

ANECDOTES OF BOOKS AND AUTHORS.

Juana Inez de la Cruz.—Juana Inez de la Cruz was born in November, 1651, a few leagues from the city of Mexico. Her father, a Spaniard, had sought wealth by an establishment in America, where he married a lady of the country, but of Spanish extraction. Juana, the fruit of this union, displayed in early childhood a passion for letters, and an extraordinary facility in the composition of Spanish verse. At eight years of age she was placed by her parents with an uncle, who resided in Mexico; he caused her to receive a learned education. Her talents having attracted notice and distinction, she was patronised by the lady of the viceroy, the Marquis de Mancera, and, at the age of seventeen, was received into his family.

A Spanish encomiast of Juana relates a curious anecdote respecting her, communicated to him, as he affirms, by the viceroy. Her patrons, filled with admiration and astonishment by the powers and attainments of their young protégé, determined to prove the extent and solidity of her erudition. For this purpose they invited forty of the most eminent literary characters of the country, who assembled to examine Juana in the different branches of learning and science. Questions, arguments, and problems were accordingly proposed to her by the several professors in philosophy, mathematics, history, theology, and poetry, all of which she answered with equal readiness and skill, acquitting herself to the entire satisfaction of her judges. To this account it is added, that she received the praise extorted on this occasion by her acquirements with the most perfect modesty; neither did she, at any period of her life, discover the smallest tendency to presumption or vanity, though honoured with the title of the *tenth muse*; humility was her distinguishing characteristic. She lived forty-four years, twenty-seven of which she passed in the convent of St. Gerommo, where she took the veil, in the exercise of the most exemplary virtues.

In the fervour of her zeal she wrote in her blood a confession of faith. She is said to have collected a library of four thousand volumes, in the study of which she placed her delight; nevertheless, towards the close of her life, she sacrificed this darling propensity for the purpose of applying the money which she acquired by the sale of her books to the relief of the indigent. However heroic may be the motive of this self-denial, the rectitude of the principle is doubtful; the cultivation of the mind, with its influence upon society, is a more real benefit to mankind than the partial relief of pecuniary exigences.

Juana was not less lamented at her death than celebrated and respected during her life; her writings were collected in three quarto volumes, to which are prefixed numerous panegyrics upon the author, both in verse and prose, by the most illustrious persons of old and new Spain. It is observed by the Spanish critic, Father Feyjoo, that the compositions of Juana excel in ease and elegance, rather than in energy and strength. This is, perhaps, in some degree, attributable to the age in which she lived, and to the subjects of her productions, which were principally compliments addressed to her friends, or sacred dramas, for which an absurd and senseless superstition afforded the materials.

Dr. Watts.—It was so natural for Dr. Watts, when a child, to speak in rhyme, that even when he wished to avoid it, he could not. His father was displeased at this propensity, and threatened to whip him if he did not leave off making verses. One day when he was about to put his threat into execution, the child burst out into tears, and, on his knees, said—

"Pray, father, do some pity take,
And I will no more verses make."

Dryden.—Dryden, who was notoriously poor, was one evening in company with the Duke of Buckingham, Lord Dorset, and some other noblemen of wit and genius. It happened that the conversation, which was literary, turned on the art of composition and elegance of style; and, after some debate, it was agreed that each party should write something on whatever subject chanced to strike his imagination, and place it under the candlestick for Mr. Dryden's judgment. Most of the company took uncommon pains to outdo each other, while Lord Dorset, with much composure, wrote two or three lines, and carelessly threw them to the place agreed on. The rest having finished, the arbiter opened the leaves of their destiny. In going through the whole he discovered strong marks of pleasure and satisfaction; but at one in particular he seemed in raptures. "I must acknowledge," says Dryden, "there are abundance of fine things in my hands, and such as do honour to the personages who wrote them; but I am under the indispensable necessity of giving the highest preference to my Lord Dorset. I must request that your lordships will hear it, and I believe all will be satisfied with my judgment:—"

"I promise to pay John Dryden, or order, on demand, the sum of five hundred pounds. DORSET."

