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COWLEY'S ESSAYS

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CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1923

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107665279

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First edition 1887
Reprinted 1891, 1902
Second edition 1923
First published 1923
First paperback edition 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-66527-9 Paperback

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Preface

I N this revision of the Pitt Press edition of Cowley's *Prose Works* I have made considerable changes. I have omitted *A Proposition for the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy*, *A Discourse by way of Vision concerning the Government of Oliver Cromwell*, and the Preface to *Cutter of Coleman Street*—everything, in short, but the *Discourses by way of Essays*. I have written a new introduction, and I have made the notes much shorter—this last in the interest alike of the young student and the general reader. Most of us have met with young people who have been goaded by superabundant notes into a life-long dislike of some masterpiece. Teachers, publishers, and editors, acting and re-acting upon one another, must all share in the blame. Happily there have been for some time signs of a marked improvement; notes are fewer and shorter, or absent altogether. But there is still too great a tendency in examiners to examine on the notes rather than on the text, and the teacher with his or her finger firmly embedded in the notes is still too common a phenomenon.

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All the same, no teacher can be expected to be familiar with every author or, being hard-worked and human, to give sufficient time to the preparation of every lesson. In a seventeenth century author, especially in one like Cowley, who is steeped in classical literature, there must always be archaic words and classical allusions to explain. In these notes, explanation has been my main object, sometimes also illustration. The two longest are a quotation from Pascal and a note on the Toupinambaltians. I don't know that I can justify them, but my young friends will perhaps forgive them in a lover of Pascal and Montaigne.

Both in the introduction and in the notes I have borrowed freely from my learned predecessor, Dr Lumby, especially in the notes for difficulties of language and for illustration from sixteenth and seventeenth century writers. I am also indebted to Mr Gough's excellent edition of Cowley's *Essays and Other Prose Writings*, of which he kindly permitted me to make use, and which for the scholarly study of Cowley will still remain indispensable.

The text, save for one or two unimportant alterations, is that of Mr A. R. Waller's edition of Cowley in the Cambridge English Classics. He hoped at one time to publish a "Supplement of Notes, biographical, bibliographical and critical," but his single-hearted

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devotion to the University Press prevented the realisation of this hope. It is to my lasting regret that I have been unable to submit to him for criticism the work which on behalf of the Syndics he entrusted to me; the leave which he gave me to carry it out in my own way has turned a task into a pleasure. My grateful thanks are due to his successor, Mr S. C. Roberts, who has kindly read the proofs of the introduction and notes.

A. T.

November 21, 1922

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Introduction

ABRAHAM COWLEY, the seventh and posthumous son of Thomas Cowley, a stationer domiciled in the parish of Michael le Querne¹, was born in 1618. Like Milton and Keats, he was profoundly influenced at an early age by the poetry of Spenser, a copy of which he found in his mother's parlour, though "she herself never in her life read any book but of devotion"². His own poetic faculty blossomed at a precociously early age, for he was only ten when he wrote *The Tragical Historie of Pyramus and Thisbe* in six-lined stanzas, and only twelve when he wrote *Constantia and Philetus* in the same metre. They were published with three other pieces in 1633, when he was at Westminster School, in a volume entitled *Poetical Blossoms*, *Pyramus and Thisbe* being dedicated to Mr Lambert Osbaldeston, the great Busby's immediate predecessor in the Headmastership, and *Constantia and Philetus* to the Dean of Westminster.

Neither the admissions to the School nor those to the College exist for this period, but Cowley was probably admitted on the Foundation in 1632, and under the Statutes of Queen Elizabeth he must have been at the

¹ *Notes and Queries*, Series IV, xi. 390. The statement of Dr Johnson, following Anthony à Wood, that Cowley's father was a grocer seems to rest on no foundation. St Michael le Querne, at the extreme east end of Paternoster Row, was destroyed in the Great Fire and not rebuilt. Sir Thomas Browne, the author of *Religio Medici*, was baptized in it. Cowley is usually said to have been born in Fleet Street, near Temple Bar, and it is possible that his mother removed there after his father's death.

² Essay, *Of My self*.

