The Religious Convictions of John Dryden

Hugh P. Tarrant

Loyola University Chicago

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THE RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS OF JOHN DRYDEN

BY

HUGH P. TARRANT, F.S.C.H.

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VITA

Born: St. Lawrence, Newfoundland,
August 13, 1906.

Grammar School: Catholic School, St. Lawrence.

High School: St. Bonaventure's College, St. Johns, Newfoundland.

College: St. Mary's Training College
West Park, New York.
St. Mary's College,
Halifax, Canada. (A.B., 1930)
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The reader of Macaulay, carried away by the brilliance and readableness of his style, is likely to lose sight of the fact that "his distortion of facts, his political bias, and his lordly indifference to original sources" conspire to affect his reputation as a trustworthy portrayer of the events of the past. Of those personages, whose reputations have suffered from this conscious or unconscious distortion, bias, or indifference, none has suffered more than the poet John Dryden. Of course, Macaulay did not originate the libel against Dryden, but his influence has been greater than that of any other critic in perpetuating the foundationless charges of his political and personal enemies.

There are in Dryden's career three periods. The first takes us to the year 1660 which witnessed the collapse of the Commonwealth and the Restoration of the Stuart dynasty with the return of Charles II—a period during which he was, to all appearances, Puritan in sympathies. The second begins with the Restoration and concludes with the year 1686, the year of the much-discussed conversion to Catholicism—a period of intense anxiety for Dryden during which he was professedly Anglican in religious matters. The third takes in the remaining years till his death in 1700—a period in
which he saw the price to be paid for adherence to an unpopular religion and in which he was to realize how true were the lines he had written in Astraea Redux some thirty years previously:

How easy 'tis when destiny proves kind,  
With full-spread sails to run before the wind,  
But those that 'gainst stiff gales laveering go,  
Must be at once resolved and skilful too.

Enemies like Macaulay have asserted that adherence to so many causes could indicate only time-serving. From external evidence alone it is possible to build a substantial case for the sincerity of Dryden's motives, but it is the purpose of this thesis to trace the growth of religious conviction in the mind of the poet and to show from an examination of his works as well as from external sources that the stages in the adoption of Catholicism were, not the results of a hypocritical and time-serving attitude, but logical steps in the process of development which his mind underwent.

Croce states in his Autobiography the process of mental and spiritual development—how each stage in the process is reached only after long and bitter struggles; and how in the process of arriving at truth, or as near to the truth as we are permitted to reach, each stage, attained only after a bitter struggle, is merely the starting point for a new advance along the way. Such a theory is tenable here. Dryden's was a robust, vigorous nature with an enormous
capacity for assimilation; and when these two qualities unite in the same person, there is bound to be growth. But, as in the present instance, one who is constantly revising his opinions upon questions of all kinds leaves open to question the sincerity of his motives, especially if there be involved the suggestion of purely personal interest.

In the course of this discussion little use will be made of the dramatic works of Dryden, for they give little indication of the author's true state of mind when writing them— and this for three reasons. In the first place, Dryden had to meet the demands of a theater-going public in an age when standards of decency judged by modern standards were somewhat lax. In the second place, during the period of his greatest religious activity he wrote no dramas at all. In the third place, there is great danger in attributing to an author the sentiments of his characters.
CHAPTER II
HISTORY OF THE CRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS DRYDEN

The criticism of John Dryden has, in the main, centered around the refutation or the confirmation of the three charges of insincerity leveled against him. There is the charge of political insincerity in his change from the praise of Cromwell and Cromwellian policies, in the *Heroic Stanzas*, to the adulation of the Stuarts, in the poem *Astraea Redux*, written to commemorate the Restoration of the Stuart dynasty. There is the charge of insincerity in the conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism, since, it is charged, he saw in this tergiversation the only sure means of securing his pension. There is the further charge that all his life he was immoral and that his adoption of Catholicism was insincere since his writings underwent no noticeable change after that event.

This Chapter will attempt only a statement of the attitudes of the more important of his critics in order to ascertain how far the reputation of the poet has suffered on account of malice or of ignorance.

The history of Dryden criticism began when, upon the release of Shaftesbury after his imprisonment for participation in the political disturbance of 1680, Dryden wrote *The Medal*. He thus opened the gates to a flood of
scurrilous lampoons by Settle and others, chief of whom was Shadwell with the most scurrilous of all—The Medal of John Bayes. While Dryden always thought the lampoons of most of his contemporaries unworthy of his notice, he seems to have made an exception of Shadwell and to have considered him of sufficient eminence to merit a more severe castigation than could be administered in a general satire. About the same time there appeared MacFlecknoe, or a Satire on the True Blue Protestant Poet, T. S., by the Author of "Absalom and Achitophel". While the title-page contained only the acknowledgment that it was the work of the "Author of 'Absalom and Achitophel'", there was no doubt as to the identity of the author. Yet Shadwell asserted that Dryden denied its authorship with oaths and imprecations. Not only did Dryden not disown it, but he actually took pains, in The Essay on Satire, to point to it as being, of all his works, the best example of the Var­ronian satire.

In an article published in the Publications of the Modern Language Association, David M. McKeithan quotes several Dryden scholars in support of his contention that the publication of MacFlecknoe was the result, not, as is generally supposed, of the publication of Shadwell's The Medal of John Bayes, but of Shadwell's praise, in the
Preface to his play *The History of Timon of Athens, the Man-Hater*, of the Duke of Buckingham for that gentleman's attack upon Dryden. Whether this be true or not, it is sufficient for our purpose to know that of his contemporary rivals Shadwell was by far the most antagonistic and vindictive.

In the footsteps of the unsorupulous Shadwell came Bishop Burnet, who in his *History of His Own Time*, refers to Dryden as "being a monster of immodesty and of impurity of all sorts". The bitterness of Burnet's attack is somewhat assuaged by the explanation of his son that the father's attack "must be understood of his (Dryden's) writings for the stage, for as to his personal character, there was nothing remarkably vicious in it".

The Whig Macaulay could be expected to have but little sympathy with the Tory Dryden, and he had little. His accusation that the poet was guilty of "violating grossly and habitually rules which the (Catholic) Church, in common with every other Christian society, recognizes as binding" and his implication that Dryden changed his religion to assure himself of a pension of one hundred pounds annually, in addition

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3Ibid., Footnote to p. 183.
to an annual butt of sack, are typical.

Dr. Johnson, who, with Scott, is mentioned by Lord Macaulay as naturally doing "their utmost to persuade themselves and others that this memorable conversion was sincere", wrote of that event as follows:

That conversion will always be suspected that apparently concurs with interest. He that never finds his error till it hinders his progress towards wealth or honor will not be thought to love truth only for herself. Yet it may easily happen that information may come at a commodious time.... When opinions are struggling into popularity, the arguments by which they are opposed or defended become more known; and he that changes his profession would perhaps have changed it before with the like opportunities of instruction.... But inquiries into the heart are not for man; we must leave him to his Judge. 4

Sir Walter Scott, never a friend to anything Catholic, maintains that the conversion of the Poet to Catholicism was not from Anglicanism but from a species of Scepticism known as Pyrrhonism. He does, however, feel that

Dryden's conversion was not of the sordid kind which is the consequence of a strong temporal interest.... but, being tossed on the billows of uncertainty, he dropped his anchor in the first moorings to which the winds, waves, and perhaps an artful pilot chanced to convey his bark. 5

But to assure his followers that there is no softening of his attitude towards the Church, he continues:


We may indeed regret, that, having to choose between two religions, he should have adopted that which our education, reason, and even our prepossessions, combine to point out as foully corrupted from the primitive simplicity of the Christian Church.  

J. R. Green, in his History of the English People, writes that "his (Dryden's) life was that of a libertine, and his marriage to a woman of fashion who was yet more dissolute than himself only gave a new spur to his debaucheries".  

Almost the first writer of prominence to declare wholeheartedly for the sincerity of Dryden was Bell, who, in his Memoir, published in 1854, showed conclusively that Macaulay was in error in stating that James II had increased Dryden's pension by one hundred pounds upon the occasion of his conversion to the Church of Rome. This grant, Bell shows, was the renewal of a similar pension enjoyed under Charles II.  

The Globe Edition of Dryden's Poetical Works contains the Memoir of Professor Christie. He admits that Macaulay, for whom he apologises, was in error in deciding that the conversion was an attempt to secure an emolument of one hundred pounds; but he goes on to submit his own theory that "it is hard to believe that in this great change.... visions of

6Ibid., pp. 264-5.
greater worldly advantage did not influence Dryden".8

Leslie Stephen, in his article in The Dictionary of National Biography, writes: "It is idle to compare such a conversion to those of loftier minds. But, in a sense, he may have been sincere enough".9

French criticism, too, has its exponents of both sides of the question. Alexandre Beljame, in Le Public et les Hommes de Lettres, follows, in the main, the arguments of Macaulay and seeks in vain for good and weighty reasons to acquit him of the charge that personal interest motivated his conversion. Taine finds in him "a mind bending rather from conventionality than from nature, possessing enthusiasm and afflatus, occupied with grave thoughts, and subjecting his conduct to his convictions."10 Pierre Legouis, writing in Revue Anglo-Amerique, finds no reason for challenging Dryden's sincerity and endeavors to contribute to a solution of the problem by searching in the works anterior to 1682, and particularly in the Dramatic Works, for evidences of an interest in matters religious.

