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PRIZE BIOGRAPHY.

GEORGE WYTHE.—BY J. L. LEWIS, JUN.

It is a remark of that elegant writer, Dr. Knox, that the law reminded one of a Gothic edifice, which time had consecrated, and to which, although it was irregular and misshapen, no one would think of giving a modern cast. This remark seems to be true in every particular, and the observer is induced to exclaim with the poet, "How reverend seems the face of this tall pile." The solemnity and awe which fills the mind, upon contemplating the structure, is naturally conveyed to its ministers, and the respect and admiration with which we look upon a dignified and upright judge, is a surer protection than all the panoply of his guards and attendant ministers. We hang upon his accents as upon the breathings of an oracle; and we regard his frowns and rebuke as more terrific than the lightnings and thunder of the fabled Jupiter. The guardian of our dearest rights, and the dispenser of equal and exact justice, has a claim upon our affections, which obloquy cannot shake, nor jarring passions obliterate; and we regard him rather as an indulgent parent, than one elevated above us by official station. Of all the patriots of the revolution, pure and incorruptible as they were, and venerated as they may have been, there is no one who has juster or stronger claims upon our esteem, than the upright, impartial and venerable Chancellor Wythe, the Aristides of America, in whose breast there glowed, not only the warmest and most disinterested love of his country, but the purest philanthropy. The father of the orphan, the protector of the widow, and the guardian of the helpless. By virtue of his office, he entered as warmly into their concerns as if there had been a nearer and dearer tie and bond of union between them; and none applied to him for relief whose just claims were denied. The blessings of the people smoothed the decline of the patriarch, and added softness to his nightly pillow.

George Wythe, the Chancellor of Virginia, was born in that state, in the year 1726, of a respectable but not affluent family, and was nurtured in the very lap of science; for his mother has been represented to be a lady possessed of uncommon endowments and strength of mind—one who watched, not only over the physical, but the moral improvement of her child, and who regarded his advancement in knowledge, with all the tender solicitude of a mother. Her mind was one of no common order; she infused its strength and vigor into his, and gave a practical commentary on the advantages of female education; more striking than the precepts of a volume. She habituated herself to converse fluently with him in the Latin language, and he might be said to be a classical scholar from his very cradle. Beyond this, however, he had few of those advantages which the students and illustrious men of the old world have possessed, and which our thousand literary institutions now present;—his education was limited to reading, writing, and a knowledge of arithmetic. His earliest friend, and guide and instructor, his mother, died in his boyhood, and George Wythe, before he had attained his majority, was destitute and an orphan. Without a friend to direct his steps or to counsel him as to the course he should pursue, it is not surprising that he should have plunged into all the vices and dissipation of youth. But a mind like his could not always be obscured by this moral darkness; and the sparkling of the diamond could still be perceived despite the surrounding rubbish. At the age of thirty the chains which had bound him were broken, the sleeper was awakened from his slumbers, and he was a regenerate and disenthralled man. By intense and close application to study he redeemed the time which he had wasted, but he never ceased lamenting the loss of the most valuable and useful part of his life. He mastered the Greek and Latin languages without an instructor, and applied himself to the study of the law, in the office of a Mr. Lewis, whose daughter he subsequently married. His professional career was marked by all those exalting traits which distinguish the man of judgment, talents and integrity, and his rise at the bar was steady and sure. He never could admire that feeling which prompted the skilful advocate to defend an unjust cause, and he was never enlisted on the side of dishonesty or baseness. So punctually scrupulous was he on this point, that he would choose to either hear the testimony of witnesses himself, or to take the affidavit of his client to the truth of his story. Those were days of Arcadian simplicity and innocence, when might could not prevail over justice, nor the strong arm of the oppressor, nor the wily cunning of the knave defeat its ends. Without wishing to cast an imputation on a profession which is loaded with much undeserved reproach and stale slander, it is to be wished that such was the now prevailing state of things, and that lawyers should be a little more scrupulous in espousing the causes of their clients, without being satisfied that their claims were just or their pleas meritorious. They would render themselves the guardians of the spirit of the laws which they profess to expound; the conservators of the public tranquility, and the promoters of human happiness. Mr. Wythe took an early and an active stand in the difficulties with the mother country, and though he swayed not the thunderbolt, nor wielded the shafts of vengeance, yet the cool calm steadiness and firmness of Wythe achieved, what the impetuosity of Henry could never accomplish. Yet his whole soul was with the cause in which he was enlisted, and though emphatically a "man of peace," yet he was active in raising a company of volunteers to assist in guarding his country's right, and associated with his illustrious