Milton.—The Duke of York, in the hey-day of his honours and greatness, went to satisfy a malignant curiosity, by visiting Milton in his own house. He asked him if he did not regard the loss of his sight as a judgment for his writings against the king. Milton replied, calmly, "If your highness thinks calamity an indication of Heaven's wrath, how do you account for the fate of the king, your father? I have lost but my eyes—he lost his head."

On the duke's return to court, he said to the king, "Brother, you are greatly to blame that you don't have that old rogue, Milton, hanged."

"What!" said the king, "have you seen Milton?"

"Yes," answered the duke, "I have seen him."

"In what condition did you find him?"

"Condition? why, he is old, and very poor."

"Old and poor," said the king, "and blind, too? You are a fool, James, to have him hanged; it would be doing him a service. No; if he is poor, old, and blind, he is miserable enough in all conscience; let him live."

Blacklock.—Blacklock, the poet, certainly much better known for his blindness than for his genius, happened to call upon Hume, the historian, one day, and began a long dissertation on his misery, bemoaning his loss of sight, his large family of children, and his utter incapacity to provide for them, or even to supply them, at that moment, with the necessaries of life.

Hume himself was at that period so little a favourite of fortune, from the smallness of his paternal fortune, and the scantiness of his collegiate stipend, being then a member of the university, that he had solicited, and just then received through the strenuous interest of a friend, an university appointment, worth about forty pounds per annum.

The heart of the philosopher, however, was softened by the complaint of his friend; and, being destitute of the pecuniary means of immediate assistance, he ran to his desk, took out the newly-received grant, and presented it to the unhappy poet, with a promise, which he faithfully performed, of using his best interest to have the name of Hume changed for that of Blacklock. In this generous attempt he was finally successful; and by his noble philanthropy, had the pleasure of saving his friend and family from starvation.

La Harpe.—The academy of Rouen having proposed a subject for a prize in poetry, when the pieces for competition were read, the judges were unanimous in acknowledging the superiority to two odes, and the difficulty that now arose was to which to give the preference; at length, after long discussion, finding that they were unable to decide otherwise, they determined to divide the prize between their respective authors. On opening the sealed billets sent with them, they found in each the name of La Harpe.

Catherine Cockburn.—Catherine Cockburn, whose poetical productions procured her the name of the *Scottish Sappho*, but who is better known to posterity by her able "Defence of the Essay on the Human Understanding," and other metaphysical lucubrations, was the youngest daughter of Captain David Trotter, a native of Scotland, and a naval officer in the reign of Charles II. On the death of her father, who fell a victim to the plague at Scanderoon, she was still a child. She had given early indications of genius, by some extemporary verses on an accident which, passing the street, excited her attention. Several of her relations and friends happened to be present on the occasion, among whom was her uncle, a naval commander. This gentleman, greatly struck by such a proof of observation, faculty, and talent in a child, observed with what pleasure the father of Catherine, who possessed a peculiar taste for poetry, would have witnessed, had he been living, this unpremeditated effusion. Catherine, by application and industry, made herself mistress of the French language without any instructor; she also taught herself to write. In the study of the Latin grammar and logic she had some assistance; of the latter she drew up an abstract for her own use. In 1693, being then only fourteen years of age, she addressed some lines to Mr. Bevil Higgins, on his recovery from sickness. In her seventeenth year she produced a tragedy, entitled "Agnes de Castro," which was acted with applause at the Theatre Royal in 1696, and published, but without her name, the following year, with a dedication to the Earl of Dorset: and when she wrote her "Defence of the Essay on the Human Understanding," she was no more than twenty-two years of age. Mr. Locke himself was pleased to say of this defence, in a letter to the fair author, "You have hereby not only vanquished my adversary, but reduced me also absolutely under your power, and left no desire more strong in me, than that of meeting with some opportunity to assure you with what respect and submission I am," etc.

Grotius.—Hugo Grotius, at the age of eight years, is said to have composed verses, which an old poet would not have disavowed. At the age of fifteen, he maintained theses in philosophy, mathematics, and jurisprudence, with great applause. The following year he went to France, where he attracted the notice of Henry IV. On his return to his own country, he pleaded his first cause at the age of seventeen, having previously published commentaries on Capella and Aratus. When only twenty-four years of age, he was made advocate-general of Rotterdam.

