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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER.

Among the recent productions of the press, few are more amusing than the *Memoirs of Gibbon*, written by himself, followed by a miscellaneous selection of letters and minor pieces published by Lord Sheffield since his death. The distinguished historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire will long live in the gratitude of those who have been instructed and delighted by his learning and eloquence. The private occupations of such a man, his opinions of men and things, the portion of happiness he enjoyed, must all be objects of high literary curiosity. In ranging over the wide field of seven octavo volumes, compiled by the diligence of Sheffield, they will, like the discriminating bee, exercise the prerogative of neglecting many a weed, but they will likewise be regaled by the nectar of many a delicious flower. For the entertainment of our readers we shall offer them a few extracts, which will quicken their curiosity to read the whole of the memoirs, which could be comprised in a moderate duodecimo, and is well worthy of a republication in this country.

EXTRACTS.

"The death of a new born child before that of its parents may seem an unnatural, but it is strictly a probable event; since of any given number the greater part are extinguished before their ninth year, before they possess the faculties of the mind or body. Without accusing the profuse waste or imperfect workmanship of nature, I shall only observe, that this unfavorable change was multiplied against my infant existence. So feeble was my constitution, so precarious my life, that, in the baptism of each of my brothers, my father's prudence successively repeated my christian name of Edward, that, in case of the departure of the eldest son, this patronymic appellation might be still perpetuated in the family.

—— *Uno avulso non deficit alter.*

"To preserve and to rear so frail a being, the most tender assiduity was scarcely sufficient; and my mother's attention was somewhat diverted by her frequent pregnancies, by an exclusive passion for her husband, and by the dissipation of the world, in which his taste and authority obliged her to mingle. But the maternal office was supplied by my aunt, Mrs. Catharine Porten; at whose name I feel a tear of gratitude trickling down my cheek. A life of celibacy transferred her vacant affection to her sister's first child: my weakness excited her pity; her attachment was fortified by labor and success: and if there be any, as I trust there are some, who rejoice that I live, to that dear and excellent woman they must hold themselves indebted. Many anxious and solitary days did she consume in the patient trial of every mode of relief and amusement. Many wakeful nights did she sit by my bed side in trembling expectation that each hour would be my last. Of the various and frequent disorders of my childhood my own recollection is dark; nor do I wish to expatiate on so distressing a topic. Suffice it to say, that while every practitioner, from Sloane and Ward to the Chevalier Taylor, was successively summoned to torture or relieve me, the care of my mind was too frequently neglected for that of my health; compassion always suggested an excuse for the indulgence of the master, or the idleness of the pupil; and the chain of my education was broken, as often as I was recalled from the school of learning to the bed of sickness."

"My first introduction to the historical scenes, which have since engaged so many years of my life, must be ascribed to an accident. In the summer of 1751, I accompanied my father on a visit to Mr. Hoare's, in Wiltshire; but I was less delighted with the beauties of Stourhead, than with discovering in the library a common book, the Continuation of Echard's Roman history, which is indeed executed with more skill and taste than the previous work. To me the reigns of the successors of Constantine was absolutely new; and I was immersed in the passage of the Goths over the Danube, when the summons of the dinner bell reluctantly dragged me from my intellectual feast. This transcient glance served rather to irritate than to appease my curiosity; and as soon as I returned to Bath, I procured the second and third volumes of Howel's History of the World, which exhibit the Byzantine period on a larger scale. Mahomet and his Saracens soon fixed my attention; and some instinct of criticism directed me to the genuine sources. Simon Oakley, an original in every sense, first opened my eyes; and I was led from one book to another, till I had ranged round the circle of Oriental history. Before I was sixteen, I had exhausted all that could be learned in English of the Arabs and Persians, the Tartars and Turks; and the same ardor urged me to guess the French of D'Herbelot, and to construe the barbarous Latin of Pocock's Abulfaragius. Such vague and multifarious reading could not teach me to think, to write, or to act; and the only principle that darted a ray of light into the indigested chaos, was an early and rational application to the order of time and place. The maps of Cellarius and Wells imprinted in my mind the picture of ancient geography; from Stranchius I imbibed the elements of Chronology: the tables of Helvetius and Anderson, the Annals of Usher and Prideaux, distinguished the connection of events, and engraved the multitude of names and dates in a clear and indelible series. But in the discussion of the first ages I overleaped the bounds of modesty and use. In my childish balance I presumed to weigh the systems of Scaliger and Petavius, of Marsham and Newton, which I could seldom study in the originals; and my sleep has been disturbed by the difficulty of reconciling the Septuagent with the Hebrew computation. I arrived at Oxford with a stock of erudition, that might have puzzled a doctor, and a degree of ignorance, of which a school-boy would have been ashamed."

