

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF DISTINGUISHED PERSONS.

LIFE OF DAVID MANSON.

To the Editor of the Belfast Magazine.

SIR,

AS sketches of the lives of eminent persons, are a part of the contents of your publication; a short history of the life of the ingenious, the benevolent, the persevering, and successful David Manson, late a schoolmaster in Belfast, claims a page, or two, in your instructive Magazine. This eminent improver of youth, was the son of Mr. John Manson, and of Agnes Jamison, inhabitants of the parish of Carncastle, which is on the eastern coast of the county of Antrim, between Glenarm and Larne. He was born in the year of our Lord 1726.

His constitution from his infancy, was delicate: in his eighth year it received a very severe shock, from a most violent attack of a rheumatic fever; which shattered his weak frame, and left him in such a state of debility, that he never afterward was fit for undertaking, any laborious or active employment. This is a striking instance of the goodness of providence, even in the afflictions of mankind, and that affliction cometh not forth from the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground. This was the occasional cause of the commencement of his own improvement; and the efficient cause of most, beneficial improvements of his countrymen.

His mother, who was a very good scholar, seized the opportunity from his confinement, of laying the foundation of his future eminence. His natural genius, the thoughtfulness occasioned by disease and confinement, seconded her endeavours, so successfully, that he soon became so

good an English scholar, that he was invited to teach Mr. Shaw's children, in Ballygelly-house. From the progress he had made in learning, by the mild manner of his mother's instructions, he thought of imitating the same plans with the children at Ballygelly, that had been suggested by his mother's tender affection, with the additional improvement, of teaching when he played with the children. These are the foundations, the first rudiments of his play-school, which he instituted in Belfast; and by adhering to the rules afterward perfected by him, he, and every schoolmaster who imitated him, taught the English language, with unexpected and unrivalled success.

When he had taught in Ballygelly, so far as was thought necessary, he removed to Larne, where he taught the English language, improved himself in writing, in arithmetic, in the practical branches of the mathematics, and in the rudiments of the Latin language, in the school of Mr. Robert White, afterward the learned and pious protestant dissenting minister of Templepatrick, in the county of Antrim.

As he was ambitious of becoming a complete teacher, and as English, writing, arithmetic, the rudiments of Latin and Greek, and the practical branches of mathematics, were generally taught in the same school, and by one master; and as he thought, from his progress in writing, he was not perfectly qualified for this multifarious and laborious task, he put himself under the care of the celebrated penman, Mr. King, who then taught in Belfast.

Being then sufficiently qualified for being a general schoolmaster, he settled in Ballycastle, where he

became acquainted with Miss Linn; but while he remained in Belfast, he found, that the sea-faring men, who sailed between Belfast and Liverpool, were very deficient in the knowledge of mathematical navigation: he thought his usefulness would be more extensive, if he commenced teacher in England.— There he commenced the education of young men upon a new and improved plan. He taught one pupil only, at the same time; at the moderate rate of six-pence the hour. His care, his benevolent attention to his pupils, secured him the desired success; but his mother's illness, and his attachment to Miss Linn, obliged him to forsake these plans; and to return to his native country.

After his mother's death, and his marriage with Miss Linn, he settled for life in Belfast; in the year of our Lord 1752. The inhabitants of this great mercantile town know, that he spent his whole life in great and unwearied exertions, for the benefit of youth; he dedicated all his time, all his powers, and all his improvements, to their education. His benevolent designs were attended with desired success. He taught them with ease and expedition to read distinctly, and to understand the English classics. He taught them the grammatical construction of language, and to express their sentiments with grammatical precision and propriety. His school was free to every schoolmaster, who chose to be improved by him, consequently the good effects of his labours, were not confined to a town or district. but were diffused over distant countries. The young ladies received the same extensive education as the young gentlemen. He, and the school-masters taught by him, were the great causes of infusing into their delicate and tender minds,

the rudiments of the good sense and erudition, for which our ladies during this age, have been remarkable.