Recent critics, like Bredvold, Summers, and Hollis, have

generally accepted the hypothesis that Dryden was sincere in his conversion, though they are not always in agreement as to the exact degree of his sincerity. Hollis' *Dryden*, published in 1933, is a sympathetic study from the Catholic angle, devoted largely to a refutation of the various charges leveled against the poet. In connection with the tercentenary in 1931 there was considerable scholarship dealing with phases of the Poet's life and work other than that under discussion.
CHAPTER III
HISTORY OF DRYDEN AND HIS TIMES

To understand as far as it is humanly possible to do so the motives underlying the actions of a man it is always well to study the character of the man in relation to the events of the period through which he moved. In the case of Dryden, political and religious events are inseparable; hence we go back a few years to trace these political and religious movements which reached their culmination during the lifetime of our poet.

When, in 1649, Cromwell brought Charles I to the scaffold, he destroyed the existing order of things in England and placed in jeopardy, not only the property, but the very life of every man. Shortly after the execution of Charles, the Council of the Army had proclaimed the so-called "Agreement of the People" recommending a public profession of Christianity reformed to the greatest purity in doctrine, worship, and discipline, but guaranteeing immunity to those who differed from it. Popery and Prelacy were, however, not included in this toleration.

The result of this policy was the rise of many sects, and one is not surprised to find scepticism rather common in this period of intellectual and religious stirring among the people.
Dryden, at the time of the regicide, was a young man of eighteen at Cambridge University. Born in 1631, he had passed under the Royalist influence of the famous Dr. Busby at the Westminster School. There can be no doubt that the influences of those years of young manhood were at variance with those of his earlier years, for his parents were both staunch Puritans and his birth had occurred at a time when Puritanism was entering upon the period of its greatest power in England.

To the Puritan mind of the 1640's the terms 'Royalist' and 'Anglican' were synonymous, and for either there was little sympathy in the Puritan heart. That Dryden, who had been imbibing Royalist doctrines from the day of his removal from parental influence, and who, moreover, had desires of becoming a writer, should shake off the shackles of Puritanism and drift with the main stream of unbelievers and sceptics is not difficult to understand. In later life he was to refer to this period in the following lines of *The Hind and the Panther*:

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.  

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11 *The Hind and the Panther*, 11. 72-75.

(N. B. All quotations from Dryden have been taken from the Scott-Saintsbury Edition of the Poet's Works).
When Dryden went up to London in 1657, he had the privilege of meeting Cromwell. The qualities of statesmanship and courage exhibited by the Protector called forth the admiration of the poet, who, two years later, was to publish in his honor his first worth-while production—*Heroic Stanzas, Consecrated to the Memory of His Highness, Oliver Cromwell.*

Then came the Restoration and the almost immediate publication of *Astraea Redux* in commemoration of the return of the Stuarts.

Save for an occasional flash, such as *Annus Mirabilis* of 1666, there was no poem of consequence by Dryden until 1680. But during the period the poet was not idle. To meet the demands of the Court of Charles II, which was decidedly French in tone, a new drama had to be evolved; for the Elizabethan drama, banned during the Puritan regime, was hardly palatable to the licentious courtiers. Thus we find the Restoration drama grievously disfigured by grossness and indecency—reflecting the loose morals of the Court and reacting against the rigid code of the Puritan religion. To meet the demands of such a theater Dryden wrote his drama—a form of composition for which, even in his most successful years, he felt a distaste and a lack of talent.

The political disturbance of 1680, at root religious, furnished Dryden with the motive for the composition of
Absalom and Achitophel--with the publication of which he became the outstanding poet of the age. Various acts of Charles had made that monarch unpopular and since the Duke of York, the heir to the throne, was a Catholic, certain elements in the nation saw no hope of preserving Anglicanism. Hence Shaftesbury induced the Duke of Monmouth, the illegitimate son of Charles, to head a rebellion. For his share in the conspiracy Shaftesbury was accused of treason and lodged in the Tower. All England took sides. Dryden, who had been Poet-laureate since 1670, gave immediate evidence of his support of his King by the publication of his "Satire against Sedition"--Absalom and Achitophel--a poem which enjoyed an immediate and immense popularity. Its characterization was graphic. Under the guise of the Old Testament narrative the political situation was accurately summed up.

When, upon the acquittal of Shaftesbury, his supporters signalised the event by the stamping of a medal, Dryden issued another of his satirical poems, this time The Medal, which drew forth a swarm of replies from a multitude of poets of varying degrees of ability.

To prepare the way for the promised declaration of his belief in the doctrines of the Catholic Church, Charles had issued his "Declaration of Indulgence" in 1672. Parliament was successful in forcing the withdrawal of the Declaration
and followed up its victory with the passage of the "Test Act" (1679), a measure aimed directly at Catholics. The legislation had been helped considerably by the agitation consequent upon the "discovery" of the Popish Plot of 1678. This struggle between the Whigs and the Tories, which ended in the passage of the Exclusion Bill, opened the whole controversy between the Church of England and the Church of Rome.

As a member of the Royal Society in an age of controversy, Dryden had heard the Intellectuals, the philosophers of the day, question the time-worn traditions, religious tenets, authority and belief in all the ancient writings of the Church. He saw anarchy, treachery in high places, injustice, persecution, and death for religion under cover of sedition. Many of those who had become converts to, and had suffered for, the despised religion were his personal friends. In the midst of all this religious upheaval, Dryden was in the middle course, far from Scepticism and far from Rome.

The year 1685 witnessed the death of Charles and the accession of his brother, the Catholic James Duke of York, who immediately attempted to bring about the repeal of the disabling statutes against Catholics. He was shrewd enough to realize that should he exercise his right of invoking the royal dispensing power, such relief would be only temporary
and dependent upon his own reign. Repeal of the statutes, however, would assure security to Catholics even under Protestant successors.

From a note in the Diary of John Evelyn for January 19, 1686, it would appear that Dryden's submission to the Church was made at the beginning of that year—a submission in which he was following in the footsteps of his wife and their sons: "Dryden, the famous play-writer, and his two sons, and Mrs. Nelly—(Miss—-to the late --) were said to go to mass;"¹²

Dryden's The Hind and the Panther was begun with the avowed purpose of answering the objections of the English clergy and the people to the repeal of the disabling laws. Reconciliation of the Hind (Catholic Church) and the Panther (Anglican Church) is the predominant note of the earlier part of the poem. The Panther is

........ sure the noblest next the Hind,
And fairest creature of the spotted kind,
Oh, could her inborn stains be washed away,
She were too good to be a beast of prey.¹³

while the Sects are wolves, bears, boars, and foxes—all that is odious in the brute creation.

Before the poem was completed an event was to take place

¹³The Hind and the Panther, ll. 327-30
which was to injure greatly its unity and consistence. That event, as Dryden himself tells us in the Preface, was the unforeseen change in the policy of the King in regard to the whole Catholic question. James, seeing the determination of his Parliament not to repeal the objectionable statutes, entered on a "course of political manipulations, closetting of members of the Commons, coercion and threats, which the English people regarded as a menace to their political liberties."15

Backed by the obsequious court, the King proceeded to appoint Catholics to high offices. Thur the new policy made common the cause of Catholics and Dissenters against the Church of England, and the poet seems to insinuate in Part Three that the issue is incapable of readjustment. The Panther's "hour of grace had passed",16 and the downfall of the Doves indicates the fall of the English hierarchy:

'Tis said the doves repented, though too late
Become the smiths of their own foolish fate:
Nor did their owner hasten their ill hour:
But, sunk in credit, they decreased in power.
Like snows in warmth that mildly pass away,
Dissolving in the silence of decay.17

14"Preface to The Hind and the Panther", pp. 113-4.
16The Hind and the Panther, III, l. 893.
17Ibid., III, l. 1267-72.
James' promulgation of his Declaration of Indulgence together with the fact that Louis XIV of France, an old ally of the Stuarts, was at the same time taking severe measures against the Huguenots aroused universal indignation. The climax came when James ordered the Anglican bishops to have read in their churches the Declaration granting almost complete religious liberty to Catholics. During the course of the trial of those bishops who had refused to carry out the order of the King, an event took place which was destined to bring about an immediate change in the condition of affairs in England.

A son was born to Mary of Modena, the second wife of James. Protestant leaders had hitherto placed their hopes in Mary (daughter of James by his first wife), who, herself a Protestant, had married the Protestant Prince of Orange. Offered the throne, William could muster only a small army with which he landed in England. Its numbers were, however, soon increased by deserters from the cause of James, who with his wife and infant son made his escape to France.