Speaking of the University of Oxford, Mr. Gibbon observes—

"It might at least be expected, that an ecclesiastical school should at least inculcate the orthodox principles of religion. But our venerable mother had contrived to unite the opposite extremes of bigotry and indifference: a heretic, or unbeliever, was a monster in her eyes; but she was always, or often, or sometimes, remiss in the spiritual education of her own children. According to the statutes of the university, every student, before he is matriculated, must subscribe his assent to the thirty-nine articles of the church of England, which are signed by more than read, and read by more than believe them. My insufficient age excused me, however, from the immediate performance of this legal ceremony; and the vice-chancellor directed me to return, as soon as I should have accomplished my fifteenth year; recommending me, in the mean while, to the instruction of my college. My college forgot to instruct: I forgot to return, and was myself forgotten by the first magistrate of the university. Without a single lecture, either public or private, either christian or protestant, without any academical subscription, without any episcopal confirmation, I was left by the dim light of my catechism to grope my way to the chapel and communion table, where I was admitted, without a question, how far, or by what means, I might be qualified to receive the sacrament. Such almost incredible neglect was productive of the worst mischiefs. From my childhood I had been fond of religious disputation: my poor aunt has been often puzzled by the mysteries which she strove to believe; nor had the elastic spring been totally broken by the weight of the atmosphere of Oxford. The blind activity of idleness urged me to advance without armor into the dangerous mazes of controversy; and at the age of sixteen, I bewildered myself in the errors of the church of Rome.

"The progress of my conversion may tend to illustrate, at least, the history of my own mind. It was not long since Dr. Middleton's free enquiry had sounded an alarm in the theological world: much ink and much gall had been spilt in the defence of primitive miracles; and the two dullest of their champions were crowned with academical honors by the university of Oxford. The name of Middleton was unpopular; and his proscription very naturally led me to peruse his writings, and those of his antagonists. His bold criticism, which approaches the precipice of infidelity, produced on my mind a singular effect; and had I persevered in the communion of Rome, I should now apply to my own fortune the prediction of the Sybil,

——*Via prima salutis,*
Quod minime reris, Graiia, pandetur ab urbe.

"The elegance of style and freedom of argument were repelled by a shield of prejudice. I still revered the character, or rather the names, of the saints and fathers whom Dr. Middleton exposes; nor could he destroy my implicit belief, that the gift of miraculous powers was continued in the church, during the first four or five centuries of christianity. But I was unable to resist the weight of historical evidence, that within the same period most of the leading doctrines of popery were already introduced in theory and practice: nor was my conclusion absurd, that miracles are the test of truth, and that the church must be orthodox and sure, which was so often approved by the visible interposition of the Deity. The marvellous tales which are so boldly attested by the Basils and Chrysostoms, the Austins and Jeromes, compelled me to embrace the superior merits of celibacy, the institution of the monastic life, the use of the sign of the cross, of holy oil, and even of images, the invocation of saints, the worship of relics, the rudiments of purgatory in prayers for the dead, and the tremendous mystery of the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ, which insensibly swelled into the prodigy of transubstantiation. In these dispositions, and already more than half a convert, I formed an unlucky intimacy with a young gentleman of our college, whose name I shall spare. With a character less resolute, Mr. **** had imbibed the same religious opinions; and some Popish books, I know not through what channel, were conveyed into his possession. I read, I applauded, I believed: the English translations of two famous works of Bossuet, bishop of Meaux, the Exposition of the Catholic Doctrine, and the History of the Protestant Variations, achieved my conversion, and I surely fell by a noble hand. I have since examined the originals with a more discerning eye, and shall not hesitate to pronounce, that Bossuet is indeed a master of all the weapons of controversy. In the Exposition, a specious apology, the orator assumes, with consummate art, the tone of candor and simplicity; and the ten-horned monster is transformed, at his magic touch, into the milk-white hind, who must be loved as soon as she is seen. In the history, a bold and well-aimed attack, he displays, with a happy mixture of narrative and argument, the faults and follies, the changes and contradictions of our first reformers; whose variations (as he dexterously contends) are the marks of historical error, while the perpetual unity of the Catholic church is the sign and test of infallible truth. To my present feelings it seems incredible that I should ever believe that I believed in transubstantiation. But my conqueror oppressed me with the sacramental words, "*Hoc est corpus meum*," and dashed against each other the figurative half-meanings of the protestant sect: every objection was resolved into omnipotence; and after repeating at St. Mary's the Athanasian creed, I humbly acquiesced in the mystery of the real presence.

