

**THE POETICAL
WORKS OF GEORGE
LORD LYTTTELTON**

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The Poetical Works of George Lord Lyttelton by George Lyttelton

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GEORGE LYTTTELTON

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WORKS OF GEORGE
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SKETCH OF THE LIFE

— by Dr. Johnson —
(but much
cut.)

OF

GEORGE LORD LYTTTELTON.

GEORGE LYTTTELTON, the son of Sir Thomas Lyttelton, of Hagley, in Worcestershire, was born in 1709. He was educated at Eton, where he was so much distinguished, that his exercises were recommended as models to his school-fellows.

From Eton he went to Christ-church, where he retained the same reputation of superiority, and displayed his abilities to the public in a poem on "Blenheim."

He was a very early writer, both in verse and prose. His "Progress of Love," and his "Persian Letters," were both written when he was very young.

He staid not long at Oxford; for in 1728 he began his travels, and saw France and Italy. When he returned, he obtained a seat in parliament, and soon distinguished himself among the most eager opponents of Sir Robert Walpole,

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though his father, who was commissioner of the admiralty, always voted with the court.

For many years the name of George Lyttelton was seen in every account of every debate in the house of commons. He opposed the standing army; he opposed the excise; he supported the motion for petitioning the king to remove Walpole. His zeal was considered by the courtiers not only as violent, but as acrimonious and malignant; and when Walpole was at last hunted from his places, every effort was made by his friends, and many friends he had, to exclude Lyttelton from the secret committee.

The Prince of Wales, being (1737) driven from St. James's, kept a separate court, and opened his arms to the opponents of the ministry. Mr. Lyttelton became his secretary, and was supposed to have great influence in the direction of his conduct. He persuaded his master, whose business it was now to be popular, that he would advance his character by patronage. Mallet was made under-secretary, with 200*l.* and Thomson had a pension of 100*l.* a year. For Thomson, Lyttelton always retained his kindness, and was able at last to place him at ease.

Moore courted his favour by an apologetical poem, called "The Trial of Selim;" for this he was paid with kind words, which, as is common, raised great hopes, that were at last disappointed.

Lyttelton now stood in the first rank of opposition; and Pope, who was incited, it is not easy

to say how, to increase the clamour against the ministry, commended him among the other patriots. This drew upon him the reproaches of Fox, who, in the house, imputed to him as a crime his intimacy with a lampooner so unjust and licentious. Lyttelton supported his friend, and replied, that he thought it an honour to be received into the familiarity of so great a poet.

While he was thus conspicuous, he married (1741) Miss Lucy Fortescue of Devonshire, by whom he had a son, the late Lord Lyttelton, and two daughters, and with whom he appears to have lived in the highest degree of connubial felicity: but human pleasures are short; she died in childbed about five years afterwards, and he solaced his grief by writing a long poem to her memory.

He did not, however, condemn himself to perpetual solitude and sorrow; for, after awhile, he was content to seek happiness again, by a second marriage with the daughter of Sir Robert Rich; but the experiment was unsuccessful.

At length, after a long struggle, Walpole gave way, and honour and profit were distributed among his conquerors. Lyttelton was made (1744) one of the lords of the treasury; and from that time was engaged in supporting the schemes of the ministry.

Politics did not, however, so much engage him as to withhold his thoughts from things of more importance. He had, in the pride of juvenile

confidence, with the help of corrupt conversation, entertained doubts of the truth of christianity; but he thought the time now come when it was no longer fit to doubt or believe by chance, and applied himself seriously to the great question. His studies, being honest, ended in conviction. He found that religion was true, and what he had learned, he endeavoured to teach (1747), by "Observations on the Conversion of St. Paul;" a treatise to which infidelity has never been able to fabricate a specious answer. This book his father had the happiness of seeing, and expressed his pleasure in a letter which deserves to be inserted.

