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NEW-BRUNSWICK RELIGIOUS AND LITERARY JOURNAL.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good will toward men."

VOLUME II. SAINT JOHN, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1830. NO. 6.

BIOGRAPHY.

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

But this tide of popular applause was not without its corresponding eddy. Mortified at being foiled by this youthful stranger, many, even among the learned, envied both his fame and merit, and did not hesitate to resort to artifices, which, they imagined, would lessen his reputation. Crichton was not ignorant of these contrivances; and, conscious of his own transcendent abilities and attainments, he resolved to give all who were inclined to detract from his merit, a convincing proof of his decided superiority. He therefore caused a paper to be fixed on the gates of St. John's and St. Paul's Churches, in which he offered to prove before the university, that both Aristotle and his followers had fallen into almost innumerable errors; and that the latter had failed in explaining the philosophy of their master, and had erred in their application of his principles to theological subjects. He engaged, likewise, to refute the theories of several mathematical professors; offered to dispute with any one on all the sciences; and promised to answer whatever might be proposed to him, or objected against what he should advance. All this he engaged to do, either in the common logical way, or by numbers and mathematical figures; or, in case his antagonists should prefer it; in no less than one hundred sorts of verses.

The men who had been secretly contriving how to undermine his reputation, beheld this challenge with strange emotions. From the presumption which it displayed, they flattered themselves with an easy conquest; but from the talents which Crichton had on all former occasions manifested, and his being constantly victorious; they became intimidated, and hesitated to accept the summons they had provoked. They had, however, proceeded too far to retreat; and therefore nothing remained but for them to collect their forces, and meet him agreeably to his proposal. Mantua informs us, that the meeting took place at the time appointed; that the disputations continued for three days; and that Crichton, during the whole contest, supported his credit, and maintained his propositions with so much spirit and energy, and apparently with so little fatigue, that he obtained, from an unusual concourse of people, such acclamations and praises as were scarcely ever before received by man.

Nor were the bodily powers, activity and skill, of this astonishing man less conspicuous, than those energies by which his mind was distinguished. Of these, also, he has given some surprising proofs in his various exploits.

It happened much about this time, that a famous gladiator, who, in his travels, had foiled the most able fenceurs in Europe, and lately killed three men who had entered the lists against him, took up his residence in Mantua. The duke, under whose promised protection he had taken shelter, on finding that he had afforded an asylum to a troublesome inmate, by whom the inhabitants were much annoyed, did not hesitate to manifest his regret; but having pledged his word, which he could neither recall nor violate, no way remained to release the public from this sanctioned pest, but that of finding some person who would dare to meet him in single combat.

Crichton having been informed of the fact, in connection with its various circumstances, voluntarily offered his services, not only to drive the murderer from Mantua, but to prevent his remaining in any part of Italy. He therefore made a proposal to fight him for fifteen hundred pistoles. The duke, though anxious to be delivered from his troublesome intruder, was unwilling that the valuable life of Crichton should be placed in competition with that of such a barbarous adventurer. But having been informed that he was as capable of appearing in feats of arms, as in scientific disquisitions, he gave his consent, that he should undertake to meet the

combatant. Affairs being arranged, and the day appointed, the whole court assembled to witness the issue of this singular conflict. In the commencement of this encounter, Crichton stood wholly on the defensive; while his antagonist assailed him with such eagerness and fury, that in a short time he became exhausted. This Crichton soon perceived; and availing himself of the opportunity, attacked him in return, with so much skill and resolution, that he was unable to withstand the assault. The weapons with which they fought were rapiers, then but newly brought into use; but so far had Crichton made himself master of this instrument of death, that he ran his antagonist through the body three times, and saw him fall dead at his feet. The spectators on perceiving this victory, uttered thunders of applause, making the earth resound with their united acclamations. And although many present were much skilled in the use of arms, they united in declaring, that they had never seen art, grace, nature, or nature second the precepts of art, in so lively a manner as the events of this day had exhibited before their eyes. Crichton in the meanwhile, to prove that his generosity was equal to his skill and courage, distributed the fifteen hundred pistoles which he had won by his valour, among the widows of the three men who had lost their lives in fighting with the gladiator whom he had slain.

Pleased with this bloody performance, the duke of Mantua is said immediately to have chosen Crichton as preceptor to his son Vincentio di Gonzaga, who is represented as a youth of a turbulent disposition, and a dissolute life. This appointment was pleasing to the court, and highly flattering to the vanity of the victor; who, to testify his gratitude, and to contribute to their diversion, is said to have framed a comedy in which he exposed to ridicule, the foibles, weaknesses, and defects of the several employments in which sexes were engaged. The composition was regarded, as one of the most ingenious satires that was ever made upon mankind. In the performance of this comedy, Crichton is represented as sustaining no less than fifteen characters in his own person. Among the rest, he acted the divine, the philosopher, the lawyer, the mathematician, the physician, and the soldier, with such an inimitable grace, that every time he appeared on the theatre, he seemed to be a different person.

