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ing so much more valuable than notes at that time; and for no other reason was this demand made, than because the tenants presumed to choose their own clergyman, contrary to his opinion. Such a gentleman as I have described could not readily be found in the present day, nor in any other, I dare say, except in the reign of Nero. I believe this fact can be authenticat-

ed by too many evidences, as the poor tenants can testify. I had it from a very respectable gentleman residing in the neighbourhood. In such a case as that, your "Ulster independence of mind" must have been as far humbled as it could be in this county, or any other county in the province of Leinster.

A WEXFORD FARMER.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF DISTINGUISHED PERSONS.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MOSES MENDELSSOHN*, A PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY JEW.

"Philosophy is the purification and perfection of the life of man."

THE national character of the Jewish people has proved so averse to letters, that some persons will not easily believe that they can boast of no concise catalogues of illustrious men. Obsolete, superstitious, hereditary customs, and political oppressions have isolated this

people. Whenever a nation suffers, men are frequently led to think. The Jews have been considered as bold thinkers, but situation sometimes converts bold thinkers into timid men. In this more polished age they have not been without some, whose minds have caught the enthusiasm of fame, and who have breathed a portion of that ethereal

* Many of the particulars of the life of Moses Mendelssohn have been extracted from an excellent periodical publication, the *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*. A writer in that work assigns the following motives for publishing the memoirs of a singular character, a philosophical Jew. For similar reasons an enlarged biographical sketch is inserted in the *Belfast Magazine*. "The life of Moses Mendelssohn exhibits a pattern which young persons of a taste and ardour like his, and in similar circumstances would do well to copy. They may hence learn never to distrust the governing Providence of God, never to remit the efforts of which they are capable, never to despise the dictates of an honourable prudence. It is principally with the view of inculcating such lessons as these, that the present memoir of this extraordinary man has been prepared. Another end may perhaps be answered by the perusal of it; the reader may

have a stronger conviction that moral and intellectual excellence are not confined to particular denominations or sects of men. In the age and nation in which he lived, Mendelssohn was not the only literary Jew. Let the benefits of unrestricted toleration and liberal intercourse be extended to people of *all* persuasions in religion, and the minds and characters of *all* will be improved in the highest degree which humanity permits. We have in England opulent Jews, some of whom are occasionally spoken of as patronizing, and some few as cultivating knowledge and the arts. But it is rarely indeed, that any of these or their humbler brethren have appeared with reputation as writers on subjects of general learning or science. There is not one of them who approaches to Mendelssohn. In these circumstances, it is natural to inquire, what cause can be assigned for this difference between the Jewish inhabitants of Great-Britain and those of Germany? The practical solution of the problem can be given by the legislature of the United Kingdom."

spirit, which is touched by the glory of philosophers and of letters, and consoles feeble humanity, amidst human afflictions.

Of the modern literary Jews many have been opulent, and their productions though elegant and refined, want the energy of originality, Urbane, timid, and desiring nothing but public esteem, they have rested satisfied in embellishing the gay precincts of the more agreeable literature.

In such a state of mental depression, a sublime genius, an Israelite, who felt no degradation when associated with a Locke, and a Leibnitz, was a phenomenon which was not expected to arise until Moses Mendelssohn appeared amidst peculiar and controuling accidents of fortune. Under every disadvantage of birth and early situation, he attained to intellectual, literary and moral excellence. In his youth perplexed by the voluminous ignorance of Judaical learning, in his middle age oppressed by comfortless indigence and excruciating malady, and in his mature life unpatronized but by public applause, he persevered in philosophical researches.

Moses Mendelssohn was born in 1729, at Dessau, in the circle of Upper Saxony. His father, a Jewish school-master, had great difficulty in providing for the wants of the passing day; his office being little esteemed, and very scantily remunerated, by the community of which he was a member. His avocation would seem not unfavourable to a literary youth; but a Jewish schoolmaster is frequently the most illiterate of men. The Jewish schools, formed merely for their own youth, exhibit to the philosopher no in curious spectacle. He beholds the antipodes of the human understanding; youths, with the assiduity of students, exerting themselves in sys-

tematical barbarism. The summit of Hebrew studies closes with an introduction to that vast collection of puerile legends, and still more puerile superstitions, the Talmud. The student consumes the season of youth in perusing this immense repository of human follies. With a pious abhorrence he would reject every science, did he know to distinguish them by their names.

