

**IN PRAISE OF CAMBRIDGE:
AN ANTHOLOGY IN
PROSE AND VERSE**

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In praise of Cambridge: an anthology in prose and verse by Sydney Waterlow

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SYDNEY WATERLOW

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AN ANTHOLOGY
IN PROSE AND VERSE

SELECTED AND EDITED BY

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We dare not have wit at the University
for fear of being counted rakes. Your
solid philosophy is all read there, which
is clear another thing.

George Farquhar,
Love and a Bottle, 1669.

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INTRODUCTION

CAMBRIDGE is one of the best abused and best loved places in England. When I began to collect pieces for this anthology I quickly perceived that it would be impossible to conform literally to my pre-ordained title on pain of excluding many of the most famous and nearly all the most amusing things that have been written about us. This was a relief in a way; for undiluted eulogy is monotonous at the best, and the ordinary run of enthusiastic writing about academic scenes becomes, when taken in large quantities, positively nauseating. I therefore abandoned all attempt to make this collection uniformly rose-coloured, and I hope that the inconsistency will be forgiven for the sake of the resulting advantages.

Misleading indeed, as well as dull, would be a book about Cambridge which should rule out everything that has been said to her dispraise—Milton's indignation against college plays, the complaints of the unknown genius who wrote the 'Parnassus' plays, the thrice-concocted spleen of Gray's satire, Warton's Oxonian malice, the ponderous gloom of Bentley's verses, Byron's petulant contempt, Wordsworth's retrospective disapproval, the growlings of Carlyle, and, to come to our own day, the gibes of Mr. H. G. Wells. These, then, and many others, wilfully offensive or morally denunciatory, find a place between these covers. The fact is that more men who have become eminent in letters have been bred at Cambridge than at any other University, yet if she has worked in them, it has been dumbly, hardly ever firing their imagination or prompting them directly to any passionate utterance in prose or verse. The town is not poetic, nor, on the whole, for all its venerable beauty of building and grove, is the University. A host of smaller scribblers may draw their inspiration from academic life, its quaint traditional appurtenances and thinly romantic atmosphere; the great ones have remained unmoved, or, if moved, it is too often to cursing. It is all very well to be proud of the roll of Cambridge poets, and to say that all our great names, save two

or three, are blazoned on it; but what have they had to say of their nursing-mother? For the most part silence or abuse. Usually, as for instance with Marlowe or Ben Jonson, we know nothing beyond the bare fact that they were here. Modern research unearths the names of their tutors and chamber-fellows, and that is all. When we have put together a few exquisite stanzas by Cowley, Gray's Installation Ode, a couple of score lines from Wordsworth's Prelude, and a canto of Tennyson's In Memoriam, there remains, out of all the writing of her sons, scarcely any poetry which is at one and the same time undoubtedly first-rate, and descriptive, with any tenderness, of the student's life. A slight maniple! And always there rankles the insult of Dryden's magnificent but tawdry compliment to our aunt: 'He chooses Athens in his riper age.'

Evidently, then, it was out of the question to make an anthology with the praise of Cambridge as theme which should contain, as an anthology ought, nothing but the first-rate. And even when I had deliberately enlarged my scope and admitted, for the sake of their interest or merit, pieces which were not merely neutral in tone but actually hostile, it was still impossible to fix the standard very high, either in prose or verse. With so special a subject it seemed inevitable that some trash should find its way in, usually because it happened to be touched with the glamour of antiquity, illustrating the subject in some one of its picturesque vanished aspects. I have tried, however, to let in as little as possible of the merely rubbishy. I may perhaps mention two of the principles which guided me in selecting the humbler blossoms out of the vast tangle of University literature. In the first place, I have sometimes chosen pieces which have little or no intrinsic merit, but which acquire a certain adventitious interest from being the work of some eminent person: in this class come, for instance, the stanza from Lord Byron's *Adieu: Written under the Impression that the Author would soon Die*, and the pages from Mr. Gladstone's *Romanes Lecture*. If dull bits there had to be, it seemed more amusing to have dull bits with a great name attached. On the other hand, I have observed moderation even in snobbishness: thus I have not printed both of Milton's heavy jests on the death of Hobson, nor all three of Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Sonnets on King's Chapel. In the second place, there is one whole region of this jungle in wandering through which I have scarcely gathered a single spray, chiefly because more competent hands than mine have already been at work there. In print, in manuscript collections, and in the mouths of men, there exists an immense body of