He never allowed the desire of founding a play-school, which was to be taught on the principle of amusement, to depart from his mind. He wished the idea of drudgery, and the fear of the rod, to be banished from places of junior education. The system of domination had long been practised, in the great schools in cities, and through every gradation down to the pedagogue, who taught in the thatched hovel, or the country barn. He therefore perceived, his newly projected plans had the prejudices of his countrymen to combat; a dawn of hope rose in his mind, by supposing that he might find in a large town some individuals whose tender feelings, and discernment, would induce them to pay attention to his schemes, and give them a fair trial. The situation of Belfast, and the few friends he had gained during his short stay in it, determined him as before related to settle in it. The late Henry Joy encouraged him, by sending as his first pupil his daughter Ellen, afterwards Mrs. Tomb, who made such proficiency under Manson's mild and gentle tuition, that she very soon became useful to her father, as assistant, in comparing manuscripts, and in correcting the press. That his scheme might have a fair and impartial trial, he at first admitted into his school those only, who had not been taught the alphabet.

He laboured 18 months in Belfast before he had 20 scholars. His success with these was equal to his wishes. The children had made great progress, and were under perfect discipline, although they never had been chastised, on account of negligence, or inattention to their books.

After 18 months his scheme appeared rational, and his success great: some who had contracted an aversion from their books, because they had been forced to them, by severe correction, were admitted into his school. To these he at first paid little attention, but allowed them to enter cheerfully and heartily into the amusements of the school, little connected with literature. These attended cheerfully, but for some time declined entering into a class, or reading when proposed to them, as a favour, even such seeing the honours conferred upon children who paid attention to their books, and who read with alacrity; and hearing of the disrespect due to such as were ignorant, and consequently inattentive, after a few months, requested the favour of a lesson.

Having at length gained his end, and demonstrated the utility of his scheme, he had such a number in his school, who were so fond of their books, and so exemplary, as to put any idle and irregular boys out of countenance; he admitted all into it who desired improvement in the English language.

Manson's Publications.

In teaching large companies, he found a very large alphabet necessary; he caused such to be printed with a new type upon a fine large sheet: and put up as a picture upon the side of his own desk, or upon a wall of the school room; so that each child might distinctly see each letter.

He next got the monosyllables commonly found in primers and spelling books, printed on four large sheets, and fixed to the sides of a square-box, placed upon his desk. The first company of the lowest class, and the second company of the same attended, and learned the natural sound of the letters, and to spell

two or three hundred words, before they were perfect in the alphabet.

His penetration soon pointed out to him the necessity of school-books, upon a plan different from any before in use. As children spend much time in learning to spell monosyllables, he imagined that a primer printed upon good paper would save larger books, and would be otherwise useful, and that such little ornaments might be added to the covers by the binder, as would make them more pleasing to the children of the low class,

His spelling-book, upon a similar plan, was next published. It contained tables from monosyllables up to polysyllables, and many reading lessons, entertaining and useful to children. The words in his primer and spelling-book were so arranged, that children could not be induced from the sound, to spell them by rote.

As the custom of spending the evening at cards even then prevailed, and as children were generally amused with old packs, he thought of turning this custom to the advantage of his pupils, and had spelling, reading, and numerical cards, printed, that his pupils might be induced as an evening play, to read, spell, and do easy accounts. On these cards most of the common games could be imitated.

That he might teach his pupils to know, the meaning of the words by which the elegant sentiments of the English authors were expressed: He published a dictionary containing the most useful words in the language, properly accented, and the long and short syllables marked, and the most plain and proper meanings adjoined. Many cheap editions of this work have been printed and sold at first cost, without any emolument to the author.

That his pupils might learn to express their sentiments with grammatical precision, he composed a short and easy introduction to English grammar, and prefixed a copy to each Dictionary of the first edition.

Manson's intended publications.

When Sheridan's pronouncing dictionary appeared, he enlarged his own, and made it a perfect spelling and pronouncing dictionary, without any addition to the price of the former editions, which prevented the publication of this useful work, because no printer would engage to publish it at so low a rate; it still exists in its improved state. The title is; "*A complete Pronouncing Dictionary, and English Expositor*, particularly calculated for the use of schools, being printed in a larger letter, and having more concise and familiar explanations, than any book hitherto published, being also an excellent pocket companion for young people, tradesmen, and others who desire to speak, read and write with propriety and elegance. The fourth edition corrected, improved and considerably enlarged, and adapted to Mr. Sheridan's pronunciation, by David Manson, school-master in Belfast."

That he might improve the condition of our linen weavers, he wrote a system of agriculture, in which he demonstrated in opposition to Arthur Young's opinion, that linnen weavers need not be confined to large towns, but might hold small farms of land, and follow their trade, with advantage to their own health, and profit to their country. In this little treatise he described the most convenient dimensions of dwelling houses and offices. The best form and dimensions of the farms, and of the fields; the most profitable inclosures, and manures, for every kind of soil; and the most proper methods of cultivating them.