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School at least a year before his admission¹. In the essay quoted from above he tells us that

instead of running about on Holy-daies and playing with my fellows; I was wont to steal from them, and walk into the fields, either alone with a Book, or with some one Companion, if I could find any of the same temper. I was then, too, so much an Enemy to all constraint, that my Masters could never prevail on me, by any perswasions or encouragements, to learn without Book the common rules of Grammar, in which they dispensed with me alone, because they found I made a shift to do the usual exercise out of my own reading and observation.

At Westminster Cowley continued to write poetry, under the approving eye of the Headmaster, who, sharing to the full the love of his age for far-fetched conceits, found in the boy an apt pupil. In 1633 Cowley with other Westminsters celebrated in verse the birth of the Duke of York². His lines may be compared with those which Dryden wrote at the same school sixteen years later on the death of Lord Hastings. The conceits are far more numerous than in Dryden's poem, and they are not re-deemed, as the latter is, by any promise of future excellence.

Unfortunately the Electors from Christ Church and Trinity were more particular than the Westminster masters about "the common rules of Grammar" and Cowley failed to obtain a Westminster Scholarship either at Christ Church or at Trinity. He was admitted to Trinity as a Pensioner on April 21, 1636³, and a year later was elected to an Open Scholarship⁴.

¹ I owe this information to my friend Mr G. F. Russell Barker, the author of *A Memoir of Richard Busby, D.D.* 1895. See also John Sargeaunt, *Annals of Westminster School*, 1898. This staunch Johnsonian and inspiring teacher, who for 24 years was Sixth Form master at Westminster School, died on March 20, 1922.

² Printed by Sargeaunt, *op. cit.* p. 282, from a ms. in the British Museum entitled *Genethliaca Ducis Eboracensis celebrata a Musis Reg. Schol. Westmon.*

³ W. W. Rouse Ball, *Admissions to Trinity College, Cambridge*, 1913, II. 352.

⁴ He was admitted on June 14, 1637.

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Before this he had reprinted his juvenile volume of verse with the addition of *Sylva or Divers Copies of Verses*, and in 1638 he published, with a dedication to Sir Kenelm Digby, a Pastoral Comedy entitled *Love's Riddle*. He also wrote a Latin comedy, *Naufragium jocularis*, which was performed in Trinity on February 2, 1638, and four years later he was called upon to provide an English play for the entertainment of the Prince of Wales (the future Charles II), who visited Cambridge on March 12, 1642 (N.S.). It was printed in 1650 under the title of *The Guardian*. Eight years later Cowley re-wrote it, and gave it the new title of *Cutter of Coleman Street*. It was acted in London on December 16, 1661, when Pepys saw it and pronounced it to be "a good play"; it was published in 1663.

At the time of the Prince of Wales's visit to Cambridge Cowley was a B.A. and a Minor Fellow of Trinity, having taken his degree in 1640 (N.S.) and having been admitted to a Fellowship on October 30, 1640. But, though admitted, there was not a Fellowship vacant for him, and in 1643 his name still appears among the Scholars. There is no record of his admission as a Major Fellow¹.

Of his Cambridge friendships the two most notable were those with William Harvey of Pembroke Hall² and Richard Crashaw, the poet, who was elected from that College to a Fellowship at Peterhouse in the year in which Cowley came up to Trinity. Their early deaths inspired Cowley with his two best poems. Of Harvey he writes:

He was my *Friend*, the truest *Friend* on earth;
 A strong and mighty *Influence* joyn'd our *Birth*.

* * * * *

Say, for you saw us, ye immortal *Lights*.
 How oft unweari'd have we spent the *Nights*?
 Till the *Ledæan Stars* so famed for *Love*,
 Wondred at us from above.

¹ The particulars from the Trinity College records were given to Dr Lumby by W. Aldis Wright.

² William Harvey of Bury St Edmunds was admitted to Pembroke on April 5, 1636, being then in his 17th year. I owe this information to the kindness of Mr Comber, Fellow and Treasurer of Pembroke College.

