

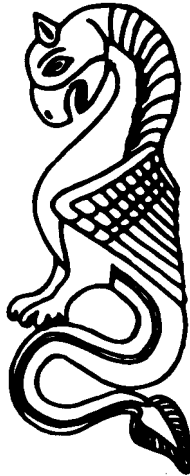
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ALEXANDER POPE'S AND SIR WILLIAM TRUMBULL'S TRANSLATIONS OF BOETHIUS

By BRIAN S. DONAGHEY

The major facts about Pope's youthful association with Sir William Trumbull are familiar to students of Pope's literary development. However, though the friendship endured over a decade, it remains shadowy and undefined, owing to the paucity of documentation beyond a few letters passed between them, and some references by Pope and others. Anything new that can be learnt about the friendship is therefore welcome as clarifying Pope's relationship with Sir William. Pope made Trumbull's acquaintance during his most formative years, and there is no doubt that the old gentleman took a genuine and even a fatherly interest in his education and health. It is even possible that Sir William was the first to begin the relationship.

This brief note presents further documentary evidence of the friendship, elucidates some of the influences exerted on Pope, and indicates the influence he himself had begun to exert even at an early age: for, as will appear later, it must have been in 1703 or early 1704 that the friendship began. A résumé of what is known about the relations between Pope and Sir William may be useful for estimating the significance of the documents presented below.

Sir William Trumbull (1639 - 1716) rounded off a full political life in the position of Secretary of State from 1695 to 1697; in 1698 he retired from public life, withdrawing to Binfield and refusing further appointments offered to him. Some observers characterized him as a man of moderate opinions, a cautious man, perhaps not quite equal to his high position.¹ Yet he was a thorough humanist, a trait which influenced Pope for the good. Pope's famous line, "The proper study of Mankind is Man," probably owes its origin to the attitudes he early acquired from Sir William.²

Concerning the other attitude adopted by Trumbull in these years, the praise of a retired life spent in edifying pursuits, it is doubtful that Pope did much more than pay lip-service to it. Except in moments of exasperation (of which there were not a few in his life), when he sometimes wished to withdraw from the turmoil of literary life, this attitude may be regarded as having little influence on him.³ Whatever influence it did exert could not have had an adverse effect, for Sir William's attitude was not due to bitterness or misanthropy. There was little of the real *contemptus mundi* in it, and Sir William still cultivated the friendship of a select few.

Trumbull had known Dryden, who claimed that his translation of the *Aeneid* owed much to Sir William's encouragement. Even before his retirement Trumbull was known as somewhat of a Maecenas. Though in religious beliefs he was Protestant, he recognised literary worth when he saw it, and did not allow the prevailing spirit of religious controversy and sectarianism

to blight his friendships based on common literary interests. Thus it was that when the Papes removed to Binfield about 1700, Sir William began to show an interest in this serious boy just entering his teens, whose desire for learning was manifested by his steady application to Latin and Greek, and even by his firm resolution to go to London to master French and Italian, as he did in 1703. Spence's record of a remark of Pope's shows the strength of the friendship:

It was while I lived in the Forest, that I got so well acquainted with Sir William Trumbull, who loved very much to read and talk of the classics in his retirement. We used to take a ride out together, three or four days in the week, and at last, almost every day.⁴

Of all the friends Pope made in those early years, Trumbull had perhaps the greatest influence, at least at the beginning of his association with the young poet. Through him Pope met others in the world of letters, and thus began his literary career. Soon Sir William is to be found suggesting ideas for verses and examining Pope's work critically. Pope dedicated "Spring" from his *Pastorals* to Sir William; but as he gained more experience in society and in literary affairs, Trumbull's influence on him declined. Pope might even be accused of being unwilling to recognize his debt to his friend, even though he always had a great regard for him.⁵

We are accustomed to recognizing Sir William's influence on Pope: but what of the other side of the picture? Might not Sir William have been stimulated and influenced by his pupil in the interchange of ideas? The documents described below seem to indicate that this is quite possible.

