas, a deep appreciation of the beauties of nature, and, here and there, a certain reverence for what is high and noble. Are any of these attributes to be found in the poems of Rochester? Byron's work is often debasing, but, it is sometimes elevating. Did Rochester ever write a verse that would elevate an eel? Did Rochester, in his highest poetical flights ever write anything within measurable distance of the following lines in Byron's grossest and coarsest poem:—

Ave Maria!¹ blessed be the hour!
 The time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft
 Have felt that moment in its fullest power
 Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft,
 While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,
 Or the faint dying-day hymn stole aloft,
 And not a breath crept through the rosy air,
 And yet the forest leaves seem'd stirr'd with prayer.

Of what characteristics of greatness is there evidence in anything recorded of Rochester? With two exceptions, the tributes to his courage are qualified, if nothing worse. We read of nothing to induce us to believe him to have been fitted for a leader of men, or to have had a powerful influence over the minds of others. There are no signs of his having

¹ The hour in the evening at which the Ave Maria, or Angelus, is said in Italy.

been possessed of a strong will, or steadfastness of purpose. It is true that he persevered in scribbling his verses, his libels and his lampoons; but he never seemed to set any definite object before him and pursue it until he obtained it. Even in his illicit amours, he was, as he himself admits, fickle and changeable. And, although he may have had ambition of a kind, it is a question whether he had sufficient ambition of the necessary sort to carry him to eminence in any useful capacity.

Rochester had no lack of humour and was remarkably ready with repartee; but neither of these qualifications go far towards the making of a great man. Neither the professional jester, nor the "funny man" of society, nor the practical joker, simply as such, and without other and very different faculties, rises to celebrity except as a clown. Much has been made of Rochester's classical scholarship; but was his knowledge of Ovid and Horace sufficient to entitle him to fame as a student? If he had adopted a scholastic life, is there reason for supposing that he would have become a greater "glory of his age" than an average college Don?

In how many families is there not an amusing, clever, good-looking fellow, who, though rather idle, shows talent at school and at college, is a favourite with his tutors, in spite of his pranks and scrapes, is exceedingly popular among his companions, and is said to be capable of doing great things if he would only try? But he never does try; on the contrary,

he gets into all sorts of trouble, to the disgrace of which he is much less sensible than is any other member of his own family. Such a character is not capable of great things. It lacks the will and the perseverance which are the main powers in a successful man. Its very cleverness is of the flickering, feeble type. There are always people, little less foolish than himself, who mistake the paradoxes of such a man for talent. If, instead of being an earl and a courtier, Rochester had belonged to the middle-classes, he would probably have been the black sheep of his family.

Again, the theory that the man who descends to one extreme has necessarily the power to ascend to its opposite, if he so pleases, is as illogical as it would be to pretend that an idle student, notorious for his forgetfulness, could take a double-first if he tried. It may be that the great sinner sometimes becomes a great saint; but the depth of his past depravity is no test or measure of the possibilities of his future sanctity. So far from it being the case that the man prodigious in wickedness would, if his energies were directed in the opposite direction, be a prodigy of virtue, it is well known to students of criminology that, in great criminals, there is often, if not usually, some mental deficiency. If there was no mental deficiency in Rochester, there were two hereditary weaknesses; for we know that Rochester's father was intemperate and licentious, and that the son inherited both of these tendencies.

As an amusing companion, as the life of a party, as a teller-of-good-stories, and as funny when drunk, Rochester seems to have been popular ; but nothing that we can learn about him leads one to suppose him to have been beloved. If he offended his friends with his libels and smart sayings as often as he offended his king, he must have had many enemies—in his letter recently quoted he admits as much—and his treatment of Dryden and other poets, his reputation for leading a companion into a street-row and then deserting him, and his petulant boxing of Killigrew's ears in the presence of the king, are anything but characteristic of what is called, in the slang of our own time, a "good fellow".

The telling of scandalous stories about women, both married and unmarried, is prevalent enough, even in the twentieth century ; but it would not now be considered good taste, or even manly, to hand about scurrilous verses, blasting the characters of ladies personally known to their author. The greatest libertines may be chivalrous towards women ; but of chivalry we find no trace in any story of Rochester ; and from his own writings as well as from what has been written of him by others, it may be inferred that by nature he was somewhat effeminate. In short it cannot be claimed for Rochester that he exhibited any of the better characteristics of either the Noble Savage, the Good Pagan, the Christian, the Knight of old, or the Gentleman of modern times.

If, however, it were to be suggested that with his

powers of repartee, lively wit, poetic temperament, literary tastes, and good looks, Rochester, virtuous instead of vicious, might have been one of the most attractive and ornamental social characters at the court of Charles II., no reasonable objection could be offered.

On the other hand, it may be that it was to this very court that most of his short-comings were due. To become a popular favourite in such a hot-bed of evil, at the early age of seventeen, was about the worst fate that could have befallen a lad of his disposition; and at least we must allow the defence made for him by Walpole: "As Lord Rochester was immersed only in the vices of that (Charles the Second's) reign, he was an innocent character compared to those who were plunged in its crimes". And beyond this, whatever may have been the degree or the value of his final repentance, it was evidence that there was some good in the man. It should also be remembered that he was to a large extent the victim of heredity and the slave of circumstances.

