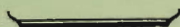


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THE UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT

DRYDEN AS A POLITICAL SATIRIST

IN ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

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BY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Satire and the satirists have been in evidence in all ages of the world's history. Satire has always ranked as one of the cardinal divisions of literature, and it has been distinctly cultivated by men of genius. This was especially true in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the classics were esteemed on authority as models. This type of writing may have historical as well as literary and ethical values. Smeaton says: "The satiric denunciation of a writer burning with indignation at some social wrong or abuse, is capable of reaching the very highest level of literature. "1 John Dryden's satires fit into this category. His Absalom and Achitophel is the greatest political satire in our literature, and the rest of his satires are very highly esteemed. Dryden has justly been regarded as England's greatest satirist, and the epoch of Dryden has been fittingly styled the "Golden Age of the English Satire."2

It is the object of this thesis to exhibit his contribution to the "Satiric Domain" by considering the meaning of satire, Dryden's interpretation of satire, the special qualities which distinguish Dryden's satiric spirit, and the modi-

1. Oliphant Smeaton, English Satire, p. xiii.
2. Ibid., p. xxxiii.

fications of that spirit as they are shown in his political satire, Absalom and Achitophel.

The absence of any established criteria as a basis for the study of satire is a difficulty which must be recognized and met at the very outset. This paper does not attempt, by any means, to fill this gap. For Professor Tucker³ and Professor Alden⁴ have quite satisfactorily succeeded in establishing criteria or terminology that might serve for the treatment of satire as a genre. An effort is made to define satire only in general terms as an introduction and as an aid to the reader.

Any study of satirical poetry in England is rendered difficult by a confusion of terms. If we look into A New English Dictionary, we will note that satire comes from the Latin word "satira, later form of satura" meaning a medley. As a specific application of satura (medley), satire was "in early use a discursive composition in verse treating of a variety of subjects, in classical use a poem in which prevalent follies or vices are assailed with ridicule or with serious denunciation." Dr. Johnson's Dictionary gives the following definition: "Satire (Lat. satira) Poem of a moral character (as such opposed to lampoon), wherein vice or folly is either ridiculed, or censured with irony." These defini-

3. Samuel Tucker, Verse Satire in England before the Renaissance.

4. Raymond M. Alden, The Rise of Formal Satire in England under Classical Influence.

tions give us a general idea of the term. But to understand satire a more detailed clarification will prove helpful.

Professor Tucker gives us quite an adequate explanation when he says that the confusion of terms lies in the really triple meaning of the word satire. "As given in the dictionary, satire, in one sense, is an abstract term cognant with ridicule; as when we say, 'Satire has accomplished revolutions.' A second meaning refers to a literary form that has for its object destructive criticism, as when we say...."⁵
Mac Flecknoe is a Satire on Shadwell.

In this double meaning there is no confusion, for a distinction is simplified by the mere use of a capital letter when the word "satire" is used to denote a literary form.

But, unfortunately, a double meaning lurks in the first and more abstract signification of the word Here two things are confused: the satirical spirit, an intangible, abstract something that underlies and inspires what we commonly call satire--or ridicule--or invective; and satire itself, which is merely the concrete manifestation of the satiric spirit in literature.⁶

Clarification of terms would involve a long discussion and many illustrations, but for our purpose it is sufficient to bear in mind that

.... the term satirical spirit always refers to a point of view; the word satire to a concrete but general embodiment of that point of view in literature; and the Satire (capitalized) to the literary form or the genre, as well as to any particular example of the genre.⁷

5. Tucker, op. cit., p. 3.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

Thus, we may say, the satirical spirit is enthusiastic; Dryden's satire is directed against the Whigs; Dryden made a great contribution to the Satire; Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel is a Satire of great importance.

Worcester defines formal satire as:

.... a poem of short or middling length, designed to express the author's disapprobation of political, social, or personal actions, condition or qualities written in heroic couplet, in real or fancied imitation of one or more of the Roman satirists; its prevailing tone may be one of gross invective, satiric invective, or burlesque....⁸

Dryden, on the other hand, in his Essay on Satire quotes with approval Heinsius's definition of satire, and evidently means formal satire. Heinsius (in his dissertation on Horace) defines satire thus:

Satire is a kind of poetry, without a series of action, invented for the purging of our minds; in which human vices, ignorance, and errors, and all things besides, which are produced from them in every man, are severely reprehended; partly dramatically, partly simply, and sometimes in both kind of speaking; but for the most part, figuratively, and occultly; consisting in a low familiar way, chiefly in a sharp and pungent manner of speech; but partly, also, in a facetious and civil way of jesting; by which either hatred, or laughter, or indignation, is moved.⁹

Briefly, Dryden's theory is that all virtues are to be praised and recommended to practice, and all vices reprehended, and made either odious or ridiculous; otherwise, there is a fundamental error in the whole design. Dryden from the standpoint of the literary artist, says in his Essay on Satire,

8. David Worcester, The Art of Satire, pp. 160, 161.

9. W. P. Ker, Essays of John Dryden, II, 100.

"The nicest and the most delicate touches of satire consist in fine raillery."¹⁰

Dryden's dictum for designing a perfect satire is "that it ought only to treat of one subject; to be confined to one particular theme; or at least to one principally. If other vices occur in the management of the chief, they should only be transiently lashed, and not be insisted on, so as to make a design double."¹¹ Another rule comprehended under this unity of theme is that the satirist is "bound, and that ex officio, to give his reader some one precept of moral virtue, and to caution him against some particular vice or folly."¹² Other subordinate virtues may be recommended under the chief head; other vices or follies may be scourged, besides that which he principally intends. "But he is chiefly to inculcate one virtue, and insist on that."¹³ This has not been a universal law for satire, nevertheless, it is highly respected by many reliable critics. Later in the treatise we shall see how Dryden adheres to his principles. His Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire (1692) was written after his great Satires (1681-1687), but the same principles were well set in his mind.

Numerous unjust attacks have been launched against Dryden by some critics. Are their conjectures true? Prejudices

10. Ker, op. cit., II, 92.

11. Ibid., p. 102.

12. Ibid., p. 104.

13. Ibid.

and assumptions, and not true evidence played an important role here. To understand Dryden's satire, it is necessary to take into consideration his cast of mind, as well as, the events of his time. With this intellectual insight we shall agree that his thoughts and his craftsmanship are superb. He seems to fit into Newman's dictum: "The style of a great author will be the faithful image of his mind, and this no less in oratory than in poetry."¹⁴ Great authors have great thought; for thought and speech are inseparable. Why question Dryden's sincerity? "Dryden has succeeded in making eternally interesting and entertaining his own private beliefs, just as Shakespeare has succeeded in arousing our interest in his own love for a dark-eyed lady, long since dead."¹⁵

A consideration of Dryden's satiric spirit as it is shown in Absalom and Achitophel involves an investigation of the objects of his attacks, whether individuals, classes, or institutions, and a discussion of the relation of his satire to contemporary society and politics; what he tried to do and how he succeeded. It also necessitates a study of the methods he utilized, and the manner he was inclined to assume. Therefore, Chapter II will deal with Dryden's cast of mind, his intellectual milieu, his honesty, and his consistency. Chapter III will treat the political background of the central problem of his poem. Chapter IV will contain the analysis of Absalom

¹⁴. John H. Newman, The Idea of a University, edited by Daniel M. O'Connell, p. 285.

¹⁵. Allardyce Nicoll, Dryden and his Poetry, p. 19.

and Achitophel, analyzed politically, satirically and poetically. Lastly, a summary will be presented of the characteristics which distinguish his satiric spirit and make his work distinctive and unique.

CHAPTER II

DRYDEN'S CAST OF MIND

Dryden's stylistic achievements have been readily acknowledged by critics. But the content of his work, his cast of mind, and his intellectual equipment received scant attention. Before Bredvold's work his sincerity was generally questioned.

Mr. Allan Lubbock, for instance, has recently asserted that Dryden's whole body of work can be explained as the child of deep enthusiasm, which made him attach but little importance to religion or politics, or even to many aspects of literature itself. What excluded everything was the love of expression for its own sake. He devoted himself therefore to increasing the efficiency of his instruments. That is to say, Dryden was an expert craftsman with an uninteresting mind.¹

Lubbock forgets that style is not a mere addition from without. The author must be sincere. According to Newman, "Style is a thinking out into language. The view that style is a mere addition from without leads to insincere and artificial writing."² Hence, Dryden could not be an expert craftsman without an interesting mind. Lubbock's judgment represents the mind of a few twentieth century critics. Dryden, however, has a capable expositor in Mr. Bredvold, who has found in him a meaning for the modern reader. Bredvold's findings will be

1. Louis I. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, pp.3,4.

2. Newman, op.cit., p.264.

reflected in this chapter.

Johnson, Scott, and many readers of the past have said much in favor of Dryden. Walter Savage Landor compliments him in his verse letter to Wordsworth:

Our course by Milton's light was sped,
And Shakespeare shining over head:
Chatting on deck was Dryden too,
The Bacon of the rhyming crew;
None ever crost our mystic sea
More richly stored with thought than he;
Tho' never tender nor sublime,
He wrestles with and conquers Time³

From these lines, we do not infer that Dryden should be placed among the great philosophical poets, with Lucretius and Dante. Landor merely reminds us that there are stores of great thought in Dryden's works which should be considered in an explanation and appraisal of his literary achievement.

It is about time that we root out the unpleasant assumption underlying much of the criticism, even much of the praise of Dryden. He has been displayed as a sophist and dealt with accordingly. The belief that, with the possible exception of some of his literary criticism, his mind was neither sincere nor significant was common among critics. This bias was due to Christie's publication which was a reliable edition of Dryden but prejudiced against him as a poet. Today, these prejudices have been reverted and John Dryden is looked on from a brighter point of view.

Depreciation of Dryden's mind was due to certain precon-

3. Bredvold, op.cit., p.4.

ceptions regarding his moral and intellectual character. The three common preconceptions which the student encounters as obstacles in his approach to Dryden are: "that Dryden was a hireling, whose political and religious affiliations were determined by bribes and pensions; that in his most serious work he never rose intellectually above the level of ephemeral journalism; and that the inconsistencies and contradictions with which his work abounds are conclusive evidence of a lack of intellectual character and significance."⁴ These preconceptions are refutable. For detailed discussion one should read Bredvold's The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden. Here his primary interest lies in the evolution of Dryden's faith in matters of philosophy, religion and politics. He convinces us that Dryden's sincerity can no longer be questioned.

Macdonald gives the harsh judgments and censures against Dryden in "The Attacks on Dryden."⁵ Bredvold refutes the attack that Dryden is a hireling in his "Notes on John Dryden's Pension."⁶ The full facts in regard to Dryden's pension as Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal are now known and many of the insinuations can be proved gratuitous. Everything points rather to Dryden's deep devotion and dignified loyalty to the Tory cause, which he identified with the best interests

4. Bredvold, op.cit., p.5.

5. Hugh Macdonald, "The Attacks on Dryden," Essays and Studies, XXI (1935), 35.

6. Louis Bredvold, "Notes on John Dryden's Pension," Modern Philology, XXX (May, 1933), 267-74.

of his king and country. It has been proved that Dryden's political and religious affiliations were not determined by bribes and pension but by sincere conviction. His pension was incidental and the only bribe was his conscience.