In the Brotherton Collection at the University of Leeds, classified as MS Lt. 15, are two papers sold together as Lot 577 at Messrs. Sotheby's sale of 30th July 1963, formerly the property of the Marquess of Downshire.⁶ They are (1) an autograph manuscript by Pope, unsigned, of his verse translation of Book III, metre 9, of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius; and (2) a letter to Sir William Trumbull from Charles Bertie, dated 19 February 1703, on the two inner pages of which is Sir William's unsigned draft of his own verse translation of the same metre.⁷

Since these two papers are associated, it is interesting to consider them together, for as a more detailed description of their physical appearance will show, some of the circumstances surrounding their composition can be inferred. Thus it seems likely that Pope and Sir William studied the work of Boethius together; that when Pope wrote his translation of Book III, metre 9, Sir William regarded it so favourably that he asked Pope for a fair copy for himself; and that Sir William was then stimulated to attempt his own verse translation under the influence of Pope's rendering, with reminiscences of Dryden, as will also appear.

As a starting-point towards establishing the likelihood of this hypothesis, the observation may be made that Pope's acquaintance with Boethius is not surprising. The *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, written in A.D. 525 in his prison at Pavia by a man who was a brilliant scholar but an unfortunate politician, was deservedly ranked among the most popular books of medieval times. By the age of Pope it had been accepted as a standard text for study in schools and universities. Sir William had probably come across it in his youth, at a time when competent editors like Sitzmann and Vallinus

Boetius, de Consol. Philos. Lib. 3. Met. 9. p. 99.

Thou who did'st form, and form'd dost still sustain
 The radiant Heavens, and Earth, and ambient Main:
 Eternal Reason, whose presiding Soul
 Informs great Nature, and directs the Whole:
 Who wert, e'er Time his rapid Race began,
 And bad'st the years in long Procession run:
 Who fix'd Thyself, amidst the rolling Frame,
 Gav'st All things to be chang'd, yet ever art the same!
 Oh teach the Mind i' *Ethereal* Height to rise;
 And view, familiar, in her native Skies,
 The Source of Good; Thy Splendor to Descrie;
 And on Thyself fix her undazzl'd Eye!
 Enliven the dull Mass of mortal Clay;
 Shine thro' the Soul; and drive its Clouds away;
 For Thou art Light; in Thee the Righteous find
 Calm Rest, and soft Serenity of Mind:
 Thee we regard alone, to Thee we tend,
 At once our Great Original, and End,
 At once our Strength, our ~~Admirer~~ Guide, our Way,
 Our utmost Bound, and our Eternal Stay!

Pope's autograph.

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University of Leeds.

MS Lt. 15.

were making it better understood than ever before, and — a matter perhaps important in Sir William's opinion — rescuing it from the charge of barbarous Latinity levelled against it by all but the most enlightened of Renaissance scholars. If Pope had not already encountered such a well-known book, Sir William would surely have been the means of introducing it to him.

It is, moreover, a book that Pope would have found to his liking: imbued with a spirit of a noble stoicism, the epitome of private moral virtues, and written for the express purpose of reinforcing faith in God by revealing the rational basis for a theistic belief. It is a work which, for all its antiquity, would sound strangely modern to Pope's ear; for it discusses questions particularly relevant to his times, in terms that such moralists as Samuel Clarke and Bishop Butler would not have considered old-fashioned. Perhaps Pope became familiar with the whole book. Certainly he could not fail to notice that Book III, metre 9, which deals at short length with God's creation and government of the world as a preliminary to further philosophical disquisition, had always been considered as the crux of the whole work, and as one of the most fervent invocations to the deity in Western literature. The sincerity of purpose of this book, no less than its author's eclectic philosophy, has had a great influence throughout its existence. It must therefore be taken into account as a definite force helping to shape Pope's attitude to life, at an age when it could have its greatest effect on the awakening moral conscience.⁸

Pope's motive, then, for attempting to put part of this book into his own words is quite evident. However, further investigation into the circumstances of the composition of Pope's translation is warranted. It is no news to students of Pope that he made this translation, for some years ago the late Norman Ault showed that Pope included it among other poems of his in a miscellany he edited in 1717.⁹ It has since been reprinted in the Twickenham edition, with variants supplied from an autograph manuscript discovered later.¹⁰ The poem has been tentatively dated not later than 1710; but, for reasons that will soon appear, it can be dated much earlier, in 1703 or 1704. The autograph manuscript described in this article is not the one printed in the Twickenham edition (which has been lost sight of since 1950, and is now known only in Ault's transcript), since it differs from the transcript both substantively and in certain accidentals of spelling and punctuation. Neither the autograph manuscript nor the manuscript from which Ault transcribed his copy is dated, but a comparison of the readings which the autograph manuscript shares with Ault's transcript and the text of 1717 makes it probable that this manuscript represents a middle stage between Pope's first draft and his final published text.