friend and pupil, Jefferson, he boldly stood forth the advocate of liberty and freedom. But it was not the destiny of Wythe to fight his country's battles. Previous to the war he was chosen where his services were most needed, and the weight of his influence was most deeply felt, to the legislature of his native state, of which dignified and illustrious body he was a most efficient member, and was chosen speaker of the house of Burgesses, the duties of which station were discharged, as might be expected, from a man of his exalted character. The day of trial at length arrived, and Mr. Wythe was deputed to Congress, and was one of that immortal body who declared themselves "free and independent," and one who sanctioned the high minded pledge which they gave to the world with his name. In November, of that memorable year, he was appointed to the task as one of the committee of revising the laws of Virginia. The manner in which that committee discharged the trust is emblazoned on the pages of our nation's history, as it struck a deep blow at the root of those aristocratical institutions which were then our inheritance, and promoted essentially the cause of liberty and equal rights throughout the world; and it is engraven on the tomb-stone of one of that committee, as the highest tribute which can be paid to his memory, that he was "author of the statutes for religious freedom in Virginia." They abolished the right of primogeniture, converted estates tail into fee simple, and gave the first impetus to those changes which destroyed the dominions of the monarchs of the old world in America forever. In June, 1779, they completed their labors, and although they failed in their proposed system of education and amelioration of the code of punishment, yet their services will ever be felt and gratefully remembered. Under the new system, Mr. Wythe was appointed a Judge of equity, and subsequently Chancellor, which office he filled till his death, in June, 1806. So limited was his salary during the greater period of that time, that he was forced to accept of the law professorship in William and Mary college, to increase the means of livelihood; for it could not be supposed that he who had never fattened on the spoils of iniquity, nor shared in the plunder of the unwary and unsuspecting, should be rich. He was a member of the Virginia convention, which adopted the federal constitution, and to which he gave his warm support, and he twice presided over the college of electors and gave a republican vote. It being once his fortune to vote for his former pupil and steady friend, Thomas Jefferson.

Such is a succinct and brief account of the life and services of George Wythe. But let not the historian here drop the pen. It is the province of the biographer, not merely to detail facts, but to furnish examples worthy of imitation, and the example of Wythe is rife with instruction. We mark his promising boyhood and rejoice in the brilliancy of the prospect. Steerner manhood arrives, the aspect is dreary, and the brow is clouded with sorrow. The rising sun of genius, which gave promise of a glorious day, is enshrouded in gloom. But the soul cannot rest in this torpor; it aspires to a higher and better state of existence. He bursts the bonds which confined him, and achieved a more triumphant victory than that of any conqueror: it was a victory over himself—it was the triumph of the intellect over the passions—a triumph which elevated him at once from the depths of sorrow and degradation, to the station which he so proudly and ably filled. It is such victories which raise the standard of human character and exalts one above the common herd. An Alexander may prevail by means of mere physical superiority; but the self-conqueror deserves a like crown of laurels, and a yet higher meed of praise, for his are more fierce, persevering and relentless enemies—his own vices and faults. Bitterly as he lamented the loss and misapplication of his earlier years, yet his close and persevering attention to the business of his profession, and his exemplary and useful life, redeemed his earliest faults and follies. To the young man, who too eager in the pursuit of pleasure, has contracted dissipated habits, the story of Wythe is all worthy of imitation. He may, by one vigorous effort—one exertion of his will, become an ornament to society. No one enjoyed a more unblemished reputation, and to his plain and abstemious manners and inward peace of mind, may be attributed his green old age and his long and continued usefulness. As a man of benevolent and philanthropic feelings, Howard himself scarcely surpassed our distinguished American—and it was his constant endeavor to alleviate human sufferings, and promote human happiness. As the constant friend of the blacks, the highest judicial officer of Virginia did not disdain to become their instructor—and it is related of him that he taught a colored boy in his family, the Greek language. But it is on the discharge of his duties as a judge and chancellor that the solid basis of his reputation is founded, and he stands in that respect upon an eminence to which we look up with feelings of admiration and veneration. Elevated above the storms and tempests to which the lives of great men are too often subject, he stood like the snow capped peak of some lofty mountain, an object of profound respect and attention, superior to earth and emulous of its native Heaven. He sought not the praise of men, nor the empty applause of the crowd, but seemed only intent upon rendering to every man that which was his due. The guilty trembled at the bar of his judgment seat, and the innocent rejoiced in a protector powerful, more by the weight of an unimpeachable character, than by the law's array with which he was surrounded. When he pronounced judgment, none murmured at his decisions, for their judge was inflexibly just. Although surpassed by many other legal worthies in facility and dispatch of business, yet he heard patiently, and decided promptly and correctly, and seemed anxious to have

