

## BIOGRAPHY.

## MEMOIRS OF GIBBON.

Among the recent productions of the press, few are more amusing than the *Memoirs of Gibbon*, written by himself, followed a miscellaneous selection of letters and minor pieces published by Lord Sheffield since his death. The distinguished historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire will long live in the gratitude of those who have been instructed and delighted by his learning and eloquence. The private occupations of such a man, his opinions of men and things, the portion of happiness he enjoyed must all be objects of high literary curiosity. In ranging over the wide field of seven octavo volumes, compiled by the diligence of Sheffield, they will, like the discriminating bee, exercise the prerogative of neglecting many a weed, but they will likewise be regaled by the nectar of many a delicious flower. For the entertainment of our readers we shall offer them a few extracts, which will quicken their curiosity to read the whole of the memoirs, which could be comprised in a moderate duodecimo, and is well worthy of a republication in this country.—*National Intelligencer*.

"My first introduction to the historical scenes, which have since engaged so many years of my life, must be ascribed to an accident. In the summer of 1751, I accompanied my father on a visit to Mr. Hoar's in Wiltshire; but I was less delighted with the beauties of Stouthead, than with discovering in the library a common book, the *Continuation of Ezechiel's Roman history*, which is indeed executed with more skill and taste than the previous work. To me the reigns of the successors of Constantine was absolutely new; and I was immersed in the passage of the Goths over the Danube, when the summons of the dinner bell reluctantly dragged me from my intellectual feast. This transient glance served rather to irritate than to appease my curiosity; and as soon as I returned to Bath, I procured the second and third volumes of Howel's *History of the World*, which exhibit the Byzantine period on a larger scale. Mahomet and his Saracens soon fixed my attention; and some instinct of criticism directed me to the genuine sources. Simon Oakley, an original in every sense, first opened my eyes; and I was led from one book to another, till I had ranged round the circle of Oriental history. Before I was sixteen, I had exhausted all that could be learned in English of the Arabs and Persians, the Tartars and Turks; and the same ardour urged me to guess the French of D'Herbault, and construe the barbarous Latin of Pocock's *Abulfaragius*. Such vague and multifarious reading could not teach me to think, to write, or to act; and the only principle that darted a ray of light into the indigested chaos, was an early and rational application to the order of time and place. The maps of Cellarius and Wells imprinted in my mind the picture of ancient geography; from Strachius I imbibed the elements of Chronology; the tables of Helvetius and Anderson, the *Annals of Usher and Predieus*, distinguished the connection of events, and engraved the multitude of names and dates in a clear and indelible series. But in the discussion of the first ages I overlooked the bounds of modesty and use; in my childish balance I presumed to weigh the systems of Scaliger and Petavius, of Marsham and Newton, which I could seldom study in the originals; and my sleep has been disturbed by the difficulty of reconciling the Septuagint with the Hebrew computation. I arrived at Oxford with a stock of erudition, that might have puzzled a proctor, and a degree of ignorance, of which a schoolboy would have been ashamed."

Speaking of the University of Oxford, Mr. Gibbon observes—

"It might at least be expected, that an ecclesiastical school should at least inculcate the orthodox principles of religion. But our venerable mother had contrived to unite the opposite extremes of bigotry & indifference; a heretic, or unbeliever, was a monster in her eyes; but she was always, or often, or sometimes, remiss in the spiritual education of her own children. According to the statutes of the university, every student, before he is matriculated, must subscribe his assent to the thirty-nine articles of the church of England, which are signed by more than believe them. My insufficient age excused me, however, from the immediate performance of this legal ceremony; and the vice-chancellor directed me to return, as soon as I should have accomplished my fifteenth year; recommending me, in the mean while, to the instruction of my college. My college forgot to instruct; I forgot to return, and was myself forgotten by the first magistrate of the university. Without a single lecture, either public or private, either catholic or protestant, without any academical subscription, without any episcopal confirmation, I was left by the dim light of my catechism to grope my way to the chapel and communion table, where I was admitted, without a question, how far, or by what means, I might be qualified to receive the sacrament. Such almost incredible neglect was productive of the worst mischiefs. From my childhood I had been fond of religious disputation: my poor aunt has been often puzzled by the mysteries which she strove to believe; nor had the elastic spring been totally broken by the weight

of the atmosphere of Oxford. The blind activity of idleness urged me to advance without armour into the dangerous mazes of controversy; and at the age of sixteen, I bewildered myself in the errors of the church of Rome."

"The progress of my conversion may tend to illustrate, at least, the history of my own mind. It was not long since Dr. Middleton's free enquiry had sounded an alarm in the theological world: much ink and much gall had been spilt in the defence of primitive miracles; and the two dullest of their champions were crowned with academical honours by the university of Oxford. The name of Middleton was unpopular; and his proscription very naturally led me to peruse his writings, and those of his antagonists. His bold criticism, which approaches the precipice of infidelity, produced on my mind a singular effect; and had I persevered in the communion of Rome, I should now apply to my own fortune the prediction of the Sybil.

