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978-1-108-05569-7 - The Works of Sir William Jones: Volume 2: Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Correspondence of Sir William Jones 2

Edited by Lord Teignmouth

Excerpt

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MEMOIRS

OF THE

LIFE, WRITINGS, AND CORRESPONDENCE,

OF

SIR WILLIAM JONES.

SIR WILLIAM JONES embarked for India in the Crocodile frigate; and in April 1783, left his native country, to which he was never to return, with the unavailing regret and affectionate wishes of his numerous friends and admirers.

As to himself, the melancholy impressions which he could not but feel on such an occasion, were alleviated by various considerations. The expectations of five years were now accomplished in the attainment of his wishes; he anticipated the utility of his official labours to the public, and the occupation

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fo peculiarly delightful to him, of investigating unexplored mines of literature. Sir William Jones was now in his thirty-seventh year, in the full vigour of his faculties, and he looked forward with ardour to the pleasures and advantages arising from his situation in India, without any apprehension that the climate of that country would prove hostile to his constitution. A difference of opinion on great political questions, without diminishing his regard for his friends, had narrowed his habits of intercourse with some whom he sincerely esteemed, and he felt therefore the less regret in quitting those whose principles he wished to approve, but from whom, an adherence to his own frequently compelled him to dissent. He reflected with pleasure on the independency of his station, that the line of duty, which it prescribed, was strait and defined, and in leaving his native country, for which he retained the warmest affection, he was not sorry to abandon all political cares and discussions. But his greatest consolation and enjoyment were derived from the society of Lady Jones.

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To those who are destitute of internal resources, whose habits have led them to seek for amusement in the miscellaneous occurrences and topics of the day only, a sea voyage is a period of fatigue, languor, and anxiety. To Sir William Jones every new scene was interesting, and his mind, exercised by incessant study and reflection, possessed an inexhaustible fund of subjects; which he could at pleasure select and apply to the purposes of recreation and improvement, but his application during his voyage was more particularly directed to those studies, by which he was to enlarge the requisite qualifications for discharging the duties of his public station, with satisfaction to himself, and benefit to the community*.

* The following memorandum was written by Sir William Jones during his voyage.

Objects of Enquiry during my residence in Asia.

1. The Laws of the Hindus and Mohammedans.
2. The History of the *Ancient* World.
3. Proofs and Illustrations of Scripture.
4. Traditions concerning the Deluge, &c.
5. Modern Politics and Geography of Hindustan.
6. Best Mode of governing Bengal.

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The following short letter to Lord Ashburton, written a few weeks after his em-

7. Arithmetic and Geometry, and mixed Sciences of the Asiatics.
 8. Medicine, Chemistry, Surgery, and Anatomy of the Indians.
 9. Natural Productions of India.
 10. Poetry, Rhetoric, and Morality of Asia.
 11. Music of the Eastern Nations.
 12. The Shi-King, or 300 Chinese Odes.
 13. The best accounts of Tibet and Cashmir.
 14. Trade, Manufactures, Agriculture, and Commerce of India.
 15. Mogul Constitution, contained in the *Defteri Alemghiri*, and *Ayein Acbari*.
 16. Mahratta Constitution.
To print and publish the *Gospel* of St. Luke in Arabic.
To publish Law Tracts in Persian or Arabic.
To print and publish the *Psalms* of *David* in Persian Verse.
To compose, if God grant me Life,
 1. Elements of the Laws of England.
Model—The Essay on Bailment—Aristotle.
 2. The History of the *American* War.
Model—Thucydides and Polybius.
 3. Britain discovered, an Heroic Poem on the Constitution of England. Machinery. Hindu Gods.
Model—Homer.
 4. Speeches, Political and Forensic.
Model—Demosthenes.
 5. Dialogues, Philosophical and Historical.
Model—Plato.
 6. Letters. *Model*—Demosthenes and Plato.
- 12th July, 1783. Crocodile Frigate.

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barkation, may not be unacceptable to the reader :

Sir WILLIAM JONES to Lord ASH-BURTON.

April 27, 1783.