It was difficult for any man in such an unsettled age as the seventeenth century to remain indifferent to political and religious embroilments. Dryden, as a poet, considered it essential to keep up with the intellectual life of his age and nation. The nature of his own intellectual regimen is fairly indicated by his statement on the qualifications necessary for the practice of poetry:

I am of opinion that they cannot be good poets, who are not accustomed to argue well. False reasonings and colours of speech are the certain marks of one who does not understand the stage; for moral truth is the mistress of the poet as much as the philosopher; Poesy must resemble natural truth, but it must be ethical.⁷

In 1677, he wrote, "It requires Philosophy as well as Poetry to sound the depth of all the passions."⁸ Johnson said that "every page discovers a mind very widely acquainted both with art and nature, and in full possession of great stores of intellectual wealth."⁹

Dryden's vital intellectual, or even artistic, interests were not narrowly confined in matters of style and language. He said often enough that style is more than a technique, that

7. Ker, op.cit., I, 121

8. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu, p.10.

9. Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, edited by G. Birkbeck Hill, I, 417.

"it must proceed from a genius and a particular way of thinking."¹⁰ Not only did Dryden know his belles lettres, but he "ranged extensively among the most unliterary books; he has a wealth of quotations, allusions, and anecdotes, much of it from obscure sources as yet untraced by any editor of his work."¹¹ In philosophy he "studied and adopted the latest theories of the most advanced thinkers, from Newton to Harvey."¹² Reason, not emotional or fanciful theorizing, became his guide. Dryden was a qualified and active member of the Royal Society.¹³ He understood the new philosophy and the new science, and showed a keen interest in the deterministic implications regarding human nature. He rejected the dogmatic materialism of Hobbes and Lucretius. And when we look for the meaning and importance of his distrust of the reason in Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther, or for the interpretation of his ingenuous changeableness in literary opinion, we must go among other places to his intellectual adventure with the new sciences, with Hobbes, and with the Royal Society.

What has been said so far is sufficient to disprove the assertion made by some critics that Dryden "never rose intel-

10. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu, p.11.

11. Ibid

12. Nicoll, op.cit., p. 14.

13. Dryden's interest and activity in the Royal Society is discussed in C. Loyd, "John Dryden and the Royal Society," P.M.L.A., XLV (December, 1930), 967-76.; L.I. Bredvold, "Dryden, Hobbes, and the Royal Society," Modern Philology, XXV (May, 1928), 417-38.; R.G. Ham, "Dryden

lectually above the level of ephemeral journalism."¹⁴
 Instead, we can say that he had a generous conception of the learning necessary to a poet and that his intellectual interests, thus closely integrated to his calling, were both wide and genuine. His learning and reading equipped him to understand the political question of his day.

Let us now consider the preconception "that the inconsistencies and contradictions with which his work abounds are conclusive evidence of a lack of intellectual character and significance."¹⁵ This idea is nothing more than a misinterpretation or assumption. The fact is that there are no inconsistencies but rather clarifications or developments of a strong mind. All through his life Dryden changed and moved, steadily, in a single direction, but he never went back. Raleigh says "Those who fiercely demand consistency in a political career commonly mean by consistency the repetition of a party cry. Their ideal character is the parrot, who never forgets what he was taught in youth, and never tires of repeating it. They make no allowance for experience, and none for thought--that bugbear of the drill sergeant, which will not stop when you cry Halt!"¹⁶

Changeableness was one of the dominant characteristics of his mind. But it was a type of change that led to fuller maturity. It was a process of development, in slow stages

14. Eredvold, The Intellectual Milieu, p.5.

15. Ibid.

16. Walter Raleigh, "John Dryden and Political Satire," in Some Authors, p.165.

and, after much reflection, to more considered conclusions. Discussion and argument helped him. Dryden loved to debate. He preferred to see an idea tested in a vigorous combat with its opposite, each side putting forth its utmost force; and he wrote accordingly. Political ideas are expressed in Absalom and Achitophel very largely by discussion and argument, and no one can say that the contest is intellectually contemptible. The plan of The Hind and Panther permitted a vigorous recapitulation of arguments used on both Catholic and Anglican sides in the enormous pamphlet war of the time. And one might add that even Religio Laici is a balancing of conflicting ideas. As Dr. Johnson had observed, Dryden's mind was "always curious, always active." Hence, the apparent indecision is evidence not of weakness, but of strength, of energy and of versatile understanding. Dryden understood the skeptical and diffident nature of his own mind. In the Preface to Religio Laici (1682) he tells us explicitly that he was "naturally inclined to skepticism in philosophy." Dryden's natural temperament and his contact with philosophical skepticism enabled him to rationalize his natural diffidence of temper.

Dryden did possess a group of philosophical ideas and doctrines. They constitute an essential part of his personality both as a man and as a writer; to them he was attracted by his "genius," by his "particular way of thinking" and through them his intellectual character was formed. On the whole his intellectual biography is an ardent and curious examination

and testing of those ideas which were current in his age. His success in achieving something like centrality and consistency in his intellectual life testifies both the seriousness and strength of his mind. His intellectual reactions are as thoroughly characteristic of him as is his style. Therefore, we may say that his learning and his reading, his deep interest in contemporary problems, and his genuine intellectual curiosity prepared him for his work on Absalom and Achitophel. His sincere convictions and strength of character made him take a long-range view of the important political question of his day. Dryden is on the intellectual side a significant and imposing figure.

We are greatly impressed by the development of this strong mind, a mind that seeks truth and follows its light. Mr. Saintsbury defends his client by an analogy with the case of Cardinal Newman. Everyone knows the lines in which the latter poet describes his mental changes:

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou
Should'st lead me on:
I loved to choose and seek my path;
I loved the garish day, and spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will.

Dryden describes the same process in himself:

My thoughtless youth was winged with vain desires.
My manhood, long misled by wandering fires
Followed false lights; and when their glimpse,
was gone,
My pride struck out new sparkles of her own.¹⁷

17. John A. Evans, "Dryden," Living Age, CLXXXV (May, 1890), 317.

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL

Absalom and Achitophel "has been uniformly and universally admired, not only as one of Dryden's most excellent performances, but as indisputably the best and most nervous political satire that ever was written."¹

Long before Absalom and Achitophel, Dryden was a practiced hand at satire both in verse and prose. His great ambition in life was to write an epic, but history would not permit a theme of convenient unity. His opportunity for displaying skill, however, "came with the crisis of 1678-1681, and the proposal to exclude from the succession to the throne the King's brother, the Duke of York, in favour of his illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth. Here was a national episode immensely important and exciting, with a compact simple issue almost expressible as a single situation."²

In order to understand the allusions and historical facts in Absalom and Achitophel it is necessary to know something about the political conditions of England in the latter part of the seventeenth century and the circumstances that brought about the agitation which lead to the writing of this great satire.

1. Sir Walter Scott, The Works of John Dryden, IX, 197.
2. Arthur W. Verrall, Lectures on Dryden, p. 49.

The political conditions were very unsettled. Charles I began his reign in 1625 with an empty treasury, and Parliament was determined to take advantage of this to obtain more privileges. In 1628 the Petition of Right was forced upon the King, but the next year Charles dissolved Parliament and endeavored to rule the country until 1640 without the assistance of this pugnacious body. Taxation was arbitrary, and the king's prerogatives seemed to be increasing. Moreover, Puritan sentiment was outraged, as Charles seemed to be going in the direction of Roman Catholicism. When the Long Parliament met in 1640, the struggle between the King and people reached a more acute stage. The result was the beginning of the Civil War in 1642, a conflict that ended with the King's execution in 1649.³

For the next eleven years the Commonwealth, controlled by Cromwell and the army, was England's form of government. Rather vigorous policies were entered upon. Bickering between Parliament and the Ruler continued. Finally, experiments of the Commonwealth crystallized the popular opinion that the only way to end military despotism was to restore the Stuarts.

When Charles II saw the trend of events in England in 1660, he issued at Breda, his place of exile in Holland, a declaration of his policies. This Declaration became the basis of the political settlement effected by the legislation

3. Howard Robinson, The Development of the British Empire: p. 36.

of the Convention Parliament.

The constitutional situation created by the restoration was a balance of powers between King and Parliament. As long as the two cooperated harmoniously, all worked well, but when one differed from the other, neither had the constitutional right to decide the issue. Thus the ultimate authority was still left unsettled. The final determination of this issue in the constitutional development was of chief importance during the reign of Charles II and James II.

Another important issue, with direct bearings on politics, was the religious question. The religious settlement was not accomplished by the Convention Parliament. Parliament's radical Anglicanism led it, between 1661 and 1665, to enact legislation which ended toleration and made the established church narrowly Anglican. The Presbyterians, Catholics and other nonconformists were driven from municipal posts by a severe Corporation Act, "which required a reception of the Communion according to the rites of the Anglican Church, a renunciation of the League and Covenant, and a declaration that it was unlawful on any grounds to take up arms against the King."⁴ The Act of Uniformity, the Conventicle Act, and the Five Mile Act were also passed. These Acts brought the element of Dissent into the religious and political history of England. Green⁵ discusses the religious situation in detail.

⁴. J.R. Green, Short History of the English People, p. 621.

⁵. Green, op. cit., pp. 621-29.

In the settlement Charles II gave Parliament free rein, intervening actively only to seek greater toleration for rebels, Catholics, and Dissenters than Parliament was inclined to bestow.

In 1660 and in 1662, Charles tried to persuade Parliament to grant general religious liberty, but did not succeed. Instead, Parliament reflected the temper of devotion to the English Church and destestation of the Catholics and Nonconformists by banishing many clergymen. To put an end to the injustice imposed by penal laws, Charles II, in 1672, under the power which he claimed, issued a Declaration of Indulgence, suspending the execution of all penal laws in matters ecclesiastical. Although the Declaration granted to Catholics only liberty of private worship while all Protestant sects were to be allowed public worship, men suspected it was issued mainly in the Catholic interest. When Parliament met in 1673, the opposition was intense, and Charles tried to bear it down. The Commons, however, refusing to give way, carried a resolution: "That penal statutes in matters ecclesiastical cannot be suspended but by act of Parliament," and respectfully petitioned that the laws be once more enforced. In face of such opposition and in return for money which he sorely needed, Charles II recalled the Declaration.⁶

To clinch their victory, Parliament passed a Test Act (1673) requiring all holding civil or military office to receive the sacraments according to the Church of England, and to take an oath declaring their disbelief in transsubstantiation. That

6. Arthur Lyon Cross, A History of England and Greater Britain, p. 551.

test excluded Roman Catholics and conscientious Dissenters for over a century and a half.⁷

Charles saw that Parliament's iron hand blocked his progress. He, therefore, set out to establish himself as an absolute monarch. The four means by which he sought to accomplish his purpose were:

building up the standing army; attaching the Dissenters by offering toleration which Parliament refused to grant; restoring Roman Catholicism; and securing a closer alliance with the French King, to whom he looked for supplies and, in case of need, for troops. The obstacles, however, proved so formidable that he had to follow a very crooked course, and, before many years had passed, to alter his plans profoundly.⁸

It seems that Parliament forced Charles to seek aid outside of his own country. Trevelyan says that

The King was indeed put by the Cavalier Parliament on an absurdly short allowance, which hampered all branches of the administration and ere long tempted him to sell the control of his foreign policy to Louis XIV of France.⁹

Charles frequently exerted his influence in foreign affairs. He negotiated for a time with France and Spain and soon came to terms with the former. When his project of toleration failed, he discovered that for any real success in his political or religious aims he must seek resources elsewhere than at home. At this time France was the dominant power of Europe. Its young King, Louis XIV, was considered by some as the champion of Catholicism and despotism against civil and religious liberty throughout the world. France

7. Cross, op. cit. p. 551.

8. Ibid.

9. George Macaulay Trevelyan, History of England, p. 453.

was also the wealthiest of European powers, and her subsidies could free Charles from dependence on his Parliament. He felt that the aid of Louis could alone realize his aims, and he was willing to pay the price which Louis demanded for his aid, the price of concurrence in his designs on Spain.¹⁰ In order to gain his designs, he waged costly and devastating wars, and Charles had to do some double-dealing to fulfill his part of the plan.

