

**ENGLISH SONNETS.
A SELECTION**

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English Sonnets. A Selection by John Dennis

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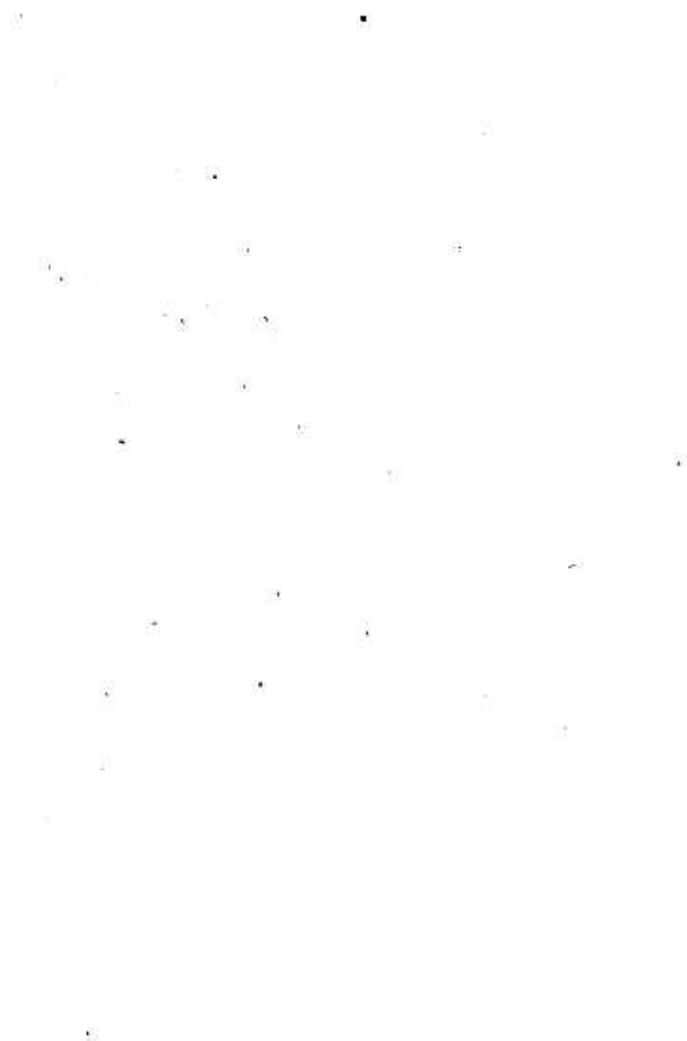
280. n. 641.

TO

JOHN WILLIAM INCHBOLD.

To you who have so dear a love of the Sonnet, and have sometimes so happily employed it in moments of release from professional labour, I gladly and affectionately dedicate this little volume. And I do this the more readily, because all that is most worthy in it comes from the noble masters of English verse, who impart to us, although in different language, the same joy-inspiring lessons which our great artists teach upon canvas.

J. D.



PREFACE.

THIS selection of Sonnets is designed for the student of poetry ; not for the reader who takes up a volume of verse in order to pass away an idle hour. A beautiful song gladdens the ear at once, a noble ode, or a pathetic ballad, sends the blood bounding or brings tears to the eyes, and a great drama affords to the mind infinite delight even upon a first perusal ; but "the sonnet is a form of poetry, in which style is put under high pressure," and the wealth it contains is rarely to be won without toil. Condensation of thought, exactitude of language, and unity of design are demanded of the sonnet writer, and through his fourteen lines, and knitting them together, must run the golden thread of poetry. Perfection in this most difficult branch of the poetic art is of course not easily attained, and even in this little volume several Sonnets will be found whose intrinsic value is comparatively slight, although from association, or from other causes, they possess a literary interest.

It will be observed that the names of living writers

are not included in the list. It is difficult to judge wisely, it is scarcely possible to judge impartially, of the works of men whose presence is perhaps familiar, and whose poetry is associated with the charm of personal intercourse. And even when this link is wanting, the rigid estimate of the critic can scarcely be given to works which, as it were, belong to ourselves and form a part of our lives. The contemporary poet may or may not be a greater poet than one of his predecessors, who belongs to the crowned kings of poesy, but it is probable that his influence over us will be more penetrating. He speaks the language of the age, knows the thoughts of the age, takes his share in it, and belongs to it even while rising above it. Some of his popularity is therefore due to temporary causes, and he must be a rash man or a consummate critic who shall venture to say how much of the living poet's work is fulfilling a passing service, and how much of it is destined to an enduring life.

There are two selections of English verse, and, as far as the Editor knows, two only which will thoroughly satisfy the student and lover of poetry. One is Mr. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Songs and*

Lyrics, a little volume which it may be safely said will prove a joy to future generations as well as to our own : the other, less known, perhaps, but scarcely less precious, is Archbishop Trench's *Household Book of English Poetry*. The patient labour expended on these anthologies will be as evident to any one who has toiled in the same field, as the fine taste and judgment of which every reader of culture must be conscious. The range covered by these selections is far wider than that now chosen. Variety, which gives a zest to life, also adds to the charm of poetry, and a book which consists wholly of Sonnets cannot boast the attraction of volumes which embrace almost every class of poetry save the epic and the dramatic. And yet there are reasons, perhaps, why the Editor may hope without presumption, to secure a place for this collection, on the shelf which holds the two admirable volumes edited by Archbishop Trench and by Mr. Palgrave.

Archbishop Trench has well said that "poems of the highest order are in their very essence sources of a delight which is inexhaustible." This delight is afforded in no stinted measure by the Sonnet, which concentrates within a narrow space such rare and