

MEMOIRS
OF
DOCTOR PULTENEY.

DR. RICHARD PULTENEY was born at Loughborough, in the county of Leicester, February 17th, 1730. His parents had thirteen children, of whom Richard alone arrived at the age of maturity; and he himself was affected, at an early period of life, with a pulmonary complaint which indicated considerable delicacy of constitution. Though the circumstances of the family were easy, yet they did not admit of an expensive education, or of a superior branch of profession being bestowed on the subject of these memoirs, whose only advantages of instruction were those of an ordinary elementary school, and of subsequent apprenticeship to an apothecary. The formation of that taste for natural history by which he became so much distinguished, seems to have taken place in very early youth. Instead of engaging in the boisterous and useless sports of his schoolfellows, in the hours of relaxation from learning, he used to wander in the fields, with no companion but his herbal, examining the plants that grew in his path with the most lively
B curiosity.

curiosity. The circumstances to which the acquisition of this taste, so singular in a boy, is principally to be ascribed, were his frequent opportunities of observing the pursuits of his uncle, Mr. George Tomlinson, of Hathern, who (we are informed by Dr. Pulteney himself, in a very feeling tribute of affection and gratitude to this gentleman's memory*) devoted much of his time to the study of natural history, and to whose example he was, no doubt, taught to look up with that respect which it merited.

Whether the destination of Dr. Pulteney to the medical profession was owing to his parents, or whether it was occasioned by a decided choice of his own, that profession was certainly the one which his bent of mind and disposition rendered the most proper for him of all others; and it is most probable that a predilection for it grew out of his fondness for sciences so intimately connected with that of medicine. At the termination of his apprenticeship, he was induced to commence practice at Leicester; where, however, partly from the circumstances of the situation, and partly from the effect of religious animosities, he laboured some time under many discouragements. The system of religion in which our author had been educated was Calvinism; many of his townsmen, therefore, who were of a different persuasion made it a matter of conscience to show indifference alike to his abilities and to his worth. He was obliged to adopt strict œconomy, as one of the means of maintaining a struggle with the unpropitious-

* See Nichols's *History of Leicestershire*, vol. 2. p. 846.

MEMOIRS OF DOCTOR PULTENEY.

3

ness of his situation: but this was not difficult to a young man whose habits, from his infancy, were those of the greatest temperance and frugality; the only mortification it produced was the being prevented from purchasing several books essential to the prosecution of his favourite studies. Books formed the great delight of his life, and the only solace under professional mortifications. Those which he had most pleasure in perusing had botany for their subject; and he was at length prompted by his partiality to that charming science to take up the pen himself, with a view to render it a matter of more general curiosity to his countrymen.

Dr. Pulteney chose for the vehicle of his first literary performances, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, a work at that period in high repute, and a medium of communication among men of the first literary distinction. His modesty, however, withheld him from putting his name to his papers, which, though the initials R. P. sometimes occurred, were often sent without any signature at all. Our author first became a contributor to this miscellany in the year 1750, at which period the pursuit of natural history was, in England, confined to very few persons, and a knowledge of the principles of the Linnean system, to still fewer. The following communications, therefore, could not fail to exhibit the importance of both one and the other in an interesting point of view; and many of them may be consulted, with satisfaction, even by a scientific naturalist of the present day.

B 2

“ On

“ *On the seeds of Fungi, with some botanical queries.*” (Vol. 20. p. 68.)

“ *A description of the Agaricus pedis equini facie, or the styptic agaric*” (Boletus igniarius), *with remarks on Mr. Hall’s letter in the foregoing magazine.* (Vol. 21. p. 455—456.)

“ *An account of poisonous English plants.*” (Vol. 25. p. 29—30. 69. 114. 159—160. 210—211. 270—272. 308—310. 348. 393—394. 450—451. 491—492.)

“ *A brief dissertation on Fungi in general, and concerning the poisonous faculty of some species in particular, being a supplement to the papers on poisonous plants.*” (Ibid. p. 542—545. 585.)

“ *A brief account of the most material writings of Professor Linnæus.*” (Vol. 26. p. 415—417. 463—465.)

“ *An abstract of a Latin thesis published in the third volume of the Amœnitates Academicæ, entitled Noctiluca marina.*” (Vol. 27. p. 208.)

