Mr Walkington’s Verses to my Lord Cranbourne
Joan Williams

The following poem, written in an early seventeenth century hand on one side of a single-sheet document recently discovered among the Dean & Chapter muniments in Lincolnshire Archives Office (Fig. 1), appears to be an autograph copy of a hitherto unknown piece by Thomas Walkington (1576-1621). Walkington, born at Thornton Curtis in Lincolnshire, owes what little fame he possesses to a ‘curious volume that may be regarded as a forerunner of Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy’. Three other printed works, all of a strictly religious nature, are credited to him: Salomon’s Sweete harpe... preached of late at Thetford (Cambridge, 1608); An Exposition of the two first verses of the sixth chapter to the Hebrews, in a form of a Dialogue (London, 1609); and Rabboni, Mary Magdalen’s Tears of Sorrow... (London, 1620).  

Walkington was the eldest child and only surviving son of Thomas Walkington (c.1548-1620), vicar of Thornton Curtis (where all his 10 children were baptised) from 1576 to 1601, and his wife, Elizabeth Kennington. Walkington’s father was subsequently vicar of North Kelsey from 1602 and of Barrow from c.1616 to his death. Thomas junior entered St. John’s College Cambridge in 1593, progressing to B.A. in 1596, M.A. in 1600, B.D. in 1608 and D.D. in 1613; he was a Fellow of his college from 1602. He remained in Cambridge until 1615, although he was vicar of Raunds, Northamptonshire, from 1608, and rector of Waddingham St. Mary, Lincolnshire, from 1610. In 1615 he became rector of Fulham, Middlesex, where he died unmarried in 1621.  

Walkington may therefore be thought of as pursuing an academic career in Cambridge for most of his life.

The present poem consists of twenty-three heroic couplets. The first twenty-eight lines illustrate the combined proverbial themes of good stuff in little bundles and great oaks from little acorns grow. From line 28 the tone shifts to a moralising recommendation of the virtues of moderation and temperance (‘Ne quid nimis’). The last eight lines form a rather quizzical envoi. This, together with the poem’s profusion of classical and scholarly allusions and references, and the author’s attempts at whimsical paradox (e.g. line 27), mark it out as a donnish (if not quite Donnesh) production. At the same time it is very personal, addressed to a particular associate who is to be consoled (presumably) for shortness of stature, and to whom the author feels himself in a position to offer avuncular moral advice. But the relationship seems also to have been one of considerable intimacy, as is revealed in the tone of the envoi and in the use of ‘sweet’ as a term of affection in line 25.

The person to whom these verses were addressed is known, if one is to believe the annotation written in another seventeenth century hand on the reverse of the document: ‘Mr Walkington’s verses to my Lord Cranbourne’. Viscount Cranbourne was the title borne by the eldest son of the Earl of Salisbury, and by the first Earl, Robert Cecil, from the creation of the title in 1604 to his elevation to the earldom in 1605. It is tempting to think that he might have been the Cranbourne who was so familiar with Walkington, especially as the former is well known to have been short, nicknamed by Elizabeth I ‘her little man’ and by James I ‘his little Bogle’. That Robert Cecil might have been addressed by anyone, let alone another man, as ‘sweet’, might seriously challenge the general assumptions about his friendliness and his apparently colourless personality.

Sadly it is much more probable that the poem’s subject was Robert’s son William, born in 1591, who was Viscount Cranbourne from 1605 until 1612 when he succeeded to the earldom. William entered St. John’s College Cambridge in 1602, and was apparently still in residence there in November 1606. As a junior member of Walkington’s college he could well have come under the author’s personal scholarly patronage, and the latter might have been permitted to assume the moral superiority which the poem implies, despite his younger friend’s social eminence. It is also possible that William could have inherited his father’s lack of inches.

If this identification is correct, the poem may be dated between 1602 and 1606, and its annotation between 1605 and 1612, all within the period of Walkington’s residence at Cambridge. Its composition therefore probably preceded that of his printed works. How the document came to rest among the archives of the Dean & Chapter of Lincoln remains a mystery.

The present article does not pretend to be a definitive edition of the poem: no attempt has been made to identify all its allusions and quotations, or to provide a full critical appreciation. But I hope that others with more time and better resources at their disposal may be encouraged to do so, and perhaps even to make a study of Walkington and his work. As far as I can discover this is virgin territory.

NOTES
1. Lincolnshire Archives Office (subsequently L.A.O. & D.E.C A/4/10/10). I am indebted to Dr Nicholas Bennett for bringing this document to my attention.

2. Theological Rules to guide us in the Understanding and Practice of Holy Scriptures... also Aiginita Sacra, Holy Riddles... (London, 1615) listed by the D.N.B. is now attributed to Thomas Wilson. I am grateful to Dr Margarita Stocker for advice on Walkington’s publications.


