



THE RIGHT HON. EDMUND BURKE.

Engraved by H. Kell from a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

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MEMOIR

OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF THE

RIGHT HON. EDMUND BURKE;

WITH SPECIMENS OF HIS POETRY AND LETTERS,

AND AN

ESTIMATE OF HIS GENIUS AND TALENTS,

COMPARED WITH THOSE OF HIS

GREAT CONTEMPORARIES.

BY JAMES PRIOR, ESQ.

SECOND EDITION,

ENLARGED TO TWO VOLUMES,

BY A VARIETY OF ORIGINAL LETTERS, ANECDOTES, PAPERS,
AND OTHER ADDITIONAL MATTER.

VOL. I.

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1826.

**C. Baldwin, Printer,
New Bridge-street, London.**

TO
JOHN WILSON CROKER, Esq.

LL.D. F.R.S. M.P. &c. &c. &c.

SECRETARY OF THE ADMIRALTY.

SIR,

An attempt to sketch the life and character of one of the greatest men of modern times may, with peculiar propriety, be addressed to one of his distinguished countrymen, who is himself connected, not only with that part of Ireland where Mr. Burke spent his earlier years, but also with his family; who likewise acquired his relish for learning in the same venerable academic retreat; who possesses much of his taste, much of his acknowledged love for the Fine Arts, much of his literary talents, and no ordinary share of his laborious devotion to public business.

That it is wholly worthy of your acceptance, or of the memory of the distinguished man of whom it treats, I am by no means

vain enough to believe. To render full justice to his various genius and acquirements, would demand some of his own powers. No wonder, therefore, if, under so illustrious a burthen, *my* pen should break down. But the intention, at least, may be excused by the admirers of a statesman, whom to remember is to honour; and whom to honour is but another name by which to express our reverence for those venerable institutions of our country, which, as forming its pride and boast, he laboured so strenuously to defend; and which, through their influence on the national spirit, proved the salvation of Europe in the great struggle, now happily past. I have the honour to be, Sir,

With much respect,

Your most faithful

and obedient Servant,

JAMES PRIOR.

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ERRATA.

VOL. I.

Page	69,	line 28	from top,	for <i>cource</i>	read <i>source</i> .
	87,	18		for <i>Ireand</i>	read <i>Ireland</i> .
	357,	4		for <i>injury</i>	read <i>inquiry</i> .
	382,	29		omit	<i>was</i> .
	496,	18		for <i>villany</i>	read <i>villainy</i> .

VOL. II.

Page	346,	line 18	from top,	for <i>and</i>	read <i>or</i> .
	88,	23		for <i>rules</i>	read <i>rulers</i> .

ADVERTISEMENT

TO

THE SECOND EDITION.

IN presenting a second and much enlarged edition of this work to the public, the writer cannot omit to express his acknowledgments for the favourable reception experienced by the first ; not only from the periodical censors of literature who assume to guide the public taste, but from the private testimonies of approbation afforded by persons of the very first consideration and talents in the country, whose opinions would seem to be confirmed by the sale of a large impression of the work in no very considerable space of time.

This encouragement naturally induced a corresponding diligence on his part, to endeavour, by every available means, to add to its interest and correctness ; and the inquiry and research resorted to with this view, though laborious, have not, it will be perceived, been in vain. The additional matter collected, almost the whole of which is original, adds a second volume to the work, and has necessarily caused a new arrangement in many parts for its introduction in the order of time, while other passages

are wholly re-written ; so that the work may be considered almost as new. This plan he conceived to be much more systematic and desirable than merely to give a supplemental volume of disjointed letters, anecdotes, and fragments, thrown together without any bond of coherence or connexion.

For the information thus received the writer is indebted to a variety of sources, upon which he can place implicit reliance. Some of these are noticed in the progress of the volumes : while several persons to whom he is obliged think it obtrusive or unnecessary to give their names to the world upon circumstances of lighter moment in themselves, or which carry with them in substance a sufficient guarantee of authenticity. He should be ungrateful, however, not to avow in a particular manner his acknowledgments to the Hon. Sir William C. Smith, Bart., F.R.S., Second Baron of the Court of Exchequer in Ireland, for the documents with which he has been obliging enough to favour him, while he has to regret that one of them, the " Recollections," did not arrive in sufficient time to be inserted in chronological order, although the reader will meet with it at the conclusion of the work. He is likewise indebted for some contributions to the late Mr. James Gomme, F.S.A., who died shortly after they were communicated. But more especially his thanks are due to Thomas Haviland Burke, Esq., of Lincoln's Inn, the nephew and nearest surviving relative of Mr. Burke, and no less near to him in the virtues of the heart than in blood ; and who, from the satisfaction

which the writer has derived from his personal acquaintance, he must consider to require only a little more time and opportunities to display no inconsiderable portion of the talents of his family. For this public avowal of his sentiments, the author claims his indulgence; as in making it he fears to offend that unpretending merit whose value rises in the esteem of every competent judge by the unobtrusive spirit with which it is accompanied. He has been kind enough to supply every document and information in his power for these volumes.