“ *An abstract of a Latin treatise published by Linnæus, and entitled Somnus Plantarum.*” (Ibid. p. 315—320.)

Explanation of the above subject. (Vol. 28. p. 313—315.)

“ *A series of experiments and observations to show the utility of botanical knowledge in relation to agriculture and the feeding of cattle.*” (Ibid. p. 360—364. 407—409. 463—465. 515—517. 567—568.)

“ *On the Acacia.*” (Vol. 29. p. 262.)

“ *An account of the first volume of a new and enlarged edition of Professor Linnæus’s Systema Naturæ.*” (Ibid. p. 454—455. 509—511. 564—566.)

An

MEMOIRS OF DOCTOR PULTENEY.

5

- An account of the second volume.* (Vol. 35. p. 57—61.)
Concerning the Elæagnus. (Vol. 42. p. 12.)
 “*A Fungus [Lycoperdon stellatum] ascertained.*” (Ibid.
 p. 227.)
 “*On Tremella Nostoc.*” (Vol. 46. p. 123.)
 “*On the Orcheston Grass.*” (Vol. 52. p. 113.)
 “*An account of the Flora Rossica.*” (Vol. 55. p. 613—617.)
 “*On Myrica Gale.*” (Vol. 56. p. 639—642.)
The Anastatica described. (Vol. 61. p. 202—204.)
 “*On Trochitæ.*” (Vol. 62. p. 233—234.)*

The *Sleep of Plants*, mentioned as the subject of papers in the 27th and 28th volumes, was afterwards treated by the author in a more scientific and complete manner in the 50th volume (part 2. p. 506—517) of the *Philosophical Transactions*, under the title of “*Some observations upon the sleep of plants; and an account of that faculty which Linnæus calls Vigilæ Florum, with an enumeration of several plants which are subject to that law.*” Dr. Pulteney had before made himself known to the Royal Society by “*An account of the more rare English plants observed in Leicestershire*†,” in which he describes their medicinal and œconomical uses, and quotes the synonyms of all the authors to whom he had the

* These are not all the papers of which Dr. Pulteney was author in the publication above mentioned, though they are all that relate to natural history. In the 43d volume is “*A description of a Roman camp at Ratby, in Leicestershire,*” (p. 76); and in the 47th are “*Memoirs relative to Dr. Threlkeld,*” (p. 63.)

† See *Phil. Trans.* vol. 49. part 2. p. 803. 866.

means of referring. This paper, the materials for which must have been collected before he was twenty-six years of age, formed a very promising specimen of its author's skill in botany, to which, indeed, handsome testimony was borne by Sir William (then Doctor) Watson, through whose hands the communication was transmitted. In the same volume with the *Observations on the sleep of plants*, he also gave "*A brief botanical and medical history of the Solanum lethale, Belladonna, or deadly night-shade*" (*Atropa Belladonna* of *Linnaeus**); and "*An historical memoir concerning a genus of plants called Lichen by Micheli, Haller, and Linnaeus, and comprehended by Dillenius under the terms Usnea, Coralloides, and Lichenoides; tending principally to illustrate their several uses*†."

But it was not merely on subjects of natural history that Dr. Pulteney employed his pen, even in the earlier part of his life. In the 52d volume‡ of the *Philosophical Transactions*, we find "*The case of a man whose heart was found enlarged to a very uncommon size,*" which was also communicated by Sir William Watson, and which contains some useful remarks and reflections that entitle the paper to a higher estimation than that of a mere medical record.

The acquaintance and correspondence which our author had the good fortune to establish with a man so distinguished in the philosophical world as Sir William Watson, proved sources of the highest gratification to the former, and, as they were com-

* Vol. 50. part 1. p. 62—88. † Ibid. part 2. p. 652—688. ‡ Page 344.

menced and continued solely from a mutual love of science, did no small honour to both. By this respectable friend, Dr. Pulteney was introduced to the Earl of Macclesfield (at that time President of the Royal Society), Mr. Hudson (author of the *Flora Anglica*), and other persons, an intercourse with whom increased his passion for scientific pursuits, and stimulated him to those exertions which laid the foundation for lasting fame of his own. But his situation and sphere of life appeared to all who could best appreciate his character far too humble and obscure; his cast of mind and acquirements seemed to qualify him for attaining the highest honours of his profession, which, however, a native modesty and humility prevented him from coveting. It was recommended to him to apply for the doctorate, and, after having acquired this promotion, to remove to the metropolis, where the patronage of the Earl of Bath*, to whom he was related, might be productive of the most beneficial consequences to his interests. Yet, judicious as was this advice, it is probable that Dr. Pulteney would never have acted upon it had not an intimate friend † formed a similar design, and, being about to graduate himself, prevailed on the former to accompany him to Edinburgh.