To take up half on trust, and half to try,
Name it not faith, but bungling bigotry.
Both knave and fool, the merchant we may call
To pay great sums, and to compound the small,
For who would break with Heaven, and would not break for all?

"No sooner had I settled my new religion than I resolved to profess myself a Catholic. Youth is sincere and impetuous; and a momentary glow of enthusiasm had raised me above all temporal considerations."

"By the keen protestants, who would gladly retaliate the example of persecution, a clamor is raised of the increase of Popery: and they are always loud to declare against the toleration of priests and jesuits, who pervert so many of his majesty's subjects from their religion and allegiance. On the present occasion, the fall of one or more of her sons directed this clamor against the university; and it was confidently affirmed that the Popish missionaries were suffered, under various disguises, to introduce themselves into the colleges of Oxford. But justice obliges me to declare, that, as far as relates to myself, this assertion is false; and that I never conversed with a priest, or even with a papist, till my resolution from books was absolutely fixed. In my last excursion to London, I addressed myself to Mr Lewis, a Roman Catholic Bookseller in Russel street, Covent Garden, who recommended me to a priest, of whose name and order I am at present ignorant. In our first interview he soon discovered that persuasion was needless. After sounding the motives and merits of my conversion, he consented to admit me into the pale of the church, and at his feet, on the 8th of June 1753, I solemnly, though privately, abjured the errors of heresy. The seduction of an English youth of family and fortune was an act of as much danger as glory; but he bravely overlooked the danger, of which I was not sufficiently informed. "Where a person is reconciled to the see of Rome, or procures others to be reconciled, the offence (says Blacksone) amounts to high treason." And if the humanity of the age would prevent the execution of this sanguinary statute, there were other laws of a less odious cast, which condemned the priest to perpetual imprisonment, and transferred the proselyte's estate to his nearest relation. An elaborate controversial epistle, approved by my director, and addressed to my father, announced and justified the step I had taken. My father was neither a bigot nor a philosopher; but his affection deplored the loss of an only son; and his good sense was astonished at my strange departure from the religion of my country. In the first sally of passion he divulged a secret which prudence might have suppressed, and the gates of Magdelen College were forever shut against my return. Many years afterwards, when the name of Gibbon was become as notorious as that of Middleton, it was industriously whispered at Oxford, that the historian had formerly "turned papist:" my character sood exposed to the reproach of inconstancy; and this invidious topic would have been handled without mercy by my opponents, could they have separated my cause from that of the university. For my own part, I am proud of an honest sacrifice of interest to conscience. I can never blush, if my tender mind was entangled in the sophistry that seduced the acute and manly understandings of Chillingworth and Bayle, who afterwards emerged from superstition to scepticism."

ANSWER.

Of the President of the United States, to the address and proceedings of the meeting of the republican delagates of the county of Salem, N. J on the 3d ult.

Washington, March 20, 1809.