These external policies had a strong repercussion on internal politics. Ever since the Declaration of Indulgence the suspicion that Charles sought to build a Catholic despotism had been growing. His persistent anti-national policy of friendly relations with Louis increased English suspicion, though nothing was definitely known of the Treaty of Dover or of the duplicity of Charles's negotiations with Louis. This situation created a strong minority of opposition in the loyal Cavalier Parliament and led to the formation of the political parties which ever since have been a prominent part of English parliamentary system.

Opposition, of course, had never been entirely lacking, but before 1672 it had been either factious or short lived. It began in earnest after the Dutch war of 1665-1667. Though England was on the whole successful, the disgrace of the Dutch exploit on the Thames was never forgotten. Clarendon was held responsible in public opinion and was sent into exile.

10. Green, op. cit., p. 634.

"From the fall of Clarendon in August, 1667 to the death of Shaftesbury in January, 1683, England was in a high state of ferment and agitation."¹¹ Long series of national calamities and political blunders intensified the tension of the nation. There were feuds in the Cabinet and among the people; there was religious intolerance; the Royal house had become a center of perfidy and dissatisfaction. Clarendon, though blameless, had been made the scapegoat of the disasters.

The Triple Alliance (April, 1668) was followed by the scandalous Treaty of Dover (May, 1670), by which an English King bound himself to re-establish the Roman Catholic religion in England, and to join his arms with those of the French king in support of the House of Bourbon, that he might turn the arms of France against his own subjects, should they attempt to oppose his designs.¹²

Between 1667 and 1674, Charles conferred with the committee of the privy council on foreign affairs. The most influential men of this council were Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley (Lord Shaftesbury) and Lauderdale. Since their initials spelled "cabal" which already had a sinister meaning the group was soon known popularly as the cabal. The government, in the hands of the Cabal, is known as "the most unprincipled and profligate ministry in the annals of our constitutional history."¹³

Next followed the administration of Danby, who was the leader of the intolerant Anglican group in parliament. Danby built up a regular party of supporters whose chief tenets were

11. John Churton Collins, The Satires of Dryden, p. xxxiii.

12. Collins, op. cit., pp. xxxiii, xxiv.

13. Ibid., p. xxxiv.

intolerant Anglicanism and a wide royal prerogative. Opposed to this party were those who believed in toleration for Protestant Dissenters and in the supremacy of Parliament.

Shaftesbury soon headed the group, giving it an organization like that of a modern political party. Danby's followers became known as the Tories, and Shaftesbury's as the Whigs.

These groups were also divided on the question of lawful succession. In May 1662, Charles II had married Catherine of Braganza, but he had no issue by her. Therefore, the question of the succession began to assume prominence. In the event of the king leaving no legitimate children the crown would revert to the Duke of York. But the Duke was a catholic, and of all the many prejudices of the English people, Papacy was the strongest. This question was now at stake. Two great political parties were formed. One insisted on the exclusion of the Duke of York from the right succession, on the ground of his religion. These were the Petitioners, later nicknamed Whigs, and the Exclusionists whose leader was the Earl of Shaftesbury. The other party, the Abhorrrers (later nicknamed Tories) were anxious, partly in accordance to the theory of the divine right of kings and the mistrust of the multitude, to please the king by supporting the claim of his brother.

The object of the Exclusionists was to inflame the populace against the Catholics. Two events played into their hands in 1678, the Catholic Terror and the impeachment of Danby. The Catholic Terror was produced by Titus Oates, who apparently seeking notoriety concocted a series of lies about Catholic

plots to dethrone Charles, seize the government, and establish the Catholic Church. These false charges were "taken for gospel," and the public flared into a state of unreasoning panic.

Shaftesbury utilized the popular frenzy to build up the Whig party. He then put forward the program of exclusion of the Catholic succession, disbandment of the army, and the impeachment of Danby.

The seed of Shaftesbury's rancor can be traced to the time when he was Lord Chancellor. At that time he had the misfortune or he sought the opportunity to quarrel with the Duke of York. James had no doubt perceived that Shaftesbury's schemes were not likely to coincide with his own.

By the Duke's manoeuvres, therefore, Shaftesbury was forced to resign the Great Seal though he still sat in Parliament. Shaftesbury's leading principle now became hated for the Duke of York and popery.¹⁴

He determined to bend his whole genius to the task of securing the succession for Monmouth, the king's son by Lucy Walters, even at the risk of civil war. With this object in mind, he set out to gain the confidence of the people and of the king. Knowing how the people detested the Papists and lacked affection for the Duke of York, he had full hopes of success.

Monmouth, though known to be the king's illegitimate child, was a favorite. He was indifferent to all religions,

¹⁴. Collins, op. cit., p. xxxvii.

but under the auspices of Shaftesbury and with the prospect of a crown, he became the representative of Protestantism. He was well fitted naturally to play the part that Shaftesbury planned for him. His manners were singularly engaging, his figure striking. He was wealthy and popular and his popularity increased by a vague and unfound claim to legitimacy based on the reported marriage of Charles to his mother.

Shaftesbury utterly embroiled the kingdom by persuading Monmouth to return to England without his father's consent, and to become the ostensible head of that body of which the wily politician was himself the soul. This conduct deeply injured Monmouth in his father's favor. Charles refused to see him, and to put an end to his hopes, publicly declared his illegitimacy.

This avowal was ascribed to the king's fear for his brother. Pamphlets were published to assert the legitimacy of Monmouth, against the express and solemn declaration of his father. Monmouth himself by various progresses through the kingdom, with an affectation of popularity which gained the vulgar but terrified the reflecting, above all, by a close alliance with the Machiavel, Shaftesbury, showed his avowed determination to maintain his pretensions against those of the lawful successor.¹⁵

Monmouth was received in England with enthusiastic applause. Simultaneously with his appearance his partisans circulated an appeal "for the preservation of his majesty's person, liberty, property, and religion."¹⁶ It propagandized the point that what was needed was a man to lead true hearted Bretons against French invaders and popish rebels,

15. Scott, op. cit., IX, 255

16. Collins, op. cit., p. xxxviii.

and that that man was Monmouth, qualified alike by birth, conduct and courage. ¹⁷

The popular excitement was at its peak; the country was on the verge of civil war and Shaftesbury was now sanguine of success.

This was the state of affairs in 1681 when Absalom and Achitophel first appeared. No doubt, Dryden with his masterly pen had helped to revert public opinion. For the tide had changed and the facts are that two parliaments were called in turn, but twice the Exclusion Bill had been rejected. Charles saved the cause for his brother by dissolving Parliament before it granted the supply. The Whig's greatest blunder was the attempt to vest the succession in the Duke of Monmouth who was a "frivolous fop." James had a mind of his own, and was notably serious. The attitude of Parliament, moreover, had aroused a fear that departure from the hereditary line of succession would result in civil war, and Englishmen had had their fill of civil war.

The fear of civil war brought about a great reaction and the king soon found himself strong enough to strike a decisive blow against Shaftesbury who in the eyes of the royalists was the seducer of young Monmouth and the arch-enemy of the public peace. In July, 1681, he was arrested on charge of "subordination of high treason for conspiring for the death of the king and the subversion of the Government, "¹⁸ and committed to the

17. Collins, op. cit., IX, 253.

18. Ibid. p. xxxix.

Tower to await his trial at the Old Bailey in the following November.

At this critical period, just a week before the trial on which so much depended, appeared Absalom and Achitophel. Sir Walter Scott said that "the time of its appearance was chosen with as much art as the poem displays genius."¹⁹ The country had to be saved from strife. At this momentous crisis, Dryden launched his greatest efforts to work upon public opinion. His poem, as he calls it, had for its theme a definite political project. According to a note by Jacob Tonson, Dryden undertook the poem on the request of Charles II.

The plan of the satire evidently was not original. Undoubtedly, the fourth satire of Juvenal suggested the idea of casting satire in the epic mould; Horace and Lucan supplied models for the elaborate portraits and "Lucan's description of the political conditions of Rome at the time of the great civil conflict is, unmistakably, Dryden's archetype for his picture of the state parties in London".²⁰ Nor was the device of disguising living persons and current incidents and analogies under the veil of scriptural names new. Beer says that "The parallel between David and Absalom and Charles II and Monmouth had already been exploited by other writers before Dryden took it up."²¹ Professor Richard F. Jones in

19. Scott, op. cit., IX, 197.

20. Collins, op. cit., p. xl.

21. E. S. Beer, "Absalom and Achitophel: Literary and Historical Notes," Review of English Studies, xvii (July, 1941), 304.

"The Originality of Absalom and Achitophel"²² shows that the parallel was in common use in the seventeenth century.

In 1679 the scriptural story of Naboth's vineyard was paraphrased and applied to the condemnation of Lord Stafford for his supposed complicity in the Popish Plot and in 1680 a small prose tract was published in Dublin entitled Absalom's Conspiracy; or The Tragedy of Treason. But the analogy between Jewish history in the reign of David (II Samuel, Chapters 13-16.) and the condition of England in 1681, and the analogy between the Biblical characters and the political characters after the Restoration, were sufficiently obvious to strike a less intelligent reader than Dryden. The allusions could not be missed. Dryden had a purpose for writing in allegories.

In spite of this, Dryden was profoundly original in his plan and style, in his vigor and method of application. He uses the Biblical parallel to admit the heroic style. For generally the Biblical terminology was considered the thing of dignity. Sanhedrin and Abbethdin would bear a treatment which Parliament and Lord Chancellor could not. The actual parallel is slight. There is no Sanhedrin in the story of David, nor does Dryden attempt to press the parallel. Verrall claims that "the treatment of contemporary events

22. R. F. Jones, "The Originality of Absalom and Achitophel," Modern Language Notes, XLVI (April, 1931), 211-18.

on abstract lines, and the comparison with the Biblical story, is necessary on pain of absurdity."²³

This poem is the triumph of genius as distinguished from mere talent A party pamphlet,--in the hands of Regnier or Churchill, a party pamphlet it would have remained,--that and nothing more. Let the student ask himself, or ask his teacher, why Dryden's party pamphlet is immortal.²⁴

²³ Verrall, op. cit., p. 56.