As to the rest of the literary rakes of the court of Charles II., it is not necessary that very much more should be added to what has already been said of them. Perhaps their most important work was assisting to a very large extent in the development of that comparatively modern product, the "gifted amateur". Whether the gifted amateur is a mammal that would be better existent or extinct is a large

question that shall not be discussed here. Whether the amateur should be an artist, as well as a lover of art, is another subject of dispute which shall be left undisturbed. Lovers and patrons of art are almost as ancient as history; though in early periods the patron usually encouraged the artist by threatening him with punishment if he failed to be productive. The first notable instance, in the Christian era, of an amateur who practised as well as patronised an art was Nero. To make a jump of sixteen hundred years from Nero, we find a typical amateur author and rhymster, who had just died when Rochester became a courtier, in Sir Kenelm Digby, and his example may possibly have had something to do with the formation of the school of literary rakes which graced, or disgraced, the court of Charles II.

What has been said by a learned writer¹ of Rochester's great exemplar, Ovid, might be said with almost equal truth of Rochester himself, as well as of several more of our literary rakes. "Though he wanted neither diligence, perseverance, nor literary ambition, he seems incapable of conceiving a great and serious whole. Though his mind works very actively in the way of observing and reflecting on the superficial aspects of life, yet he has added no great thoughts or maxims to the moral or intellectual heritage of the world. . . . He has not a genuine and consistent sense of human greatness or

¹ Professor Sellar, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, article on "Ovid."

heroism. . . . His spirit seems thoroughly ironical or indifferent in regard to the higher ideals or graver convictions of men." So far as the ironical spirit was concerned in our literary rakes it should be remembered that they lived in a century remarkable for the irony of its authors. Molière, Butler the author of *Hudibras*, Dryden, Boileau and Andrew Marvell were their contemporaries.

In judging the indifferent rhymes which passed for poetry at the court of Charles II., due consideration should be given to the fact that the circumstances and surroundings of their writers were singularly uncondusive to the production of poems of merit. Peace and quiet afford a congenial atmosphere to the poet; so also may noble activity, or even war; and there have been instances of poetry thriving in the midst of vice; but of all conditions destructive to the genuine poetical spirit there is none more fatal than that of intrigue and the unscrupulous use of politics and even religious animosities for the gratification of the passions, the attainment of wealth, favouritism, honour, or the enjoyment of personal revenge. It is notorious that the most unscrupulous intrigue was rampant at the court of Charles II. Mistresses were there the tools of statesmen, statesmen were the tools of mistresses; gay, rollicking and idle favourites of the king, owing to that king's toleration and encouragement, were enabled to make tools of both; nay, they even made a tool of the king himself! Their lampoons sometimes exercised an

indirect influence upon the affairs of the nation, more powerful than that of the finest speeches in Parliament or the sagest advice of the king's Privy Councillors.

One of the virtues, the very few virtues, of the literary courtiers was that, whatever else they may have been, they were not prigs. They were free from any affectation of a refinement or a culture which they did not possess : nor is there any evidence that they pretended to have read books that they had not read. Among themselves and their admirers to have a smattering of Ovid was more esteemed than to be able to quote Dante by the page, to know Chaucer by heart, or to be a walking concordance to Shakespeare.

It is true that there is little good and much evil to be learned from their writings, but what evil there is in them is avowedly evil. These writers did not expound upon the deep religious feeling of their atheism, or the immaculate purity of their illicit affections ; nor did they call irregular alliances marriages in the sight of God¹ though not in the sight of man. Whatever they may have been, they were not as a rule

¹ So far as the literary rakes are concerned this is probably true ; but since writing the above, the author has met with that very phrase in a work frequently quoted in these pages, Lord Ailesbury's *Memoirs*, vol. i., p. 76. Lord Ailesbury states that the Duke of Buccleugh "alleged a pretence, very airy and absurd, that he was married so very young that he did not know what he was doing, and that my poor Lady Henrietta Wentworth he regarded as his wife before God : and she was as visionary on her side".

humbugs. With all its faults, their school was free from the atrocious affectation of the "Euphuists" of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, or, for that matter, from the almost as objectionable affectations of the many 'ists and 'isms of the reign of a much later and an immeasurably better queen.

Considering themselves poets, our literary rakes associated with poets, whatever their rank of life. Then, and since then, for good or for evil, successful literature has been a passport to the companionship of the rich and the noble—to say a passport to high society would be to say too much; for there are always men of high family and low culture only too ready to keep a "poet fellow" in his proper place, or to remind an author that, though *in* society, he is not *of* it, after the fashion of the patrician who once said to a literary celebrity at a large party: "Well, Mr. Thackeray, what do you think of Vanity Fair, now that you have contrived to get into it?"

As was pointed out in an earlier chapter, the subjects of these pages must not be credited with having been the first literary courtiers. If it were necessary to give precedents, to name Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney, of those living within a hundred years of the literary rakes with whom we have been dealing, might be sufficient. There were the literary courtiers, again, of Charles I., of whom Falkland was the high priest. Like the literary courtiers of the next reign, they associated with many literary men who were not courtiers. At

Great Tew, Falkland's home near Oxford, "all men of parts and faculties in Oxford, besides those who resorted thither from London, found their lodgings".¹ It was the Liberty Hall of Letters. The rule of the house was that the host was not even to be informed of the coming or going of his literary guests, and a mixture of men there assembled that, as Clarendon says, could not be found "in any other society".

But this literary set differed greatly from that of the literary rakes. It was scholastic, theological, theoretical, "improving"; and its atmosphere was slightly redolent of the presence of the prig. Clarendon describes its conversation as "one continued *Convivium Philosophicum*, or *Convivium Theologicum*". If Ben Jonson and Hobbes were occasionally drunk, the general tone of the set was "sweetness and delight".