In this university there were some circumstances which rendered the attainment of the doctor's degree, without having kept a regular academical residence, a matter of much greater difficulty and favour than it would have been at former periods, and

* The celebrated Mr. Pulteney. † Doctor (at that time Mr.) Garthshore,
 which

which would have been sufficient to discourage a person of greater enterprise than our author from making application for it, unsupported by the customary claims. Many of the senior students had entered into a common resolution to oppose, to the utmost of their power, the practice of conferring degrees on applicants who had not resided, and attended the lectures, the statutable period, conceiving that practice to be no less an injustice to themselves, than as having a tendency to bring the place of their education into discredit. Fortunately, the present candidate's merits were not unknown among the professors even before he was admitted to the usual examinations, which he also actually passed with so much ability, and so warmly did his friends interest themselves in his behalf, that opposition (though it had amounted almost to open rebellion) was overcome; and the outcry ultimately changed into general acquiescence in an indulgence which, on this occasion, was seen to be amply deserved. Dr. Pulteney obtained his diploma in May, 1764.

The subject of our author's inaugural dissertation was *Cinchona officinalis*—a subject which enabled him to display very fully not only his medical but also his botanical knowledge, and which was treated of with so much ability that it must have insured him high reputation, even if he had never been known as the author of other productions. This academical exercise was intended to have been inscribed to the Earl of Macclesfield, who had declared his willingness to accept the compliment; but, that nobleman dying just as the author was about to pay it, the
name

name of Lord Willoughby, of Parham, who had also shown marks of attention and kindness to Dr. Pulteney, was substituted for the former. That the performance was deemed honourable to the university itself, is sufficiently proved by its having obtained insertion in the *Thesaurus medicus**.

Having accomplished thus much of the plan recommended to him by his friends, Dr. Pulteney now thought of settling in London. He was introduced to the Earl of Bath by the celebrated Mrs. Montagu. On inspection of the family pedigree, his lordship acknowledged the Doctor for his kinsman, and, having also formed a very favourable idea of his professional merits, offered him the situation of physician to his person, with a handsome salary. Dr. Pulteney accepted the appointment, but had the misfortune to lose his patron (with whom he was just about to travel to the continent) by death, within a year afterwards.

Not long after this event, a medical vacancy occurred at Blandford, in Dorsetshire, in consequence of the departure of Dr. England to Bristol. There was no physician then resident nearer to Blandford than Dorchester, and Dr. Cuming himself was so far advanced in years, that there was a prospect of a still wider field of practice being soon opened. Under these promising circumstances, prudence dictated to Dr. Pulteney the propriety of relinquishing the metropolis, especially as the limited state of his paternal income was unpropitious to a long and patient struggle with the chance and fashion of that place; a

* Tom. 3. p. 10. (1785).

struggle, for which a sort of constitutional timidity and apprehensiveness likewise rendered him peculiarly unfit. Being presented with letters of the strongest recommendation to several families in the county by Sir George Baker and Sir William Watson, who warmly interested themselves in his success, our author accordingly took up his abode at Blandford; and the same good sense which led him to that determination continued to influence and govern him throughout his professional career. He studiously kept himself aloof from the petty dissensions and cabals which so frequently subsist in a country town; and being fully aware that too great a familiarity of intercourse with the general mass of people is destructive of that respect which it ought to be the first object of a physician to secure, he preferred remaining at his post, in converse with his books, to partaking in the common convivialities and gossipings of the place. He was no less anxious to preserve independence and dignity of character among his medical brethren, neither entering into any of those humiliating leagues, nor courting any of those interested intimacies, which are so frequent between different orders of practitioners. In the discharge of his more immediate professional duties, he showed such scrupulous punctuality, such unremitting attention, added to so much firmness, decisiveness and caution in his practice, that he invariably obtained the entire confidence of his patient. By this correct and conscientious conduct, Dr. Pulteney was not long in establishing that degree of reputation which necessarily brings with it pecuniary affluence.

In