

**THE POETICAL WORKS OF
SIR THOMAS WATT.
WITH MEMOIR AND
CRITICAL DISSERTATION**

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The poetical works of Sir Thomas Watt. With memoir and critical dissertation by Sir Thomas Wyatt

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With Memoir and Critical Dissertation,

BY THE

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THE
LIFE OF SIR THOMAS WYATT.

SIR THOMAS WYATT ranks with Henry, Earl of Surrey, as one of the best of our early poets; and with Surrey, Byron, Walpole, and some others, as one of the comparatively few of our aristocracy who have contributed much of value to the stores of English literature. He was descended from an ancient and noble family, which had been settled for several successive generations at Southange, in the county of York. His father, Sir Henry, had been faithful to the cause of the House of Lancaster during its darkest days; had been imprisoned in the Tower by Richard III., and even, it is said, tortured in the Usurper's presence. It is stated by tradition, and is inscribed on his monument in Kent, that, during his imprisonment, a cat brought him daily a pigeon from a neighbouring dove-cot, which served amply to supply his wants! When the sun began to shine on the Lancastrian side of the hedge, Henry VII. did not forget the loyalty of the able, prudent, and wise Sir Henry Wyatt, but appointed him one of his Privy Councillors, and afterwards one of the executors to his will. In the year 1493, we find him rich enough to purchase the estate of Allington, near Maidstone, in Kent, which became the residence of the family; and about the same time he also bought from the Marquis of Dorset the estate and mansion of Mole, lying a little to the east of Maidstone, and which fell afterwards into the possession of the Earl of Romney. After Henry VII.'s death, Wyatt was nominated by the Countess of Richmond one of the council for managing public affairs till the young king was of age; and he con-

tinued under Henry VIII. to enjoy many marks of royal distinction. [At his coronation on the 23d of July 1509, Wyatt was created a Knight of the Bath; and having greatly distinguished himself at the battle of Spurs in August 1513, he was made Knight Banneret on the spot: besides afterwards acting at one time as Knight Marshall; at another, as Keeper of the King's Jewels; and at a third as Ewerer to His Majesty. In 1502 he married Anne, daughter of John Skinner, of Reigate, in Surrey, and by her had three children—Thomas, the elder Sir Thomas Wyatt, as he is usually denominated, Henry, and Margaret.]

The year 1503 was the time, and Allington Castle the place, signalised by the birth of our poet. As to the first twelve years of his life, biography is silent; but it seems probable that he enjoyed the instructions of a private tutor. In 1515 he was entered of St John's, Cambridge. He took his degree of B.A. in 1518, and that of A.M. in 1520. In the same year, when only seventeen, he married Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Brooke, Lord Cobham. In 1525 he took part in a grand feat of arms which was performed at Greenwich at Christmas. Wyatt was one of sixteen challengers; and the enterprise began the day after St John the Evangelist's day, and lasted till the 8th of February, when "every man having journeyed as his course came, and many a sword being broken, and many a good stripe given, and every man having stricken his full number of twelve strokes, the combatants were severed and disarmed, and the achievement closed." Those who have the opportunity of consulting Hall's Chronicles, will find there a full and glowing picture of this splendid passage of arms, which the graceful and gallant courtesy of the combatants, the quaint titles and devices, the presence of the most beautiful and illustrious ladies, whose eyes

"Rain influence, and decide the prize;"

the gorgeous costumes, and the mazy dances, which alternated with the mock fights, must have rendered enchanting—reminding us, in some points, of the "gentle and joyous

passage of arms" at Ashby, in Ivanhoe, and exciting a renewal of the old sigh of Burke, because the "age of chivalry is gone."

In the absence of distinct information, various pleasant myths have been invented about this period of Wyatt's life, some supposing that he completed his education at Oxford, and others tracing him in imaginary tours to Paris and Italy. The fact, however, seems to be, that as Dr Nott well remarks, "at the period when Wood supposes him to have been advancing himself in learning by hearing the cardinal's lectures at Oxford, he must have been dividing his time between his attendance at Court, and the society of his wife Elizabeth in the 'classic' bowers of Allington, on the peaceful and romantic shores of the winding Medway."

