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Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century

The subtitle of this eight-volume set is Consisting of Authentic Memoirs and Original Letters of Eminent Persons, and Intended as a Sequel to the 'Literary Anecdotes', which had been published in nine volumes by the author, editor and publisher John Nichols (1745–1826) between 1812 and 1815, and are also reissued in this series. Like its predecessor set, these 'illustrations' are a useful source of biographical material on authors and publishers at a time when many of the literary genres we take for granted, such as the novel, the autobiography and the analytical history, were first being developed. The volumes were published between 1817 and 1858, the project being continued after Nichols' death by his son and grandson. Among the 'eminent persons' included in Volume 7 are the scholar and literary editor George Steevens, Bishop Thomas Percy, Dr Johnson and James Boswell.



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Consisting of Authentic Memoirs and Original Letters of Eminent Persons, and Intended as a Sequel to the 'Literary Anecdotes'

VOLUME 7

John Nichols





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Born 1729. _ Died 1811.

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BY JOHN BOWYER NICHOLS, F.S.A.

VOLUME VII.

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1848.





TO THE

REV. JOHN MITFORD, M.A.

OF BENHALL,

WHOSE EXCELLENT EDITIONS OF GRAY

AND OTHER POETS,

AS WELL AS HIS OWN ELEGANT WRITINGS IN VERSE AND PROSE,

HAVE SHEWN HOW JUSTLY HE CAN

APPRECIATE THE LABOURS OF KINDRED GENIUS,

THESE RELIQUES OF BISHOP PERCY

AND HIS FRIENDS

ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY HIS FAITHFUL

HUMBLE SERVANT,

J. B. NICHOLS.

Feb. 19, 1848.





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After an interval of many years I venture to lay before the public a seventh volume of "The Literary Illustrations of the Eighteenth Century;" of which my revered Father lived to publish four volumes; and to which two more were added after his decease.

The correspondence contained in this volume was not in my possession at the completion of the sixth volume, but has been acquired since by public sale. I had no sooner become possessed of this literary treasure, than I felt a strong desire to show my sense of the respect and gratitude I felt to the memory of Bishop Percy. for his uniform kindness to my Father and myself, by making a selection from his correspondence, as a portion of "The Literary Illustrations" of the time in which he lived.

Perhaps there was no person who mixed more extensively with the learned men of his day than the Bishop of Dromore. In early life he was the intimate friend of Johnson, Goldsmith, Burke, Reynolds, Boswell, Steevens, Malone, Lord Stowell, and the whole of the celebrated Literary Club; as



vi

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well as of Shenstone, Dr. Grainger, Dr. Farmer, Dr. Lort, and other eminent men of letters. In his latter years he had the good fortune to attach to himself friends, who, whilst he was himself resident in a distant part of the North of Ireland, contributed to his happiness and amusement by the richness of their correspondence; from some one or other of whom he was sure to hear of any event that occurred in the literary world.

The letters of and to Dr. James Grainger are the first in point of time, and open to view much of the aspiration of two young authors ardent in their pursuit of literary distinction. Dr. Percy's letters to Dr. Birch, and his correspondence with the Rev. George Ashby, are connected with the Bishop's early works; as those of the Rev. Henry Meen are with his later publications.

The letters of George Steevens, it is to be regretted, are few, but very characteristic of that lively and satirical writer.

Nor are the letters of James Boswell less characteristic of the Biographer of Johnson. His letters to Percy are followed by others by him, and by some addressed to him, chiefly relative to the character of the great Colossus of Literature.

One of the most communicative of the Bishop's correspondents was the well-known antiquary, Dr. Michael Lort; who, mixing in the first literary circles in London and Cambridge, was in constant communication with Percy. I have added to the Lort Article some correspondence between Dr. Lort and Dr. Birch; and at the suggestion of my friend Sir Frederic Madden, K.H., Keeper of



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vii

the MSS. in the British Museum, I have inserted an interesting series of letters from Dr. Lort to Horace Walpole, at the close of which Walpole's conduct to Chatterton is satisfactorily defended.

The correspondence with Percy of the learned and accomplished scholar Archdeacon Nares, has been much enlarged by a collection of his letters to his literary friends.

The Bishop's epistolary intercourse was not confined to the friends he had left behind him in England. From Edinburgh he was furnished by Dr. Robert Anderson, Lord Woodhouselee, Mr. Pinkerton, and others, not only with the literary news of the Northern Metropolis, but with much that they had themselves learned from their own correspondents. In Ireland, Dr. Thomas Campbell, Dr. Edward Ledwich, Joseph Cooper Walker, and others, added to the gratification of the good Bishop.

To the articles of the Rev. George Ashby, Dr. Campbell, Dr. Ledwich, and Mr. Walker, I have added their correspondence with RICHARD GOUGH, Esq. from the large collection I possess of the literary remains of that eminent Antiquary.

I had intended to have completed the Percy Correspondence in one volume, but it has extended to half of another. It is printed, but reserved to be published with a General Index to the whole Eight Volumes of the "Literary Illustrations of the Eighteenth Century," to be completed, if my life and health are preserved, at as short a period as is consistent with so laborious a task.

The notes in this volume are studiously short,



viii

ADVERTISEMENT.

but it is hoped will be found useful, as the object has been to ascertain, if possible, the dates of the deaths of the parties spoken of; and to refer to those works where the most ample memoirs of them may be found.

A pleasing duty remains—to return my best acknowledgments to my kind friend the Rev. John Mitford, of Benhall, Suffolk, (by whose recommendation the Percy Correspondence was selected for publication,) and to Sir Frederic Madden, K.H. To their kind perusal of the work during its progress, I am indebted for many friendly hints, some of which appear as useful notes.

The Rev. Joseph Hunter, F.S.A. and Wm. B. D. Turnbull, Esq. F.S.A. have obligingly afforded me assistance in the article of Dr. Grainger, a literary character of whom little was previously known.

To E. G. BALLARD, Esq. I am indebted for much literary assistance.

I need scarcely add that the Volume has much profited by the careful revision of my attentive son, J. G. Nichols, F.S.A. Had not his time been occupied by other laborious literary pursuits, the "Seventh Volume of Literary Illustrations" would probably have appeared many years since, compiled from different materials. Those stores, some of which were originally intended for this work, still remain at his disposal, to be produced hereafter in any way that public encouragement may demand.

J. B. N.

Feb. 19, 1848.



CONTENTS.

Notice of George Steevens, Esq	1
Correspondence between Mr. Steevens and Bishop Percy.	
STEEVENS to PERCY. Jan. 11, 1788.—Deaths in his family; Lord of mont's advice; Boydell's Shakspeare Gallery, Aldermen John and Boydell (note); the bad taste of the painters in costume; Malone's edi Shakspeare expected; line in Spenser's Faëry Queen; Mr. Monck (note); Mr. Boswell and his Life of Johnson; Mr. Jephson's "Julia; bon's Decline and Fall; Bruce's Abyssinia; Goldsmith's Works, and hitive; Mr. Ritson; Bust of Johnson by Nollekens. Same. (A fragment) no date.—Bishop Percy's Nephew	Josiah ition of Mason, '' Gib-
SAME. June 2, 1796.—A juvenile work of James I. and "Reulis antelis"	d Cau-
SAME. Oct. 24.—Addresses him as Uncle; poem in blank verse mention. Tyrwhitt; bantering compliments to his Aunt and Cousins; Dr. Farm health; Rev. H. Meen; Burke and his pamphlet; Thomas's opinion. "Melibeus;" doubts about its author.	ier's ill
SAME. Dec. 26.—Mr. Meen's character; "Tale of the Two Swannes' land's Shakspeare forgeries; the Literary Club; Dr. Farmer; G "Sepulchral Monuments".	fough's 7
Same. Jan. 3, 1797.—Thomas Watson's EKATOMIIAOIA; S. Ireland	
and his pamphlet SAME. Jan. 30.—Proposed Mezzotinto of Bishop Percy from Mr. A painting; sends an ancient poem in blank verse; extract from the "M for Magistrates"; G. Chalmers's invective against Malone; Dr. Fa health; Isaac Reed; visit of the French to Ireland; Literary Club SAME. Feb. 6.—Sends him more old poems; Dr. Farmer; price	Airrour armer's 11
quarto editions of Shakspeare Same. March 10.—Portrait of Bishop Percy by Abbott; Valentine (note); list of old poems in blank verse; Nichols's Progresses of Queen beth; Milton and blank verse; Sir H. Englefield and the Club Farmer; Sir John Jervis, afterwards Earl St. Vincent; Milton a: Works	Eliza- ; Dr.
SAME. Apr. 12.—Milton and blank verse; Dr. Farmer; Mr. Pinkert. Mr. Anderson; Vally (Valentine Green); Rupert Green; Bishop man and Mr. Meen; Bp. Percy's work, "Blank Verse before Milton."	Prety-
SAME. May 1.—" Mr. Anderson's Answer to Pinkerton's Attack," "Elizabetha Triumphans"; Mr. Meen; Anglo-Saxon verses."	
SAME. July 17.—George Chapman; Jas. Aske; Pontius Pilate's I Higgins; Literary Club; Mr. Edmund Wigley; Duke of Leeds Meen	Letter; ; Mr. 21
SAME. June 10.—Ireland and the Navy; Dr. Farmer and the Annual ing of Emanuel College at the Crown and Anchor; Mr. Meen; Rev. Plumptre's opinion of the characters of Hamlet and Ghost; prices quarto copies of Shakspeare at Leigh and Sotheby's, June 8, 1797.	James



X CONTENTS.

