

**THE BARONS'  
WARS, NYMPHIDIA,  
AND OTHER POEMS**

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The barons' wars, Nymphidia, and other poems by Michael Drayton

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# THE BARONS' WARS

NYMPHIDIA

*AND OTHER POEMS*

BY

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*WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HENRY MORLEY*

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## INTRODUCTION.

MICHAEL DRAYTON was only a year older than his friend Shakespeare, and born in the same county. As Thomas Fuller says, when writing of him among Warwickshire Worthies, "Michael Drayton was born within a few miles of William Shakespeare, his countryman and fellow-poet, and buried within fewer paces of Geoffrey Chancer and Edward Spenser." Drayton's birth year was 1563, his birth-place Hartshill, halfway between Atherstone and Nuncaton, near the north-eastern border of Warwickshire. Close by, in Leicestershire, just over the border, is that one of the many English parishes called Drayton—Fenny Drayton—from which his family may have derived its name. The river Anker flows by pleasant hills and woods, where there was once the Forest of Arden; it flows near to Hartshill on its way to join the Tame at Tamworth, and they were its waters that fed the Drayton fens. The Anker is the home river whose ripples are heard also in Drayton's song:

"Fair Arden, thou my Tempé art alone,  
And thou, sweet Anker, art my Helicon."

Drayton's Anker thus became associated with a poet's life, like Herrick's Dean Burn, or Spenser's Mulla. When celebrating Warwickshire, the middle shire of England, in his "Polyolbion"—"that shire which we the heart of England well may call"—Drayton speaks of it as his native county—

"My native country then, which so brave spirits hast bred,  
If there be virtue yet remaining in thy earth,  
Or any good of thine thou breath'dst into my birth,  
Accept it as thine own whils; now I sing of thee;  
Of all thy later brood th' unworthiest, though I be."

Drayton found patrons in his boyhood and youth. His earliest helper was a Warwickshire man, Sir Henry Goodyere of Polesworth, about seven miles northward of Hartshill, who

is said to have maintained him for some time at Oxford, and by whom he was introduced to the Countess of Bedford. Sir Walter Aston also gave substantial help to Drayton in his early life; but of that early life little is known.

It was at the age of eight-and-twenty that Michael Drayton published his first volume of verse. That first book, dedicated to Lady Jane Devereux of Merivale, was described in its title as "The Harmonie of the Church, containing the Spiritual Songs and Holy Hymns of Godly Men, Patriarchs and Prophets, all sweetly sounding to the Glory of the Highest, now (newly) reduced into sundry kinds of English metre: meet to be read or sung, for the solace and comfort of the godly." John Whitgift was then Archbishop of Canterbury, suppressing epigrams and other writings of the poets, and it pleased him to order the destruction of Drayton's volumes, except forty copies which he seized and kept. The Archbishop, who was "bridling the Puritans," perhaps suspected Puritanism in a book professing to be "for the solace and comfort of the godly."

In 1593 Drayton published love sonnets and pastorals under the title of "Idea"; "The Shepherd's Garland," fashioned in nine eclogues; "Rowland's Sacrifice to the Nine Muses," taking Rowland for his own pastoral name; and in 1594 these were followed by "Idea's Mirror," "Amours in Quatorzains," and his "Matilda," written in Chaucer's stanza. There is a robust freshness in Drayton's love poems that suggests an independent spirit in their writer. They were addressed to the lady of whose late coming to town Drayton playfully complained in one of his Elegies, and of whom he said in a sonnet to his native river—

"Arden's sweet Arker, let thy glory be  
That fair Idea only lives by thee;"

but there may have been no more in them than, according to poetic form, a poet's playful celebration of her graces. Drayton lived to the age of sixty-eight, and died a bachelor.

From strains of love that earned him credit among wits and scholars of Elizabeth's Court, Drayton passed to strains of war in the latter years of the reign, when there was no direct heir to the throne, and none knew that Elizabeth—who, for her own politic reasons, had not named a successor—had agreed privately with her council upon all steps to be taken to make the succession sure. It suited her well that a politic omission should be set

down to her petticoat. But among her subjects there was widespread expectation that the Queen's death would be made the signal for another civil war. Ledge for that reason wrote his play on Marius and Sylla, called "The Wounds of Civil War." The Second and Third of the Three Parts of Henry VI. on which Shakespeare worked, had the same thought in them. And the poets who wrote during Elizabeth's last years the two chief heroic poems of their time took for their warning themes the two great Civil Wars of the past; Michael Drayton, the Barons' Wars, and Samuel Daniel the wars of York and Lancaster.

Drayton's poem first appeared in 1596 as "Mortimeriados; the Lamentable Civil Wars of Edward the Second and the Barons." He had begun to write this poem in Chaucer's seven-lined stanza, but finding that too sweet for a tale of discord and war, rewrote the opening, and completed the work in the Italian octave rhyme, which the strong influence of Italy upon our literature had brought into new prominence, and which was used by Daniel also for his poem upon civil war.

In the same year (1596) Drayton produced his "Legend of Robert Duke of Normandy;" and in 1597 he produced, in imitation of Ovid's "Heroides," "England's Heroical Epistles." He then worked afresh upon his "Mortimeriados," which was enlarged and published in 1603, under the title it now bears, "The Barons' Wars."

In the same year (1603) Drayton welcomed the new reign with a Gratulatory Poem, "To the Majestic of King James," which was ungraciously received. He turned with contempt from the cloud of James's new knights, and the meaner life that gathered about the meaner Court of the new sovereign. James, though a Solomon in his own eyes, and warranted a Solomon by Francis Bacon, had mean tastes, and low-minded men stood high in his favour. Daniel as well as Drayton complained bitterly of change of times. Daniel turned his back upon the Court and town, and went away to turn farmer at Beckington. Drayton turned from the Court, and what he thought of it will be found here in some of his Elegies; but he gave himself with new devotion to his Muse. In 1604 he published a satire, "The Owl." In 1605 he published an edition of his "Barons' Wars," with his historical poems, and "Idea." Then he set to work manfully on the long labour of a poetical description of his native land, which he called "Polyolbion" (Many-ways-Happy), of which