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ABRAHAM COWLEY

We spent them not in toys, in lusts, or wine;
 But search of deep *Philosophy*,
Wit, Eloquence, and Poetry,
 Arts which I lov'd, for they, my *Friend*, were *Thine*.
 Ye fields of *Cambridge*, our dear *Cambridge*, say
 Have ye not seen us walking every day?
 Was there a *Tree* about which did not know
 The *Love* betwixt us two?
 Henceforth, ye gentle *Trees*, for ever fade;
 Or your sad branches thicker joyn,
 And into darksome shades combine,
Dark as the *Grave* wherein my *Friend* is laid.

The elegy on Crashaw, who died at Loreto in 1650,
 begins:

Poet and Saint! to thee alone are given
 The two most sacred *Names* of *Earth* and *Heaven*,

and, referring to his friend's having joined the Roman
 communion, he says:

Pardon, my *Mother Church*, if I consent
 That *Angels* led him when from thee he went,
 For even in *Error* sure no *Danger* is
 When joyn'd with so much *Piety* as *His*.

* * * * *

His *Faith* perhaps in some nice *Tenents* might
 Be wrong; his *Life*, I'm sure, was in *the right*.
 And I my self a *Catholick* will be,
 So far at least, great *Saint*, to *Pray* to thee.

In 1643 Cambridge began to suffer from the effects of
 the Civil War. The Castle was fortified, several of the
 bridges over the Cam being broken down to provide stone;
 soldiers were quartered in the colleges; St John's was
 converted into a prison; outrages were of frequent occur-
 rence. So Cowley migrated to Oxford, where the King
 had his headquarters, and found hospitality at St John's
 College. It was apparently at this time that he made the
 personal acquaintance of Lord Falkland, whom he had
 long admired, and whose house at Great Tew was within
 ten miles of Oxford. This

great cherisher of wit and fancy and good parts in any man
 ...contracted familiarity and friendship with the most polite

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and accurate men of the university; who found such an immenseness of wit, such a solidity of judgment in him, so infinite a fancy, such a vast knowledge. . . that they frequently resorted, and dwelt with him, as in a college situated in a purer air; so that his house was a university bound in a less volume.

But Falkland was now Secretary of State, and during these months of open warfare there can have been little or no opportunity for gatherings at Great Tew, and on September 20, 1643, he sought and found death in the "unhappy battle" of Newbury, leaving an immortal memory which his friend Clarendon has enshrined in some of the noblest pages of our prose¹.

In 1644 the storm descended upon Cambridge with increased severity. For refusing to subscribe to the Covenant, Comber, the Master of Trinity, and 47 Fellows, including Cowley, were ejected from the College; and Cowley's friend Crashaw suffered the same fate at Peterhouse. Cowley himself obtained a post, apparently as secretary, in the household of Lord Jermyn, secretary to Queen Henrietta Maria and commander of her body-guard. On July 14, 1644, the Queen crossed to France, taking with her Jermyn, and probably Cowley, for Sprat says that Cowley "was absent from his native country for twelve years," and he puts his return in 1656. His service involved him in several "dangerous journies," but he was chiefly employed in ciphering and deciphering the correspondence that passed between the Queen and Charles I, work which "for some years together took up all his day, and two or three nights every week."

In 1656 "it was thought fit," says Sprat, "that he should come over into England, and under pretence of privacy and retirement should take occasion of giving notice of the posture of things in this nation"—a round-about way of saying that he was sent as a spy. While he lay hid in London, continues Sprat, he was arrested in mistake for some other man, and only released from

¹ Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion*, vii. 217–234. Sprat says that Cowley had the entire friendship of Falkland.

