

He, who revered thee when living, and dwelleth on thy memory, now thou art dead,

ALDUS MANUCCIUS.
Venice, 2d. Nov. 1583.

ANECDOTES OF THE LATE PROFESSOR
PORSON.

ALTHOUGH it is expected that a Life of this celebrated character, whose death has been a subject of such regret to the admirers of classical literature, will soon be published, a sketch of the principal circumstances of it, particularly such as serve to elucidate his character, collected from the detached anecdotes and notices already laid before the public, cannot fail of being both interesting and instructive.

He was born on the 25th of December, 1739, in the village of East Ruston, Norfolk; and in his early infancy gave marks of memory, which has been one of his most singular qualifications. For the improvement of it, however, he was very much indebted to the attention of his father, who, though but an humble parish clerk in an obscure village, had sagacity to discover and perseverance to pursue the best method of laying a solid foundation for his son's future literary acquirements. Beginning in his earliest childhood, he taught his son to make arithmetical calculations in his mind, without any external assistance, with such success, that before he was nine years old the child could extract the cube root in this manner. By this means he acquired a habit of close and solid thinking, and a strength of memory, which adhered to him during his whole life, and enabled him to apply his studies to present use, with a promptitude and correctness so difficult to be attained. In teaching him the alphabet, his father adopted the plan of learning to read and write at the same time, since put in practice on an extensive scale, by Bell of Madras, and imitated by Lancaster. The figure was traced with chalk, and the child taught to pronounce the correspondent sound. This mode of learning caught the mind of the young scholar, and answered a purpose, perhaps not thought on at the time, of

rendering him a correct and elegant imitator of every kind of hand-writing.

At nine he was sent to the village school, where he soon signalized himself among his fellows. Even here he was indebted to the indefatigable attention of his parent, who continued to form and strengthen his memory, by obliging him to repeat every evening the lessons he had studied during the day.

At this time mathematics appear to have been his favourite study; an anecdote recorded by himself, proves his fondness for calculation. Returning from school one evening he lost his way, and was obliged to take shelter during the night at a farmer's cottage, whose son, somewhat older than himself, had lately left school. With him he was sent to sleep; but instead of sleeping, they began to question each other about their school acquirements. He soon found that his new acquaintance was an excellent arithmetician, and had attained such powers of calculation as to be capable, like himself, of multiplying nine figures by nine, by the mere act of the mind.

Abilities like Porson's could not always remain concealed. He was first noticed by the Rev. Mr. Hewit, who undertook to instruct him in the classics. Under his tuition he remained till he was fourteen years old, during which time he made such a progress as astonished his preceptor, and made him the conversation of the men of learning around the country. Among the rest Mr. Norris, since dead, heard of this prodigy, and resolving to prove the truth of the reports concerning him, sent for him, and after subjecting him to an examination, beneath the rigour of which most boys of more than ordinary capacity must have sunk, he was so gratified with his answers, that he took him under his own patronage, sent him to Eton, and procured for him a settlement of £80 a year, while there.

While at Eton, his literary reputation continued to increase, and he became the favourite and friend of many of the boys much higher advanced in the school than himself. He was not only the partaker of their studies, but the companion of their sports and amusements. He even composed a play,

which was acted there by the boys. At the same time he pursued his studies with unremitting assiduity. The solid impression made on his mind by every thing he had once learned, may be collected from the following circumstance. When going to his Tutor's to translate a lesson in Horace, previous to repeating it in school, one of the senior boys took away his Horace and gave him an English book in its place. He was called upon to translate, and his class-fellows amused themselves with the thoughts of his perplexity. He, however, who had committed this author completely to memory before he went to school, knowing where the lesson was to begin, opened the book and repeated without hesitation

Mercuri facunde, nepos Atlantis.

first reciting the Latin, and then the English, as if he had the author in his hand. The tutor perceiving strong marks of astonishment, as well as mirth among the boys, began to suspect something; and inquired what edition of Horace Porson was making use of. "I learned my lesson from the Delphin," replied he, avoiding a direct answer, "That is strange," replied the master, "for you seem to be reading a different side of the page from myself....Let me see your book." The truth was then discovered, and the teacher wisely and kindly remarked to the others, that he should be happy to find them extricating themselves in a similar manner from such a predicament.