There was little of sweetness, *Convivium Philosophicum* or *Convivium Theologicum* in the conversation of the literary rakes of the next reign: drunkenness was rather the rule than the exception with them, and their influence was more deteriorating than improving. Perhaps the best that can be said of their literary influences is that they made literature, of a sort, a familiar matter, a thing of every day, and of no special set-apart class. Indeed, when writing of them as a set or a clique in these pages, those words have been used in a wide sense, and not as meaning

¹ *Life of Clarendon.*

that the members were in any way associated together by particular bonds ; on the contrary, if they began by being friends, they nearly always ended by becoming enemies.

In the Great Tew set, there was just a trace of the clergyman and the schoolmaster ; whereas the chief object of our rakes seems to have been to eradicate even the faintest recollection of the pulpit and the birch from literature. This may be a small thing to have done ; but it was something, and a good thing.

It would be foolish to claim too much for the literary rakes of the court of Charles II. ; but it may be suggested that they did a good deal towards establishing the tradition that none are so noble as to be incapable of further ennoblement by successful authorship. Certainly since their time there have been literary peers, peeresses, and even royalties in abundance ; and, of these, mention shall here be made of only four, who have handed down without a break the tradition of royal, noble and successful authorship from the reign of King Charles II. to the eve of that of King Edward VII. :—

Lord Bolingbroke	(1678-1751)
Lord Orford	(1717-1797)
Lord Byron	(1788-1824)
Queen Victoria	(1820-1901)

No attempt has been made in the preceding pages to represent Rochester and his set as heroes ; but if the idle, effeminate, dissolute, and unprincipled

literary rakes of the court of Charles II., in their curled wigs, their silks, satins, velvets, ribbons and laces, did even a little towards the gradual establishment of success in literature as one of the loftiest objects of ambition to the very highest in the land—even to royalty itself—we ought not to part from them altogether with contempt.

INDEX.

[FN. stands for Footnote.]

- ADDERBURY, 270, 272-3.
 Ailesbury, Thomas Bruce, second Earl of, his description of Charles II., 49 *seq.*; his story of Lauderdale, 106-7, 191, 314.
 Airy, Dr., 263.
 Argyle, Duke of, 273.
 Arlington, Lord, 255.
 Armourer, Sir N., 248, 263.
 Aston, Col., 208 *seq.*
 Aubrey, statement as to Rochester in the country, 266-7.
- BALCARRES, Lord, 48.
 Ball, A, 154 *seq.*
 Ballard, 304.
 Bear gardens, 19, 20.
 Bellasys, Lady, 235.
 Bergen, battle of, 188, 189.
 Besant, Sir W., 26.
 Blanchard, 227.
 Blood, Col., 184.
 Bodicot, 273.
 Boileau, 35, 280, 283, 323.
 Bolingbroke, Lord, 327.
 Bowls, game of, 250.
 Brooke, Sir John, 208.
 Brouncker, Henry, Lord, 176 *seq.*, 234.
 Bruce, Thomas. See Ailesbury.
 Brydges, Sir Egerton, 142.
 Buccleugh, Duke of, 273, 324 FN.
 Buckhurst, Sackville, Lord, afterwards Earl of Dorset, tried for murder, 23; description of, 97 *seq.*, 123, 233, 256, 265, 295-6.
 Buckingham, George Villiers, Duke of, 54, 76; description of, 87 *seq.*, 135; duel with Lord Shrewsbury, 90 *seq.*; as a publican, 242 *seq.*; on the turf, 246-7; preaches before the king, 256; said to have written verses conjointly with Rochester, 279, 299.
- Buckingham, Sheffield, Duke of. See Mulgrave.
 Bull fighting in England, 20.
 Bullivart, the Rev., 249.
 Bulstrode, Sir R., 52, 59.
 Burnet, Bishop, his book on Rochester, 304 *seq.*; question of his credibility, 305-6; and frequently quoted.
 Butler, Lord John, 182, 187, 203.
 — S., 6, 7, 243, 323.
 Byron, Lord, 287, 316-7.
- CAR, Sir Robert, 248.
 Card, Mr., 262.
 Carnegy, Lady, 68.
 Carteret, Sir G., 262.
 Castlemaine, Lady, 50, 58, 121, 226; description, 229.
 Catholics, persecution under Charles II., 52.
 Cats and hobbledehoys, 38.
 Cavaliers, 29.
 Charles II., King, restoration and court, 5 *seq.*; description of, 43 *seq.*; his spaniels, 137, 191; lost without Rochester, 164, 172; angry with Rochester for kidnapping Miss Mallet, 185; behaviour at the great fire, 193; introduces a fashion that is to last for ever, 196; with Nell Gwynn, 218 FN.; pensioner of Louis XIV., 238; trick played on him by Rochester at Newmarket, 253 *seq.*; drunk, 256, 262; death, 314 *seq.*
 Chandos, Lord, 183.
 Chesterfield, Lord and Lady, 120 *seq.*
 Chiffinch and his wife, 232 *seq.*
 Churchill, Arabella, 235.
 City of London, 165 *seq.*
 Clarendon, Lord, on drunkenness, 259-60; and frequently quoted.

