Inn-Fields. Soon after this comedy had been performed, Lord Halifax, who was a great admirer of Betterton, re­quested Vanbrugh to finish the Provoked Wife, which had been shown to his lordship in an imperfect state, and give it to the other house. This solicitation he was unable to resist ; nor did his compliance give any offence to Sir Thomas Skipwith. The Provoked Wife was performed in 1697, and was received with as much applause as the Re­lapse. In the preface to that comedy he says, “ there is not one woman of real reputation in town, but, when she has read it impartially over in her closet, will find it so innocent, she’ll think it no affront to her prayer-book to lay it upon the same shelf.” This reminds us of Smollett, who flattered himself that in his novel of Peregrine Pickle there would not be found a single “ adventure, phrase, or insinuation, that could be construed by the most delicate reader into a trespass upon the rules of decorum!” Of the tendency of Vanbrugh's writings, a very different opinion was formed by the arch-enemy of the theatre, Jeremy Col­lier, who, in his celebrated View of the Immorality of the Stage, assigned him a conspicuous place among the offen­ders against religion and decency. Vanbrugh replied in “ A Short Vindication of the Relapse and the Provok'd Wife from Immorality and Prophaneness.” Lond. 1698, 8vo. This tract contains more wit than argument ; and the grave charge brought against him, Sir John Vanbrugh rebuts too much in the manner of Sir John Fa1staff, ano­ther ingenious sophist of equestrian rank. Although petu­lant enough, however, he was not angry, like some of the other antagonists of Collier. The world acknowledged that he had not written foolishly, and it gave him very little concern that, in the opinion of one rigid censor, he had written wickedly. Lefebvre-Cauchy has said in a few words all that can be urged in extenuation of his offence : “ Malheureusement la plus grande licence régnait alors sur la scène Anglaise, et l’on ne devait pas attendre qu’un jeune militaire cherchât à en épurer la morale."@@1

During the same year, 1697, Vanbrugh, who was again at liberty to oblige his friend Sir Thomas Skipwith, brought out Esop, a comedy in two parts, at Drury Lane. This comedy, which was a translation, with the addition of some new characters, from the French of Boursault, met with a much more moderate share of success than its predecessors. Pope is said to have complimented Vanbrugh by saying, that the fables in his Esop were written in the true style of La Fontaine, very much to the surprise of the dra­matist, who knew nothing of La Fontaine or his produc­tions. Esop was followed in 1700 by the Pilgrim, and in 1702 by the False Friend. About this period was finished a theatre in the Haymarket, for which Vanbrugh had sufficient interest to procure thirty subscriptions at one hundred pounds each. On the foundation-stone of this structure were inscrib­ed the words “ Little Whig,” in compliment to Lady Sun­derland, the second daughter of the duke of Marlborough. The management of the bouse was conducted by Congreve and Vanbrugh, in whose company the names of Betterton and his principal adherents were enrolled. That great tra­gedian and his associates had not found their account in deserting the patentees, and now hoped that a succession of new pieces from the chief favourites of the town would speedily retrieve their affairs. They were however dis­appointed in their expectations. The house was badly adapted for the conveyance of sound ; and although Van­brugh wrote with great despatch, Congreve was too jealous of his fame to suffer any thing to come from his hands that had not been polished to the most dazzling brilliancy. About this time the Italian opera, though yet in an embryo form, had found favour in England ; and to humour the prevailing taste, the new managers opened their theatre with a piece set to Italian music, called the Triumph of Love, which brought nothing into the treasury. In 1705 Van­brugh produced the Confederacy, founded on the “ Bour­geois à la mode ” of Dancour. This piece was also coldly received ; and Congreve quitted with some precipitation what he considered to be a falling house. Vanbrugh was now left to his own resources, and in the year 1706 pro­duced the Cuckold in Conceit, Squire Treelooby, and the Mistake, from the “Cocu Imaginaire,” the “Monsieur de Pourceaugnac,” and the “ Depit Amoreux ” of Moliere. The terse antithesis and epigrammatic point of the French comedian were little to the taste of an English audience ; and Vanbrugh, now thoroughly disgusted with theatrical management, assigned his house and properties to Mr. Owen Swiney, upon condition of receiving five pounds for every acting night, or an income not exceeding two hun­dred per annum. But if he had no dexterity in managing a theatre, he possessed to a wonderful degree the more im­portant art of endearing himself to powerful friends. A lively writer is often a very sombre companion ; but Van­brugh’s most “entertaining scenes,” says Cibber, who knew him well, “ seemed to be no more than his common conversation committed to paper.” Great men are not al­ways in haste to provide for the needy companions of their pleasures, who seldom acquire any thing by such exalted intercourse, but a taste for enjoyments which they can rarely secure. Such helpless witlings it is often impossible to rescue from the miseries of dependence, which seems to be their natural element. But Vanbrugh was a man of true genius, whom it was reputable to befriend, and a man of energy, who was never plunged in disreputable indi­gence, and who was perfectly able to befriend himself. Dignity and wealth now flowed fast upon him. At Green­wich in 1714 he received the honour of knighthood ; in 1715 he was appointed comptroller of the royal works ; and in the ensuing year, surveyor of the works at Greenwich Hospital. Some years before, he had been made Claren- cieux king-at-arms, an office for which he had no qualifica­tions. His appointment created such an outcry in the Col­lege of Heralds, that he had the modesty to resign. His successor however had recourse to more palatable argu­ments than abuse. In 1715 he produced a farce called the Country House.

At one period of his life, Vanbrugh paid a visit to France, where he met with a remarkable adventure. When sur­veying some fortifications with minute attention, he at­tracted the notice of an engineer, upon whose information he was handed over to the civil authorities, and conveyed to the Bastile. Upon the news of this extraordinary in­carceration, he was visited by some of the French nobility, whose language he spoke with perfect fluency and elegance, and who were so much charmed by his wit and vivacity, that they exerted themselves strenuously in his behalf, and he was speedily restored to liberty. In that gloomy edi­fice, which bad often re-echoed to the groans of despair, Vanbrugh passed some of the most pleasant hours of his life. It is singιdar enough that a similar incident occurred to Hogarth, who was taken into custody when sketching the gate of Calais. But that morose and irritable humour­ist had no distinguished visitors to cheer the gloom of his confinement, and commemorated this disagreeable event of his history in the print entitled, “ O, the Roast Beef of Old England !”

Although he had retired from the bustle of theatrical management, Vanbrugh still continued his dramatic labours, and was engaged in writing the Provoked Husband, when his hand was arrested by the stroke of death. This event

@@@1 Biographie Universelle, tom. xlvii. p. 418.