

**AN ESSAY ON THE LIFE  
AND GENIUS OF THOMAS  
FULLER, WITH SELECTIONS  
FROM HIS WRITINGS**

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An essay on the life and genius of Thomas Fuller, with selections from his writings by Henry Rogers

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**HENRY ROGERS**

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OF  
THE LIFE AND GENIUS  
OF  
THOMAS FULLER,

WITH SELECTIONS FROM HIS WRITINGS.

BY HENRY ROGERS.

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## PREFACE.

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It is a little surprising that Fuller has not furnished a title to one of the many volumes of *Ana* which have instructed and amused the world. If it be said that he left behind him no collection resembling those to which the name of *Ana* was at first applied, this is true; but it has been not unfrequently extended to compilations from the "Opera Omnia" of authors of eminent merit, when their works, like those of Fuller, abound in anecdote, amusing gossip, and piquant reflection, or are distinguished by vigour, vivacity, and epigrammatic point. The selections containing the "essential extract" of voluminous authors—their most racy thoughts and most striking images—differ but little from those miscellanies, consisting of anecdotes and fragments of conversation, to which the term *Ana* was originally applied.\*

\* No attempt, so far as I am aware, has been made to furnish such a *spicilegium* of Fuller as I have here endeavoured to supply. Charles Lamb has indeed given a few fragments, but they were not designed to be any thing more than a specimen, and extend to only four or five pages. The Rev. A. Broome, of Baliol College, Oxford, nearly

The writings of Fuller present peculiar facilities for the construction of such a series as the present. Indeed, their digressive, fragmentary character, in general, would almost entitle them to be considered, collectively, a gigantic *Ana*—so wild and capricious is the career of his eccentric genius. To compile such a work as the present is, as himself with one of his quirks might say, only to select from a *collection*; to choose a certain number of detached thoughts out of a much larger number equally detached;—it is not taking “bricks” as a specimen of “a house,” or cutting figures out of a picture. The chief ornaments of his works are as valuable when out of his pages as when in them. There is no continuity to be dissolved—no essential unity to be destroyed.

In attempting a similar task with many of our older writers characterized by greater consecutiveness of thought than Fuller, (a task which yet has been often performed, so as to bring their chief beauties into contact with minds which might otherwise never have been touched by them,) the great

half a century ago, published a little volume from Fuller and South; each author had about half the book to himself. The selections from Fuller were exclusively made from the “Holy and Profane State,” and, if we except a few detached sentences at the close, are not so much extracts from that book, as a reprint of a *part* of it. A certain number of the “essays and characters” are reprinted nearly entire.

In the following series of extracts, on the contrary, the object has been to give only the more striking thoughts of any one “Essay,” unless it be in those cases—rare in any author of Fuller’s age—in which the whole composition is one “entire and perfect chrysolite.”

difficulty is to *detach* thoughts from the context without spoiling or impairing them. More than half the beauty of such thoughts is from the thoughts with which they lie in contact; more than half their brilliance from the light thus reflected on them. In such cases, the work of "extraction" is difficult indeed; to transplant the flower is to destroy it; that which bloomed beautifully in its own native dells, though half concealed, as it is apt to be in our older writers, amidst tangled, wild luxuriance, is no sooner removed to the trim garden prepared for it, than it droops and dies.

I am far from saying that this is not the case, to a certain extent, even with Fuller. On the contrary, I have been obliged to leave in their obscure recesses many flowers of his genius, which either could not be removed without removing so much of the surrounding *earth*, that they would have occupied too large a space in the following little plot, or, if torn away by their bleeding roots, would be torn away only to wither. To this—and not insensibility to their beauty, the reader must attribute it, if he misses in the following "*collectanea*" some favourite passages. Indeed, in general, he must bear in mind that my space has been limited; to give all that every reader may think worth preserving would be simply impossible. It is sufficient, if I have given nothing but what, on one account or another, may afford rational amusement. The reader is also reminded that some of the passages for which he might naturally have looked in the following pages, had already been quoted in the Introductory



Essay. Two of his most striking compositions—on “Fancy” and on “Tombs”—are there given *in extenso*.

But though in Fuller, as in all writers, many passages are not susceptible of transplantation, it is, for the reasons already given, more easy to detach them from Fuller than from most. His most striking “Essays” are but a series of insulated thoughts, epigrammatically expressed; often of great beauty, but often marred by others little worthy to keep them company. In many cases, it is but to weed, and the flowers, so far from being injured, are seen to greater advantage and bloom in greater beauty than before.

Whether, in some cases, I may not have spared a weed and grubbed up a flower, will of course admit of doubts with many, because taste and association in such matters so widely differ. All I ask of critics is, first, that they will be pleased to examine what is excised in any particular place, and compare it with what is retained, before pronouncing judgment; secondly, that they will recollect that it is impossible to please all palates; and, thirdly, that they may well believe that I have left out much that I myself should have liked to put in, when I say that the passages I had marked for extraction are at least twice as numerous as those which can be compressed into this little volume. The great difficulty has been in selection.

The extracts admitted into the Introductory Essay on “Fuller’s Genius and Writings,” have been allowed to stand, with the exception of a few sentences, which, as part of more

extended extracts in the subsequent pages, have, to avoid any repetition, been transferred thither.

The extracts, from No. 1 to No. 62, are from the author's "Good Thoughts in Bad Times," "Good Thoughts in Worse Times," and "Mixed Contemplations;" from No. 63 to No. 199, from the "Holy and Profane State"—unquestionably the greatest work of Fuller's genius; the remainder from the "Worthies," the "Church History," and the "Holy War."

Some few of the extravagances of Fuller's wit—even a few of his quibbles and puns—have been admitted, just as characteristic of the man. For some of his "puns," indeed, he would almost deserve the treatment Sidney Smith denounces against the makers of charades. "I shall say nothing of charades, and such sort of unpardonable trumpery. If charades are made at all, they should be made without benefit of clergy;—the offender should instantly be hurried off to execution, and be cut off in the middle of his dulness, without being allowed to explain to the executioner why his first is like his second, or what is the resemblance between his fourth and his ninth."

Of any such specimens of Fuller's style, I have of course been sparing. They will be found in abundance in his works; for he could not find in his heart to refuse harbourage in his pages to any vagrant of his riotous fancy, however ragged. But as the Introductory Essay, and the following extracts will show, Fuller was as capable of rising to the higher, as of sinking to the lower, forms of wit.

On the whole, I hope that this little volume of "Fragments" will not be unsuitable to the series of which it forms a part. The parenthetical minutes and the transient attention which are often all that the traveller can command, will not be ill-bestowed, I think, on any of the ensuing extracts. While none of them exact prolonged or consecutive thought, there are few which will not either teach a pleasant wisdom, or inspire innocent mirth.

I have allowed myself to make no other alterations in the text than such trivial ones as were necessary, here and there, to render extracts, abruptly torn from the context, intelligible; such as a slight change in punctuation; the occasional *emphasising* of a word by printing it in italics; the substitution of the antecedent for its pronoun; or the transposition of a word or two. Omissions of sentences are of course frequent—but a break is generally indicated in the usual way. For the *headings* of the extracts the compiler is for the most part responsible.

H. R.