nothing unheard that would elicit truth. He was no friend to that ingenuity which would "make the worst appear the better cause," nor to genius which would sell itself for base purposes. In his charges and fees he was more moderate than a due attention to his own interests required, and he was never known to accept a solitary cent while at the bar for any service beyond the ordinary and legal costs. He was, indeed, the model of a just judge—one, to use the language of an impassioned orator "before the splendor of whose genius and virtues men bowed with respectful deference." The annals of the old world may produce judges of equal sanctity of character, but none so happy in his life and death. His memory is dear indeed to the profession, and it is firm as the adamantine rocks which surround our country.

Pen Yan, N. Y.

POPULAR TALES.

THE CONSPIRACY DETECTED.—BY M. MATTON.

Dom Bernardo was by birth a Spaniard. In his youth he was indulged in every luxury that could be procured by his affluent parents; still he preferred a wandering and irregular life. He was at last driven from the protection of his father, and with this mark of parental dislike fixed upon him forever, he sought refuge with a company of banditti who horded in the mountains of the Austrias. With his new associates he remained but a short period. A dialogue between him and one of the lawless hidalgos was the cause of their separation. He left them, however, with a character for bravery that few among them had acquired.

A few years subsequent to this period, we find Dom Bernardo the captain of a piratical cruiser. His depredations, at first, were committed chiefly along the Mediterranean; but, last, he honored the shores of America with his formidable presence. Many efforts were made to secure his person, but they all proved abortive. While pursuing his dangerous profession, he was never seen a second time, by any other than his crew, in the same apparel. Thus he eluded the ministers of justice.

Dom Bernardo's vessel had been dashed against a rock during a severe storm in the Gulf of Mexico, and his crew, one and all, perished, while he was preserved to fill a darker gloom, by clinging to a fragment of the wreck. He was taken up by some fishermen; and after partaking their hospitality for several days, he set out on his way to New Orleans. In this city he had a confidential agent to whom he had consigned a large portion of his funds.

It was at this time that the pirate thought of changing his mode of life. He fancied he had become disgusted with the scenes of blood and slaughter through which he had passed.—The secret of all this, however, was that he had fallen desperately in love with a handsome young lady whom he met at the house of his agent. The worthy Dom could not altogether resist the influence of love. He began to sigh, and as a necessary concomitant, to read poetry; but this romance of feeling was destined to be of short duration. Scarcely two months had elapsed before the lady, of whom he had become so deeply enamored, was the partner of his passions. In the society of his young bride he enjoyed a happiness he little expected to have realized. In her absence she was the sole occupant of his thoughts. She was as a star upon which he loved to fix his gaze. In her beauty there was a delirium that filled his heart with a strange and ineffable rapture. His whole nature underwent a change. The asperities of his character were entirely subdued. He resigned himself to the dominion of love and gentleness! Thus he was rendered contented and happy; and at length, as a pledge of his continued felicity, he was blest with the birth of a daughter, who was called Isabella. Soon after this his wife died; and his affections were now centered in his only child. He bestowed upon her every possible attention, and when she had arrived at a sufficient age, he placed her at a public school to receive an education.

Again we find Dom Bernardo restless and dissatisfied. He had been accustomed to a life of cruelty and blood, and without some powerful excitement, he became the victim of his own gloomy and foreboding thoughts. As a remedy, he returned, once more, to the seas. He was absent three years, during which time he plundered many vessels, while his young and innocent daughter was profoundly ignorant of his nefarious pursuits.

The luxurious habits of the pirate subjected him to frequent and severe attacks of the gout; it was during one of these visitations that he solemnly resolved to quit forever his dangerous profession, and retire with his daughter into private life. Accordingly he bade adieu to his associates, and hastened to receive her welcome embrace. He found her grown up almost into womanhood, possessing a gay and cheerful spirit. Her heart was light and buoyant as the breeze; for care had never yet laid upon her his withering touch. Her cheeks were flushed with the roses of youth and her dark eye sparkled with irresistible eloquence and fascination. She was told by her father that she must prepare for a life of seclusion; that he was weary of the world, and with the exception of herself wished to stand aloof from all society. For a moment a shade came over the brow of Isabel, but it vanished in an instant: she thought only of contributing to the happiness of her parent, who was so enfeebled by excess that she doubted whether he could survive many months.