- Cleveland, Duchess of. See Castlemaine.
- Clifford, Captain, 183.
- Coal, 201 *seq.*
- Cockfighting, 250, 252.
- Colbert, 93.
- Coldstream Guards, 210 FN.
- Congreve, 100.
- Conway, Lord, 248.
- Cook, Aurelian, 56.
- Cosmo III., travels of, 25 *seq.*, 41, 60, 261, 263; and often quoted.
- Courtin, French ambassador at Whitehall, 238-40.
- Cowley, 12, 13, 72-3.
- Cranbourne, 262.
- Cremona, 16.
- Cromwell, Oliver, 7, 9, 93, 217.
- Crowne, John, 220 *seq.*
- DANCING, 154 *seq.*
- Davenant, Sir Wm., description, 95 *seq.*, 294.
- Defoe, 257.
- Denham, Lady, 124, 235.
- Sir John, 73; description, 79 *seq.*
- Digby, Sir Kenelm, 322.
- Ditchley, 271-2.
- Dorchester, Countess of, 77, 99.
- Dorset, Earl of. See Buckhurst.
- Dress, 28, 181-2, 194 *seq.*, 328.
- Drinks, 24.
- Dryden, John, 35, 216 *seq.*; the Rose Alley ambuscade, 225 *seq.*, 294, 323.
- Drunkenness, 259 *seq.*
- Duels, Buckingham and Shrewsbury, 92-3; Rochester and Mulgrave, 208 *seq.*
- Duncomb, Alderman, 262.
- EDWARD VII., King, 327.
- Erasmus, *Colloquies* of, 294.
- Estcourt, R., 82.
- Etheredge, Sir George; description, 108 *seq.*; story to Buckingham, 112 *seq.*, 123.
- Euston, 255.
- Evelyn, John, bear gardens and executions, 19 *seq.*; and frequently quoted.
- Evremond, St., on Rochester, 64; description of, 132 *seq.*, 240, 294.
- Executions, 20 *seq.*
- FALKLAND, Lord, 325 *seq.*
- Falmouth, Lady, 149-50.
- Fénelon, 241.
- Fire of London, 193.
- Foods, 25 *seq.*, 275.
- GAMES, 18.
- Geeres, Sir Rob., 249.
- Grammont, Count, description of, 117 *seq.*; and frequently quoted.
- Le Maréchal de, 120.
- Grenadier Guards, 210, FN.
- Grey, Henry, 233.
- Griffith, the Rev., 286.
- Guildhall, banquet at the, 167.
- Guildford, Lord Keeper, 261-2.
- Gwynn, Nell, 218; description of, 229.
- HALIFAX, Lord, 55-6; description, 101 *seq.*
- Hamilton, brother-in-law of Grammont, 120 *seq.*
- Miss, Countess Grammont, 118 *seq.*, 235.
- Hare-hunting, 251.
- Hawking, 251.
- Hawley, Lord, 184, 206, FN.
- Hearne, 271-2, 304.
- Henrietta, sister to Charles II., 47.
- Herbert, Lord, 182, 183, 187.
- Hinchingbroke, Lord, 182, 202, 204.
- Hobbes, 326.
- Hobart, Miss, 147 *seq.*
- Hore, his *History of Newmarket*, 252; a good deal quoted.
- Howard, Earl of, 98.
- JANSSEN, 195.
- Jennings, Miss, 148, 172 *seq.*
- Johnson, Dr., 12, 35; opinion of Rochester's poems, 278 *seq.*; on Burnet's book on Rochester, 303.
- Jones, Inigo, 41.
- Jonson, Ben, 281, 326.

- KEELING, Lord Chief Justice, 256.
Killigrew, Harry, 46-7.
— Tom, 70; description of, 71 *seq.*; affair with Lady Shrewsbury, 90-3; helps Rochester in a love affair, 157 *seq.*, 175, 215, 233.
- LAUDERDALE, Duke of, 105 *seq.*
Lee, Sir H., 270.
Lenclos, Madame Ninon de, 241.
Life Guards, 209-10, 251.
Louis XIV., 54, 197, 238, 241.
Lyttleton, Dr., 304.
— Sir Charles, 156, 163.
- MAIZEAUX, Des, 134, 138.
Mallet, Elizabeth. See Rochester, Lady.
— John, 182.
Marvel, Andrew, 57-8, 323.
Mary, Sister of Charles II., 48.
Mazarin, Duchess of, 133, 136; description of, 230-1, 240.
Merchants of London, 165 *seq.*
Milton, John, 13, 15, 23; on divorce, 306.
Molière, 323.
Monconis, 67.
Mulgrave, Sheffield, Lord, afterwards Duke of Buckingham or Buckinghamshire, 52; description of, 96-7; quarrel with Rochester, 207 *seq.*, 225, 284 FN.
Muscovy, the ambassador from, 73.
Music, 16.
Muskerry, Lord, 140.
- NEWCASTLE, Duke of, 139 *seq.*, 247, 249.
— Duchess of, 139 *seq.*
Newdigate MSS., 40, 275.
Newmarket, 245-57.
- OLDHAM, 295 *seq.*
Orange, Prince of, 260.
— Princess Mary of, 77.
Orford, Lord, 327. And see also Walpole.
Otway, 221 *seq.*, 228.
Ovid, 14 *seq.*, 274, 322.
- PALAMEDES, 194.
Penn, William, 50.
Pepys, bear gardens and executions, 19 *seq.*; menu, 25, 61, 69; teetotaler, 264; and frequently quoted.
Periwigs, 39.
Peter of the Wood, Don Pedro Tomasco Correo de Silva, 89.
Pierce, 256.
Plymouth, Lord, 222.
Pope, 35, 295; verses quoted, 94, 100, 273.
Popham, Sir F., 182, 187.
Porter, Col., 209.
Portsmouth, Duchess of, 226; description, 230, 240, 298.
Price, Miss, 143, 152, 171 *seq.*
Pryme, Abraham de la, 73.
- RACINE, 241.
Racing, 246 *seq.*
Ratisbon, Etheredge's story of, 112.
Reresby, Sir John, 208, 276.
Richmond, Duchess of, 184, 203; description, 229.
Rochester, Ann, wife of first earl, 32, 270, 314.
— Elizabeth, wife of second earl, 182 *seq.*, 202 *seq.*, 314.
— Henry Wilmot, first Earl of, 30 *seq.*
— John Wilmot, second Earl of, admiration of Cowley, 12; birth, 31; boyhood and youth, 32 *seq.*; drunkenness, 35, 259; offends Charles II., 57, 162, 242, 254; character of Dorimant in "A Man of Mode" attributed to him, 110; Miss Price, 143; Miss Temple, 145 *seq.*; his disguises, 164; as a city man, 165; as a foreign doctor, 169 *seq.*; his poverty, 181; kidnaps Miss Mallet, 183 *seq.*; in the navy, 188; his troop of horse, 192; his marriage, 202; his children, 204; funeral sermon, 205; as a tavern-keeper, 242 *seq.*; on the turf, 246 *seq.*; at his country homes, 266 *seq.*; his

