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978-1-108-05568-0 - The Works of Sir William Jones: Volume 1: Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Correspondence of Sir William Jones 1

Edited by Lord Teignmouth

Excerpt

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MEMOIRS

OF THE

LIFE, WRITINGS, AND CORRESPONDENCE,

OF

SIR WILLIAM JONES.

THE origin of the family of Sir WILLIAM JONES on the maternal side, has been traced, by the industry of Lewis Morris, a learned British antiquary, to the ancient Princes and Chieftains of North Wales. With whatever delight, however, the Cambrian genealogist might pursue the line of his ancestry, a barren catalogue of uncouth names would furnish no entertainment to the reader. I shall only transcribe from the list a single and remarkable name in one of the collateral branches, that of William o Dregaiian, who died in one thousand five hundred and eighty

Life—V. I.

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one, at the age of one hundred and five years; with the note annexed to it, that by three wives he had thirty-six children, seven more by two concubines, and that eighty of his issue, during his life, were living in the parish of Tregaian, in Anglesey.

But I insert, without apology for the anticipation, a letter addressed by Mr. Morris to the father of Sir William Jones, as an interesting memorial of an ancient custom which is daily falling into disuse, and a pleasing specimen of the mind and talents of the writer.

TO WILLIAM JONES, Esquire.

SIR;

January 1, 1748.

It was a custom among the Ancient Britons (and still retained in Anglesey) for the most knowing among them in the descent of families, to send their friends of the same stock or family, *a dydd calan Ionawr a calennig*, a present of their pedigree; which was in order, I presume, to keep up a friendship among relations, which these people

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preserved surprisingly, and do to this day among the meanest of them, to the sixth and seventh degree.

Some writers take notice that the Gauls also were noted for this affection and regard for their own people, though ever so distantly related. These things, to be sure, are trifles: but all other things in the world are trifles too.

I take men's bodies in the same sense as I take vegetables. Young trees propagated by seed or grafts, from a good old tree, certainly owe some regard to their primitive stock, provided trees could act and think; and as for my part, the very thought of those brave people, who struggled so long with a superior power for their liberty, inspires me with such an idea of them, that I almost adore their memories. Therefore, to keep up that old laudable custom, I herewith send you a *callennig* of the same kind as that above mentioned; which I desire you will accept of.

I have reason to know, it is founded on good authority; for both my father and mo-

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ther were related to your mother, and came from the same stock mentioned in the inclosed; which is the reason I am so well acquainted with your mother's descent; and on the same account, till further enquiry, an utter stranger to your father's family.

As you were young when you left the country, it cannot be supposed that you could know much of these things. I have had too much time there; I wish I had not; for I might have applied it to better use than I have. If this gives you any pleasure, I shall be glad of it; if not, commit it to the flames: and believe me to be, with truth and sincerity, &c.

LEWIS MORRIS..

Leaving the genealogical splendour of the family of Sir William Jones to the contemplation of the antiquary, it may be remarked with pleasure, that its latest descendants have a claim to reputation, founded upon the honourable and unambiguous testimony of personal merit. His father was the celebrated philosopher and mathematician who so emi-

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nently distinguished himself in the commencement of the last century: and a short, but more accurate sketch of his life than has hitherto appeared, which I am enabled to give from the authority of his son, may be acceptable to the lovers of science.

Mr. William Jones was born in the year 1680, in Anglesey; his parents were yeomen, or little farmers, on that island; and he there received the best education which they were able to afford: but the industrious exertion of vigorous intellectual powers, supplied the defects of inadequate instruction, and laid the foundation of his future fame and fortune. From his earliest years, Mr. Jones discovered a propensity to mathematical studies, and, having cultivated them with assiduity, he began his career in life, by teaching mathematics on-board a man of war: and in this situation he attracted the notice, and obtained the friendship, of Lord Anson. In his twenty-second year, Mr. Jones published a Treatise on the Art of Navigation; which was received with great approbation. He was

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present at the capture of Vigo, in 1702; and, having joined his comrades in quest of pillage, he eagerly fixed upon a bookseller's shop as the object of his depredation; but finding in it no literary treasures, which were the sole plunder that he coveted, he contented himself with a pair of scissars, which he frequently exhibited to his friends as a trophy of his military success, relating the anecdote by which he gained it. He returned with the fleet to England, and immediately afterwards established himself as a teacher of mathematics, in London; where, at the age of twenty-six, he published his *Synopsis palmariorum Matheseos*; a decisive proof of his early and consummate proficiency in his favourite science.