With the accession of William and Mary, Dryden lost his positions of Poet-laureate and Historiographer-royal, and to his great grief, saw Shadwell, his old and bitter enemy, appointed to the former office. The loss of these positions necessitated the parting with his three sons, whom he sent to
the Continent for the education denied them at home, and his return to writing in order to earn even a meager subsistence. He died in 1700.
CHAPTER IV

A

BEFORE 1682

The writings of Dryden before the year 1682—that in which he published *Religio Laici*, the first of his works to be classified as definitely religious—give, it is claimed, little evidence of an interest in things religious. Macaulay goes so far as to assert that "he knew little and cared little about religion."[^1] The greater part of Dryden's literary output during the period under discussion was concerned with his drama, and extreme caution is necessary when attributing to an author the sentiments expressed by his characters.

Yet, while there is this lack of a deliberate dwelling on topics of a religious nature, there are in his works many references to things purely religious, which, while they may be considered to be purely dramatic, may also be regarded as instinctive tendencies, if not as actually reasoned preferences.

This Chapter is an examination of the poems of the period in an effort to ascertain how far the mind of the poet had concerned itself with that subject which was to become in later years its all-absorbing interest.

Enemies have pointed with satisfaction to the change of Dryden from the flattery of the Protector in the *Heroic Stanzas* to the adulation of the Stuart in *Astraea Redux*. Christie finds that such change could have been motivated only by purely personal interest. It is true that in 1659 Dryden had written a poem in praise of Cromwell and had followed it within two years by another in praise of Charles, but examination of these two poems reveals that the two political philosophies are not nearly so contradictory as one would at first suppose. Dryden, as a lover of peace, praised in the first place, Cromwell as a man who had brought peace to the country:

> And yet dominion was not his design;  
> We owe that blessing not to him, but Heaven,\(^{19}\)

> He fought to end our fighting, and assayed  
> To stanch the blood by breathing of the vein.\(^{20}\)

> Peace was the prize of all his toil and care.\(^{21}\)

but there is not a single line wherein one can detect criticism of his Royalist opponents. In *Astraea Redux*, Charles is praised for much the same reason, in that he was restored without the horror of Civil War:

> The Prince of Peace would, like himself, confer  
> A gift unhoped without the price of war.\(^{22}\)

\(^{19}\) *Heroic Stanzas*, Stanza 10.  
\(^{22}\) *Astraea Redux*, 11. 139-40.
And again:

At home the hateful names of parties cease,
And factious souls are wearied into peace. 23

Peace at all costs was Dryden’s ideal, and when the "foolish Ishbosheth" was forced to forego the crown, there was nothing left but the recall of the Stuarts.

Though there is in the Heroic Stanzas a noticeable lack of enthusiasm for the religious and political beliefs of the Protector, since there is a single reference and that in the last line:

Where piety and valor jointly go. 24

there is no such lack for the religion and politics of the restored Stuart Monarch in the poem in his honor. First:

For his long absence Church and State did groan;
Madness the Pulpit, Faction seized the throne. 25

And again, when referring to the ruling powers:

... when their black crimes they went about,
First timely charmed their useless conscience out.
Religion's name against itself was made;
The shadow served the substance to invade. 26

Condemnation of the Royalists he had avoided in the earlier poem, but now that the Parliamentarians have been punished, he gives expression to his feeling of satisfaction:

23 Ibid., ll. 312-3.
24 Heroic Stanzas, Stanza 37
25 Astraea Redux, ll. 21-2.
26 Ibid., ll. 189-92
Suffer'd to live they are like Helots set,
A virtuous shame within us to beget. 27

For this change of attitude, if it were indeed a change, "the poet", says Lounsbury, "has been censured"; and he goes on to say:

It is a censure which might be bestowed with as much propriety upon the whole population of England. The joyful expectations to which he gave utterance were almost universal; and no other charge can be brought against him than that he had the ability and took the occasion to express sentiments which were felt by nearly the entire nation. 28

The late Professor Saintsbury, commenting on this, finds it strange that those "who reproach him with the change (if change it was) forget that he shared it with the nation". 29

He accounts for the almost complete royalization of the nation by a circumstance, which, in his opinion, has a special bearing on the case of the Poet:

It has been said that his temperament was specially English. Now one of the most respectable, if not the most purely rational features of the English character, is its objection to wanton bloodshed for political causes, without form of law. It was this beyond question that alienated the English from James II, it was this that in the heyday of Hanoverian power made them turn a cold shoulder on the Duke of Cumberland, it was this which enlisted them almost to a man against the French Revolutionists, it was this which in our own days brought about a political movement to which there is no need to refer.

27 Ibid., 11. 205-6
29 George Saintsbury, Dryden, p. 12.
more particularly. 30

He continues by contrasting this bloodless change with the Puritan atrocities at Drogheda, Naseby, etc.

At this period, therefore, Dryden differed from his contemporaries, not so much in his political philosophy, as in his capacity for expressing that philosophy in imperishable verse.

In *Annus Mirabilis*, written to commemorate the two great events of the year 1666—the Great Fire of London and the Naval War with the Dutch—he makes one of the few references to things religious to be found in the earlier poems. Referring to the destruction wrought by the conflagration, he says:

> The fugitive flames, chastised, went forth to prey On pious structures by our fathers reared; By which to Heaven they did affect the way, Ere faith in Churchmen without works was heard. 31

One of the reasons alleged for the conversion of Dryden to Catholicism is that he was desirous of assuring himself of his pensions. How little credence can be placed in that theory is apparent when we consider that, when the reasons for reconversion to Anglicanism were no less urgent in 1688, Dryden remained loyal.

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31*Annus Mirabilis*, Stanza 273.
Following the death of Davenant in 1668, he had been appointed to the Laureateship, but his patent was not issued until August 18, 1670, when he was given the additional post of Historiographer-royal with an annuity of two hundred pounds, in addition to which there was the now-celebrated butt of sack. This was increased some time between 1670 and 1697 by an annuity of one hundred pounds, possibly in answer to his plea, in the Dedication of Aureng-Zebe, for funds to assure leisure sufficient for the composition of the long-meditated epic:

But the unsettledness of my condition has hitherto put a stop to my thoughts concerning it. As I am no successor to Homer in his wit, so neither do I desire to be in his poverty. I can make no rhapsodies nor go a-begging at the Grecian doors, while I sing the praises of their ancestors. The times of Vergil please me better, because he had an Augustus for his patron; and, to draw the allegory nearer you, I am sure I shall not want a Maecenas with him.32

By 1677, Dryden, in common with others, felt the effects of the financial embarrassment of the King. From 1679 to 1683 there were annual payments, but only of one-quarter each. Thus, by 1683 he was receiving money which had been due in 1679 and 1680, for the warrants so designate the payments. In the Vindication of "The Duke of Guise" he answers the charge of his having had mercenary motives in the writing of that play, and gives some idea of his financial condition at

the period: "If I am a mercenary scribbler, the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury best know: I am sure they have found me no importunate solicitor." 33

Many critics attach great importance to the fact that the patent under James was not issued until March, 1686, some months after the Poet's conversion to the religion of the reigning Monarch. Professor Bredvold, in an article in Modern Philology, shows that the business of issuing the patent was often a long drawn out process, which in Dryden's case had been initiated as early as April 27, 1685--almost a year before the above-mentioned conversion. 34

Dryden's biographers have stated that the Poet was, in December, 1683, appointed to the office of Collector of the Customs for the Port of London. Mr. C. E. Ward, writing in Modern Language Notes, disagrees with the findings of Malone and more recent biographers in this connection, and makes out a convincing case against the general belief that he was ever appointed to that office. 35 The findings of Ward are mentioned by Bredvold who inclines to their belief, though he would absolve earlier biographers from all blame since they


were not in possession of all the facts of the case.

Absalom and Achitophel, written on the occasion of the rebellion instigated by Shaftesbury and led by the Duke of Monmouth, may be made the basis of a study of the fundamental honesty of Dryden in the quest for religious truth. The writer of this satire was a man with a firm belief in a personal God—a man with a consciousness of a moral law in man.

The workings of conscience, as illustrated in the case of Absalom (Duke of Monmouth), Dryden traces step by step. Against the perpetration of the deed suggested by Achitophel (Shaftesbury) he argues that David (Charles) is the rightful sovereign, the defender of the faith, the delight of mankind; a man good, just, observant of the laws; the ruler who has wronged none and is zealous for the good of his people. Were his father a tyrant, Absalom might "mourn" such a condition, but the law of God would forbid any attempt on his part at supplying a remedy. The people might assert their own rights, but the King's son would not be justified in such assertion.

Against this "Hell's dire agent" argues that the virtues of Absalom are Heaven-sent for a purpose; that the people, having a right supreme to make their kings, may, if they so desire, cast aside the rightful succession; and finally, that
the assurance of universal good outweighs all the objections the youthful Absalom can muster. Conscience points out the right and the wrong, but the victim of the wiles of Achitophel, possessing free-will, succumbs to the temptation.

Dryden is concerned with the problem—What constitutes human happiness? To the Utilitarian belief that personal pleasure and glory form the sole motive of human action—a doctrine which Achitophel states as

The public good, the universal call
To which even Heaven submitted, answers all:36

he is definitely opposed.