—*Via prima salutis, Quod minime reris, Gratia pandetur ab æthere.*

"The elegance of style and freedom of argument were repelled by a shield of prejudice. I still revered the character, or rather the names, of the saints and fathers whom Dr. Middleton exposes; nor could he destroy my implicit belief, that the gift of miraculous powers was continued in the church, during the first four or five centuries of christianity. But I was unable to resist the weight of historical evidence, that within the same period most of the leading doctrines of popery were already introduced in theory and practice: nor was my conclusion absurd, that miracles are the test of truth, and that the church must be orthodox and sure, which was so often approved by the visible interposition of the Deity. The marvellous tales which are so boldly attested by the Basils and Chrysostoms, the Austins and Jeromes, compelled me to embrace the superior merits of celibacy, the institution of the monastic life, the use of the sign of the cross, of holy oil, and even of images, the invocation of saints, the worship of relics, the rudiments of purgatory in prayers for the dead, and the tremendous mystery of the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ, which insensibly swelled into the prodigy of transubstantiation. In these dispositions, and already more than half a convert, I formed an unlucky intimacy with a young gentleman of our college, whose name I shall spare. With a character less resolute, Mr. \*\*\* had imbibed the same religious opinions; and some Popish books, I know not through what channel, were conveyed into his possession. I read, I applauded, I believed the English translations of two famous works of Bossuet, bishop of Meaux, the *Exposition of the Catholic Doctrine*, and the *History of the Protestant Variations*, achieved my conversion, and I surely fell by a noble hand. I have since examined the originals with a more discerning eye, and shall not hesitate to pronounce, that Bossuet is indeed a master of all the weapons of controversy. In the *Exposition*, a specious apology, the orator assumes, with consummate art, the tone of candour and simplicity; and the ten-horned monster is transformed, at his magic touch, into the milk-white hind, who must be loved as soon as she is seen. In the history, a bold and well aimed attack, he displays, with a happy mixture of narrative and argument, the faults and follies, the changes and contradictions of our first reformers; whose variation (as he dexterously contends) are the marks of historical error, while the perpetual unity of the Catholic church is the sign and test of infallible truth. To my present feelings it seems incredible that I should ever believe that I believed in transubstantiation. But my conqueror oppressed me with the sacramental words, "*Hoc est corpus meum*," and dashed against each other the figurative half-meanings of the protestant sect: every objection was resolved into omnipotence; and after repeating at St. Mary's the Athanasian creed, I humbly acquiesced in the mystery of the real presence.

To take up half on trust, and half to try,  
Name it not faith, but hanging bigotry.  
Both knave and fool, the merchant we may call  
To pay great sums, and to compound the small,  
For who would break with Heaven, and would not  
break for all?

"No sooner had I settled my new religion than I resolved to profess myself a Catholic. Youth is sincere and impetuous; and a momentary glow of enthusiasm had raised me above all temporal considerations."

"By the keen protestants, who would gladly retaliate the example of persecution, a clamour is raised of the increase of Popery: and they are always found to declare against the toleration of priests and jesuits, who pervert so many of his majesty's subjects from their religion and allegiance. On the present occasion, the fall of one or more of her sons directed this clamour against the university; and it was confidently affirmed that the Popish missionaries were suffered, under various disguises, to introduce themselves into the colleges of Oxford. But justice obliges me to declare, that, as far as relates to myself, this assertion is false; and that I never conversed with a priest, or even with a papist, till my resolution from books was absolutely fixed. In my last excursion to London, I addressed myself to Mr. Lewis, a Roman Catholic Book-seller in Russel street, Covent Garden, who recommended me to a priest, of whose name and order I am at present ignorant. In our

first interview he soon discovered that persuasion was needless. After sounding the motives and merits of my conversion, he consented to admit me into the pale of the church, and at his feet, on the 8th of June 1753, I solemnly, though privately, abjured the errors of heresy. The seduction of an English youth of family and fortune was an act of as much danger as glory; but he bravely overlooked the danger, of which I was not sufficiently informed. "Where a person is reconciled to the see of Rome, or procures others to be reconciled, the offence (says Blackstone) amounts to high treason." And if the humanity of the age would prevent the execution of this sanguinary statute, there were other laws of a less odious cast, which condemned the priest to perpetual imprisonment, and transferred the proselyte's estate to his nearest relation. An elaborate controversial epistle, approved by my director, and addressed to my father, announced and justified the step I had taken. My father was neither a bigot nor a philosopher; but his affection deplored the loss of an only son; and his good sense was astonished at my strange departure from the religion of my country. In the first sally of passion he divulged a secret which prudence might have suppressed, and the gates of Magdalen College were forever shut against my return. Many years afterwards, when the name of Gibbon was become as notorious as that of Middleton, it was industriously whispered at Oxford, that the historian had formerly "turned papist;" my character stood exposed to the reproach of inconstancy; and this invidious topic would have been handled without mercy by my opponents, could they have separated my cause from that of the university. For my own part, I am proud of an honest sacrifice of interest to conscience. I can never blush, if my tender mind was entangled in the sophistry that seduced the acute and manly understandings of Chillingworth and Bayle, who afterwards emerged from superstition to scepticism."