The Brotherton autograph manuscript consists of a small sheet of paper (167 x 112 mm.) written on one side only. The poem is complete in a title and twenty lines, and is evidently meant to be a fair copy. From the circumstance of its being associated with the Trumbull item, it appears likely to have been written for Sir William. The handwriting is a youthful version, without blot or erasure, of Pope's famous "printing" hand, which he used regularly for the manuscripts he circulated among friends before revising his poems for publication, and for the fair copy to be sent to the printer. The beauty of this writing, italic in appearance and so different from his

usual style, has been remarked upon by several of his contemporaries, and this specimen is no exception.¹¹

Sir William's autograph presents a marked contrast, for it is plainly his draft of his own verse translation. It is written in twenty-three lines on the right-hand inner page of a letter addressed "For Sr. W^m Trumball at his house in Gerard Street," the text of which is as follows:

Saturday Februy 19th 1703

Sir

The Last time I did my self the honour to wait on you you desired mee to Lett you know when y^e Duke of Leeds came to Town, & saw Company, his Grace came Last night, & receives all visitants this afternoon, & so on for ten days, I am

Dear Sir,

Your most Obed^t humble Serv^t

Cha: Bertie.

Several signs show that it is a draft, notably a number of lines and words crossed out and revised. Sir William's hand, as one would expect, is more reminiscent than Pope's of seventeenth-century script both in the formation of letters and in orthography; but he appears also to have written hastily, as if to set down the words before inspiration vanished. However, he returned to his draft later. With a different pen he wrote two couplets along the right-hand margin of the page, and on the left-hand inner page he wrote thirteen further lines as additions and revisions.

The fact that this draft is written on the back of a letter is important for two reasons. First, it is a further proof of the haste of writing. Pope, as is well known, used the space on the backs of letters to write his drafts, and attracted attention and even derision for doing so; but it is difficult to imagine an affluent man like Sir William being reduced to this unless in his eagerness he snatched the scrap of paper nearest to him, which happened to be a letter lying handy. Secondly, it makes possible a fairly close dating of both Pope's and Sir William's translations. This letter is not an important one of permanent value: it is ephemeral in nature, and having served its purpose would, in the normal course of events, soon have been thrown away. Consequently one could advance a plausible argument that it cannot have been long after 19 February 1703 when Sir William wrote his draft, though there can be no positive proof of this.

Furthermore, if we believe from the nature of Pope's manuscript that it was written for Sir William to keep, we must also date Pope's poem at roughly the same time, in the early part of 1703. At the very latest both poems might be dated in late 1703 or early 1704, after Pope had returned from London, where he had gone to study, as previously mentioned. It is surely not by chance that these two manuscripts are associated together, for everything in their nature and appearance indicates a close linkage between them.

Printed below are the texts, reproduced as they stand, and followed by a few notes of explanation:

1. *Pope's Translation*

Boethius, *de Consol. Philos.* Lib.3. Met.9. p.99.

Thou who did'st form, and form'd dost still sustain
 The radiant Heav'ns, and Earth, and ambient Main:
 Eternal Reason, whose presiding Soul
 Informs great Nature, and directs the Whole:
 Who wert, e'er Time his rapid Race begun,
 And bad'st the Years in long Procession run:
 Who fix'd Thyself, amidst the rolling Frame,
 Gav'st All things to be chang'd, yet ever art the same!
 Oh teach the Mind t'Ætherial Height to rise;
 And view, familiar, in her Native Skies,
 The Source of Good; Thy Splendor to descry;
 And on Thyself fix her undazzl'd Eye!
 Enliven the dull Mass of mortal Clay;
 Shine thro' the Soul; and drive its Clouds away;
 For Thou art Light; in Thee the Righteous find
 Calm Rest, and soft Serenity of Mind:
 Thee we regard alone, to Thee we tend,
 At once our Great Original, and End,
 At once our Strength, our Aid, our Guide, our Way,
 Our utmost Bound, and our Eternal Stay!