²⁴ Collins, op. cit., p. xli.

CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS OF ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL

The genius of John Dryden can be traced through his great political satire, Absalom and Achitophel. It is an allegorical satire in heroic couplets and has been called the greatest political verse satire in the language. It has an energetic presentation of the political principles of two parties, dignified but damaging characterization, deadly wit, and blazing diction. According to Verrall, it is "an announcement and a prophecy of the royal triumph, and an appeal to the nation for grateful acquiescence."¹

"The greatness of the poem lies however not in the plot, but in the brilliant characterizations and in the vigorous presentation of the political tenets of both sides."²

The plan of Absalom and Achitophel is one of extreme simplicity, a situation rather than a story. Absalom (Monmouth), a young illegitimate prince, is seduced into rebellion by the art of a treacherous statesman, Achitophel (Shaftesbury). He is taught to cultivate popularity and does so with dangerous success. All this is stated in outline and abstraction only, but is very easy to follow, if the political background is known. Owing to the caprice of the mob, the prince's position becomes a national danger.

1. Verrall, op. cit., p.54.

2. Louis I. Bredvold, The Best of Dryden, p. 540.

Abstract sketches with identifying touches are given to his principal supporters and to some of the loyal sincerity. The king is moved to interfere. His protest and his paternal threat allay the tumult:

....Th' Almighty, nodding, gave consent;
And peals of Thunder shook the Firmament.
Henceforth a Series of new time began.³

Si propius stes te capiat magis: "If you stand nearer, you will be still more attracted,"⁴ Dryden's motto on the title page of this political allegory is intriguing. The more you delve into it, the more you find.

The poem on the whole may be divided into five parts: the introduction; the temptation or Shaftesbury's and Absalom's speeches; the succumbing and campaigning; the King's friends; and the King's speech.

The first part may be called the introduction. Lines 1-45 introduce King Charles II (David); Queen Catherine of Braganza, (Michal), who like the Biblical Michal was childless; and the illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth (Absalom), who gifted by nature has distinguished himself in "Foreign Fields." His pleasing exterior concealed a weak and irresolute character, but this the king did not perceive for:

With secret Joy, indulgent David view'd
His Youthful Image in his Son renew'd;
To all his wishes Nothing he deni'd

3. John Sargeaunt, The Poems of John Dryden, p. 62, lines 1026-28. All further references to the poem will be to this edition which was printed in London in 1681 and which presents an un-modernized text with textual notes.

4. Horace, Ars Poetica, 361-62.

And made the Charming Annabel his Bride.
 What faults he had (for who from faults is free?)
 His father could not or he would not see.
 31-36

Lines 45-84 compare the English people to the Hebrews:

The Jews, a Headstrong, Moody, Murm'ring race
 As ever tr'd th' extent and stretch of grace
 God's pamper'd People, whom, debauch'd with ease,
 No King could govern nor no God could please....

Dryden excels in description here. He describes them as a pampered people, always in strife, whom no king could govern. The progress and main events of revolt can be interpreted from Dryden's poetry. The multiplicity of sects is ridiculed in a characteristic couplet:

(Gods they have tri'd of every shape and size
 That God-smiths could produce or Priests devise:)
 49, 50

Their political instability is ridiculed. A short time ago:

In contemplation of whose ugly Scars.
 They curst the memory of Civil Wars.
 The moderate sort of Men, thus qualifi'd
 Inclined the Ballance to the better side....
 73-76

Now ideals have changed again:

The careful Devil is still at hand with means;
 And providently Pimps for ill desires:
 The Good Old Cause, reviv'd, a Plot requires,
 Plots, true or false, are necessary things,
 To raise up Common-wealths and ruin Kings.
 80-84

Lines 85-133 usher in the Jebusites (Papists) or the Roman Catholics. Their sad situation is well treated. The allusions are to the civil disabilities put upon them and to the false accusations alleged against them. Dryden clearly exhibits the fate of the Jebusites. Noyes maintains that the following lines "do not exaggerate the treatment of

the Catholics by the government and the people of England."⁵

Th' inhabitants of Old Jerusalem,
 Were Jebusites; the Town so call'd from them;
 And their's the Native right--
 But when the chosen People grew more strong,
 The rightful cause at length became the wrong;
 And every loss the men of Jebus bore,
 They still were thought God's enemies the more.
 Thus, worn and weaken'd well or ill content,
 Submit they must to David's Government:
 Impoverish't and depriv'd of all Command,
 Their Taxes doubled as they lost their Land;
 And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood,
 Their Gods disgrac'd, and burnt like common wood.
 This set the Heathen Priesthood in a flame,
 For Priests of all Religions are the same:
 Of whatsoe'er descent their Godhead be,
 Stock, Stone, or other homely Pedigree,
 In his defence his Servants are as bold,
 As if he had been born of beaten Gold.

85-103

From hence began that Plot, the Nations Curse....

108

"That Plot" refers to the Popish Plot, of which unsavory Titus Oates gave the first information in August, 1678. In order to inflame Protestant frenzy, Oates concocted a series of lies. He laid before the Council a declaration alleging that an extensive plot was on foot among the English Catholics for setting fire to the city, massacring the Protestants, and assassinating the king in order to bring England back into the fold of the Catholic Church. The falsehood is described as:

Bad in itself, but represented worse,
 Rais'd in extremes, and in extremes decr'd,
 With Caths affirm'd, with dying Vows deni'd,
 Not weigh'd or winnow'd by the Multitude,
 But swallow'd in the Mass, unchewed and crude.

5. George R. Noyes, The Poetical Works of John Dryden, Cambridge edition, p. 950.

Some Truth there was, but dashed and brew'd with
 Lies;
 To please the Fools, and puzzle all the wise.
 109-15

Lines 110-13 describe the common action of man and
 can be applied even to-day. Many principles are:

Not weigh'd or winnow'd by the Multitude,
 But swallow'd in the Mass, unchewed and crude.
 112-13

After the exposal of the Popish Plot, there were two
 groups of people in the State, those:

Believing nothing or believing all.
 117

Lines 118-32 denounce Catholicism. At that time France
 was the leading Catholic power and Oates had supposedly
 testified that a French army was to support the Popish schemes
 and aid in suppressing Protestantism. The French are referred
 to as Egyptians:

The Egyptian Rites the Jebusites embrac'd,
 Where Gods were recommended by their taste.
 Such sav'ry Deities must needs be good
 As serv'd at once for Worship and for Food.
 118-21

The quoted lines are a sneer at the doctrine of transubstan-
 tiation. They recall to mind the Test Act which was treated
 in Chapter III. The Act provided that all office holders
 declare their disbelief in transubstantiation. This auto-
 matically excluded the Catholics from holding office.

This Plot, which fail'd for want of common Sense,
 Had yet a deep and dangerous Consequence;
 For as, when raging Fevers boil the Blood
 The standing Lake soon floats into a Floud;
 And ev'ry hostile Humour which before
 Slept quiet in its Channels bubbles o're;
 So several Factions from this first Ferment
 Work up to Foam, and threat the Government.
 134-41

These lines refer to the parties whose intrigues were interwoven to menace the security of the English State.

The Popish Plot was only a thread in the fabric, a sheepskin for the wolf, a guise for a treacherous design.

....ev'ry hostile Humour which before
Slept quiet in its Channels bubbles o're....
138,39

Several factions rise up and threaten the government. Among the rebels were men goaded on by friends or personal ambition; men who opposed the power to which they could not rise; men who had been great in court and favored by the king; men who:

Were raised in Pow'r and Publick Office high....
148

Of these, false Achitophel (Lord Shaftesbury) was first. Cross describes him as "a born agitator and demagogue, a forerunner of the modern party leader."⁶ Lines 150-200 are the inimitable portrait of Achitophel, while lines 200-29 exhibit his uneasiness, his designs, and introduce his famous speech. Dryden attacks him in lines of biting satire which have become classic:

For close Designs and crooked Counsels fit,
Sagacious, Bold, and Turbulent of wit,
Restless, unfixed in Principles and Place,
In Pow'r displeased, impatient of Disgrace
A fiery Soul, which working out its way,
Fretted the Pigmy Body to decay:
And o'r informed the Tenement of Clay.
152-58

These lines contain all the essence of Shaftesbury's character and the passage that follows is a scathing reference to his

6. Cross, op. cit., p. 548.

overt acts of jealousy or pride, his insatiable desire for power, or whatever it may be that is satirized. Just a few evidences of overt acts will be quoted:

A darling Pilot in extremity;
 Pleas'd with the danger when the waves were high
 He sought the Storms; but for the Calm unfit,
 Would steer to nigh the Sands to boast his Wit.
 159-62

In Friendship false, implacable in Hate,
 Resolv'd to Ruine or to Rule the State;
 To Compass this the Triple Bond he broke;
 The Pillars of the Publick Safety shook,
 And fitted Israel for a Foreign Yoke.... }
 173-77

The above triplet identifies the Triple Alliance of 1668, which had been formed between England, Sweden, and the Dutch Republic, against France. Shaftesbury (Achitophel) "played a prominent part in breaking up this alliance and bringing on the Dutch War of 1672-74, in which England was aided by France."⁷

Dryden's comment describes the conveniences of popularity:

So easie still it proves in Factious Times
 With publick Zeal to cancel private Crimes:
 How safe is Treason and how sacred ill,
 Where none can sin against the peoples Will
 where Crouds can wink; and no offence be known,
 Since in anothers guilt they find their own.
 180-85

The people forgive much in those who uphold their cause.

"Shaftesbury's share in promoting the war with Holland, a Protestant ally of England, was forgiven when he espoused the Whig cause."⁸

7. Noyes, op. cit., p. 951

8. Raleigh, op. cit., p. 171.

Dryden gave Shaftesbury a "bitter dose of medicine" but he counteracted it with at least a "drop of honey." From biting satire he turns to a few lines of praise, for example,

The Statement we abhor, but praise the Judge.

187

Lines 187-99 did not appear in the first edition. Dryden was taking no risk in weakening his political objective. But he added them to his second edition, "praising Shaftesbury as an upright and uncorruptible judge, as a contrast to the corruption and demagoguery of his political leadership."⁹ The laudatory lines refer to the time when he served the king faithfully, but after the fall of the Cabal he became the most conspicuous leader of the Opposition. In 1678 and the following years, he took advantage of the belief in Popish Plot, and was the chief supporter of the Exclusion Bill, which was brought forward to deprive the Duke of York of lawful succession.

"The gist of Dryden's charge against Shaftesbury is not that he represented the people, but that he deceived them."¹⁰ He stirred up envy and hatred; he encouraged opinions that he did not share, if he thought them beneficial to his cause.

His cunningness is pointed out in:

Achitophel, grown weary to possess
A lawful Fame, and lazie Happiness
Disdan'd the Golden Fruit to gather free
And lent the Crowd his Arm to shake the Tree.
Now, manifest of Crimes, contriv'd long since,
He stood at bold Defiance with his Prince
Held up the Buckler of the Peoples Cause
Against the Crown; and sculk'd behind the Laws.