## POLITICAL.

The Inadmissible Principles  
OF THE  
KING OF ENGLAND'S PROCLAMATION  
OF OCT. 22. 1807.—By JOHN ADAMS, late President of the United States.

## TEXT.

"The proclamation of the king of G. Britain, requiring the return of his subjects, the seamen especially, from foreign countries, to aid in this hour of peculiar danger, in defence of their own."

"But it being an acknowledged principle that every nation has a right to the service of its subjects in time of war, that proclamation could not furnish the slightest ground for an embargo."

This partial description has a tendency to deceive many, and no doubt has deceived thousands. It is concealing the ash in a basket of figs. The dangerous, alarming and fatal part of the proclamation is kept carefully out of sight. Proclamations of one kind are of immemorial usage; but the present one is the first of the kind. Proclamations of the first kind, issued usually in the beginning of a war, are in effect but simple invitations to subjects, who happen to be abroad, to return home. To deny the right of the king to issue them, would be as unreasonable as to deny his right to send a card of invitation to one of his subjects to dine with him on St. George's day. But in neither case is the subject bound by law to accept the invitation. None of these proclamations, till this last, ever asserted a right to take British subjects by force, from the ships of foreign nations, any more than from the cities and provinces of foreign nations. On the other hand, it is equally clear, that British subjects in foreign countries are under no indispensable obligation of religion, morality, law or policy, to return in compliance with such proclamations. No penalty is annexed by English laws to any neglect; no, nor to any direct or formal disobedience. Hundreds in fact, do neglect and disobey the proclamations to one who complies with them. Thousands who have formed establishments and settled families, or become naturalized, or made contracts, or enlisted on board merchant ships, or even ships of war in foreign countries, pay no regard to these orders or invitations of their former sovereign. Indeed, all who have become naturalized in foreign countries, or entered into contracts of any kind, public or private, with governments or merchants, or farmers or manufacturers, have no right to return until they have fulfilled their covenants and obligations.—The President of the United States has as legal authority to issue similar proclamations, and they would be as much respected by American citizens, all over the globe. But every American would say his compliance was voluntarily, and none, whose engagements abroad were incompatible, would obey. But "it is an acknowledged principle, that every nation has a right to the service of its subjects in time of war." By whom is this principle acknowledged? By no man, I believe, in the unlimited sense in which it is here asserted. With certain qualifications and restrictions it may be admitted. Within the realm and his own dominions the king has a right to the service of his subjects, at sea and on land, by voluntary enlistments, and to send them abroad on foreign voyages, expeditions and enterprises.—But it would be difficult to prove the right of any executive authority of a free people to compel free subjects into service by conscriptions or impressments, like galley-slaves at the point of the bayonet, or before the mouths of field artillery. Extreme cases and imperious necessity, it is said, have no law; but such extremities and necessity must be very obvious to the whole nation, or freemen will not comply. Impressments of seamen from British merchantmen in port or at sea, are no better than the conscriptions of soldiers by Napoleon or Lewis XIV. who set him the example. So much for that part of the proclamation, which the text produces to public view. Now for the other part, which it has artfully concealed.

Thurlow, when he was chancellor, hazarded a saying to a committee of the city of London, that the practice of impressment of seamen was legal; but the committee answered him respectfully, but firmly, though in the presence of the king in council, "we acknowledge the High authority of your

lordship's opinion, but we must declare that we are of a very different opinion;" and their answer appeared to be applauded by the nation. Press laws are continually opposed and resisted at sea, by the sailors, whenever they have the means or the least hope of escaping. Navy officers and men are sometimes killed, and there is no inquiry for their blood. As little noise as possible is made about it. It is known to be justifiable homicide to take the life of an assailant in the necessary defence of a man's liberty. There is not a jury in England who would find a verdict of murder or manslaughter against any sailor, on land or at sea, who should kill any one of a press gang in the necessary defence of his liberty from imprisonment.—Press gangs on shore are often resisted by the people, fired on, some of them wounded, sometimes killed. Yet no inquiry is made for this. The practice is held in abhorrence by the men-of-war's men themselves. The boatswain of the *Rose* frigate, after the capture of the four Irish sailors, who were prosecuted in a special court of admiralty at Boston, for killing a gallant and amiable officer, lieutenant Pantony, said, "this is a kind of work in which I have been almost constantly engaged for twenty years, i. e. in fighting with honest sailors, to deprive them of their liberty; I always suspected that I ought to be hanged for it, but now I know it." Since I have alluded to this case, it may not be a miss to recollect some other circumstances of it.