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custody on the security of the eminent physician Dr Scarborough, who went bail for him for £1000. This is Sprat's story, but Mr A. B. Gough has shewn in his Introduction to his excellent edition of Cowley's *Prose Writings* that it does not tally with the facts. It was really in April 1655, as we learn from *The Weekly Intelligencer* and one or two other newsletters, that "the memorable M. Abraham Cowley, more famous by his pen than by his sword," was arrested in London "for having had a hand in the plot"—that is to say in the Royalist plot which came to an abortive ending in the previous March¹. Thus Sprat has evidently post-dated Cowley's arrest by a year and is also wrong in his assertion that Cowley was mistaken for another man. Whether he is right in saying that Cowley was sent from France to spy out "the posture of things in this nation," it is impossible to determine. At any rate Cowley, impressed, no doubt, by the rapid fizzling out of the Royalist risings, and apparently released from imprisonment on his promise of good behaviour, seems quietly to have accepted the new Government, in spite of its high-handed and illegal measures. This at least is the inference to be drawn from his preface to a collected edition of such of his poems as he considered worthy of preservation, which he published in 1656. The volume contained: (1) *Miscellanies*, "some of them made when I was very young," (2) *The Mistress*, which had already been published separately in 1647, (3) *Pindarique Odes*, (4) *Davideis*, an heroic poem of the troubles of David in four books, the greater part of which, says Sprat, was written while Cowley was a student at Cambridge. In the preface Cowley explains his reasons for publication and announces his resolution "never to exercise any more the poetical faculty," and in a passage, which was suppressed in subsequent editions of his works, he declares his intention to accept the new order of things:

¹ The Colley whose arrest on or about April 12, 1655, is referred to in *Notes and Queries*, Series IV, xi. 389, is evidently the poet.

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When the event of battel, and the unaccountable *Will* of *God* has determined the controversie, and that we have submitted to the conditions of the *Conqueror*, we must lay down our *Pens* as well as *Arms*. . . . The *enmities* of *Fellow-Citizens* should be, like that of *Lovers*, the *Redintegration* of their *Amity*¹.

Cowley, in short, was not a “Die-hard.” Having said farewell (as he thought) to poetry, Cowley gave himself for a time to the study of Medicine and on December 2, 1657, was incorporated in the University of Oxford as a Doctor of Physic. After the death of Cromwell (September 3, 1658) he returned to France and stayed there till just before the Restoration, an event which he celebrated in an Ode of fulsome flattery. Shortly afterwards he was restored to his Fellowship at Trinity, and at the special request of Charles II was granted “the continuance of his seven years before taking holy Orders”². Thus he held his Fellowship till the day of his death.

Cowley now hoped for some substantial recognition of his services to the Royal Family. The Mastership of the Savoy Hospital was said to have been promised to him, but nothing came of it. In a poem entitled *The Complaint*, included in *Verses, Lately Written upon several Occasions* (1663) he refers to himself as “the Melancholy Cowley” and schools himself to bear with patience the still deferred reward of his services.

Kings have long hands (they say) and though I be
 So distant, they may reach at length to me.

The poem inspired some imitator of Suckling’s *Session of the Poets* to write the following stanza:

Savoy—missing Cowley came into the court,
 Making apologies for his bad play;
 Every one gave him so good a report,
 That Apollo gave heed to all he could say:

¹ Sprat says, “he was a close prisoner when he wrote this,” but, seeing Sprat’s confusion of dates, it is difficult to accept this statement.

² Trinity Admission Book, under date of February 11, 1661 (N.S.).

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ABRAHAM COWLEY

Nor would he have had, 'tis thought, a rebuke,
 Unless he had done some notable folly;
 Writ verses unjustly in praise of Sam Tuke,
 Or printed his pitiful Melancholy¹.

In 1662 the Royal Society was incorporated by Charter and Cowley became one of its original members. A few years earlier—before his return to France after the Protector's death—he had written *A Proposition for the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy*, which consists of a fully detailed scheme for the foundation of a Philosophical College. It was discussed by the Royal Society in November 1660² and published in the following year. Though Cowley's studies for his medical degree seem to have been more or less confined to botanising in Kent³, he shared to the full the interest in science taken by the leading men of his day; his *Ode upon Dr Harvey* which he included in the *Verses* of 1663 and the *Ode to the Royal Society*, which he wrote in 1667, though only here and there they rise to real poetry, are not the worst of his more ambitious poems.

In 1663, the Mastership of the Savoy Hospital having been given to another, Cowley put into execution the design he had been for some time meditating of "withdrawing himself from all tumult and business of the world"⁴. He was the better able to do this because through the good offices of Lord St Albans (Lord Jermyn) the Duke of Buckingham had bought and presented to him a lease of the Queen-Mother's lands at Chertsey on terms so favourable as to promise him a net income of £300 a year⁵. He first retired to Barn Elms, near Putney, then a favourite resort of Londoners, and here Evelyn

¹ Quoted by Johnson in his *Life of Cowley*. In the *Dict. of Nat. Biog.* the lines are attributed to Suckling himself, who died in 1642.