9. Bredvold, Fest of Dryden, p. 540.

10. Raleigh, op. cit., p. 171.

The wish'd occasion of the Plot he takes;
 Some circumstances finds, but more he makes
 By buzzing Emissaries, fills the ears
 Of listening Crouds, with Jealousies and Fears
 Of Arbitrary Counsels brought to light,
 And proves the King himself a Jebusite.

200-13

The leader naturally looks about for a pretender to the throne to substitute for the Duke of York. Achitophel introduces his claimant and reveals his method of approach. Observe the dignity of the introductory passage and the rise of poetical ornament:

Achitophel still wants a Chief, and none
 Was found so fit as Warlike Absalom:
 Not, that he wish'd his Greatness to create,
 (For Politicians neither love nor hate:)
 But, for he knew his Title not allow'd,
 Would keep him still depending on the Croud,
 That Kingly pow'r, thus ebbing out, might be
 Drawn to the Dregs of a Democracie.
 Him he attempts with studied Arts to please
 And sheds his Venome in such words as these.

220-29

The second division, including lines 230-476, may be labelled as The Temptation, or Achitophel's Speech and Absalom's Reply. Here all of Achitophel's "Venome" is artfully applied. "The Central and all important episode is the Temptation. Here we must read minutely and with careful attention to metrical effects, in order to note the appeal of the actual verse."¹¹

The Invocation to Absalom is very effective. Achitophel's masterly speech begins:

Auspicious Prince! at whose Nativity
 Some Royal Planet rul'd the Southern Sky;
 Thy longing Countries Darling and Desire
 Their cloudy Pillar, and their guardian Fire,

11. Verrall, op. cit., p. 63.

Their second Moses, whose extended wand
 Divides the Seas and shows the promis'd Land
 Whose dawning Day, in every distant Age,
 Has exercised the Sacred Prophets rage,
 The Peoples Pray'r, the glad Diviners Theam,
 The Young mens Vision and the Old mens Dream!
 Thee, Saviour, Thee the Nations Vows confess;
 And, never satisfi'd with seeing, bless:
 Swift, unbespoken Poms, thy steps proclaim.
 And stammering Babes are taught to lisp thy Name.

230-43

The adulation is strong and cleverly presented. Achitophel flatters the "Auspicious Prince" and works systematically on his pride.

Swift, unbespoken Poms, thy steps proclaim....

241

The allusion here is to the popular demonstrations which had accompanied Monmouth's progress through the country after his return from abroad in 1679.

There is a touch of satire in the word "unbespoken."

The first proposal of royalty is introduced:

How long wilt thou the general Joy detain;
 Starve, and defraud the People of thy Reign?
 Content ingloriously to pass thy days,
 Like one of Vertues Fools that Feeds on Praise;
 Till thy fresh Glories, which now shine so bright,
 Grow Stale and Tarnish with our dayly sight.
 Believe me, Royal Youth, thy Fruit must be
 Or gather'd Ripe, or rot upon the Tree.

244-51

Fate is now impressed. Heaven had allotted to all sooner or later a special opportunity:

Our Fortune rolls as from a smooth Descent
 And, from the first impression, takes the Bent;
 But, if unseiz'd she glides away like wind;
 And leaves repenting Folly far behind.

256-59

Had Charles (David) not dared when fortune called, he would

have remained in exile at Erussels. Charles seized his opportunity and Monmouth (Absalom) should do the same. There is something to build on. Charles is not as popular as on the day of Restoration. The reception of Charles at Dover in May, 1660 is described in the triplet:

He is not now, as when, on Jordan's Sand
The Joyful people throng'd to see him Land
Gov'ring the Beach and blechning all the strand }

Now Charles's fortune has turned for the worse. He has fallen from his height like the "Prince of Angels." Events of time as well as Charles's position are again reviewed in lines 275-302. Achitophel importunes as to say-- Why hesitate?

What strength can he to your Designs oppose,
Naked of Friends, and round beset with Foes?
If Pharaoh's doubtful succour he should use,
A foreign Aid would more incense the Jews

Achitophel puts forth another entreaty:

.... And 'tis the general Cry
Religion, Common-wealth, and Liberty.
If you, as Champion of the Publique Good,
Add to their Arms a Cheif of Royal Blood;
What may not Israel hope, and what Applause
Might such a General gain by such a Cause?
291-96

Raleigh claims that "Shaftesbury took pleasure in the craft of statesmanship and delighted in his own dexterity in handling public opinion."¹² This pride Achitophel himself reveals in his speech:

All sorts of men by my successful Arts
Abhorring Kings, estrange their altered Hearts
From David's Rule

289-300

12. Raleigh, op. cit., p. 170.

Lines 230-302 are concerned with Achitophel's masterly speech. Dryden now introduces his interlude, as a strain or a period of reflection allotted for Absalom's reply:

What cannot Praise effect in Mighty Minds,
 When Flattery Scoths and when Ambition Blinds!
 Desire of Pow'r, on Earth a Vicious Weed,
 Yet, sprung from High is of Coelestial Seed;
 In God 'tis Glory: And when Men Aspire,
 'Tis but a Spark too much of Heavenly Fire,
 Th' Ambitious Youth, too Covetous of Fame,
 Too full of Angels Metal in his Frame,
 Unwarily was led from Vertues ways,
 Made Drunk with Honour, and debauch'd with Praise.
 Half loath and half consenting to the Ill,
 (For Loyal Blood within him struggled still,)
 He thus repli'd

303-15

In lines 303-72, Dryden gives high praise to David (Charles) through the mouth of Absalom by enumerating his good deeds and by questioning any wrong ones.

Absalom is ready with the reply. Although "Half loath and half consenting," in a virtuous strain he thus replies:

.... And what Pretence have I
 To take up Arms for Publick Liberty?
 My Father Governs with unquestion'd Right;
 The Faiths Defender and Mankinds Delight,
 Good, Gracious, Just, Observant of the Laws;
 And Heav'n by Wonders has espous'd his Cause.
 Whom has he Wrong'd in all his Peaceful
 Reign?
 Who sues for Justice to his Throne in Vain?

315-22

Absalom continues, praising his father and pointing out that Charles had the people at heart. He tells the people that they might assert their liberty but he has no right to do so because his father gives him all but the "Kingly Diadem," which is destined for a "Worthier head." Here he also praises the lawful heir, James II, who will ascend the Throne. The

last lines of the speech suggest Absalom's inner battle:

Yet oh that Fate, Propitiously Inclined,
 Had rais'd by Birth, or had debas'd my Mind;

 And, made for Empire, Whispers me within;
 Desire of Greatness is a God-like Sin.

363-72

"After the storm comes the calm." Absalom shakes off the temptation and concludes:

Desire of Greatness is a God-like Sin.

372

The transitional lines, lines 373-75, are very realistic. Achitophel, "Hells dire agent" finds Absalom staggering and weak. The tempter took advantage of that situation, and before virtue maintained her ground, he pursued Absalom with greater force by playing on his pride. Achitophel begins his second speech:

Th' eternal God, Supremely Good and Wise,
 Imparts not these Prodigious Gifts in vain;
 What Wonders are Reserv'd to bless your Reign?
 Against your will your Arguments have shown,
 Such Virtue's only giv'n to guide a Throne.
 Not that your Father's Mildness I contemn,
 But manly Force becomes the Diadem.

376-82

Achitophel presses the point that the people are getting the upper hand and if Absalom does not save the situation the government will fall into the hands of the multitude.

Lines 373-476 unveil Achitophel's plan for Absalom, the method of procedure, and the assurance of success.

All will take a natural course. Charles will give to the people till he can give no more.

The thrifty Sanhedrin shall keep him poor:
 And every Sheckle which he can receive
 Shall cost a Limb of his Prerogative.

390-92

From history we know what a hard time Charles had in getting money from Parliament (Sanhedrin). Usually it entailed a sacrifice of a prerogative or demand, as for instance, when he had to recall the Declaration of Indulgence in order to get a supply of money.

Achitophel says that the rest of the designing will be his:

To ply him with new Plots shall be my care;
 Or plunge him deep in some Expensive War;
 Which, when his Treasure can no more supply,
 He must, with the Remains of Kingship, buy.

393-95

The Catholics, his faithful friends, will be torn from his aid by a "Fury" (refers to Oates' doings) and Charles shall be left to public scorn. The next successor (James II) will be made obnoxious to the state by Achitophel's "Arts." He would continue in these devilish schemes:

Till time shall Ever-wanting David draw,
 To pass your doubtful Title into Law.
 If not; the People have a Right Supreme
 Go make their Kings; for Kings are made for
 them.

407-10

All empire is no more than Pow'r in Trust

410

Achitophel's tenets are exhibited in lines 410-76. He molds Absalom's views to suit his own. Finally he urges Absalom to:

Doubt not; but, when he most effects the Fawn,
 Commit a pleasing Rape upon the Crown.
 Secure his Person to secure your Cause;
 They who possess the Prince, possess the Laws.

473-76

The third division, lines 477-810, constitutes the succumbing and the process of campaigning. So convincingly did Achitophel present his views that Absalom weakened. Importunities prevailed and the last advice suited him best. From then on:

Strong were his hopes a Rival to remove,
With Blandishments to gain the publick Love,
To Head the Faction while their Zeal was hot,
And Popularly Prosecute the Plot.

486-90

A parade of actions begins. To further the Plot Achitophel unites:

The Malecontents of all the Israelites

492

Dissenters and "Mistaken Men," who were patriots at heart but were seduced by "Impious Arts," were instrumental in "cracking the Government." With their aid, Achitophel does everything possible to cause an uprising of the English people. Being part of the Council, he finds it easy to do underhand work and charge the consequences to Charles as poor management. As a result of Achitophel's fraudulent business, the financial burden is at a peak; all progress is curtailed, the people lose property and become so panicky that they hate not only "David" but also the King; (not the person but the form of government).

The conspirators and their goal are vividly and satirically portrayed:

Yet deepest mouth'd against the Government.
A numerous Host of dreaming Saints succeed;
Of the true old Enthusiastick Breed:
'Gainst Form and Order they their Pow'r imploy.
Nothing to Build, and all things to Destroy.

Bur far more numerous was the Herd of such,
 Who think too little, and who talk too much.
 These, out of meer instinct, they knew not why,
 Adored their Fathers' God, and Property:
 And, by the same blind Benefit of Fate,
 The Devil and the Jebusite did hate:
 Born to be sav'd, even in their own desptight;
 Because they could not help believing right.
 Such were the Tools; but a whole Hydra more
 Remains, of sprouting heads too long to score.