A press-gang from the *Rose*, commanded by lieutenant Pantony, with a midshipman and a number of ordinary seamen, visited and searched a merchant ship from Marblehead, belonging to Mr. Hooper, at sea. The lieutenant enquired if any English, Irish or Scotchmen were on board? Not satisfied with the answer he received, he prepared to search the ship from stem to stern. At last he found four Irishmen retired and concealed in the forepeak.—With sword and pistols he immediately laid siege to the enclosure and summoned the men to surrender. Corbett, who had the cool intrepidity of a Nelson, reasoned, remonstrated, and laid down the law with the precision of a Mansfield. "I know who you are. You are the lieutenant of a man of war, come with a press-gang to deprive me of my liberty. You have no right to impress me; I have retreated from you as far as I can; I can go no farther. I, and my companions are determined to stand upon our defence. Stand off." The sailors within and without employed their usual language to each other, and a midshipman, in the confusion, fired a pistol into the forepeak and broke an arm of one of the four. Corbett, who stood at the entrance, was engaged in a contest of menaces and defiance with the lieutenant. He repeated what he had before said, and marking a line with a harpoon in the salt, with which the ship was loaded, said, "You are determined to deprive me of my liberty, and I am determined to defend it. If you step over that line, I shall consider it as a proof that you are determined to impress me, and by the eternal God of Heaven, you are a dead man." "Aye my lad," said the lieutenant. "I have seen many a brave fellow before now." Taking his snuff box out of his pocket, and taking a pinch of snuff, he very deliberately stepped over the line and attempted to seize Corbett. The latter, drawing back his arm, and driving his harpoon with all his force, cut off the carotid artery and jugular vein, and laid the lieutenant dead at his feet. The *Rose* sent a reinforcement to the press-gang; broke down the bulkhead, and seized the four Irishmen, and brought them to trial for piracy and murder. The court consisted of governor Bernard, governor Wentworth, chief justice Hutchinson, judge Achmuty, commodore Hood himself, who then commanded all the ships of war on the station, now a peer of the British empire, and twelve or fifteen others, councillors of Massachusetts, New-Hampshire, and Rhode-Island. After the trial, the president, governor Bernard, pronounced the judgement of the court, that the action of the prisoners was justifiable homicide, and in this opinion the whole court was unanimous. The sailor who was wounded in the arm, brought an action against the midshipman, and commodore Hood himself interposed and made compensation to the sailor, to his satisfaction, after which the action was withdrawn. Such was the impressment of seamen, as it stood, by law, before our revolution.—The author of my text, then, carries his courtly complaisance to the English government, farther than the governors Bernard and Hutchinson, and even than lord Hood carried it, when we were a part of the British empire. He thinks, that, as every nation has a right to the service of its subjects, in time of war, the proclamation of the king of Great Britain, commanding his naval officers to practise such impressments on board, not only the vessels of his own subjects, but of the U. States, a foreign nation, could not furnish the slightest ground for an embargo. It is not necessary for me to say, that any thing could furnish a sufficient ground for an embargo, for any long time, this, I leave to the responsibility of our president, senators, and representatives in congress.—But, I say, with confidence, that it furnished a sufficient ground for a declaration of war. Not the murder of Pierce, nor all the murders on board the Chesapeake, nor all the other injuries and insults we have received from foreign nations, atrocious as they have been, can be of such dangerous, lasting and pernicious consequence to this country, as this proclamation, if we have servility enough to submit to it.

Quincy April, 18, 1803.

Sir—I have received your favour of April 5th. I agree with you that our Prosperity has been as great as that of any people that ever existed and that our Massachusetts and national Constitutions are better than any that I have known or read, as long as they are administered by the people and their Representatives according to their spirit and true principles. How long this will be depends upon the people themselves. If the people and their Representatives sacrifice the characters and destroy the influence of the best, most enlightened and most disinterested men, by calumnies, and promote those who have neither heads nor hearts fit for their stations and are actuated only by motives of avarice and ambition, it will not be very long before our prosperity will be exchanged for Calamity and our free constitutions converted into Tyrannies.

That I neither wish for a Monarchy nor a Grecian Democracy nor a Grecian or Roman Aristocracy in these U. States is most certain and most evident to this whole nation if they have ever attended to my words, actions or writings for fifty years.—In January 1776 I printed my opinion of a proper form of government under the title of *Thoughts on Govern-*