

Life of Earl Stirline,

private gentleman, but with the character of a learned and accomplished one. He still found occasion to exercise his poetical talents, from the recommendation they made of him even to the King, who might be the readier to encourage those studies in another, which he had so publicly professed himself. Further notice of, and perhaps acquaintance with him, might be promoted by the situation of his abode, being so commodious for these sports, wherewith his Majesty was wont, in his journeys of pleasure, there to divert himself. But the poetry to which Mr. Alexander now turned his pen, was that solid and sublime species of it, which would hold up the clearest mirror to princes and potentates; which would best animate the lifeless precepts of philosophy, and render its gravest lessons most agreeably affecting; for the better government, not only of a people in general, but the passions and appetites of the governors themselves; by the most sovereign precedents, and harmonious precautions, of the uncertainty of life, and the insufficiency of its felicities, the vanity of grandeur, the corruption of power, and the burden of riches. To this purpose he formed himself somewhat after the plan of the antient Greek and Roman tragedies, at least in their choruses between the acts; not so much to have his dramatic compositions personated in mimicry upon the narrow stage of a play-house, as to be really and more extensively acted in human life, by those who bore the parts of the greatest actors in the common theatre of mankind. And to this effect we find a tragedy of Mr. Alexander's published upon the story of Darius, at Edinburgh, in the year 1603. The choice of his measure in this (as in his other plays) is alternate rhyme, which I leave the critics to defend and decry; and as to his style, if it is not always pure, our author has modestly pleaded his country, and allowed the preference to our dialect, in the preface thereof. It was the year after, published again at London, with some verses before it in praise of the author, by J. Murray, and Walter Quin, who has here also an anagram, upon the name of William Alexander, which has been reprinted elsewhere. But that preface is not here revived; and there are two poems of our author's at the end of this edition, which were never afterwards printed again; the one, congratulating his Majesty on his entry into England, the other, written shortly after, upon the inundation of Dover, a water near our author's house, upon which his Ma-

jesty was wont to recreate himself with the pastime of hawking. The same year this play was re-printed in England, was published here his *Aurora*, also in quarto, 1604; which as it was the fruit of, he made an oblation to Beauty, by dedicating it to Agnes Douglas, Countess of Argyll. But these poems were never after re-printed, tho' bound up with the succeeding augmentation of his plays. In the same year last mentioned, his *Paraphrase*, to Prince Henry, was here also published; therefore how truly its publication was deferred till after the death of that Prince, lies upon Mr. Langhain to reconcile; in which, among other noble instructions, he shews, how the happiness of a Prince depends on his choice of a council; such, as can throw off private grudges, regard public concerns, and will not, to betray their seats, become pensioners. Further shews, the use of histories, and how the lives of great men are to be read with greatest profit: Lays open the characters of vicious Kings; those abandoned to avarice, to flattery, and, the most contemptible of all, to effeminacy and lust: Displays the glory of martial accomplishments; and hopes, if the Prince should ever make an expedition to Spain, that he might attend him, and be his Homer to sing his acts there. Whether the author was yet arrived in England, does not appear, by any of these writings; and whether he published any more, separately, till the year 1607, we have not yet directly learnt. But in this year came out his three other plays, which with that before-mentioned, are intitled, *The Monarchic Tragedie: Cæsar, Darius, The Alexandrian, Julius Cæsar; newly enlarged, By William Alexander, Gentleman of the Prince's privy chamber*: and with them are bound the poems aforesaid. These plays are dedicated to King James, in a poem of thirteen stanzas, and have a copy by Sir Robert Ayton before them, expressing, that the King himself had graced our author's labours with his glorious name; so that, patron, subject, style and all, make him the *Monarchic Tragedian* of our island. And though indeed these plays, for the reasons before given, must, to all royal readers of them, administer a kind of terrible pleasure; yet his Majesty is said, not only to have been delighted with our author's conversation, but his works; and to have called him his *Philosophical Poet*. Inasmuch, that no stream appears to have so visibly waited him to those honours wherewith he was a few years afterwards graced, than what thus flowed through his own hand from the fountain of the Muses.

^c *Ger. Langhain's account of the English dram. poets*, 8^{vo}. 1691. p. 5.

^d *Ibid.* p. 4.