The desire of earthly power is to Dryden

on earth a vicious weed
Yet sprung from high is of celestial seed
In God 'tis glory, and when men aspire,
'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire,37

The grief of Absalom is directly traceable to his unlawful and unattainable desire for power. Likewise Achitophel, "in power displeased", though blessed with honor and reasonable wealth stops at nothing in the endeavor to compass his designs:

Else why should he, with wealth and honor, blest,
Refuse himself the needful hours of rest?38

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36Absalom and Achitophel, I, ll. 421-2.

37Ibid., ll. 305-8.

38Ibid., ll. 165-6.
His choice of Absalom as an instrument is motivated, not by reason of his affection for the youthful Prince:

But, for he knew his title not allowed
Would keep him still depending on the crowd. 39

Zimri's (Buckingham) chief fault is the squandering of wealth by rewarding the undeserving:

In squandering wealth was his peculiar art;
Nothing went unrewarded but desert. 40

Shimei (Sheriff Bethel) receives the doubtful compliment of being one who

never broke the Sabbath but for gain. 41

and is reported as having heaped up wealth by the most ready way

Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray. 42

Yet Dryden would not entirely condemn the possession of wealth, since rightly used, it can bring as much happiness as can be attained here on earth. The self-denial and self-sacrifice exhibited by Barzillai (Duke of Ormond), of whom the poet could write

Large was his wealth, but larger was his heart; 43

by his son "snatched in manhood's prime"; by Zadoc (Archbishop Sanoroft), who shunned power and place; and by Hushai (Hyde),

39 Ibid., ll. 224-5.
40 Ibid., ll. 558-9.
41 Ibid., l. 588.
42 Ibid., ll. 591-2.
43 Ibid., l. 826.
for whom he could say

His frugal care supplied the waiting throne 44
are not to be forgotten in a world whose standards are largely Utilitarian.

From his comments on Hushai's care of the distressed David we learn that he is convinced of the necessity of a limited amount of worldly wealth:

'Tis easy conduct when exchequers flow;
But hard the task to manage well the low:
For Soverign power is too deprest or high,
When kings are forced to sell, or crowds to buy. 45

In considering the judgment of human acts, Dryden believes in the punishment of evil and in the reward of good:

Heaven punishes the bad, and proves the best. 46
Absalom is a man of many faults, "for who from faults is free?"
But these

His father could not, or he would not see. 47
Virtue is extolled throughout, while no condemnation is too severe for the vices encountered in the enemies of David.

With the Catholic conception of government Dryden is in complete accord. The essential purpose of government is the

44Ibid., l. 892.
45Ibid., ll. 894-5.
46Ibid., l. 44.
47Ibid., l. 36.
welfare of the people, since all lawfully constituted authority is the representative of Divine authority. Dryden puts into the mouth of Charles his belief that

Kings are the public pillars of the state.
Born to sustain and prop the nation's weight. 48

and again

A king's at least a part of government. 49

Early in the poem he had acknowledged that the followers of the Church of Rome had named the city of London, that theirs was the "native right," that the rightful cause at length became the wrong, and that the faithful Catholics were regarded as the enemies of God because of their patience in adversity. There is apparent a note of censure for their failure to rise in defense of their rights:

Thur worn or weakened, well or ill content,
Submit they must to David's government:
Impoverished and deprived of all command,
Their taxes doubled as they lost their land;
And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood
Their gods disgraced, and burnt like common wood. 50

Of the charges against them he takes no notice, for he characterises Titus Oates as beneath contempt—the deviser of plots "exceeding man's belief".

48 Ibid., ll. 953-4
49 Ibid., l. 977.
50 Ibid., ll. 92-7.
CHAPTER IV

B

RELIGIO LAICI (1682)

The political crisis of 1680, treated by Dryden largely from the political side, was at root religious, and hence likely to stimulate in a man of Dryden's intellectual power an interest in matters theological. Dryden, passing out of middle age, was at that stage of life when to a man of his intellectual power a deeper consideration of life's problems was not unnatural. The Religio Laici is the first indication we have of Dryden's serious reflection on religious subjects, and whoever will consider the poem attentively will see that his eventual conversion to the faith of Rome was merely what might be expected from one who reasoned as he had reasoned there.

We are not surprised to find in the Preface to the Religio Laici (1682) the expression of his belief in a close relation between religion and politics. The poem is his profession of faith as a member of the Anglican communion, since neither the faith of the Roman Catholic nor that of any of the Sectaries can be accepted in England.

The safety of England, in the opinion of the poet, can be guaranteed only by adherence to Anglicanism—the religion
which will support the English monarchical and limited constitution. In this connection it is worth mentioning that, while Dryden was not remarkable for deep and abiding convictions, he did have an unusual, in his day at least, respect for lawfully constituted authority. E. K. Broadus, in his study of the Laureateship, goes so far as to suggest that this devotion to constituted authority furnishes a probable reason for Dryden's change of religion upon the accession of James II. To this argument one might propose the question: If such were, in 1685, the poet's conception of his duty as laureate, why did he remain a Catholic after the Revolution when reasons for a return to Anglicanism were more urgent?

Of the "two sorts of enemies", he considers the Papists the less dangerous, if only because the fewness of their numbers and the severity of the laws enacted against them render them practically harmless. His distrust of Papists finds its roots in an abhorrence of the Jesuited Papists,

for not two or three of that order, as some of them would impose upon us, but almost the whole body of them, are of the opinion that their infallible master has a right over kings, not only in the spirituals but in temporals.

The Fanatics, or Schismatics, of the English Church he considers more dangerous. Of them he says:

52 Preface to Religio Laici, p. 19.
Since the Bible has been translated into our tongue, they have used it so, as if their business was not to be saved, but to be damned by its contents. If we consider only them, better had it been for the English nation that it had remained in the original Greek or Hebrew, or at least in the honest Latin of St. Jerome, than that the several texts in it should have been prevaricated to the destruction of that government which put it into so ungrateful hands.\textsuperscript{53}

This prevarication of the text eventually brought about such a state of affairs that even the most saint-like of the party, though they durst not excuse this contempt and vilifying of the government, yet were pleased, and grinned at it with a pious smile: and called it a judgment of God against the hierarchy.\textsuperscript{54}

And again, he notes the effect of this loose interpretation:

The Scriptures, which are in themselves the greatest security of governors, as commanding express obedience to them, are now turned to their destruction; and never since the Reformation has there wanted a text of their interpreting to authorize a rebel. And it is to be noted by the way, that the doctrines of king-killing and deposing ..., have been espoused, defended, and are still maintained by the whole body of Nonconformists and Republicans.\textsuperscript{55}

In publishing\textit{Religio Laici} Dryden dedicated it to his friend Henry Dickinson on the occasion of his translation of Abbe Simon's\textit{L'histoire Critique de Vieux Testament}. What was the nature of this work that Dryden should so signalize its translation? In his poem he hints that the Abbé was not

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., pp. 22-3.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., pp. 27-8.
\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., pp. 30-31
exceptionally sincere in his profession:

For some, who have his secret meaning guessed, 
Have found our author not too much a priest; but Simon was a good Catholic and his arguments must be understood as an attempt to demonstrate that the Bible, as the source of religious truth, is ambiguous and unintelligible, and as such, in constant need of interpretation by an authoritative church which must be in possession of an uninterrupted tradition. It is obvious that the Critical History was only part of a larger movement to disprove the Protestant position which had paid a handsome compliment to human reason by its acceptance of private interpretation.

Enemies have dismissed Religio Laici as mere politics; but anyone who ponders the opening lines:

Dim as the borrowed beams of moon and stars
To lonely, weary, wandering travellers,
Is reason to the soul: and as, on high,
Those rolling fires discover but the sky,
Not light us here; so reason's glimmering ray
Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,
But guide us upward to a better day.
And as those nightly tapers disappear,
When day's bright lord ascends our hemisphere;
So pale grows reason at religion's sight;
So dies, and so dissolves in supernatural light.  

cannot but be convinced that a work which, as Saintsbury points out, "had no purpose of pleasing a lay patron, ..... 

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56Religio Laici, ll. 252–3.

57Ibid., ll. 1–11.
nor could have recommended itself to a clerical patron"58 was more than the sincere expression of a man's desire for religious certainty.

The poem is a defense of the Church of England as a via media between the tyranny of an infallible church on the one hand and the seditious anarchy, likely to be brought on by the individualism of fanatical Sectaries, on the other. In his opinion, individualism in religion is synonymous with factiousness and insubordination in the state. Commonwealth notions flourished among the Sects and were given a new life in the pamphleteering of the Whigs.