4. Vennt’s entry on Thomas Walkington, senior, does not mention his presentation to North Kelsey in 1602 (L.A.O. P.D. 1602/23); endorsed with additional biographical details and only conjectures that he was vicar of Barrow (he signs the registers from c.1616). He was buried at Barrow on 4 June 1620. His library accounted for a substantial portion of his goods and chattels, appraised at £173 17s. 3d. on 6 June. ‘In his Study / Item all the books therein / Item there one table and frame one stool and a desk viij’ (L.A.O. Inv.123/311). His will (L.A.O. L.C.C. Wills 1620/107) dated 31 October 1619, contains the following bequest: ‘I give to my sonne doctor Walkington... all my books except these excepted, to Elisabeth my wife one volume of Mr Bacon’s works in English and to my daughter Elisabeth Morris my englishe bible redd covered and bound and such other English books as her said brother shall think fittting for her. I give my said daughter more Mr Calvins lectures in English upon Jobe... the little table and frame in my study and the buffett stolee yr also and the desk in the study.’


6. Apparently William Cecil, if he is the Lord Cranbourne in question, did not benefit from Thomas Walkington’s advice: Clarendon in his History of the Rebellion, quoted in the Peerage, says of him: ‘No man so great a tyrant in his country; and was less swayed by any motives of justice or honour. He was a man of no words, except in hunting and hawking, in which he only knew how to behave himself’.
To εν πράττεν καὶ ὑγιάνειν

1. The tender leasick plant now springing low
   Will erst into a stately cedar grow.
   The spark that whilom did in embers lie
   Will in a flame mount up to the crystal sky.

5. The Cestridge, crocodile, and elephant:
   First least, will of ther porsty stature Vaunt;
   First letters framed are, then words, then wit,
   Words are the clapsings of our letters wroth.
   The smaller drops that clouds weep from above,

10. Into an inundation once may proove:
    The stilken thried y' scarcely now is spun.
    Will to an ample circle eft be wound:
    When Romulus first lay by the groundwork ston
    What was then Romon, though ancient Romone be gone.

15. Nature, arithmetick that gins with one,
    By Vaury will gaine a millione.
    Small things grow great, so being small
    Are great, and things are great being tall.
    Less men by criticism are ever seen

20. More valousious and more witty to have beene:
    Vigil in Priva
    Tydess in Homer, if thou crede it,
    Vilius Tydess, qui si quid credis Homero,
    Astyanax body laid, a Hector witt:
    Ingenio pugnae, corpore parvis erat,
    Th'Hydralin hunny be, the tolaun amant,
    Astyanis

25. Disparo act (sweet) then of thy littlegood
    A little loth may be great Robin hood.
    Thow't small, though great, yet greater shall thow bee,
    If learning thow embrace and ply.
    Tread in the craggie paths of industry

30. Yet Ne quid nimis let thy motto bee.
    Apelles past no day withouten line,
    S0 Zeno sometimes chard himself wth wine.
    Eat not too much, ne drink, sleep not too long
    These do the longer life the wit most wrong.

35. Plate the skip of life with all discretion
    Ev'ry guide it by the pole star of religion.
    Let honour be the prize, vertue the waye
    So shal thy name and honour last for aye.
    Parson my rulre will my harsher title,

40. My pen this virgin paper would defile:
    Yet for a paralyse as is most meet
    It doth permanece in this paper sheet
    wilt kiss the hand, these verses that did weave?
    The kiss my hand, and now le me take my leave.

45. Post hast I write: I end: if thou ask, why?
    My cand'st'st stop, my Hippocrene's drye.

Yours, if versus: Thomas Walkington

NOTES TO THE POEM

The Greek title (source, if any, not identified) means 'well-being and health'; my thanks are due to Canon P. Hammond for this, and for the translation.

The author's Latin marginalia are placed in the text as close as possible to their relative positions in the manuscript.

Apelles: a Greek painter of the time of Alexander the Great, used as the type of a master artist.

Astyanax: the young son of Hector, the hero of Troy, killed after the sack of the city by being thrown from the battlements, and therefore permanently a child, for poetic purposes.

Hippocrene: a fountain on Mount Helicon, sacred to the Muses; metaphorically it's waters connote poetic inspiration.

Hyblaean: pertaining to Hybla in Sicily, celebrated in classical times for the honey produced in the neighbourhood.

Tydessus: one of the seven against Thebes in Greek myth, and the father of Diomedes, who played a prominent part on the Greek side in the Trojan war.

Zenon: probably Zeno of Citium, c. 300 B.C., founder of the Stoic school of philosophy.