Same. Sept. 3.—Epilogue (by Goldsmith, see note); Dodsley's Papers and
Goldsmith's MSS.; Oratorio of Captivity set to music by an eminent com-
poser (Steevens, see note); Songs published (see note), (N.B. Notes * and †
are transposed a period of those pieces a Marlow's Lucan a Dr. Former
are transposed); notice of these pieces; Marlow's Lucan; Dr. Farmer;
Book on China by Sir George Leonard Staunton, and critique on it, and
some notice of the author
Same. Sept. 9.—Advice to Dr. Percy on his dealing with the booksellers; Mr.
Dodsley's executors; Dr. Warton's edition of Pope; C. and D. (Cadell and
Davies, see note)
PERCY to STEEVENS. Sep. 10.—Goldsmith's Epilogue and his other MS.
works
STEEVENS to PERCY. Sep. 14. Mrs. Bulkeley; Goldsmith's Epilogue; Death
of Dr. Farmer; "Pursuits of Literature"
of Dr. Farmer; Furshis of Interacting
Same. Nov. 10.—Examination of Dr. Farmer's papers; supposed debt of
Dr. Percy to Dr. Farmer
Percy to Steevens. Nov. 12.—Denies his debt to Dr. Farmer . 35
Memoir of Rev. Henry Meen, B.D
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN REV. MR. MEEN AND BISHOP PERCY.
MEEN to PERCY. July 26, 1796.—Corrections of Bishop Percy's "Blank
Verse before Milton " (see note); Dr. Farmer, G. Steevens, and I. Reed 38
SAME. Aug. 6.—Corrections of his "Blank Verse," &c. Glossary to
Chaucer
Same. Oct. 3.—Corrections of the Bishop's work; Bishop Pretyman 40
Same. Dec. 15.—Corrections continued; preferment of the Bishop's nephew;
Isaac Reed; Meen's Poem on "Happiness" 41
Same. Jan. 23, 1797.—Corrections continued; Dr. Farmer's health 42
Same. March 14.—Corrections continued; the Bishop's nephew . 43
SAME. May 2.—Corrections continued; Mr. Meen goes to Chigwell; Dr.
Farmer
Same. June 15.—Corrections continued; Dr. Farmer 45
Same. Aug. 30.—Corrections continued; Dr. Farmer; Sir Herbert Croft's
verses "on returning the key of the gardens at Ham House to the Earl of
Dysart" 46
Same. Dec. 16.—Death of Dr. Farmer; the Bishop's supposed debt to Dr.
Farmer; letters (Bishop Percy to Dr. Farmer) consigned to his care by
Steevens; Thanksgiving day at St. Paul's (on Lord Duncan's Victory, see
note); MS. notes on the New Testament 47
SAME. Nov. 25, 1799.—Isaac Reed and the European Magazine; Dr. John
Lettice; Mrs. Scott's poems; Dr. Grainger's poems; Rev. Weldon Champ-
neys (see note)
Same. Feb. 14, 1800.—Translation of Ovid's Epistles by Grainger, &c.
death of G. Steevens; his will and works; Mrs. Scott's poems; Jane Gibbs 49
SAME. Aug. 29.—Dr. Farmer's works and papers 51
Same. Apr. 8, 1801.—MSS. consigned to his care by Bishop Percy; Mrs.
Scott's poems; Dr. Lettice and Isaac Reed; inquiry about Dr. Grainger's
poems; death of Miss Steevens; Rev. J. D. Haslewood, and various in-
quiries
Same. Jan. 29, 1802.—Todd's edition of Milton (note); Milton's copy of
"Lycophron;" Mrs. Scott's poems; Dr. Lettice; Dean Vincent; Isaac Reed;
Dr. Samuel Berdmore and his pamphlet (note)
Same. March 17.—Milton's copy of "Lycophron"
Same. June 26.—Milton's "Lycophron;" Dr. Lettice and Isaac Reed; Mal-
colm's "Londinium Redivivum"; "Philosophical Transactions, abridged" 56
Same. Jan. 1803.—Milton's "Lycophron;" Edition of Goldsmith's works;
Steevens's "Shakspeare;" Mr. Todd's "Spenser;" Mr. J. P. Malcolm;
Dr. Percy
SAME. May 18.—Bishop Percy's health; Milton's "Lycophron;" Todd's
"Spenser;" Goldsmith's works



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CONTENTS.

хi

Same. Aug.—Charles Goldsmith (see note); Isaac Reed and G. Steevens;
curious plate and note respecting men whose heads appear not above their
shoulders; Lord Charlemont's "Milton," and notes on "Lycophron," and
his keeping the book so long (see note); the European Magazine and Mr.
Richard Rolt 60
Same. March 13, 1804.—Bishop Percy's health; Lord Charlemont; Milton's
notes on "Lycophron;" Mr. Rivington; Dr. Lettice's Lectures on "Arti-
ficial Memory;" Mr. Todd's "Spenser;" Mr. Warton's edition of "Dry-
den (see moto), Emily indicate and Emily Educate (art moto)
SAME. July 30.—Mr. J. Mayne (see note); Bishop Bennett (see note); Mil-
ton's "Lycophron;" Mr. W. Preston's translation of "Argonautics of Apol-
lonius Rhodius;" Isaac Reed; Dan. Braithwaite (see note); J. Scott the
Quaker poet
SAME. Jan. 20, 1807.—Bishop Percy's health; death of Isaac Reed (see note);
Lord Royston's translation of "Lycophron;" Mr. T. Thirlwall's "Selec-
tions from Jeremy Taylor" (see note); death of Mrs. Percy (see note); acci-
dent to Mr. J. Nichols (see note) 66
Memoir of Robert Anderson, M.D 69
Correspondence between Dr. Anderson and Bishop Percy.
Percy to Anderson. July 21, 1798.—Commends his "British Poets" and
his "Life of Dr. Grainger;" offers him Grainger's MSS 71
Anderson to Percy. Nov. 30.—Accepts the offer of Bishop Percy's assistance;
obtains Mr. Mundell as a publisher of Grainger's Works, and Mr. G. Pa-
ton and Earl of Buchan as contributors of materials; various works in which
Dr. Grainger was engaged
Percy to Anderson. Feb. 21, 1799.—Promises the Grainger MSS.; list of
Grainger's published poems
Anderson to Percy. June 20.—Mr. G. Paton's ill health and death; visit
from Rev. Dr. William Traill; presses Bishop Percy to become the Editor
of Grainger; his own literary engagements; Mr. Alex. Thomson's "Pic-
tures of Poetry" and Campbell's "Pleasures of Hope" presented to Bishop
Percy by their authors
error in Dr. Anderson's Life of Shenstone
Anderson to Percy. July 31.—Thanks for Bishop Percy's present, &c.
curious information received from Mr. Joseph Cooper Walker; another
Poem of Dr. Grainger
Same. Sept. 28.—Some observations on the "Reliques;" commends the
Dedication to the Duchess of Northumberland; Alnwick Castle, noticed in
a "Monody" by Dr. Anderson (see note); Alex. Thomson and T. Camp-
bell; Mr. Paton and others; "Orpheus Caledonius;" another poem of Dr.
Grainger; his own literary labours
Percy to Anderson. June 18, 1800.—Sends him the Collection of Grainger's
Poems
Anderson to Percy. June 21.—Mr. (afterwards Sir W.) Scott's first efforts
at Ballad writing; critical observations on the Grainger Collection; Dr.
Frome and Dr. Currie; his occupations; Mrs. Jane West. 83
SAME. Sept. 13.—Grainger's books, and inquiry for his portrait [see p. 295];
Walten Scott and his Dallada. Mr. D. Tamisson and his "Scottish Dallada.
Walter Scott and his Ballads; Mr. R. Jamieson and his "Scottish Ballads;"
Life and Works of Lord Hailes
SAME. Sept. 14.—Mr. Foulis and the French MSS.; Dr. Trail; Mrs. Jane
West's poems commended, (see note); old Scottish Ballads of "Lord John
and Proud Ellen," and "Child Waters;" Mrs. Brown; Mr. Robert Jamieson,
(see note)
SAME. Jan. 27, 1801.—Walter Scott and his Ballads; the "Reliques;"
Mr. Fraser Tytler (afterwards Lord Woodhouselee); death of Mr. Mun-
dell; Dr. Anderson's Life of Smollett 91
SAME May 9 Progress of Grainger's Works and notes on them. William