The argument of the poem is straightforward, and is, in brief, as follows: Through reason we may attain to a knowledge of God; but this Deistic tenet is not enough. We must fall back on Revelation. But how is the Bible, the guide of faith, to be interpreted? Of course, he insists, all things necessary to salvation are clear without interpretation:

It speaks itself, and what it doth contain,  
In all things needed to be known, is plain. 59

The Roman Catholic Church alone claims to be infallible in its interpretation and Dryden expresses an ardent wish that it were so:


59Religio Laici, 11. 369-70
Such an omniscient church we wish indeed; 'Twere worth both Testaments, and cast in the creed. 60

But this claim of hers cannot be allowed, for it seems

Strange confidence, still to interpret true, Yet not be sure that all they have explained, Is in the blest original contained. 61

Were there, he thinks, "such an omniscient church", it would point out the corruption of the canon and restore it where lost:

But if this mother be a guide so sure, As can all doubts resolve, all truth secure, Then her infallibility as well Where copies are corrupt or lame can tell; Restore lost canons with as little pains, As truly explicate what still remains. 62

Surely a mind as keen as was Dryden's must have seen where such an argument would lead. Hence we need not be surprised, when we read a few lines further what seems to be an admission that the author recognised his inability to extricate himself from the maze of so involved a question:

Shall I speak plain, and in a nation free, Assume an honest layman's liberty? I think, according to my little skill, To my own mother-church submitting still, That many have been saved and many may; Who never heard this question brought in play. The unlettered Christian, who believes in gross, Flops on to Heaven and ne'er is at a loss. For the strait-gate would be made straiter yet,

60 Ibid., ll. 282-3.
61 Ibid., ll. 292-4.
62 Ibid., ll. 284-9.
The Fanatics, on the other hand, interpret the Scriptures by the "private spirit":

The common rule was made the common prey,
And at the mercy of the rabble lay;
The tender page with horny fist was galled,
And he was gifted most that loudest bawled;
The spirit gave the doctoral degree,
And every member of a company
Was of his trade and of the Bible free. 64

But in the final analysis, the poet's pretext for compromise between the tyranny of the Papacy and the anarchy of the Sectaries is a flimsy one:

private reason 'tis more just to curb,
Then by disputes the public peace disturb:
For points obscure are of small use to learn;
But common quiet is mankind's concern. 65

It is hardly conceivable that a clear, practical-minded man like Dryden sincerely believed that a compromise such as he advocates in the last two lines would bring a lasting peace. Had he not, in the course of his travels along the via media, expressed the desire for a court of final appeal when he wrote:

Such an omniscient church we wish indeed. 66

J. Churton Collins remarks in this connection that "if any-

63Ibid., ll. 316-25.
64Ibid., ll. 402-8.
65Ibid., ll. 447-50.
66Ibid., l. 282.
thing is clear from the *Religio Laici* it is that Dryden already felt there was no middle course between Deism and the creed of Rome, between believing nothing and believing all."  

CHAPTER IV

G

THE HIND AND THE PANTHER (1687)

We have seen that in Religio Laici Dryden had been but expressing his yearning for an infallible guide in religious matters when, early in the poem, he told of his wish for "an omniscient church". As a result of the process of development which his mind underwent he entered the Catholic Church late in 1685, or early in the following year. The Diary of John Evelyn contains an entry under date of January 19, 1686 which would indicate that the conversion of the Poet was the subject of gossip at that date: "Dryden, the famous playwright, and his two sons...are said to go to mass". That his wife and their third son had been converted before that date has not been substantiated; in any case, it is of little import.

To a public familiar with Religio Laici and the apology for Anglicanism therein, the conversion of the leading literary man of the day must have seemed strange and must indeed have led to considerable discussion as to the motives underlying the change. Hence we are not surprised to find that

68Religio Laici, l. 282.
within a year Dryden had published his Apologia—The Hind and the Panther.

Contemporary critics carefully opposed the Religio Laici to those passages of The Hind and the Panther which appeared most contradictory to its tenets. But, as Walter Scott points out,

while the Grub Street editor exulted in successfully pointing out inconsistency between Dryden's earlier and later religious opinions, he was incapable of observing, that the change was adopted in consequence of the same unbroken train of reasoning, and that Dryden, when he wrote the Religio Laici, was under the impulse of the same conviction, which, further prosecuted, led him to acquiesce in the faith of Rome.70

Critics, who point out inconsistencies between the Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther, would hardly accuse later, and perhaps more eminent, converts of insincerity. Yet it is apparent that

The post-conversion writings of the Cardinal (Newman) are not less superficially inconsistent with Tracts for the Times and The Oxford Sermons, than The Hind and the Panther is with Religio Laici.71

On the question of religious authority the poem is the resolution of the problem left unsolved at the conclusion of Religio Laici. Its fundamental philosophy is the same as that of the earlier work, despite the frequent accusation of insincerity. brought against its writer. The poem makes use of the old device of the animal allegory and is divided into three parts.

70Scott-Saintsbury, Dryden's Dramatic Works, I, p. 279
In the first part, after devoting some space to his own conversion, he introduces the Churches under the names of those animals whose characteristics most nearly correspond to those of the doctrines of the churches in question. As in the *Religio Laici*, they are condemned as a menace to England:

So, springing where those midnight elves advance, Rebellion prints the footsteps of the dance. Such are their doctrines, such contempt they show To heav'n above, and to the prince below, As none but traitors and blasphemers know.  

The first part is really his objection to Anglicanism on political grounds:

God's and king's rebels have the same good cause.  

He finds that the Anglican Church

wants innate authority;  
For how can she constrain them to obey,  
Who has herself cast off the lawful sway?  

And again in Part II:

But soon against your superstitious lawn  
Some Presbyterian saber would be drawn;  
In your established laws of sovereignty  
The rest some fundamental flaw would see,  
And call rebellion gospel-liberty.  

The purely personal and religious note is struck early in the poem:

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72 *The Hind and the Panther*, I, ll. 214-8.
But, gracious God, how well Thou dost provide,
For erring judgments an unerring guide.
Thy throne is darkness in the abyss of light,
A blaze of glory that forbids the sight.
O teach me to believe thee, thus concealed,
And search no further than thyself revealed;
But her alone for my director take,
Whom thou hast promised never to forsake. 76

and is followed by his confession of the follies of his youth
and of his powerlessness without supernatural aid:

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.
Such was I, such by nature still I am;
Be thine the glory, and be mine the shame. 77

Resolutions for the future are followed by a profession
of faith:

Good life be now my task; my doubts are done; 78

Did Dryden at the moment realize the sacrifices the keeping of
that resolution would entail?

Higher than the motives reason gives for credibility he
places the ultimate rule of faith:

Man is to believe
Beyond what sense and reason can conceive,
And, for mysterious things of faith, rely
On the proponent, heaven's authority. 79

76 Ibid., I, ll. 64-71.
77 Ibid., I, ll. 72-7.
78 Ibid., I, l. 78.
79 Ibid., I, ll. 118-21.
One who remembers that he had seen this, though dimly, years before and had expressed it in the opening lines of Religio Laici should experience no surprise on learning that Dryden had at last discovered this truth. Reason had led him to know that truth must have the support of authority. He had examined the doctrines of the one Church which laid claim to infallibility in her teachings; he had found the claim substantiated; and he had embraced that Church.

The idea of the compromise suggested at the conclusion of Religio Laici is again brought forward, but now there is no advocating of a bargain; there must be a guarantee:

To take up half on trust, and half to try,  
Name it not faith, but bungling bigotry;  
Both knave and fool the merchant we may call  
To pay great sums, and to compound the small;  
For who would break with heaven, and would not break for all? 80

His greatest objection is to the Calvinists, who are represented by the Wolf:

More haughty than the rest, the wolfish race  
Appear with belly gaunt, and famished face;  
Never was so deformed a beast of grace.  
His ragged tail betwixt his tail he wears,  
Close clapped for shame; but his rough crest he rears,  
And pricks up his predestinating ears. 81

Catholic Spain and Italy never entertain those monsters

80 Ibid., I, ll. 141-5.
81 Ibid., I, ll. 160-5.
and in this respect they are models for England where they are a constant menace; and, were it not for the guardianship of the Lion (King), they would seize the Hind and "leap the fold".

For the rural sects there is likewise great contempt.

They are:

A slimy-born and sun-begotten tribe;
Who, far from steeples and their sacred sound,
In fields their sullen conventicles found.

While he holds them in derision, he would not persecute them; and though their name is legion, he does not fear them:

Such souls as shards produce, such beetle things
As only buzz to heaven with evening wings;
Strike in the dark, offending but by chance,
Such are the blind-fold blows of ignorance.
They know not beings, and but hate a name;83
To them the Hind and Panther are the same.

The Panther (Church of England), Dryden's old love, is

the noblest next the Hind,
And fairest creature of the spotted kind;84

but she is not, he discovers, an ancient church, since there is

A second century not half-way run
Since the new honors of her blood begun;85

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82 Ibid., I, ll. 311-2.
83 Ibid., I, ll. 321-6.
84 Ibid., I, ll. 327-8.
85 Ibid., I, ll. 349-50.
A King (Henry VIII) began a schism which in turn begot heresy. The Church of England kept outwardly her resemblance to the Catholic Church:

Showed affectation of an ancient line; but her acquiescence in the doctrines of Calvin drove her farther and farther from the center of unity. Despite her unsettled state, the morals of the Anglican Church are good; her principles are true to her king, for she is his tool; and for him she has suffered even martyrdom. She cannot curb rebellion yet fears her force to try, because she wants innate authority; for how can she, who is a rebel herself, constrain others to obey? And it is this inability to control that leads to the solution of Dryden's problem in _Religio Laici_—Infallibility and Authority.

