

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06733-1 - The Works, Literary, Moral, and Medical, of Thomas Percival, M.D.:
To which are Prefixed, Memoirs of his Life and Writings, and a Selection from his
Literary Correspondence: Volume 1

Thomas Percival

Excerpt

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A
FATHER'S INSTRUCTIONS;
ADAPTED TO
DIFFERENT PERIODS OF LIFE,
FROM
YOUTH TO MATURITY:
AND DESIGNED TO PROMOTE
THE LOVE OF VIRTUE;
A TASTE FOR KNOWLEDGE;
AND ATTENTIVE OBSERVATION OF
THE WORKS OF NATURE.

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**QUID DULCIUS HOMINUM GENERI A NATURA DATUM EST,
QUAM SUI CUIQUE LIBERI?**

CICERO.

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TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE
COUNTESS OF STAMFORD;
AN AMIABLE PATTERN OF
BILIAL PIETY, CONJUGAL AFFECTION,
AND MATERNAL LOVE;
THESE
MORAL TALES AND REFLECTIONS
ARE INSCRIBED,
AS
A TRIBUTE OF ESTEEM AND RESPECT,
BY HER LADYSHIP'S
MOST FAITHFUL AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR.

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TO

T. B. P.—A. P.—F. P.—J. P.

&c.



MY DEAR CHILDREN,

THE little present, which is now offered to your acceptance, if it have no other value, will at least evince the sincerity and warmth of my affection for you. It will shew that you have been the objects of my fondest attention, and tenderest solicitude. The bustle of the town and the anxieties of an active profession have, indeed, necessarily diverted my thoughts, and at times excluded your image from my mind; but, like the bird which has been hunted from her nest, my heart has soon returned to the place where all its pleasing cares are centered. In our delightful retirement at *Hart-Hill*, every thing around me has conspired to suggest ideas of your health, your happiness, or improvement. The setting sun,

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the shady tree, the whispering breeze, or the fragrant flower, have alike furnished some tale or analogy, which has been applied to your instruction.

When you recollect these Lessons of Wisdom and Virtue, I flatter myself you will associate with them the paternal endearments, with which they were delivered; and that I shall live with honour in your memories, when forgotten by the world, and mouldering in the dust. Such immortality I am more ambitious to obtain, than all the fame which learning or philosophy bestows.

Adieu! my dear children. May you be wise, virtuous, and happy! And hereafter may we meet, to part no more, in those regions of the blessed, where our knowledge and felicity will be for ever increasing; and where we shall enjoy together the glorious presence of our common Father, the Parent of the universe!

THOMAS PERCIVAL.

HART-HILL, near MANCHESTER,
August 1, 1775.

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THE PREFACE.



AS the following Tales and Reflections will fall into other hands, besides those of the author's children, for whose use they were solely intended, it may be proper to acquaint the reader, that three objects of instruction have been principally kept in view. The first and leading one is to refine the feelings of the heart, and to inspire the mind with the love of moral excellence. And surely nothing can operate more forcibly, than striking pictures of the beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice; which at once convince the judgment, and leave a lasting impression on the imagination. Dry precepts are little attended to, and soon forgotten:* and if inculcated with severity, they produce in youth an aversion to every subject of serious reflection; teaching them, as Erasmus justly observes, *virtutem simul odisse et nosse*.

The second design of this little work is to awaken curiosity, to excite the spirit of inquiry, and to convey, in a lively and entertaining manner, a knowledge of the works of God. On this account, a strict

* Longum iter per precepta; breve et efficax per exempla.

SENECA.

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PREFACE.

attention has been paid to truth and nature. No improbabilities are related; and most of the narrations are conformable to the usual course of things, or derived from the records of history.

The third end proposed is to promote a more early acquaintance with the use of words and idioms. These being only the arbitrary marks of our ideas, such as are most proper and expressive may be learned with no less facility than the vulgar and familiar forms of speech.

It will be acknowledged that these are highly-interesting and important objects; but the attainment of them must depend upon the attention of the learner, and the capacity of his parent or tutor to explain the terms, point out the analogies, and enforce the reflections which are here delivered. To the younger pupil, therefore, every tale that is suited to his years, should be made a distinct lesson; and a reasonable time allotted for the fullest illustration of it: and when the words, the subject, and the moral are clearly understood, his curiosity concerning whatever may be connected with or suggested by them, should be gratified and encouraged.

Such an early exertion of almost every faculty of the mind cannot fail to enliven the imagination, quicken the apprehension, enlarge the understanding, and give strength and solidity to the judgment. And these are the most valuable advantages, which can be derived from the completest education. For half of what we learn in youth is soon lost in oblivion; and

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erves only for the exercise and improvement of our capacities. So limited, indeed, are the powers of memory, that every man of letters may apply to himself, what Dr. Bentley said of Dr. Gooch, with a pride disgraceful to learning, *I have FORGOTTEN more knowledge than he POSSESSES.*

The composition of Themes generally forms a part of the system of education in public schools. But the task is always irksome to boys, and seldom well executed by them; because a grave, didactic, and methodical discourse is not suited to their taste and genius. The writing of tales and fables, with moral reflections, might perhaps be a more useful and entertaining exercise; as it would afford a greater latitude for invention, would better display the powers of imagination, and would produce the happy talent of relating familiar and trivial occurrences with ease and elegance.

No attention has been paid to system in the arrangement of the articles contained in this volume. They are placed in the order in which they were written; and they were written at various times, as leisure allowed, or as the subjects of them were suggested, by family incidents, and other fortuitous circumstances. But though the tales are severally adapted to certain ages and occasions, it is hoped that their utility will not be confined within such precise and narrow limits. The amusements and instructions, even of early youth, are reviewed in manhood with satisfaction and advantage. And as the

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same objects at different periods of life excite different ideas and reflections, the lessons, which are comprehensible to an intelligent boy of ten, may furnish new matter to him at twenty, and be interesting to others of every age.*

Perhaps some apology may be thought necessary for the publication of a work, in many respects of a private nature, and professedly written by a parent for the instruction only of his own children. The author chooses not to plead, though he might with truth, the sollicitation of his most judicious friends, who have honoured his undertaking with their approbation. He relies on the candour of the public; conscious that he is influenced by no other motive than a sincere desire to do good. And he flatters himself that precepts which have flowed from the heart, will reach the heart, and produce impressions on the tender minds of youth, not to be expected from the wisest maxims, delivered with coldness and indifference.

* “I read in Livy,” says Montaigne, “what another man does not; and Plutarch read in him what I do not.”