528-42

In a series of brilliant character sketches, the leading Whigs are brought on the scene. Dryden treats these "Chiefs" politically and satirically as well as artistically. The first in rank is Zimri. Since Dryden is fully aware of the genius shown in this portrait, and since in his opinion Zimri is worth the whole poem, we can not refrain from quoting it:

In the first Rank of these did Zimri stand:
 A man so various, that he seem'd to be
 Not one, but all Mankind's Epitome.
 Stiff in Opinions, always in the wrong;
 Was everything by starts, and Nothing long:
 But, in the course of one revolving Moon,
 Was Chymist, Fidler, States-man, and Buffon;
 Then all for Women, Painting, Rhiming, Drinking,
 Besides ten thousand Freaks that died in
 thinking.
 Blest Madman, Who cou'd every hour employ,
 With something New to wish, or to enjoy:
 Railing and praising were his usual Theams;
 And both (to show his Judgment) in Extreame:
 So over Violent, or over Civil,
 That every Man, with him, was God or Devil.
 In squandring Wealth was his peculiar Art:
 Nothing went unrewarded, but Desert.
 Begger'd by fools, whom still he found too late:
 He had his Jest, and they had his Estate.
 He laugh'd himself from Court; then sought Relief
 By forming Parties, but could ne'r be Chief:
 For, spight of him, the weight of Business fell
 On Absalom and wise Achitophel:
 Thus wicked but in Will, of Means bereft,
 He left not Faction, but of that was left.

544-68

Zimri's portrait is not only brilliant but just. History

has it that Zimri, George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham (1628-1657), "was not only a man of no religious opinions, but a libertine to boot; indeed, he was, perhaps, the most disreputable of all the dissolute set who surrounded the King."¹³ He was gifted with engaging manners and excelled in a high order of wit, especially mimicry; he dabbled in chemistry, wrote verse and stage plays; he invested much money in buildings and gardens; but he was vain, unsteady, and ever striving for power in the state.¹⁴ Buckingham is described:

Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,
Was everything by starts and nothing long.
547,48

As Scott writes,

The Restoration put into the hands of the most lively, mercurial, ambitious, and licentious genius who ever lived, an estate of 20,000 pounds a year, to be squandered in every wild scheme which the lust of power, of pleasure, of license, or whim could dictate to an unrestrained imagination.¹⁵

Buckingham was a member of the Cabal, but in 1674 he was dismissed from office. Having changed to the Opposition party, he strove to become a leader and played a most active part in all proceedings which had relation to the Popish Plot.

Dryden justly prided himself on the finish of this passage; he could have been savage in his satire but he is merciful even amid his severity. The follies are exposed to ridicule, but the foul crimes are left in the shade.

13. Cross, op. cit., p. 548.

14. Ibid.

15. Scott, op. cit., XX, 270.

After this masterly portrait of the dilettante duke, we have a few thumb-nail sketches. Among the lesser figures, Balaam represents Theophilus Hastings, Earl of Huntington; Caleb is Lord Grey; Nadab is William, Lord Howard of Escrick, who was accused of having taken the sacrament, when a prisoner in the Tower, in lamb's wool -- ale poured on roasted apple and sugar.

And Canting Nadab let Oblivion damn,
Who made new Porridge for the Paschal Lamb.
575, 76

Jonas, or Sir William Jones, had as attorney-general prosecuted the victims of the Popish Plot. He is described as the "Bull-fac'd Jonas" or the double-faced Jonas. Though Jonas was bad, a worse follows; "The Wretch" is Shimei or Slingsby Bethel, one of the Whig London sheriffs elected in 1680.

Dryden in his political portrait gallery never painted a type without individual significance, nor an individual that was not highly typical. This accomplishment is best noted in Shimei. He is at once Bethel and the sectarian politician of all days. The hypocrisy of Shimei also typifies the detestable hypocrisy and gloom of the sects in religion. According to Wolfe, "Here the decalogue and the prayer-book are by brilliant paradox prayed-in-aid to fix by their immortal line the timeless engraving of a traitor."¹⁶ Bethel is supposed to have "lent his private fortune to endow the university of treachery."¹⁷ Perhaps the most characteristic passage, indicative of the kind

16. Humbert Wolfe, Notes on the English Satire, p. 83.

17. Ibid.

of satire Dryden wrote, is the passage describing Shimei:

Shimei, whose Youth did early Promise bring
 Of Zeal to God, and Hatred to his King;
 Did wisely from Expensive Sins refrain,
 And never broke the Sabbath, but for Gain:
 Nor ever was he known an Oath to vent,
 Or Curse, unless against the Government.
 Thus, heaping Wealth, by the most ready way
 Among the Jews, which was to Cheat and Pray;
 The City, to reward his pious Hate
 Against his Master, chose him Magistrate:
 His Hand a Vane of Justice did uphold;
 His neck was loaded with a Chain of Gold.
 During his Office, Treason was no Crime.
 The Sons of Belial had a Glorious Time:
 For Shimei, though not prodigal of self,
 Yet lov'd his wicked Neighbour as himself:
 When two or three were gather'd to declaim
 Against the Monarch of Jerusalem,
Shimei was always in the midst of them. }
 And, if they Curst the King when he was by
 Wou'd rather Curse, than break good Company.
 If any durst his Factious Friends accuse,
 He pact a jury of dissenting Jews:
 Whose fellow-feeling, in the godly Cause
 Would free the suff'ring Saint from Humans
 Laws.

For Laws are only made to Punish those
 Who serve the King, and to protect his Foes.
 If any leisure time he had from Pow'r,
 (Because 'tis Sin to misemploy an hour;)
 His bus'ness was by Writing to persuade
 That kings were Useless, and a Clog to Trade:
 And that his noble Stile he might refine,
 No Rechabite more shund the fumes of Wine.
 Chaste were his Cellars; and his Shrieval
 Board

The Grossness of a City Feast abhor'd:
 His Cooks, with long disuse, their Trade
 forgot;
 Cool was his Kitchin, though his Brains
 were hot.

Such frugal Vertue Malice may accuse;
 But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews:
 For Towns once burnt, such Magistrates
 require

As dare not tempt Gods Providence by Fire.
 But free from Flesh that made the Jews rebel:
 And Moses's Laws he held in more account,
 For forty days of Fasting in the Mount

585 - 629

In lines 614, 15 Dryden probably refers to one of Bethel's

recent tracts, The Interest of Princes and States. Bethel's stinginess is a great contrast to the hospitality expected of a sheriff:

Chaste were his Cellars; and his Shrieval
Board
The Grossness of a City Feast abhor'd....
619, 20

This couplet is typical of all the other couplets of Dryden.

Each has wit, but at the end there is a "crack of a whip".

Saintsbury says:

The prodigality of irony, the sting in the tail of every couplet, the ingenuity by which the odious charges are made against the victim in the very words almost of the phrases which his party were accustomed to employ, and above all the polish of the language and the verse, and the tone of half-condescending banter, were things of which that time had no experience. The satire was as bitter as Butler's but less grotesque and less laboured.¹⁸

The next in succession is Corah (Titus Oates), the contriver of the Popish Plot. His rancorous deeds were historically treated in the third chapter, The Political Background of Absalom and Achitophel. In Corah we have an individual as well as a type. Titus Oates, who was once called the Saviour of his country, was one of the most infamous villains whom history is obliged to record.

In the Spectator, No. 57., Mr. Traill, summarizing, the historical evidence, describes him as 'a squat, misshapen man, bullnecked and bandy-legged, with villainous low forehead, avenged by so monstrous a length of chin that his wide-slit mouth bisected his purple face'.¹⁹

Dryden sarcastically compares him to the brazen serpent

18. George E. Saintsbury, Dryden, p. 83.

19. Raleigh, op. cit., p. 169.

raised up in the wilderness by Moses, which brought salvation to the Israelites. Dryden's description of the "Monumental Brass" vibrates with scorn. The first four lines are packed with meaning and invective.

Yet, Corah, thou shalt from Oblivion pass;
Erect thy self thou Monumental Brass:
High as the Serpent of thy Metal made,
While Nations stand secure beneath thy shade.

632, 635

Lines 630-80 portray Titus Cates' character and his treachery in connection with the "Plot."

With lines 682 - 97 Dryden presents his interlude, where he exhibits Absalom's attitude and his part in campaigning, and then he introduces Absalom's final famous speech.

It seems that while Absalom was going through the stage of uncertainty and hesitancy, he was taking special note of his forerunner's progress. Seeing what favoritism, what a variety of friends and what a stronghold his "Host of dreaming Saints" have prepared for him, he weakens and acquiesces:

Surrounded thus with Friends of every sort,
Deluded Absalom forsakes the Court:
Impatient of high opes, urg'd with renown,
And Fir'd with near possession of a Crown.

682- 85

Lines 682 - 750 contain Absalom's appeal to the people, the organization of his progress through the country and the consolidation of the Opposition Party.

In order to win the people, Absalom sets out to make public demonstrations. Thus he artfully succeeds:

He glides unfelt into their secret hearts:
Then with a kind compassionating look,
And sighs, bespeaking pity e'r he spoke,
Few words he said, but easie those and fit,
More slow than Hybla drops, and far more sweet.

693 - 97

In a sympathetic air, Absalom begins his second famous speech, this time not to Achitophel, but to the people themselves. He confesses his concern by saying:

I mourn my Country-men, your lost Estate,
 Though far unable to prevent your Fate:
 Behold a Banish'd man, for your dear cause
 Expos'd prey to Arbitrary Laws!
 Yet oh! that I alone cou'd be undone,
 Out off from Empire, and no more a Son!
 Now all your Liberties a spoil are made;
Egypt and Tyrus intercept your Trade,
 And Jebusites your Sacred Rites invade.
 My Father, whom with reverence yet I name,
 Charm'd into Ease, is careless of his Fame
 698-708

After much insinuation, he friendlily concludes:

Take then my tears (with that he wiped his Eyes)
 'Tis all the Aid my present pow'r supplies:
 No Court-Informer can these Arms accuse;
 These Arms may Sons against their Fathers use;
 And, tis, my wish, the next Successor's reign
 May make no other Israelite complain.
 717-22

It is surprising how cunningness prevails:

Youth, Beauty, Graceful Action seldom fail;
 But Common Interest always will prevail;
 And pity never Ceases to be shown
 To him, who makes the Peoples wrongs his own.
 The Croud, (that still believe their Kings oppress)
 With lifted hands their young Messiah bless
 723-28

All this admiration, loyalty and love make Absalom sanguine of success. He, therefore, eagerly plunges into dire campaigning. His swift progress is exhibited in the following lines:

Who now begins his Progress to ordain,
 With Chariots, Horsemen, and a num'rous train;
 From East to West his Glories he displays;
 And, like the Sun, the Promised Land surveys.

Fame runs before him as the Morning Star,
 And shouts of Joy salute him as a Guardian God. . . .
 729-34

The progression appeared to be "Pomp" but **other** ends were in disguise. Achitophel was busy contriving. Shaftesbury was eager to manifest the strength of Monmouth. The real state of affairs is:

Thus, in a Pageant Show, a Plot is made;
 And Peace in self is War in Masquerade.
 751-52

Lines 753 - 810, one of the greatest parts of the poem, seem to record the King's view as well as Dryden's view. Here the people are warned not to fall for the "Bait."