"I have read your religious treatise with infinite pleasure and satisfaction. The style is fine and clear, the arguments close, cogent, and irresistible. May the King of kings, whose glorious cause you have so well defended, reward your pious labours, and grant that I may be found worthy, through the merits of Jesus Christ, to be an eye-witness of that happiness which I don't doubt he will bountifully bestow upon you. In the mean time I shall never cease glorifying God, for having endowed you with such useful talents, and given me so good a son.

"Your affectionate father,

"THOMAS LYTTELTON."

A few years afterwards (1751), by the death of his father, he inherited a baronet's title, with a

large estate, which, though perhaps he did not augment, he was careful to adorn by a house of great elegance and expence, and by much attention to the decoration of his park.

As he continued his activity in parliament, he was gradually advancing his claim to profit and preferment; and accordingly was made in time (1754) cofferer and privy counsellor: this place he exchanged next year for the great office of chancellor of the exchequer; an office, however, that required some qualifications which he soon perceived himself to want.

The year after, his curiosity led him into Wales; of which he has given an account, perhaps rather with too much affectation of delight, to Archibald Bower, a man of whom he had conceived an opinion more favourable than he seems to have deserved, and whom, having once espoused his interest and fame, he never was persuaded to disown.

About this time Lyttelton published his "Dialogues of the Dead," which were very eagerly read, and have been much admired.

His last literary production was his "History of Henry the Second," elaborated by the searches and deliberations of twenty years.

Lord Lyttelton had never the appearance of a strong or of a healthy man; he had a slender uncompact frame, and a meagre face; he lasted, however, sixty years, and was then seized with his last illness. Of his death a very affecting and in-

structive account has been given by his physician, which will spare me the task of his moral character.

“ On Sunday evening the symptoms of his lordship's disorder, which for a week past had alarmed us, put on a fatal appearance, and his lordship believed himself to be a dying man. From this time he suffered by restlessness rather than pain; though his nerves were apparently much fluttered, his mental faculties never seemed stronger, when he was thoroughly awake.

“ His lordship's bilious and hepatic complaints seemed alone not equal to the expected mournful event; his long want of sleep, whether the consequence of the irritation in the bowels, or, which is more probable, of causes of a different kind, accounts for his loss of strength, and for his death, very sufficiently.

“ Though his lordship wished his approaching dissolution not to be lingering, he waited for it with resignation. He said, ‘ It is a folly, a keeping me in misery, now to attempt to prolong life;’ yet he was easily persuaded, for the satisfaction of others, to do or take any thing thought proper for him. On Saturday he had been remarkably better, and we were not without some hopes of his recovery.

“ On Sunday, about eleven in the forenoon, his lordship sent for me, and said he felt a great hurry, and wished to have a little conversation with me in order to divert it. He then pro-

ceeded to open the fountain of that heart, from whence goodness had so long flowed, as from a copious spring. ' Doctor,' said he, ' you shall be my confessor: when I first set out in the world, I had friends who endeavoured to shake my belief in the christian religion. I saw difficulties which staggered me; but I kept my mind open to conviction. The evidences and doctrines of christianity, studied with attention, made me a most firm and persuaded believer of the christian religion. I have made it the rule of my life, and it is the ground of my future hopes. I have erred and sinned; but have repented, and never indulged any vicious habit. In politics and public life, I have made public good the rule of my conduct. I never gave counsels which I did not, at the time, think the best. I have seen that I was sometimes in the wrong, but I did not err designedly. I have endeavoured, in private life, to do all the good in my power, and never for a moment could indulge malicious or unjust designs upon any person whatsoever.'

" At another time he said, ' I must leave my soul in the same state it was in before this illness; I find this a very inconvenient time for solicitude about any thing.'

" On the evening when the symptoms of death came on, he said, ' I shall die; but it will not be your fault.' When lord and lady Valentia came to see his lordship, he gave them his solemn benediction, and said, ' Be good, be virtuous, my