Yet, notwithstanding the powers of his memory were so great, it does not appear that he was proud of them. To a friend of his, who made some remarks on this extraordinary and enviable acquirement, he said, "I never remember any thing but what I transcribed three times, or read over six times at the least: and if you will do the same you will have as good a memory."

When at Eton he lost his zealous friend and patron, Mr. Norris. Shortly after he was attacked with an imposthume on the lungs, which brought him to the brink of the grave, and though his youth, and the strength of his constitution enabled him to struggle against it, he never completely recovered. It terminated in a confirmed asthma. This

disease, for which no effectual remedy has yet been discovered, oppressed him during his whole succeeding life, and at length terminated in his untimely dissolution.

After remaining three years at Eton, he removed to Cambridge where he was entered in Trinity College. He first directed his mind to mathematical studies to which he was naturally led by the genius of that seminary, which is most celebrated for scientific, as Oxford is for classical literature; these he continued to pursue with his usual assiduity and success. But from what cause we are yet unacquainted, he soon relinquished them, for the study of antient language, which became ever after his favourite pursuit. In this branch of learning also he soon distinguished himself, and obtained one of the two gold medals annually adjudged to the greatest proficient in classical learning.

In 1785 he obtained the degree of Master of Arts, before which time he had begun to make himself remarkable as an author, by the republication of Hutchinson's edition of Xenophon's *Anabasis*. This work, undertaken by members of the two rival universities, attracted much notice among the learned. He added some notes to it, but without annexing his name to them. These are introduced by a preface beginning with this remarkable sentence, "Lectori, si quis erit, &c." and chiefly relate to manuscripts either unnoticed or neglected by the former Editor.

Previously to this time he had been elected fellow, when only a junior Bachelor, contrary to the usual custom of that university, averse to bestow honours on an inferior rank. This appointment redounded more to his honour than emolument, as the annual salary did not exceed £100. He now undertook to write notes for a new edition of a very learned work, entitled, "Emendationes in Suidam et Hesychium, et alios Lexicographos Græcos," published at the Clarendon press. These were never publicly acknowledged, except by being marked with his initials. Small as were the profits of his fellowship, he did not long enjoy it. According to the statutes, every fellow at the end of seven years must enter into holy orders, or resign his appointment. Preparatory

to this, Porson applied himself to the study of the controverted points, and after a long and cautious inquiry, not being able to bring his mind to consent to a subscription of the thirty-nine articles of the church of England, he resigned his fellowship. This must be considered as no small sacrifice to a man whose sole dependence was derived from thence. It is said by one of his biographers, that he might still have held a lay-fellowship, without any impeachment to his integrity, had not a disingenuous artifice been used to prevent him from taking advantage of it.

During the course of studies, in which he was thus engaged, he published Letters to Archdeacon Travis, in answer to his Defence of the three Heavenly Witnesses. I. John, v. 7. This was his first avowed publication, and deservedly spread his fame, not only through Great Britain, but to many places on the Continent.

After his resignation he retired to London, but was soon recalled to Cambridge, in a manner highly honourable. On a vacancy to the Greek professorship, he declared himself a candidate, and in consequence of a thesis on Euripides, composed by him for the purpose, was unanimously chosen by the seven electors. The salary of this was no more than £.32 per annum: Porson hoped to augment it by delivering lectures, but was disappointed, as no rooms were provided for the purpose.

In the year 1795 he married Mrs. Lunan, formerly Miss Perry, sister to the proprietor of the Morning Chronicle, which paper he is said to have enriched by his occasional writings. He still continued to increase his character by new publications. Among these was a new edition of Eschylus, and some of the plays of Euripides, published at intervals. While employed on studies such as these, a circumstance occurred which serves to bring into view a trait of character hitherto unnoticed. A manuscript copy of the Lexicon of Photius, Patriarch, of Constantinople, which was the property of Trinity College, Cambridge, and had been nearly obliterated by age, was carefully transcribed by him for the press. In the execution of

this painful and tedious task, which occupied most part of his time during ten months, he was much indebted to the pains taken by his father and village teacher, to improve his hand-writing. But after having completed a beautiful and correct copy, which might be almost called a *fac-simile* of the original, all his labour was frustrated, by a fire which broke out in his brother-in-law's house. Fortunately the original escaped the flames. On hearing of this misfortune, far from giving vent to any expressions of useless sorrow, he sat down to his desk, and without a murmur, commenced a new transcript equally beautiful and correct as the former.