² See Gough, *op. cit.* p. 242.

³ In 1662 he published *Plantarum libri duo* in Latin verse.

⁴ Essay X, *The Danger of Procrastination*.

⁵ The most explicit account of this transaction is given by Aubrey and reproduced by Stebbing.

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visited his “excellent and ingenious friend” on May 14, 1663, paying him another visit on January 2, 1664, “after his sickness.” In April 1665 Cowley moved to the Porch House, Chertsey, which still stands, though deprived of its porch. His first experiences in his new home were unfortunate, as we may see from the following letter to his friend Thomas Sprat, afterwards Dean of Westminster and Bishop of Worcester.

Chertsey, May 21, 1665.

The first night that I came hither I caught so great a cold, with a defluxion of rheum, as made me keep my chamber ten days. And, two after, had such a bruise on my ribs with a fall, that I am yet unable to move or turn myself in my bed. This is my personal fortune here to begin with. And, besides, I can get no money from my tenants, and have my meadows eaten up every night by cattle put in by my neighbours. What this signifies, or may come to in time, God knows; if it be ominous, it can end in nothing less than hanging. Another misfortune has been, and stranger than all the rest, that you have broke your word with me, and failed to come, even though you told Mr Bois that you would. This is what they call “*Monstri simile*.” I do hope to recover my late hurt so farre within five or six days, (though it be uncertain yet whether I shall ever recover it,) as to walk about again. And then, methinks, you and I and “the dean” might be very merry upon St Ann’s hill. You might very conveniently come hither the way of Hampton Town, lying there one night. I write this in pain, and can say no more: “*Verbum sapienti*”¹.

After reading this we can easily believe Sprat when he tells us that Cowley excelled in his letters to his private friends, and we cannot sufficiently condemn Sprat for declining to publish them, on the ground that “in such Letters the Souls of Men should appear undressed.” “What literary man,” asks Coleridge “has not regretted the prudery of Sprat in refusing to let his friend Cowley appear in his slippers and dressing gown?”

During the last leisured years of his life Cowley wrote

¹ Printed in Johnson’s *Life of Cowley*.

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but little—a few poems, eleven short essays, to which he appended some verse translations from the Latin poets, and some more books of plants in Latin verses, making the whole number up to six. He planned various works—“a discourse concerning style” of which his friend Sprat could find no traces but “some indigested Characters of Ancient and Modern Authors,” and a history of the Church during the first four or five centuries, and “it was his design to have added many other essays.” But none of these pleasant projects came to fruition. He was again taken ill, and “languished for some months.” Then he seemed to be “pretty well cured,” but in the summer of 1667 a neglected cold developed into a serious illness, and he died on July 28, in the forty-ninth year of his age. Four days later Evelyn records in his diary that he “receiv’d the sad news of Abraham Cowley’s death, that incomparable poet and virtuous man, my very dear friend,” and Charles II declared that “Mr Cowley had not left a better man behind him in England.” The funeral ceremony on August 3 testified to the honour in which he was held. His body, writes Evelyn, “was convey’d to Westminster Abbey in a hearse with 6 horses and all funeral decency, near an hundred coaches of noblemen and persons of quality following; among these all the wits of the town, divers bishops and clergymen. He was interred next Geoffrey Chaucer, and near to Spenser.” Denham wrote his elegy, the Duke of Buckingham erected his monument, and Sprat composed the inscription, “Anglorum Pindarus, Flaccus, Maro, Deliciae, Decus, Desiderium Aevi sui”—so it runs—and to justify this perfervid *elogium* Sprat published in 1668 an edition of his friend’s works with a prefatory account of his life and writings. Unfortunately it contains a small modicum of fact to an “intolerable deal” of sentiment.