xii

CONTENTS.

Cunningham and his Poems; Lord Surrey's Poems; Walter Scott's Ballads; Mr. Thomas Park; Mr. Jamieson; marriage of Miss Percy with Hon. and Rev. Pierce Meade June 15 .- Invitation to Dromore; progress of Grainger's Works; Miss Bannerman's Poems . 95 AME. Aug. 1.—Excursion to Scotland; Grainger's early life; progress of his Works; Bishop Percy's translation of Ovid's Epistles 97 Anderson to Rev. Dr. William Trail. Dec. 7.—William Cunningham; Grainger's Essay "On West India Diseases". 99

Anderson to Percy. May 8, 1802.—Indisposition, and intended journey to England; Grainger's "Essay on West India Diseases," and Poems (see note); Grainger's birth place, and other particulars and notes; Life of Goldsmith; Mr. Fraser Tytler (Lord Woodhouselee); Walter Scott; Mr. Leyden 100 Anderson to Percy. July 5 .- Proposed visit to Dromore 103 SAME. July 29.—Journey into Scotland with Rev. Thomas Jervis (see note) 104
SAME. Oct. 1.—Kind reception by Bishop Percy, and introduction to several
eminent characters; visits J. C. Walker at St. Valeri, (see note,) which he
describes; extends his literary acquaintance; General Vallancey; Sir
Richard Musgrave; presents of books from their authors; Harvey's MS. notes relative to Spenser 105 SAME. Nov. 6.—His journey to Dublin and acquaintances made there; Mr. Beauford's MSS.; Sir Richard Musgrave; poem of Mr. Boyd, translator of Dante, addressed to Dr. Anderson; Miss Stewart; Preston's version of Apollonius Rhodius. 107 LADY DALRYMPLE to PERCY. Nov. 10.—Percy's letters to Lord Hailes; Lord Hailes's Works; Lord Hailes's letters Anderson to Percy. Dec. 16.—Extract from Lady Dalrymple's and Lord Woodhouselee's letters; Percy's answer to the account of Dr. Grainger in SAME. translation of Froissart; Miss Stewart's Ode; Ritson's "Preliminary Dissertation on Metrical Romances" 111 Same. June 27 .- Miss Stewart's Ode to Dr. Percy; quotations from the Ode; alterations suggested 114 Aug. 16.—Letters relating to the Grainger family; Bishop Percy's illhealth; extracts of letters from Earl of Buchan and Colonel Johnes ME (resumed). Sept. 15.—Miss Stewart's Ode to Mr. Ercke, and stanzas to Dr. Anderson; Bishop Percy's letters to Lord Hailes; letters of Mrs. Same (resumed). Sept. 15 .-Grainger; her character defended; murder of Lord Kilwarden (see note) 117 Grainger; her character defended; murder of Lord Kilwarden (see note) 117 ME. Oct. 14.—Miss Stewart's Ode, &c.; letters of Dr. Percy and Lord Hailes; Grainger's Works; Ossian's Poems; Bruce's Travels; Park's Nugæ Antiquæ; "Northumberland Household Book;" Dr. Jamieson's "Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language;" Mr. J. C. Walker's "Essay on the revival of the Drama in Italy" and other works; Sir Richard Musgrave's account of the Insurrection in Dublin; Goldsmith's Works; Mrs. West's play; Walter Scott's "Sir Tristrem;" Death of Mr. Ritson 118 MME. Jan. 24, 1804.—Death of Mr. Alex. Thomson; Miss Bannerman (see SAME. note); Miss Stewart's Ode; Grainger's works

ME. May 6.—The Bishop's health; Grainger's Works; Miss Stewart's Ode; Mr. Stott's verses on Miss Stewart; Dr. Percy's "Northern Antiquities," SAME. and edition of Goldsmith; Mr. Owen Rees

124

Same. July 26.—Herbert's "Select Icelandic Poetry" (see note); extracts
from the notes (see note); the "Northern Antiquities"; Grainger's letters 127

Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Anderson. Aug. 16.—Bishop Percy to "Runic Poetry" and "Northern Antiquities"; Percy to Antiquities "Runic Poetry" and "Ru Antiquities;" Hon. and Rev. Wm. Herbert; Dr. Blair; Icelandic poets 130



More information

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CONTENTS.

xiii

Anderson to Percy. Sept. 15 .- Bishop Percy's "Runic Poetry;" Mr. Herbert's criticisms and poems; Messrs. Longman and Rees; Miss Stewart's Ode; Miss Bannerman; Grainger's memoirs Same. Oct. 29.—Miss Stewart's Ode; Mr. Hay Drummond; mis-statement in the notes to the Ode, as to Dr. Percy's preferment; Miss Bannerman and her affairs; benevolence of Dr. Anderson towards William Wight (see note); Dr. Grainger's letter to Mr. Burt; Dr. Anderson's life of Dr. Johnson; Dr. Ryan's work on the Irish Catholics; lines by William Wight, and a prose Address by the same to the unknown author of Chevy Chase Percy to Anderson. Oct. 17.-Mr. T. Armstrong; Bishop Percy's liberality to Miss Bannerman; Messrs. Cadell and Davies, and Goldsmith's Works; anecdotes of Ritson Anderson to Percy. (No date.)-Mr. T. Armstrong, and Mr. T. Robinson and his son Same. Dec. 4.—William Wight; Bishop Percy's liberality to him; Sir W. Forbes's Life of Beattie, with his correspondence (see note); Mr. Armstrong and Mr. T. Stott; hopeless state of Mr. W. Cunningham; Dr. Grainger's letter to Mr. Burt, and the date of Dr. G.'s death (see note); index to the "Sugar Cane;" Boswell's account of the recitation of the "Sugar Cane;" Boswell's Life of Johnson; Ritson's death; Mr. Selby and the Duke of Northumberland; Col. Johnes and his "Froissart"

140
PERCY to Anderson. Feb. 5, 1805.—Dr. Grainger's letter to Mr. Burt; Dr. Grainger's life, and time and place of birth, and death; the "Sugar Cane;" Dr. Smollett and Dr. Grainger; Col. Johnes and "Froissart;" Mr. William Cunningham's death; memoir of William Cunningham. 143 Anderson to Percy. April 3.—Dr. Grainger; Col. Johnes; Mr. Laing's new edition of Macpherson's "Ossian," and the forgery; Mr. Armstrong; death of Mr. W. Cunningham, and account of him to be published in Poetical Register Same. April 9.—Laing's Macpherson; the "Northern Antiquities;" Anderson's Life of Johnson; letters of the Duchess of Somerset (see note); extract from Good's Life of Dr. Geddes (see note) Same. April 12.—Mr. T. Armstrong and Mr. T. R. Robinson; Dr. Ryan's pamphlet, and new edition of his "History of the Effects of Religion;" Mr. Murray's "Bruce's Travels," with Life; Mr. J. C. Walker's "Essay on the Revival of the Drama in Italy;" Mr. Boyd's translation of the "Araucana," (see Repasts;" the Duchess of Somerset's letters censured; Dr. Anderson's Life of Shenstone, and critique on it; Dr. Anderson's Life of Johnson; new edition of the "Northern Antiquities;" Mr. W. Davies and the Works of Goldsmith; Ritson's death, and the British Critic (see note); Mr. Armstrong; Mr. T. R. Robinson; young actress at Belfast (see note); verses by Hafiz, Mr. T. Stott Anderson to Percy. June 13.—Mr. Laing and Macpherson; the "Northern Antiquities;" conversation with Mr. Rees and Mr. Longman, and comparison between Percy and Walter Scott; the "Poetical Register," and Dr. Anderson; Mr. T. R. Robinson's Address; Mr. Gillespie's poem on "Refinement;" Dr. Browne's "Observations on Hume," and Professor Same. Sept. 3 .- Mr. Duhigg's "King's Inns Remembrances;" Mr. T. R. Robinson's poems; Mr. Johnstone's "Lodbrokar-Quida, or the death-song of Lodbrok," with English translation, &c. (see note); Mr. Boyd and his Percy to Anderson. Nov. 27.—Criticism on Dr. Anderson's Life of John-Anderson to Percy. Dec. 14.—Mr. Boyle the banker, and Mr. John Lays Black; Dr. Anderson's intention to print Dr. Percy's observations on his "Life of Johnson" in the form of notes; Mr. T. R. Robinson, and Miss Stewart's verses to the young poet; "Northern Antiquities" . 159



