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BIOGRAPHY.

Memoir of the celebrated Mr. James Crichton generally designated "THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON."

In the preceding number of this work we introduced to the notice of our readers, some account of the Rev. Samuel Lee, now Professor of Arabic in the University of Cambridge. By Archdeacon Corbett, Mr. Lee has been compared to the much-celebrated James Crichton, who was, not without reason, considered as a prodigy of learning, and as the wonder of the age in which he lived; and it may be doubted, if another individual can be found, since the days of Crichton to the present hour, in the higher walks of learning, with whom the Professor could be so justly compared. As contemporaries with Mr. Lee, a few individuals may be discovered, a comparison with whom, would confer no disgrace on the learned Professor. But as those are alike raising their literary career of glory, we can only mark their progress in attainments, or, "on weak wings, from far pursue their flight." Several have already ascended high on the mountain of fame; but their likenesses cannot be taken until they become stationary, when death shall have put a period to their toils.

"These sons of glory please not till they set."

There is something remarkable in the manner in which these gems of literature and science rise above the intellectual horizon, to display their brilliancy before us, and sparkle in our sight. It is not, indeed, to be expected, that every age should teem with prodigies. Greece had long existed, before it produced a Homer or an Aristotle; and Rome, before it gave birth to Cæsar or Virgil. England had long been a nation, before a Newton or a Locke appeared. Between the days of Crichton and those of Lee, upwards of two hundred years have elapsed; and the world has produced but one Columbus to the present hour.

Mr. James Crichton, according to the generality of his biographers, was born in the year 1551; but Lord Buchan fixes the time of his activity in the month of August 1560. It is admitted by all, that this celebrated man was a native of Scotland; but although Perth has in general been considered as his birth-place, even this circumstance has been perplexed with conflicting opinions. Of his ancestors the accounts are equally diversified. Some assert that his father, Robert Crichton, commanded the army of Queen Mary at the battle of Langside; others state, with equal confidence, that he was Lord Advocate of Scotland from 1560 to 1573. His mother's name was Elizabeth Stewart, the only daughter of Sir James Stewart, of Beath, a descendant of Robert duke of Albany, the third son of King Robert the Second. Relying on his pedigree, the subject of this memoir was accustomed to boast, when he displayed his astonishing acquirements in foreign countries, of his lineal descent from the Scottish kings.

At what time Mr. James Crichton began his studies, we are not informed; neither have we any satisfactory accounts when those diversified powers of his mind, on which all Europe gazed with admiration, first appeared to excite attention. The primary rudiments of his grammatical education were received at Perth; after which he studied philosophy in the University of St. Andrew. In that University, his tutor was the celebrated John Ruthford, a professor, famous for his learning, and distinguished by four books, which he had written on Aristotle's Logic, and a commentary on his Poetics. But it is not to this professor alone, that the honour of forming this extraordinary character is to be ascribed. Manutius, who calls Crichton first cousin to the king, says, that he was educated with James I. under Buchanan, Hepburn, and Robertson, as well as under Rutherford. We can not doubt, from the favourable circumstances under which Crichton entered life, that the best masters were assigned him

that could be procured in every department of learning.

Under their tuition, and through the native vigour of his understanding, he has acquired a knowledge of ten different languages, and had run through the whole circle of the sciences, by the time he had attained the twentieth year of his age. Arduous, however, as these varied pursuits may seem to common minds, they occupied a part only of Crichton's attention. A portion of time was devoted to music, in the knowledge of which he made an astonishing proficiency. He learnt to play on various instruments; and improved himself, to the highest degree, in dancing, fencing, singing, and horsemanship.

Having made himself master of these various acquirements, he left his native land, and, proceeding to Paris, introduced himself to the literati of that city in the following manner. On his arrival he caused six placards to be fixed on the gates of the schools, halls, and colleges, belonging to the University, and on all the pillars and posts of the houses inhabited by men most renowned for literature and science, inviting all who thought themselves well versed in any art, to meet and dispute with him in the college of Navarre, on that day six weeks, by nine in the morning. In this challenge, which was according to the practice of the age, he declared himself ready to answer any question which should be proposed to him, on any art or science, in any of the twelve following languages, viz. Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, Italian, English, Dutch, Flemish, and Slavonian; and this either in prose or verse, at the choice of his antagonist.