He continued to support himself in this manner for several years, until by a choice which reflects great honour on the directors, he was elected first librarian to the London Institution. This appointment promised him a quiet and respectable retreat for the decline of life, which however he was not long permitted to enjoy. The death of his wife, which took place in 1797, may be considered as the forerunner of his own. A spasmodic asthma, which seems to have been ingrafted in his constitution by the disease with which he was attacked when at school, now attacked him with increasing violence. During the paroxysms of this painful disorder, he never could lie down in bed, and found his only relief in an almost total abstinence. The effect of this on his frame, naturally delicate, was a state of total debility, which at length turned to an intermittent fever. From this however he partially recovered, when he fell a martyr to an apoplectic fit. Every circumstance relative to the death of an illustrious character is deserving of notice. On the 19th of Sep. as he was walking in the Strand, apparently in good health, he was seized with a paroxysm of the epileptic kind. In this state he was carried by the bye-standers, who did not know him, to St. Martin's work-house, where he lay totally insensible, till about 6 o'clock the following morning. He was not then sufficiently collected to give any account of himself, but was

at length accidentally recognized by one of the attendants at the London Institution, who conducted him to the house in the old Jewry.

Here he breakfasted, during which time he entered into conversation with several gentlemen belonging to the Establishment; They observed much incoherence both in his manner and the matter of his speeches, and fearing he was labouring under some fatal disorder, recommended to him to make his will. He at first hesitated, but at length consented, expressing himself strongly, though sometimes incoherently, on the moral obligation of disposing of our property after death.

He continued to converse there for five hours, sometimes in the full possession of his senses, at others wild and wandering; when at three o'clock he went out and after walking through some parts of the town he proceeded to Corn-hill, where he stopt and looked up for sometime at the vane and clock of the Exchange which had been under repair. The singularity of his behaviour collected a number of persons about him. At length the porter of the Institution, who had remarked him, brought him into an adjoining tavern; here after drinking a couple of glasses of wine, the paroxysm and insensibility returned; he was carried home in a coach, and remained in a state of stupor, with very short intermissions, until the following Sunday, when he died.

Few persons had a greater contempt for the practice of physic than Mr. Porson, yet none reckoned a greater number of medical men among his acquaintance. He was attended during his illness, by several of the most eminent; after his death his body and skull were opened. This is mentioned here merely to contradict the silly report at first prevalent, relative to the unusual thickness of his skull, it having been found to be thinner than usual in persons of the same age and habits.

His body was claimed by the university of Cambridge, and buried in the Chapel of Trinity College, near that of Bentley, whom he so strongly resembled. The funeral was solemn and well attended, and several of his former friends and admirers endea-

voured to testify their respect by appropriate verses and inscriptions to his memory. The following was inscribed on his coffin:

Ricardus Porson,
Apud Cantabrigienses,
Linguae Græcæ professor,
et
Coll. Trin. SS. et Ind. olim Soc.
Apud Londinenses,
Institutionis Literariæ,
Bibliothecarius princeps.
Nat. VIII. cal. Jan. MDCCCLX.
Obiit VII. cal. Oct. MDCCCVII.

Richard Porson,
Professor of the Greek language
at Cambridge,
Formerly fellow of the College of the
Holy and undivided Trinity.
Principal Librarian
of the Literary Institution
in London.
Born, 25th Dec. 1759.
Died, 25th Sept. 1808.

To delineate his character from the few documents published, would be premature; but some of the most prominent features may be noticed, sufficient to give a general idea of his prevailing characteristics, and to efface some reflections on his character, which have been too hastily circulated and believed. As a critic his talents were supremely eminent; and perhaps did we judge by the merit, not the bulk of his writings, we should not be wrong in placing him at the head of this department of literature. In private life, he maintained an undeviating integrity of character, an inviolable regard to truth, and a most determined independence of spirit. His peculiar speculative tenets of Religion are not well known, but in practice he was rigidly correct. Never would he suffer the name of God to be profaned in his presence; and from any obscenity in conversation he turned away with undisguised marks of antipathy and disgust.