Manson's School.

When his pupils increased to a very great number, he found it necessary to divide them into three different classes, and to accommodate them with three different school-rooms. The first class was taught by himself, the other two by assistants; each class was divided into two companies.—When the low class, by many diverting methods, were taught the letters as before related, they were then taught to spell the tables in the primer, alternately, with those on the box, before mentioned; they got a reading lesson alternately with the tables. When they could read and spell the primer well, they were then allowed to get the spelling book, and were taught in it, the greatest part of the winter season. The first company of the low class, was then advanced to the second company of the second class, and the second company of the low class became the first of the same. The low class was recruited by beginners in the spring.

In the second class, they who were deficient in spelling off book, were allowed to spell a considerable time on book, and to read lessons in the spelling-book, *Litiputian Magazine*; and in some other easy and diverting books. They committed to memory, the catechisms, and divine songs for children at home; and repeated them in school before breakfast. The tutor explained any words in the reading lessons which they did not understand: after several repetitions the best scholars were enabled to do it themselves.

When the first company of the second class had acquired a thorough knowledge of the spelling-book tables, they were promoted to the third company of Mr. Manson's own class. In this they entered the dictionary and grammar, and read-

ing easy English classics. As they advanced in the knowledge of the dictionary, and in reading, they were promoted to the second company, and at ward to the first of the master's class.

Each class-room was furnished with the master's seat, a high and low chair, and two rows of seats; the chairs were seats of honour, he who obtained the high chair was dignified with title of chancellor, and he who obtained the low chair, was for the time, vice-chancellor.

In the morning the high company took the front seat, the second the back seat, on the right hand, and the third, that on the left; each company had the front seat, by turns as they read. The right hand was most honourable in the front, the left the most honourable in the back seat. The space behind the seats was the apartment allotted to idle boys to stand in. They had the title of the *trifling club*.

Rules of discipline in Manson's morning school.

The morning lessons, as catechism, divine songs, or grammar, were all said or repeated before breakfast; being committed to memory at home. Each being at liberty to take the quantity agreeable to his inclination. The boy or girl, who said the longest lesson, not less than 24 lines; got the title of king or queen. They who said 20 lines or more, of prince or princess; 16 or upwards of dukes or dutchesses; 12 or upwards of lord or lady.—These were all members of the royal society, and each got a ticket marked F. R. S.

They who made an unseasonable noise in school, or were deficient in spelling, lost their tickets.

The king and queen got two tickets each, and lost but one for the above faults. He who returned

ten tickets, unsoiled, got half a guinea medal.

They who said eight lines or upwards were called tenants: they who said four lines and upwards were *undertenants*: they who could not say four lines without missing, or absented themselves till the morning lesson was over, had the dishonourable title of *sluggards*. The members of each company took their seats, according to their stations as king, prince, duke, &c.

Rules in the Day-school.

When the scholars assembled after breakfast, the king of the class read a morning prayer, the rest behaving with suitable gravity. The teacher read the lesson first, with an audible voice; the whole class following the line, on their own books. Then the high company, read from the highest to the lowest; the other two companies following the line. The second company read in the same manner, the low company following the line. The high company (after proving each other in spelling a column of the dictionary, off book) got the explanation of the spelling or next reading lesson according to their inclinations; till the two low companies had all read; while the low company read the second got the spelling and meanings as above, when the forenoon's reading lesson was over, a story or an entire piece of poetry, was read, by those who said the lesson without word or stop. Each person had the privilege of reading a page, but was put out at the first period after missing.

Each class had its chancellor and vice-chancellor. The chancellor sat in the high chair, to explain the hard words, which occurred in the lessons, and the vice-chancellor, in the low chair, to correct the reader.

The chancellor might explain a word at every stop, higher than a comma; this being no interruption to a reader. Any person in the same company might win the chair, by explaining a word in the foregoing sentence, after waiting half the time the reader should stop. Whoever explained a word in favour of the chancellor, was not allowed to speak again in the same lesson. The chancellor was under the like penalty, if he spoke along with one who gave him proper time, any person who spoke after another had begun, was likewise under the same penalty, so was he who offers to keep, or take the chair by foul play. When the company had all read, the chancellor, and vice-chancellor, if they were members of the royal society took the head of the seat; if otherwise they sit at the head of the commons.