To advert to the various criticisms passed upon the work will not be thought necessary, further than to acknowledge the conciliatory and approving spirit in which they are generally couched; while it is satisfactory to find that the plan, which the author originally chalked out to himself, of touching very briefly upon the parliamentary and other great public labours of Mr. Burke, which are already embodied in the history of the country as well as in other works of general interest and of course accessible to every description of reader, has been likewise approved.

Much of this favour to the author personally, is doubtless owing to the great popularity of his subject with the best informed and reflecting order of men. But it is not to be denied, that there is in this country a considerable number of politicians, who, from some original obliquity of judgment, or peculiarity of opinion upon certain constitutional points, persist in censuring the conduct of Mr.

Burke for the part he took on the question of the French Revolution, although it might be supposed that observation and the progress of events, independent of all argument, had confirmed the accuracy of his views on that matter beyond further cavil or dispute.

It was not therefore with any great degree of surprise that he lately saw an attempt, under cover of a criticism on his book, to maintain that Mr. Burke was so far mistaken in his assertion of there being no good likely to result from the Revolution, that France had at length acquired by it that freedom for which she had so long contended. This statement of the matter is quite a perversion of his argument. He never said, or thought of saying, that she was condemned to such a state of perpetual, irreversible slavery, that no accident could extricate her from it. What he really said and enforced was, that her Revolution, of which she was at first so proud, contained no one principle of which a wise or good man could approve ; that all its acts, means, and purposes, were equally indefensible ; and that, *of itself*, it was not likely to lead to any system of rational freedom. Experience has taught us that it *did not* of itself introduce, or attempt to introduce, any such system.

As to the other clause in the critic's remark, about France having contended for the establishment of her constitutional freedom, it is so notoriously contrary to fact, that the wonder has been how perseveringly she struggled against it. She never,

in fact, seriously set about seeking it; neither did she, by the exertion of any wisdom, talent, or intelligence of her own, win it. The freedom, or at least the rudiments of freedom, which she now enjoys, was thrust upon her. A series of unexpected and fortuitous circumstances, which she not only did not forward, but on the contrary opposed by every means in her power, led to the production and establishment of the Charter. That important measure, therefore, so far from being her own work, was the work of the combined armies of Europe.

It may be doubted, indeed, whether she ever possessed any clear conception of the blessings of a free constitution, or understood anything about how it was to be introduced or managed. For with the example of England before her, which might be considered a sufficient guard against committing gross mistakes, she plunged every succeeding year from her first efforts deeper and deeper into error; floundering from simple financial embarrassments into general anarchy, from anarchy into a system of the bloodiest massacre and tyranny, from this into the crude and impracticable scheme of a directory, from a directory into a mawkish imitation of the consular government of ancient Rome, and from this product of folly, into the next and natural stage, a grinding military despotism. In all this series of changes there was no approach to the establishment of consistent, steady, practical liberty. And at the beginning of 1814 she had neither in fact nor in appearance advanced one step nearer to obtaining it, than in 1714, or any other

period of her history, nor was likely so to do, had not the wild ambition of her ruler provoked his own downfall and led to the general change in her institutions. Consequently, France has no claim whatever to be considered her own liberator; she struggled hard, on the contrary, to continue enslaved, and was at length only drubbed out of her chains. And a constitutional system, the most valuable present that could possibly be made to any nation, worth more than all the conquests she ever effected had she been permitted to retain them all, has been the voluntary gift of her conquerors.

So little, therefore, did her revolution, with all its spoliations, proscriptions, terrors, massacres, and wars, for more than twenty-two years, effect for its nominal aim—that of giving freedom and security to her people. And so fully was the anticipation of Mr. Burke verified, that an event which inflicted and permitted so many evils, could scarcely, if left to itself, be productive of good.

The Addenda contain some particulars which were mislaid during the progress of the work; and likewise a few others which came to hand too late to be inserted in their proper places.