

**THE POEMS, PLAYS AND  
OTHER REMAINS OF  
SIR JOHN SUCKLING.  
IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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The poems, plays and other remains of Sir John Suckling. In two volumes. Vol. I by W. Carew Hazlitt

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**W. CAREW HAZLITT**

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Suckling, whose numbers could invite  
Alike to wonder and delight ;  
And with new spirit did inspire  
The Theapian scene and Delphic lyre :  
Is thus express'd in either part  
Above the humble reach of art.  
Drawn by the pencil, here you find  
His form—by his own pen, his mind.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[These lines occur beneath the (very indifferent) portrait by Marshall prefixed to all the old editions of the works, 1646-96. They were written, as elsewhere pointed out, by Thomas Stanley.]

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTICE.

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**A** NEW edition of the remains of SIR JOHN SUCKLING, in verse and prose, has for many years past been a desideratum. The volume which is now offered to the public embraces all that is known to be extant from his pen. The account of his life which is prefixed has been reprinted from that which accompanies a volume of selections from his writings published in 1836 by the late Suffolk historian, the Rev. Alfred Suckling; but it has been carefully revised, and in certain places enlarged.

The tracts which form the Appendix are in themselves curious, and they throw some light on Suckling's history, and on the circumstances by which he was surrounded and influenced.

Some of the notes have been derived from a copy of Suckling's works, edit. 1658, purporting to have been formerly in the possession of Wordsworth. All the notes written by the poet himself are initialed *W. W.*, or signed in full, evidently to distinguish them from notes in two other hands, those of George Chalmers and John Lawson; but the authenticity of this MS. matter has (it is right to say) been called in question. The handwriting is certainly very like Wordsworth's, which varied a good deal from time to time; but it was

thought that, at any rate, these remarks, whether by Wordsworth or not, could not be without a certain value.

*W. W.* observes:—"Suckling was among the few who read Shakespeare in that age; of all poets he seems to have been his favourite. He not only imitated him in his writings, but praised and quoted him in all the polished circles of the day, of which he was a distinguished ornament. The exertions of Suckling to make Shakespeare popular have hitherto escaped the notice of the editors and biographers of that poet."

The following lengthy note is written on vacant spaces in various parts of the "Account of Religion," "Aglaure," &c., and is introduced by a short remark from another pen, or at least in another hand:—

"Suckling's observations on religion are always just, and sometimes profound. He has nobly vindicated the use of reason, which he very properly calls 'the highest and most golden privilege we enjoy.'" —*J. Lawson.* "Sir John at an early age made great proficiency in the ancient and modern languages; he was also an excellent musician, at an age when music was little cultivated in England. Every poet is supposed to be a musician in his ear, if not practically. Moore, in his 'Retrospect of Prose' [?] writing in England, has named Milton as the only poet of eminence in England who was a practical musician, which is a piece of injustice to Sir J. Suckling, who was at least as great a proficient in music as Milton. Moore could hardly have erred through ignorance, because, as he tells us in his Preface to Little's Poems, he has made the early English amatory poets [?] his study, and [he] has borrowed largely from them, almost always without acknowledgment. Were it necessary, innumerable instances might be produced where [he] has borrowed hints for some of his best poems from Cowley, Donne,



Burns, Suckling, and others. Sir John Suckling, dazzled by the reputation of the French poets, imitated their style; but he did not succeed. But he soon discovered his mistake; he was not fitted by nature to excel in that species of writing.

“Winstanley says his poems smell more of the grape than the lamp. Suckling, Denham, and Waller were the first who polished our versification. All attempted the metaphysical style, but did not succeed. They wanted resources. Donne, the founder of the metaphysical school, had passed his life in the cloister, with no other aim but eminence in literature, and thus acquired a vast fund of learning, and by constant exercise made his hand expert at metaphysical disquisitions, of which he availed himself in his poetry.

“Cowley, his great rival, and who, though not the founder of the school, was certainly its greatest ornament, had passed his life in a similar manner. Cleveland ranks next to him; he was also a man of great erudition, and perhaps equal in powers of poetry. His youth and manhood had been passed at Oxford and Cambridge, where he highly distinguished himself as a man of learning, an orator, and a poet. His letters possess great wit and humour, and much the same faults and beauties as his poetry.

“The Metaphysical School was formed on false principles; its reign was but temporary; and it was the means of creating a reaction among those who were ambitious of being ranked among its scholars, which led to all our subsequent improvements in versification and language. The school which arose in opposition is called, in contradistinction, the French School of Poetry. They proposed the ancients for their model, but found they could only imitate their chaste, nervous style of thought. The English language could not also receive their

measures.<sup>1</sup> Recourse was therefore had to the French School, which was found more adapted to the genius of the language, and their system of versification was accordingly introduced. Rhyme, a modern invention, was deemed unclassical; but the best poets have not disdained it, and public taste has given a certain superiority to rhyme: very powerful arguments can be brought against it. The new school soon found numerous admirers, but was in great danger from the popularity of the other school. A revolution in public taste is never effected without great difficulty. Many men of learning loudly decried the new school. . . . The decision of men qualified to judge in matters of taste no doubt influenced the public. The new school would probably have fallen, but fortunately at this critical juncture Dryden appeared. He soon saw the intrinsic worth of the new school, and was not slow at perceiving the defects of the old. No man ever possessed a finer genius for poetry. Every difficulty vanished before him, and the new school was established on the firmest basis, and has ever since retained its superiority.

"For Pope, however, was reserved the honour of giving to English versification its final polish.

"I have said that the French School failed for want of resources; but I have given an account of the other school's habits and acquirements to illustrate my remarks. As a further illustration, I must give an account of the poets called the French School.

<sup>1</sup> The genius of the language is so essentially different, that all attempts to introduce the ancient measures have hitherto failed. The use of hexameters . . . contributed to that oblivion in which the poetry of Sydney, Abraham Fraunce, and others is buried at present. Milton, Collins, and . . . have imparted considerable grace and harmony to some of the ancient measures, and in the present age Southey and others have attempted to bring them into general-use, but without much success."

"Waller was not remarkable for learning, and he was not early initiated into poetry. Suckling was a courtier and a wit. And therefore they may be all said to have . . . for the metaphysical . . . , which the other school . . . , and the reputation they now enjoy has amply repaid them for the neglect they sustained in their own age . . . to say that—as their books have advanced in popularity, their . . . have retrograded in the same degree.

"W. WORDSWORTH.

"MOUNT RYDAL, *May 9, 1838.*"

The play of "The Goblins," which has been inserted in Dodsley's collection, is now printed with the notes of Isaac Reed and others, as its retention in the new edition of the *OLD PLAYS* will probably, under the present circumstances, hardly seem desirable.

On the whole, it was thought expedient to adopt, in the text of Suckling, the modern standard of spelling and punctuation.

Considering the early age at which he passed away, and what he has left behind him in print, not to name his political exploits, it will be allowed, no doubt, that Suckling was a man of no ordinary genius, nor have we it in our power, we apprehend, to raise a better monument to him, than a faithful text of his authentic writings.

W. C. HAZLITT.

KENSINGTON, *June 1874.*

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The edition of 1874 having been exhausted, Mr. Reeves asked me to revise the text, in order to enable him to include the work in the *Library of Old Authors*. The "Additional Notes" have now been transferred to their proper places; certain