xiv

CONTENTS.

AME. March 25, 1806.—"Northern Antiquities;" Dr. Anderson's Life of Smollett; the Massachusetts "Historical Collections;" inquiries for notices of Dryden for Walter Scott's new edition; Dedication to the "Evangelical History Harmonised," by Dr. Johnson; Chapter in Mrs. Lennox's "Female SAME. Quixote," by Dr. Johnson (see note); Mr. Robinson; failure of Vaccination 160 ME. June 28.—Thanks for Grainger's letter; Life of Grainger; Life of Smollett and "Northern Antiquities;" Scott's Life of Dryden and his Plays; Forbes's Life of Beattie; Miss Bannerman's Poems and Tales

162

Same. July 13.—New edition of "Key to the New Testament;" Mr. T. R. Robinson's Poems; Mr. W. H. Drummond's poem on "The Battle of Trafalgar," and his MS. of "Lucretius;" Recollections of Dromore and its scenery; the enlarged plan of "Poetical Translations;" the Leslie Controversy; Brown's "Observations on Hume;" "Campbell's Pleasures of Hope;" two Songs by Walter Scott

164 ME. Aug. 14.—Bishop Percy's subscription to Miss Bannerman's poems; "Key to the New Testament;" Anderson's Life of Smollett 167 Anderson to Mr. Thos. Robinson. Oct. 30 .- (See note); compliments him on his son T. Romney Robinson's progress at Trinity College, and mentions his portrait and the success of his subscription Anderson to Percy. Nov. 18.—The failure of Bishop Percy's sight; Smollett and Grainger's Lives; R. Jamieson's "Popular Ballads;" Bishop Percy and the Chatterton Controversy; "Key to New Testament," and "Northern elections; Miss Bannerman's Poems Same. March 11, 1807.—Death of Mrs. Percy (see note) and Dr. Anderson's ill health; moral reflections; George Paton's death; Miss Bannerman's Poems; Lord Woodhouselee's "Life of Kames;" Walter Scott's new poem; death of Mr. Wm. Preston (see note); Mr. Stott's and Mr. Boyd's verses on the death of Mrs. Percy (see notes)

Same. April 23.—Mr. R. Jamieson's "Ballads;" Character of Mr. M'Clean; destructive fire at Col. Johnes's at Hafod; his works SAME. Dec. 29, 1800.—(See note); list of Old Scottish Songs penès Mr. Fraser Tytler (Lord Woodhouselee), with specimens, and their history 176 176 July 23, 1807.—Introduction of Rev. Mr. Buckminster, an American traveller, to Dr. Percy; reflections on the religious feeling in Ireland; Miss traveller, to Dr. Percy; reflections on the religious feeling in Ireland; Miss Bannerman and her prospects; Bishop Percy's account of Don Quixote's library, collected by him, and burnt at Col. Johnes's fire in Hafod; Latin version of Cædmon's Anglo-Saxon paraphrase of the Bible; progress of Johnes's works; Critique on Lord Woodhouslee's "Life of Kames;" Grainger's "Key" and "Northern Antiquities;" Dr. Ryan's liberality to Dr. Anderson (see note); Mr. Park's "Royal and Noble Authors," and Warton's "History of English Poetry" (see note); Scott's "Dryden" and "Battle of Flodden"; Hafiz's "Sonnet to Hon. Mrs. Meade" Meade" Percy to Anderson. Jan. 4, 1808.—The Bishop's strictures on Mr. J. C. Walker and Mr. Ritson, and their conduct; endeavour to conciliate the religious differences of Ireland; inquiries about various works in hand; Messrs. Cadell and Davies Anderson to Percy. May 18.—Ill health the cause of silence; summer tour in Cumberland; Messrs. Cadell and Davies, and Goldsmith's Works; Grainger's Works; the "Key," and "Northern Antiquities;" Mr. J. C. Walker,



CONTENTS.

 $\mathbf{x}\mathbf{v}$

"Key;" the case of Cadell and Davies and Goldsmith's Works stated at
large
Anderson to Percy. July 14.—Death of Dr. T. Percy the Bishop's nephew,
and remarks on his character (see note); death of Dr. Anderson's elder
brother; works in hand; statement relative to Goldsmith's Works; Miss
Bannerman, Dr. John Jamieson, and Mr. W. H. Drummond; Belfast College
and Dr. David Irving (see note)
SAME. Aug. 26.—Bishop Percy's correspondence with Mr. Stevenson relative
to Dr. Irving; his character and works; Dr. J. Jamieson; Mr. Coucher's
poems; Dr. Graham's Essay on Macpherson's Ossian; notice of the Spanish
patriots and their success
SAME. Nov. 15.—Dr. David Irving's works, and testimonials . 196
Same. Dec. 6.—Dr. Irving; Mr. Laing stimulated to answer Dr. Graham's
book; works in hand; Walter Scott's new edition of Swift and Somers's
Tracts, and his increasing reputation; Mr. Brougham gives offence by his
Essay on Cevallo's Exposition in the Edinburgh Review; Sir Brooke
Boothby, and his works (see note)
Same. April 28, 1809.—Dr. Anderson's illness, and intended tour; illness of
Mr. Laing
SAME. May 12. Short notice of Dr. Anderson's tour 200
SAME. June 6.—Fatal illness of Mr. Robert Bourne, and lines on his death by
David Carey and Miss Stewart; extract from the preface to vol. VI. of General
Vallancey's "Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis," and "Relics of Burns" 200
SAME. Jan. 3, 1810.—Bishop Percy's blindness; Lord Woodhouselee's "Life
of Petrarch;' Jubilee at Dromore; application to Principal Brown for
degree of D.D. for Mr. W. H. Drummond; Dr. David Irving a candidate
for the office of Rector of the High School 204
DR. David Irving to Percy. Jan. 27.—Returns thanks for Bishop Percy's
testimonials in his favour for the Rectorship of the High School, which he
did not obtain
Dr. W. H. Drummond to Percy. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish
Dr. W. H. Drummond to Percy. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
Dr. W. H. Drummond to Percy. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
Dr. W. H. Drummond to Percy. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
DR. W. H. DRUMMOND to PERCY. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian
Dr. W. H. Drummond to Percy. Feb. 1.—(See note); Account of the Irish Harp Institution; Dr. Richardson and Swift's Letters; inquiries for a copy of Oppian



xvi

CONTENTS.