While it is left to the reader to compare this with the version in the Twickenham edition, one or two points may be noted. First, Pope does not translate the whole poem (nor does Sir William). His verses correspond only to the very beginning and end, 11. 1-3 and 22-28 of the whole;¹² no doubt the long middle section, based as it is on Platonic and Neoplatonic cosmology, was omitted because Pope felt it unsuitable for working into verse-form — though we could be uncharitable to Pope and ask whether he really understood its obscurities. Secondly, if he has omitted some lines, he has on the other hand expanded those he has used, as will readily be seen by comparison with the lines quoted in the footnote. Thirdly, though a full discussion of the influence of Boethius on Pope cannot be entered into here, one probable example may be noted. While Pope gave Sir William none of the credit for *Windsor Forest*, in one section of the poem (in the first half, written in 1704) he compares him to Atticus, in his portrait of whom there seem to be verbal echoes of his translation of Boethius, and of other parts of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. These verses are as follows:

Happy the Man whom this bright Court Approves,
 His Sov'reign favours, and his Country loves;
 Happy next him who to these Shades retires,
 Whom Nature charms, and whom the Muse inspires,
 Whom humbler Joys of home-felt Quiet please,
 Successive Study, Exercise and Ease.
 He gathers Health from Herbs the Forest yields.
 And of their fragrant Physick spoils the Fields:
 With Chymic Art exalts the Min'ral Pow'rs,

And draws the Aromatic Souls of Flow'rs.
Now marks the Course of rolling Orbs on high;
O'er figur'd Worlds now travels with his Eye.
Of ancient Writ unlocks the learned Store,
Consults the Dead, and lives past Ages o'er.
Or wandring thoughtful in the silent Wood,
Attends the Duties of the Wise and Good,
T'observe a Mean, be to himself a Friend,
To follow Nature, and regard his End.
Or looks on Heav'n with more than mortal Eyes,
Bids his free Soul expatiate in the Skies,
Amid her Kindred Stars familiar roam,
Survey the Region, and confess her Home!
Such was the Life great *Scipio* once admir'd,
Thus *Atticus*, and *Trumbal* thus retir'd.

To mention Trumbull in the poem was a compliment; but if Pope's terms are really verbal echoes of Boethius, and not mere conventional constructions, the compliment becomes more subtle. Moreover, the reference to Scipio gives rise to another interesting speculation, as will soon appear.

2. *Sir William's Translation*

(a) Right-hand page:

Paraphrase o Boetius. Ô qui perpetuâ etc.
 Thou who didst make y^e Heavn & Earths vast Frame
 [altered to "O God who madst"]
 And by Eternal Wisdom rul'st y^e same!
 Thou, who vnmoovd bidst things in order run,
 ["makst all in motion" written above]
 Till Ages passt & Time it self begun. &c.
 Ô grant my Heav'n-born soul may mount y^e skie
 [altered to "mind", re-altered to "soul"]
 And windg with pure Desire to Thee may flie.
 Thy all-Enlightening glories let me find
 That through y^e dark Recesses of my Mind;
 That my glad soul may find y^e souv'raign spring
 Whence all that's Good flows out to every thing;
 And no mean objects may my Thoughts remooove
 Fixt on y^e Beauties of Thy wondrous Love.
 Grant y^t this World, my former vain Delight,
 Still as I rise may lessen to my sight,
 Till y^e whole prospect does so little grow
 I wonder where we roll set here below.
 Throw off these drossy Particles of Earth
 From whence dark Clouds & vap^{rs} have y^eir Birth;
 O God, who dost in vnmixt Glorie dwell,

With thy resplendent Rayes these Mists dispell.
Thou art y^e Good Mans Rest, his Help, his Freind;
In Thee all things begin, to Thee they tend;
To Thee, y^e onely Way, y^e Guide, y^e End.

dryd.

Through all these earthly Limbs & gross Alloy
Of mortal members subject to decay
Thy Heavenly beams may shine a constant day.

