

JUVENILE ENTERTAINER.

"Torquet ab obscuris jam nunc sermonibus aurem."

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THE JUVENILE ENTERTAINER

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BIOGRAPHY.

The Progress of Genius.

FROM OBSCURE AND LOW SITUATIONS, TO EXISTENCE AND CELEBRITY.

Genius is that gift of God which learning cannot confer, which no disadvantages of birth or education can wholly obscure.

THE REV. THOMAS CHALMERS, D. D.

Professor of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh.

Dr. CHALMERS was born (about fifty years ago) in a small borough of Austruther-Wester, in the county of Fife. That borough and the neighbouring one of Austruther-Raster have always had a soul of literature. The Doctor's father was a clothier and draper, a man of the most exemplary piety, of well informed mind, of great liberality of sentiment and the most delightful manners.

From his earliest years Dr. Chalmers was enthusiastically fond of reading, so that when a little boy, in the chimney-corner with his book, he got the name of "the minister," not from any view of his future profession, but from his delight being in books. At the same time he was a most active and energetic boy, and when he did enter into sports he took the lead. In very early life indeed that restless activity of mind, and that determination to seize and to master all subjects, even the most contrary, which has enabled him to do so much more than almost any other man of his time, were abundantly conspicuous. His progress at school was rapid; he went early to college, and, while but a youth, he did the duty of mathematical professor. Though above the average, his attainments in classical literature were not very great. The bent of his mind lay more towards subjects of which the practical application was more obvious. He was a mathematician, a natural philosopher, and, though there was no regular professor of that science at St. Andrews, a chemist.

About the close of the last century he was admitted to orders, and soon after went to assist the Rev. Dr. Charteris, a venerable and eminent preacher near the border. Some years after this the College of St. Andrews appointed him to the Church of Kilmenny, where he sat about the discharge of his duties with great energy; but he was not very popular at the outset. This arose, in part, from the want of mental correspondence between the inhabitants of a country parish and a man of so much energy as their pastor, and partly from that very energy itself. He had the utmost dislike of gossiping, cared not much for forms of rustic politeness, and could not find half occupation for his time in his parochial labours. Accordingly, he took

to a number of other avocations he lectured in the different towns on chemistry and other subjects, he became an officer of a volunteer corps, and he wrote a book on the resources of the country, besides pamphlets on some of the topics of the day, and when the Edinburgh Encyclopaedia was projected, he was invited to be a contributor, and engaged to furnish the article "Christianity," which he afterwards completed with so much ability. These supplemental avocations had nothing improper in them, and yet they were not usual among the Doctor's professional brethren, who generally filled up the intervals of their time in visiting and conversations, but the event has shown that, instead of the mental activity which Chalmers thus kept up being injurious to the very highest theological powers, they have been the chief means of developing them. And, though there be not much merit in publishing a prophecy after the event, it was in these very causes of want of village popularity, that the friends of Dr. Chalmers placed their new hopes of the eminence to which he would rise.

Even then, he was a most wonderful man. All life and energy, he was here, there, and everywhere, both bodily & mentally. Mathematics, botany, conchology, astronomy, politics, political economy, theology, polemics,—he was at them all; and yet his most intimate friends hardly knew when he studied. Indeed the whole of his progress seemed more like the inspiration of heaven, than that of any other man that we ever know or heard of. Mention a new subject to him, with which you had made yourself familiar, and a week after he would beat you upon it; the cause seemed to be this, he did not plod over books, and become the retailer of recorded opinions. He thought himself, so: every one with whom he met thinking, and then generalized the whole. We have often been quite astonished at the quantity of information which we had acquired during a few hours conversation with Chalmers, upon a subject of which neither of us knew much at the outset.

As a friend, his attachment and disinterestedness were unbounded, but he had a great dislike to forms, and though he was very hospitable, his friends very often found him with an empty larder. One day three or four friends called on him; he was just setting out for Edinburgh, but insisted on their dining with him, which was readily agreed to. After giving old Effie (Euphemia) who was the whole of his establishment, her orders, they all set down to that combination of information and glee, which shortens time most, by actually lengthening it in pleasure and utility. Dinner was soon announced, and two large covered dishes, with a smoking plate of potatoes between, appeared on the table. "Gentlemen," said Chalmers, under this cover there is hard fish from Dundee, and under that cover there is hard fish from St. Andrew's, take your choice." We have been at many and various feasts, but we have seldom enjoyed an evening like that one.

