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MEMOIRS
OF
BARON CUVIER.

INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE I enter upon the subject of this volume, I would explain to my readers the motives which have induced me to write it, in order to prevent that appearance of presumption, which may naturally be laid to the charge of an unlearned person, who attempts to write the life of so illustrious a savant.

When death has torn from us those whom we have most loved and revered, and the overwhelming bitterness of grief is past, the first feeling which awakens us from our sorrow is the desire to uphold the memory, and to make known to all men the virtues of the being enshrined in our hearts; a feeling which springs, not only from an honest pride in doing justice

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to one who is no more, but from a desire that posterity should benefit by the example. Rousing myself, then, from the stunning grief which at first assailed me, I eagerly sought all the public notices which appeared in England concerning the Baron Cuvier, in the hope of finding something equal to his high deserts; but though all did him the justice of placing him above every other naturalist, not one spoke of his talents as a legislator, and all equally neglected his private character. This, and the almost universal incorrectness of detail, no doubt proceeded from ignorance rather than intention; yet, disappointed as I was that my countrymen should have so little known and appreciated one of the most admirable persons of our time, nothing, at that moment, could be further from my thoughts than to supply the deficiencies by my own pen.

Most of those who were either anxious to enquire of me concerning the surviving family, or who were kindly solicitous about myself under such a calamity, seemed to think it a matter of course that I should publish some particulars of my lost friend; but although this certainly suggested the possibility of doing so, I still felt my own inadequacy too deeply to do other than refuse the undertaking. In a few weeks, how-

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ever, I was solicited in one or two influential quarters to write a short memoir for one of our public journals, and, afraid to trust solely to my own reminiscences, I applied to the relatives of Baron Cuvier for data. These data were contributed with a readiness which vouched for the sentiments of the family, and I seriously applied to the task. Recollection crowded upon recollection, anecdote upon anecdote, till, in a short time, it became very difficult to select from the mass. Long did I hesitate from the conviction of my own inability ; but the universal desire expressed to me that I should publish the documents which abundantly flowed from the best sources, and the anxiety evinced to know something of the private character and domestic habits of the great man, seemed to point out that part of his career which alone I was worthy to describe. Reflection whispered, that I was able to correct the many errors afloat ; that, perhaps, I was the only one in England, who, from having been received into the bosom of his family, could personally speak of various circumstances and events ; and when I thought of all the affection and kindness I had received, I began to feel that there would be a degree of ingratitude in remaining silent, and determined that I would,

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independent of all other publications, attempt to lay open to the English world the noblest part of the gifted individual — his heart.

Such is the chief purport of the present biography; the labours of M. Cuvier speak for his wonderful mind; and time alone can show, to its full extent, the influence of that mind upon science. To time also must we look for an impartial opinion upon his political career; but it is only for those who have lived with him to do justice to his high moral virtues; and in the hope that this little volume may serve, when I have followed the illustrious subject of it to the grave, as a basis for a more extended publication, I offer a narrative of facts.

Having thus, I trust, obviated every feeling of disgust which accompanies all kinds of presumption, and which would, most probably, be attached to me, were I to dare to think myself qualified for a biographer of savants, there yet remains something for me to say to those to whom I am unknown; for, when an individual starts from a private circle to give an account of an illustrious public character, it becomes necessary to vouch for the veracity of details, and to explain the opportunities afforded for observation. This will be best done by a short history

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of my intercourse with the Cuvier family, an introduction to whom took place through our mutually cherished friend, Dr. Leach, of the British Museum.

Mr. Bowdich had returned from his second, and I from my first, voyage to Africa, in the year 1818, and shortly after Mr. Bowdich proceeded to Paris, where his reputation, as the successful African traveller, was already known. The letter of Dr. Leach was scarcely necessary with the Baron Cuvier, who received him with that warmth and encouragement which always marked his conduct towards men of talents younger than himself, that interest which he extended to all who were devoted to science. Struck with the facilities afforded for study in the French capital, Mr. Bowdich determined to remain there some time, in order to qualify himself for the principal object of his ambition, a second travel in Africa. We both accordingly went to Paris in 1819; and from that moment the vast library of the Baron Cuvier, his drawings, his collections, were open to our purposes. We became the intimates of the family, with whom, for nearly four years, we were in daily intercourse. We left France with their blessings; and on returning alone to Europe, I was re-

ceived, even as a daughter. My correspondence with M. Cuvier's daughter-in-law, and other branches of the family, has been uninterrupted since that period; I have paid them repeated visits at their own house; and for fourteen years not a single shadow has passed over the warm affection which has characterised our intimacy.