+ May no contracted filth within remain
nor speck be left of each bestial stain.

Heek Lord of word, & raise this grovelling mind,
In Flesh, as in a Dungeon dark confin'd,
To join above its own ethereal kind.

From this coarse mixture of Terrestrial parts,
With Grief & Joy, Desire & Fear in parts,
Purge - all of Dregs; In thy appointed time
+ Wear off of filth of each contracted Crime.
Purge off of Rust committed

In the right-hand margin:

And through my purified Ideas shine
Serene Impressions of a stamp Divine.

They w^h thy Godlike Image fully blest,
Joy fills my [*figure of a heart*] & peace securs my breast.

(b) Left-hand page:

Dryd.

Through all these earthly Limbs & gross Allay
Of mortal Members subject to decay
Thy Heuenly beames may shine a constant day.

May no contracted Filth within remain
Nor speck be left of each habitual stain.

Speak Lord y^e Word, & raise this groveling mind,
In Flesh, as in a dungeon dark confind,
To joyn above its own *Etherial Kind*.

From this coarse mixture of Terrestrial parts,
W^{ch} Greif & Joy, desire & Fear imparts,
Purge all y^e dregs; In thy appointed Time
Wear off y^e Filth of each contracted Crime.

[altered to "Cleanse off y^e Rust"]

["contracted" altered to "committed"]

The influence of Pope is apparent in the incipit, where Sir William began as Pope did, though he then altered it. Other similarities can be detected, for example, Sir William's second couplet compared with Pope's third couplet, and the fact that Sir William translated the same lines as Pope did. But in many ways this poem is the more interesting of the two, especially since his translation is more expansive than Pope's. The style reminds one more of Dryden than of Pope, and though haste is shown in one or two couplets that seem to be incomplete or do not make adequate sense, Sir William appears to have caught the spirit of the Boethian invocation better than Pope did. Perhaps this is only to be expected; after all, at this stage of his life Sir William had greater experience in and deeper understanding of the classics, reinforced by many years spent in an age for the most part profoundly concerned with religious issues. This deeper reading in the classics is shown particularly by the verses on the page headed "Dryd." This contraction of course suggests Dryden's name, and investigation shows that Sir William has adapted Dryden's translation of the lines in Book VI of the *Aeneid* in which Virgil expounds the working of the Universe in terms principally Orphic and Platonic.¹³

Yet it may be more surprising that Sir William omitted the middle section of Boethius' poem than that Pope did. One can understand the

difficulties that Pope might have in comprehending it; but the meaning should have been clearer to Sir William. Pope's mention of Scipio in *Windsor Forest* suggests the possibility that Sir William may have been acquainted with that vast repository of medieval lore, the *Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis* of Macrobius, so often referred to by commentators on Boethius. If Sir William had glanced at Macrobius for an elucidation of the cosmology and natural science of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Pope may have been introduced to the book too, and may be making an indirect reference to it in *Windsor Forest*. However, this must remain a mere conjecture. As far as the middle section of Boethius' poem is concerned, even if Sir William was ignorant of the work of Macrobius and of the host of other commentators on Boethius, he might still have remembered the exposition of Pythagorean cosmology in Book XV of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and part of Book III of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (besides parts of other books), which would certainly have come into his classical studies. Moreover, both of these were translated by Dryden. If Sir William was willing to adapt some lines from Dryden's Virgil, why should he not have used the others as well?

Whatever problems remain to be solved with regard to these documents, they must at least be considered as of some importance from both the historical and the literary point of view. Not only do they throw light on a scantily documented period of Pope's life, but they reveal the genius and personality he possessed even at so early an age. It is no mean feat for a lad in his teens to prompt an elderly retired politician to unaccustomed literary efforts: one might even say, for a mere tyro to teach his mentor to express his humanism, not merely absorb more of it. That Pope could so teach, is a proof of his ripening genius; that Sir William was willing to be so taught, is further evidence of the sincerity and humility with which he faced life. Pope had a true friend and patron.