At home, Moses Mendelssohn was instructed only in Hebrew, and in the elements of the Mosaic religion; and although he was afterwards placed at one of the public schools of the Jews, he learned scarcely any thing there which invigorated his faculties, or added to his stock of knowledge. Ardent and constant in his reading, notwithstanding the difficulties of his situation, he soon selected from the mass of Rabbinical dreamers, the superior works of the celebrated Maimonides. To the perusal of them he applied himself with a diligence which undermined his health. So fond was he of the employment, that he devoted to it whole nights; nor could he be easily torn from his favourite author, to whom he was mainly indebted for the love of truth, of free inquiry, and of philosophical reflection, which characterized him through life. By his intimate acquaintance with whose writings his talents were developed and improved.

Those talents were at once considerable and varied. With more than usual strength of understanding Mendelssohn united a warm yet enlightened sensibility. His love of metaphysical investigation was mingled with occasional indulgence in polite literature. He wrote verses when he was only ten years old; but though his translation of the Psalms, at a much later period, shews that he had some claim to the honours of a poet, his habits and his inclination

marked him for a philosopher. He persevered in the study of Maimonides, and manifested a decided predilection for abstract speculations.

Extreme poverty seemed to be his destiny. So miserable was the penury of his parents that they could no longer maintain him, and at the age of fourteen, he left his father's house. This step was taken with the consent of his parents, who shared his hope that he would be able to gratify in another scene his literary taste, and to surmount the obstacles of his poverty, his descent, and his sickly frame. On his arrival at Berlin, he was without money, and apparently without a friend.

In this state of extreme indigence, he happened to gain the notice of a benevolent Jew, who gave him board and lodging, and did all that he could for his relief. Mendelssohn, too, had now the long wished for opportunity of making some progress in learning. Hearing that Fränkel, who had formerly been a Rabbi at Dessau, was stationed in Berlin, he conquered his natural bashfulness, and introduced himself to this person, who assisted him in studying the Talmud and Jewish Theology, and engaged him to copy his manuscripts. This kind of labour, it must be confessed, did not suit exactly the young man's views; yet, being pursued with assiduity, it served to strengthen his powers, and to prepare him for higher efforts. Labouring in these mines of lead, it would not have struck a sagacious observer that the humble copier of the reveries of a Talmudist was one day to open a quarry of valuable marble, and to erect a graceful column of genius, which was to endure to a future age.

The afflictions of poverty, and the difficulties of study were at

length alleviated and animated by the consolations of literary friendship. Berlin was at that period the residence of many learned men, and even of some literary Jews, with whom Mendelssohn would have gladly associated, had not his indigence retained him in retirement. However, with one of these, who like himself, was in very humble circumstances, he formed a valuable acquaintance. Israel Moses, a native of Stari Zamose in Poland, had settled in Berlin as the teacher of a school; but owing to the undaunted freedom with which he had exposed some pretensions of the Jewish ecclesiastics, and to his love of philosophy, he became the victim of bigots, and received the honours of persecution. Calumniated without remorse, this sensitive student was expelled from the communion of the orthodox. His heart having more sensibility than fortitude, wasted without energy, in the mental disease of melancholy. The friendship which Mendelssohn contracted with him, was founded in the similarity of their intellectual habits, at well as in that of their situation. Israel Moses was a man of uncommon talents and various acquirements. To a large portion of general knowledge he added particular skill and proficiency in mathematics. Under such an instructor the pupil made rapid and sure advances. Israel Moses translated Euclid into Hebrew, for the benefit of Mendelssohn; and the reasonings of Maimonides, of whom both were enamoured, furnished them with an almost inexhaustible subject of discussion.

Israel Moses conversed and composed exclusively in the Hebrew language; he was an acute mathematician, an able naturalist, sensible of the charms of the fine arts, and possessed of a mind which was

a volcano of poetry. He threw into the soul of Mendelssohn the first spark of genius. These two youthful philosophers sat in the corners of retired streets, the one with an Hebrew Euclid, instructing the other; and the scholar was one day to be classed among the great preceptors of the human understanding! This singular circumstance may instruct youthful and indigent philosophers, that the cold touch of poverty can never palsy the sublime industry of resolute genius.

Mendelssohn enjoyed not the pleasures of friendship without paying at length its heavy price, in the affliction he suffered at the loss of his friend, whose premature death was occasioned by the gradual torture of despondence. Dr Kisch, a Jewish physician, in some measure supplied his loss, and afforded him essential assistance. By his advice Mendelssohn applied to the Latin language; he was so indigent that he could not purchase a lexicon. By the generosity of this physician, he not only obtained the means of study, but with rare kindness, Dr. Kisch devoted, during the space of six months, some hours of every day to the instruction of a student whose capability of intellect he had the discernment to perceive, and the benevolence to aid. Mendelssohn was soon enabled to read Locke in a Latin version; but with so great difficulty, that, compelled to seek for every single word, hours were employed in reading a page. He had to collect words, and then to arrange periods, and at the same time, to unite in his mind the metaphysical ideas. He did not so much *translate* as *guess*, by the force of meditation. But the acquisition was more than a compensation for the toil.