The first authentic glimpse we get of him after the birth of his eldest son, in 1521, is at Anne Boleyn's marriage, in July 1533, where Wyatt officiated as ewerer, in room of his father. He had undoubtedly, in the mean time, been cultivating his mind in his study, perhaps serving in the army, and certainly shining in the Court. He possessed almost all the qualifications which go to constitute a consummate courtier. He had a noble appearance, a form where, according to Surrey, "force and beauty met," a face of perfect symmetry, eyes of dazzling lustre, a mouth of singular sweetness, and a carriage distinguished alike by dignity and ease—the dignity of the oak and the yielding grace of the willow. His accomplishments, too, were extensive, and yet hung elegantly about him, waving to his outline freely like the toga—not sternly girded around him like the tunic. He spoke French, Italian, and Spanish, like English, besides being thoroughly acquainted with the classical languages. He sung, too, and played skilfully on the lute; excelled in the arts of conversation, particularly in wit and repartee; was already celebrated as a poet, and formed altogether an unequalled specimen of the high-born cavalier of the period—of the soldier and the scholar, the gentleman and the genius. Through his various accomplishments he ingratiated himself greatly with the king, but is said to have used his influence

more in favour of others than of himself, so that it became a proverb when any one received unexpected advancement—"He has been in Wyatt's closet." That our young wit and poet passed through the ordeal of such a Court as Bluff King Hal's quite scatheless, is far from probable; but there is no evidence that he was ever dissolute or abandoned to pleasure. He accuses himself, indeed, to his son of past folly and unthriftiness; but it is not certain whether the folly ever amounted to guilt, or the unthriftiness to dissipation. His gay qualities, however, contributed, with other circumstances, to bring him into serious dangers, and nearly to premature death.

Our readers are all familiar with the character of the "Blue-beard among Monarchs;" the wife-killing king, Henry VIII., and with the tragic fate of (if we may use the somewhat paradoxical term) the "English Mary Queen of Scots," poor unfortunate Anne Boleyn. We must not judge of King Henry as a monster. There are few, if any, monsters in the history of mankind. He was merely a man of strong passions, developed by power and popularity into a selfish and ungovernable despot—a despot who would have been incomparably more tyrannical to his people, had not his fury found a safety-valve in his cruel treatment of his wives. The whole history of his marriages has almost a phantasmagorical effect on the imagination. His wives come like shadows, and like shadows depart—each diverse in aspect as in destiny—the gentle, dignified, and pious Catharine of Arragon, dying after writing a last letter to her husband, full of a tenderness and pathos which melted even his rough nature to tears, and leaving the "Bloody Mary" as her sad and terrible legacy to England—the gay and beautiful Anne Boleyn, appearing to imagination like that pale fair girl in Faust, with

"A single blood-red line,
Not larger than the sharp end of a knife,
Around her lovely neck,"

and from whose blood sprang Elizabeth, the Lioness of the Protestant faith—Jane Seymour, the beloved Rachel among the throng, and the mother of the boy-king Edward

VI., although, alas! like the Princess Charlotte in later days, perishing in parturition, and being, like her, the "consort of a year," although not the "parent of the dead"—the coarse Anne of Cleves, the voluptuous and unhappy Catherine Howard—and the learned, sensible, and religious Catherine Parr, who was fortunate enough to outlive her capricious and sensual lord, and whose "Prayers and Meditations, wherein the mind is stirred patiently to suffer all afflictions here, and to set at nought the vaine prosperitie of this worlde, and, also, to long for the everlasting felicitie," still survive to praise her in the gates. It was Anne Boleyn, the second in this strange procession, whose name has been associated with that of Wyatt, and the vortex of whose fate had very nearly engulfed our accomplished and brilliant bard. It will be remembered that she accompanied Mary, sister of Henry, on her marriage with Louis XII., to France, as maid of honour, and that, afterwards, she entered the service, first of Queen Claudè, wife of Francis I., and then of his sister, the Duchess of Alençon. Her youth, beauty,* wit, and the fascination of her manners, rendered her a great favourite in the French Court, where it is supposed Wyatt first met and became enamoured of her. On her return to England, she was appointed lady of honour to Queen Catharine, and attracted the notice of the king, who straightway moved heaven and earth, first, in an attempt to seduce her, which was unsuccessful, and then to obtain her as his wife. They were privately married, on November 14, 1532, but soon, her pregnancy revealing the secret, Cranmer declared the first marriage void, and celebrated a second, after which Anne was crowned Queen at Westminster, amidst circumstances of unequalled splendour. Her triumph proved as brief as her rise had been sudden. Henry speedily tired of her, transferring his affections to Jane Seymour, her maid of honour, and pretending to entertain suspicions of the Queen's virtue. In 1535, two years after she had given birth to Elizabeth, she was

* *That*, however, was far from perfect. She had six fingers on her right hand, and her complexion was too yellow. Her eyes, however, were fine, and her carriage majestic.