- poetry, 278 *seq.*; his speech in Parliament, 299-301; health breaks down, 301; religious discussions with Burnet, 307; letter to Savile, 309; letter to Burnet, 311; death compared with that of Charles II., 314-5; his death, 315; summary, 316 *seq.* His verses quoted, 34, 43, 55, 63, 64, 109, 225, 267, 279 *seq.*, 302, 312.
- Roscommon, Earl of, description, 83 *seq.*, 242.
- Ruyter, De, 200.
- SACHARISSA. See Sidney, Lady.
- Sandwich, Lady, 202.
- Lord, 21, 189.
- Sarah, 152-3, 157, 163.
- Sarsfield, Captain, 183.
- Savile, Henry, 225, 233, 298, 309.
- Saxam, 256.
- Scott, Sir Walter, 14, 63 *FN.*, 264.
- Scrope, Sir Carr, description, 100, 214, 282-3.
- Seddiman, Captain, 188.
- Sedley, Miss, 77, 235.
- Sir Charles, description, 76 *seq.*, 123, 256, 265, 295.
- Sellar, Professor, on Ovid, 322.
- Settle, Elkanah, 219.
- Sévigné, Madame de, 241.
- Shaftesbury, Countess of, 199 *FN.*
- Earl of, 58.
- Shakespeare, 13, 23, 95.
- Sheffield, J., Lord Mulgrave and later Duke of Buckingham. See Mulgrave.
- Sheppard, Fleetwood, description, 107-8, 233.
- Shrewsbury, Earl of, 91 *seq.*
- Countess of, 90 *seq.*
- Sidney, Lady Dorothea (Sacharissa), 102, 103.
- Sir Philip, 325.
- Silvestre, Dr., 137.
- Smith, Dr., 304.
- Somers Tracts, 9.
- Spelsbury churchyard, 316.
- Spenser, E., 325.
- Sports, 17.
- Spragge, Sir Ed., 192, 200-2.
- Stewart, Miss. See Richmond, Duchess of.
- Stradivarius, 16.
- Sunderland, Lady. See Sidney, Lady.
- Sydney, 150-1, 174.
- Suckling, 280 *seq.*
- TAAFE, Lord, 74.
- Tea, 27.
- Temple, Miss (Lady Lyttleton), 145-63, 171.
- Tew, Great, 327.
- Thackeray, 325.
- Thames, naval battle on the, 192; second ditto, 200; Denham's lines on, 80.
- Tirrell, Lady, 183.
- Tobacco, 27.
- Thompson, E., 295.
- Tooke, C., lines by, 108.
- Tunbridge Wells, 246, 257.
- VANE, Sir H., 21.
- Voltaire, 134.
- WALLER, description, 102 *seq.*, 217.
- Walpole, Horace, Lord Orford, 44, 321, 327.
- Warmestre, Miss, 74.
- Warre, Francis, 206 *FN.*
- Lady, 206.
- Wentworth, Lady Henrietta, 324 *FN.*
- Whitehall, 41 *seq.*
- Williamson, Secretary, 248.
- Willis, Brown, 304.
- Wood, Anthony, 72, 315.
- Woodstock, the ranger's house at, 270-2; Rochester wins a race at, 247.
- YARBOROUGH, Lady, 150.
- York, Ann, Duchess of, 67 *seq.*, 146-7, 179.
- Duke of, 16; description, 66, 172, 176, 221, 235; drunk, 262-3, 299.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
<i>BADMINTON LIBRARY (THE)</i> -	12	MENTAL, MORAL, AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY	17
BIOGRAPHY, PERSONAL MEMOIRS, &c.	9	MISCELLANEOUS AND CRITICAL WORKS	38
CHILDREN'S BOOKS	32	POETRY AND THE DRAMA	23
CLASSICAL LITERATURE, TRANSLATIONS, ETC.	22	POLITICAL ECONOMY AND ECONOMICS	20
COOKERY, DOMESTIC MANAGEMENT, &c.	36	POPULAR SCIENCE	30
EVOLUTION, ANTHROPOLOGY, &c.	21	RELIGION, THE SCIENCE OF	21
FICTION, HUMOUR, &c.	25	<i>SILVER LIBRARY (THE)</i>	33
<i>FUR, FEATHER AND FIN SERIES</i>	15	SPORT AND PASTIME	12
<i>FINE ARTS (THE) AND MUSIC</i>	36	<i>STONYHURST PHILOSOPHICAL SERIES</i>	19
HISTORY, POLITICS, POLITY, POLITICAL MEMOIRS, &c.	3	TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE, THE COLONIES, &c.	11
LANGUAGE, HISTORY AND SCIENCE OF	20	WORKS OF REFERENCE	31
LOGIC, RHETORIC, PSYCHOLOGY, &c.	17		

INDEX OF AUTHORS AND EDITORS.