Attention is centered on the purely local character of the Church of England:

In her own labyrinth she lives confined; To foreign lands no sound of her is come, Humbly content to be despised at home.

and the First Part of the Poem concludes with the exposition of the powerlessness of the Panther, who is Ruled while she rules, and losing every hour

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87_Ibid., I, ll. 452-3._
88_Ibid., I, ll. 403-5._
The Second Part of *The Hind and the Panther* is devoted to a discussion of the Catholic Church, especially on the question of authority, between the "milk-white Hind, immortal and unchanged", and the Panther, "the fairest creature of the spotted kind". Infallibility had been the note which had attracted Dryden to the Catholic Church, and it is but natural that he should devote a large part of his Apologia to a discussion of the distinguishing characteristic of this faith of his adoption. Hence, before the conversation is far advanced, the Panther raises this very question:

But, shunning long disputes, I fain would see
That wondrous wight, Infallibility.
Is he from heaven, this mighty champion come?
Or lodged below in subterranean Rome?
First seat him somewhere, and derive his rage,
Or else conclude that nothing has no place.\(^90\)

It is argued that in the answer of the Hind

Suppose, though I disown it, ........
That certain mansion were not yet assigned;
That doubtful residence no proof can bring
Against the plain existence of the thing.
Because philosophers may disagree,
If sight by emission, or reception be,
Shall it be thence inferred, I do not see?\(^91\)

Dryden is weak enough to ask, why, since we see without knowing how, we may not have an infallible guide without knowing

\(^{89}\)Ibid., I, ll. 509-10.

\(^{90}\)Ibid., II, ll. 64-9.

\(^{91}\)Ibid., II, ll. 70-6.
where? This criticism is plausible enough, but it is clearly not fair. Dryden takes the authority of the Church as a part of historical experience; "the plain existence of the thing" is not, in his view, disputable.

There follows a discussion of the Popes and the General Councils, and the Panther brings forward the very argument the poet himself had used in the Religio Laici:

I maintain

The word in needful points is only plain.92

But now there is no doubt that Dryden realizes the inadequacy of that doctrine

but the rule you lay

Has led whole flocks, and leads them still astray,
In weighty points, and full damnation's way.93

In Religio Laici, Dryden had not yet been able to accept Tradition in its entirety:

first, Traditions were a proof alone; Could we be certain, such they were, so known; But since some flaws in long descent may be, They make not truth, but probability.94

But here, in the argument, simple yet lively, on the questions of Scripture and Tradition, when the Panther accuses the Hind of tampering with Tradition and receives the reply:

How but by following her, .......
To whom derived from sire to son they came;

92Ibid., II, ll. 143-4.
93Ibid., II, ll. 147-9.
94Religio Laici, ll. 342-5.
Where every age does on another move,
And trusts no farther than the next above;
Where all the rounds like Jacob's ladder rise,
And lowest hid in earth, the topmost in the skies. 95

in difficulty, the Panther escapes with a political threat consonant with the times:

Since luore was your trade,
Succeeding times such dreadful gaps have made,
'Tis dangerous climbing: To your sons and you
I leave the ladder and its omen too. 96

With the Panther's arguments on the question of Tradition disposed of, Dryden advances to the next problem—that of Infallibility:

For what did Christ his word provide,
If still his Church must want a living guide?
And if all-saving doctrines are not there,
Or sacred penmen could not make them clear,
From after-ages we should hope in vain
For truths which men inspired could not explain. 97

These same doubts had been, in Religio Laici, set aside as of no importance to salvation. Faith, he had said there, is not built on vain disquisition; the things we must believe are few and plain. Obscure points may be ignored without endangering salvation:

It speaks itself, and what it does contain,
In all things needful to be known, is plain. 98

95 The Hind and the Panther, II, 11. 216-21.
96 Ibid., II, 11. 224-7.
97 Ibid., II, 11. 299-304.
Now, he takes infinite pains to study the question from all angles until he arrives at Infallibility. There is no trace of doubt in the answer of the Hind:

Behold what marks of majesty she brings,
Richer than ancient heirs of Eastern kings.
Her right hand holds the scepter and the keys
To show whom she commands, and who obeys;
With these to bind, or set the sinner free,
With that to assert spiritual royalty.
One in herself, not rent by schism, but sound,
Entire, one solid shining diamond;
Not sparkles shattered into sparks like you:
One is the Church, and must be to be true:
One central principle of unity;
As undivided, so from errors free;
As one in faith, so one in sanctity. 99

The Hind presents the problem: If, on the one hand, Scripture is to be the guide, an interpreter is necessary. This would, of course, exclude all the non-Catholic Sects, for that, which must direct the whole, must be bound in one faith and unity. 100

If, on the other hand, Tradition is to be the authority, then it must be accepted as the Roman Catholic Church accepts it—in its entirety. There is no lack of earnest conviction in his assertion that

It then remains, that Church can only be the guide, which owns unfailing certainty; 101

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99The Hind and the Panther, II, ll. 520-32.
100Ibid., II, ll. 451-2.
101Ibid., II, ll. 483-4.
this unfailing universal state
You shun; and in the further charge that
(You) strive to evade, and fear to find them true,
As conscious they were never meant for you.

The reference in the last quotation is, of course, to the promises of the Saviour to His Church.

Verrall suggests that here Dryden seems to have felt the need of lifting the theme above mere bickering, and he does so. The same critic thinks that the passage

So, when of old the Almighty Father sate
In council, to redeem our ruined state,
Millions of millions, at a distance round,
Silent the sacred consistory crowned,
To hear what mercy, mixed with justice, could propound;
All prompt, with eager pity, to fulfil
The full extent of their Creator's will:
But when the stern conditions were declared,
A mournful whisper through the host was heard,
And the whole hierarchy, with heads hung down,
Submissively declined the ponderous proffered crown.

Then, not till then, the Eternal Son from high
Rose in the strength of all the Deity;
Stood forth to accept the terms, and underwent
A weight which all the frame of heaven had bent
Nor He Himself could bear, but as Omnipotent.

is an admirable compression of the idea of Milton's famous passage at the beginning of the Third Book of Paradise Lost, where, when the Almighty, seated on His throne, foretells the

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102 Ibid., II, ll. 491-2.
103 Ibid., II, ll. 495-6.
104 Ibid., II, ll. 499-514.
success of Satan in perverting mankind and declares His purpose of grace towards man, the Son offers Himself as the victim of expiation for sin.

The allegory is resumed and both the Hind and the Panther arrive at the dwelling of the former, whereupon the Hind, perceiving a "change of weather in the skies", invites the Panther to partake of her miserable shelter. For fear she might be wildered in her way, Because she wanted an unerring guide,105

The abode of the Hind "with hoary moss and winding ivy spread" is obviously the Catholic Church, and when the Panther is entered for a brief rest, she is urged to remain for ever. This part of the poem ends on a note of toleration on the part of the Panther.

Much of the Third Part of the poem would, according to Dryden, have been omitted altogether, or indeed, have been unwritten, could he have foreseen the turn of events. In the Preface he writes:

About a fortnight before I had finished it, His Majesty's Declaration for Liberty of Conscience came abroad: which if I had so soon expected, I might have spared myself the labor of writing many things which are contained in the Third Part of it. But I was always in some hope that the Church of England might have been persuaded to have taken off the Penal Laws and the Test, which was one design of the poem when I proposed to myself the writing of it.106

105Ibid., II, 682-3.
Dryden had no sympathy with the religious policy of the King. He believed that policy, advocated by the Jesuit, Father Petres, would result in a brief respite for the Catholics but that, upon the accession of James' successor, the old disabilities would be renewed. Hence he was of the party, which, under the guidance of Ronquillo, the Spanish ambassador, and of d'Adda, the Papal Nuncio, thought it important that Catholics should give no cause for reprisals after the death of James II.

At the beginning of Part III, the Hind, continuing the dialogue, expresses gratitude for the kindly tolerance of the Panther:

Nor failed she then a full review to make
Of what the Panther suffered for her sake;107
and appreciation of
Her faith unshaken in an exiled heir,108
--obvious references to the support given James, when as the exiled Duke of York, he was forced to reside away from London and was threatened with exclusion from succession to the throne.

Some details of the controversy with Stillingfleet are followed by a reminder that Dryden is aware of the charges brought against him and his co-religionists:

107The Hind and the Panther, III, ll. 39-40.
108Ibid., III, l. 42.
Now for my converts, who, you say, unfed
Have followed me for miracles of bread.
Judge not by hearsay, but observe at least,
If since their change their loaves have been increased.

The Lion buys no converts; if he did,
Beasts would be sold as fast as he could bid.¹⁰⁹

His own course of action is defended, but all thought of vengeance is disclaimed in a passage which indicates the poet's almost complete abstention from giving vent to venom:

Be vengeance wholly left to powers divine,
And let heaven judge betwixt your sons and mine:
If joys hereafter must be purchased here
With loss of all that mortals hold so dear,
Then welcome infamy and public shame,
And last, a long farewell to worldly fame.¹¹⁰

Echoes of the controversy with Stillingfleet are heard again in line 329. "That Treatise on Humility", mentioned by Stillingfleet in refutation of the poet's charge that there had been no Protestant treatise on that virtue, is shown by Dryden to have been an unacknowledged translation of the work of the Jesuit Rodriguez.