Macpherson's publications, and Bishop Percy's Reliques; Hall's "Select Letters," one from Mr. MacGowan to Shenstone on Erse poetry; a young American traveller; Select Papers of the Belfast Literary Society . 219 Mr. Shenstone to Mr. M'Gowan. Sept. 24, 1761.—On Erse poetry; commendation of Mr. T. Percy and his collection of English and Scotch Ballads, and progress of his work, the future "Reliques of Ancient Poetry"
List of his Works; Percy's contributions to the Grand Magazine . 232
POEMS BY, OR SUPPOSED TO BE BY DR. GRAINGER, not printed in his Works: Three Epigrams; Ode to Love; Ode to Contentment . 234
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN DR. GRAINGER AND BISHOP PERCY.
Grainger to Percy. Oct. 22, 1756.—Inquiries about Camoens; the state of the London Theatres; Mrs. Cibber, Miss Pritchard, and Shuter (see note); Mr. H. Dill's Tragedy of "Minorca;" John Slade's "Love and Duty" (see note); Bally's Prize Poem (see note); begs the loan of the first Elegy of Tibullus, translated by Percy (see note). 240
Percy to Grainger. March 24, 1757.—Notes on Dr. Grainger's Tibullus 242 Grainger to Percy.—Medical directions for his sight; remarks on Mr. Percy's Notes on Tibullus
SAME. March 30.—Medical advice; Tibullus; inquiries after friends 246
Same. Feb. 1758.—Death of George Augustus second Earl of Sussex (see
note); Mr. W. Strahan, and the Grand Magazine (see note); Mr. Percy's Song
of "O Nannie, wilt thou gang with me?" (see note); Ovid's Elegy on Tibullus, translated by Percy; Rev. Robert Binnel's opinion of it (see note) . 247
SAME. Feb.—Dr. Grainger's examination before the College of Physicians;
Dr. Griffiths and Shui-ping-Sin (see note); Mr. Binnel's notes on Tibullus;
proof sheets; Home's tragedy of Agis (note); Tibullus; Mr. T. Apperley 248
Same. Feb.—Dr. Griffiths and the Chinese novel; Henry 3rd Earl of Sussex;
Tibullus; the Grand Magazine
"Agis;" Percy's Contributions to the Grand Magazine 251
Same. April 14.—Dr. Griffiths; Miss Anne Guthridge, afterwards Mrs.
Percy; Miss Sophy and Dr. Grainger's unsuccessful courtship 252
Same. May.—Dr. Percy's matrimonial prospects; medical advice; Johnson's Shakspeare; Tibullus
SAME. May 13.—Translation of Ovid's Epistles; medical advice 254
SAME. May 30.—Percy's Translation of Ovid's Epistles, and Grainger's
critique on a specimen; Dr. Johnson's opinion of their value; the poem of Avon (see note)
SAME. June 27.—Percy's Translation of Ovid's Epistles, and their disposal 258 SAME. July 20.—Death of Mr. John Douglass, surgeon (see note), and notice
SAME. July 20.—Death of Mr. John Douglass, surgeon (see note), and notice
of him; Tibullus; Ovid's Epistles; Johnson's Shakspeare
SAME. Aug. 23.—Tibullus, and Rev. Robert Binnel 263
SAME. Oct. 18.—Account of Dr. Grainger's Tour in Scotland; Dr. Stewart
of Wolverhampton, and his marriage (see note); Dr. Percy's approaching marriage; Dr. Grainger appointed travelling tutor to Mr. Bourryau; Ovid's
Epistles; Dr. Percy's Ode on the death of Earl of Sussex (not known to be preserved); Tibullus
Same. Jan. 10, 1759.—Ovid's Epistles (see note); Smollett's illiberal review
of Tibullus; Shenstone's Miscellany; Dodsley's "Cleone" (see note) 268 SAME. Feb. 17.—Translation of Ovid's Epistles, and Chinese novel (see note) 269
SAME. March 31.—Dr. Grainger's intended departure from England; sends
his translation of Ovid's Epistles of Hero and Leander 270
Same. April 9.—His departure for St. Kitt's; final adieus 271
DR. GRAINGER to MR. BURT. A long letter about his marriage . 271



CONTENTS.

xvii

Change to Depart T. 10 1801. But at the B. Ohe (a) at
GRAINGER to PERCY. Jan. 16, 1761.—Robert Lloyd's Odes (see note); the
style of Mason and Gray; Macpherson's Fragments from the Erse . 275
SAME. June 5.—Sterne's Tristram Shandy; Hurd's Dialogues; Lord Lyttel-
ton's Dialogues; Macpherson's "Fragments" 276
Same. June 5, 1762.—Sends presents; domestic affairs; Percy's literary
projects; Don Quixote and Indian poetry; state of literature in the West
Indies; Percy's Chinese Romance and Bourryau's opinion of it; Dr. Grain-
ger's "Cane Piece" (see note); requests remarks on it from Mr. Percy and
Mr. Binnel; conquest of Martinique; curious anecdotes concerning it 276
SAME. June 25.—The "Sugar Cane;" Dr. Percy's Chinese novel; private
affairs
SAME. April 18, 1763.—The "Sugar Cane"; private affairs; public news 282
Same. Nov. 30.—Dr. Grainger's return to London; the "Sugar Cane;"
deaths of Mr. Shenstone and Rev. Robert Binnel (see note) . 284
SAME. Jan. 22, 1764.—Chevy Chase; Petrarch and Lord Surrey; Kempfer and Kircher; the "Sugar Cane;" Mr. White's "English Verb" (see note) 285
and Kircher; the "Sugar Cane;" Mr. White's "English Verb" (see note) 285
SAME. March 24.—Highway robbers; the "Sugar Cane" 286
SAME. April 6.—The "Sugar Cane;" Mr. Percy's "Dissertation on the
English Drama"
SAME. April 30.—Dr. Grainger about to return to St. Kitt's 287
SAME. May 14.—On Shenstone's poems
SAME. May 25, 1765.—Disapproves of Mr. Percy's design to write the
"History of the House of Percy," with his reason; proposes to go to St.
Vincent; the "Sugar Cane;" presents promised; Mr. Percy's "Ballads" 288
Same. Sept.—"Reliques of Ancient Poetry;" private affairs; the "Sugar
Cane," how received
SAME. Dec. 4, 1766.—The Ancient Ballads; Mr. Lye's Saxon Dictionary
(see note); Dr. Johnson's Shakspeare; Miss Williams's "Miscellany;"
private affairs
Mrs. Grainger to Percy. Jan. 27, 1771.—Dr. Grainger's picture . 295
Mrs. Grainger to react. Jan. 21, 1111.—Dr. Grainger's picture . 295
ALLEN to PERCY. Jan. 15, 1774.—Mrs. Percy's pension; Percy's account
of Dr. Grainger, inserted in the Whitehall Evening Post 295
MRS. GRAINGER to PERCY. July 19, 1779.—Private affairs; account of the
feast of the Rosiere, at Bethune, in Flanders 296
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE OF JAMES BOSWELL, Esq 300
Construction of the Constr
Correspondence between Mr. Boswell and Bishop Percy.
Boswell to Percy. March 8, 1784.—Mr. Boswell's pamphlet on the
state of the nation; illness of Dr. Johnson; proposes to publish "The Praises
SAME. July 8.—Health of Dr. Johnson; resolves to practise at the English
bar
SAME. March 20, 1785.—Death of Dr. Johnson; his intention of publishing
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concern-
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson
the "Life of Johnson;" "Tour to the Hebrides;" "Pope's Note" concerning Dr. Johnson



xviii

CONTENTS.

Same. April 9.—"Debate on the Corporation and Test Acts;" "Life of Johnson;" Goldsmith's "Encyclopædia" (see note); Sir Joshua Reynolds; notice of Letters in Boswell's "Life of Johnson" relative to Bishop Percy 313 Boswellto J. Abercrombie. June 11, 1792.—Letters of Dr. Johnson (see note); "Life of Johnson;" Johnson's letter to Bishop White; Johnson's Sermons; Mr. Courtenay's poetical review of Johnson's works, and character of him 314 ME. July 28, 1792.—Second edition of the "Life of Johnson;" Young's SAME. criticism on Gray's "Elegy" (see note); dissertation on the elements of written language; Mr. Agutter's sermon on Johnson's death; lost letter of Johnson to Mr. Odell; correction of chum to cham; Sir Joshua Reynolds's "Tour to the Netherlands" 315 Boswell to Sir Andrew Mitchell. Aug. 28, 1764.—The return of Mr. Mitchell from Berlin; asks advice concerning his intended continental Same. Dec. 26.—His continental tour; Rev. W. Johnson Temple (see note) 320 LETTERS RELATIVE TO DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON. Miss Seward to Boswell. March 25, 1785.—Early years of Johnson; Mrs. Lucy Porter; letters of Johnson to Mrs. Porter; letters to Gent. Mag.; letter to Chancellor Thurlow (see note); conversation between Johnson and Miss Seward on the subject of Mrs. Elizabeth Aston (see note); letter of Johnson to Mr. Levett; Johnson's verses, when a child, on having killed a duck; Mrs. Porter's recollections of Johnson (see note) 321 SAME. March 25.—Character of the "Tour to the Hebrides;" Boswell's ancestry, and reflections on it; Mrs. Montagu (see note); opinions of the " Tour to the Hebrides" as drawn by his various biographers Boswell to Gent. Mag. April 17, 1788.—Observations on Mrs. Piozzi's "Anecdotes of Dr. Johnson". 338 A. D. to GENT. MAG. July 7, 1787 .- A defence of Dr. Johnson in "Olla Podrida," by Bishop Horne

Miss Seward to Gent. Mag.