And now, having stated my motives, and my claims to confidence, I have to express a sincere gratitude towards those who have assisted me, either by their notes or their works*, and to give an outline of the plan I have thought it necessary to adopt.

Unwilling to incur the risk of confusion, by mingling too much anecdote, either with my narrative of events or description of scientific and legislative labours, I have divided the present volume into four parts or portions, that each may bear its own share of detail. The first will give the data of all the important circumstances of the Baron Cuvier's life, in their respective order; the second will contain an account of his various works, as a savant and philosopher; the third will be devoted to his

* Foremost among these are, Baron Pasquier, M. Laurillard, Dr. Duvernoy, and the Baron de H—.

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legislative career ; and the fourth will be chiefly confined to those anecdotes which will best illustrate his character as a man. In following this method, I may, probably, be led into something like repetition ; but I hope I shall be excused, if each part shall be found to contain a whole in itself, which facilitates reference.

PART I.

GEORGE LÉOPOLD CHRÉTIEN FRÉDÉRIC DAGOBERT CUVIER was born at Montbéliard (département du Doubs) on the twenty-third of August, 1769. This town now belongs to France, but at that time formed a part of the kingdom of Würtemberg. His family came originally from a village of the Jura, which still bears the name of Cuvier, and settled at Montbéliard at the period of the Reformation. The grandfather of the subject of the present biography had two sons; one became celebrated for his learning, and the other, the father of George Cuvier, entered a Swiss regiment then in the service of France. Having much distinguished himself in his military duties, he was made Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite Militaire*, which, among the Protestants, was equal to the catholic Croix de St.

* The impossibility of finding English words equivalent to French technical terms, names of public functions, orders, &c. obliges me, in most cases, to preserve the original phrase.

Louis ; and, after forty years service, he retired, with a small pension, to Montbéliard, where he was afterwards appointed commandant of the artillery in that town. At fifty years of age he married a young lady, gifted with much talent and feeling, by whom he had three sons. The eldest died while his mother was pregnant with her second son, which event preyed so much upon her health, that her infant, George, came into the world with a constitution so feeble, that his youth scarcely promised manhood. The cares of this excellent mother, during the extreme delicacy of his health, left an impression on M. Cuvier which was never effaced, even in his latest years, and amid the absorbing occupations of his active life. He cherished every circumstance connected with her memory ; he loved to recall her kindnesses, and to dwell upon objects, however trifling, which reminded him of her. Among other things, he delighted in being surrounded by the flowers she had preferred, and whoever placed a bouquet of red stocks in his study or his room, was sure to be rewarded by his most affectionate thanks for bringing him what he called “the favourite flower.” But this well-judging parent did not confine her cares

to his health alone ; she devoted herself equally to the formation of his mind, and was another proof of the influence that a mother's early attentions frequently shed over the future career of her son. She guided him in his religious duties, taught him to read fluently at the age of four years, took him every morning to an elementary school, and, although herself ignorant of Latin, so scrupulously made him repeat his lessons to her, that he was always better prepared with his tasks than any other boy at the school. She made him draw under her own inspection ; and, by constantly furnishing him with the best works on history and general literature, nurtured that passion for reading, that ardent desire for knowledge, which became the principal spring of his intellectual existence. As he advanced in drawing, his progress was superintended by one of his relations, an architect in the town of Montbéliard ; and he successively passed through all the exercises of this first school, repeating the usual catechisms, the psalms of David, and the sonnets of Drelin-court, &c., with the utmost facility. At ten years of age he was placed in a higher school, called the Gymnase, where, in the space of four years, he profited by every branch of education