Oh foolish Israel! never warn'd by Ill:
 Still the same Bait, and circumvented still!
 Did ever men forsake their present ease,
 In midst of health imagine a Disease;
 Take pains contingent mischiefs to foresee,
 Make Heirs for Monarchs, and for God decree?
 753-58

A plea for the King's and Dryden's view is reflected throughout the passage:

What shall we think! Can people give away
 Both for themselves and Sons their Native sway?
 Then they are left Defenseless, to the Sword
 of each unbounded, Arbitrary Lord.....
 759-62

In these remarkable passages Dryden sets forth his views on political philosophy. He grounds the royal power not on "divine right", but on an original contract or "covenant" made by the governed,

....where all have Right to all.
 794

Dryden's general argument for not disturbing the traditional

basis of government is expounded. He believes that there is no security in speculation as recent experience proved. The multitude should be distrusted. If not, uncertain results will follow and the safety of all would be in peril.

Add that the Pow'r, for Property allow'd,
Is mischievously seated in the Croud;
For who can be secure of private Right,
If Sovereign Sway may be dissolv'd by Might?
Nor is the Peoples Judgment always true:
The Most may err as grosly as the Few.

777-82

If the necessity for resumption of the covenant should exist, who is to judge? The multitude? Or Parliament, itself a multitude after all?

What Standard is there in a fickle rout,
Which flowing to the Mark runs faster out?
Nor onely crouds, but Sanhedrins may be
Infested with this public Lunacy:
And Share the madness of Rebellious Times,
To Murther Monarchs for Imagin'd crimes.
If they may Give and Take when e'r they please,
Not Kings alone, (the Godheads Images,)
But Government itself at length must fall
To natures state, where all have Right to all.

785-94

This course of speculation will end up with a grave civil war. Dryden's hate of innovation is also sensed;

All other Errors but disturb a State;
But Innovation is the Blow of Fate.

779-800

Whatever the theory is of the relation between King and people, Dryden proclaims that tradition is the only safety for them at least for the present time. Note the admirable summary in the concluding couplet:

The tamp'ring World is subject to this Curse,
To Physick their Disease into a Warse

809-10

The fourth section of the poem, lines 817-932, introduces the King's friends. Here the serious situation is relieved by an account of the loyalists, or the Tory Chiefs headed by Barzillai, who stands for Dryden's patron, the marquis and soon afterward the Duke of Ormonde. This venerable Duke is panegyricized with a beautiful apostrophe to the memory of his son, the gallant Earl of Ossary, a patron of learning.

His Eldest Hope, with every Grace adorn'd,
By me (so Heav'n will have it) always Mourn'd
And always honour'd, snatch'd in manhoods prime
B' unequal Fates and Providences crime....

831-34

Then came the clergy, Zadock, Archbishop Sancroft of Canterbury; the Sagan of Jerusalem, Henry Compton, Bishop of London; "Him of the Western Dome, "Bishop Dolben of Rochester, whose position as Dean of Westminster gave Dryden an opportunity to compliment his old school:

The Prophets, Sons, by such Example led,
To learning and to Loyalty were bred:
For Colleges on bounteous Kings depend,
And never Rebel was to Arts a Friend.

870-73

Now "a train of Loyal Peers ascend", Adriel, John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, "the Music Friend, Himself a Muse"; Jotham, George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, the prime minister of Charles, whose effective speech was influential in the defeat of the Exclusion Bill; Hushai, Lawrence Hyde, the son of Clarendon, created in 1682 the Earl of Rochester; and finally Amiel, Sir Edward Seymour, who had been the speaker of the House of Commons from 1673 to 1679, and is represented as:

The Sanhedrin long time as Chief he rul'd,
 Their Reason guided, and their Passion cool'd:
 So dextrous was he in the Crown's defense,
 So form'd to speak a Loyal Nations Sense,
 That, as their Band was Israels Tribes in small
 So fit was he to represent them all.

902-907

These Tories were the faithful band which dared to stand
 by David at the expense of the popular hatred.

With grief they view'd such powerful Engines bent,
 To batter down the lawful Government.

917-18

The passage including lines 917-32 deserves particular
 attention. Here the Loyalists implore the King to stand
 firm. They see the ills that confront the government and
 they pointed them out to the King.

That no Concessions from the Throne would please;
 But Lenitives fomented the Disease;
 That Absalom, ambitious of the Crown,
 Was made the Lure to draw the People down:
 That false Achitophel's pernicious Hate
 Had turn'd the Plot to ruine Church and State;
 The Council violent, the Rabble worse;
 That Shemei taught Jerusalem to Curse.

925-32

After Dryden has arrayed the forces of each side, some account
 of a combat is naturally expected. The King speaks as an
 oracle:

With all these loads of Injuries opprest
 And long revolving in his careful Brest,
 Th' event of things, at last his patience tir'd,
 Thus from his Royal Throne, by Heav'n inspir'd
 The God-like David sopke; with awful fear,
 His Train their Maker in their Master hear....

933-38

The fifth or last division of the poem, lines 939-1025,
 is King David's speech.

Thus long have I by Native Mercy sway'd,
 My wrongs dissembl'd, my Revenge delay'd;
 So willing to forgive the offending Age;
 So much the Father did the King assuage.
 But now so far my Clemency they slight,
 Th' Offenders question my Forgiving Right.

939-44

The Whigs questioned the King's power to commute punishment, notably in the case of the Earl of Danby and Lord Stafford. Now the King questions and decides:

Must I at length the Sword of Justice draw?
 Oh curse Effects of necessary Law!
 How ill my Fear they by my mercy scan,
 Beware the Fury of a Patient Man.
 Law they require, let Law then show her Face;
 They could not be content to look on Grace,
 Her hinder parts, but with a daring Eye
 To tempt the terror of her Front, and Die.

1002-9

Dryden here terms "Grace" the "hinder parts" of Law. The Whigs had clamored for a law against the Catholics and denied the king's power to grant pardon; hence, they shall behold the face of Law and die themselves.

By their own Arts 'tis Righteously decreed,
 Those dire Artificers of Death shall bleed.
 Against themselves their Witnesses will Swear,
 Till, Viper-like, their Mother Plot they tear....

1010-13

Scott claims that this is rather an imprudent avowal of what was actually the policy of the court faction at this time. "They contrived to turn against Shaftesbury and his party; many of these were witnesses by whom so many Catholics had been brought to execution."²⁰ Dugdale,

20. Scott, op.cit., IX, 311.

Turberville, Haynes, and Smith came as readily forward to convict College, Howard and Shaftesbury himself, of high treason. This infamy ought to have discredited them on all sides; but "it was the misfortune of the time, that, swear what they would one day, and the exact contrary on the next, they, on each occasion, found a party to countenance, believe and reward them."²¹

The last words of the speech reflects the confidence of the King. His outlook is bright. There is no doubt that all reaction will turn in his favor.

No doubt th' event; for Factious crouds engage
In their first Onset, all their Brutal Rage;
Then let 'em take an unresisted Course;
Retire and Traverse, and Delude their Force:
But when they stand all Breathless, urge the fight,
And rise upon 'em with redoubled might:
For Lawful Pow'r is still Superiour found,
When long driv'n back, at length it stands the
ground. 1018-25

Finally the royal speech concludes with a peal of thunder, the stock epic ornament signifying divine approval and the nod of Heaven:

He said. Th' Almighty, nodding, gave consent.
And peals of Thunder shook the Firmament.
Henceforth a Series of new time began,
The mighty Years in long Procession ran:
Once more, the God-like David was Restor'd
And willing Nations knew their Lawful Lord....
1026-31

Some critics state that the King obliged Dryden to put his speech to the Oxford Parliament into verse, and insert it at the close of Absalom and Achitophel. Mr. Malone extracted parallel passages, which gave some coun-

21. Ibid.

tenance to the tradition. This speech was the talisman by which Dryden was to extricate David from his difficulties. Compare David's speech in verse to the extracted parallel passages:

The unwarrantable proceedings of the last House of Commons were the occasion of my parting with the last Parliament; for I, who will never use arbitrary government myself, am resolved not to suffer it in others I am unwilling to mention particulars, because I am desirous to forget faults; but whoever shall calmly consider what I made to the last Parliament, and then shall reflect upon the strange unsuitable returns made to such propositions by men who were called together to consult, perhaps may wonder more that I had patience so long, than that at last I grew weary of their proceedings....I conclude with this one advice to you, that the rules and measures of all your votes may be known and established laws of the land, which neither can nor ought to be departed from, nor changed, but by act of Parliament; and I may the more reasonably require, that you make the laws of the land your rule, because I am resolved they shall be mine.²²

Johnson and some other critics consider the ending a little weak in comparison to the rest of the poem. Nevertheless, this was the best management that could be admitted because the issue was yet in question, and could not be safely anticipated in the satire. Therefore, the best solution in Dryden's mind was brought forth. The tone on the main is lofty and dignified. Dryden attributes a magic power to the King's speech. The Whigs, hereafter, gradually declined in spirit, in power and in popularity.

The sensation produced throughout the nation by the first part of Absalom and Achitophel was so deep and exten-

22. Scott, op. cit., Ix, 311.

ded that Dryden was pressed to write a second part. His assistance was invoked to silence and to crush the writers and agitators of the Whig Party as well as to celebrate some of the King's supporters and favorites, who were necessarily omitted in the first part of the poem. Dryden deputed Nahum Tate to be his collaborator, reserving for himself only the execution of certain particular characters, and the general plan and revisal of the poem.

The second part of Absalom and Achitophel appeared about November 10th, 1682 in folio. It was written chiefly by Nahum Tate, but contains about 200 lines from Dryden's own pen, dealing with his literary antagonists in a style of sovereign majesty. Here Dryden inserted another tremendous onslaught on Shadwell with whom he joined Settle, another versifier of the same camp. He stigmatized his two opponents under the names of Og and Doeg:

Two fools that crutch their feeble sense
on verse;
Who, by my Muse, to all succeeding times
Shall live, in spite of their own dogg'rel rhymes.
409-11

The only part known for certain to be entirely Dryden's composition, besides some touches in other places, are lines 310-509. They begin,

Next these, a troop of busy spirits press....
and end,

To talk like Doeg, and to Write like Thee.

The poem owes all its spirit to the touches and additions of Dryden. Scott's opinion on this matter is of much interest.

To prevent Tate from suffering too much by comparison, Dryden has obviously contributed much to the poem at large Much of the character of Corah (lines 69-102), for example, is unquestionably Dryden's; so probably is that of Arod (lines 534-555) and the verses generally descriptive of the Green-ribbon Club (lines 522-533) which precede it. Such pungent satire is easily distinguished from the smooth insipid flow of other parts, in which Dryden's corrections probably left nothing for censure, and which Tate was unable to qualify with anything entitled to praise. The character of Michal (lines 51-68), of Dryden as Asaph (lines 1037-1064), and some of the encomiastic passages, seem to show the extent of Tate's powers, when unsupported by the vivifying assistance of his powerful auxiliary. They are just decently versified, but flat, commonplace, and uninteresting.²³

The second part of Absalom and Achitophel shared the fate of most continuations.

It is the first part of Absalom and Achitophel which is especially stressed because of its outstanding political, satirical and literary success.

