

history this universal turpitude of literature admits of an easy explanation. When the Puritans first became known as a distinct sect, their peculiar attire, long faces and scriptural phrases were a constant butt for the wit of the gallants of the court. This went on for two generations, but in spite of it the saints became more and more numerous; at length they rose up in their might, conquered, and grimly smiling, trod down the scoffers without mercy. To them books were the instruments of the devil, and authors his agents, to be treated accordingly. The theatres were closed, the actors were flogged. But this could not last. The violent contraction of so elastic a spring must be followed by a recoil as violent. And so it proved. No sooner was the Restoration an accomplished fact than this recoil was felt in all its force; everything that the Puritan had effected was now execrated. Because he had been scrupulous about small things; a total disregard for all that is right and proper was now shown; because he had preached a stern morality, licentiousness of the most depraved character was openly practised. The theatre was naturally the place where these sentiments could be best paraded. Hence as soon as they were reopened the plays put upon the boards were such as to drive away all but those of the most frivolous character. The influence which the plays had upon those who remained was to make them crave for something more depraved. The authors as in duty bound pandered to the public taste. Thus the authors continued to corrupt the audience and the audience the authors until the turpitude of the English stage became such that it has seldom been equalled and never surpassed in any age. And into this maelstrom of corruption all the great authors of the day

were drawn by the exigencies of a literary career. For whilst a poet of the first order could scarcely earn his bread, the poorest play-wright could live at his ease and even grow wealthy. Hence anyone engaged in literary pursuits turned his attention to the writing of plays whether fitted for it or not. No better example of a great genius turned from its proper field of labour can be had than that of Dryden. As a satirist and didactic poet he had no equal in his own age and few superiors in any other. But that he had no talent for dramatic composition must be made evident by a single perusal of one of his plays. Yet it was at these that he spent his best years; and he, the author of the greatest lyric ode in the English language, wasted his energies and prostituted his genius in catering to the degraded taste of a vulgar rabble. In fine, to complete the debasement of literature, the most savage party intolerance was introduced; the authors goaded on by the remembrance of the treatment they had formerly received at the hands of the Puritans now displayed towards them an animosity that equalled their immorality. The theatre was again used as a vehicle for taunts against those who advised leniency towards the vanquished. Dryden's satire "Absalom and Achitophel," which MacCauley calls the greatest of modern days, deserves to be deeply censured for the vindictive hatred therein displayed towards the Roundheads. Thus we find something objectionable even in the greatest production of that age. Hence from whatever point of view the literature of the transition period be examined there will be found but little to be praised and much, very much to be condemned.

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