	Page		Page		Page
Abbott (Evelyn)	3, 22	Banks (M. M.)	24	Campbell (Rev. Lewis)	21, 22
— (J. H. M.)	3	Baring-Gould (Rev. S.)	21, 38	Camperdown (Earl of)	9
— (E. A.)	17, 18	Barnett (S. A. and H.)	20	Chasseloup - Laubat (Marquis de)	13
Acland (A. H. D.)	17	Baynes (T. S.)	38	Chesney (Sir G.)	3
Acton (Eliza)	36	Beaconsfield (Earl of)	25	Childe-Pemberton (W. S.)	9
Adeane (J. H.)	9	Beaufort (Duke of)	13, 14	Cholmondeley-Pennell (H.)	13
Adelborg (O.)	32	Becker (W. A.)	22	Christie (R. C.)	13
Æschylus	22	Beesly (A. H.)	23	Churchill (W. Spencer)	4, 25
Änger (A. C.)	14	Bell (Mrs. Hugh)	9	Cicero	11
Albemarle (Earl of)	13	Bent (J. Theodore)	3	Clarke (Rev. R. F.)	22
Alcock (C. W.)	15	Besant (Sir Walter)	11	Clarendon (E. J.)	10
Allen (Grant)	30	Bickerdyke (J.)	14, 15	Clodd (Edward)	21, 30
Allgood (G.)	3	Bird (G.)	23	Clutterbuck (W. J.)	12
Alverstone (Lord)	15	Blackburne (J. H.)	15	Colenso (R. J.)	36
Angwin (M. C.)	36	Bland (Mrs. Hubert)	24	Conington (John)	23
Anstey (F.)	25	Blount (Sir E.)	9	Conway (Sir W. M.)	14
Aristophanes	22	Boase (Rev. C. W.)	6	Conybeare (Rev. W. J.)	13
Aristotle	17	Boedder (Rev. B.)	19	& Howson (Dean)	33
Armstrong (W.)	13	Brassey (Lady)	11	Coolidge (W. A. B.)	17
Arnold (Sir Edwin)	11, 23	— (Lord)	14	Corbett (Julian S.)	4
— (Dr. T.)	3	Bright (Rev. J. F.)	3	Coutts (W.)	22
Ashbourne (Lord)	36	Broadfoot (Major W.)	3	Coventry (A.)	14
Ashby (H.)	3	Brooks (H. J.)	17	Cox (Harding)	13
Ashley (W. J.)	3, 20	Brown (A. F.)	32	Crake (Rev. A. D.)	12
Avebury (Lord)	21	— (J. Moray)	14	Craven (W. G.)	4
Ayre (Rev. J.)	31	Bruce (R. I.)	3	Crawford (J. H.)	25
Bacon	9, 17	Bryce (J.)	14	— (R.)	11
Bagehot (W.)	9, 20, 38	Buck (H. A.)	14	Creed (S.)	25
Bagwell (R.)	3	Buckland (Jas.)	3	Creighton (Bishop)	4, 6, 9
Bailey (H. C.)	25	Buckle (H. T.)	32	Crozier (J. B.)	- 9, 17
Baillie (A. F.)	3	Bull (T.)	36	Custance (Col. H.)	15
Bain (Alexander)	17	Burke (U. R.)	3	Cutts (Rev. E. L.)	23
Baker (J. H.)	38	Burns (C. L.)	36	Dabney (J. P.)	6
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Balfour (A. J.)	- 13, 21	Butler (E. A.)	6	— (T. F.)	4
— (Lady Betty)	6	Cameron of Lochiel	15	Dallinger (F. W.)	15
Ball (John)	11			Daughish (M. G.)	9
				Davidson (A. M. C.)	22
				— (W. L.)	17, 20, 21
				Davies (J. F.)	22
				Dent (C. T.)	14
				De Salis (Mrs.)	36
				De Tocqueville (A.)	4
				Devas (C. S.)	- 19, 20
				Dickinson (G. L.)	4
				— (W. H.)	38
				Dougall (L.)	25
				Dowden (E.)	40
				Doyle (Sir A. Conan)	25
				Du Bois (W. E. B.)	5
				Dufferin (Marquis of)	14
				Dunbar (Mary F.)	25
				Dyson (E.)	26
				Ebrington (Viscount)	15
				Ellis (J. H.)	15
				— (R. L.)	17
				Erasmus	9
				Evans (Sir John)	38
				Falkiner (C. L.)	4
				Farrar (Dean)	- 20, 26
				Fitzgibbon (M.)	4
				Fitzmaurice (Lord E.)	4
				Folkard (H. C.)	- 15
				Ford (H.)	16
				— (W. J.)	16
				Fountain (P.)	11
				Fowler (Edith H.)	26
				Francis (Francis)	16
				Francis (M. E.)	26
				Freeman (Edward A.)	6
				Fremantle (T. F.)	16
				Freshfield (D. W.)	14
				Frost (G.)	38

INDEX OF AUTHORS AND EDITORS—continued.