When the Panther taunts the Hind with small number of recent converts to Catholicism despite the possibilities of immediate gain, the latter replies by pointing out the disabilities under which the Catholics of England still exist:

My proselytes are struck with awful dread,

¹⁰⁹Ibid., III, 11. 221-6.
¹¹⁰Ibid., III, 11. 279-84.
Your bloody comet-laws hang blazing o'er their head;
The respites they enjoy but only lent,
The best they have to hope, protracted punishment.
Be judge yourself, if interest may prevail,
Which motives, yours or mine, will turn the scale.
While pride and pomp allure, and plenteous ease,
That is, till man's predominant passions cease,
Admire no longer at my slow increase.

and by further pointing out that, while the Anglicans have peace, Catholics have no civil rights, no gainful office, not even freedom of conscience.

The Panther plays upon the fears expressed by the Hind:

You hinted fears of future change in state,
Pray heaven you did not prophesy your fate.
Perhaps you think your time of triumph near,
You may mistake the season of the year;

and proceeds to the telling of the first of the two fables for which this Third Part of the Poem is noted—that of the Swallows.

James' policy of invoking the royal power of dispensing met with the disapproval of many of the long-established Catholic families, who saw therein merely a temporary gain. Some of these went so far as to petition the King for permission to sell their estates and to settle in some foreign land. The chief opponent of this proposed course of action was the Jesuit, Father Petres, who counseled adherence to the policy of the king. In the episode of the Swallows, judiciously

111 Ibid., III, ll. 380-8.
112 Ibid., ll. 415-8.
placed on the tongue of the Panther, it is not difficult to ascertain that the poet's sympathies lay with the opponents of the counsels of Petres. That the policy of James would undergo the changes previously mentioned Dryden had, of course, no means of surmising. Hence his admission in the Preface to the Poem that he might, had he foreseen the change, have spared himself the labor of writing this portion.

The Fable of the Swallows is obviously an allusion to the Catholics in England. Gathered for their migration, the Swallows are persuaded by the Martin (Father Petres) to postpone the flight in view of the prospect of happier days to come. Deluded by a period of miraculous springtime, the Swallows hearken to his plea, and caught by the inevitable frost and snow, perish miserably. Sir Walter Scott sees in the proposed migration a general agreement by the Catholics at a grand consult held at the Savoy that they either remain quietly at home or settle abroad. Professor Bredvold, however, sees no reason for agreement with Scott that there was any "general consult" of the Catholics. He inclines to the opinion that "Dryden is referring not to one consultation of the Catholics at the Savoy in 1686, but to almost every consultation by Catholics since the accession of James II."113

In an argument of nearly one hundred lines the Hind takes

113Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, p. 182.
up the question of the Anglican Test, charging that the Panther has used unfair tactics in its application. The Panther replies by comparing the present situation of the Catholics to that of Aeneas in the epic of Vergil. They plead their ancient rights, but

will endeavor in succeeding space
Those household puppets on our hearths to place.\textsuperscript{114}

The Panther is forced to the admission that necessity compels her to uphold the Test:

Think not my judgment leads me to comply
With laws unjust, but hard necessity:\textsuperscript{115}

and the Hind, realizing the futility of all hope of readjusting the difficulty, since the Panther's "hour of grace had passed"\textsuperscript{116}, proceeds to the tale of the Buzzards.

The application of that fable to contemporary events is likewise simple. The recent move of the High Church Anglicans towards the Latitudinarians Dryden characterizes as base submission to the chief of all the Latitudinarians, Burnet, afterwards Bishop of Salisbury. The lesson of the fable is that the Buzzard (Burnet) will plunder (as is the nature of his kind) the Pigeons more effectually than their supposed enemies, the Poultry, possibly could do. The Doves repent, but too late:

\textsuperscript{114}The Hind and the Panther, III, ll. 779-80.

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., III, ll. 835-6.

\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., III, l. 893.
'Tis said the Doves repented, though too late. 
Become the smiths of their own foolish fate: 117

and the poem ends with what appears to be Dryden's prophecy of peaceful days for the Church of his adoption:

The Dame withdrew, and, wishing to her guest  
The peace of heaven, betook herself to rest:  
Ten thousand angels on her slumbers wait,  
With glorious visions of her future state. 118

Dryden, "naturally inclined to scepticism", had ceased to be satisfied as soon as he had begun to reflect seriously on religious matters. As the close of Religio Laici, his first purely religious poem, he had been unwilling to admit the claims of Infallibility made by the Catholic Church, though he did not hesitate to admit the desirability of "such an omniscient guide"; and though he had then accepted the Anglican Church as a Via Media, he had been fully conscious of the lack of necessary authority in her teachings.

He examined the claims of the Catholic Church, found them just, and took the only step possible for the sincere inquirer—submission to that Church, though he fully realized what his conversion would mean in the way of privations and sufferings.

117 Ibid., III, ll. 1267-8.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER 1688

A point which Macaulay fails to mention, or quite probably chooses to ignore, is that after the year 1688 Dryden remained a loyal Catholic in spite of the fact that a change would undoubtedly have been to his advantage. It has been argued that Dryden as a well-known convert to Catholicism would not have been welcome had he returned to the Anglican fold upon the accession of William and Mary. It will be shown that Dryden never had doubts as to the certainty of a welcome should he decide to recant; and it is beyond doubt that the Whigs, who, as Saintsbury says "were so desperately hard up for talent that Dorset when presenting Shadwell for the Laureateship, had to pay him the very left-handed compliment of saying, that if he were not the best poet he was at least the honestest", 119 would have welcomed him with open arms. In any case, a change of political allegiance was not, in the seventeenth century, an unpardonable offense.

In dedicating his translation of Father Bohours' *Life of St. Francis Xavier* to Mary of Modena, wife of James, Dryden had expressed the hope that a "son of prayers" would soon

make his advent to assure the longed-for Catholic succession. The birth of a son to Mary on June 10, 1688, momentarily raised the hopes expressed by the poet in Britannia Rediviva.

The true prophecy, however, was contained, not in the poem in praise of the infant prince, but in the Fable of the Swallows in the Third Part of The Hind and the Panther. The Revolution of 1688 was inevitable and Dryden was one of the first victims of the changes wrought by it. The flight of James and the accession of William and Mary reduced the poet to a state bordering on that of actual want, for his positions of Poet-laureate and Historiographer-royal were handed over—the former to his arch-enemy Shadwell, and the latter to Thomas Rymer—and with them went the pensions enjoyed under James. The fall from power of the Stuarts and the consequent unpopularity of the Catholic religion made it utterly impossible for Dryden to attempt retaliation on the numerous enemies who took advantage of his disgrace in high places to level at him their petty attacks.

That the financial support recently withdrawn was badly needed we learn from repeated references in his letters at this period. Thus in April, 1695:

The paying of Ned Sheldon the fifty pounds put upon me this speed in translating. (Book VI of the Aeneid).

120Scott-Saintsbury, Vol. XVIII, p. 120.
And in June of the same year:

'Tis now high time for me to think of my second subscription.\textsuperscript{121}

and later:

When that (Book VIII of the Aeneid) is finished, I expect fifty pounds.\textsuperscript{122}

That he was assured the needed support would have been forthcoming had he been willing to pay the price demanded is also apparent from his letters, notably the reply to his publisher's suggestion that he dedicate his translation of Virgil to King William. The refusal was due to the poet's unwillingness to be party to anything that might possibly be construed into a recognition of William as the lawful King. Referring to this scheme of Tonson (his publisher), he writes to his sons at Rome:

He has missed of his design in the dedication, though he had prepared the book for it; for, in every figure of Aeneas he has caused him to be drawn like King William, with a hooked nose.\textsuperscript{123}

Discretion forbade a more outspoken refusal than that contained in the poem \textit{Lady's Song}, but there can be no doubt that Pan and Syrinx meant James and Mary of Modena.

To his sons he remarks again on the disadvantages attend-

\textsuperscript{121}Ibid., p. 121.
\textsuperscript{122}Ibid., p. 123.
\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., p. 133.
ant upon his profession of Catholicism:

You know the profits might have been more; but neither my conscience nor my honor would suffer me to take them; but I can never repent of my constancy, since I am thoroughly persuaded by the justice of the cause for which I suffer. 124

The Virgil translation was made possible eventually by public subscription, a method to be followed with even greater success by Pope with his translation of Homer.

From a passage in the Essay on Satire it would appear that some faith may be placed in the story which would credit his old patron Dorset with having so great an appreciation of the steadfastness of the Poet that he recompensed him from his own pocket.