Cowley.—Cowley, losing his father at an early age, was left to the care of his mother. In the window of their apartment lay Spenser's Fairy Queen; in which he very early took delight to read, till, by feeling the charms of verse, he became, as he relates irrecoverably a poet. "Such," says Dr. Johnson, "are the accidents which, sometimes remembered, and perhaps sometimes

forgotten, produce that particular designation of mind, and propensity for some certain science or employment, which is commonly called genius." Cowley might be said to "lisp in numbers," and gave such early proofs not only of powers of language, but of the comprehension of things, as to more tardy minds, seems scarcely credible. When only in his thirteenth year, a volume of his poems was printed, containing, with other poetical compositions, "The Tragical History of Pyramus and Thisbe," written when he was ten years old; and "Constantia and Philetus," written two years after. And while still at school, he produced a comedy of a pastoral kind, called "Love's Riddle," though it was not published till he had been some time at Cambridge.

LACONICS.—Beware of the ruinous practice of pledging your goods and clothing; poverty, misery, and degradation are its inevitable consequences—Let the management of your family, the peace of your house, and the peace of your neighbourhood be your constant study. Let both husband and wife exercise patience, forbearance, and forgiveness towards each other, and love one another sincerely. Do not suffer noise and clamour in the house, and never suffer more than one to speak at a time. Let the children see that they love and obey their parents, love their brothers and sisters, keep from bad company, improve their minds, and aim at respectability in the world.—Let your whole family unite in every good work, study your present prosperity and your future welfare, and be determined to live as you would wish to die.—Whenever you buy or sell, let or hire, make a clear bargain, and never trust to "We shan't disagree about trifles."—Many friends are lost by ill-timed jests: rather lose your best jest than your best friend.—Sir John Barleycorn is a stout knight, but a wicked and cunning knave, and does much mischief before men are aware of him.—Nothing is more odious than the face that smiles abroad, but flashes fury amidst the caresses of a tender wife and children.—Never defer that till to-morrow which you can do to-day, nor do that by proxy which you can do yourself.

LIFE is but short, no time can be afforded but for the indulgence of real sorrow, or contests upon questions seriously momentous.—Let us not throw away any of our days upon useless resentment, or contend who shall hold out longest in stubborn malignity. It is best not to be angry—and best, in the next place, to be quickly reconciled.—Dr. Johnson.

"I positively never knew a man in the country who was too poor to take a newspaper. Yet two out of three, even respectable people, read no papers but what they borrow. As I speak generally, I hope I offend none. If I do—the greater the necessity to speak out. Every man is able conveniently to take a newspaper. How many who think themselves too poor to take a newspaper, pay four times as much daily for drink! Miserable man, thou art poor indeed."—Benjamin Franklin.

SINGULAR MARRIAGES.—A widower at Campden, who was not very young, became smitten with a young and beautiful girl, and married her. A short time after, the son of this man by a former wife, became also in love not with a younger person, but with the mother of the father's new wife, a widow lady still in the bloom of life. He offered himself, and soon the young man and the widow were united in the bands of matrimony, so that in consequence of these two connexions, a father becomes the son-in-law of his own son, and a wife not only the daughter-in-law of her own son-in-law, but still more, the mother-in-law of her own mother, who is herself daughter-in-law of her own daughter, while the husband of the latter is the father-in-law of his mother-in-law, and father-in-law to his own father. Singular confusion may arise, if children should spring from these peculiar marriages.

CATHERINE DE MEDICIS.—When the infamous Catherine of Medicis had persuaded Charles IX. of France to massacre all the Protestants in the kingdom, that detestable Prince sent orders to the Governors of the different Provinces, to put all the Hugonots to death in their respective districts:—"Sire," answered one Catholic Governor, who will ever be dear to humanity, "I have too much respect for your Majesty not to persuade myself that the order I have received must be forged; but if, which God forbid, it should be really your Majesty's order, I have too much respect for your Majesty to obey it."

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