One failing it must be acknowledged that he yielded to; but not to the excess generally supposed. He applied to wine as a relief from the anguish of pain or the tedium of debility; he was led to it at times by the indiscretion of friendship; but he was not a drunkard. When alone, he was singularly abstemious. And even in

the social and heart expanding intercourse of friendship his usual and favourite drink was table beer; frequently would he pass the night, with no stronger stimulative to excess, charming and instructing the little circle of his admiring friends without the slightest advance to ebriety. But sometimes the officious zeal of his less discreet companions would supply temptations against which he was not sufficiently

on his guard: and towards the latter part of his life, his frame, undermined by the incessant ravages of disease, immediately betrayed those trifling indulgences, which it could ill sustain. Yet, in no moment of gaiety did he lose his reverence for the name of his Creator, and that loathing of obscenity already noticed: never did he swerve from his undeviating adherence to truth, nor ever was he known to betray a secret.

ORIGINAL POETRY.

LINES

ADDRESSED TO THE AUTHOR OF THE FAMILIAR
EPISTLES.

(Not before published.)

THOU literary HARLEQUIN!
Whose *mask* brings safety to thy skin,
With patch'd and party-colour'd dress,
Made up of shreds of languages;
A taylor's hell of common-places,
Hoarded for all convenient cases;
Remnants and rags from 'hole of glory,'
And lumber of an *attic* story,
The Critic's cheap applause to win,
By treasure of an ass's skin.

'Thy pocket-mem'ry serves to quote,
Thy wit, enough to point a note;
Thy learning, to make sizers stare;
Thy spirit, to lampoon a play'r.

Resolv'd to vent satiric spite,
Yet, pre-determined not to fight,
This TRUCER of the *pigeon-hole*,
Seeks a dark place to save his poll,
Then darts his poison'd shafts below,
With little vigour in the bow.

Without one manly, gen'rous aim,
Thine, is an effervescent fame:
Pungent, and volatile, and smart,
Distill'd from vitriol of the heart,
Thy verse throws round its spitter spatter,
The acid flash of soda water;
No juice divine, no racy drop,
That flames and mantles in the cup,
And shows the soil from whence it came,
Warm'd with the pure Phœbean beam.

Will the soft wing of flying time,
Drop odour on such stinging rhyme?—

O not for such, the hallow'd bays,
For *memory* dear, when life decays.
Nor such the verse of taste and truth,
The v'let sweet of primy youth;
Youth, that with flag of hope unfur'd,
Walks forth, amidst a garden world,

Beholds each blossom of delight,
Fair to the sense, and full in sight,
While pleasure flows from ev'ry part,
And genial nature swells the heart.

Such scenes our youthful bard annoy,
He blights each bursting bud of joy;
The laurel round his temple strays,
To drop its poison, not its praise.
Such venom in the early page,
What will the *virus* be in age?

A sat'rist in his *vernal* years,
Like the first foe to man appears,
When, on the tree of life, he sate,
And croak'd out Eden's coming fate,
Her blossoms to be tempest-tost,
And paradise for ever lost.

Trust me, thy marriage with this muse,
Not long will drop hyblean dews;
Swiftly *must* change his honey'd moon,
Who woos and weds the low lampoon,
Swift shall his moon decrease and fall,
Succeeded by a moon of *Gull*.
The bile, tho' *splendid*, by degrees,
Becomes the Cynic's sore disease,
Works to the heart, corrodes unseen,
And makes his breast, the cave of spleen;
Till by a sort of moral trope,
The coxcomb turns a misanthrope:
His ruling maxim, and his fate,
Hated by all and all to hate.

Where'er he comes, his atmosphere
Turns the sweet smile into a sneer;
The quick, and ardent spirit of love
Congeals, and can no longer move;
Chill'd to the source of genial heat,
The pulse forgets its mirthful beat,
The flush of pleasure leaves the cheek,
The palsied tongue wants power to
speak,

The graces quit their mazy dance,
And stand, appall'd in speechless trance:
The voice of music, at its height,
Its airy wheel, and circling flight,