The vice-chancellor told the next word, when the reader stopped without a proper mark; which is a blemish in the reading, and prevents his advancement. If the reader neglected to make a stop, when there was a mark, the vice-chancellor bade him count the time of the stop, which he must do, below his breath, and then proceed from that stop. If he missed, or miscalled words, he told him his error, and made him read it properly. These corrections were made instantly without waiting for a stop. If the vice-chancellor neglected his duty, any other person in the same company, might make the proper correction, after a short pause, and so win the low chair. The penalty for silence is inflicted here in the same manner as he who had lost the privilege of gaining one chair, must not speak for the other. They who read without missing, took place of all the rest, except the chancellor, and vice-chancellor. They who left their seats, or neglected their

business by idleness, or foolish tricks, were sent to the trifling-club; where they stood, and followed the line till they had proper partners. They of the low company rehearsed the reading and spelling lessons on the book, to partners of the higher companies, till they said one of them without missing, and then got to their seats. They of the second rehearsed to the high company, in the same manner, or rehearsed the low company, till they told 5 words, and then got to their seats. They who misbehaved in the club, must continue there till they went through the above course; once for every instance of misbehaviour. Such as continued in the club till the 2d company had done reading, got a *ba* or a *hiss* from the whole class; while they marched along the company to their seats.

To indefatigable diligence in his schools, he added exercise of benevolence in the vacant hours. He took a small farm near town for the amusement of his little guests, and called it Lilliput. There he built a house, and formed a bowling-green, for the amusement of good boys.— He constructed a machine by which he could raise persons above the top of every house in town, for an amusing prospect. Convinced of the utility of teaching girls to spin flax with both hands, he invented a wheel, which being turned by one man, moved a great number of spindles, at the same time; this gave an opportunity to the learner to pay attention to her hands, without the trouble of attending to the motion of the feet likewise. This wheel is still in the Belfast poor-house.

He had a carriage constructed for the exercise and amusement of his boarders and good scholars, as described in Emerson's *Mechanics*, which was moved by a crank within the body of the machine, without any other moving power.

He died the 2d March, 1792, in the 66th year of his age, and left no family. He was interred privately in the burying-ground of the old chapel of ease, in Belfast.

If ever a man merited well of his country, for benevolence, and exertions in favour of the best interests of it, the education of its youth, MAN-

SON deserved well. Are monuments erected, and poems composed to the memory of ruffians, and tyrants? and neither a stone raised, nor an epitaph composed to the memory of the good, the generous, the beneficent MANSON: the best friend to the rising generations of his time!!!

DETACHED ANECDOTES.

PUBLIC EXECUTIONS.

THE following account of an execution at Paris, extracted from *Causes Celebres*, exhibits in a strong point of view, hardened audacious guilt, false compassion, and especially the error of attempting to represent persons guilty of crimes suddenly converted into imagined saints, by the machinery of fanaticism.—Madame Tiquet, the wife of a banker, a woman of notorious intrigue, and dissipation, formed a project to rid herself of her husband, in order that she might marry her gallant. During three years after the first conception of this project, she made three several attempts to carry it into effect, all of which failed, but without exposing her to a discovery. At last she bribed her porter to assassinate his master, at a time and place appointed, and on the very evening of the execution, she was present at a large company, where she was remarked to lead the conversation expressly to the subject of her husband, observing that she had no reasonable expectations of happiness, considering his age and state of health, which promised him long life, and herself an indefinite period of subjection. The attack was made as concerted; and on her return home, Madame Tiquet was inform-

ed, that her husband had been wounded, but not killed, by a pistol-shot, and that on his examination by the magistrate, as to the cause of the assault, he affirmed, that he knew of no enemies he had in the world, *except his wife*. The result of this examination was publicly known, nevertheless Madame Tiquet paid a visit the next day at the same house where she had been on the fatal night, and where, though every eye was fixed on her with horror, her countenance remained unaltered. That evening, one of her friends came to her, from motives of compassion, and conjured her to make her escape while yet in her power, as she was about so be arrested in her own house upon suspicion. "Those who are justly accused," she answered, "should fly—the innocent have nothing to fear." Not long after, the lieutenant-criminal entered with a body of police-officers. "You might have dispensed with this attendance," she coolly observed, "I should have been equally ready to obey you, had you come alone." By the law of France an assault, with intent to commit murder, was capitally punishable, both on principal and accomplices. Madame Tiquet was shortly after fully convicted on the evidence of