GENTLEMEN,

The proceedings of the republican delegates of the several townships of the county of Salem, in New Jersey, on the 3d intant, transmitted by you, have been duly received.

It is highly agreeable to find in these proceedings, our national embarrassments traced to their true source, in the injustice and aggressions of foreign powers; and equally so to see measures of counteracting them so entirely approved.

It cannot be doubted that these measures have had many salutary effects; and that the efficacy of them would have been still greater, if the perseverance of those powers in their wrongs, had been less encouraged by unworthy citizens, who have shewn themselves ready to sacrifice their duty and their country, to the spirit of party or the thirst of gain. There could not be a more honorable contrast, than is presented in the sentiments and determinations of the meeting in the county of Salem, nor pledges more animating to those charged with the maintenance of the rights and interests of the nation.

Having borne a part, though less distinguished than your partiality ascribes to me, in establishing the system of government, under which we live, I may be well presumed to feel a solicitude for the success, as well as a conviction of the soundness of its principles.

Thus far we have all had reason to be gratified with its fruits; and nothing could make me more happy than to be among the instruments of divine providence, in rendering it conducive, in the highest possible degree, to the welfare of our country.

JAMES MADISON.

THE PRESIDENT'S REPLY,

To the address and resolutions of the democratic citizens of Kent county, Md. convened at the head of Chester, on the 4th ult.

Washington, March 21, 1809.

SIR—I have received your letter of the 16th inst. enclosing the proceedings of "the democratic citizens of Kent county, on the 4th instant." I am greatly obliged by the kind expressions towards me, which have a place in those proceedings, and the more so as the value of them is enhanced by the patriotic spirit which characterizes the meeting.

In preferring peace, though prepared for a suspension of its blessings, when the national rights cannot be otherwise maintained; and in doing justice to the measures and motives by which those blessings have been cherished, without an abandonment of those rights, they have shewn themselves worthy of the country and government of which they are citizens.

It is a grateful reflection that a like disposition prevails throughout the great mass of our countrymen; and it may reasonably be hoped, that the number forming an exception will every day diminish under the influence of truth and of the general example.

I tender to the citizens of Kent county, to whom I am indebted for the address transmitted by you, my sincere respects and friendly wishes.

JAMES MADISON.

FROM THE NORTH AMERICAN.

ROAD TO PHILADELPHIA.

Some public spirited gentleman, anxious for the improvement of this hitherto neglected but highly interesting road, have employed an eminent surveyor to go over it. The distance is found to be ninety-three miles, through Derby, Chester, Wilmington, Elkton, Havre-de-Grace and Bushtown to Baltimore. The same surveyor has ascertained the distance between Baltimore and Philadelphia, in a direct line to be 85 1-4 miles, or 7 3-4 miles shorter than the road now runs. He has also laid down a plan of nearly straightening the road, at the same time that it runs through all the abovementioned towns: according to this plan the distance would be reduced to 86 1-2 miles. The straight line passes better than two miles South of the mouth of the Susquehanna, and the present post towns are as nearly as they possibly can be on the straight line. Thus supposing, the surface of the road to be in no higher degree of improvement than it now is, about 1 1-2 hours travelling would be saved by the proposed change or about 1-14th of the whole distance.

There is no habitual traveller between this city and Philadelphia, or between the towns lying on different sides of the Susquehanna, but has suffered delay or danger in his journies from the necessity of crossing it.—To female travellers in particular it very often clouds a journey of pleasure with a dread, which the desire to see a near connection or dear friend, or some highly interesting concern, is alone sufficient to surmount. The motion of the mail is also materially retarded by the present mode of crossing the river. What with the shipping and unloading of the baggage; waiting for the boat, which may be on the other side; the wind being unfavorable, the ice, &c. &c. &c. an hour's gain of time is a reasonable average computation, which a bridge instead of a boat would produce.

A bridge, at the mouth of the Susquehanna, is very practicable; and it could be more durable and substantially placed there at an expense not greater than has been laid out in building that which has been thrown across the Potomac at Washington, [illegible]