Johnson in "Olla Podrida"

340

Aug. 9.—Observations on the character of Dr.

Johnson in "Olla Podrida" Boswell's Advertisement relative to Johnson's Conversation with His Majesty, and Johnson's Letters to Lord Chesterfield; Alexander Chalmers's "Lesson in Biography," &c.; Extract from Byrom applicable to Boswell 344 Sprig of Myrtle from a Lady" MISS SEWARD to GENT. MAG. Boswell to Gent. Mag. Nov. 16 .- On the above communication of Miss Seward Miss Seward to Gent. Mag. Dec. 14 .- In reply to Mr. Boswell; Bishop Newton's character of Johnson MR. Boswell to Gent. Mag. Jan. 20, 1794.—In his own vindication, with letter from Mr. E Hector 356 REV. H. WHITE to GENT. MAG. March 19.—On the "Verses on the Sprig 362of Myrtle' Oct. 21.—On the character of Mr. Seward as drawn by Dr. Johnson; SAME. Miss Seward acknowledges the letters of "Benvolio" as hers 363Sept. 18, 1771.-Mr. Gray's death and cha-Boswell to GARRICK. racter; Mr. Mickle and his tragedy; General Pascal Paoli; Johnson's intended journey to Scotland; Mr. Donaldson's edition of Shakspere 364 Same. April 11, 1774.—Death of Dr. Goldsmith; Dr. Morell's Prometheus 366

First printed in 1770

368---383



CONTENTS.	xix
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE OF REV. GEORGE ASHBY	384
Correspondence between Mr. Ashby and Dr. Percy.	
ASHBY to PERCY. Description of the Howard Book at Cambridge SAME. (Extract.) Oct. 28, 1769.—Observations on the "Northum Household Book," [or perhaps the Howard Book] SAME. Dec. 13, 1773.—"Peebles to the Play" and "Christ's Kirk Green" SAME. Dec. 21.—Old Scotch Songs; the Glossary to Douglas; Scot ters; Scotch phrases; Baal and Druidism; Beltain, and the and languages SAME. March 30, 1774.—The "Reliques," remarks promised; D Miss Hester Percy; helpless state of Mr. Ashby's father, Edmund (see improvements in the "Reliques" suggested. SAME. April 19.—Account of a curious Legend or Miracle Play, called solatorium Peccatorum;' the "Howard Book" SAME. May 22.—Oly Prancing (see note); Mr. Lambe's "Flodden (see note) SAME. June 8.—On the same subject SAME. June 8.—On the same subject SAME. April 16, 1776.—On the same subject CORRESPONDENCE OF THE REV. GEORGE ASHBY WITH OTHER LITERARY ASHBY to (see note). June 12, 1760.—On the purchas book; the Visitation Book of Leicestershire, 1619	385 on the 386 sch wri- alogy of 386 eath of a note); 388 "Con- 389 Field" 391 392 293 r Men. se of a 394
Notice of Mr. Ashby's paper on a coin of Nerva	395
ASHBY to RICHARD GOUGH, Esq. Feb. 14, 1773.—On Mr. Gough' in the preface to Archæologia, respecting Henry Ferrars and the Go	
Horsley's Inscriptions; house at Shepreth, Cambridgeshire. ASHBY to GENT. MAG. Nov. 1774.—On a passage in Hamlet (see	395
"Unaneled," &c	396
SAME. March 1, 1776.—On the same subject SAME. March.—On celebrated large diamonds	397 399
ASHBY to GOUGH. March 26.—A MS. copied for Mr. Gough; at Mr. Bryant, relating to some ancient coins; the new rooms at Schouse of the Royal and Antiquarian Societies SAME. April 10.—Mr. Bryant on the Apamean Medal (see note) Hunter and his cabinet of coins; on the general subject of coins ancient gold ring (see note); Biographia Britannica, and Dr. Kipi note); the Bayeux Tapestry.	tack on omerset 400 ; Dr.
Same. May 21.—On the subject of coins, in reply to Mr. Bryant . Same. Oct. 23.—Roman Milliary at Leicester (see note); Mosaic Pav (see note); Blomefield's Norfolk; Burton's Leicestershire, and Cave's MS. copy (see note); Lord Chetwynd; Bridges's Northampto Hutchins's Dorsetshire; Dr. Gower's Cheshire; Roman Milliary: cester; the Apamean coin; attack on Mr. Gough in Gent. May	404 rements Sir T. nshire; at Lei- z. (see
note); Mr. Tyson's drawing from Feckenham Church (see note); Non's preferment (see note). SAME. Dec. 17.—Leicester Roman Milliary; the Apamean coin;	Ar. Ty- 405
Cullum's MS. copy, with additions, of Sir Richard Gippes's "Suffolk G and collection of Suffolk Epitaphs; the Oculist's stamp. SAME. Jan. 2, 1777.—Roman Milliary, and Roman coin; Sir John and Mr. Lort; the Roman road at Spittle in the Street; the Royal	entry,'' 408 Cullum
and the President's speeches; Mr. Planta, &c. (see note). SAME. Dec. 11.—Thetford (see note); Satirical Medal of Lion and I Mr. Charlton's History of Whitby (see note)	409 Lambs;
SAME to JOHN NICHOLS, Esq. May 13, 1781.—Relative to reprintin Ashby's "Essay on Gentoo Laws" (see note) SAME to MR. WILLIAM HERBERT. April, 1787.—An Historical Disson Lady Eliz. Tirwit's Book of Prayers, and Queen Katharine Parr's Pray	ertation
b 2	



 $\mathbf{x}\mathbf{x}$

CONTENTS.

Same to Gough. March 12, 1788.—Death of Mrs. Nichols; Lady T	
wit's Book of Prayers &c. Mr. Gough's "Sepulchral Monuments". 4 Same to Nichols. April 3.—Laneham's Kenilworth; Lady Tirwit's Bo	18 ook
of Prayers (see note)	20
SAME. April 12.—The Gold Book; Holmes' Academy of Armory; Que	en 22
Same to Herbert. June 4, 1790,-The Gold Book; David Clemen	ıt's
account of Rare Books, and an error in a date; the "Nice Wanton" a	nd
	24
Same to Nichols. June 23.—County Histories, Sir William Burrell, a Craven Ord; Sir Thomas Caves copy of Burton's Leicestershire (see note	e):
Mr. Peck's MSS.: Bishop More's MSS. at Cambridge 4	25
Same. Aug. 6.—Suggestions and Materials for the History of Leicestersh (see note); reprint in Gent. Mag. of the "Gold Book;" 4	ire 27
MR. RICHARD GREEN'S account of a Manual of Devotions of Queen Kathari	
	28
	$\frac{29}{30}$
	30
	32
ASHBY to GENT. MAG. March 10.—On the same subject 4 ASHBY to NICHOLS. June 21, 1790.—Nichols's Materials for his Leice	35
	3 5
Same. Nov. 7, 1791.—Bridges's Northamptonshire (see note); Mr. Pennan	
method with Mr. Ashby Same. March 23, 1800.—Mr. Daines Barrington on the Statutes; his portr.	36 ait
	36
Additional Notes to the Ashby Article	37
NOTICE OF REV. MICHAEL LORT, D.D	38
Canada and a superior and the Control of the Contro	
Correspondence between Dr. Lort and Bishop Percy.	
LORT to PERCY. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Original Control of the Control of	
LORT to PERCY. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note) 4	38
LORT to PERCY. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38
LORT to PERCY. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at 40
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Origand Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at 40 41
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Origand Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at 40 41 41
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at 40 41 41 lus
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Origand Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 40 41 41 lus 42 an
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Origand Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at 40 41 tlus 42 an on
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at 40 41 lus 42 an on i a nd
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at 40 41 41 an on i a ord 42
LORT to PERCY. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Origand Progress of Letters (see note)	38 40 41 41 42 42 41 42 42 42 42 42 42 42 42 43
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 at 40 41 lus 42 an ord 42 y's 44 of
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at 40 41 lus 42 an ord 42 y's 44 of w-
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Origand Progress of Letters (see note)	38 at 40 41 lus on a de 42 y's 44 of w-45
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 at 40 41 lus 42 an ard 42 y's 44 of w-45 447
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 at 40 41 lus 2 an ard 42 y's 44 of 45 47 tter
LORT to PERCY. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Origand Progress of Letters (see note)	38 the 38 at 40 41 lus 42 an at 42 y's 44 of w-45 447 tter 48
Lort to Percy. Jan. 31, 1781.—Governor Pownall's Paper on the Orig and Progress of Letters (see note)	38 at 40 41 lus 42 an at 42 y's 44 of w-45 447 ret 48;



