

DRYDEN

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649178476

Dryden by George Saintsbury

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GEORGE SAINTSBURY

DRYDEN



JOHN DRYDEN

Dryden

by

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"HISTORY OF ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE" "DRYDEN"
"MARLBOROUGH" ETC.

English Men of Letters

EDITED BY

JOHN MORLEY



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

1902

PREFATORY NOTE.

A WRITER on Dryden is more especially bound to acknowledge his indebtedness to his predecessors, because, so far as matters of fact are concerned, that indebtedness must necessarily be greater than in most other cases. There is now little chance of fresh information being obtained about the poet, unless it be in a few letters hitherto undiscovered or withheld from publication. I have, therefore, to acknowledge my debt to Johnson, Malone, Scott, Mitford, Bell, Christie, the Rev. R. Hooper, and the writer of an article in the *Quarterly Review* for 1878. Murray's "Guide to Northamptonshire" has been of much use to me in the visits I have made to Dryden's birthplace, and the numerous other places associated with his memory in his native county. To Mr. J. Churton Collins I owe thanks for pointing out to me a Dryden house which, so far as he and I know, has escaped the notice of previous biographers. Mr. W. Noel Sainsbury, of the Record Office, has supplied me with some valuable information. My friend Mr. Edmund W. Gosse has not only read the proof-sheets of this book with the greatest care, suggesting many things of value, but has also kindly allowed me the use of original editions of many late seventeenth-century works, including most of the rare pamphlets against the poet in reply to his satires.

Except Scott's excellent but costly and bulky edition, there is, to the disgrace of English booksellers or book-buyers, no complete edition of Dryden. The first issue of this in 1808 was reproduced in 1821 with no material alterations, but both are very expensive, especially the second. A tolerably complete and not unsatisfactory Dryden may, however, be got together without much outlay by any one who waits till he can pick up at the bookshops copies of Malone's edition of the prose works, and of Congreve's original edition (duodecimo or folio) of the plays. By adding to these Mr. Christie's admirable Globe edition of the poems, very little, except the translations, will be left out, and not too much obtained in duplicate. This, of course, deprives the reader of Scott's life and notes, which are very valuable. The life, however, has been reprinted, and is easily accessible.

In the following pages a few passages from a course of lectures on "Dryden and his Period," delivered by me at the Royal Institution in the spring of 1880, have been incorporated.

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DRYDEN.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE THE RESTORATION.

JOHN DRYDEN was born on the 9th of August, 1631, at the Vicarage of Aldwinkle All Saints, between Thrapston and Oundle. Like other small Northamptonshire villages, Aldwinkle is divided into two parishes, All Saints and St. Peter's, the churches and parsonage-houses being within bowshot of each other, and some little confusion has arisen from this. It has, however, been cleared up by the industrious researches of various persons, and there is now no doubt about the facts. The house in which the poet was born (and which still exists, though altered to some extent internally) belonged at the time to his maternal grandfather, the Rev. Henry Pickering. The Drydens and the Pickerings were both families of some distinction in the county, and both of decided Puritan principles; but they were not, properly speaking, neighbours. The Drydens originally came from the neighbourhood of the border, and a certain John Dryden, about the middle of the sixteenth century, married the daughter and heiress of Sir John Cope, of Canons Ashby, in the county of Northampton.