Your kind letter found me on board the Crocodile: I should have been very unhappy had it missed me, since I have long habituated myself to set the highest value on every word you speak, and every line you write. Of the two inclosed letters to our friends, Impey and Chambers, I will take the greatest care, and will punctually follow your directions as to the first of them. My departure was sudden indeed; but the Admiralty were so anxious for the sailing of this frigate, and their orders were so peremptory, that it was impossible to wait for any thing but a breeze. Our voyage has hitherto been tolerably pleasant, and, since we left the Channel, very quick. We begin to see albicores about the ship,

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and to perceive an agreeable change of climate. Our days, though short, give me ample time for study, recreation, and exercise; but my joy and delight proceed from the surprising health and spirits of Anna Maria, who joins me in affectionate remembrance to Lady Ashburton. As to you, my dear Lord, we consider you as the spring and fountain of our happiness, as the author and parent, (a Roman would have added, what the coldness of our northern language will hardly admit) the *god* of our fortunes. It is possible indeed, that by incessant labour and irksome attendance at the bar, I might in due time have attained all that my very limited ambition could aspire to; but in no other station than that which I owe to your friendship, could I have gratified at once my boundless curiosity concerning the people of the East, continued the exercise of my profession, in which I sincerely delight, and enjoyed at the same time the comforts of domestic life. The grand jury of Denbighshire, have found, I understand, the bill

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against the Dean of St. Afaph, for publishing my dialogue; but as an indictment for a theoretical essay on government was I believe never before known, I have no apprehension for the consequences. As to the doctrines in the tract, though I shall certainly not preach them to the Indians, who must and will be governed by absolute power, yet I shall go through life with a persuasion, that they are just and rational, that substantial freedom is both the daughter and parent of virtue, and that virtue is the only source of public and private felicity. Farewell.

* * * * *

In the course of the voyage he stopped at Madeira, and, in ten additional weeks of prosperous sailing from the rugged islands of Cape Verd, arrived at Hinzuan or Joanna. Of this island, where he remained a few days only, he has published an interesting and amusing description. He expatiates with rapture on his approach to it, delineates with the skill of an artist the beauties of the scenery, and sketches with the discriminating pen

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of a philosopher, the characters and manners of the unpolished but hospitable natives. The novelty of the scene was attractive, and its impression upon his mind is strongly marked by the following just and elegant reflection, which in substance is more than once repeated in his writings:—" If life were not
" too short for the complete discharge of all
" our respective duties, public and private,
" and for the acquisition even of necessary
" knowledge in any degree of perfection,
" with how much pleasure and improve-
" ment might a great part of it be spent in
" admiring the beauties of this wonderful
" orb, and contemplating the nature of man
" in all its varieties*!"

But it would be injustice to his memory, to pass over without particular notice, the sensible and dignified rebuke, with which he repelled the rude attack of Mussulman bigotry on the divinity of our Saviour. During a visit which he made to a native of the island, a Coran was produced for his inspec-

* Sir William Jones's Works, vol. iv. p. 274.

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tion, and his attention was pointedly directed to a passage in a commentary accusing the Christians of blasphemy, in calling our Saviour the Son of God. “ The commentator (he replied) was much to blame for passing so indiscriminate and hasty a censure; the title which gave your legislator, and which gives you such offence, was often applied in *Judea* by a bold figure, agreeably to the *Hebrew* idiom, though unusual in *Arabic*, to *angels*, to *holy men*, and even to *all mankind*, who are commanded to call God their father; and in this large sense, the Apostle to the Romans calls the elect the *children* of God, and the Messiah the *first born among many brethren*; but the words *only begotten* are applied transcendentally and incomparably to him alone; and as for me, who believe the Scriptures which you also profess to believe, though you assert without proof that we have altered them, I cannot refuse him an appellation, though far surpassing our reason, by which he is distinguished

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“ in the Gospel; and the believers in Mohammed, who expressly names him the Messiah, and pronounces him to have been born of a virgin (which alone might fully justify the phrase condemned by this author) are themselves condemnable, for cavilling at words, when they cannot object to the substance of our faith, consistently with their own*.”

This quotation affords a decisive proof of the belief of Sir William Jones, in the sublime doctrines of the Christian religion. Had he been an infidel, he would have smiled at the scoffs of Mussulman bigotry; and had he been indifferent to his faith, he would have been silent on an occasion, where he could expect neither candour nor concessions from his antagonists. Indeed he was well aware, that a religious dispute with those zealots, would have been fruitless and unseasonable, and might have been dangerous; but, as it was inconsistent with his principles, to disavow or conceal what he firmly believed

* Sir William Jones's Works, vol. iv. p. 269.