The private character of Mr. Jones was respectable, his manners were agreeable and inviting; and these qualities not only contributed to enlarge the circle of his friends, whom his established reputation for science had attracted, but also to secure their attachment to him.

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Amongst others who honoured him with their esteem, I am authorized to mention the great and virtuous Lord Hardwicke. Mr. Jones attended him as a companion on the circuit when he was chief justice; and this nobleman, when he afterwards held the great seal, availed himself of the opportunity to testify his regard for the merit and character of his friend, by conferring upon him the office of secretary for the peace. He was also introduced to the friendship of Lord Parker (afterwards president of the Royal Society), which terminated only with his death; and, amongst other distinguished characters in the annals of science and literature, the names of Sir Isaac Newton, Halley, Mead, and Samuel Johnson, may be enumerated as the intimate friends of Mr. Jones. By Sir Isaac Newton, he was treated with particular regard and confidence, and prepared, with his assent, the very elegant edition of small tracts on the higher mathematics, in a mode which obtained the approbation, and increased the esteem, of the author for him.

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After the retirement of Lord Macclesfield to Sherborne Castle, Mr. Jones resided with his lordship as a member of his family, and instructed him in the sciences. In this situation, he had the misfortune to lose the greatest part of his property, the accumulation of industry and economy, by the failure of a banker: but the friendship of Lord Macclesfield diminished the weight of the loss, by procuring for him a sinecure place of considerable emolument. The same nobleman, who was then Teller of the Exchequer, made him an offer of a more lucrative situation; but he declined the acceptance of it, as it would have imposed on him the obligation of more official attendance, than was agreeable to his temper, or compatible with his attachment to scientific pursuits.

In this retreat, he became acquainted with Miss Mary Nix, the youngest daughter of George Nix, a cabinet-maker in London, who, although of low extraction, had raised himself to eminence in his profession, and, from the honest and pleasant frankness of

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his conversation, was admitted to the tables of the great, and to the intimacy of Lord Macclesfield. The acquaintance of Mr. Jones with Miss Nix, terminated in marriage; and, from this union, sprang three children, the last of whom, the late Sir William Jones, was born in London, on the eve of the festival of Saint Michael, in the year 1746; and a few days after his birth was baptized by the christian name of his father. The first son, George, died in his infancy; and the second child, a daughter, Mary, who was born in 1736, married Mr. Rainsford, a merchant retired from business in opulent circumstances. This lady perished miserably, during the year 1802, in consequence of an accident from her clothes catching fire.

Mr. Jones survived the birth of his son William but three years; he was attacked with a disorder, which the sagacity of Dr. Mead, who attended him with the anxiety of an affectionate friend, immediately discovered to be a polypus in the heart, and wholly

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incurable. This alarming secret was communicated to Mrs. Jones, who, from an affectionate but mistaken motive, could never be induced to discover it to her husband; and, on one occasion, displayed a remarkable instance of self-command and address in the concealment of it.

A well-meaning friend, who knew his dangerous situation, had written to him a long letter of condolence, replete with philosophic axioms on the brevity of life; Mrs. Jones, who opened the letter, discovered the purport of it at a glance, and, being desired by her husband to read it, composed in the moment another lecture so clearly and rapidly, that he had no suspicion of the deception; and this she did in a style so cheerful and entertaining, that it greatly exhilarated him. He died soon after, in July 1749, leaving behind him a great reputation and moderate property.

The history of men of letters is too often a melancholy detail of human misery, exhibiting the unavailing struggles of genius and