But it was not long after he had sustained these various characters, in the comedy which he had composed for public entertainment, before he became the subject of a dreadful tragedy, which furnished a melancholy occasion for lamentation.

It happened one night, during the time of carnival, as he was walking along the streets of Mantua, playing upon his guitar, that he was attacked by six persons in masks. He immediately drew his weapon to defend himself; and soon convinced his assailants, that they had something more than an ordinary person with whom to contend. In this conflict, when they found they were unable to stand their ground, their leader, being disarmed, pulled off his mask, and begged his life, telling him that he was Prince Gonzaga his pupil. Crichton, on making this discovery, fell upon his knees, and expressed much concern for his mistake; alleging that what he had done was only in his own defence, and that if Gonzaga had any design upon his life, he was always master of it. Having said this, he took his sword, and holding it by the point, presented the handle to the prince, who instantly received it, and with a degree of barbarous meanness, that will always be associated with his name, immediately stabbed Crichton to the heart.

On the causes which led to this brutal action, various conjectures have been started. Some have imagined, that it arose from the mortification of being foiled, disarmed, and discovered, and being obliged to beg for his life. Others have supposed, that it was nothing more than the effect of a drunken frolic, in which the passions assumed the dominion over reason. And others have intimated, that it was the effect of jealousy, Gonzaga being suspi-

cious that Crichton was more in favour than himself, with a lady whom he passionately loved. In one point, however, all who have recorded these transactions mutually agree, namely, that Crichton lost his life in this rencounter; but whether the meeting was premeditated on the part of the prince and his associates, or purely as accidental as it was on that of Crichton, we have no means of ascertaining.—The time when this disastrous event took place, is said, by the generality of his biographers, to have been early in July, 1583; but Lord Buchan thinks it to have happened one year earlier. The difference is still greater with regard to his age, when he was thus assassinated. The common accounts declare, that he was killed in his thirty-second year; but Imperialis asserts, that he was only in his twenty-second; and in this he is confirmed by the testimony of Lord Buchan.

There is nothing marvellous in supposing that the tragical end of Crichton should excite a very great, and very general lamentation. Sir Thomas Urquhart says, that the whole court of Mantua went into mourning for him and continued so for three quarters of a year; that the epitaphs and elegies which were composed on his death, some of which were stuck upon his bier, would exceed, if collected, the bulk of Homer's works; and that for a long time afterwards, his picture was to be seen in most of the bed-chambers and galleries of the Italian nobility, exhibiting him on horse-back, with a lance in one hand and a book in the other. The same author, in giving a delineation of his character, observes as follows. "He gained the esteem of kings and princes by his magnanimity and knowledge; of noblemen and gentlemen, by his courtness and breeding; of knights, by his honourable deportment and pregnancy of wit; of the rich, by his affability and good fellowship; of the poor, by his munificence and liberality; of the old, by his constancy and wisdom; of the young, by his warmth and gallantry; of the learned, by his universal knowledge; of the soldiers, by his valour and courage; of the merchants and artificers, by his upright dealing and his honesty; and of the fair sex, by his beauty and handsomeness, in which respect he was a master-piece of nature."

Romantic as the accounts which we have given of Crichton, and extravagant as the testimony of Urquhart may appear, they are rather augmented than diminished by the memoir of Imperialis, his Italian biographer. "He was," says this writer, "the wonder of the last age; the prodigious production of nature; the glory and ornament of Parnassus, in a stupendous and unusual manner; and that, in the judgment of the learned world, he was the phoenix of literature; and rather a shining particle of the divine mind and majesty, than a model of what could be attained by human industry. What can more exceed our comprehension, than that Crichton, in the 21st year of his age, should be master of ten different languages, and perfectly versed in philosophy, mathematics, theology, literature, and all other sciences? Besides, was it ever heard, in the whole compass of the globe, that to these extraordinary endowments of the mind, should be added a singular skill in fencing, dancing, singing, riding, and in the exercise of every gymnastic art? Nature, in grief for the loss of the wonder she had produced, threatened never more to confer such honor upon mankind." Bayle says, that "Crichton was one of the greatest prodigies of wit that ever lived," and Feixix Astolius bears testimony to his "wonderful memory."

As the vast learning and extraordinary abilities which have been ascribed to Crichton by his biographers seem to partake in no small degree of the marvellous, it was necessary to introduce the names of such authors as vouch for the authenticity of the facts which they have recorded. How far their sentiments partake of the hyperbole, we have no means of knowing with indubitable certainty. Some circumstances there are, which disfigure this luminous picture with visible shadows. His comedy has been represented as "one of the most ingenious sa-