In the poem addressed to Congreve in 1694 he gives evidence of having sensed the inevitability of neglect to be followed by attack:

Already I am worn with cares and age,
And just abandoning the ungrateful stage.
Unprofitably kept at Heaven's expense,
I live a rent-charge on his providence. 125

The closing appeal to the youthful Congreve is touching:

Be kind to my remains; and oh defend,
Against your judgment, your departed friend.
Let not the insulting foe my fame pursue;
But shade those laurels which descend on you;
And take for tribute what those lines express;

124 Ibid., pp. 134-5.
You merit more; nor could my love do less.¹²⁶

As an act of revenge on Dryden for his refusal to give it his support, the new government ordered a public production of The Spanish Friar—a play of his notorious for its attacks on the priesthood of the Catholic Church. Unfortunately for the designs of his enemies, they lost sight of the fact that in addition to its attacks on the Catholic priesthood, the play also contained several very uncomplimentary references to daughters who usurped the thrones of their fathers. Mary's embarrassment on the opening night of the revival formed the subject of conversation for many days.

Dryden had said, in Absalom and Achitophel, that "priests of all religions are the same"; hence, after the revival of The Spanish Friar, he felt that he must either defend or apologize for his creation of Father Dominic. An apology was, however, far from his intention. He believed that priests of all religions had an important duty to perform, but that history bears witness that under stress of temptation, members of the clergy too frequently capitulated to an unlawful desire for wealth and for political power. The Catholic clergy he held responsible for the Revolution of 1688 and the consequent sufferings of the faithful; the Nonconformist ministers he

¹²⁶Ibid., ll. 72-7.
accused of submitting to the Earl of Shaftesbury, the enemy of all religion; and the Anglican clergy he censured for their bigotry in opposing the policy of toleration advocated by James II. Hence, in Don Sebastian, he created the character of Mufti Abdalla, a Mohammedan priest filled with those vices which he considered the invariable concomitants of the clerical profession when the spiritual side was neglected.

Perhaps the most nearly correct statement of the position of Dryden in the closing years of his career is to be found in the dedication of Amphitryon to Sir William Leveson Gower:

(I) endeavor to pitch on such only as have been pleased to own me in this ruin of my small fortune, who, though they are of a contrary opinion themselves, yet they blame not me for adhering to a lost cause and for judging for myself what I cannot choose but judge, so long as I am a patient sufferer and not a disturber of the government. 127

CHAPTER V

THE MORALITY OF JOHN DRYDEN

Dryden's religious sincerity, called into question because of his successive adherences to the tenets of Puritanism, of Anglicanism, and of Catholicism, has likewise been the occasion of much discussion because, it has been claimed, the moral character of his life and works was inconsistent with a sincere belief in any form of Christianity.

It was Dryden's misfortune to have attained fame in an age when literary criticism all too frequently degenerated into an attempt to belittle the talents or to besmirch the moral character of one's adversary. We are told that personal hatred so embittered literary contest that victory was tasteless unless gained by the disgrace and degradation of the antagonist. Hence his morality was questioned by his contemporaries—men who were his foes for political or other selfish reasons.

With the exception of those of Shadwell and Settle, Dryden ignored even the most virulent of attacks, for so great was his acknowledged superiority that libels, no matter how virulent, did little damage to his reputation. He, therefore, deemed it inadvisable to concentrate his efforts upon insignificant attackers, as he would thereby confer upon them
a greater claim to immortality than could their own most bitter lampoons.

Dryden's marriage to Lady Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Earl of Berkshire, was the first event to bring forth the attacks on the morality of the Poet. "Dryden's life", writes Green, "was that of a libertine. His marriage to a woman of fashion who was yet more dissolute than himself only gave the spur to new debaucheries". Of the charges against Lady Elizabeth there is no evidence beyond that contained in a letter of hers to the Earl of Chesterfield, and of this Saintsbury says, "the evidence it contains can satisfy only minds previously made up;" and the sole documentary evidence against Dryden himself is to be found in an anonymous letter printed in the Gentleman's Magazine, forty-five years after the death of the poet. Its author claims: "I have eat tarts with him and Mrs. Reeve at Mulberry Garden"—not in itself a damaging piece of evidence. The Mrs. Reeve mentioned was an actress who played the part of Amarillis in The Rehearsal and died a religious.

From his occasional uncomplimentary references to the married state, as in the case of the Epistle to My Honored

John Dryden, enemies have been quick to argue unhappiness in his own married life; but in the letters of Dryden and his wife to their sons there is an abundance of affectionate solicitude and a complete absence of mention of domestic unhappiness.

However free from immorality Dryden's life may have been, there is no purpose served in denying that his works do not boast a similar freedom. Some partition of his guilt may be found in the condition of the stage in his day, in the vitiated tastes of the theater-going public, in the example of his fellow play-writers, and in the natural reaction in language against the austerity of the Puritans; but his greatest defense lies in the fact that after his conversion he had the good sense to acknowledge his guilt in this respect.

When the conditions of the times drew from Jeremy Collier his now famous protest against play-writers in general, and against Dryden in particular, the latter made no defense but readily admitted his transgression:

I shall say the less of Mr. Collier, because in many things he has taxed me justly; and I have pleaded guilty to all thoughts and expressions of mine, which can be truly argued of obscenity, profanemess, or immorality, and retrace them. If he be my enemy, let him triumph; if he be my friend, he will be glad of my repentance. It becomes me not to draw my pen in defence of a bad, cause when I have so often drawn it for a good one. Yet it were not difficult to prove that in many places he has perverted my meaning by
his glosses, and interpreted my words into blasphemy or bawdry of which they were not guilty.\textsuperscript{131}

In writing his short poem addressed to Mr. Motteux, he says:

\begin{quote}
What I have loosely or profanely writ
Let them to fires, their due desert, commit.\textsuperscript{132}
\end{quote}

This is not the reaction of a man who was guilty of the charges brought against Dryden.

Again, in the \textit{Preface to the Fables}, written near the end of his life, he touches on this question and gives unmistakable proof that the accusation that there was no improvement in the tone of his writings after the conversion is untrue:

\begin{quote}
May I have leave to do myself justice (since my enemies will not allow me so much as to be a Christian, or a moral man), may I have leave to inform my reader that I have confined my choice to such Tales of Chaucer as savor nothing of immodesty. If I had desired more to please than to instruct, the Reeve, the Miller...would have procured me as many friends and readers as there are beaux and ladies of pleasure in the town. But I will no more offend against good manners: I am sensible, as I ought to be, of the scandal I have given by my loose writings; and make what reparation I am able by this public acknowledgment. If anything of this nature, or of profaneness, be crept into these poems, I am so far from defending it, that I disown it.\textsuperscript{133}
\end{quote}

And in the following year, while criticizing the looseness of

\textsuperscript{132}\textit{Poem to Mr. Motteux}, Vol. XI, p. 67, ll. 15-6.
\textsuperscript{133}\textit{Preface to the Fables}, p. 231.
Mrs. Aphra Behn, he admits

I am the last man who ought in justice to arraign her, who have been myself too much of a libertine in most of my poems; which I would be well contented I had either time to purge, or to see fairly burned. 134

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CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

The growth in spiritual life of John Dryden, the foremost convert to Catholicism of Seventeenth Century England, has been traced from error to truth and has been shown to have been the logical result of experience and reflection. Born a puritan, he shook off the cumbering fetters of the religion of his fathers; and for a time, because he possessed an "innate tendency to scepticism" in matters philosophical, he "followed false lights". Convinced that his adherence to the principles of Scepticism would but lead to a labyrinth of perplexing doubts and unresolved problems, he embraced for a time the tenets of Anglicanism as a comparatively safe refuge from the noise of the Sectaries.

But Dryden was always a friend to authority, whether in religion or in the state. For the state he believed in monarchy, be the monarch Cromwell, Charles II, or the Catholic James II; and in religious matters he realized the absolute need of a power whose authority should be indisputable when there arose question of the correct interpretation of the Scriptures. To infallible authority in such matters the Anglican Church would not, for she could not, lay claim. Hence it was that examination of the tenets of the
one Church laying claim to the possession of such authority convinced him that here, after all, was the haven he had longed for and had sought so long. Having once satisfied himself of the justice of her claims, he took the one road open to a man of Dryden's nature—the road to Rome.

Then when trial and persecution made loyalty to his newly-adopted faith a hindrance to continued enjoyment of the life that was his by virtue of his official positions, he steadfastly refused to deny the creed which his reason had told him was the real teaching of the Master. But conviction as to the truth of the doctrines of the Catholic Church was not in itself enough. Newman has said that no man is willing to die for a syllogism, and our poet was no exception to that rule even though the "martyrdom" in his case would fall far short of the stake. Reason, as shown in the pre-conversion Religio Laici, led to faith; but faith begins where reason ends. Many a man has been convinced of the truths of Catholicism but has been denied something essential for sincere entrance to the fold. That Dryden received that mysterious and incalculable thing—the gift of faith—we may hold as practically certain, for it is difficult to imagine that The Hind and the Panther, in which are resolved the problems of Religio Laici, could have been the work of any but a sincere Catholic—certainly not, as has been charged, of a man who was a
Catholic for sordid motives.
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Morton D. Zabel, Ph.D.  
June 3, 1935

James J. Young, A.M.  
June 5, 1935