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Excerpt

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BIOGRAPHICAL ANECDOTES
OF
WILLIAM HOGARTH.

THIS great and original Genius is said by Dr. Burn to have been the descendant of a family originally from Kirkby Thore in Westmorland*.

His grandfather was a plain yeoman, who possessed a small tenement in the vale of Bampton, a village about fifteen miles North of Kendal in that county; and had three sons.

The eldest assisted his father in farming; and succeeded to his little freehold.

The second settled in Troutbeck, a village eight miles North West of Kendal, and was remarkable for his talent at provincial poetry.

* Dr. Burn's History of Westmorland and Cumberland, vol. I. p. 479.

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“ I must leave you to the annals of Fame,” says Mr. Walker, the ingenious Lecturer on Natural Philosophy, who favoured me with these particulars, “ for the rest of the anecdotes of this great Genius ; and shall endeavour to shew you, that his family possessed similar talents ; but they were destined, like the wild rose,

‘ To waste their sweetness in the desert air.

“ Happy should I be to rescue from oblivion the name of ALD HOGART, whose songs and quibbles have so often delighted my childhood ! These simple strains of this Mountain Theocritus were fabricated while he held the plough, or was leading his fewel from the hills. He was as critical an observer of Nature as his nephew, for the narrow field he had to view her in. Not an incident or an absurdity in the neighbourhood escaped him. If any one was hardy enough to break through any decorum of old and established repute ; if any one attempted to over-reach his neighbour, or cast a leering eye at his wife ; he was sure to hear himself sung over the whole parish, nay, to the very boundaries of the Westmorland dialect ! so that his songs were said to have a greater

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effect on the manners of his neighbourhood, than even the sermons of the parson himself.

“ But his poetical talents were not confined to the incidents of his village. I myself have had the honour to bear a part in one of his plays (I say *one*, for there are several of them extant in MS. in the mountains of Westmorland at this hour). This play was called ‘The Destruction of Troy.’ It was written in *mètre*, much in the manner of Lopez de Vega, or the antient French drama. The unities were not too strictly observed; for the siege of ten years was all represented. Every hero was in the piece; so that the *Dramatis Personæ* consisted of every lad of genius in the whole parish. The wooden horse—Hector dragged by the heels—the fury of Diomed—the flight of Æneas—and the burning of the city, were all represented.

“ I remember not what Fairies had to do in all this; but, as I happened to be about three feet high at the time of this still-talked-of exhibition, I personated one of these tiny beings. The stage was a fabrication of boards placed about six feet high, on strong posts; the green-room was partitioned off with the same materials; its ciel-

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ing was the azure canopy of Heaven; and the boxes, pit, and galleries, were laid into one by the Great Author of Nature, for they were the green slope of a fine hill. Despise not, Reader, this humble state of the provincial drama; let me tell you, there were more spectators, for three days together, than your three Theatres in London would hold; and let me add, still more to your confusion, that you never saw an audience half so well pleased.

“ The exhibition was begun with a grand procession, from the village to a great stone (dropt by the Devil about a quarter of a mile off, when he tried in vain to erect a bridge across Windermere; so the people, unlike the rest of the world, have remained a very good sort of people ever since); I say, the procession was begun by the minstrels of five parishes, and were followed by a yeoman on bull-back—you stare!—stop then till I inform you that this adept had so far civilised his bull, that he would suffer the yeoman to mount his back, and even to play upon his fiddle there. The managers besought him to join the procession; but the bull, not being accustomed to much company, and particularly so much applause; whether he was intoxicated with praise, thought

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himself affronted and made game of, or whether a favourite cow came across his imagination; certain it was, that he broke out of the procession; erected his tail, and, like another Europa, carried off the affrighted yeoman and his fiddle, over hedge and ditch, till he arrived at his own field. This accident rather inflamed than depressed the good humour arising from the procession; and the clown, or jack-pudding of the piece availed himself so well of the incident, that the lungs and ribs of the spectators were in manifest danger. This character was the most important personage in the whole play; for his office was, to turn the most serious parts of the drama into burlesque and ridicule. He was a compound of Harlequin and the Merry Andrew, or rather the Arch-fool of our antient kings. His dress was a white jacket, covered with bulls, bears, birds, fish, &c. cut in various-coloured cloth. His trowsers were decorated in like manner, and hung round with small bells; and his cap was that of Folly, decorated with bells, and an otter's brush impending. The lath sword must be of great antiquity in this island, for it has been the appendage of

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a jack-pudding in the mountains of Westmorland time out of mind.