	Page		Page		Page
Froude (James A.)	4, 9, 11, 26	Kant (I.)	18	Nesbit (E.)	24
Fuller (F. W.)	5	Kaye (Sir J. W.)	6	Nettleship (R. L.)	17
Furneaux (W.)	30	Keary (C. J.)	23	Newman (Cardinal)	28
Gardiner (Samuel R.)	5	Keller (A. G.)	22	Nicbols (F. M.)	9
Garthorne-Hardy (Hon. A. E.)	- 15, 16	Kelly (E.)	18	Ogilvie (R.)	23
Geikie (Rev. Cunningham)	38	Kent (C. B. R.)	6	Oldfield (Hon. Mrs.)	9
Gibbons (J. S.)	15	Kerr (Rev. J.)	14	Onslow (Earl of)	14
Gibson (C. H.)	17	Killick (Rev. A. H.)	18	Osbourne (L.)	28
Gleig (Rev. G. R.)	10	Kitchin (Dr. G. W.)	6	Packard (A. S.)	21
Goethe	23	Knight (E. F.)	- 11, 14	Paget (Sir J.)	10
Gore-Booth (Sir H. W.)	14	Köstlin (J.)	10	Park (W.)	16
Graham (A.)	5	Kristeller (P.)	37	Parker (B.)	40
— (P. A.)	- 15, 16	Ladd (G. T.)	18	Payne-Gallwey (Sir R.)	- 14, 16
— (G. F.)	20	Lang (Andrew) 6, 14, 16, 21, 23, 27, 32, 39	5	Pearson (C. H.)	14
Granby (Marquess of)	15	Lapsley (G. T.)	5	Peek (Hedley)	10
Grant (Sir A.)	17	Lascelles (Hon. G.)	13, 15	Pemberton (W. S.)	9
Graves (R. P.)	9	Laurie (S. S.)	6	— (Child)	9
Green (T. Hill)	- 17, 18	Lawley (Hon. F.)	14	Pembroke (Earl of)	14
Greene (E. B.)	5	Lawrence (F. W.)	20	Pennant (C. D.)	15
Greville (C. C. F.)	5	Lear (H. L. Sidney)	36	Phillipps-Wolley (C.)	12, 28
Grosce (T. H.)	18	Lecky (W. E. H.)	6, 18, 23	Pierce (A. H.)	19
Grosse (C.)	5	Lees (J. A.)	12	Pitman (C. M.)	14
Grove (F. C.)	13	Leighton (J. A.)	18	Pleydell-Bouverie (E. O.)	17
— (Lady)	13	Leslie (T. E. Cliffe)	20	Pole (W.)	14
— (Mrs. Lilly)	11	Lieven (Princess)	8	Pollock (W. H.)	- 13, 40
Gardon (Lady Camilla)	26	Lillie (A.)	16	Poole (W. H. and Mrs.)	36
Garnhill (J.)	18	Lindley (J.)	31	Poore (G. V.)	15
Gwilt (J.)	31	Locock (C. D.)	16	Pope (W. H.)	40
Haggard (H. Rider)	11, 26, 27, 38	Lodge (H. C.)	6	Powell (E.)	7
Hake (O.)	14	Loftie (Rev. W. J.)	6	Powys (Mrs. P. L.)	10
Halliwell-Phillipps (J.)	10	Longman (C. J.)	- 12, 16	Praeger (S. Rosamond)	33
Hamilton (Col. H. B.)	5	— (F. W.)	16	Prevost (C.)	13
Hamlin (A. D. F.)	36	— (G. H.)	- 12, 15	Pritchett (R. T.)	14
Harding (S. B.)	5	— (Mrs. C. J.)	37	Proctor (R. A.)	- 17, 30
Harmsworth (A. C.)	13, 14	Lowell (A. L.)	6	Raine (Rev. James)	6
Harte (Bret)	27	Lucock (Sir John)	21	Ramal (W.)	- 24
Harting (J. E.)	15	Lucan	22	Randolph (C. F.)	7
Hartwig (G.)	30	Lucia	22	Rankin (R.)	8, 25
Hassall (A.)	8	Lutenslawski (W.)	18	Ransome (Cyril)	3, 8
Haweis (H. R.)	9, 36	Lyall (Edna)	27	Raymond (W.)	28
Head (Mrs.)	37	Lynch (G.)	12	Reid (S. J.)	23
Heath (D. D.)	17	— (H. F. B.)	12	Rhoades (J.)	23
Heathcote (J. M.)	14	Lytelton (Hon. R. H.)	13	Rice (S. F.)	12
— (C. G.)	14	— (Hon. A.)	14	Rich (A.)	23
— (N.)	11	Lytton (Earl of)	6, 24	Richardson (C.)	- 13, 15
Helmholtz (Hermann von)	30	Macaulay (Lord)	6, 7, 10, 24	Richmond (Ennis)	19
Henderson (Lieut.-Col. G. F. R.)	9	Macdonald (Dr. G.)	24	Rickaby (Rev. John)	19
Henry (W.)	14	Macfarren (Sir G. A.)	37	— (Rev. Joseph)	19
Henty (G. A.)	32	Mackail (J. W.)	- 10, 23	Ridley (Sir E.)	22
Herbert (Col. Kenney)	15	Mackenzie (C. G.)	16	— (Lady Alice)	28
Hiley (R. W.)	9	Mackinnon (J.)	7	Riley (J. W.)	24
Hill (Mabel)	5	Macleod (H. D.)	20	Roberts (E. P.)	33
Hillier (G. Lacy)	13	Macpherson (Rev. H. A.)	15	Roget (Peter M.)	- 20, 31
Hime (H. W. L.)	23	Madden (D. H.)	16	Rolls (Hon. C. S.)	13
Hime (H. W. L.)	13	Madden (D. H.)	16	Romanes (G. J.)	10, 19, 21, 24
Hodgson (Shadworth)	18, 38	Magnusson (E.)	28	— (Mrs. G. J.)	10
Hoenig (F.)	38	Maher (Rev. M.)	19	Ronalds (A.)	17
Hogan (J. F.)	9	Malleson (Col. G. B.)	6	Roosevelt (T.)	6
Holmes (R. R.)	10	Marchant (A. W.)	27	Ross (Martin)	28
Holroyd (M. J.)	9	Marshman (J. C.)	9	Rossetti (Maria Francesca)	- 40
Homer	22	Maryon (M.)	39	Rotheram (M. A.)	36