CONTENTS.

xxi

Same. April 2Political changes; changes in the Church; pamphlet at-
tributed to Dean Shipley
Same. April 15 Mr. Pitt Prime Minister (see note); newspaper politics;
Bishop Watson's Sermon at Court; abridgment of Cruden's Concordance by
Taylor; new book of Coats of Arms; Sir William Jones's "Dialogue" (see
note); Dean Shipley's pamphlet (see note); funeral of Archbishop Corn-
wallis; various editions of Shakspeare in hand
Same. April 19.—New Lord Lieutenant; illness of Bishop Yonge and Lord
Hardwicke
SAME. April 29.—Death of Bishop Percy's son; deaths of Dr. Stinton and
Bishop Yonge; Irish promotions; Malone's pamphlet on Shakspere . 454
SAME. May 10.—Political news; Irish appointments; death of Prince Oc-
tavius (see note); Croft's and Sir G. Page's book sales, and Gulston's Illus-
trated Granger
SAME. May 19.—The Primate Dr. Robinson; Dr. Stinton's death; prefer-
ments in the Church; Dr. Scott returns; Mr. H. Howarth, the eminent Counsel (see note); illness of Lord Hardwicke; Mrs. Thrale's reduced
fortunes; Canne's Bible; translation of Solomon's Song by Mrs. Anne
Francis (see note); Mr. Ritson's pamphlet against the editors of Shakspeare;
Mr. Capel's School of Shakspeare 456
Same. June 3.—Thanks Bishop Percy for his congratulations on his marriage
(see note); character of his wife (see note); Bishop Newton's reasons for
marrying (note); Bishop Watson and Mr. Cumberland (see note); Lord
Hardwicke's health
Same. June 6.—Mr. Cumberland and Bishop Watson (see note); "The Country Curate's Answer;" Rowley's Poems, by Herbert Croft; "Life of the
Countess of Devonshire;" Countess of Carlisle confined in the Tower during
the Interregnum
Same. Aug. 7.—Dr. Johnson's health, and his portrait by Opie (see note);
Lord George Gordon's pamphlet; Bishop of Nova Scotia 459
Same. Feb. 14, 1784.—Death of Dean Milles (see note); opposition to Sir
Joseph Banks in the Royal Society (see note)
SAME. Feb. 24.—Mr. King elected President of the Society of Antiquaries
pro tempore; Lord De Ferrars expected to preside (see note); death of Dr. Morell (see note); strong party against Sir Joseph Banks; ill health of Dr.
Johnson; institution of a weekly club in Essex Street (see note); the Literary
Club; the Portland Vase described by Bartoli and Wright . 461
SAME. Feb. 28.—Defeat in the Royal Society of the party against Sir Joseph
Banks; Mr. William Preston, afterwards Bishop of Leighlin (see note):
cherries at 2s. 6d. a-piece to treat Billy Pitt; the Dissenters, Republicans,
and Reformers in his favour 462
SAME. March 26.—Mr. Richard Gamon disappoints the Duke of Chandos's expectations (see note); the Great Seal stolen; illness of the Prince of
Wales; Jeremy Taylor burnt his "Liberty of Prophesying;" sale of the Yel-
verton library
SAME. July 27 Mrs. Thrale's marriage with Piozzi; Major Vallancey;
Eugene Aram's Celtic Dictionary; his great talents (see note); Chatterton's
Work and his Will
Same. Aug. 19.—On some application to the Archbishop of Canterbury; a
Bishop of Nova Scotia proposed; troubled state of the Irish; the Yelverton
MSS. (see note)
Mr. Ledwich relative to the Ship Temple; death of Alderman Norfolk, Mrs.
Lort's father; death of Dr. Johnson, and anecdotes of him (see note); Bishop
Preston, and his rise; T. Warton made poet laureate (see note) . 466
SAME. June 24.—Prints of the Prince of Wales and Primate of Ireland; the
new Antiquarian Society of Dublin (see note); Sir Ashton Lever's Museum
(see note); Mr. Duane's coins; prints of the Emperor of China's battles with



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xxii

CONTENTS.

the Tartars; Henderson's set of Hogarth's prints; Alexandrian New Testament (see note); thinks of visiting Bishop Percy at Dromore . 469 ME. Aug. 15.—Journey to Chester, &c.; Mr. Travis's answer to Gibbon; Robert Heron's (Pinkerton's) "Letters on Literature;" Dr. Johnson's Prayers; Boswell's conversation with the King relative to the title of the Pretender Same. Oct. 31.—Manuscript of the Gospels in Dublin College Library; Mrs. Piozzi and her "Anecdotes of Dr. Johnson;" Boswell's "Tour to the Hebrides;" Johnson's Dictionary; Sir John Hawkins's Life and Works of Johnson; Hawkins's "Ignoramus;" Italian play of Baptista Porta, found by Dr. Farmer at Clare Hall; De Foe's History of Union of Scotland with England, and his other proposed works; the Earl of Bristol (Bishop of Derry, and Mrs. Yearsley (see note); portraits of Irish patriots . 472

ME. Dec. 16, 1786.—Mr. Pinkerton and his works; Dr. Towers's Life of Dr. Johnson; Whiteboys in Ireland; American Bishops; Bishop Seabury and his mitre; charge in the annotated Tatler against Swift (see note) 474

Same. March 8, 1787.—Disturbed state of the Church in Ireland; the Dissenters and the Test Act; the American Bishops; Mrs. Piozzi and her mar--Disturbed state of the Church in Ireland; the Dissenters riage March 21.—The Irish Church and the Dissenters; Mrs. Piozzi and SAME. the republication of Sherlock and Hoadly's pamphlets on the Dissenters; Dr. Wm. Campbell's answer to the Bishop of Cloyne (see note); poetical squib against the Duke of Norfolk on his turning Protestant; female association in Ireland against payment of tithes; a curious pamphlet of the same kind published 1659 in England, with an extract SAME. April 9.—The Dissenters and their pamphlets; Bishops Shipley and Watson; Dr. James Macknight's translation of the Epistles, (see note); Lady Percy, that was in the King's Bench prison with Sheriff Sayre, (see note); The King has the gout the May 13.—Journey to Cambridge and Ely with Bishop Barrington; the Dublin MS. of St. Matthew's Gospel about to be published; the Alexandrian MS.; sermon to prove the authenticity of the Doxology; Dr. Bentley's volumes of the New Testament; "The World" conducted by Capt. Topham and Mr. Miles Peter Andrews; Priestley's letter to Mr. Pitt; Lord North's last speech and total blindness; Rev. Jos. Berington's letter to Priestley, and other Roman Catholic pamphlets, (see note); Lindsay's Liturgy used in America; Irish Society for Christian Knowledge; portrait of O'Leary; Mrs. Piozzi and "Johnson's Letters;" Sir John Hawkins pulled to pieces in the Monthly Review (see note); Bp. Percy's Letter on Fossil Horns in Ireland (see note); Pinkerton on the Celts 483 Same. June 26.—Controversial pamphlets (see note); Courayer's Last Sentiments (see note); David Williams's Liturgy on Universal Principles (see note); Peaufort's Map of Ireland; the state of the Irish Church; fire at Dodsley's warehouses, and works burnt ME. Aug. 14.—Dr. Inglis elected Bishop of Nova Scotia; doctrine of the General Assembly of Scotland, respecting the head of the Church; Mr. SAME. Wharton, a Popish priest, converted, and his pamphlet; O'Leary's letter 488
PERCY to LORT. March 2, 1788.—Mr. Browne's pamphlet vindicating the
Government relative to the Articles of Limerick; Dr. Porteus made Bishop of London; London nuisances LORT to PERCY. April 17 .- Bishop Porteus; preferments in the Church; Mr. Soame Jenyns and his works; Mr. Bruce's Travels satirised by Mr. J. C. Walker in his "Irish Bards;" "Johnson's Letters," and Mrs. Piozzi; Dr. Priestley called Anti-Christ; state of the Church in America; emigrants to America (see note)