“ The play was opened by this character with a song, which answered the double purpose of a play-bill and a prologue; for his ditty gave the audience a foretaste of the rueful incidents they were about to behold; and it called out the actors, one by one, to make the spectators acquainted with their names and characters, walking round and round till the whole *Dramatis Personæ* made one great circle on the stage. The audience being thus become acquainted with the actors, the play opened with Paris running away with Helen, and Menelaus scampering after them; then followed the death of Patroclus, the rage of Achilles, the persuasions of Ulysses, &c. &c and the whole interlarded with apt songs, both serious and comic, all the production of *Ald Hogart*. The Bard, however, at this time had been dead some years, and I believe this Fête was a Jubilee to his memory; but let it not detract from the invention of Mr. Garrick, to say that his at Stratford was but a copy of one forty years ago on the banks of Wiindermere. Was it any im-

provement, think you, to introduce several bulls into the procession instead of one? But I love not comparisons, and so conclude.

“ Yours, &c. ADAM WALKER.”

“ However *Ald Hogard* might have succeeded in the dramatic line, and before a rustic audience, his poems of a different form are every way contemptible. Want of grammar, metre, sense, and decency, are their invariable characteristics.” This opinion, given literally in the words of the late Mr. Steevens, was “ founded on a thorough examination of a whole bundle of them, transmitted by a friend after the first publication of this work.”

RICHARD HOGARTH, the third son, who was educated at St. Bee's, and had kept a school in the same county, appears to have been a man of some learning. He came early to London, where he resumed his original occupation of a schoolmaster in Ship Court in The Old Bailey, and was occasionally employed as a corrector of the press.

A Latin letter from him in 1697 (preserved among the MSS. in the British Museum, N^o 4277, 50.) relates

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to a book which had been printed with great expedition. But the letter shall speak for itself.

“ Vir Clarissime, Excusso Malpighio intra sex vel plurimum septem septimanas te tamen per totum inconsulto, culpa est in Bibliopolam conferenda, qui adeo festinanter urgebat opus ut moras nectere nequivimus. Utut sit, tamen mihi met adolor me satis rectè authoris & verba & mentem cepisse (diligenter enim noctes atque dies opere incubui ne tibi vel ulli regionum tuorum sodalium molestus forem). Rudiora tamen (quorum specimen infra exhibere placuit) & Italico-Latina, juxta præceptum tuum, similia feci; aliter si fecissem, totus ferè liber mutationem subiisset. Authorem tam pueriliter & barbarè loquentem nunquam antehac evolvi quod meminerim; faciat ergo lector, ut solent nautæ, qui, dum foetet aqua, nares pilisando comprimunt, spretis enim verbis sensum, si quis est, attendat. Multa (infinita pœnè dixerim) authoris errata emendavi, quædam tamen non animadversa vereor; Augeæ enim stabulum non nisi Hercules repurgavit. Partem Italico sermone conscriptam prætermitto, istam enim provinciam adornare suscepit Doctor Pragestee,

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Italus; quam bene rem gessit, ipse viderit. Menda Typographica, spero, aut nulla, aut levia apparebunt. Tuam tamen & Regiæ Societatis censuram exoptat facilem, Tibi omni studio addictissimus,

RICHARDUS HOGARTH, Preli Curator.”

He published “Grammar Disputations; or, an Examination of the Eight Parts of Speech by way of question and answer, English and Latin, whereby Children in a very little time will learn, not only the knowledge of Grammar, but likewise to speak and write Latin; as I have found by good experience. At the end is added a short Chronological Index of men and things of the greatest note, alphabetically digested, chiefly relating to the Sacred and Roman History, from the beginning of the World to the Year of Christ 1640, and downwards. Written for the use of Schools of Great Britain, by Richard Hogarth, Schoolmaster, 1712.”

This little book has also a Latin title-page to the same purpose, “Disputationes Grammaticales, &c.,” and is introduced by the following dedication :

“ **Scholarchis, Ludimagistris, et Hypodidascalis Magnæ
Britanniæ, S. P.**

“ Ne miremini, Fratres, (sit verbo venia) me manipulum hunc, qualis qualis est, vestri gratiâ scripsisse, et vobis dedicasse, siquidem non feci ut vosmetipsos instruerem (absit talis jactantia!) sed ut onus vestrum, quantum in me esset, levarem: Pueros enim comperi inter sese certantes ter quaterve in hebdomade *hisce Quæstiunculis et Responsalibus* (quum licuit per otium) Artem Grammatices melius calluisse *semestri uno*, quam ferè solent *duennio* vulgari methodo. Præterea hâc methodo insensibiliter discent liberi Latinè condere et loqui, dixissem pœnè prius quàm Latinè didicerunt. Qua fit ut domesticos aliosque cavillantes facilè retundent et repriment, quo comperto strenuè nitentur, et animabuntur ulterius progredi, quod Doctori non mediocrem pariet laudem. Proinde vos oro, si quid minus rectè expressum vel omisum videatis, ut me monitum faciatis, quo opusculum hoc in posterum prodeat cultius et emendatius; et ut tandem evanescat nugamentum illud laboriosum diu nimis in Scholis tritum. Si in hoc vobis aliquo modo prospexero