Sometimes there was not even hard fish, but still there was a resource. We have seen John Bouthron's "kail pot," broth, beef, and all, brought over to the manse—we have helped to bring it. John was a retired farmer, a very plain and a very pleasant old man.

We mention these traits in the character of Dr. Chalmers, as a most effectual means of refuting and reproving those persons who maintain that formality of department is essential to eminence, more especially to clerical eminence,—as if dulness were the badge of intellect. Here was the most effective preacher that the age has produced, as innocent certainly, but at the same time as playful as a child. Nor must it be supposed that he was not the same great man and great preacher then as now. Even in his every-day sermons which he called "short-handers," from their being written in short hand on a slip of paper about double the size of a playing card, there were chains of reasoning, and bursts of imagination and feeling, which we have seldom seen equalled, and never excelled. They were done in no time too; for after a morning's

ramble among the rocks and woods in the north of Fife, we have seen him compose a whole sermon in half an hour—aye, in less. Some of his most choice orations were composed thus, as for instance, the matchless charity sermon from the text, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor,"—a sermon in which the line between genuine charity, and ostentatious alms-giving which so often usurps its place, is more clearly marked than in any other composition with which we are acquainted. To mention the good ones would only be to give a list; there are degrees of excellence; but we never heard a sermon, or even a remark of Chalmers, in which there was not some indication of genius—some touch of the hand of a master.

We shall never forget the arch face of a jolly farmer, and the observation that he made to us upon leaving the church one Sunday. The sermon is throughout an argument for temperance, and if we mistake not, it was composed as a college exercise. The text was, "Look not on the wine when it is red in the cup; for it shall bite as a serpent and sting as an adder." The opening is a very glowing and graphic delineation of the seductions of bacchanalian indulgence; and it began with these words: "There is a pleasure, my brethren, in the progress of intoxication." As we were moving along the churchyard path, the farmer said, "I'm thinking the minister and you have been taking a glass extra last night; for he gives the same account that I myself could have given fifty times."

It was not in the nature of things that a man possessing such talents could remain in concealment. The people began to understand and relish his sermons; some speeches that he made in the General Assembly attracted the notice both of the clergy and the Scottish barristers, many of whom attended the annual convocations of the kirk in the capacity of ruling elders. From these and a number of other circumstances, the popularity of Dr. Chalmers was waxing apace, when about the year 1811 a severe and protracted malady had nearly put an end to all his labours. His constitution never had been of that confirmed strength which a mind of so restless energies would have required; and probably he had exposed himself to fatigue and the inclemency of the weather, in a way which one, who thought less about his mind and more about his body, would have avoided. He was attacked by a very severe and obstinate liver complaint, for the removal of which the administration of a great deal of mercury became necessary. The disease was subdued, but before his system had recovered the requisite tone, he resumed his labours, and having exposed himself to cold, the disease returned with more inveteracy and obstinacy than ever. So alarming was the relapse that his physician had to resort to the boldest means of treatment, and what with the disease, and what with the means of cure, he presented for months a spectacle of physical exhaustion which we believe that no man of weaker mind could have survived. In the agony of pain, in the exhaustion of nature, and almost in the absence of hope, the firmness and placidity, nay the cheerfulness of his temper never forsook him; and when we have sat by the side of his bed or his couch, in that gloomy mood which steals over one on such occasions, some bright saying, which came but in a half articulated whisper, has compelled us to laugh, at the same time that the undiminished force and lustre of his mind, amid a physical wreck so nearly total, affording a very strong argument for mental immortality. We have seen Dr. Chalmers in many attitudes, in the glee of social enjoyment, in the sublimity of science, and in the terrible power of a Christian orator, but we are not sure that we ever saw him more truly in the character of a great man, than when, to all appearances, the scale of life was doubtful, and his friends were trembling for his fate. Since that time he has come more before the world, and commanded admiration from quarters which he then little thought of, but physically, he has never been the same man; and