NOTES

- ¹ Cf. his remark in a letter to Pope: "I hope you will never condemn me of partiality, since I only swim with the stream, and approve what all men of good taste (notwithstanding the jarring of parties) must and do universally applaud." Letter of 6 March 1713/14; see *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. G. Sherburn (Oxford, 1956), I, 212.
- ² Cf. Pope's words in a letter to Sir William not long before his death: "I think to be a lover of one's Country is a glorious Elogy, but I do not think it so great an one as to be a lover of Mankind." Letter of 16 Dec. 1715; see Sherburn, *Correspondence*, I, 324. In his "Memorial List of Departed Relations and Friends" Pope called Sir William "amicus meus humanissimus a juvenilibus annis."
- ³ But one such moment seems to be shown in the following: "I sincerely wish myself with you, to contemplate the wonders of God in the firmament, rather than the madness of man on the earth. But I never had so much cause as now to complain of my poetical star, that fixes me at this tumultuous time, to attend the ginging of rymes and the measuring of syllables." From the same letter as the preceding quotation.

- ⁴ J. Spence, *Anecdotes, Observations and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. S. W. Singer (London, 1820), p.194.
- ⁵ For example, though the inspiration for *Windsor Forest* came partly from Sir William, partly from Lord Lansdowne, Pope gave credit for the poem only to the latter. Similarly he publicly thanked Addison for encouraging him to translate the *Iliad*, yet in fact Sir William had done the same years before.
- ⁶ I take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to Professor A. C. Cawley, of the School of English at Leeds University, who, knowing my interest in Boethian studies, mentioned these papers to me; and to Mr. David I. Masson, Deputy Keeper of the Brotherton Collection, who supplied me with photographic copies.
- ⁷ Though these manuscript papers once belonged to the present Marquess of Downshire, they are not mentioned in the *Historical MSS Commission: Report on the MSS of the Marquess of Downshire* (4 vols., 1924).
- ⁸ Readers of Pope unfamiliar with the work of Boethius will find good accounts in English in the following: H. F. Stewart, *Boethius: An Essay* (London, 1891); E. K. Rand, *Founders of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), and H. M. Barret, *Boethius: Some Aspects of his Times and Work* (Cambridge, 1940).
- ⁹ *Pope's Own Miscellany*, ed. N. Ault (London, 1935), a reprint of *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1717).
- ¹⁰ *Poems of Alexander Pope*, VI (Minor Poems, 1954), pp. 73-74, where the original is said incorrectly to be "lib.3 metrum I."
- ¹¹ Spence praises the typographical quality of Pope's hand as shown on a title-page (*Anecdotes*, ed. Singer, p.283); Jonathon Richardson, a friend of Pope's, wrote a similar encomium in his copy of the *Pastorals* in 1717 (quoted in Elwin and Courthope's edition of Pope, I, 239); and later Dr. Johnson, in his *Life of Pope*, contrasted Pope's fine hand with his ordinary writing. A good facsimile of a page of the fair copy for the *Essay on Criticism*, written in 1709, will be found in P. Simpson, *Proof-Reading in the Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1935), facing p.102.
- ¹² The original lines are as follows:

O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas,
 terrarum caelique sator, qui tempus ab aevo
 ire jubes, stabilisque manens das cuncta moveri, . . .
 . . . Da, pater, augustam menti conscendere sedem,
 da fontem lustrare boni, da luce reperta
 in te conspicuos animi defigere visus.
 Dissice terrenae nebulas et pondera molis
 atque tuo splendore mica; tu namque serenum,
 tu requies tranquilla piis, te cernere finis,
 principium, vector, dux, semita, terminus idem.

- ¹³ Dryden's *Aeneid*, Bk. VI, ll. 990-99, 1009-11 (731-38, 745-46 of the original):

As much as earthly limbs, and gross allay
 Of mortal members subject to decay,
 Blunt not the beams of heaven and edge of day.
 From this coarse mixture of terrestrial parts,
 Desire and fear by turns possess their hearts,
 And grief and joy: nor can the grovelling mind,
 In the dark dungeon of the limbs confined,
 Assert the native skies, or own its heavenly kind:
 Nor death itself can wholly wash their stains;
 But long-contracted filth e'en in the soul remains . . .
 . . . Then they are happy, when by length of time
 The scurf is worn away of each committed crime;
 No speck is left of their habitual stains.