Cowley “lisped in numbers,” but nature meant him to be a prose-writer rather than a poet, for reason not imagination was his mistress. He had wit, ingenuity, learning, understanding, all admirable qualities in a

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writer of prose; but lacking the wings of imagination and the driving-power of passion, he could not fly. His most ambitious attempts at flight—his *Davideis*, his *Pindarique Odes*—are his worst failures. Even the Odes *To Mr Hobs* and *To the Royal Society*, which some have praised highly, are little more than fine declamations in praise of philosophy and science. Confront them with the *Hymn on the Nativity* by Cowley's great contemporary, and they are at once detected as impostors. It is only when sincerity constrains him to be simple that Cowley is a real poet, as in the elegies on his friends William Harvey and the poet Crashaw.

On the other hand, he is a delightful prose writer. Moreover he is of singular interest, for, with Dryden, he marks the beginning of the new post-Restoration prose, with its lucid thought, short periods, and easy conversational tone. He failed in poetry, partly because having little real imagination he tried to write in the lofty style, rich in imagery, appropriate to Pindaric and other odes, partly because in compliance with contemporary fashion and under the influence of Lambert Osbaldeston he indulged in tasteless conceits. But he was a clear and orderly thinker and a man of genuine simplicity, so that, when he descended to prose, he was by nature disposed towards a style which demanded these qualities.

He could not of course shake off in a moment the methods and mannerisms of Caroline prose. In the preface of 1656 his sentences are cumbrous and involved, with a tendency to trailing sequences of relatives, and it is only in the last three or four pages that they become shorter and better balanced. The Preface to *A Proposition for the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy*, which was written in 1659, shews a decided progress, but it has one or two unwieldy sentences. The *Vision concerning Cromwell*, written in 1658 or 1659, and published in 1661, belongs, as might be expected from its character, more decidedly to the older school, and the latter part of it is a fine example of rhetorical prose. Even in the

Preface to *Cutter of Coleman Street* (1663), though the sentences are, as a rule, short and well balanced, Cowley has by no means wholly eradicated the faults of the older style. Then we came to the essays proper, eleven in number, which he wrote during the last four or five years of his life. The date of some of them can be approximately fixed, and of all it can be conjectured within no very wide limits. Thus *The Garden* (5) must belong to 1666, for it was in answer to Evelyn's dedication to Cowley of the second edition of his *Kalendarium Hortense*. *Of Obscurity* (3) must have been written in 1666 or 1667, for Browne's translation of Horace was not published till the former year. *The Danger of an Honest man in much Company* (8) was written at Chertsey. *The Danger of Procrastination* (10) is one of the earliest, for Cowley had not yet accomplished his design of withdrawing from the world. On the other hand in the last, *Of My self*, he says that "he met . . . with so much sickness as would have spoiled the happiness of an emperor as well as mine," which, with its reference to "these precedent discourses," suggests that it was written in 1666 after his third illness. It is more of a conjecture that the meditation on *The Shortness of Life* was provoked by one of these illnesses. In the remaining five essays there are no references to events to enable us to determine their date, but in two of them, *Of Solitude* (2) and *Of Greatness* (6), Cowley cites Montaigne, borrowing from him the titles¹ and some of the contents of these essays.

It is possible that Cowley may have read Montaigne in France, for during the years of his sojourn there the great essayist was exceedingly popular. But the English, with the exception of Hobbes, seem to have had little intercourse with French society and French men of letters, and it is far more likely that Saint-Évremond, who made England his home from 1662 to 1665 and from 1670 to his death, and who was on intimate terms with

¹ *De la solitude* (I. 38) and *De l'incommodité de la grandeur* (III. 7).

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the English wits and courtiers, introduced Cowley to Montaigne. At any rate the influence of Montaigne on Cowley is unmistakable not only in these two essays, but on all those, except *The Danger of Procrastination*, for which a date has been suggested. On the other hand, in the three essays not yet mentioned, *Of Liberty*, *Of Agriculture*, and *Of Avarice*, the personal element which is so eminently characteristic of Montaigne, is entirely lacking, while in *The Danger of Procrastination* it only peeps forth at the beginning of the essay, and after that keeps discretely in the background. The inference is that these four essays are the earliest. The essays then may be conjecturally arranged in order of composition as follows: (1) *Of Agriculture*, (2) *Of Liberty*, (3) *Of Avarice*, (4) *The Danger of Procrastination*, (5) *Of Solitude*, (6) *Of Greatness*, (7) *The Dangers of an Honest man in much Company*, (8) *The Shortness of Life*, (9) *The Garden*, (10) *Of Obscurity*, (11) *Of My self*.