The purely political element is notably presented because of its importance at this time. These "Political ideas are expressed in Absalom and Achitophel very largely by discussion and argument, and no one can say that the Whiggism there presented, whatever its morality may be is intellectually contemptible."²⁴ The sympathies of the nation at large are reflected. Dryden's definite political project was to fight anarchy and preserve traditional succession because he felt it was the most compatible ideal for the English at that crucial moment. He aimed to confirm

23. Sir. Walter Scott, The Works of John Dryden, edited by George E. Saintsbury, IX, 321.

24. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu, p. 14.

public opinion in its new course by painting the characters of Achitophel and his leading Whig associates in odious colors.

The political aspects are well focused. These can be sensed from the political speeches of Absalom and Achitophel which are full of reminiscences of past politics as well as schemes for the future. Experiences of past civil wars have clearly suggested to the nation that "They who possess the prince possess the laws, "and the line, "not only hating David, but the king," clearly indicates that the conflict was one of political theories, and not merely a question of persons. The same was true of Dryden who did not write for personal ends or revenge but for the common good.

His Absalom and Achitophel is frankly political. Here every hit is calculated and every blow is telling, but in each character brought on the scene only those features are selected for exposure or praise which are of direct significance for the purposes in hand, that is,

to lead up, as to an unavoidable sequitur to the trial and conviction of its hero. The satirist after the fashion of a great parliamentary orator, has his subject and his treatment of it well in hand; through all the force of the invective and the fervour of the praise, there runs a consciousness of the possibility that the political situation may change. This causes a constant selfcontrol and wariness in the author, who is always alive to his inspiration and never unmindful of his clue.²⁵

25. A.W. Ward, and A.R. Waller, editors. The Cambridge History of English Literature, VIII, 42.

The author was no democrat; nevertheless his independence of extreme royalist ideas even in this satire is striking. He respected the principles of constitutional legitimacy and rested his cause on David, who was content that:

The Law shall still direct my peaceful Sway,
And the same Law teach Rebels to obey:
Votes shall no more Established Pow'r controul,
Such Votes as make a Part exceed the Whole.....

991-94

Because the laws, in letter and in spirit, were on David's side, Dryden was David's partisan.

The key to Dryden's political thought and to his contribution to the political ideas of his countrymen should be sought in his belief that the correct position of every question is an independent and realistic attitude, guided by respect for the law.²⁶

Weary of the chaos and uncertainty of the past years, Dryden was certain that political stability, which is so necessary to national welfare, could be attained only by the ancient regime of the monarch. All in all, Dryden had one eye on the past and another eye on the future. If the nation was induced to follow Shaftesbury in a new career of revolution, and to tread the weary round once more, he anticipated chaos.

Like many of our greatest literary men from Shakespeare to Garyle, he had a profound distrust of the multitude. In Shaftesbury he saw an unprincipled politician who, having tried in vain to seduce Charles to arbitrary government, has turned round, and no drives down the

26. Merritt Y. Hughes, "Dryden as a Satirist", Philological Quarterly, VI (October, 1927), 350.

current with a popular gale.²⁷

The poem was also a success as a satire. Dryden executed his satiric design with extraordinary skill. In this he surpasses all other poets.

As an artificer of satire, he stands on a pinnacle by himself, with no one like him or second to him. Those who are fond of that kind of article have it here in perfection, clothed in the most powerful and pointed form which the rhymed heroic couplet had ever afforded.²⁸

In his Absalom and Achitophel he excels in concealing the iron hand beneath the silk glove. This dynamic force issues from masked expressions in which his animus is well controlled. "Moral indignation was not part of Dryden's satirical stock."²⁹ Nevertheless, the peculiar attribute of his satire is that the keen and trenchant blade of Dryden never makes thrust in vain but always strikes a vulnerable point. This is done through his clever way of saying things, making them meaningful, forceful but yet refined. He knew that to be effective he had to be an artist. In his Preface to Absalom and Achitophel he says that there is a pride of doing more than is expected from us, and more than others would have done. "There's a sweetness in good verse, which tickles even while it hurts, and no man can be heartily angry with him who pleases him

27. Hugh Walker, English Satire and Satirists, p. 155.

28. John A. Evans, "Dryden", Living Age, CLXXXV (May, 1890), 315.

29. Ward, op. cit., p. 43.

against his will," Dryden's manner toward his subjects is that of a cool and not ill-humored scorn. They are great scoundrels, but are perhaps more contemptible than they are vicious. This attitude is admirably expressed by the well known line:

They got a villain, and we lost a fool,

Dryden's satire never turns "sour" because of its poignancy. There is no better example of his sarcasm and humourous invective than the epigram:

But far more numerous was the Herd of such
Who think too little, and who talk too much.
533,34

His scorn is magnificent in:

The Jews, a Headstrong, Moody Murmuring Race,
As ever try'd the Extent and Stretch of Grace;
God's pamper'd People, whom debauch'd with Ease,
No King could Govern, nor no God cou'd please
45-48

and in the reflection on the mingled fanaticism and stinginess of the Sheriff, Slingsby Bethel:

His cooks with long disuse their trade forgot:
Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot.
620, 21

The author's procession of satirical portraits is superb. Every bite of Dryden is calculated and every stroke goes home as each character is brought on the scene. His diction is so clear that the victims found it impossible to retort without proving themselves ridiculous.

Dryden was a unique satirist but also a skillful

craftsman in other literary qualities. Characterization is one of the chief glories of his poem. The sketches of Shaftesbury and Buckingham are considered the greatest satiric descriptions in English literature. Walker says that Zimri is "a satiric portrait probably unsurpassed not merely in English, but in either Latin or Greek, or the language of Western Europe."³⁰ It is worth quoting at least a few lines from the famous passage on Shaftesbury:

Of these the false Achitophel was first,
 A name to all succeeding ages curst:
 For close designs and crooked counsels fit,
 Sagacious, bold and turbulent of wit,
 Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
 In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace
 150-55

Dryden himself in his Essay on Satire declares that Zimri is "worth the whole poem." This masterpiece of wit and model of Dryden's invective begins thus:

In the first rank of these did Zimri stand,
 A man so various that he seem'd to be
 Not one, but all Mankind's Epitomy
 Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong
 Was ev'rything by Starts, and nothing long
 544-48

A gallery of portraits which is found in Absalom and Achitophel testifies that Dryden's supreme excellence lies in description of character. His figures are always at once types and individuals. Zimri is at once Buckingham and the idle grand seigneur who dabs at politics and at learning; Achitophel is instantly Shaftesbury as well as the

30. Walker, op. cit., p. 152.

abstract intriguer; while Shimei emerges as Bethel and the sectarian politician of all days. The same can be traced in other characters which typify a procession of honest Whigs, utilitarian radicals, spectators, demagogues, mob orators, etc. In drawing these satirical portraits Dryden certainly did exercise a singular judgment in selecting his traits.

Another great contribution was Dryden's diversion of English satire into the channels of epic dignity. In his elevation of satire to epic dignity and in his general treatment of the subject, Dryden defies comparison. His Preface to Absalom and Achitophel indicates the loftiness of his aim.

I have but laughed at some men's follies, when I could have declaimed against their vices; and other men's virtues I have commended, as freely as I have tax'd their crimes I have not so much as an uncharitable wish against Achitophel, but am content to be accused of a good-natured error, and to hope with Origen, that the Devil himself may at last be saved.

Verrall classifies Absalom and Achitophel as an 'epyllion, or epic in miniature, comprising satiric elements."³¹ The tone in the main is lofty and dignified, as, for instance, in the scene of the temptations, in Absalom's appeal to the people and in the King's pronouncement. The King's speech concludes with a peal of thunder, the stock epic ornament signifying divine approval and the nod of Heaven. The speeches are proper to epic or grave drama, and the occasional archaisms point to the influence of the English epics.

31. Verrall, op. cit., p. 59.

The harmony and splendor of the versification is due to the skill with which the epic style is blended with the homely and familiar idiom of satire.

Dryden has also a wonderful command over the couplet. His natural gift and his enormous practice in play-writing made the couplet a natural vehicle for him. This form was most suited for satire because of its remarkable varied cadence, and its strong antitheses and smart telling hits lent themselves to description and attack with consummate ease. There are passages in Absalom and Achitophel in which every couplet has not only the force but the actual sound of a slap in the face. The rapidity of movement from one couplet to another is another remarkable characteristic. Dryden's verse strides along very smoothly. There is no doubt as to the fitness of the heroic couplet, but evidently for the sake of a slight variation Dryden uses the triplet and the double rhyme a few times throughout the poem.

Absalom and Achitophel holds an assured place in English literature. It is remarkable for its characterization, for its masculine vigor and force, for its tone of urbanity, and amused self-possession, for its cleverness of style and for other qualities which had hitherto been strange in English satire.

We may well apply Dryden's own words to the poem: "Yet if a poem have a genius, it will force its own reception in the world."

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, only a brief comment on Absalom and Achitophel is necessary, for it proved to be a magnetic weapon hurled against Shaftesbury, the evil counsellor, who put forward Monmouth, Charles II's illegitimate son, as an anti-Catholic claimant to the throne. This brought about a conspiracy. Dryden saw the danger threatening his country and set out as the voice of the nation, in a political crisis, to warn the people against false politicians and false theorists.

Past experiences of civil wars firmly convinced Dryden that the multitude should be distrusted. With respect to the law and because of the temperament of the English people, Dryden believed that the current form of government was the best for the nation, at least during his troubled period. He, therefore, wrote against all prevalent political vices and follies. Dryden spoke especially against the vice of hypocrisy and the various plots that were under notable disguise. Instead he recommended honesty and respect for authority and law. His indictment brings to light the extremists, his natural enemies, and the wrong-headed theorists and fanatics who imposed their alliance on the reforming party. The works of all contented and self-sufficient dullards were also exhibited. Dryden met this turbulent situation with his invincible satire.

In this thesis, Absalom and Achitophel was introduced by a summary of satire in general and of Dryden's use of it in particular.

Then followed a study of Dryden's thought, for it is important to know that conviction and not emotional theorizing prompted his psychological movements.

The chapter, "The Political Background of Absalom and Achitophel", was helpful in interpreting the political problems that are actually involved in the poem, and in understanding the circumstances that led to this political satire. With this background in mind it was easier to interpret Absalom and Achitophel which is analyzed politically, satirically and poetically in Chapter IV.

An effort was made to outline the Satire according to its essential parts. Here the highlights were discussed as to content and form, and these were well illustrated through various quotations. Only Part I of Absalom and Achitophel has been analyzed, for it really is a finished political work, rounded and complete. Part II was merely mentioned as a "by product." Lastly, the political and literary merits were summarized.

Thus it seems that Absalom and Achitophel was successful politically since it was instrumental in barring Shaftesbury from executing his schemes. This came to pass because of the satirical success, for Dryden through his reserved but forceful and clever diction, unveiled to the

public the evil of the day.

It is certain that the modern student after a thorough study will conclude that Absalom and Achitophel is the greatest English political satire. It should be studied to-day not for its theories, for times have changed, but for its satire, restraint, pungency, brilliant characterization, force and other literary qualities. Raleigh calls it "the deadliest document in English literature, splendid in power, unrelenting in purpose."³²

32. Raleigh, op. cit., p. 162.

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