CONTENTS.

xxiii

SAME. May 21Dr. Farmer's marriage with Miss Hatton broken off; Mr.
Cottingham's marriage to Miss Wollery, with a short account of the lady and
her family
Same. Aug. 1.—Mr. Cottingham and his marriage; pamphlets on Ireland
by Dr. Hales and Mr. Browne; Dr. Hales's "Survey;" African expedition,
and Mr. Ledyard (see note); the Westminster Election; robbery of coins
and medals at the Duke of Devonshire's 496
SAME. April 13, 1789.—Dr. Lort's ill-health; the King's illness and reco-
very; the pamphlets issued at that period; the Dissenters and the Test
Act; Mrs. Piozzi's "Travels;" Miss Hatton married; intended celebration
at St. Paul's for the King's recovery
Same. June 14.—Barrett's "History of Bristol," and Chatterton; Mr. Rit-
son repulsed at the Society of Antiquaries; Mrs. Piozzi's Travels; the Dissenters
and the Test Act
Same. July 11Lord Stanhope's Bills for Toleration; Dr. Farmer's pam-
phlet on Shakspeare; "Hints to the New Association;" Barrett's "History
of Bristol"
SAME. March 12, 1790.—Dr. Lort's account of his tour in the North 502
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
SAME. April 16.—Sends a number of pamphlets, with remarks; Mr. Burke
and his "Reflections on the French Revolution;" African Association;
George Steevens and his tricks on Gough and Pegge; the American inscrip-
tion, inserted in the Archæologia 504
Same. May 1.—The Popish Bishops' opposition to the proceedings of the
Committee relative to their suit to Parliament; letter to one of the Bishops;
Lord Petre's letter to Bishop Horsley
Remarks on Lord Petre's letter by Bishop Percy 507
SAME. May 8.—Bishop Horsley's pamphlet against the Dissenters; "Apo-
logy for the Clergy and Liturgy," and other pamphlets; Soame Jenyns;
Labrage's Monument proposed (see note). Steamer's estimate the Anti-
Johnson's Monument proposed (see note); Steevens's satire on the Anti-
quarian Society
Same. May 14.—Proposed oath of the Catholics; English newspaper to be
printed in Paris, and Mr. Courteney; the lost books of Livy; Mr. Whaley
the Irish traveller, and his journey to Jerusalem 509
Same. June 16.—Sir Robert Chambers's letter sent to H. Walpole; Sir William
Scott and Mr. Steevens; papers relative to Rowley lodged in British Museum
by Dr. Glynn; Sir Robert Chambers's letter recommended to be published
in European Magazine (see note); the Arabic translation of Livy; anecdote
of Mr. Whaley (see note); Bruce's Travels; the African Association; Mr.
George Chalmers's edition of De Foe's works
SAME. July 13.—Dr. Lort's accident, and Mrs. Percy's illness; sends pam-
phlets; remarks on them
Same. July 17.—De Foe's Life; Dr. Thomas Campbell's "Strictures on the
History of Ireland;" Dr. D. A. Beaufort's transcripts from Lord Carew's
MSS. at Lambeth
Same. Aug. 3.—Druidical Temple transplanted by General Conway to Park
place, near Henley; the lost books of Livy; sends pamphlets; the names of four
Roman Catholic Bishops; the Irish Catholics and the oath; the "Layman's
Letter; 'two rectors of Marylebone at one time
SAME. Aug. 5.—Sends pamphlets; Sir H. Englefield elected Vice-President
of Society of Antiquaries
Same. Aug. 24.—Relative to Mr. Smith and Mrs. Hill of Marylebone;
Bishop Percy's sermon; animal magnetism; George Chalmers's Life of De
Foe; Dr. John Carrol, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Baltimore . 514
Same. Sept. 4 Mrs. Hill; Mrs. Percy's ill-health; Mr. Steevens on the
suppose I disinterment of Milton's corpse 516
Percy to Mrs. Lorr. Feb. 1791.—On the death of Dr. Lort 517
PERCY to Mrs. Lorr. Feb. 1791.—On the death of Dr. Lort . 517 Mrs. Lorr to Percy. Feb. 27.—Promises to return all the Bishop's letters;



xxiv

CONTENTS.

LETTERS BETWEEN DR. LORT AND DR. BIRCH. Birch to Lort. May 9, 1761.—Mr. Lort's proposed Life and Correspondence of Dr. Bentley; illness of Bishop Sherlock LORT to BIRCH. May 12. - Dr. Bentley's letters; Lord Granville; Bentley's 519 Nov. 29, 1762.—Lord Bacon's letters; MS. of Quine Ecalp, the SAME. noted Black Nov. 13, 1764.—On the letters of Howard Earl of Northampton to Same. Carr Earl of Somerset (see note) Same. Dec. 2.—Lord Northampton's letters; copy of a letter of the Earl of Northampton to the Earl of Somerset 522 Nov. 29, 1765.—MS. account of Charles II.'s escape after the battle of Worcester (see note); Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes 523 LETTERS FROM DR. LORT TO THE HON. HORACE WALPOLE. LORT to RICHARD CUMBERLAND, Esq. (see note). Dec. 22, 1759.—Dr. Bentley's "Lucan;" requests Mr. Cumberland to introduce him to Mr. Walpole 525 Some cursory Remarks on Walpole's Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors, by Dr. Lort LORT to WALPOLE. Feb. 7, 1760.—Further Remarks on "Royal and Noble Authors;" Lady Masham; Lady Harmonia, Countess of Warwick, an authoress; Lord Capel's "Daily Observations;" pamphlet ascribed to Mr. Robert Walpole ME. Feb. 25.—Lord Delawar's account of Virginia; Lord Chandos's "Hore Subsevice" (see note); Ballad of "Christ's Kirk of the Green;" Lord Grey's "Account of the Plot" 530 Same. July 27 .- Mr. Lort's sermon before the University 531 Same. March 14, 1762.—Commends the "Anecdotes of Painting". 532 Same. May 10, 1765.—Correspondence of Carr Earl of Somerset and Over-532 June 3 .- Murder of Sir Thomas Overbury; Sir John Holles SAME. 533 SAME. Feb. 4, 1773.—Relative to a book of anecdotes; Admirable Creyghton 534 SAME. July 5, 1775.—Relative to a curious case of incestuous marriage 534 SAME. June 11, 1776.—Vertue's print of Charles I. and his Queen, the same as that published by Van Voorst; mention of it in the Minutes of Society of Antiquaries 534 Same. July 10.—Thanks for some pictures sent by Mr. Walpole SAME. July 10.—Thanks for some pictures sent by Mr. waipoie SAME. Aug. 1.—Sends prints of Wilson the painter, and St. Paul's Cross 535 SAME. Aug. 6.—Mr. Waddilove's letter on English Portraits in Spain 535 SAME. Aug. 7.—Notes of St. Paul's Cross; Muntz on Encaustic Painting; Mr. Waddilove; Dr. Maty; Mr. Lort's intended journey to the North 536 535 June 20, 1778. -Mr. Lort's paper on Celts, &c.; Viscount Shannon's " Discourses" Discourses SAME. July 20.—" Clubbe's Physiognomy," and Hogarth's print; Shirley's travels; Hogarth's works; materials for the "Narrative" relating to Chatterton; letter of Chatterton to the "Town and Country Magazine" 537 to Charles I. at Madrid; Mr. Swinburne's "Account of Spain" 541 Same. May 18.—Sends a drawing by Mr. Tyson; Mr. Grimm engaged to make a drawing of the "Embarkation of Henry VIII." at Windsor (see note); Mrs. Penny's poems June 3 .- Article relative to the Arundel Marbles in Gent. Mag., supposed to be by Judge Blackstone; MS. with notes by Sir John Cullum 542 WALPOLE to LORT. June 4.—The MS. illustrative of the portraits on pannel of Henry VI. &c., at Bury, and description of them (see note) . 542 LORT to WALFOLE. June 11.—On the above royal portraits; Hogarth's