Hope (Anthony)	22	Mason (A. E. W.)	27	Rowe (R. P. P.)	14
Horace	22	Maskelyne (J. N.)	16	Russell (Lady)	10
Houston (D. F.)	5	Matthews (B.)	31	Saintsbury (G.)	15
Howard (Lady Mabel)	27	Maudner (S.)	39	Salomons (Sir D.)	13
Howitz (W.)	11	Max Müller (F.)	10, 18, 20, 21, 22, 27, 39	Sanders (T. C.)	18
Hudson (W. H.)	30	May (Sir T. Erskine)	7	Sanders (E. K.)	9
Huish (M. B.)	37	McFerran (J.)	14	Savage-Armstrong (G. F.)	25
Hullah (J.)	37	Meade (L. T.)	13	Scott-Montagu (Hon. J.)	13
Hume (David)	18	McCredy (R. J.)	32	Seebomb (F.)	8, 10
— (M. A. S.)	3	Melville (G. J. Whyte)	27	Selous (F. C.)	- 12, 17
Hunt (Rev. W.)	6	Mervale (Dean)	7	Senior (W.)	14, 15
Hunter (Sir W.)	6	Merriman (H. S.)	27	Setb-Smith (C. E.)	- 14
Hutchinson (Horace G.)	13, 16, 27, 38	Mill (John Stuart)	- 18, 20	Seton-Karr	8
Ingelow (Jean)	23	Millias (J. G.)	- 16, 30	Sewell (Elizabeth M.)	28
Ingram (T. D.)	6	Milner (G.)	40	Shadwell (A.)	- 40
Jackson (A. W.)	10	Mitchell (E. B.)	13	Shakespeare	25
James (W.)	18	Monck (W. H. S.)	19	Shand (A. I.)	15
Jameson (Mrs. Anna)	38	Montague (F. C.)	7	Shaw (W. A.)	8
Jefferies (Richard)	38	Moore (G. W.)	24	Shearman (M.)	- 12, 13
Jekyll (Gertrude)	38	Moore (T.)	31	Sheehan (P. A.)	28
Jerome (Jerome K.)	27	— (Rev. Edward)	17	Sheppard (E.)	8
Johnson (J. & J. H.)	39	Morgan (C. Lloyd)	21	Sinclair (A.)	14
Jones (H. Beuce)	31	Morris (Mowbray)	13	Skirne (F. H.)	9
Joyce (P. W.)	6, 27, 39	— (W.)	- 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 37, 40	Smith (C. Fell)	10
Justinian	- 18	Mulhall (M. G.)	20	— (R. Bosworth)	8
		Murray (Hilda)	33	— (T. C.)	5
		Nansen (F.)	12	Smith (W. P. Haskett)	12
		Nash (V.)	7	Somerville (E.)	28
				Sophocles	23
				Soulsby (Lucy H.)	40
				Southery (R.)	40
				Spahr (C. B.)	20
				Spedding (J.)	9, 17
				Spender (A. E.)	12
				Stanley (Bishop)	31
				Stebbing (W. J.)	- 10, 28
				Steel (A. G.)	13
				Stephen (Leslie)	12
				Stevens (H. Morse)	8
				Sternberg (Count Adalbert)	8
				Stevens (R. W.)	40
				Stevenson (R. L.)	25, 28, 33
				Storr (F.)	17
				Stuart-Wortley (A. J.)	15
				Stubbs (J. W.)	8
				Suffolk & Berkshire (Earl of)	14
				Sullivan (Sir E.)	14
				Sully (James)	19
				Superfand (A. and G.)	8
				— (Alex.)	- 19, 40
				— (G.)	29
				Suttner (B. von)	40
				Swan (M.)	29
				Swinburne (A. J.)	19
				Symes (J. E.)	20
				Tait (J.)	7
				Tallentyre (S. G.)	10
				Tappan (E. M.)	33
				Taylor (Col. Meadows)	8
				Tebbutt (C. G.)	14
				Terry (C. S.)	10
				Thomas (J. W.)	19
				Thorn (H. C.)	8
				Thornhill (W. J.)	23
				Thornton (T. H.)	10
				Todd (A.)	8
				Tout (T. F.)	7
				Twynbee (A.)	20
				Trevelyan (Sir G. O.)	6, 7, 8, 9, 10
				— (G. M.)	- 7, 8
				Trollope (Anthony)	29
				Turner (H. G.)	40
				Tyndall (J.)	9, 12
				Tyrrill (R. Y.)	- 22, 23
				Unwin (R.)	- 40
				Upton (F. K. and Bertha)	33
				Van Dyke (J. C.)	37
				'Veritas'	5
				Virgil	23
				Wagner (R.)	25
				Wakeman (H. O.)	8
				Walford (L. B.)	29
				Wallas (Graham)	10
				— (Mrs. Graham)	32
				Walpole (Sir Spencer)	8, 10
				— (Horace)	10
				Walrod (Col. H.)	12
				Walsingham (Lord)	14
				Ward (Mrs. W.)	29
				Warwick (Countess of)	40
				Watson (A. E. T.)	14
				— (G. L.)	14
				Weathers (J.)	- 40
				Webb (Mr. and Mrs. Sidney)	20
				— (Judge T.)	40
				— (T. E.)	- 19, 23
				Weber (A. R.)	19
				Weir (Capt. R.)	14
				Wellington (Duchess of)	37
				West (B. B.)	29
				Weyman (Stanley)	25
				Whately (Archbishop)	17, 19
				Whitelaw (R.)	- 23
				Whittall (Sir J. W.)	40
				Wikins (G.)	- 23
				— (W. H.)	3
				Willard (A. R.)	37
				Willich (C. M.)	31
				Witham (T. M.)	14

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