The essays *Of Agriculture* and *Of Liberty* are clearly the earliest. They are rather longer than any of the others and they exhibit in places the defects of the older style. *Of Agriculture* seems to be the earlier of the two, partly because it is closely connected in its subject matter with *A Proposition for the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy*, and partly because the long sentences predominate. Indeed the sentence on pp. 34–35, “The utility etc.,” is not only extremely long, but unwieldy and formless into the bargain. We have three relative clauses (“the reason of *which* I conceive” . . . as if it were a law, “*which* is . . . but such *who* are so poor”), followed by another long dependent clause (“that . . . the tenant”); and finally there is tacked on at the end a fresh clause, introduced by *whilst* and then qualified by *though*. The sentence on p. 38, “All these considerations etc.,” though rather shorter, is even worse in point of construction. We may note too the rhetorical turn of the passage from “We are here among the vast and noble Scenes of Nature”; to “there guilty and expensful Luxury,”

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(p. 37), with its succession of formal antitheses—quite unlike the simplicity of Cowley's later essays and strangely anticipatory of Johnson.

So too in the essay *Of Liberty* we find a very long sentence on p. 4 ("Above all things etc."), a badly constructed one on p. 12 ("The Voluptuous Man etc.") and one with a double relative clause on p. 13 ("This by the Calumniators of Epicurus etc."). Even in *The Danger of Procrastination* there is a sentence of considerable length: "The summ of this is...Top-Gallants" (pp. 103–104). But here it is chiefly a question of punctuation; by putting a full stop after "recovered" and another after "candle," we can break it up into three short and excellent sentences. The essay *Of Avarice* is in a different style; its brevity and sententiousness shew that Cowley is experimenting in the manner of Bacon. But when we come to the two essays in which Montaigne is mentioned, we meet with an almost new type of essay. One of Montaigne's characteristics, the quotations and 'examples' from classical authors, Cowley possessed already, but he owes to his new model the combination of a conversational ease of tone with artistic workmanship, and the personal element. And it is just this personal element which saves Cowley from being a mere satellite of Montaigne. In the words of his biographer, his essays are "a real Character of his own Thoughts upon the Point of his Retirement." They reflect too the qualities ascribed to him by his friend—his lack of affectation, his modesty and humility, and, above all, the pleasant gravity of his speech. But let Sprat speak for himself:

There was nothing affected or singular in his Habit, or Person, or Gesture. He understood the Forms of good Breeding enough to practise them without burdening himself, or others. . . . His Modesty and Humility were so great, that if he had not had many other equal Virtues, they might have been thought Dissimulation. His Conversation was certainly of the most excellent kind for it was such as was rather admired by his familiar Friends, than by Strangers at first sight. . . . In his Speech, neither the Pleasantness excluded Gravity, nor

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was the Sobriety of it inconsistent with Delight...His Learning was large and profound, well compos'd of all Ancient and Modern Knowledge. But it sat exceeding close and handsomly upon him. It was not imboss'd on his Mind, but enamell'd...He was a passionate Lover of Liberty, and Freedom from Restraint both in Actions and Words. But what Honesty others receive from the Direction of Laws, he had by native Inclination: And he was not beholding to other Mens Wills, but to his own for his Innocence.