This prodigious exercise of his intellectual powers, in retarding his

progress, invigorated his habit. By running against the hill, the racer at length courses with facility. What we expect to do greatly, we must at first learn to do with difficulty.

His attention was next engaged by the modern languages, particularly the French and English*, in the study of which he availed himself of his intimacy with Dr. Gumperz, a young Jew, much distinguished by his literary habits, talents and attainments.

The circle of Mendelssohn's friends was now larger: and his intercourse with persons of taste and learning, had an auspicious influence on his mind and manners. From no connexion, however, did he derive so much advantage as from that which began in 1754, with Lessing, in whom some of the richest treasures of intellect and knowledge were united with a superior disposition and ability to bring forward the mental powers of other men, and who was in the practice of examining with perfect freedom, subjects of the first consequence to human beings. Frederic Nicolai, a literary bookseller at Berlin, was the beloved associate of both. During more than twenty years these three friends were closely linked together by mutual affection and confidence: nor did their occasional discordancies in opinion produce the slightest jealousy or ill-will.

Nicolai was editor of a periodical work of high and deserved reputation: and in this he received occasional help from the pen of Mendelssohn, who, in 1755, came before the public with a volume of 'Letters, on a Taste for Beauty in the Arts.'

* To a work of Manasseh Ben Israel, "concerning the Jews, &c." translated from the *English*, Mendelssohn afterwards published a very admirable preface.

&c. These were composed in the German language, which, at that time, was relatively in an uncultivated state. But Mendelssohn considerably improved it: his style was easy, perspicuous and elegant; and the world soon saw that an obscure and indigent Jew was destined to rank among the finest writers of his age and country.

His intense pursuit of his studies, in which, with an imprudence too common among literary men, he frequently passed the night, increased the weakness of his constitution. Once he was prevented for a whole year from attending to any employments which required abstraction of thought. From this threatening indisposition he recovered: and the writings which he afterwards published, are sufficient proofs that his intellectual vigour was unimpaired.

Mendelssohn's most important publication is, *Phædon, a Dialogue on the Immortality of the soul.* But while it bears this title, in common with Plato's on the same subject, its reasonings are not those of heathen philosophy. It is divided into three parts: and prefixed to it is a life of Socrates, chiefly taken from the English of John Gilbert Cowper.

He was also the author of some performances, the object of which is the development of what may be termed *the philosophy of taste.* Of these the principal has been already mentioned. Among his metaphysical writings, his 'Essay on the Immateriality of the Soul,' his 'Dissertation on Evidence,' which gained the prize of the Berlin Academy, and his '*Morgenstunden, [Morning-hours] or Lectures on the Being of a God,*' the substance of which he had kindly delivered to some young relations and friends, who, towards the conclusion of his life, spent their mornings with him, must, of course, be ranked.

In his treatise entitled *Jerusalem* he very ably discusses the subjects of religious liberty and the Mosaic dispensation. His purpose in writing it, was to place toleration on its proper basis, and to remove the popular prejudices against his Jewish brethren.

At the request of Hirschel Levi, chief Rabbi at Berlin, he drew up his 'Ritual of the Jews.' In this undertaking also he had the benefit of the members of his own communion principally in view. The work is a compendium of those of their laws which relate to property, and the knowledge of which is essential in suits between individuals of this people. Such knowledge had hitherto been withholden from many of them, in consequence of the regulations in question being veiled in rabbinical Hebrew: but Mendelssohn now presented it to the German Jews, in the language of the country, and in a clear and attractive style.

He wrote a Commentary, in Hebrew, on the Book of Ecclesiastes, and published separately, etymological notes on this part of the Bible, for the use of students.

With the benevolent intention of aiding the Jewish youth of Germany, in the study of the vernacular language, he printed his version of the five books of Moses, a specimen of which he had before given to the world.

His translation of the Psalms is dedicated to Ramler, a celebrated Lyric Poet of Germany, and an intimate associate of Mendelssohn's. In an interesting preface the translator makes his readers acquainted with the steps by which he advanced in executing a version of *all* the Psalms, and with the motives which prompted him to the undertaking. He has divided his translation into five books, and intimates his design

of reserving some critical observations for a future volume, which however has not appeared. The version is eminently simple, pure, and elegant, and often presents readings which are singularly happy.

The controversies in which Mendelssohn was a party, were highly injurious to his health and spirits.

