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Walter Scott
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Memoirs of John Dryden

Upon the restoration of Charles II, theatre burst back into popularity across the stages of England. For the first time since the rise of Cromwell, it was possible to make a living from writing verse, and the theatres attracted poets in their dozens. One of them was the young John Dryden (1631–1700). In this sprightly 1826 biography, reissued here in one volume, Walter Scott (1771–1832) brings Dryden's work, philosophy and historical context vividly to life. He begins with Dryden's literary origins in the Restoration theatre, exploring the flops and then the successes that earned the poet his laurels, and continues with a detailed analysis of his later work, including the unstaged opera *The State of Innocence* as well as *Mac Flecknoe*, the cornerstone of Restoration satire. A lively critic, Scott is unafraid to write off Anglo-Saxon poetry, insult grammarians and illuminate Dryden's less admirable qualities.

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Memoirs of John Dryden

WALTER SCOTT



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MEMOIRS
OF
JOHN DRYDEN.

BY SIR WALTER SCOTT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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AMONG the most eminent of the illustrious names of those whose genius has done honour to English Literature stands that of Dryden, who may claim at least the third place in the honoured list, and who has given proofs of greater versatility of talent than either Shakspeare or Milton, though justly placed inferior to both in their respective provinces. It would be hard to exact that the Editor of these Memoirs should rival the criticism of Johnson, or produce facts which have escaped the accuracy of Malone. While, however, he has availed himself of the labours of both, particularly of the latter, whose industry has removed

the cloud which so long hung over the events of Dryden's life, he has endeavoured to take a different and more enlarged view of the subject than that which his predecessors have presented. The general critical view of Dryden's works being sketched by Johnson with unequalled felicity, and the incidents of his life accurately discussed and ascertained by Malone, something seemed to remain for him who should consider these literary productions in their succession, as actuated by and operating upon the taste of an age, where they had so predominant an influence; and who might, at the same time, connect the life of Dryden with the history of his publications, without losing sight of the fate and character of the individual. How far this end has been attained, is not for the editor to guess, especially when, as usual at the close of a work, he finds he is possessed of double the information he had when he commenced it. The kindness of Mr Octavius Gilchrist, who undertook a

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journey to Northamptonshire to examine the present state of Rushton, where Dryden often lived, and of Mr Finlay, of Glasgow, who favoured the editor with the use of some original editions, fall here to be gratefully acknowledged.

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NOTICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

THE admirers of Sir, Walter Scott will be gratified by the separate publication of these Memoirs, which will complete our edition of his works. They are now for the first time published distinct from the works of Dryden, with which, at the price of upwards of eight guineas, they can only be purchased in London. Those who possess old editions of Dryden will find these Memoirs a valuable addition.

Paris, March 15, 1826.

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