Finally Sprat speaks, though without applauding it, of Cowley's "earnest Affection for Obscurity and Retirement," and this is practically the theme of all his last seven essays. In the essay *Of Solitude* he begins by quoting from Cicero a saying which Cato attributed to Scipio Africanus, that "One is never less alone than when alone." This brings him to Seneca's description of Scipio's villa at Liternum. Then he cites a sentence from Montaigne's essay *On Solitude* that "Ambition it self might teach us to love Solitude; there's nothing does so much hate to have Companions." To this he adds his own comment. "'Tis true," he says, "it loves to have its Elbows free (*ses coudées franches*)...but it delights above all Things in a Train behind, I (aye), and Ushers too before it." (Note how Cowley plays up to Montaigne's metaphor.) Then he compares the majority of mankind to "a becalmed Ship; they never move but by the wind of other mens breath, and have no Oars of their own to steer withal." There follow quotations from Horace, Tibullus, and Catullus. But solitude is only suited to a very few persons—not to those who are possessed by passions, for these like robbers murder us when they catch us alone. For a man to enjoy solitude he must first eradicate all lusts; secondly he must get the habit of thinking; and in order to get this he must have continual recourse to learning and books.

The essay *Of Greatness* opens with a quotation from Montaigne and towards the end there are two almost certain reminiscences of him. And the whole essay is

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more in Montaigne's manner than its companion; it has more vivacity, more nimbleness, more ease; it digresses, it dallies on the way, instead of making straight for its goal. There is an anecdote freely translated from the elder Seneca; there are a few examples from Suetonius of the foibles of Roman emperors; there is a pointed reference to "the late Gyant of our Nation"; a quotation or two from the Latin poets; and a few lines of the author's own.

For the remaining five essays it is enough to point out that the fact of *The Garden* being addressed to that eminent dilettante, John Evelyn, accounts for a more ceremonial style and perhaps for the conceit that horticulture is Evelyn's wife and the other arts his concubines; that *The Shortness of Life* is written in a graver tone, as befits the subject; and that in the admirable essay *Of My self*, which one is tempted to regard as the latest of all, and which at any rate is Cowley's crowning achievement, he gives full expression to that personal note which is so delightful a characteristic of his latest essays.

The posthumous volume of 1668 had a great success, and in 1721 reached a twelfth edition. In 1737 Pope in his *Epistle to Augustus* asks "Who now reads Cowley?"; but he was thinking of his poetry and in the charming edition in two volumes of his *Select Works* which Richard Hurd, afterwards Bishop of Worcester, published in 1772, the editor declares that "the Sieur de Montagne and Mr Cowley are our two great models of essay-writing." Fifty years later two of the greatest of English essayists acted on this belief. In the *Round Table* we find Hazlitt declaring his preference for the *Tatler* over the *Spectator* and "all the periodical Essayists (our ingenious predecessors)." Is this because the personal element is more prominent in the *Tatler* than in the rest? But though Steele recounts his own experiences, he does not admit us to his intimacy. Nor indeed does Hazlitt in the *Round Table* essays (1815-1817). The three earliest attempts of Elia are personal reminiscences rather than true essays. But in the December number of the *London*

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Magazine for 1820, which contains Lamb's *The two races of Men* and Hazlitt's *The pleasures of painting*, the personal essay comes to its own. Lamb and Hazlitt handled it with a variety and a gusto unknown to Cowley, but when we surrender ourselves to the charm of their delightful art, let us in justice remember that (so far as English literature is concerned) it was Cowley who created the type.

PRINCIPAL EDITIONS OF COWLEY'S
PROSE WRITINGS

1. In *Works*, fo. 1668; 9th ed. fo. 1700; 10th ed. 3 vols. 8vo. 1707–1708; 11th ed. 3 vols. 8vo. 1710–1711; 12th ed. 3 vols. 12mo. 1721.
2. *Select Works*, with preface and notes [by R. Hurd], 2 vols. 1772.
3. *Essays, Plays and Sundry Verses*, ed. A. R. Waller. Cambridge, 1906.
4. *Essays and Other Prose Writings*, ed. Alfred B. Gough. Oxford, 1915.

LIFE AND CRITICISMS

1. Account of life and writings prefixed by Thomas Sprat to the 1668 edition of the *Works*.
2. Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, 1779–1781.
3. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. (By Leslie Stephen.)
4. *Dictionary of National Biography*. (By Edmund Gosse.)
5. W. Stebbing, *Verdicts of History Reviewed*, 1887.
6. A. W. Fox, *A Book of Bachelors*, 1899.
7. A. B. Gough, Biographical Sketch, prefixed to his edition of the *Essays*.