Lavater, famous throughout Europe for his labours, if we must not call them his reveries, in physiognomy, had translated from the French a work of Bonnet's, in proof of the truth of Christianity, and, with the best intentions, dedicated his volume to Mendelssohn. The language of the dedication gave it the air of a challenge rather than the appearance of an act of courtesy. Mendelssohn was called upon by the zealous translator either to refute the arguments of Bonnet, or to embrace and avow the Christian faith. With the indelicacy of this proceeding he was justly hurt, and he published, in consequence, a letter to Lavater, in which he states his reasons for declining the discussion. He is perhaps to be commended for not obeying such a summons into the field of theological dispute. Yet for the sake of the public, and for the benefit of truth, it were to be wished, that a man of Mendelssohn's powers had laid before the world the progress and the issue of his reflections on the claims of the Christian doctrine. From the tenor and language of his letter, he seems to have imagined, that by receiving the gospel he would renounce his belief of the divine origin of Judaism. But this opinion is a palpable error; although it is not uncommon among his Jewish brethren.

His death was hastened by his zeal in vindicating the memory of Lessing.

Spinosa, himself a Jew, was the

author of some philosophical speculations, the tendency of which is generally considered to be destructive of the first principles of natural religion: and Jacobi, a German writer of notoriety, informed Mendelssohn, in a private letter, that those principles had been fully adopted by his deceased companion. Lessing, he said, had declared as much to him, not long before his dissolution. Nor can it well be doubted that Jacobi put this sense on certain expressions of the dying philosopher. Mendelssohn on the other hand was persuaded that his correspondent must have misapprehended Lessing's sentiments. In vain, however, did he attempt to undeceive Jacobi; in vain did he appeal to the unreserved confidence which subsisted between Lessing and himself, to his perfect knowledge of his friend's opinions, and to the testimony of their common associates. No explanation could satisfy the party bringing the accusation, who even ventured on publishing this correspondence. A voluminous controversy followed, in which many others took a share. Mendelssohn was thought to have refuted his antagonist, and to have avenged Lessing; but his life was in fact sacrificed to his exertions.

On the merits of the dispute it may not be very material to pass a judgment. Lessing, unquestionably, was in the practice of allowing the freest scope to his inquiries; and Jacobi unfortunately supposed that philosophical investigations are of necessity hostile to religion. Nevertheless it is difficult to believe that Mendelssohn was ignorant of the sentiments of his most intimate friend on a point of so much importance; and we cannot but admire the warmth of attachment by which he was animated to the defence of Lessing, and the vigorous talents of which he gave proof in the contro-

versy, notwithstanding the increased weakness of his bodily constitution.

The agitation of his mind in this controversy exhausted his feeble and too sensitive frame. His whole composition partook so much of excessive sensibility as to render his entire life a continued series of maladies. Resignation and docility tempered his infirmities. He was placid in pain; but whenever he protracted his studies to an unusual hour, or when deeply engaged in profound discussion, a fainting fit was the consequence of his intellectual exertion. He would sometimes retire suddenly from such conversations, to avoid the danger of fainting. "In these moments" says Zimmerman, "it was his custom to neglect all study, to banish *thought* entirely from his mind." A physician asked him how he employed his time, if he did not think? "I retire," said Mendelssohn, "to the window of my chamber, and count the tiles upon the roof of my neighbour's house." He died of an apoplexy, January 4th, 1786.

Mendelssohn is described as having been particularly amiable in his

family, to whom he bequeathed property sufficient for preserving them from want. He had carried on for many years a retail trade, and had superintended a silk manufactory; yet he proved himself capable of combining the habits of a scholar with those of a man of business. His friends were accustomed to speak of him as eminently possessing the most valuable qualities of the understanding and the heart. Such were the wisdom and energy of his conversation that it was not uncommon to style him *the Socrates of Germany*; and without doubt, he is a memorable example of the force of talent and perseverance in removing some of the greatest obstacles to the improvement of the mind.

His friendships were not confined to his literary associates, nor his good offices to the community of the Jews. There were other individuals who sought his advice, who admired his abilities and character, and who behaved to him with a confidence, affection and hospitality, no less gratifying to his own feelings than honourable to theirs.

DETACHED ANECDOTES AND OBSERVATIONS.

CLIMAX OF BIGOTRY.

LORD Granville was said to have been "an accomplished scholar, and a distinguished orator and statesman" of the last century; yet Dr. Kippis, in the Addenda of *Biog. Brit.* Vol. 3d. gives the following account of his opinions. "He maintained that christianity is incorporated with civil government, as sand with lime, each of which by itself makes no mortar. When he imagined that the public interest might receive prejudice

by Christianity, he was against its being taught. He hoped, therefore, never to see our negroes in America become Christians, because he believed that this would render them less laborious slaves. On the same principle he was against any attempts to convert the American savages. In learning christianity, they would fall into the use of letters, and a skill in the arts being the consequence, they would become more formidable to the plantations. Pursuing a similar