epigrams, facetiae, anecdotes of University events and personages, from traditional jokes which can be traced back for centuries and which every freshman learns anew, to the latest *mot* which makes the round of the high-tables and common-rooms. All these, or almost all, though many of them have become classical, I have with some misgiving left on one side. Many critics I fear will blame me. Looking in vain for Porson's neatly barbed shafts or for the lampoons that sprang up round the personality of Dr. Mansel, they will feel that the quintessence of Cambridge is left out of this book. And I do not know that they will not be right: the flavour of academic wit is something so distinctive that perhaps no Cambridge mixture that omits it can have any *bouquet* to speak of. But the best of it has been distilled in recent years, notably by Mr. Charles Whibley in *In Cap and Gown: Three Centuries of Cambridge Wit*, and more lately, with great diligence and learning, by Mr. E. E. Kellett, in *A Book of Cambridge Verse*. The desire to avoid covering precisely the same ground as those admirable compilations was decisive with me, although overlapping could not be avoided altogether, and a good deal of the verse of Mr. Whibley's and Mr. Kellett's books of necessity re-appears in mine.

An apologetic tone is perhaps natural and proper in the compiler of an anthology.

'Let standard authors, then, like trophies borne,
Appear more glorious as more hackt and torn.'

Even when one is careful to hack and tear as little as may be, the conscience will sometimes be a little troubled over this throwing together of often incongruous fragments. Also, as I have already admitted, in the hope of disarming in advance the reader of fastidious literary taste, some pieces of inferior merit have undoubtedly crept in here and there. But there is another class of reader whom there is probably no propitiating,—I mean the antiquarians and archaeologists. For I have gathered my extracts on no systematic plan; the book, though it contains scraps of history, is quite innocent of any ambition to be a 'source-book,' to collect authorities, or to give a connected view of any branch of its subject—historical, architectural, or what not. I have taken where I could find it any passage which struck me as vivid or interesting in any human way, allowing much play to my personal likes and dislikes; and I hope that any scholar and lover of Cambridge who may turn these pages will not be so deeply shocked by their arbitrary haphazard character as to be unable to forgive their omissions. I hope, too, that the taste of some readers will so far coincide with my own

as to be beguiled by a good part at any rate of the prose and verse that has appealed to me. For I will end by confessing—lest this Introduction should be altogether too much of an apology—that much of it does seem to me very good and not unworthy of the subject. I would instance the numerous poems and prose pieces by living authors which I have been so fortunate as to be allowed to include; and for those who prefer what has stood the test of time there is always the charm of Pepys' garrulity or Fuller's whimsical embroidering of history.

Still, when all is said and done, there must always be many whom an anthology will displease, if not by something it leaves out, then by something it puts in. Of the imperfections of mine I am acutely conscious. They would have been far greater but for the help and suggestions of friends. I owe to Mr. E. J. Dent, Mr. E. E. Kellett and Mr. Charles Sayle several pieces which would otherwise have escaped me. But my greatest debt is to Mr. A. T. Bartholomew of the Cambridge University Library, who has been at the pains of reading the proofs throughout, and who acted as my guide through the collection of Cambridge books and documents (a model, both for extent and arrangement, of what a local collection should be), which is housed in the University Library. Even a transient glance through such a collection must involve some toil, but the courtesy of the Library authorities made my task pleasant.

I am also much indebted to the authors, publishers, and literary representatives of authors, who have generously allowed me to make use of copyright pieces. A list of these pieces, together with the names of the authors and publishers in question, will be found in an Appendix.

SYDNEY WATERLOW.

CAMBRIDGE, *January* 1912.