Held as this challenge may appear, instead of devoting himself to the minute examination of the various articles contained in its comprehensive embrace upon the issue of which he had risked his reputation, his time was chiefly spent in hunting, hawking, tilting, vaulting, riding, tossing the pike, handling the musket, and such military feats and athletic exercises; and, when tired with these, the interim was filled up in domestic engagements, such as balls, concerts of music, vocal and instrumental, cards, dice, and tennis, together with such diversions as frequently occupy the mind of youth. A mode of conduct, apparently so inconsistent with the character he had assumed in his placards, the students of the University were at a loss how to interpret. And so provoked were they at the insolence of this daring foreigner, that, beneath the placard which was fixed on the gate at Navarre, they caused the following words to be written:—"If you would meet with this monster of perfection, to make search for him either in the tavern or the brothel is the readiest way to find him."

But notwithstanding this wild dissipation, when the appointed day arrived, Crichton appeared in the college of Navarre, and engaged in a disputation, which lasted from nine in the morning until six in the evening. And so well did he acquit himself, that the President, after expatiating on the many rare and excellent endowments which God had bestowed upon him, rose from his chair, and accompanied by four of the most eminent professors of the University, presented him with a diamond ring, and a purse full of gold, as a testimony of their high approbation. On what subjects these antagonists disputed, we have not been informed; neither is it known with certainty in what languages they addressed each other. We are only told that the interview ended amidst the reiterated acclamations and hurrahs of the spectators; and that this conquest obtained for him the appellation of "THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON." It has been added, to the preceding account, that so little was he fatigued with the dispute, that he went to the Louvre, on the ensuing day, and engaging in a tilting match, an exercise then much in use, carried off the ring fifteen times successively, and broke as many lances, in the presence of some princes of the French court, and of

a great many ladies, whose applauses were deemed a glorious reward, by all the heroes of chivalry.

Of Crichton's exploits in Paris, the following account has been given by Mackenzie, and translated by Pennant, from the testimony of an author whom they consider as an eye-witness.

"There came to the college of Navarre, a young man of twenty years of age, who was perfectly well seen in all the sciences, as the most learned masters of the University acknowledged. In vocal and instrumental music, none could excel him; in painting and drawing colours, none could equal him. In military feats he was most expert; and could play with the sword so dexterously with both his hands, that no man could fight him. When he saw his enemy or antagonist, he would throw himself upon him at one jump of twenty or twenty-four foot distance. He was master of arts, and disputed with us in the schools of the college, on medicine, the civil and canon law, and theology. And, although we were above fifty in number, besides about three thousand who were present, so pointedly and learnedly he answered to all the questions which were proposed to him, that none but they who were present can believe it. He spoke Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and other languages, most politely. He was likewise a most excellent horseman; and, truly, if a man should live a hundred years, without eating, drinking, or sleeping, he could not attain to this man's knowledge, which struck us with a panic fear, for he knew more than human nature can well bear. He overcame four of the doctors of the church; for in learning none could contest with him; and he was thought to be Antichrist."

Having thus obtained in Paris the victory for which he contended, Crichton next repaired to Rome, where he affixed a placard upon all the eminent places of the city, in the following terms:—"Nos Jacobus Crichtonus Scotus, cuiusque Rei propositæ ex improviso respondebimus." In a city which abounded with scholastic learning and wit, this challenge, bearing all the marks of presumption, soon became the subject of a pasquinade. Rome, it has been said, was at this time much infested with mountebanks, jugglers, and other empirics; and those who felt indignant at the placard of Crichton, endeavoured to ridicule him, by classifying him with the quacks. Designating him by the wuter gender, their pasquinade led to the following effect:—"And he that will see it, let him repair to the sign of the Falcon, and it shall be shewn." Boccacini, who was then at Rome, says that the appearance of this paper had such an effect upon him, that, with indignant feelings, he almost immediately left the city, where he had been so grossly insulted, in being compared to the impostors who could only amuse the vulgar. Mackenzie however, asserts, that instead of being discouraged, he appeared at the time and place appointed; and in the presence of the Pope, many Cardinals, Bishops, and Doctors of Divinity, and Professors of all the Sciences, displayed such wonderful proofs of his universal knowledge, that he excited a degree of astonishment equal to that which had marked his career in Paris.

From Rome, Crichton proceeded to Venice, in which place he appears to have been reduced to much distress; but whether this arose from any mental depression, from bodily indisposition, or from onlustrament of circumstances, is not clearly expressed. The reality of his distress he has stated in a poem, the principal design of which was, to obtain a favourable reception in the city; and mere particularly so, with Aldus Manutius, a celebrated critic. On presenting his verses, Manutius was struck with an agreeable surprise, at the comprehensiveness of thought, the display of intellect, and the brilliancy of genius, which they exhibited. And upon conversing with the author, he was so filled with admiration on finding him intimately acquainted with almost every subject, that he introduced him to the acquaintance of the principal men of learning and note in Venice.